

**STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. MIROSLAV LAJČÁK, PRESIDENT OF THE
72ND SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY, AT THE 23RD SESSION
OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE UN FRAMEWORK
CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE**

Bonn, Germany
15 November 2017

Distinguished Heads of State and Government, Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to address you all today. I first want to recognise the leadership of His Excellency, Mr. Frank Bainimarama, Prime Minister of Fiji and COP23 President. I am delighted that a Small Island Developing State is presiding over a COP; SIDS are among the most vulnerable to climate change and the most active in crafting a response to it. I would like to also acknowledge Morocco for its leadership throughout its COP 22 presidency.

Moreover, I want to thank His Excellency, Mr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier, President of the Federal Republic of Germany, for giving us all such a warm welcome to Bonn. Further thanks must go to Her Excellency, Ms. Patricia Espinosa, and her team at the Secretariat of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, for their work in organising the Conference. Finally, I want to thank His Excellency, Mr. Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, for his visionary statement.

Today I will not speak about climate change as an expert. I am a diplomat and a politician. So, I can only speak from my own experience. And the experience of those I have listened and talked to. This experience says that climate change is real. And it is dangerous. It says that families have seen their homes destroyed by hurricanes. It says that people are wondering if, or even when, their communities will be swallowed up by the sea. It says that farmers have seen land that used to produce food and support life turn to desert.

This experience also says that climate change is different from the threats which faced humanity in 1945, when the United Nations was created. It doesn't respect ceasefires or agreements. It doesn't know borders or territories. It cannot negotiate. And it cannot be reasoned with. However, experience has shown us all that, when we come together, there is a way to tackle every threat. Climate change can be abated. But only through multilateral agreement, and multilateral action.

I have three points to make on this today. The first is good news. We already have multilateral agreement.

We saw it in Paris, in 2015, when world leaders came together to make promises for the planet, and the people who live on it. This was the biggest multilateral milestone for climate change in history. In the words of President Macron: "This agreement will not be renegotiated, it unites us, it brings us together; to unravel it would be to destroy a pact that was made not only between nations but also between generations". We saw it, also, through the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. And through other relevant frameworks such as the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. And we saw it again, just two months ago. The 72nd General Debate of the United Nations General Assembly this year saw the highest number of references to climate change on record. In fact,

84% of UN member states highlighted it as a priority. And many of them made calls of support for the Paris Agreement.

So, multilateral agreement to tackle climate change is there. However, putting words on paper is one thing. Acting on these words is another. This brings me to my second point, which is that action is needed. And it is needed urgently.

We need to stick to the agreements we have made. Unfortunately, the United Nations Environmental Programme has warned that we are already falling behind. The UNEP Emissions Gap Report confirmed that current pledges will not be sufficient to limit the rise in global temperature to below 1.5 degrees Celsius. In fact, they will not even be enough to keep to our baseline commitment of a limit of 2 degrees. This situation is simply unacceptable. We are continuing to emit carbon at an alarming rate. We need to mitigate the effects this will produce. And we need to adapt to them. Yet, we are seeing a shrinking pot of financing shared between mitigation and adaptation efforts, which are equally important.

The message is clear: our pledges are insufficient. The people who are suffering most from climate change are not in this hall. But that does not mean we are not accountable to them. We must meet the agreed goal of mobilizing USD 100 billion per year by 2020 to support climate action in developing countries. According to the OECD, limiting temperature rise to less than 2 degrees Celsius will cost about USD 7 trillion per year up to 2030. We must scale up climate finance if we are to keep the promises we made to each other and to the people of this world.

My third point is that none of us can go it alone. The common threat of climate change binds us together. Only together we can solve it. We have common but differentiated responsibilities for the state of our planet. To meet them, we need bold, and innovative partnerships. They must transcend traditional separations between sectors, parties, governments or societies. And the United Nations must be the master coordinator. It must lead the charge. Because, as noted by the Prime Minister of Dominica, the Honourable Roosevelt Skerritt, “these are moments for which the United Nations exists”.

But, in doing so, people must be at the centre of everything we do. Because, the United Nations was made for people. And, here, I want to repeat myself: the people most affected by climate change are not in this hall today. However, this doesn’t mean they can’t guide and influence our discussions. Their stories must be told by us. Their experiences must be heard by us. And their resilience and determination must inspire us.

We are grappling today with the decisions of those who came before us. Similarly, the decisions we make today will affect not only us – but also those who come after.

There is a big difference, however, between us and previous generations. Because, we know what we are doing. We have the evidence. We can see it first-hand, or through countless newspapers, reports or documentaries. Furthermore, we have the science. We can predict what is coming. And we have solid guidance on how to stop or mitigate it. We even have a plan, with our signatures on it, which tells us how to go about all of this. If we hand over a planet with an uncertain future, history will not forgive us.

I thank you.