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Address by

the President of the Swiss Confederation,

Ms Simonetta Sommaruga

“The UN at 70:

The road ahead for peace, security and human rights”

**Address delivered at the week of high-level meetings on
the 70th session of the General Assembly of the United
Nations**

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Embargo :

Mr President of the General Assembly,
Mr Secretary-General,
Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

70th anniversary of the UN: the achievements are considerable but so too are the challenges.

The UN was established 70 years ago. In the ruins of a world ravaged by the Second World War, 51 countries decided to empower humanity by creating an organisation dedicated to international peace and security and by uniting around values enshrined in the Charter: dignity, human rights, equality, justice, tolerance and peace.

Seventy years on, the UN has 193 members and has become a universal organisation endowed with a unique legitimacy.

It is right that we celebrate the UN's 70th anniversary. The organisation has achieved so much that it is difficult today to imagine a world without the UN.

The UN has unquestionably delivered much progress in its lifetime, most notably a substantial reduction in poverty in a number of countries. The UN has also achieved its primary goal, as our generation is the first one not to have lived through a world war.

However, if we wish to make an honest assessment, we also need to be critical.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The fact that nearly 120,000 personnel are currently active in UN peacekeeping missions means that there are still far too many crises and wars in this world.

We have 60 million displaced persons worldwide, more than at any time since the UN was founded.

Not only have we not made sufficient progress when tackling certain problems, but we have also created new problems ourselves, global warming being one example.

Though we may not like to admit it, we have to recognise that our behaviour continues to be marked by major inconsistencies. I shall mention just two examples:

- First of all, many countries remain in abject poverty, despite their wealth of natural resources.
- Secondly, we are struggling to cope with mass migration – yet at the same time, through global warming, we are depriving many people of the basic foundation they need in order to remain where they live.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let us also be self-critical and ask ourselves the following question: What has gone wrong that so many well-educated young people wish to leave their own countries – and not just in the developing world but in many European states as well?

We have to acknowledge that we have not yet succeeded in achieving anything close to a fair global distribution of wealth. Nor have we succeeded in establishing the rule of law as the norm. Corruption remains widespread. Finally, we have to admit that we have not succeeded in combining growth and progress with the protection of our environment.

All too often national interests impede the formulation of joint responses. I am thinking for example of the current refugee crisis in the Middle East and in Europe. We can only face the important flow of migrants jointly.

If each of us only looks after its own interests, we all lose out in the end: The migrants lose out and the solidarity between states falls by the wayside.

And if we fail to protect human dignity, we do ourselves a disservice, because to betray one's own values is to betray oneself. I therefore say, once again, that refugee crises require responses based on solidarity.

Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon cannot take in all the refugees fleeing the civil war in Syria. These countries have done a great deal and arguably

received too little recognition for it. Similarly, it is not possible for a few European countries to take in all the refugees.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We will all be judged on how we respond to this dramatic humanitarian challenge.

Here, we face another inconsistency: if countries seek answers to large-scale phenomena such as migration in an uncoordinated and individualistic way, it cannot work out well in the long term.

Human beings are not free from inconsistencies – none of us are. And to some extent at least, that is part of human nature.

However, when it comes to the actions of governments, states and communities of states, we must minimise these inconsistencies. As we all know, when dealing with poverty and migration challenges, conflicts, terrorism, organised crime and climate change, collective action is vital to meet the needs of states and their citizens.

The UN is more necessary than ever. What we need is a “strong UN for a better world”. States get the UN they deserve. It is up to us to strengthen it!

We should focus on three priorities.

First priority: Strengthening the development pillar and the peace and security pillar

The ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which we have just adopted is a huge step forward. It shows the UN's ability to renew itself.

This momentum must be kept up in order to achieve an ambitious agreement at the 21st United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris this December.

As for the peace and security pillar, the three ongoing review processes allow us to discuss the future challenges while strengthening the UN. In this regard, special attention must be given to the protection of civilians.

