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Seventy-second session

7th plenary meeting
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Official Records

President: Mr. Lajčák (Slovakia)

The meeting was called to order at 9.10 a.m.

Expression of sympathy in connection with the earthquakes in Mexico

The President: Before we begin this morning's meeting, I wish to express, on behalf of the General Assembly, our sincere condolences to the Government and people of Mexico in the light of the tragic earthquake that rocked Mexico City yesterday. We regret the loss of life and stand with Mexico at this time of grief.

Agenda item 8 (continued)

General debate

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Luis Videgaray Caso, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the United States of Mexico.

Mr. Videgaray Caso (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the Government and the people of Mexico, to thank the Assembly from the bottom of our hearts for the countless expressions of international solidarity from our fellow members of the United Nations.

Yesterday a 7.1 magnitude earthquake struck Mexico City and various areas in the centre of the country. The death toll currently stands at 219, with hundreds injured and still more whose whereabouts are unknown. Our current priority is carrying out rescue work and caring for the injured. It has been a harsh blow to Mexico, but we will be able to recover, thanks primarily to the extraordinary solidarity and generosity

of our people, who have taken to the streets and to the more than 50 areas affected by the quake, where we need everyone's help.

I particularly wish to thank Secretary-General António Guterres, who called me personally, and the Secretariat, which has been in contact with us from the outset, providing us with advice, support and help in identifying the specific aid we need. Special thanks also go to the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination system for helping us to identify the countries that have the specialized teams and equipment we need for rescue operations. We have contacted them and they are already sending assistance. Support for the rescue efforts is currently under way in Mexico City. I thank the President and all of the countries that are generously supporting Mexico at this very difficult time.

Address by Mr. Sauli Niinistö, President of the Republic of Finland

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Finland.

Mr. Sauli Niinistö, President of the Republic of Finland, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Sauli Niinistö, President of the Republic of Finland, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Niinistö: Our thoughts today are with the people of Mexico and the Caribbean.

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I congratulate you, Sir, on your election to preside over the General Assembly at its seventy-second session. Finland fully supports your six priorities and we appreciate the focus on people as your mandate's centrepiece.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to Secretary-General António Guterres. His determination to reform the United Nations is laudable. Transparency, accountability, efficiency and gender balance should be the guiding principles of the United Nations system. I also welcome his focus on conflict prevention, which, when successful, saves lives and financial resources. Finland continues to advocate the use of mediation in conflict resolution, which can prevent conflicts and decrease human suffering. Those who are marginalized must be given a voice in peace processes. Women, children and young people often pay the highest price in conflicts, but they can also help to find a way out of crises. Finland has helped to establish a Nordic network of women mediators that aims to sustain peace through women's inclusive and meaningful participation in every phase of a peace process.

Peacekeeping and special political missions are at the core of the United Nations mandate. With experience of United Nations operations since 1956, Finland supports the Secretary-General in his efforts to reform and make United Nations peacekeeping more effective. Following the pledge we made in 2015, Finland has significantly increased its participation in United Nations police missions. Finnish police officers, including a specialized team for sexual and gender-based violence, are now deployed in seven United Nations peacekeeping operations. It is my firm view that no United Nations peacekeeper or any other United Nations personnel should be associated with misconduct in any shape or form. There must be zero tolerance of sexual exploitation and abuse, and the Secretary-General's initiative for a circle of leadership is timely and welcome.

In wars, there are no winners, and yet conflicts continue. In 2016, 157,000 lives were lost in violent conflicts globally. There are almost 68 million refugees in the world today. The conflicts in the Middle East, Africa and eastern Ukraine are all examples of untold human suffering, and they are not the only ones. The international community has not succeeded in maintaining peace and security.

The grave situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is an urgent concern. The North Korean nuclear-weapon programme is a threat to global peace and must be stopped. The Security Council's cooperation on North Korea has been successful, and it is important to ensure that unity can prevail. At the same time, North Korea has continued its provocations, and such behaviour cannot be tolerated. Finland, as part of the European Union, stands firmly behind the sanctions and urges everyone to do the same. We will be able to find a solution only through negotiations, and the North Korean Government must participate without preconditions.

Nuclear weapons represent a severe threat to humankind. As long as they exist there is a risk of a catastrophe. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons remains the cornerstone of global non-proliferation and the foundation for nuclear disarmament. Finland's approach to the issue is result-oriented and pragmatic. It is crucial to ensure that the countries possessing nuclear weapons are on board for any negotiations. I call on all nuclear-weapon States and countries possessing such weapons to take concrete action on disarmament as soon as possible. It is also important to ensure that the nuclear deal on Iran is honoured by all parties, and I welcome the recent talks on strategic stability between the United States and the Russian Federation. We hope that they will re-start the arms-control talks in Europe and globally.

We must also pay closer attention to other threats, of which I would like to focus on two examples.

First, countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism is a shared priority. As a global body, the United Nations is well placed to promote the fight against terrorism. I look forward to the leadership of the new United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism in that area. Secondly, we must take health security more seriously. Diseases travel across borders rapidly and synthetic biology is an emerging threat. We need better prevention and national preparedness, and a global, multi-partner collaboration. The Global Health Security Agenda is an important forum in this area, and Finland and Australia are co-chairing an alliance in support of health-security capacity-building. We must take action before the next pandemic arrives.

Population dynamics are of great importance. Although the most rapid phase of global population growth is receding, in many places populations are still

growing. That is particularly the case in some African countries, where the potential exists for a four-fold increase by the end of the century. Growing populations often result in rapid urbanization. Cities offer people many possibilities, and urbanization's positive potential is huge. But if it is mismanaged it can also increase rootlessness, hopelessness and even radicalization. One antidote is to ensure that all individuals can reach their potential. Economic opportunities and human rights are vital. People must have a positive stake in their own societies. That will require dedicated efforts to empower individuals, including ensuring their access to education and basic services.

Gender equality is a key priority in Finnish foreign policy. As a HeForShe IMPACT Champion, I attach great personal importance to this. Universal access to sexual and reproductive health and ensuring sexual rights and comprehensive sexuality education for all are key factors in sustainable development. As a candidate for the UNESCO Executive Board, Finland also considers gender equality, high-quality education and fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to be priorities.

Climate change binds the South and the North together. None of us will be spared its destructive effects. Besides the direct environmental impact, it affects security and is a cause of forced migration. The rapid implementation of the Paris Climate Change Agreement is even more urgent than it was a year ago. The Agreement has a clear goal — keeping rising temperatures below 2°C. At the moment we are not on that path, and we must speed up our efforts, because the window for action is closing. Our transition from fossil fuels to renewables and energy efficiency must be much faster than what we are seeing right now. Everyone's efforts are needed.

The Arctic is at the forefront of climate change. It is warming twice as fast as the rest of the world. If we lose it, we will lose the whole world. We must find effective ways to slow down the warming of the Arctic. One of those is reducing emissions of black carbon and methane and their impact on the Arctic. The sources of black carbon are well known and solutions exist. What we need is shared willingness and determined steps to deal with the issue. The emissions should be reduced in the Arctic area first and foremost, but global action is also needed, as much of the black carbon is transported in from outside the area. I firmly believe that tackling this issue will be a genuine win-win for

the whole of humankind. Finland currently chairs the Arctic Council, and combating climate change is one of our priorities.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Finland celebrates 100 years of independence this year, and the theme of our centennial is "Together". Since our independence began, Finland has supported and respected the rules-based international order. In our interconnected world, promoting national interests also requires international efforts. I strongly believe that global challenges and threats must be addressed not by individual action alone but by the international community. Peace and security, human rights and development belong to all of us. Only together can we make this world a better place.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Finland for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Sauli Niinistö, President of the Republic of Finland, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Almazbek Atambaev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Mr. Almazbek Atambaev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Almazbek Atambaev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Atambaev (spoke in Russian): At the outset, I would like to express my sincere condolences to the people of Mexico following the catastrophic earthquake there.

My ancient people have gone through a long and difficult journey of historical development and formation. Centuries ago, we developed our own written language and established our own multi-ethnic State known to history as the Great Kyrgyz Khanate. Unfortunately, subsequent historical events led to the loss of the Khanate and the destruction of the greater part

of our people. We used to be referred to as a vanishing ethnic group. Accordingly, freedom, independence and a sovereign State became our national ideals and an impassioned driving force for our people throughout their historic journey. That journey culminated in 1991 in our achievement of sovereignty.

However, our struggle for freedom, democracy and justice continue. I am proud of my freedom-loving people, who in the past 12 years have executed two popular revolutions against a dictatorial regime and have shown that the only true source of power in the Kyrgyz Republic is the people.

“In other countries similar events could have led to the destruction of democracy and entailed significant strife, but the Kyrgyz people underwent difficult circumstances and preserved their democracy, which I hope will serve as a model for other countries.”

Those are the words of the Secretary-General, and we are eternally grateful to Mr. António Guterres for his balanced assessment of historic events during our country's most recent past.

Like all other countries that have chosen the path of sustainable development, the Kyrgyz Republic is committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The well-being and prosperity of humankind is our main goal. Despite the impact of the global economic and financial crisis, the decline in energy prices and the sanctions-based standoff of the global Powers, the gross domestic product of the Kyrgyz Republic has been steadily growing for the past few years, and our currency, the Kyrgyzstan som, is one of the most stable of the countries that make up the Commonwealth of Independent States.

We are embarking on several major projects, including the improvement of our infrastructure. We have achieved energy independence and a stable energy sector. The Kyrgyz Republic, a country that once went nowhere, has reinvented itself as a country of transit.

We are meeting all of our commitments with respect to the social fabric of the country. Salaries for teachers and doctors are on the rise, and pensions and other social benefits are also gradually increasing. Over the past five years, the rate of extreme poverty among the population has decreased by a factor of 4.5.

We have begun a meaningful and systematic campaign to rid the Government of the scourge of

corruption, in particular at the top levels of power. In our country, the privileged circles and untouchables of six or seven years ago no longer exist.

We are engaged in dialogue today on equal terms with all our international partners. As we build our independence in foreign policy, we base it exclusively on protecting our national interests, with special priority for regional integration. The borders that we share with our neighbours are becoming gateways to friendship and good neighbourliness.

Our main achievements in recent years have been peace, consensus and stability. The country is changing before our eyes. The Kyrgyz Republic is the first and only country in the post-Soviet Central Asian region with a parliamentary democracy. International organizations, including the United Nations, recognize the Kyrgyz Republic as one of the most free and stable States with a strong civil society in Eurasia.

