

**S T A T E M E N T**  
**President of the 72<sup>nd</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly**  
**H.E. Miroslav Lajčák**  
***High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace:***  
***Opening Session***  
**General Assembly**  
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*Excellencies, Mr. Secretary-General, honourable ministers, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, and peacebuilders from around the world,*

In 1945, the world had seen too much horror. It could not go on, as it had. And, so, it made a change. This is why, the United Nations was established. And, from the start, peace was at its core. The first line of the United Nations Charter commits us to saving future generations from the scourge of war. In a way, we have met this commitment. There has not, since, been another world war. But, in many other ways, we have not. We have waited too long to act. We have not been there, when people needed us. We have done more, to respond to conflicts, than to prevent them from happening at all.

And so, in 2016, we decided to take a new approach. This body – the United Nations General Assembly – along with the United Nations Security Council, adopted what we now call the “Sustaining Peace resolutions”. And we committed to acting earlier, faster, and better– to prevent the suffering that conflict brings. But, that was the easiest part. The challenge came, in making this approach a reality.

And, that is why we are here: To assess how we have done, so far. And to plan how we can do better – going forward. And, I need to say, that we are meeting at a crucial time. We need this new approach more, now, than ever before. We need it, for people in Syria, who are in their eighth year, of a brutal conflict. We need it, for people in South Sudan, who have known more war than peace, in their lifetimes. We need it, for people facing unending conflict – from Yemen and Libya, to Somalia and Afghanistan. And we need it, for all of us – here - this morning.

We are all seeing the warning signs: Rising intolerance. Hate speech. Escalating rhetoric. And, more and more disregard for the principles, and systems, that we have spent seven decades building up.

So, this morning I will start us off by focusing on five areas, which demand our urgent attention.

**First, prevention.** Because, we need to put prevention first. And, to do this, we need more mediation, and more diplomacy. First, at the local level. This means quick, efficient responses, to stop local disputes from turning violent. Second, at the national level. The United Nations must do more to support homegrown prevention. And it must also be ready to step in, through the UN’s own mediators and good offices, if required. Third, at the regional level. Because, we have seen that regional and sub-regional actors are critical to prevent escalations. And finally, it needs to happen right here – on the international stage. The United Nations can offer a space for negotiations - of every kind. And, we must do more, to use it. We need a drive for diplomacy – and the United Nations must be the engine room.

Prevention also means tackling conflict at its roots – before it turns deadly. We must make our

societies more resilient. We need to respond to early warning signs. We need strong institutions. Sustainable Development. Access to justice. And respect for human rights. Maybe, in the past we did not associate these efforts with prevention. But they are all drivers of peace. We must invest in them; we cannot let the incentives of violence outweigh the incentives for peace.

**My second point, this morning, is that we need to join the dots, within the United Nations' own system. We need to be much more coherent.** It also means coherence across the United Nations' three pillars - and areas of work. We can no longer talk about just humanitarian work, just human rights work, or just peacekeeping. Nor can we see the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a standalone framework. This demands more links, more cooperation, and more coherence. I have seen this in person. Last March, I visited indigenous communities in the Colombian town of Totoró. There, I did not see just a "UN programme". Instead, I saw a real partnership. I saw real commitment to peace – from the United Nations and the Colombian government, to local leaders. I look forward to hearing the lessons learned, from President Santos – who I am honoured to welcome here today.

**A third area, for further action, is partnerships.** Sustaining Peace cannot be a UN export. It is not something we can make, here, and deliver to countries and societies. We can only succeed in partnership. First and foremost, with national actors. If we do not listen to them - if we go in, with our own plans and ideas – we will fail. Regional and sub-regional partners are also crucial. In 2017, the constitutional crisis in The Gambia showed us how regional action can prevent escalation. I am delighted that we can welcome President Barrow here, today - to give us the national perspective. Civil society actors are another key ingredient to Sustaining Peace. We need their experiences and expertise. And they need far more support, from us. And, finally, we must engage more with the private sector and financial institutions. Innovative partnerships are crucial. They can create opportunities. They can build capacity. They can attract investment.

**And, this brings me to my fourth point, on financing.** More investment in preventing conflicts - and sustaining peace – is vital. And, as if the moral case wasn't strong enough, we also have a solid financial one. The recent World Bank and United Nations report tells us that, for every one US dollar spent on prevention, up to seven dollars could be saved – over the long term. This means seven dollars which, instead of being spent on conflict response, can go towards actually *developing*, and advancing, societies. Yet, we are still not investing enough in prevention. And, one of our main funding mechanisms for Sustaining Peace - the UN Peacebuilding Fund - is struggling to reach its 500 million US dollars target. There are concrete proposals on the table. And I am glad that the resolution we plan to adopt gives us a mandate to consider them, in more depth.

**My final point is on the need for inclusion.** We had the wrong perspective - for too many years. We believed the power to make and build peace lay only in the hands of a few people. The elites. The politicians. The diplomats. And, always, the men. Women were seen as victims. Young people, as soldiers or agitators. But, we are starting to tear down this narrative. Some of the people in this room are doing it with their own two hands. For example, Visaka Dharmadasa. She helped to save peace talks in Sri Lanka from breaking down, through communication and confidence-building. She is not a victim of conflict; she is a champion of peace. Or, Ilwad Elman, who works with survivors of gender-based violence and former child soldiers in Somalia. She is younger than many people in this room. However, we will all be learning from her. When it comes to peace, we need more inclusion. We need more actors at

the table. And, I do not mean standing beside it – just for the optics. They must be sitting - right at the table – talking, participating, and adding their value.

*Excellencies,*

We are making progress. A few years ago, no one had even heard of Sustaining Peace. Then, in 2016, we made a strong commitment. And, by the end of this week, we will have another resolution - to keep up our momentum. We also have a report and concrete proposals from the Secretary-General. And - here, this morning – our meeting on Sustaining Peace has seen the highest levels of attendance at the United Nations this year. But, let me be absolutely clear. This. Is. Not. Enough. The stakes are too high. The effects of conflicts are too inhuman. The warning signs, of further outbreaks, are too visible. And, the disregard, of our most fundamental principles, is too frequent. That is why we need to go beyond the resolutions; beyond the statements and the words. We need to bring all of our cards to the table, here, this week. And we need to recommit to this new approach to peace.

*Thank you all, for being here – to do precisely that.*