Switzerland is convinced that a purely military approach is not sufficient to resolve a conflict. Instead, all UN actions must be underpinned by a political strategy aimed at finding a lasting solution to the conflict. We have been reminded of this repeatedly, particularly during the various peace and dialogue processes conducted in Geneva – on Syria, Libya and Yemen, as well as in the context of the E3/EU +3 nuclear negotiations with Iran.

We are also convinced that the UN must strengthen its conflict prevention capacities so that tensions are detected early and violent conflicts do not break out in the first place. Our experience in chairing the

Burundi Configuration of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission has also taught us that the UN needs to adopt a long-term approach to its work – for establishing a lasting peace takes time, patience and resources.

Among other things, this means that the UN players engaged in promoting peace and security must closely work together with the parts of the UN system responsible for development.

With regard to the review of the implementation of Resolution 1325, adopted by the UN Security Council 15 years ago, Switzerland will continue to play its part and keep up its efforts to promote women's participation in peace processes, as well as in the security sector. Indeed, the inclusion of women contributes to the sustainability of peace agreements by expanding the range of topics on the negotiation agenda and by strengthening public support and approval of the agreements and their implementation.

In summer 2016, the UN will review its global counter-terrorism strategy. Implementing this strategy is a priority for Switzerland, in particular the parts relating to terrorism prevention and respect for human rights and international humanitarian law.

Finally, Switzerland is also convinced that a strong UN is a UN capable of taking action and decisions when international peace and security are under threat. In this regard, we reiterate our longstanding call on Security Council members not to block or vote against any resolution aimed at preventing or putting an end to the commission of genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes.

Second priority: Strengthening the human rights pillar and the humanitarian system

Human rights are the third pillar of the UN. This pillar has to be strengthened and Switzerland is very committed to this goal. In this regard, Switzerland is also proud to be seeking election to the Human Rights Council in 2016-18.

Switzerland's priorities on human rights are the abolition of the death penalty, the enforcement of the prohibition of torture and the promotion of women's and children's rights as well as the protection of human rights defenders.

It is also essential that the perpetrators of human rights violations are brought to justice. Switzerland recalls the important role played by the International Criminal Court in the fight against impunity. Moreover, in April 2016, a special session of the General Assembly dealing with the global drug problem will be held. On that occasion, Switzerland will work to ensure that the human rights dimension is taken fully into account in this issue.

The humanitarian system has reached its limits, due to the growing number, duration and complexity of crises. In 2015, 82 million people needed immediate humanitarian assistance – an unprecedented number.

The World Humanitarian Summit, held in Istanbul in May 2016, is an opportunity to improve the efficiency of the humanitarian system in order to enable it to respond more effectively to the needs of victims. In

October, Switzerland and the UN are co-hosting the summit's Global Consultation meeting in Geneva in preparation of the Summit.

In this context, Switzerland's goals are the respect and implementation of humanitarian principles, the access to victims and their protection, the better mobilisation of resources, the better coordination between humanitarian actors and more synergies with the sustainable development agenda.

In December, the 32nd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent will take place in Geneva. This is an important opportunity to reaffirm the fundamental principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and to stride towards the creation of an institutional framework in which improving the compliance with international humanitarian law can be discussed.

Third priority: Reform of the organisation's working methods

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let us continue to work together in order to build a modern and effective UN. Action on governance is needed but also on infrastructure. Switzerland is a committed member of the UN and will do all it can to further support the organisation over the next 70 years.

Geneva, as the main centre of global governance with its unparalleled number and diversity of stakeholders and issues, will play a key role in this. We hope to take a major step forward soon in the very concrete form of the Strategic Heritage Plan aimed at renovating the Palais des Nations in Geneva. This will give the UN fit-for-purpose infrastructure and allow the site to be used even more efficiently as an instrument of peace, human rights and sustainable development. Switzerland strongly supports this renovation project.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is incumbent on every member state to play its part in ensuring that the UN can serve the interests of its peoples as effectively as possible. Switzerland is resolved to keep up its work in this area.

Seventy years ago, countries had the insight and vision to create the United Nations, which has brought so much to the world. Seventy years on, we must show the same insight and vision to safeguard the future of this organisation and ensure the best possible future for the peoples of the United Nations.