One achievement of particular note is the introduction of a new electoral model using biometric technologies to identify voters and count votes electronically. We successfully used that system in the 2015 parliamentary elections and in a referendum held last year. The democratic process and openness that characterized the electoral campaign in the Kyrgyz Republic were validated by international observers and, most important, by the country's political parties' acceptance of their outcome. Campaigning is now in full gear for the presidential elections to be held on 15 October. In our view, fair and transparent elections are crucial to our country's stability, and we are determined to achieve that. I firmly believe that our newly elected Government will continue to advance its development as a democratic and open State.

Kyrgyzstan is currently developing a long-term national strategy for sustainable development through 2040. Our strategic goals for future sustainable development include accelerated economic development that provides people with decent jobs; ensuring economic and social well-being; public security and a high quality of life; and developing a parliamentary democracy and a strong civil society.

One of the key initiatives of that strategy is the “Clean Society” *Taza Koom* initiative, designed to develop and promote the principles of electronic Government and open society in our country. During his visit to my country, Secretary-General Guterres noted that the Kyrgyz Republic is not only a pioneer

of democracy in Central Asia, it is also becoming a pioneer in building a digital environment as well as a digital economy.

Based on all the steps that we have taken, I believe that in the near future the Kyrgyz Republic will become an economically developed, socially prosperous and secure country with a developed agro-industrial complex and manufacturing potential. It will be a secure country that will be safe to live and visit in a framework of sustainable tourism, supported by its membership in the Mountain Partnership, with its unique natural, historical and cultural monuments along the great Silk Road. It will be a country of healthy, educated, cultured, free and prosperous people governed by a fair and accountable leadership.

The year 2040 will mark 1,200 years since the advent of the Kyrgyz Khanate in the tenth century, when Kyrgyz statehood reached its apex. We owe it to both our history and our future to reach 2040 as a strong, self-reliant and highly developed State.

The consequences of climate change now threaten all of us to some degree, and mountainous countries such as the Kyrgyz Republic are on the front lines, owing to the complex ecosystems associated with such terrain. The problems of climate change are having an impact on every sector of the Kyrgyz Republic's economy and are causing significant damage from increasingly frequent natural disasters in mountainous areas, including mudflows, landslides, floods and avalanches.

We are particularly concerned about the accelerated melting of Kyrgyz glaciers, which are natural reservoirs and a source of fresh water not only for Central Asia but for the whole world. According to forecasts, by 2025 the total glacier area in the Kyrgyz Republic could decrease by 30 to 40 percent, which could lead to a drop in the water levels of Central Asian rivers. By 2100 the glaciers of the Kyrgyz Republic could vanish altogether. Our country is therefore promoting the implementation of joint projects to preserve glaciers in mountain ecosystems of upstream countries.

The basic essence of the transition to sustainable development is a matter of the survival of humankind and the preservation of the biosphere. Due to climate change, various rare animals and the biodiversity of our mountain ecosystems are threatened with extinction.

In particular, since the nineties, the global population of snow leopards has fallen by half. In

2013, we initiated and conducted the Global Snow Leopard Forum, marking the start of a noble mission: to make preserving that species and its ecosystem a single strategic nature environmental task. Only three weeks ago in Bishkek, we held the second International Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Forum. One of its main outcomes was a proposal by the Kyrgyz Republic to initiate a multi-country project at the regional level, with an emphasis on preserving our national and, no less important, global biodiversity.

In the modern world, mankind is forgetting its origins. In a chaotically fragmented world with increasing divisions, all nations need unifying factors and ideas rather than political ideas that divide peoples over religious beliefs or language. In that regard, our country has come up with a whole range of international projects and measures. In particular, to showcase the greatness of the nomadic civilization to the international community, the Kyrgyz Republic has launched a unique project, the World Nomad Games. The General Assembly provided international recognition for this project for its contribution to intercultural dialogue. Next year, we will be hosting the third Nomad Games, and we invite everyone to participate in them.

In July, we held an international forum on "Altai civilization and related peoples of the Altaic language family". Its main goal was the development and popularization of common heritage and cultural exchange between peoples having common Altai roots, strengthening and expanding cooperation among the States belonging to the Altaic language family.

The international conference initiated by my country on the theme "Islam and the modern secular State" is dedicated to the strengthening of peace and the development of intercultural dialogue. It will be held on 28 and 29 September in Bishkek. We believe it is important to study experiences and exchange information on the interaction of the State and religious institutions and civil societies in secular countries.

All those initiatives represent a contribution by the Kyrgyz Republic to the preservation of peace and stability and the development of cultural diversity and tolerance as a counterweight to contemporary threats of terrorism and radicalism, and we believe that they will have fruitful results.

One of the key factors in good living standards in Central Asia is our mutually beneficial use of water and energy resources. The Kyrgyz Republic

has consistently advocated the development and introduction in the region of economic mechanisms for water use. The world's limited water resources will sooner or later lead to an understanding that water is an economic resource that requires reasonable use. I wish to emphasize in particular that water-use issues in Central Asia can and should be solved only by the States of the region through an open and constructive dialogue, taking into account the interests and needs of all countries. It is unacceptable for international and regional organizations to impose their own approaches and ways of developing cooperation in this area on the countries of Central Asia.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the problem of managing the numerous uranium tailings in the Kyrgyz Republic that we inherited from the Soviet Union. They pose a threat to the entire region. We all know that a number of large uranium-tailing dump sites are located in close proximity to rivers and water sources. In the event of an accident at a tailing site, pollution of the region's rivers with highly toxic waste could lead to large-scale ecological and humanitarian consequences and would imperil the lives and health of millions of people and even socioeconomic development in every Central Asian country.

That is why, in 2012, the Kyrgyz Republic initiated a proposal to adopt a special resolution on the matter of the uranium legacy in Central Asia, and the General Assembly adopted that text as resolution 68/218 in 2013. In the past five years we have made significant progress in solving problems of radiation and environmental safety. Now we see that it is time for a new Assembly resolution that takes account of the results that have been achieved. Today, here in New York, we will be having a special meeting on the issue, initiated by the Kyrgyz Republic and others. We believe that the meeting will enable us to come up with new programmes and joint measures aimed at recultivating uranium-tailing sites.

With regard to matters of peace and security and the sustainable development of all countries on the planet, I also want to mention the problem of terrorism. The international community must step up its efforts to fight terrorism, extremism and related problems such as illegal drug trafficking, trafficking in humans and arms, and money laundering. Unfortunately, the international community's measures have been inadequate and have sometimes led to confrontation between States, while it is only by joint action and efforts that we can effectively counter the threats of terrorism and extremism.

I should not omit to mention the current situation in Myanmar and the plight of the Muslims there. Kyrgyzstan resolutely condemns the violence being perpetrated against the ethnic minority in Myanmar, and we earnestly call on all parties to the conflict to engage in peaceful negotiations.

We also urge all countries around the globe to uphold their commitment to the provisions of the international conventions on the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

It is encouraging to see the increasing role that the United Nations is playing in our collective efforts to confront the challenges and threats that we face today. But as that role increases, so does its accountability. It is the 15 members of the Security Council that currently decide the fate of the world. The consensus they reach determines matters of war and peace, security and stability in various parts of our planet. Moreover, the five permanent members of the Council can always block any decision. Kyrgyzstan therefore advocates the adoption of urgent measures to improve the Security Council that will enable it to take into consideration the interests of a majority of States.

Our world will continue to develop and change. It will continue to confront difficulties and crises, make breakthroughs and have successes in development. But all of us are united by the desire to preserve peace and concord on Earth. For that to happen, we need to provide equitable conditions and possibilities for development in every country, so that no one is left behind or left to cope with troubles and problems alone.

Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Climate Change Agreement and other agreements on the international agenda must remain the main priority of our joint action as an international community. Only together can we build a world based on cultural diversity; on dialogue, not sanctions; on preventive measures and greater accountability; a world where no one will be forgotten or left behind. So let us unite our efforts and help all people on Earth to live better and attain even a little more joy. Together we can build a world that provides a dignified life for everyone on our planet Earth.

(spoke in Kyrgyz; translation provided by the delegation)

As I end my speech, I would now like to address my beloved Kyrgyz people, my dear compatriots, in Kyrgyz. A thousand years later, the Kyrgyz nomads

have found their way again. For us to find that way, thousands of our forefathers had to sacrifice their lives and thousands of our mothers were left blinded by grief. Are there any mountains where no Kyrgyz bones are buried? Are there any valleys where no Kyrgyz blood has flowed?

In a few days' time, the Kyrgyz people will elect their new leader. Let us not lose our way by following the oligarchs and leaders of other countries. We cannot let others trample on Kyrgyz leaders ever again. We cannot let our national wealth and our lands be sold off or given away again while ordinary people suffer. Let us not be deceived by money. Let us not be deceived by fancy words. Let us not look deceitfully at one another. Let us be honest with one another. We must preserve our dignity and our unity. We must preserve our motherland. We must preserve our people.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Kyrgyz Republic for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Almazbek Atambayev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Ilham Heydar oglu Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Mr. Ilham Heydar oglu Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Ilham Heydar oglu Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Aliyev: For more than 25 years, Armenia has occupied 20 per cent of the territory of Azerbaijan — Nagorno Karabakh and seven other regions of our country. Nagorno Karabakh is an ancient and historical part of Azerbaijan. As a result of Armenian aggression, almost 20 per cent of the internationally recognized territory of Azerbaijan is under Armenian occupation. More than 1 million of Azerbaijanis have become refugees and internally displaced persons. Armenia has conducted a policy of ethnic cleansing

against Azerbaijanis in Armenia, in Nagorno Karabakh and seven other regions of Azerbaijan.

Armenia committed genocide against Azerbaijanis in Khojaly. The Khojaly genocide is already officially recognized by more than 10 countries. On February 26, 1992, Armenia committed war crimes, killing 613 peaceful residents of Khojaly, among them 106 women and 63 children. One of those war criminals who committed that terrible crime against humanity is the current Armenian President.

Leading international organizations adopted resolutions demanding the withdrawal of Armenian troops from the territory of Azerbaijan. In 1993, the Security Council adopted resolutions 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993), and 884 (1993), demanding the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian troops from the territory of Azerbaijan. Other international organizations, such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament, adopted similar decisions and resolutions.

Armenia does not implement them. For 24 years, Armenia has ignored Security Council resolutions, and unfortunately it has not been punished for that. In some cases, Security Council resolutions are implemented within days. In our case, resolutions have gone unimplemented for 24 years. That is a demonstration of double standards, and it is unacceptable. International sanctions must be imposed on Armenia. A major United Nations reform should be the creation of a mechanism for implementing Security Council resolutions.

