

73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly

General Debate

Statement of Finland by

H.E. Mr. Sauli Niinistö, President of the Republic of Finland

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Madam President,
Secretary-General,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I congratulate you, Madam President, on your election as President of the 73rd session of the General Assembly. I also wish to pay tribute to Secretary-General António Guterres for his vision in leading the United Nations. Finland wholeheartedly supports both of you in your important tasks.

Madam President,

My country has always been a strong advocate of multilateral cooperation. For Finland, a rules-based international order is of fundamental importance. At home, being able to rely on commonly agreed rules is a cornerstone of our own national security and welfare. On the global level, common solutions and rules are needed to address the most pressing challenges of our time.

Unfortunately, there is now reason to be worried for all of us who believe in the benefits of multilateralism.

The international system we have built together is visibly under pressure. Its capability and credibility are questioned. We can no longer take the rules-based order for granted. It is our common responsibility to actively defend and develop it.

Finland sees the United Nations as the core of the multilateral system. Therefore the defense of multilateralism must begin here. The UN and its members need to show their will to act together, not past each other.

We fully support the Secretary-General's ambitious and comprehensive reform agenda. Now is the time to implement these reforms. We must ensure that the UN of the future is more transparent, accountable and efficient.

In order for the United Nations to be credible, it has to practice what it preaches. For any organisation, every single case of sexual exploitation in its own ranks is a case too much. This is particularly true for an organisation stressing the importance of equality and human rights. I am proud to be a member of the Circle of Leadership and I welcome the efforts taken to prevent and combat all forms of abuse throughout the UN system.

Madam President,

The three pillars of the UN – peace and security, human rights and development – have stood the test of time.

But we have also discovered that many of the present global challenges do not respect the boundaries between them. The pillars are increasingly interlinked, as are the challenges themselves.

The most important achievements of the UN system in recent years are testimony to this. I am thinking of the Agenda 2030, the Paris Agreement, and the Global Compacts on Migration and Refugees. Issues like sustainability, climate change and migration are not only about development and human rights. They are also essential questions of peace and security.

Climate change is the prime example of the need for prompt global action. The upcoming report of the IPCC will further underscore the urgency of our response. It will also show how much remains to be done. So far, the voluntary contributions from the state parties to the Paris Agreement are not enough to keep the global temperature rise well below two degrees Celsius. We must do a lot more, and more quickly.

In the North, we are witnessing how the Arctic region is warming with an alarming pace. This is not just a regional problem, as it poses a threat to the entire global climate system. One important factor in accelerating the melting of sea ice in the Arctic are black carbon emissions. Reducing black carbon that lands on the white ice would have immediate positive effects to prevent melting. A commitment to curb those emissions would be a key objective of an Arctic Summit that Finland, as the current Chair of the Arctic Council, is ready to host.

Left unchecked, climate change will also lead to a further increase in migration flows. Already now, some 65 million people across the world are displaced – the highest figure since the Second World War. Some hundred million people worldwide are in urgent need of basic humanitarian assistance, and the number is growing. There are no quick and easy solutions, but doing nothing is not an option. I therefore welcome the Global Compact on Migration and I look forward to participating in the conference to adopt it in Marrakech in December.

Madam President,

Full-scale wars, conflicts of varying intensity, and breaches of international law continue to haunt us. They constantly remind us of the immense human suffering involved. We, the international community, need to remain persistent in our efforts to solve ongoing conflicts, regardless of how deep-rooted and long-lasting they may be.

On a positive note, we have been encouraged by recent attempts to arrive at a genuine dialogue between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the international community. The momentum to take steps towards a peaceful Korean Peninsula should be maintained and supported. A successful outcome in that region could set a powerful example for non-proliferation and disarmament elsewhere, too.

Where peace has been achieved, the relevance of UN peacekeeping remains beyond doubt. But the Blue Helmets will also need to adapt to changing realities. We support the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping initiative in making UN peacekeeping more effective.

While existing conflicts need to be solved, our priority must be preventing future ones. Finland welcomes the efforts to strengthen the UN's conflict prevention capacity.

In conflict prevention, mediation is an invaluable tool. It is vital for the future of mediation that experience gained in the past is passed on to future mediators. It was an honour for my country to host the meeting of the Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation in June in Finland.

We remain strong supporters of the mediation activities of the UN and other actors. Where appropriate, Finland also continues to offer its good services to facilitate concrete discussions between parties, from Track-2 negotiations to high-level meetings.

Madam President,

Peace and security, human rights and development are not sustainable without the participation of women and the youth. Female voices and young voices must be heard – and acted upon. The needs of women, children and youth are still all too often marginalized in peace talks. Finland promotes the role of women’s effective participation in peace processes through the Nordic network of women mediators. This and other similar networks provide a useful platform for advocacy and self-education. As a HeForShe Impact Champion, I highly value these efforts.

As we celebrate the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, its importance in the international order deserves special attention. Human rights not only protect the individual, they also help us prevent conflicts, build sustained peace and speed up development. If we are serious about human rights, accountability mechanisms for crimes against international law are needed. Perpetrators must be brought to justice.

Finland appeals to all Member States and the Secretary-General to consistently keep human rights, non-discrimination and gender equality on top of the agenda of the UN.

Madam President,

It was with profound sadness that I learned of the passing of Mr. Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the UN. His legacy is an inspiration for us all.

I would like to conclude by remembering these words from him: “More than ever before in human history, we share a common destiny. We can master it only if we face it together. And that, my friends, is why we have the United Nations.”

Thank you.