

Video

26 September 2020

Speech to the 75th United Nations General Assembly

Mr. President of the General Assembly,

Mr. Secretary-General,

Distinguished Heads of State and Government,

Heads of Delegation,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Confidence ? responsibility - commitment

These are the three pillars on which we are building mutual aid and cooperation between our various countries: effective multilateralism.

These are the three values that we need to safeguard this multilateralism and that I want to talk to you about today.

[THE PANDEMIC MUST OPEN OUR EYES]

2020 will be remembered as a painful year. The COVID-19 pandemic surprised us. Each of our states has faced an unprecedented crisis.

The virus has taken the lives of hundreds of thousands of people, has broken up many families around the world. Its economic impact is also colossal.

But it has also generated uncertainty and questions about the future.

Yet COVID-19 should not blind us. On the contrary.

We must open our eyes to the weaknesses that this pandemic has exposed. To our models of society, for example.

We need to recognize the negative and disproportionate effects the pandemic has on those who suffer greatly from inequality: women and girls, children, the elderly and people with disabilities.

No one should be left behind.

[NOT FORGETTING THE OTHER CHALLENGES]

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we continue to fight with vigor and determination against the pandemic and its consequences, we nevertheless cannot turn our backs on the other major challenges of the 21st century.

Geopolitical tensions are tangible and conflicts are raging or looming in various corners of the globe. The health situation only exacerbates these tensions.

They endanger the fragile balances of our world.

These conflicts are never inevitable.

They always have a devastating impact on populations.

The situation in the **Gulf**, for example, remains a source of serious concern and calls for the utmost caution.

The JCPOA agreement remains crucial to guarantee the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program. We must actively safeguard this agreement as well as the non-proliferation regime.

The question of the imminent lifting of the embargo on conventional arms must not jeopardize the nuclear agreement and its achievements. It is an absolute priority for the region and its stability, for international security, as well as for the global non-proliferation architecture.

In the **Middle East**, the prospect of a just and lasting peace remains the objective. For there can be no peace in the Middle East without a permanent and just solution to the Palestinian question.

Nor can there be peace in the Middle East without Israel's legitimate right to live in peace and security within internationally recognized borders.

Nor can there be peace in the Middle East without the eradication of terrorism.

The suspension of plans to formalize the annexation of parts of the occupied Palestinian territories is a step in the right direction.

However, that is not enough. These plans must be abandoned for good. Annexation would seriously undermine the viability of a durable solution and close the door to future negotiations.

We welcome the recent announcements of the normalization of Israel's relations with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. It inspires hope that it can be a cornerstone of peace and stability in the whole region.

However, international and multilateral efforts aimed at a meaningful resumption of talks must be actively supported to achieve a negotiated and viable two-state solution, based on international law and United Nations resolutions.

The security situation in a large part of the **Sahel** remains very worrying, despite numerous efforts and increased international mobilization.

Following the coup led by mutinous members of the Malian armed forces, the legal and constitutional order of Mali was called into question.

The legitimate demands, aspirations and frustrations of Malian citizens, who await solutions addressing the many challenges their country faces, should not be met in this way. We are supporting all regional and inter-

Malian efforts to set up as quickly as possible a civil transition process in Bamako, allowing a return to constitutional order.

Many of Mali's challenges are common to the whole region.

Terrorism, conflicts between herders and farmers, as well as intercommunity tensions pose acute security risks.

A holistic approach is needed to counter violent extremism, emphasizing good governance, the fight against impunity, the strengthening of democratic institutions, the tackling of grievances of marginalized groups as well as sustainable and inclusive development.

At the same time, more and more regions of the world are experiencing the health, security and humanitarian implications of climate change and the degradation of biodiversity.

Drought and erratic weather conditions are pushing people out of their homes, whether in Somalia, Yemen or Afghanistan. The melting of the polar ice is leading to a militarization of the Arctic.

The impact of climate change reinforces the social, political, economic and environmental causes of conflicts.

The climate emergency is a challenge for peace. There is no time to waste.

This cause must concern us all.

The pursuit of sustainable development goals and more generally the 2030 Agenda are essential tools to respond to the global challenges we face, whether in terms of poverty, inequalities, climate, environmental degradation.

[EFFECTIVE MULTILATERALISM IN RESPONSE]

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the face of these global challenges, we must act

And admit that we cannot do it alone.

None of the common challenges I mentioned can be tackled unilaterally. None of these complex problems has a simple solution.

We have no other choice but to join forces, even if it means rethinking the obvious or even changing our paradigms. But always in accordance with the principles of the Charter.

Multilateralism does not work in essence, it works because there is a common will to make it work.

If this impedes the task of those who act and facilitates the task of those who contemplate, so be it. Let's not fight the wrong fight.

When its relevance is questioned, multilateralism reveals its essential character.

Today more than ever, we need effective multilateralism.

Never as a goal in itself,

Always as a way to tackle the issues we are all a part of, in one way or another.

As a means of preventing crises head-on

Through confidence, responsibility and commitment.

[CONFIDENCE]

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When I say **confidence**, I mean confidence in ourselves. In our individual and collective abilities, as embodied by our health care services, to fight the pandemic.