Armenia does everything in its power to maintain the status quo and block substantive negotiations. The co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group — France, Russia and the United States — have stated on several occasions that the status quo is unacceptable. How can such a corrupt, failed State, ruled by a despotic, medieval regime, violate international law for so many years and ignore Security Council resolutions and statements by the world's leading countries? Because there is a double standard. There is no international pressure on the aggressor, no international sanctions imposed on the Armenian dictatorship. That policy must end. It is not only a demonstration of injustice, it also creates the impression that the Armenian dictatorship can continue its policy of terror.

In April 2016, Armenia committed another war crime on the line of contact, attacking our cities and villages. In that attack, six Azerbaijani civilians were killed, among them one child, and 26 were wounded. Hundreds of our houses were destroyed. Azerbaijan had to defend its citizens. Through a successful counter-attack, Azerbaijan liberated some territories in the three occupied areas — Agdere, Fuzuli and Jabrayil — and installed its national flag in the liberated territories. The Armenian leadership should not forget that lesson, or the results of their next provocation will be more painful for them.

When it loses on the battlefield, Armenia resorts to the cruel policy of attacking our cities and villages. On 4 July, Armenia launched a targeted attack on Alkhanli village in Fuzuli district with 82 and 120 millimetre mortars and grenade launchers, killing two civilians, two-year old Zahra Guliyeva and her grandmother. On 7 August, a 13-year-old boy in the Tovuz area, which borders Armenia, was wounded by Armenian soldiers. The international community must stop Armenian fascism and terror.

Azerbaijan is committed to a peaceful resolution of the conflict, but at the same time it will defend its citizens, in line with the Charter of the United Nations, if Armenian military provocations continue. If necessary, Azerbaijan will again punish the aggressor, as it did in April 2016. The Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno Karabakh conflict must be resolved on the basis of international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions, and the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan must be completely restored.

Despite the enormous difficulties caused by the Armenian occupation, Azerbaijan has developed rapidly and successfully. It is an active member of the United Nations, and in 2011 was elected as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, receiving the votes of 155 countries. An absolute majority of Member States demonstrated their support for Azerbaijan and its policy. For Azerbaijan, which at that time had been independent for only 20 years, that was a great success.

Azerbaijan is a stable, modern, democratic country. The development of democracy and the protection of human rights are among the top priorities of our Government. All fundamental freedoms are fully guaranteed in Azerbaijan, including freedom of expression, of the press, of assembly and of religion.

Azerbaijan is one of the world's recognized centres of multiculturalism, which is a State policy in Azerbaijan, where representatives of all ethnic groups and religions live in peace and harmony. In Azerbaijan we declared 2016 a Year of Multiculturalism and 2017 a Year of Islamic Solidarity.

Unlike Armenia, which is a mono-ethnic country with almost no national minorities and where xenophobia is a State policy, Azerbaijan is a multi-ethnic country. Our society's cultural, ethnic and religious diversity is a big asset. In that regard, Armenia, where Islamophobia has reached a peak, has committed many acts of vandalism, destroying all mosques in the occupied territories.

Azerbaijan has hosted numerous international events aimed at strengthening interreligious dialogue. Among them are the seventh Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, the World Religious Leaders Summit, the World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue, on four occasions, and the Baku International Humanitarian Forum, on five occasions, as well as other important events.

As a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Council of Europe, in 2008 Azerbaijan launched the Baku Process, which is supported by the United Nations. The main goal of the Baku Process is to strengthen dialogue, partnership and cooperation between the Muslim world and Europe.

In 2015, Azerbaijan hosted the first European Games, in which 6,000 athletes from 50 countries participated. This year, we hosted the fourth Islamic Solidarity Games, with almost 3,000 athletes from 54 countries, so in the space of two years our capital city of Baku was the venue for both the European and the Islamic Games, in a major contribution to promoting multiculturalism. In a demonstration of Azerbaijan's status as one of the world's leading sporting countries, the Azerbaijani team came second overall at the first European Games and first at the Islamic Solidarity Games. Further proof of our achievement in this area is the fact that Azerbaijan finished fourteenth overall at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games in terms of medals, winning 18 in total.

Azerbaijan has made significant progress in social and economic development. Our economy has more than tripled since 2004, and we have created more than 1.6 million jobs, keeping our unemployment level one of the lowest in the world at 5 per cent. We

have prioritized poverty reduction; our poverty levels have gone from more than 40 per cent in 2004 to 5 or 6 per cent. Our hard-currency reserves are equal to the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and our State's foreign debt is less than 20 per cent of GDP. In 2009 Azerbaijan was named leading reformer of the world in the World Bank's *Doing Business* report. The Davos World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report for 2016-2017 ranked Azerbaijan thirty-seventh of 138 countries. In 2015, Azerbaijan received the South-South Award in recognition of its outstanding achievements in implementing the Millennium Development Goals, and since 2010 has been classified as a country with high human development. Our rapid development of our space industry has enabled Azerbaijan to join the world's space club with Azerspace and Azersky, its two telecommunication and field observation satellites, with a third, Azerspace-2, to be launched soon.

Today, Azerbaijan exports intellectual as well as industrial and agricultural products. Our State agency for services and social innovations for citizens, ASAN, is a model for modern public relations and services. With 251 services under one roof, the agency's absolute transparency and zero tolerance for corruption and bribery has made it attractive to many countries. As a purely Azerbaijani brand in the five years since it was founded, it has provided more than 1.6 million services to 5 million people. The total number of applications is 17 million and the public's rating of ASAN is 98 per cent. In 2015, in recognition of its contribution to excellence, creativity and simplification of the delivery of public services, ASAN received the United Nations Public Service Award.

The main goal of our policies is improving the lives of our citizens. Since 2004, salaries have increased by 5.6 times and pensions 8.2 times. With no foreign financial support, we have built almost 100 new settlements and towns for refugees and internally displaced persons affected by the Armenian occupation. We have thereby improved the living conditions of more than 250,000 people, providing them with new houses and flats and building 152 schools, 59 medical centres, and 60 kindergartens in their towns and settlements. Overall, since 2004 we have built or renovated more than 3,000 schools and 600 hospitals and medical centres. Azerbaijan's literacy levels are close to 100 per cent. Every year more than 5 million people — half of the population — receive medical check-ups totally financed by the State budget.

Azerbaijan plays an important role in the global energy market. As a reliable supplier of oil and gas to international markets, we provide energy security for many countries throughout the world. Today Azerbaijan, together with its international partners, is close to completing the \$40 billion Southern Gas Corridor project, one of the largest infrastructure projects in the world.

Another important priority of ours is transportation. Situated as it is between Europe and Asia, Azerbaijan is making wise use of its geographical location to become one of Eurasia's leading transportation hubs. In recent years we have built six international airports and 11,000 kilometres of modern highways and roads. Azerbaijan's 270 vessels make up the biggest trade fleet in the Caspian Sea, and our modern shipbuilding yards are capable of building all types and sizes of ships. We are also modernizing our railroad infrastructure, and most of our territory can now be reached by rail. Next year we will inaugurate an international trade seaport that will be the biggest in the Caspian region. Azerbaijan is making significant investments in East-West and North-South transportation corridors in order to create the shortest possible routes across the country in both directions.

The President returned to the Chair.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that last year we celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the restoration of our independence. Azerbaijan's successful development has demonstrated once again that only when a country is free and independent and its destiny is in the hands of its people can it achieve success. The greatest happiness of the people of Azerbaijan is that we live in an independent country conducting independent policies — policies based on the national interests of our people.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Ilham Heydar oglu Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. David Arthur Granger, President of the Republic of Guyana

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Guyana.

Mr. David Arthur Granger, President of the Republic of Guyana, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. David Arthur Granger, President of the Republic of Guyana, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Granger: Let me begin by expressing the deep condolences and solidarity of the Government and people of Guyana to the victims of yesterday's earthquake in Mexico and those of Hurricane Maria, which virtually destroyed the Commonwealth of Dominica two days ago.

The Cooperative Republic of Guyana congratulates you, Mr. President, on your election to lead the General Assembly at its seventy-second session. We are confident that under your guidance progress will be made in advancing the international agenda and realizing the theme of this year's Assembly, "Focusing on people: Striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet". Guyana also appreciates the sterling performance of your predecessor, Ambassador Peter Thomson of Fiji, in his stewardship of the Assembly during the past year. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Secretary-General António Guterres on his appointment last year and to wish him a successful tenure.

Today, I am speaking of people, peace and the planet. Nothing is more important in this general debate than ensuring that all representatives here respect its theme, "Focusing on people: Striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet". First, the theme enjoins us to focus on people — people of all countries and in all circumstances. It is about the human condition of people in States that are large and small, rich and poor, strong and weak. It is about humankind's condition everywhere on Earth.

The world is facing several serious humanitarian crises. In too many parts of the world, children still die from preventable diseases or go to bed hungry. In some places, women are denied equal opportunities for enjoying a good life. The gap between the world's rich and poor remains unacceptably wide. Conflicts within States have spawned international refugee crises, resulting in the displacement of millions from their homelands.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent our collective desire and determination to eradicate hunger and poverty from our planet while promoting equal opportunities in education, employment and social justice for both men and women. The adoption of the SDGs has catalysed our aspirations for a better world into concrete and forward-looking actions and objectives. The Goals seek to promote respect for people's inherent dignity and their rights as human beings. However, their advancement is being obstructed by human rights violations, by people's involuntary migration from their homelands and by terrorism and warfare. The challenge for the United Nations is resolving to reinforce respect for the rights of citizens within the governance structures of our Member States.

Secondly, I am speaking of planet Earth. A sustainable planet is humankind's ultimate patrimony. Nothing is more vital to people's survival. We have been indifferent too long to the need to protect the planet, and now its sustainability is threatened on many fronts. Climate change is not a fiction or the invention of a few extremists. This year, the small island States of the Caribbean and parts of North America have felt the devastating fury of a series of hurricanes — Harvey, Irma, José, Katia, Lee and Maria, to whose frequency and ferocity humankind has contributed through the reckless exploitation of Earth's resources.

Hurricane Irma was a deadly, destructive portent of the extreme vulnerability and fragility of the small island developing States and low-lying coastal States of the Caribbean, and Guyana is playing its part, within the limits of its resources, to provide relief to the affected populations of our sister Caribbean States. Guyana signed and celebrated the Paris Agreement on Climate Change last year in this very Hall. We renew our commitment to its goals this year in a demonstration of Guyana's pioneering role in global environmental stewardship. It must be remembered that in 1989 — three years before the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development was held in Rio in 1992 — Guyana had the foresight to enter into an environmental covenant with the international community by dedicating 360,000 hectares of its rainforests,

"to develop, demonstrate and make available to Guyana and the international community systems, methods and techniques for the sustainable

utilization of the multiple resources of the tropical forest and the conservation of biological diversity”.

