

Statement

by the President of the Republic of Lithuania Dalia Grybauskaitė
at the General Debate of the United Nations General Assembly

27 September 2018, New York

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This November the world will remember 100 years since the end of the First World War. It caused the fall of empires and opened a window for small nations in Europe, including Lithuania, to achieve their dream to live independent and free, enjoying their culture and traditions.

To prevent such war from ever happening again, multilateral institutions were created to safeguard political independence and territorial integrity. Yet when the world faced its next big crisis, these institutions failed to act and remained powerless bystanders as humanity plunged into another World War.

Today we wish to think that our multilateral institutions, including these United Nations, are strong enough to take a stand against aggression and disregard of international rules.

Yet sometimes reality tells a different story. We see the world that is more fractured and institutions that are crumbling instead of sheltering us from the use of force and economic storms.

In almost every major crisis of the last decade – from Syria to Ukraine, from Myanmar to Yemen – the UN Security Council was unable to play a meaningful role because of inability of states to rise above their national interests and obstructive use of veto.

Organisations created to abolish weapons of mass destruction are toothless against dictators who develop nuclear arms and use chemical weapons on civilians in our cities.

As the tide begins to turn for the global economy, the World Trade Organisation is facing paralysis. Rising global trade tensions could wipe away our achievements in sustainable development and poverty reduction.

At the same time, we must recognise that our institutions are not perfect. They can be bureaucratic, wasteful and unaccountable. But it was us, Member States, who created them, so it is up to us to improve and adapt them to new realities.

Before we seek to destroy multilateral institutions, commitments and agreements, we must know what we want to build instead. Otherwise, we will end up living on the pile of ruins.

We cannot reject globalisation, because fighting it will only make us poorer. In the last 25 years, free trade gave more than 1 billion people an opportunity to escape extreme poverty. However, globalisation also has a dark side, which must be confronted by acting against exclusion, inequality and falling labour standards.

We cannot let the voices of nationalism and division win over dialogue and cooperation. On all major challenges – terrorism, climate change and achieving women empowerment – there is simply no alternative to working together.

So far, we have been too quiet, too passive, too ignorant.

We must stop taking an easy way out blaming institutions for our domestic failures.

We must recognise that we, the Member States, have the power and resources to enable United Nations to stand up for freedom, equality and humanity.

Because *we are the UN*, so let's take responsibility for our future, empowering the UN to act.

Thank you.