

**"Making the United Nations relevant to all people: global leadership and shared responsibilities for peaceful, equitable and sustainable societies"**

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Ms President,

Let me first congratulate you on your election as President of the 73rd session of the United Nations General Assembly.

Ms President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

One hundred years since the end of the First World War we find ourselves in the World, where - despite all our efforts - lasting peace has not yet been universally secured and where people are still dying in violent conflicts. The UN's *raison d'être* is the **protection of peace, human rights, justice and social progress**. These values are not a Western instrument; they form universal ideals for whose accomplishment should all of us, the Member States, strive together.

We face many challenges to dignity of individuals, global prosperity, and sustainable development, including gender inequality, youth unemployment, global health threats, climate change, violent extremism, terrorism, forced displacement, or uncontrolled migration. Furthermore, multilateralism and the rules based system which benefit everyone and which have long held many of these threats at bay are being increasingly undermined and questioned. One way of how we, as policymakers, can tackle these challenges is **realization of the difficult structural and political reforms of the UN** - to promote shared global responsibility, robust international cooperation, and regaining common values.

We all understand the need to reform the UN Security Council to reflect the realities of today's world. Unfortunately, in recent years the **UN Security Council** has been characterized by blocking tactics rather than cooperation. Its failure to act on the world's worst atrocities is tangible in several ongoing brutal conflicts, from Syria to Yemen.

Secretary-General **António Guterres** has already embarked on the **challenging endeavour to reform the UN**. The Czech Republic fully supports his efforts. Making the United Nations more effective through much needed reforms in the areas of peace and security, management and development system would truly make the UN relevant to all people and help promote peaceful, equitable and sustainable world. As such, we have to endorse the Secretary-General's work and give his proposals, including their budgetary and financial implications, the strongest possible support.

The vital point of the Secretary-General's reform agenda is its focus on **prevention of conflicts**. All of us should tirelessly work to ensure crises are contained before they break out and that post-conflict countries are stabilized in the long term. For an effective prevention, we should adopt a **comprehensive approach to peace and security**, which treats the climate change as a security problem, while advancing **sustainable development and promoting human rights**.

The Czech Republic took great pride in having had the honour to hold the one-year Presidency of ECOSOC in 2017-2018. Allow me to thank you all, the Member States as well as the Secretariat, for excellent cooperation. It was an enlightening experience indeed not only for our Presidency team, but also for our entire administration.

In the context of **Sustainable Development Goals**, which are the foundation of our concentrated efforts in promoting sustainable development, the Czech Republic will continue to champion **SDG 16**, not only as a follow up of our ECOSOC Presidency, but mainly as a cornerstone of the 2030 Agenda. We consider peace, justice and functioning institutions our priority and a solid base on which a sustainable future for everyone can be built. In the context of sustainable development, it is also crucial that the United Nations seek **more synergies between its humanitarian, development and security activities**. Apart from conflict prevention, special focus should be put on post-conflict stabilization. Those efforts should be visible in the field. To achieve this goal, more cooperation among the UN agencies is required, as well as broader coordination with and between the UN Member States.

History teaches us that respect for **human rights** is the best remedy for conflict and violence. Efforts towards realization of human rights for all are the best investment in our peaceful and prosperous future. Lasting peace and sustainable development cannot be achieved when human rights are abused and violated. And yet, the **human rights pillar of the United Nations is chronically under-funded** and often overlooked. This must change.

The UN has developed unique tools and fora to promote the realization of human rights. We, the Member States, should take full advantage of the UN **human rights expertise** and fully honour the human rights obligations we have taken. Today as ever, independent and impartial voices speaking up for human rights are indispensable. One such voice has always been the **UN High Commissioner for Human Rights** and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the outgoing High Commissioner Zeid Raad Al Hussein for his excellent job in the office and to wish all the success to his successor Michelle Bachelet.

Human rights are deeply rooted in the historical experience of my country. The **promotion of human rights** – both in bilateral contacts and on the global scene – remains our long-term foreign policy priority. The Czech Republic is currently **running for a seat on the UN Human Rights Council for the term 2019-2021**; this candidature has been endorsed by the Eastern European Group of States. I can assure you that as a Council member, the Czech Republic will spare no effort to contribute to a better enjoyment of human rights for all, everywhere. We stand ready to collaborate in a transparent manner and in good will with all States in all geographical regions as well as with civil society. Today, here at the General Assembly, I **wish to ask you all for your valuable support** in several weeks' time at the election to the Human Rights Council.

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Our efforts to prevent conflicts and instability would not be complete without mentioning denuclearization and fight against terrorism. The Czech Republic, having its Embassy in Pyongyang, is deeply interested in improving the **situation on the Korean Peninsula**. This is why we are following with high expectations both the Inter-Korean and US-DPRK dialogue at the highest level. The complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is the only way how to achieve long-lasting peace, security and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula. We need a resolute and coordinated approach in countering proliferation of weapons of mass destruction as we do in **fighting terrorism**. Although ISIL has been defeated in large territories in Syria and Iraq, we are aware that it is still active and that there are also other terrorist organizations operating worldwide. It is necessary to take further steps in the area of international law and finally conclude the **comprehensive convention on**

**international terrorism** as mentioned by President Zeman at this gathering in 2016. We call for an internationally recognized definition of terrorism which will enhance the criminal responsibility of terrorists worldwide and enable us to hold them accountable.

This year the Czech Republic commemorates **50 years since the Warsaw Pact troops invaded Czechoslovakia**. The experience of the '68 invasion still resonates strongly not only in the Czech Republic, as the moment where many lost faith in the promises of the better world preached by the Soviet Union. This seemingly historical event however carries lessons still relevant today and echoes in incidents which are still occurring in the World around us:

Firstly, it is still **not a given that all countries including those situated in Eastern Europe have the right to choose their foreign policy orientation** without their sovereignty and territorial integrity threatened. In this context, I would like to recall once more that the annexation of **Crimea** represents a blatant violation of the international law.

Secondly, it should not be forgotten that **the use of force is allowed under the UN Charter only in self-defence** and on the basis of Chapter VII decision of the UN Security Council. The UN is the sole guarantor of international peace and security. It is only through collective means and within the rules-based international order that peace and security of all our nations can be achieved.

Thirdly, in cases when States and the international community fail in their shared responsibility for the protection of people from atrocities, it is imperative to establish **accountability for serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights**. As such, the Czech Republic firmly supports international criminal justice and, in particular, the **International Criminal Court**. We welcome the activation of the ICC's jurisdiction over the crime of aggression which we consider to be one of the checks for non-repetition of this crime in the future.

In certain cases, however, ICC's jurisdiction is absent. This should not be seen as a loophole for perpetrators of atrocities, as a way to escape accountability. For crimes committed in Syria, we are supporting, both politically and by financial contribution, the so called "**Triple I Mechanism**" - International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in Syria since March 2011. The accountability is not only a way to bring justice to those suffering in conflicts, it is also a path towards reconciliation and a crucial means to prevent atrocities from reoccurring.

Ladies and gentlemen, while newly independent Czech Republic was admitted to the United Nations 25 years ago, in 1993, this year we also celebrate the centennial of our modern statehood and independence, as Czechoslovakia was born in the crucible of the First World War in 1918. The founder and first President of my country, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, rightly posited that states are sustained only by those ideals from which they were born. The same must be true about the United Nations. We should therefore strive to reinvigorate the founding ideals of this noble organization – only thus can we succeed in fulfilling the topic of its 73<sup>rd</sup> session, making it really relevant and helpful to all people.

Thank you for your kind attention.