Twenty years after that international initiative, Guyana entered into an agreement with the Kingdom of Norway,

“to work together to provide the world with a relevant, replicable model of how Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, known as the REDD-plus programme, plus conservation and sustainable forest management, can align the development objectives of the forest countries with the need to combat climate change”.

Guyana is part of the Guiana Shield, one of the world’s last remaining blocks of pristine rainforest. The Guiana Shield is the source of 15 per cent of the world’s freshwater reserves. Its biodiversity provides ecosystem services, such as food, fresh water and medicinal products. It provides environmental services, such as the regulation of the water cycle, water quality and pollination. The Shield’s forests capture and store carbon, mitigating the greenhouse effect. In other words, the Shield is essential to life on Earth. Guyana calls on the United Nations to help protect and preserve the Guiana Shield as a global resource for the survival and sustainability of our planet.

I will now speak of peace. Striving for peace has been the principal purpose and preoccupation of this Organization throughout its existence. A good life for the world’s peoples and sustainable use of the planet’s resources are predicated on peace with justice, including justice within and between States. The world is weary of war. Striving for peace must be humankind’s ceaseless quest. The United Nations is the paramount global instrument of peace. It has a vital role to play in ensuring respect for international law through the International Court of Justice and the Security Council. In striving for peace, we must aim to resolve long-standing inter-State conflicts. In that regard, Guyana supports the call for reform of the Security Council, in order to give an even greater voice to developing countries.

We reiterate our support for a two-State solution to the Palestine-Israeli conflict. We affirm the right of the Palestinian people to a homeland and a dignified existence. We demand the withdrawal of the injurious economic embargo on the Caribbean island of Cuba, which frustrates its right to development.

Striving for peace and the right to development have been Guyana’s most serious concerns since national independence in 1966. When I addressed the Assembly last September (see A/71/PV.8), I explained the danger that we have been facing on our borders as a consequence of the territorial claims of our neighbour to the West, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. I outlined to the world’s nations the peril that Guyana was enduring on its borders at the hands of Venezuela. Venezuela’s claim to Guyana’s territory, however, has not diminished or been diverted. Guyana remains imperilled. Disturbing developments in Venezuela have attracted the world’s attention and roused the concerns of many of us about the privations of its people.

The Caribbean people want the Caribbean to be a zone of peace. Venezuela’s claim on Guyana’s territorial integrity, however, would be a threat to that zone and that peace. Venezuela is more than four times the size of Guyana, and yet it claims two-thirds of Guyana’s territory, including its maritime space. We depend on our territorial and maritime resources for our country’s development and for propelling our people out of poverty. After 51 years of Guyana’s independence, the Venezuelan claim persists. An eminent international tribunal provided a full, perfect and final settlement of the issue 118 years ago, in 1899. Venezuela repudiated that arbitral award in 1962 in the Special Committee on Decolonization, as British Guiana — as we were then — strove to achieve its independence.

This is a warning to the world, through the Assembly, that peace will be jeopardized in our region if justice does not prevail, not only within Venezuela, but also with regard to its border controversy with Guyana. Four Secretaries-General have been seized of the Venezuelans’ claim. The choice has become one between a just and peaceful settlement in accordance with international law, and a Venezuelan posture of attrition that is increasingly blustering and militaristic. In this matter, protraction is the enemy of resolution and the ally of sustained conflict.

Fortunately, as they indicated publicly, former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and current Secretary-General António Guterres have both decided that if, based on the 1966 Geneva Agreement, significant progress has not been made by the end of 2017 towards arriving at a full agreement on a settlement of the controversy, the International Court of Justice will be the next means of peaceful settlement, unless Guyana and Venezuela jointly request otherwise. Guyana has

been working assiduously with the Secretary-General's personal representative and looks to the international community to ensure that Venezuela is not allowed to thwart the process of judicial settlement, which is the clear and agreed path to peace and justice.

The people of the world yearn to fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment — an attainable objective of the Sustainable Development Goals endorsed by the United Nations. Peace for the world's peoples is the mandate of the United Nations. Peace can be achieved by addressing the world's humanitarian crises, promoting justice within and between nations and resolving long-standing conflicts between States.

Planet Earth can provide a good life for all. The planet can be protected from the ravages of climate change and reckless damage to its ecology and biodiversity. United, the nations gathered in this Hall can fulfil the promise of the Charter of the United Nations and the theme of the General Assembly to focus on people, strive for peace and protect the planet.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Guyana for the statement he has just made.

Mr. David Arthur Granger, President of the Republic of Guyana, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Dragan Čović, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Dragan Čović, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Dragan Čović, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Čović (*spoke in Bosnian; English text provided by the delegation*): I would first like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on the task you have just embarked on in leading the General Assembly at its seventy-second session. I am convinced that your tact

and diplomacy, which we in Bosnia and Herzegovina have witnessed first-hand, will help the most important body of the United Nations make new progress and effectively face new challenges. My gratitude also goes to the outgoing President for the leadership he showed during the seventy-first session.

I would also like to join others in congratulating His Excellency Mr. António Guterres on his appointment as Secretary-General of the United Nations. His noble and wise intention to devote more attention to building bridges to connect us all in the years ahead will certainly have all of Bosnia and Herzegovina's support.

In a world dominated by uncertainty and insecurity, it is simply not possible to overstate the importance of the principles and the multilateral framework defined for us by the founders of the United Nations. The strength of the Organization lies in both our individual and shared strengths in our efforts to eradicate diseases, hunger, terrorism and every other threat to human existence. In doing so, of course, we must admit to ourselves how necessary and important it is to use thoughtful and constructive measures to bring the United Nations system closer to its surroundings and enable it to adapt so that it can anticipate the challenges its environment presents and respond to them with a force that is far stronger than the simple sum of our individual abilities.

We continue to witness and to be deeply concerned about the ongoing suffering of the Syrian people. Bosnia and Herzegovina strongly condemns every form of violence against Syria's civilian population. The violence must stop. The dignity of every Syrian woman, man and child, and of every Syrian refugee, must be restored. Their belief in the possibility of recovery and opportunities for a new life must also be restored. We and many other delegations in this Hall today will continue to call for a peaceful and political solution to the conflict through negotiations. That process must be owned by the Syrian people alone, based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), and with the assistance of the international community and the United Nations, led by the Special Envoy for Syria, whose selfless efforts to continue the negotiations in Geneva are highly appreciated.

It seems superfluous to repeat that there can be no peace and prosperity for the Israeli people if the same is not provided for the Palestinians, and vice versa. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict represents the most serious

unresolved problem in the Middle East, and the current absence of any negotiations between the parties is disturbing. Both nations deserve better. Again — and this has been the case for decades — the journey towards peace has been too slow and has become more and more complex. It is therefore essential that we steadfastly recall the ultimate goal, which is the existence of two States, Israel and Palestine, living peacefully side by side, in safety and within recognized borders. Bosnia and Herzegovina still believes that this goal can be achieved if both parties can fulfil their obligations as set forth in the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Evil has existed throughout human history. Sometimes it is on the margins of our communities. Sometimes, to a greater or lesser degree, it is inside them. It does not always take the same form or manifest itself with the same intensity. Terrorism is undoubtedly the greatest evil of our times, and its form and strength represent the greatest threat we have to international peace and security. Destructive forces have always had deep roots and many different faces, but there can be no justification for their existence. We need united, concentrated efforts, along with a multidimensional and integrated approach, to overcome terrorism and permanently eliminate the fear of terror from our communities.

Bosnia and Herzegovina will continue to contribute to the full implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and the activities of the Counter-Terrorism Committee. We particularly welcome the efforts of Secretary-General António Guterres in strengthening the counter-terrorism capacities of the United Nations and, in that regard, the establishment of the new Office of Counter-Terrorism. For our part, we are ready to constantly strengthen cooperation at the regional, subregional and international levels, especially in the areas of information collection and exchange. As a member of the Global Coalition against Da'esh, we will continue to support the Coalition's efforts to liberate entire communities and help them recover from the suffering and harm imposed by Da'esh and its global network.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is committed to the full implementation of all Security Council resolutions aimed at bringing persons involved in financing, planning, preparing or executing terrorist acts to justice. Furthermore, we fully share the view that for the long-term eradication of the evil of terrorism and violent

extremism, it is necessary to continuously invest in efforts along the entire spectrum of interconnected areas, from the eradication of injustice, inequality, poverty and a lack of freedom to improving understanding among those who differ, and to strengthen intercultural dialogue and generally accepted democratic values. Once we start thinking that we have done enough in all those areas, we need to start again and redouble our efforts.

A world without the threat of the total destruction of humankind is less utopian if there are fewer means and arms for destruction. Disarmament and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are therefore still prerequisites for the global peace and security that we all strive for. In that context, Bosnia and Herzegovina joins the strong condemnation of the nuclear tests conducted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. We also call on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to comply without delay, fully and unconditionally, with its obligations under all relevant Security Council resolutions.

My faith in the value of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is as strong today as it was two years ago, when we adopted it. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, it has received due institutional attention, based on its significance and the nobility of the goals it sets for us. The roles have been defined, the goals are clear and coordination has been established.

For us, as well as for other developing countries burdened by the discrepancies between wishes and possibilities, strong political will and decisive practical steps in the right direction will not always be enough. Fulfilling the noble and ambitious Sustainable Development Goals requires knowledge and norms that many Member States do not have. It might produce an additional burden on the already overburdened State budgets. Assistance in formulating strategies and policies, transferring technologies, providing financial resources and measuring progress is therefore indisputably crucial, along with, of course, countries' full ownership of the implementation processes. In that connection, we have fully understood and accepted the strong interconnectedness of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. We have ratified the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and have chosen to follow its guidelines. It is a debt to our children and to the planet that has to be unconditionally fulfilled.

Whether in our past, present or future, women in my country hold high positions that rightfully and naturally belong to them. The role of women is vital to the development and prosperity of the family as well as of society as a whole. In post-conflict environments, women are always the first to extend the hand of reconciliation. In times of great challenges and risks, we need the strength and natural ability of women more than ever in order to pursue peaceful solutions.

Although we are extremely proud of the significant progress we have made in implementing the provisions of the historic Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, we are also aware of the areas where it is possible and necessary to do considerably more. We will certainly continue to invest in additional efforts to strengthen and empower Bosnian women and girls in accordance with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Another social group that deserves special attention is young people, who are a constant source of change and an incubator of inventive solutions to the problems we inherit from the past. When healthy, educated, and employed, they are the engine that drives our societies forward. Environments in which young people have limited access to education, economic development and decision-making processes are subject to frustration, social unrest and instability. For that reason, a significant part of the reform processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina is dedicated to creating conditions for reducing youth unemployment, corresponding to targets 8.5 and 8.6 of Goal 8 of the 2030 Agenda.

