

**STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. MIROSLAV LAJČÁK, PRESIDENT OF THE  
72<sup>ND</sup> SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY, AT AFRICAN  
GROUP RETREAT ON “PARTNERSHIP AND COOPERATION”  
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*Good evening, everyone.*

It is a great honour to address you tonight, at this opening dinner of the 2018 African Group Retreat. The theme of this evening is partnerships and cooperation. And I think it is very fitting.

Because, in the words of the Secretary-General Guterres, we are in a “new era” of partnership between the African Union and the United Nations. Frankly, it is about time. For too long, we heard too much talking about AU-UN partnerships – but we saw too little action. This is changing – significantly. Now, we have the frameworks. We have the mechanisms. And, we are building up a concrete system. These include the two joint frameworks – one on peace and security, the other on Sustainable Development – signed between the UN Secretary-General and the AU Commission. Another major step was taken through the adoption of last year’s General Assembly resolution on PAIDA – for a renewed UN-AU Partnership on Africa’s Integration and Development Agenda. And the annual resolution on NEPAD continues to act as a key platform for partnerships. All of this is very promising. The challenge now, however, is to ensure that our partnerships produce results.

And, I want to focus on four areas in particular, this evening. The first is peace and security. I feel very strongly about this. Because, to put it bluntly, there is no way that the United Nations can deliver on its commitments to peace without the African Union. It can try. But, ultimately, it will fall short. Because, when it comes to conflict in Africa, the AU is often the first to respond. It is often the first to bring parties to the table. It is often the first to call attention to escalations and crises. In some cases, it can do things that the United Nations, simply, cannot. It can have a clearer view of the situation, on the ground. It can have a firmer grasp of political dynamics. And it can have closer links and relationships with key stakeholders. All of this can feed into, and enhance, the United Nations’ work for peace.

Here, I want to praise the pioneering efforts on conflict prevention, seen within the African Peace and Security Architecture. From the development of Early Warning Systems – to the positioning of African Standby Forces across all five regions. And, the AU is tapping into the under-utilised – but crucial – role for women in preventing conflict and building peace. One example of this was seen through the AU Network of Women Mediators. We need to see increasing cooperation between the AU and all organs, departments and offices of the United Nations. And, we need more international support to AU-led initiatives – such as efforts to silence the guns by 2020. The question of predictable financing for AU peace operations also demands urgent – and frank – discussion and consideration. In April, I will host a high-level meeting on peacebuilding and sustaining peace in New York. I hope it will have a strong African perspective – including your experiences, challenges, and ideas for the future of the United Nations’ work to build peace, and prevent conflicts.

The second priority area I would like to mention tonight is migration. We just had a migration-heavy week at the United Nations, so I will be brief on this. But, I do want to repeat a point I made in front of Member States this week. Which is that, whatever way we feel about migration, one thing is clear: it is not going away. It is, most certainly, here to stay. And we will need to respond to it – one way, or another.

Negotiations on the text of the Global Compact will continue until July. I know that members of the African Group have strong positions on this. And the **African Common Position on Migrations** shows the region’s readiness for cooperation and coordination. In the past, the

narrative on migration has not always reflected the reality for Africa – including the fact that the overwhelming majority happens **within** the African continent. Now, we need to balance these discussions – both through these negotiations, and through our wider work. And I hope that you will all remain engaged, as we move towards the world’s first Global Compact on Migration.

The third area I want to flag is Sustainable Development. Because, it is more crucial now than ever to maintain the momentum of the SDGS. And, I want to take this opportunity to tell you about three events that I am planning – with the aim of doing just that. First, on 22 March, I will convene the high-level launch of the **International Decade for Action on Water**. I know this is an important issue for many members of the African Group. We have already confirmed the attendance of many of your heads of delegation. And I hope we will be receiving even more, in the coming weeks. Then, on 30 May, I will convene a youth dialogue. Because, young people should be a resource – and not an impediment – to Sustainable Development. Which is particularly important for Africans, given that your continent will be home to 1 billion young people by 2050! I can already tell you that our panels and interactive sessions will feature many young Africans voices. And, our final event will be a discussion on SDG financing, on 11 June. This needs to lead to concrete suggestions on how we can tap into new sources of private funding. And how we can dismantle many of the barriers to investment that currently exist.

Your engagement, and participation, in these events is crucial. Not only to bring the experiences and perspectives from your own countries. But, also, to ensure that our discussions can identify ways in which the 2030 Agenda, and the AU’s Agenda 2063 can interact – in a way that strengthens, and accelerates, them both. The African Group has a key role to play in the future of a strong United Nations. This is obvious. And, I want to explore how the General Assembly can incubate, and nurture, this role.

Finally, I will speak very briefly on the reform process. We have moved ahead with all three pillars of reform: peace and security, development, and management. How they end up, however, is up to you. They are entirely in the hands of Member States. And I know we can count on the African Group to use its voice and influence for a stronger United Nations. Meanwhile, intergovernmental negotiations on Security Council reform continue. And, I will state the obvious here: Africa **must** be better represented. This is not just the moral thing to do. But it is the smart thing, also. Greater African representation could strengthen efforts by both the Council – and the wider UN system – for peace.

*Excellencies,*

I have probably spoken for too long already! Because, although I was invited to address you, I really came here to listen. The African Group has a key role to play in the future of a strong United Nations. This is obvious. And, I want to explore how the General Assembly can incubate, and nurture, this role. I am flying to Addis Ababa next week. There, I will meet AU leadership, and engage with the Permanent Representative Committee. When I return, in March, I will be reaching out to you. I want to hear your priorities. I want to hear your suggestions. I want to hear your visions for the future – of both the United Nations and the General Assembly. But, for now, I am looking forward to our discussion, tonight. I want to thank you all again for hosting me.

In particular, I acknowledge Deputy-Secretary-General Mohammed; Ambassador Brown, as Chair of the African Group; and Commissioner Samate Cessouma. I also want to take this opportunity to welcome the new Permanent Observer of the African Union, Ms. Fatima Kyari Mohammed, to New York. I wish you luck in your discussions over the course of this retreat.

*Thank you all again.*