

United Nations General Assembly 70th session

General Debate Statement

by

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Statement time: Fifteen minutes (voluntary limit)

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Mr President,

We meet today at an important time for the United Nations, 70 years after its foundation.

Australia's delegate to the San Francisco conference in 1945 [*Deputy PM Ford*] described the UN General Assembly as the place where "the conscience of the peoples of the world should have its most potent expression".

It is appropriate then, here in the General Assembly chamber, to reflect on what the United Nations has achieved, and what it needs to achieve for the future.

The UN provides critical services each and every day, in many parts of the world.

Often, this important work goes unnoticed or unappreciated by those not in direct receipt of this support.

Australia recognises the dedicated, often courageous work of the thousands of UN personnel in the field, who protect vulnerable civilians, deliver vital humanitarian assistance, rebuild damaged societies, and support development.

The UN carries out its work in an increasingly hostile environment.

Today, the world faces an unprecedented number of long-running and seemingly intractable conflicts, generating displacement on a massive scale and making humanitarian need more dire, than at any time since the Second World War.

Terrorism today is a global threat.

The magnitude of the development challenge is immense.

However, we must acknowledge the remarkable achievement that is the **UN Charter**.

The values and aspirations articulated seven decades ago still guide us today.

Australia is proud that, as an active participant at the San Francisco conference, we crafted a central element of the Charter – Article 56 – known as “the **Australia Pledge**”.

Under this Article, UN members pledged to take action, individually and jointly, to “achieve higher standards of living, ... solutions to international economic, social, health and related problems..., and universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

Australia took that pledge on signing the Charter in 1945.

I reiterate that pledge today.

The **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, endorsed unanimously last Friday on the floor of the General Assembly, is a manifestation of the Australia Pledge, and a testament to the fundamental role of this organisation.

Only the United Nations could have produced this remarkable result.

The Sustainable Development Goals are necessarily ambitious.

Consider just the first five: To end extreme poverty everywhere. To end hunger. To ensure quality education. To ensure healthy lives. To achieve gender equality.

Should we realise all 17 goals, we will transform our world for the betterment of humankind.

We must ensure that the remarkable spirit of cooperation displayed during the negotiation process is maintained as we work to turn these ambitious goals into reality.

The 2030 Agenda recognises that **economic growth** – including through private sector investment and trade – is central to sustainable development.

The 2030 Agenda also recognises that, while official development assistance remains important, it is only one source of **financing for development**.

The 2030 Agenda affirms that it is the quality of assistance that matters, and that true partnerships for development are essential – based on respect and cooperation.

Climate change is a challenge for all nations, and decisive action is required.

We will only succeed in reducing global emissions if there is engagement by the entire UN membership.

Australia has announced a strong, responsible and achievable post-2020 contribution to international climate action.

We are committed to ensuring the UN Climate Conference in Paris is the platform needed to secure a collective approach to the 2 degree goal.

There is an inescapable truth – we cannot transform our world unless the place of women within it is transformed.

The 2030 Agenda requires us to achieve nothing less than full **gender equality**.

This is not just the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do.

It is essential to achieve sustainable, inclusive and equitable economic growth.

Australia has established a \$50 million Gender Equality Fund to accelerate support for gender equality in our development program delivered in our region, the Indo-Pacific.

We must step up the fight against the global scourge of **violence against women and girls**.

This week, the Australian Government announced a new domestic policy – a \$100 million women’s safety package, improving frontline support services and providing educational resources to help change community attitudes to violence and abuse.

Similarly, our overseas aid program helps countries in our region in efforts to eliminate violence against women.

The UN **Women, Peace and Security agenda** has changed our collective thinking on the role of women in conflict.

We now need to put it into practice.

That is why Australia has worked with the US to produce the first *military commanders’ guide for implementing Women, Peace and Security in the field.*

A key element of the 2030 Agenda is that **peaceful and inclusive societies** are essential to achieving sustainable development.

Human rights, good governance and open and inclusive institutions are crucial foundations for development.

Human rights have been at the very centre of the United Nations over the past 70 years, from the UN Charter in 1945 to the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015.

With the rise of terrorists like Daesh, the continuing depredations of the North Korean regime, and the persistence of forced labour and other contemporary forms of slavery, the need for the UN to prosecute a strong human rights agenda has never been more pressing or urgent.

Australia is standing for the **UN Human Rights Council** for the 2018-20 term – this is the first time that my country has sought election to this body.

I believe that Australia would bring to the Human Rights Council the same principled and practical approach that distinguished our 2013-14 Security Council term.

Should we be elected, our focus would be on empowering women and girls, strengthening governance and democratic institutions, promoting freedom of expression, and advancing human rights for all.