Unfortunately, in Bosnia and Herzegovina we know all too much about the high price of war. For us, preventive diplomacy is a tool that, when used at the right time, can help ensure that wars are never repeated anywhere. There are many reasons why, on a global level, the United Nations system must be at the heart of all activities that use preventive measures in order to resolve crises and prevent people from being displaced from their homes.

Again, much of the responsibility for prevention lies at other levels. Within our communities, we must counter all symptoms of trouble and conflicts. We must correct social injustice, reconcile what seems irreconcilable, persevere in compromise, strive for pluralistic and inclusive solutions, give equal weight to our own rights and those of others and constantly seek ways to find a common language. I believe that prevention and

mediation, as well as conflict management techniques and conflict resolution in divided societies, should be applied first within the region at issue, with regional actors who generally better understand the opposing sides, their reasoning and their different views of the problem.

We are proud of our participation in the United Nations peacekeeping missions in South Sudan, Cyprus, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali. We consider that to be the most direct contribution of Bosnia and Herzegovina to building world peace. We also see our involvement in United Nations missions as a way to do things that are possible today but that not long ago were almost impossible to even imagine, and so to help people in areas affected by conflicts.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has learned lessons from its difficult past, and for the future it has chosen to follow the principles set by the founders of the European Union 60 years ago. We have adopted the European path, and, choosing between cooperation and confrontation, we chose and will always choose cooperation in the search for common compromises.

On our own, but also with the unselfish help of our European friends, we do everything we can to find as many opportunities for open dialogue as possible, and we use each of those opportunities to build even more trust and mutually beneficial connections for our people, who, despite difficulties and complicated times, have more common links and interests than we, their leaders, are sometimes willing to recognize. Reconciliation, trust, partnership and cooperation among all of us, in contexts both broad and narrow, must become living and long-term principles for a stable and secure future. Commitment to regional initiatives and constructive action through the regional organizations to which we belong are therefore high on the list of our foreign-policy priorities.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is now doing everything it can to speed up its progress to where it really belongs, within the framework of a strong European family, whose values it shares. Reform and other processes that we are pursuing for that purpose are not always simple or easy, but we see them as a unique opportunity to accelerate the harmonization of our economic, social and institutional development with what awaits us tomorrow in the European Union. We will therefore continue to fulfil the obligations we have undertaken in

order to reach the status of candidate by the beginning of 2018 with true commitment, which will be a powerful and much needed boost to internal consolidation and the further acceleration of integration processes.

However, it is with concern that I wish to draw the Assembly's attention to the fact that my country is going through a period of important challenges. I am deeply convinced that one people in Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot be happy and prosperous if the other two are not, and indeed if all other people living in our country are not. In that regard, I believe that it is up to us in Bosnia and Herzegovina to make a crucial step to adopt changes to our electoral legislation by the end of this year, in accordance with the decisions of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As in the past, we expect understanding and support of the international community in solving the issue, because it is of vital importance for further democratizing and achieving our full integration into the European Union.

Allow me to conclude with a reminder that all of our needs — economic, social, security, political and cultural — can be very diverse, as are our possibilities for achieving them. The choices we make every day to ensure prosperity for our people also vary from one Member State to another. I am convinced that the future of humankind will largely depend on our ability to turn our differences into advantages. We expect the United Nations system to guide us in that and to assist us, above all, in building a system based on unity in diversity.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Dragan Čović, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

**Address by Mr. Juan Carlos Varela Rodríguez,
President of the Republic of Panama**

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Panama.

Mr. Juan Carlos Varela Rodríguez, President of the Republic of Panama, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Juan Carlos Varela Rodríguez,

President of the Republic of Panama, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Varela Rodríguez (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin my remarks by extending my condolences and solidarity to the people and the Government of Mexico for the victims of the earthquake that struck yesterday, as well as to the peoples of Cuba, the United States and the nations of the Caribbean for the deaths and heavy material damage left in the wake of Hurricanes Irma and Harvey and now being inflicted by Hurricane Maria, especially in Dominica. Our prayers are with the victims and their families. Such natural disasters send a clear message that we must continue to forge ties of solidarity and that our countries' protective and security capacities should be used solely to help each other, not to create conflict.

I would like to congratulate you, President Lajčák, on your election to steer the debates at this session of the General Assembly, and to extend warm greetings to Secretary-General António Guterres. In my capacity as President of the Republic of Panama, I pledge the support of my Government and country. From this rostrum, with respect and affection, I would also like to send my warmest greetings to the people of Panama, who have given me the opportunity to serve them.

For a fourth consecutive year, I am returning to the Assembly as the world is beset by challenges such as organized crime, terrorism and natural disasters that affect all our populations. Another major challenge we must tackle is the increase in migration flows driven by war, poverty and inequality. Against that backdrop, the theme of the Assembly at this session — “Focusing on people: Striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet” — will encourage Heads of State and Government to engage in dialogue and reach agreement on concrete actions that we can take to bring about peace in the world.

Peace is a human construct, the fruit of coexisting respectfully and meeting the basic needs of individuals, responsibly, all the while preserving the planet that is our home. The most effective and appropriate way to resolve the problems that currently affect the Earth's inhabitants is to ensure that human beings are always central to our decision-making. Such humanitarian policy has been the lodestar of my leadership of Panama for the past 39 months, as I have sought to build a nation where justice and equality prevail, without

making innocent people pay the price or causing unnecessary conflict.

Democracy is not just about electing Heads of State in free and fair elections. Rather, it is about those of us who are elected understanding that the power bestowed on us should be used only to serve those who elected us; about managing the wealth of the State with transparency, fairness and social justice for the benefit of the people; and about leading our countries peacefully, on a basis of dialogue and consensus. In 2015, in his opening remarks to the seventh Summit of the Americas, Pope Francis said,

“Panama’s geographic position in the centre of the American continent, making it the meeting point between North and South, between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, is surely a call, *pro mundi beneficio*, to generate a new order of peace and justice and to promote solidarity and cooperation while respecting the just autonomy of each nation.”

I have always borne in mind Panama’s role as a facilitator of dialogue and understanding. Ours is a country of unity at the service of the international community. We stand ready to cooperate as a strategic ally and to contribute our resources in the interest of addressing the common problems afflicting the region and the world at large.

At the Summit of the Americas, which took place in Panama, there was a historic rapprochement between two countries that had held divergent positions for more than half a century — Cuba and the United States. They began a frank conversation about putting an end to their estrangement. As we near the next Summit of the Americas, in Lima, we must approach it with a constructive spirit and an openness to dialogue to analyse the problems of the region and uphold peace and unity across the Americas.

The Americas and the world are happy to see that Colombia is successfully continuing to implement its Peace Agreement. In his recent visit, Pope Francis delivered an important message about the consolidation of the process — which benefits everyone, not just the Colombian people — that we must accept the mistakes that have been made, correct them and seek reconciliation.

However, our continent is facing a problem that transcends borders — the growth of drug production and trafficking. It is vital that the leaders of the Americas

unite in joining forces to tackle that challenge, one that threatens the peace of our peoples, particularly in the northern triangle. We cannot allow drug trafficking to disrupt the peace that has been restored at such cost in Central America and Colombia. Drug trafficking condemns our people to poverty; affects State budgets; makes us invest resources in security instead of education, health, housing and transportation; challenges the authority of Governments; and subverts the loyalty of those whose duty it is to comply with and uphold the rule of law.

Panama reaffirms its commitment to combating drug trafficking head-on. We will dedicate the full force of our efforts and resources to helping the region to eliminate that scourge. Moreover, we appeal to the leaders and Heads of State of the countries that produce and consume drugs to support us in this fight. Every dollar generated by drug trafficking represents death in our region.

The political crisis in Venezuela is having a profound impact on the region. We must stop the clashes that have provoked unnecessary violence, hurting all Latin Americans. It is urgent that we recognize that to resolve the conflict, both sides must seek a path to understanding and agree on a defined road map for free and transparent presidential elections in 2018. It would be a grave error if the Government of Venezuela insisted on installing a one-party political model by force. That would aggravate its social and humanitarian crisis, increasing migratory flows that could result in complex situations in neighbouring countries. We should all stand with the Venezuelan people to help them overcome this crisis.

Our continent must emerge united from the Summit of the Americas in Lima if we are to combat inequality and drug trafficking together. In that regard, Panama is willing to play a front-line role, building bridges of understanding and dialogue that can make our region stronger and more united. I call on the Heads of State of the Americas to go to Lima with that vision of unity so that we can ensure that the hemisphere makes steady progress towards development.

We live in a world that is being battered by acts of terrorism, natural disasters and organized crime. There is no time or space for us to waste effort fighting over temporary ideological differences. Countries must unite their capacities to address the evils affecting peoples beyond their borders. Panama strongly condemns all

acts of terrorism anywhere in the world, which can never be justified.

Today I respectfully call on the countries that are members of the Security Council to strengthen their measures and decisions promoting sustainable peace in places such as Syria and Iraq. I must also strongly condemn irresponsible leaders, such as those in North Korea, who seek to destabilize peaceful coexistence in the world.

Panama believes that a strong multilateral system can be used to achieve the objectives we set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and we are ready to continue playing a leadership role. That is why we support the Secretary-General's process of reform designed to make the United Nations more transparent, efficient and better able to respond to the needs of a world of more than 7 billion people. If we can share the wealth of our planet, no one will be left behind.

Those reforms must ensure that the United Nations unites us more effectively and connects Heads of State with the pain of people suffering from war, natural disasters and organized crime. Multilateral cooperation is vital to that process, which is not a question merely of economic resources but also of the transfer of capacity and best practices. Middle-income countries such as Panama can contribute to the transfer of knowledge and technology, generating tangible benefits for populations and contributing to peace.

Panama's commitment to that path is unwavering. We therefore call for the establishment of a United Nations regional headquarters in our country. We are willing to build facilities for a centre for regional humanitarian assistance that will enable us to provide timely support, when it is needed, to countries in the region that are dealing with natural disasters, as we did recently with the air and maritime bridges bringing aid to countries affected by Hurricane Irma, which struck Cuba, the Caribbean and the United States.

As President of the Republic of Panama, I have two clear goals: to make politics a service and ensure that my country continues as a functional democracy. We are recovering hundreds of millions of misappropriated dollars that belong to the people, and we are investing that money in the people, using the State's resources to benefit all Panamanians. Thanks to the honest Government that I lead, the increased revenues from our broadened Canal and the sustained economic

growth of the past few years, we are improving the living conditions of all Panamanians.

We have significantly increased the salaries of civil servants, police officers, educators, doctors and nurses. We have reviewed the money going into pensions and scholarships and strengthened conditional monetary assistance. We are also laying thousands of kilometres of roads, investing in major basic health projects and water-purifying plants, and building tens of thousands of houses for our poorest citizens, as well as modern, bilingual schools, sports and cultural centres, new metro lines and a modern mass-transport system.

