



# General Assembly

Seventy-fourth session

**66**<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting

Tuesday, 15 September 2020, 3 p.m.

New York

Official Records

---

*President:* Mr. Muhammad-Bande

(Nigeria)

*The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.*

## Statement by the Secretary-General

**The President:** I now give the floor to His Excellency Secretary-General António Guterres.

**The Secretary-General:** I am pleased to join everyone in this Hall for the closing of the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly, which has been like no other in the past seventy-five years. The past seven months have been extremely difficult for the people we serve and for many of us, both personally and professionally.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has cut a swathe through our lives and our communities. We are all dealing with high levels of uncertainty, and we are still in the middle of that fog. The extent of the pandemic, its social and economic impact and its interaction with other global challenges and megatrends are unknowable. Our only hope is to respond with unity and solidarity, while supporting the most vulnerable.

During these difficult days, it has been a privilege to work with the General Assembly, our common platform for international consensus and action, under the leadership of His Excellency Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, whose capable stewardship saw the General Assembly adopt new working methods to continue its work smoothly. Mr. Muhammad-Bande made great efforts to ensure business continuity through the regular convening of the General Committee and other online briefings.

On a personal note, I would like to thank Mr. Muhammad-Bande for his wise, determined and serene approach to those unforeseen challenges and his excellent judgment under pressure. I commend the patience and support he has demonstrated during these unprecedented times.

The introduction in March of new decision-making procedures made it possible for the General Assembly to adopt resolutions and decisions without in-person meetings. More than 70 resolutions and decisions were adopted in this way, two of which, adopted with wide co-sponsorship, called for solidarity and global access to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment during the pandemic.

The seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly also oversaw elections to the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council, as well as successful intergovernmental negotiations on the Declaration on the Commemoration of the Seventy-fifth Anniversary of the United Nations and on the omnibus resolution “Comprehensive and coordinated response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic” (resolution 74/306). I thank all Member States for their support and cooperation, and I congratulate them on completing a full programme of work.

The United Nations has fully mobilized in order to support Member States in response to the pandemic. We have put our supply chains, assets, expertise and capacities around the world to work, and we have supported the health response by distributing medical

---

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (<http://documents.un.org>).

20-23630 (E)



Accessible document

Please recycle



supplies, training health workers and increasing testing and tracing capabilities.

Our humanitarian agencies are targeting some 250 million people at greatest risk. Our peacekeeping missions are taking steps to protect vulnerable communities. Our country teams are providing direct support and expertise to Governments for a sustainable and inclusive response and recovery. We are using our communications channels to share information on prevention and containment, and we have launched the Verified campaign to promote facts and science and to fight the spread of dangerous misinformation online.

Here, in New York, we have made every effort to ensure that our day-to-day work continues with minimum disruption by adopting innovative working methods based on new technologies. We have also taken extensive steps to keep delegates and staff safe, including by providing testing.

I thank all Member States for their support for this important work, and I look forward to continuing our cooperation in the General Assembly at its seventy-fifth session. Virtual participation may mean that a record number of Heads of States and Government participate in the high-level week, but going online will undoubtedly create new challenges. We will need to learn as we go and to continue to demonstrate the greatest flexibility.

I look forward to working with all Member States, under the presidency of His Excellency Mr. Volkan Bozkir, to make the seventy-fifth session a success. The world looks to the United Nations as the indispensable forum for international cooperation on global challenges. Let us continue our work together to overcome the pandemic and build a better future.

**The President:** I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

I welcome all Member States to the closing of the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly. I thank Members for their support throughout the session and extend my gratitude to the Vice-Presidents of the General Assembly and the Chairs of the six Main Committees, as well as the co-chairs, co-coordinators and co-facilitators of the processes of the General Assembly.

I am grateful to the Governments that have supported the Office of the President of the General Assembly through contributions to the trust fund and/

or the secondment of staff, which proved critical to the success of the Office. I am particularly grateful to the President of Nigeria for having nominated me, to the African States for having allowed me to represent them in this important work and to all Member States for having supported me since the election until now.

It has been a pleasure to work in close coordination with the Presidents of the Security Council and of the Economic and Social Council, as well as the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General, who have shown unprecedented support for the work of the Assembly.

I extend my deepest appreciation to the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the Department of Global Communications and the Department of Safety and Security for the dedication and selfless service of their personnel to the General Assembly, which could not have functioned well without the dedication of the entire Secretariat staff, including the interpreters and protocol officers, among others. In addition, I thank the staff of the Office of the President of the General Assembly, led by my Chef de Cabinet, Ambassador Mari Skåre, for their enduring efforts throughout the extraordinary session.

