



STATEMENT

delivered by the President of the Slovak Republic

H.E. Ms. Zuzana ČAPUTOVÁ

General Debate

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Mr. President of the General Assembly,

Mr. Secretary General,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege for me to speak, for the first time, at this distinguished Assembly. I am aware of the many great achievements by the United Nations in its history. All these achievements have one in common. The respect for rules and principles. As much as we need these principles today, we also need trust and responsibility. And the best way to build trust is to respect the rules. To live and act by them. Because then we can predict how we behave and can be prepared when unexpected happens. I see mutual trust as the invisible silver lining that holds our societies together.

Today, I see two major challenges in this regard:

First, that we do not respect the rules and principles. As a lawyer and a long-term activist in the field of justice, I cannot ignore that many of these rules and principles are under immense pressure, including dangerous efforts to twist or break them.

That is why it is important to remind ourselves that if one country strips territory of another, it is to be called occupation and not mistaken for peace-making. Suppressing human rights of minorities must not to be confused with fighting against extremism; Spreading hate or false propaganda cannot be called freedom of speech; And using chemical weapons against innocent citizens cannot be justified as a fight against terrorism. These and many other examples are the reasons to have a strong United Nations as a guardian of rules. Guardian of our trust.

Second, that we have serious difficulties to agree on new rules. Often, we cannot agree at all. This applies to new areas that have emerged as a result of our successes and our progress. Those mostly concern climate change, but also new technologies, cyber or artificial intelligence.

We are going to face difficult times. More than ever, we need responsible governments that will draw their legitimacy from the trust of their people. That will refrain from populism and keep own ego under control. Governments that will give our people hope that there is still justice and it is worth playing by the rules. Because our future rests on our ability to repair broken trust.

More and more often we hear leaders speaking about putting their national interest before the global good. And yet, the best way to be patriotic actually lies not in national egoism, but in cooperation. Here I see climate change as the key issue.

If I had to name just one thing that worries me the most at the global level, then it is DENIAL. Denial that the climate crisis exists. Or, that it is not that serious

The scientific evidence is clear: Climate change is a fact, and we are running out of time. But if we act now, we can reduce carbon emissions within 12 years and keep global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius. If we can succeed at a local level, thanks to activists and NGOs, if we have successful green companies, why can't we do the same at global level?

As if the fear of business that it will lose competitive edge and profits or fear of governments to lose popular support was greater than all rational arguments.

To overcome these fears, we need to change our old mind-set, that green is costly and not profitable. And learn that actually, in the long term, green is far less costly, and far more efficient.

I can give you one concrete example: For many years, it was politically unthinkable to close old and inefficient coalmines in our country. Instead, we had to subsidise the mining industry to keep it alive.

But finally, we found the courage to make this difficult decision. I am very proud, that yesterday, at the Climate Summit, I could present a credible plan to close the coalmines and to transform the entire coal-mining region. In addition, Slovakia is firmly committed to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

Each country can contribute with its fair share. We have no time and excuse to wait for the others because they are bigger or richer.

That is why I highly appreciate your initiative, Mr. Secretary General, and I thank you for your leadership and personal engagement to convene yesterday's Summit

If we manage to combine our knowledge and our means with leadership, it will lead to a change of policy.

To that end we need to fulfil what we have already agreed on. The Paris Agreement is central to keep us on the right track. But its commitments are still far from achieved. And we need to go far beyond that.

We need a rapid and a profound change in how we do business, how we generate power, manage transport or make investments. We also need to change our lifestyle.

This year we celebrate 30th Anniversary of the Convention on Rights of the Child. It seems that our youth understands the urgency better than us. What kind of future are we preparing for our children? What example do we offer them?

We are in debt to this planet and to our children and we need to pay it back. The good news is that technological development is on our side. Green energy is becoming more and more competitive. Private companies and investors are starting to realise that to invest in green economy can be profitable and economically rational. Because instead of undermining economic growth, climate action generates new opportunities for businesses, new jobs for our people.

We must make sure, that in the end everybody can benefit from climate action, especially those most vulnerable, who bear the burden, but also those affected by transformation. Because the bottom-line of development is primarily about well-being and dignity of every human being.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We know what we need to do. We have been discussing it for years. We have all the knowledge and means. The time has come not to accept the excuses anymore.

I would suggest being bold and going even further. I believe that if we succeed in uniting on our action for climate, we can generate a new sense of solidarity in other areas. This can become a basis to overcome divisions among nations, and bring new opportunities.

Our citizens are already moving in this direction. We have the primary responsibility. We must lead. Let us use this opportunity to become the generation, which laid the foundations for a cooperation that is based on the common sense of our shared destiny.

Thank you.