We are working towards those objectives with a sense of responsibility and transparency, without increasing any taxes, and moving forward steadily towards fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals. That is the value of an honest Government, which, bound by social justice and equality to distribute the riches of the people, represents a road to a peaceful society, a decent quality of life and a fairer world in which we are all treated equally.

All human beings deserve a decent life, which takes everyone's efforts to build and is achieved only when the basic needs of our citizens for food, shelter, health and education are met. That is why it is important to ensure that every citizen pays taxes to the State, as the working and professional classes do. It is Governments' duty to take action against tax evasion, which affects the ability of the State to help the poorest and deepens inequality. Rulers must implement public policies and develop programmes that allow the State to distribute resources equitably, so that the most vulnerable are equipped with the tools to contribute to development and use resources sustainably.

Countries have to be accountable in the interests of achieving transparency in the administration of State resources. However, it is important to ensure that the misdeeds of the political classes and their supporters in business do not hurt innocent people. The fight against corruption is not measured by the numbers of those who are prosecuted and convicted by the judicial system, but rather by the numbers of those who benefit from a transparent administration of State resources, so that they are recovered for the State's use. That is important. Rulers have to defend their countries' economies and the jobs and projects that benefit the people.

Panama is committed to the security and protection of its logistics platforms and financial systems. We

continue to work responsibly to prevent illegal activities that undermine the common good. In a world that is constantly talking about justice, we Heads of State and Government must keep in mind that justice means giving all of us what is rightfully ours. Our planet is rich enough for all human beings to have a decent life. The most important value for the inhabitants of the Earth is peace. It is our responsibility to ensure that our actions are always aligned with the pursuit of that goal. May God bless us all and guide us in our work towards a better world.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Panama for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Juan Carlos Varela Rodríguez, President of the Republic of Panama, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Rwanda.

Mr. Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Kagame: Every year, the United Nations channels billions of dollars in humanitarian assistance. It also sets the global agenda on key policy issues from development to women's rights, while providing a platform for major international agreements. Those are signs of an Organization that is both relevant and, in many cases, effective. And yet there is a sense that the United Nations is not meeting our needs and expectations. In that context, I would like to commend the Secretary-General, and to congratulate the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, on the two important initiatives that the Secretary-General championed this week — his initiative on United Nations reform and his response to sexual exploitation and abuse.

Those steps go to the heart of the matter, which is the deficit of trust and accountability in the international system. To be truly effective in delivering a decent life

for all, the United Nations must treat all the people it serves with impartiality and respect, and it must be a good steward of the funds entrusted to it. Abuse and waste are therefore not a mere public-relations problem but an existential challenge that must be tackled head-on.

The Secretary-General deserves our full support in his efforts to make the United Nations not only effective but transformational. We have the tools and the mandates to address the global challenges of our day, from climate change to peacebuilding to human equality and development. Where we fall short is in getting things done.

Institutional reform is not a one-off event like applying a fresh coat of paint. The essence of reform is a mindset of constantly striving to improve performance and delivery and holding ourselves responsible for shortcomings and results. In that sense, the reform spirit that has started to take root in both the United Nations and the African Union is encouraging, and Rwanda is happy to be associated with both. This positive momentum is also positioning the United Nations and the African Union to work more closely together.

Concrete steps can be taken on both sides to improve the quality of coordination and consultation. The African Union and the United Nations are already good partners in peacekeeping, and Rwanda is happy and proud to have forces serving under both flags. But we can do much more and do it better.

Mr. Rajaonarimampianina Rakotoarimanana (Madagascar), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We also share the common objective of meeting the Sustainable Development Goals and Africa's Agenda 2063 targets, and of continuing to enhance women's empowerment. Closer collaboration will help us bridge the growing digital divide through universal broadband access, which can connect our people to networks of knowledge and prosperity.

Canada and Rwanda, together with other stakeholders, are working to raise awareness of the tremendous impact we can have right away by ratifying and implementing the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol. This is among the most important actions that a country can take in directly tackling climate change and reaffirming its commitment to the Paris Agreement. Fewer than 15 additional ratifications

are needed in order for the Kigali Amendment to come into force in 2019.

Our world is facing difficult challenges, but no more than in the past. Working together in a constructive spirit, we can ensure for our children the future they deserve.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Rwanda for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

**Address by Mr. Horacio Manuel Cartes Jara,
President of the Republic of Paraguay**

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Paraguay.

Mr. Horacio Manuel Cartes Jara, President of the Republic of Paraguay, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Horacio Manuel Cartes Jara, President of the Republic of Paraguay, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Cartes Jara (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the Paraguayan people and the Government of Paraguay, I hope that under the presidency of Mr. Miroslav Lajčák the General Assembly will have great success in fulfilling the purposes of the United Nations.

On behalf of the people and the Government of the Republic of Paraguay, I wish to express to the people and the Government of Mexico our solidarity with the victims of yesterday's earthquake, whose epicentre was in Morelos state, and to extend our sincerest condolences to the families of the victims of the tragedy.

After four years as Head of the Government of the Republic of Paraguay, I have the honour of participating in the General Assembly with strengthened resolve to contribute to building a world order governed by the principles of justice, peace and solidarity among nations and within an effective framework of human rights, State institutions and the rule of law. We must persist

in our efforts to strike a reasonable balance between the interests of all States and to build a democratic and equitable world order, while developing relations among sovereign, independent States based on respect and trust and prioritizing the peaceful coexistence whereby all nations can enjoy the same opportunities.

To that end, we need the bodies of the United Nations, particularly the General Assembly and the Security Council, to work efficiently. We seek a more democratic, transparent, inclusive and representative Security Council that reflects the diversity of the States Members of the United Nations and the geopolitical realities of today's world.

The Organization continues to be the most important universal forum for tackling global challenges. Problems such as poverty and inequality, climate change, transnational organized crime, drug trafficking — which undermines democratic institutions — and terrorism, among others, must be dealt with collectively. We urge all stakeholders to focus their efforts and resources on responding to these shared and pressing challenges faced by humankind.

The Republic of Paraguay reaffirms its firm commitment to implementing the provisions of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and encourages other States, particularly those that are most responsible for producing greenhouse gases, to take all necessary measures to save our planet from the consequences of global warming. In Paraguay, our vision of social responsibility is behind our efforts to increase our production of clean and renewable energy. We have two impressive hydroelectric dams — Itaipu, which we share with Brazil, and Yacyretá, shared with Argentina. This year, Itaipu Binacional was incorporated into the UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserves, as was the Alto Paraná Atlantic forest.

My mandate as President of my country comes to an end in August 2018. This is my final address to the United Nations, and I would like to mention several improvements that we have made since I took office in 2013.

Today Paraguay is a full representative democracy with a true separation of powers, solid electoral processes and a fully effective rule of law. We have given clear signals to the international community, both publicly and privately, on our country's improved potential as an investment vehicle, in the area of cooperation and with regard to treaties.

Where foreign relations and Paraguay's role in the world are concerned, our interactions have grown exponentially through visits and invitations received as well as participation in international organizations. Over the past four years, our country has had official visits from His Holiness Pope Francis, former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and all Rus', as well as other top officials from multilateral organizations and various Heads of State and international eminent persons who have honoured us with their presence.

Paraguay was unanimously admitted to the Development Centre of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). For us, our membership of that highly prestigious global organization is an unequivocal sign of international recognition of our Government's efforts and achievements through our policies of good practices and institutional robustness. We can proudly say that Paraguay is a member of that select OECD group in an affirmation of the international community's confidence in the significant reforms undertaken by our Government.

Today we are members of the World Intellectual Property Organization Advisory Committee on Enforcement, following years of mistrust of our country regarding respect for intellectual property rights. We have decided to take on additional memberships in international bodies in order to be part of discussions and decision-making, with a view to continually expanding our global presence. The role of Paraguay in the world today transcends borders and continents.

Our priorities within the framework of the United Nations have been established in the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014-2024, an integral part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We therefore urge States, especially our trading partners and transit countries, to duly take those into account.

Regional integration has undeniable benefits, especially when we work to achieve it while endeavouring to reconcile the interests of all stakeholders. We are therefore working in the Southern Common Market to revitalize economic and commercial integration while also making progress on the social, employment, scientific and cultural aspects of the bloc, which represents a very positive agenda.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the most ambitious intergovernmental development project in the multilateral sphere. In order to properly implement our national development plan through 2030, we are building an innovative, participatory institutional architecture that is committed to the Agenda's Goals and targets. I am proud to say that, together with the Presidents of our Congress and Supreme Court of Justice, I have publicly signed a joint cross-branch declaration that recognizes Paraguay's absolute commitment to the terms of the 2030 Agenda and its Goals and targets. Paraguay has thus declared itself in favour of the 2030 Agenda through its three State branches, an event previously unheard of in our region.

During these past four years, the Administration I lead has responded justly and effectively to the needs of all sectors of society. When we first came to power, in August 2013, we established three main national policies — poverty reduction through social development; inclusive economic growth; and the expansion of Paraguay's role in the world. As we implemented those policies, we transformed a culture previously marred by political cronyism and bad practices into a model based on transparency and compliance, where public access to information is guaranteed and more opportunities are offered to our people. Access to public information has led to unprecedented progress, and today we have instruments ensuring that public business is conducted in public.

We are undergoing an unprecedented transformation, and although it has triggered some concerns, reactions and resistance from those who were more comfortable with the former model, I can guarantee that it is closing the door on such evils as corruption, which delayed Paraguay's economic and social development for many years. Despite regional economic problems, we have been able to achieve sustained economic growth, and we hope to continue improving our ability to forge relationships throughout the world by being trustworthy and predictable. Paraguay's economic growth in recent years has been constant, and at an annual average of 5.2 per cent is one of the highest in South America.

While we are also working to reduce the poverty rate, years of neglect in the past have made eradicating poverty altogether a major challenge. Our priorities have been focused on giving a strong impetus to social investment, particularly in education, so that people living in poverty can benefit from economic growth

and to help reduce inequality. We are implementing flagship social-protection programmes such as the Tekoporã conditional cash-transfer programme, a school meal programme, food allowances for elderly adults living in poverty and the Sowing Opportunities poverty-reduction programme. In addition, we are increasing our grants of scholarships and financial aid to young people living in poverty, in the firm belief that education and professional training for young people represent the best possible investment for the country's future.