In our courage, our resilience, our know-how and our responsible behavior, in combination with our scientific progress, to mitigate climate change.

Confidence in our desire to achieve sustainable development for all.

The international community has already overcome major challenges and we will do so again. Resignation is not an option.

When I say **confidence**, I also mean mutual confidence. Such confidence obliges us all to respect the word we give, it obliges us to be in constant dialogue and to be able to put ourselves in the other person's shoes.

When we fail to do so, mistrust sets in and sooner or later makes the necessary cooperation too difficult or even impossible.

When I say **confidence**, I also mean good governance at national, regional and international levels, to gain the trust of citizens.

Good governance, built on the foundations of the rule of law, democracy, accountability and full respect for human rights.

When I say **confidence**, I mean confidence in justice. A justice that must be built on the unshakeable conviction that all individuals are equal and that no form of discrimination can alter it.

[RESPONSIBILITY]

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Confidence, responsibility, commitment.

As the United Nations, we have a **responsibility** to make global governance work. We contribute in different ways and at different levels, but each member can benefit. The United Nations is us.

As such, we share the responsibility of making multilateralism work. And to prove its added value.

We therefore fully support the continuing efforts of Secretary-General António Guterres for United Nations reform.

A reform with a view to increased efficiency, greater transparency, better responsiveness and adaptability.

We also reaffirm our full support for Action for Peacekeeping. It is a recognition of the need to safeguard one of the most important instruments of the international community to support political processes, protect hundreds of thousands of civilians and help to ensure ceasefires.

Making global governance and multilateralism work also means not hampering the functioning of its existing bodies.

Therefore Belgium reaffirms its firm support for the ICC in the fight against impunity for the most serious crimes that affect the entire international community. As an independent and impartial institution, the Court plays an indispensable role in this area.

Responsibility also means that we embrace challenges, that after identification, we proceed to tackle them. It is our responsibility towards our contemporaries, but also and above all towards our children and future generations. Which brings me to talk about engagement.

[COMMITMENT / WHAT BELGIUM DOES]

For my country, commitment to multilateralism is part of its DNA.

Perhaps it is not foreign to our history, our tradition of compromise.

International rules protect us.

Cooperation and our close relationship have made us stronger.

Effective multilateralism allows us to overcome our relative weight. In this process, we all, young and old, have a voice and added value.

The commitment is what helped Belgium achieve its **sixth term on the UN Security Council**.

As an elected member for 2019 and 2020, we have fulfilled and continue to fulfil our duty to advance peace and security on a daily basis.

In doing so, we note that the Security Council is not immune to geopolitical tensions. We see an imperfect body. We see 15 states that are not always able to resolve all conflicts.

However, we also see a large majority of unanimous decisions.

The increased cooperation between elected members is inspiring.

Steps taken to discuss emerging security threats, such as climate change, are encouraging.

Transitional justice is in this regard another area in which the United Nations can be ambitious.

The ambition of a comprehensive approach focused on human rights, the centrality of justice and accountability.

So many aspirations which require coordination between the various national and international actors to which Belgium contributes and will continue to commit.

Engagement is also the driving force behind **development cooperation and humanitarian aid** in my country.

This is what prompted Belgium to provide multi-year support to UNRWA, making our country one of its biggest donors, to improve the lives of Palestinian refugees.

This commitment by Belgium is also reflected in its position among the main European donors in favor of Yemen.

We also support the efforts of UNICEF to enable the monitoring of the situation of children's rights in conflict.

Belgian commitment is reflected in its predictability through its direct multi-year funding to UN organizations active in development. This allows for long-term action and an adequate reaction to numerous crises.

Through its ongoing commitment to the work and strategic objectives of UN Women, whose 10th anniversary we will be celebrating this year, my country is working to systematically integrate the gender dimension into its actions. This is a cardinal principle of our foreign policy. In this context we strongly support Dr. Denis Mukwege's action in favor of women victims of sexual violence in eastern Congo.

Commitment is also what characterizes our armed forces. We fight the threat of terrorism within the Global Coalition against Daesh and participate in multilateral peace missions in Mali and Afghanistan under the auspices of the UN, the European Union or NATO.

Finally, a strong and solid organization must be able to rely on the means that the sovereign states allocate to it.

Belgium pledges to continue its efforts to ensure that the United Nations have at their disposal the necessary resources for its action, which is an essential component of effective multilateralism.

[CONCLUSION]

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we celebrate 75 years of the United Nations in very special circumstances, we must not indulge in pessimism.

Let us stand up, meet the challenges we face and draw inspiration from past achievements.

In the coming weeks, we will celebrate 20 years of progress in consolidating the Women, Peace and Security agenda, and the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform.

So many multilateral successes in achieving a global political framework for women's rights. These are two concrete examples of what we can do together to improve the lives of half of the world's population. It matters. It is also a project in which there is still a lot of progress to be made.

These are just a few examples, but they are important.

All of this reminds us that multilateralism can work, it reminds us of the many benefits of effective multilateralism.

So, support it.

Without hesitation.

With confidence, responsibility and commitment.

Thank you.

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