Australia would be at the forefront of efforts to hold to account those responsible for human rights abuses, and to build more effective preventative and accountability measures.

We would be unrelenting in our efforts to secure abolition of the death penalty.

Our term on the Human Rights Council would reflect Australia's inclusive, diverse society, and build on the Australian Government's strong domestic human rights agenda.

There are nations for which the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda – indeed the promises of the UN Charter – appear remote, unachievable.

The '**scourge of war**' continues to tear apart families, communities, countries, and entire regions.

As a non-permanent member of the Security Council, we experienced first-hand the difficulties the Council faces in responding to the crises and conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, South Sudan, Central African Republic and Mali.

Nowhere is the devastation greater than in Iraq and Syria.

Daesh is wreaking devastating harm on individuals, families and communities and destroying the world's heritage, in gross violation of international law and basic concepts of morality.

It cannot be allowed to prevail.

Australia is participating in coalition military action to combat Daesh in Iraq and Syria.

We are doing so within the framework of the Charter, and in a manner consistent with international law.

Defeating Daesh requires both military and political action.

Reconciliation and inclusive governance in Iraq are key to reducing Daesh's appeal and support.

We continue to advocate for a political solution that can bring an end to the conflict in Syria, and we support UN envoy de Mistura's efforts towards this end.

We do not believe any transition option should be rejected, all permutations of a political solution should be assessed with clear-eyed realism.

Australia is committed to defeating **terrorism** in all its forms.

We are responding to the challenges of violent extremism and foreign terrorist fighters, taking on those who would exploit our openness and modern communications to commit violence and promote terror.

The humanitarian consequences of the conflicts in Syria and Iraq are devastating.

I commend neighbouring countries – Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey – which continue to bear the brunt of the population of displaced persons.

Australia has provided \$230 million in humanitarian assistance since the start of the conflict.

The massive **flows of displaced people** across the Middle East and into Europe have stretched response capacities to breaking point.

In this environment, people smugglers will strive to prosper from their dangerous and criminal trade.

Australia's firm response to people smuggling, and continued cooperation with our regional partners, have saved thousands of lives of those who would otherwise have succumbed to the false promises of people smugglers.

It has also enabled us to give refuge to those most in need.

Consistent with our record over decades of resettling permanently thousands of refugees, Australia was pleased to announce recently that we would resettle permanently an additional 12,000 UNHCR registered refugees from Syria and Iraq, particularly those who are unlikely to have a home to which they might return.

We also announced \$44 million in funding to support 240,000 displaced people on the borders.

The global humanitarian system is struggling to cope with the escalating demands.

The **World Humanitarian Summit** in May next year must deliver a nimble humanitarian system which responds to different types of humanitarian crises in the most effective fashion.

The only long-term solution to these man-made crises can be a political one – to bring these conflicts to an end.

Australia's recent experience as a Security Council member confirmed that the Council's role is more essential than ever.

The Security Council can only perform its role if it has the tools it needs. The role of **peacekeeping** is fundamental.

Yesterday I joined others in pledging renewed operational support for the UN peacekeeping system.

Australian airlift was vital in the UN's early response to the South Sudan crisis; we have pledged to provide C-17 Globemaster and C-130 Hercules aircraft to help UN peacekeepers respond to crises where and whenever we can in the future.

We recognise that the UN needs more tools for **peacebuilding**, to help vulnerable states emerge from crisis and prevent them from falling back into violence and disorder.

Australia is looking forward to co-chairing, with Angola, the consultations on the Peacebuilding Architecture review later this year. We need to strengthen this crucial element of conflict prevention.

Another central lesson from Australia's term on the Council was that **accountability** is crucial in preventing cycles of violence.

The International Criminal Court has a critical role to play and requires our support.

Additionally, Australia remains determined to hold to account those responsible for the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight **MH17** in July 2014.

We will not let a Russian veto impede the efforts of countries grieving the loss of their citizens and demanding justice for the perpetrators of this atrocity.

All states must uphold their **responsibility to protect** civilians from the most serious international crimes.

Security Council members have a particular responsibility to do so.

In that context, we welcome proposals to restrain use of the veto where mass atrocity crimes are being committed.

Australia's term on the Security Council in 2013-14 demonstrated that elected members can play an active and constructive role.

I am therefore pleased to announce that **Australia is nominating to serve again on the Council, for the 2029-30 term.**

Mr President,

We do not underestimate the challenges facing all of us – equally we should not downplay the opportunities.

We remain confident that, working together, we can realise the enduring promise of the Charter – for Australians, for our region, and for the international community.

Thank you Mr President.

Word count: 1880