After 175 years, the Paraguayan Government is once again granting postgraduate scholarships for study abroad at the world's best universities, with a record investment of \$42 million. Thanks to the Carlos Antonio López scholarships, 1,000 Paraguayans from the country's 17 departments and its capital are doing postgraduate studies in 50 of the world's 200 most prestigious universities. Hundreds of them are teachers and 60 per cent are women under 30 years old. The first 60 have successfully completed their studies and are returning to apply their knowledge for our country's benefit and development.

Another of our national strategic goals in combating poverty focuses on housing programmes designed to offer citizens decent homes, revive the economy and create jobs. In the past four years we have worked hard, transparently and responsibly, with unprecedented results. For the first time in Paraguay's history, by the end of its term a single Government will have delivered on its promise of more than 30,000 public housing units, 10 times more than any previous Administration, and even more valuable because they benefit thousands of families that for years were ignored by previous Governments and now have decent homes and access to better conditions in which to thrive. We are building hope and opportunities so that families in Paraguay's humblest communities — whether in poor urban areas, indigenous regions or rural villages — can move forward. We are transforming our country through transparent and efficient efforts that enable us to make the most of our resources while reducing expenses, eliminating corruption in projects and improving construction quality through rigorous controls.

My Government encourages productive development through responsible investment. We give priority to infrastructure projects that improve connectivity, both nationally and with neighbouring countries. In particular, investment in infrastructure is at its highest

in decades, and the scope and modernity of our new road construction is outstanding. We demand responsibility and commitment from our leaders and have worked hard to achieve good standards of living for our people. Thanks to this new model for Government efforts, our country is becoming more efficient, progressive and honest.

The Republic of Paraguay reaffirms its commitment to international peace and security and the use of peaceful means to resolve conflicts, based on mutual cooperation between States. Our Constitution bans weapons of mass destruction, and we therefore welcome the recent adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and reaffirm our belief that the nuclear-disarmament process should be transparent and irreversible, with effective verification mechanisms based on a universal, legally binding framework. We reiterate our condemnation of the nuclear test by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in clear defiance and breach of its international obligations, constituting yet another provocation to the international community. We hope that the General Assembly will firmly reject such irrational behaviour, which threatens security and peace on a global scale.

The Republic of Paraguay is deeply concerned about the scourge of terrorism, which we condemn in any shape or form. The fight against terrorism must be carried out within a framework of unconditional respect for the precepts of international law, through solid cooperation among States. We will continue to collaborate with peacekeeping operations organized under the auspices of the United Nations, in the belief that they can enable us to achieve the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. My country is currently contributing military personnel, both women and men, to six peacekeeping missions, and invests in the training of its contingents at our peacekeeping operations training centre.

We also reaffirm our commitment to the promotion and effective protection of human rights throughout the world. We firmly believe that we should protect the dignity and rights of all people, without discrimination. We urge the Human Rights Council to continue to fulfil its functions with objectivity, impartiality and universality. In this context, I should not omit to mention a worrying issue in my region, which is that the situation in Venezuela needs urgent attention. I would like to reiterate a message of solidarity to the people of Venezuela, victims of political persecution and human

rights violations, in the hope that our brother nation can find a solution to its current democratic breakdown and deep crisis as soon as possible.

Through international cooperation, the Republic of China on Taiwan has long been engaged in cooperation programmes related to the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals. It supports many countries, including Paraguay. Taiwan has relevant knowledge and experience and has contributed effectively to the international community. The Government of Paraguay once again urges all Member States to identify appropriate ways to facilitate Taiwan's participation in the mechanisms for meetings and activities of the United Nations system, so that its 23 million inhabitants can exercise their responsibilities normally as global citizens and establish sustainable alliances with every country.

In our view, Secretary-General António Guterres has made an auspicious start at the helm of the United Nations, supported by his vast experience as a statesman. It will be up to the Heads of State of member countries during this session to ensure that it can be a starting point of a new era for the true universalization of the principles guiding the functioning of the Organization, particularly so that its programmes and actions can reduce the enormous inequalities that still exist between countries and regions.

I reaffirm that my country will continue to give high priority to its participation in United Nations debates, in our belief in the importance of the Organization's work in building a more peaceful and just world. For our part, we will continue to work resolutely towards development with true social inclusion, creating conditions for prosperity and always putting people first. I would like to conclude with an exhortation from Pope Francis: "Let us never forget that authentic power is service."

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Paraguay for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Horacio Manuel Cartes Jara, President of the Republic of Paraguay, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Hassan Rouhani, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Hassan Rouhani, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Hassan Rouhani, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Rouhani (*spoke in Farsi; interpretation provided by the delegation*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Mr. Lajčák on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly. I would also like to congratulate Secretary-General Guterres on his appointment to his high office and to wish him every success in his crucial responsibilities.

Four months ago, more than 41 million people — 73 per cent of the total of Iran's eligible voters — came to the polls in our country's twelfth presidential election and once again expressed confidence in my platform, which calls for moderation and respect for human rights, prosperity and economic revitalization at home, and for constructive engagement around the world. Their vote illustrated the maturity of the electorate in a society that has been experiencing free and democratic governance for only four decades.

Our latest election was not merely a vote for a President. It represents a huge political investment on the part of our resilient people, who truly constitute our most reliable asset. Human and civil rights, along with a quest for justice and Islamic values, have been at the heart of the principal demands of the Iranian people for their more than 150 years of struggle, particularly during the Islamic revolution of 1979. In its first term, while pursuing nuclear negotiations internationally, at home my Government focused on discussing and articulating our citizens' rights, resulting in the promulgation of a Citizens' Rights Charter and its adoption for implementation, thereby meeting the demands of a people who, in their desire to restore their rights and human dignity, first rose up against a dictatorial regime 111 years ago, in their constitutional revolution, and again 39 years ago, in the Islamic revolution.

I declare here in this Hall that moderation is the preferred and chosen path of the great Iranian people. Moderation seeks neither isolation nor hegemony. It implies neither indifference nor intransigence. The path of moderation is the path of peace. That peace is a just and inclusive peace, not one that means peace for one nation and war and turmoil for others. Moderation is freedom and democracy, conducted in an inclusive and comprehensive manner that does not purport to promote freedom in one place while supporting dictators elsewhere. Moderation is the synergy of ideas, not a dance of swords. And lastly, the path of moderation nurtures beauty. Exports of deadly weapons are not beautiful. Peace is beautiful. In Iran, we strive to build peace and promote the human rights of peoples and nations. We never condone tyranny and we always defend those whose voices are not heard. But while we never threaten anyone, neither do we tolerate threats from anyone. Our discourse is based on dignity and respect, and we are unmoved by threats and intimidation. We believe in dialogue and negotiation conducted on an equal footing and based on mutual respect.

In today's globalized world, peace, security, stability and the progress of all nations are intertwined. We cannot see a rogue and racist regime trample on the most basic rights of Palestinians while the usurpers of their land enjoy security. No one can aspire to long-term stability, prosperity and development while Muslims in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Bahrain, Afghanistan, Myanmar and so many other places live in misery, war and poverty.

Throughout its history, Iran has been a bastion of tolerance for many religions and ethnicities. We are the same people who rescued the Jews from Babylonian servitude, opened our arms to welcome Armenian Christians in our midst and created the Iranian cultural continent with a unique mix of diverse religions and ethnicities. I represent the same Iran that has historically assisted the oppressed. Centuries ago, we supported the rights of the Jewish people and today we are insisting on the restoration of the rights of the Palestinian people. Iran is still the same country, supporting justice and seeking tranquillity.

Today we are on the front lines fighting terror and religious extremism in the Middle East, not for sectarian or ethnic reasons but for ethical, humanitarian and strategic ones. Iran does not seek to restore its ancient empire, impose its official religion on others

or export its revolution through the force of arms. We have enough confidence in the depth of our culture, the truth of our faith and the tenacity and longevity of our revolution that we will never seek to export any of them in the way that neocolonialists do through the heavy boots of soldiers. To promote our culture, civilization, religion and revolution, we enter hearts and engage minds. We recite our poetry and engage in discourse on our philosophy. Our ambassadors are our poets, mystics and philosophers. We have reached these shores of the Atlantic through Rumi and spread our influence all over Asia with Saadi. We have already captured the world through Hafez, so we are not in need of new conquests.

The call for moderation is from a nation that has been committed to it. We do not preach moderation; we practice it, and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is a case in point. The deal is the outcome of two years of intensive multilateral negotiations, overwhelmingly applauded by the international community and endorsed by the Security Council through resolution 2231 (2015). As such, it belongs to the entire international community, not just one or two countries. The JCPOA can become a new model for global interaction based on mutual constructive engagement among us all. We have opened our doors to engagement and cooperation and concluded scores of development agreements with advanced countries in both the East and the West.

Unfortunately, there are some who have deprived themselves of that unique opportunity, in a way that amounts to imposing sanctions on themselves, and now they feel betrayed. We were not deceived, and neither did we cheat or deceive anyone else. We determined the extent of our nuclear programme ourselves. We never sought to achieve deterrence through nuclear weapons. We have immunized ourselves through our people's knowledge and, more importantly, their resilience. That is our talent and our approach. Some say that they wanted to deprive Iran of nuclear weapons, but we have always vociferously rejected such weapons. We have never been distressed about forgoing an option that we never actually sought. It is reprehensible that a rogue Zionist regime that threatens regional and global security with its nuclear arsenal and is not committed to any international instrument or safeguard has the audacity to preach to peaceful nations.

Imagine how the Middle East would look if the JCPOA had not been concluded. Imagine that along with

civil wars, takfiri terror, humanitarian nightmares and complex sociopolitical crises in West Asia there was a manufactured nuclear crisis. How would we all fare? I declare here to the Assembly that while the Islamic Republic of Iran will not be the first country to violate the agreement, it will respond decisively and resolutely to any violation of it by any party. It would be a great pity if it were to be destroyed by rogue newcomers to the world of politics, and the world would have lost a great opportunity. But such unfortunate behaviour will never halt Iran in its course of progress and advancement. By violating its international commitments, the new United States Administration only destroys its own credibility and undermines international confidence in negotiating with it or accepting its promises.

Four years ago in the Assembly, the Islamic Republic of Iran sponsored the initiative of resolution 68/127, "A world against violence and violent extremism". We consider dialogue and negotiations based on a positive-sum paradigm to be the only path to resolving global and regional crises. We have made a conscious decision to strengthen relations with our neighbours and others in the region, as well as to enhance our cooperation with all friendly countries. We cannot navigate the complex and dangerous challenges in this turbulent transitional global phase without expanding interaction and exchanges and institutionalizing dialogue between nations and States. The ignorant, absurd and hateful rhetoric filled with ridiculously baseless allegations that we heard yesterday in this Hall was not only unfit to be heard at the United Nations — which was established to promote peace and respect between nations — but in fact contradicted the demands of the nations of this global Organization that it bring Governments together in the battle against war and terror.

I wish to emphasize that the defence capabilities of the Islamic Republic of Iran, including its missiles, are solely defensive deterrents for maintaining regional peace and stability and suppressing the adventurist tendencies of irrational aspirants. We cannot forget that civilians in many of our cities became the target of long-range missile attacks by Saddam Hussein during his eight-year war of aggression against us. We will never allow our people to become victims of such catastrophic delusions again. Instability and extremist violence have only been exacerbated in our region through the military interventions of extra-regional actors — the same Powers that try to sell ever more

of their deadly weapons to other States by accusing Iran of fomenting instability. I want to emphasize that foreign intervention and the imposition of alien wishes on the people of the region can only widen and deepen the crises in our region. The crises in Syria, Yemen and Bahrain do not have military solutions and can be resolved only through an end to the hostilities and acceptance of the will and desires of their peoples. The United States Government should explain to its own people why, after spending billions of dollars of the assets of the people of America and our region, it has brought the region only war, misery, poverty and the rise of terrorism and extremism rather than contributing to peace and stability.

In the past four years, Iran has demonstrated that its economy has unparalleled potential for expansion and growth. Economic sanctions not only have not hindered it, they have solidified the popular resolve to enhance domestic production. Iran's achievement of the highest global growth rate last year proved that its economy has the potential to become the world's most vibrant emerging economy within the next 20 years, with a trillion-dollar growth potential. Our strategic choice for achieving such sustainable and balanced growth is an extensive network of global partnerships. We firmly believe that development and security can grow only if they grow together, and that common interests can bind us regionally and globally to guarantee both regional and global security.

Iran, with the world's largest gas and oil reserves, is prepared to engage in long-term cooperation to advance global energy security. We are eager to expand international transit corridors through joint ventures in sea, rail and road infrastructure projects. Our achievements in enhancing economic infrastructures through a nation-wide gas pipeline, a national electricity grid and rail and road transport have made it possible for various industries to produce their goods at a lower cost, with easy access to national and regional markets. With our current friendly legal environment, many foreign investors have come to Iran, leading to an ever-increasing number of investments, joint ventures and financing agreements in multiple fields. It is the policy of my Government to continue to steadily enhance the entrepreneurial environment, protect intellectual property rights, consistently improve corporate governance and engage in a robust campaign against money-laundering in order to enhance a legal climate conducive to business and

economic investments in various fields, particularly knowledge-based enterprises.

The Iranian nation is resolutely determined to build a free and advanced Iran and participate in developing a secure and stable region based on ethics and respect for international law. In that endeavour, we welcome the participation and cooperation of all investors, intellectuals and innovators from all over the world. From this global rostrum, and as the representative of the people of Iran, who are world-famous for their hospitality, I invite all who seek peace, security and progress through partnership and cooperation among nations to visit Iran and join us in building this future of hope.

If we truly believe in our collective decision of four years ago in the General Assembly to work for a world against violence and violent extremism, we can turn the discourse of imposition, unilateralism, intimidation and war into the logic of dialogue, synergy and peace, so that moderation can become the dominant voice across the globe.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Hassan Rouhani, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Rumen Radev, President of the Republic of Bulgaria

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Mr. Rumen Radev, President of the Republic of Bulgaria, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Rumen Radev, President of the Republic of Bulgaria, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Radev: I would first like to offer my most sincere condolences to the people and Government of Mexico for yesterday's devastating earthquake.

It is an honour for me to address this forum. I congratulate His Excellency Mr. Miroslav Lajčák on his election to preside over the General Assembly at its seventy-second session and wish him every success in his important mission.

This session is a special one for my country, since while it is still going on Bulgaria will hold the presidency of the Council of the European Union. This year the general debate puts a special emphasis on our common effort to strive for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet, thereby highlighting the importance of prevention, mediation, sustainable development, preservation of the environment and respect for human rights through a people-centred approach. The United Nations upholds our shared goals of peace and security, and development and human rights.

Conflicts in many parts of the world continue to undermine international peace and security and the fundamental values of humankind. Outbreaks of violence devastate local economies, trigger large movements of refugees and migrants, and spread diseases, famine and immense human suffering on a massive scale. Children are usually the most adversely affected in any crisis situation. The root causes of armed conflicts should be addressed in a more systematic way by ensuring respect for human rights and the rule of law, improving the economic situation and promoting social inclusion.

Leaving no one behind and reaching the farthest behind first are not simply political declarations meant to invigorate the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. If we are to transform our world by lifting it out of poverty, we must fully implement the Sustainable Development Goals by promoting equality, inclusion and participation.

Protracted conflicts require a holistic United Nations response, encompassing preventive diplomacy, mediation, peacebuilding and effective special political missions. That response is critical to restoring governance and stabilizing political, economic and social conditions in crisis and post-conflict countries.

Over the past several years the United Nations peace and security architecture has benefited from three peace and security reviews that, together with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, have provided a solid foundation for achieving peace and prosperity. In that regard, Bulgaria supports the surge in diplomacy for peace, which places prevention as an overarching

priority of the United Nations work and sets the stage for the necessary reforms to sustain peace.

Prevention and mediation are essential means for reducing human suffering, including in addressing the root causes of forced displacements by bringing humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts together. The situation in the Middle East and North Africa remains of deep concern and should be addressed in a comprehensive manner, but the international community should not be distracted from the urgent need to revive the Middle East peace process. Bulgaria reaffirms its position that a two-State solution formula is the realistic, just and lasting way to settle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is our belief that a solution that can fulfil the aspirations of both sides can be achieved only through direct negotiations, with no conditions and in conformity with the relevant international obligations.

Finding a political solution to the ongoing conflict in Syria and implementing a credible political transition in the country will be essential to preserving the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian State. We support all actions aimed at achieving a cessation of hostilities as soon as possible and conducting effective and constructive inter-Syrian negotiations in Geneva in order to achieve a lasting political solution to the crisis. We consider a political dialogue under the auspices of the United Nations to be the only way that can gradually improve the security situation in Syria and sustainably resolve the humanitarian crisis.

Another source of deep concern to my country is the situation in eastern Ukraine, which, regrettably, remains highly volatile despite periodic ceasefire agreements. We reiterate our call for the swift and full implementation of the Minsk agreements, to which there is no viable alternative. We consistently support the activity of multilateral formats such as the Normandy Four and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Trilateral Contact Group, considering their role in advancing the political and diplomatic efforts for a peaceful settlement of the conflict to be key.

Bulgaria is fully committed to the peace and stabilization process in Afghanistan and considers reconciliation a major prerequisite for stability and sustainable development in Afghanistan and beyond. We encourage the National Unity Government to continue with needed reforms in key areas, such as

good governance, the rule of law, a credible electoral process, combating corruption and narcotics, and tackling gender and social issues.

Disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control are among the main pillars of international security and therefore represent tangible aspects of the effort to achieve peace and a decent life. Bulgaria reiterates its commitment to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the cornerstone of the nuclear non-proliferation regime, as well as to the objective of attaining a world free of nuclear weapons. That goal is achievable only through the participation of all States, and the nuclear-weapon States in particular. We should aim at feasible but universal measures that will gradually and irreversibly lead to the final objective of a world without nuclear weapons. The next two steps in that direction could be the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the start of negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran's nuclear programme, concluded in July 2015, continues to be historically significant. Its full implementation is extremely important to regional and global stability, and my country reiterates its full support for it.

Bulgaria categorically condemns the repeated nuclear tests and missile launches by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which have led to a further escalation of tensions in the region and are undermining world peace and security. We call on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to end its nuclear and ballistic programmes once and for all in a complete, irreversible and verifiable manner, and to engage in constructive dialogue with the international community. We reiterate our commitment to a peaceful, diplomatic and political solution to the situation.

The recent terrorist attacks are tragic reminders of the scale of the challenge ahead. Bulgaria shares the view that the newly established Office of Counter-Terrorism marks a milestone in the efforts to improve United Nations efficiency in fighting terrorism by supporting the balanced implementation of the 2006 Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, strengthening coordination among the relevant United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, as well as promoting preventive measures that address the drivers of extremism.

Bulgaria is deeply concerned about the unprecedented scale of organized looting of cultural

property in Iraq, Syria, Libya and other countries in conflict or post-conflict situations. We condemn the illicit trafficking and illegal trade in cultural objects as a tactic of war and a source of profits for financing terrorism. It is a threat that requires a global response. A number of legal instruments and resolutions have been adopted by UNESCO, the United Nations, the European Parliament and others. We have laid the legal foundations and it is our common duty to ensure their full implementation. The Antiquities Coalition, UNESCO's #Unite4Heritage social-media campaign and other activities epitomize a very positive global trend for action aimed at the preservation and protection of the world's cultural heritage.

International migration is a global phenomenon, and only through joint efforts such as the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration can we ensure a balanced approach that includes respect for international humanitarian and human rights law, as well as effective border management and re-admission. States have the right and responsibility to manage and control their borders as a central element of their national security. Strict border controls are vitally important, particularly in the context of preventing irregular migration and eradicating human trafficking. For Bulgaria, the top priority is the effective management and control of the European Union's external border, enabling free movement within the European Union to function smoothly.

Climate change continues to represent one of the biggest challenges of our time. Not only is it a threat to our countries' well-being, it also poses a security risk to many of them. Bulgaria stands by its obligations under the Paris Climate Change Agreement, and believes that only a universal approach to its implementation can achieve the goals of the United Nations climate-change agenda.

Bulgaria is strongly committed to promoting human rights and is actively involved in a number of intergovernmental processes dedicated to global advancement of the human rights agenda. As co-Chair

of the Group of Friends for Children and the Sustainable Development Goals at the United Nations, Bulgaria strongly advocates for integrating children's rights into all major intergovernmental processes, since children are the real agents of positive social change. As President of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities for the period 2017-2018, Bulgaria actively promotes the full inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others.

Bulgaria is determined to further contribute to promoting human rights internationally as a member of the Human Rights Council for the period 2019-2021, and is relying on its partners' valuable support for its candidacy. In the past few decades, the United Nations has taken crucial steps to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. Those efforts should be further strengthened in order to achieve tangible results for women and girls by eliminating all forms of gender-based violence and discrimination. Ensuring equal rights for women and men should be an integral part of everyday policies in all spheres of life. Promoting equality, countering discrimination and ensuring respect for human rights are key to achieving lasting peace and sustainable development, and we believe that the protection of human rights should be at the centre of all actions undertaken by the United Nations.

The world is currently facing enormous challenges, perhaps the greatest that humankind has ever encountered, and we, the Member States of the United Nations, must provide solutions to them. It is time to take action.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Bulgaria for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Rumen Radev, President of the Republic of Bulgaria, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.