We started this session guided by the hopes and aspirations of the people we serve. That was reflected in the high-level events that we held in the first days of the session, the statements of Heads of Delegation during the high-level week and broad support for my priorities for the session. From the beginning, I entreated Member States to give due attention to the critical issues at hand. In particular, I urged them to tackle the root causes of conflict by galvanizing multilateral efforts for poverty eradication, zero hunger, quality education, climate action and inclusion. As illustrated in the handover report, the General Assembly has made great strides in those and other areas.

The first high-level meeting of the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly focused on global health at a time when we did not know that the session and the year 2020 would be defined by a pandemic. The emergence of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has shown that we must continue to deepen multilateral cooperation in the health sector, as in other areas, and implement the commitment of our Heads of State and Government to scaling up national and global efforts to build a healthier world for all. In achieving that, it is important that we continue to deepen cooperation to

ensure that, despite the challenge posed by COVID-19, we meet the goals and targets that we set for ourselves by 2030.

I congratulate all Member States for the leadership they have demonstrated over the past 12 months as we tackled issues across the three pillars of the United Nations — peace and security, human rights and development. Those issues included financing for development, tackling the particular challenges faced by Small Island Developing States, prioritizing the rights of the child, eliminating nuclear weapons and ensuring that peacekeeping operations receive the necessary funding.

It is also gratifying that, despite our differences, the Main Committees, from the First to the Sixth, were able to achieve a broad measure of consensus on a diverse range of issues at the core of our Organization. However, I must emphasize the need to continue to recommit to the agreed frameworks and work harder to ensure that we can deliver for the people we serve through consensus. For that reason, it is regrettable that the First Committee adopted 64 per cent of its resolutions by recorded vote.

We cannot underestimate the importance of this Assembly, which is founded upon equality of voice and vote. Its resolutions reflect the aspirations of humanity, helping the normative development of international law with far-reaching ramifications across a wide breadth of issues for individuals and for States. I am therefore grateful that Member States had the foresight and flexibility to adopt decisions 74/544 and 74/555 at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. That enabled the membership to adopt more than 70 resolutions and elect the Chairs of the Main Committees for the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly. This is fully in accordance with the expectation of the people we serve. The General Assembly takes progressive action to create a better world for all, as evidenced by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the principle of self-determination and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as a broad range of other issues.

This year, the membership rallied to adopt resolutions that called for solidarity and global access to medicines and medical equipment. In particular, the omnibus resolution 74/306, “Comprehensive and coordinated response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic”, is wide-ranging in its reach,

resulting from intensive negotiations, which highlighted the importance of multilateralism and solidarity as we continued to contend with the pandemic. We must continue to send a clear message that, like the broader United Nations system, the General Assembly will always stand with those who have suffered from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and those whose loved ones have succumbed to the virus.

This is a moment of reckoning for our shared planet and future. This is a time for action, ambition, equality, inclusion and partnership. It is therefore important that, in the work of the United Nations, we continue to engage and involve young people. They have shown uncommon leadership in the face of the difficulties of our world. They have been particularly vocal regarding climate and social justice issues. We must listen to them, as our lives depend on that. It is also important to continue to make the case for other underrepresented groups, including women and people with disability. It is in so doing that we will be certain of peace, justice and development.

In this seventy-fifth year of the establishment of our Organization, we must renew our commitment to its ideals and values. We must fashion more creative ways to better deliver for those we serve. Many vulnerable individuals and groups look up to us. We must not waiver in our commitment to serving them. Seventy-five years ago, sceptics doubted the resolve of the Members of the new Organization. Our founders did not allow cynicism to prevail then, and we will not allow it to prevail now. To ensure that, we must continue to thoughtfully define our actions and uphold our pledge to leave no one behind, even in the face of disagreement. Indeed, despite disagreement, we must practice empathy and choose unity over discord.

In conclusion, I wish His Excellency Mr. Volkan Bozkir, President-elect of the General Assembly at its seventy-fifth session, a successful and productive session and assure him of my solid support throughout his tenure. I am convinced that it is the same for us all. I am grateful for the trust that Member States placed in me as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session. It is my honour to have served as President of this foremost Assembly over the past year.

As we are now coming to the end of the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly, I now invite representatives to stand and observe one minute of silent prayer or meditation in tribute to the memory of

His Excellency Mr. Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, the fifth Secretary-General of the United Nations, who passed away on 4 March 2020, and of His Excellency Mr. Pierre Nkurunziza, President of the Republic of Burundi, who passed away on 9 June 2020.

*The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silent prayer or meditation.*

**The President:** I now invite His Excellency Mr. Volkan Bozkir, President-elect of the General Assembly at its seventy-fifth session, to make a statement and, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 70/305, of 13 September 2016, take the oath of office.

**Mr. Bozkir:** It is a privilege to address Member States today as we close the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly.

In the past six months, our plans for the seventy-fifth year of the United Nations have changed. Today, we have other urgent priorities. Our masks remind us of the very serious threat we face. They remind us of the lives we have lost and the challenges we need to overcome. They remind us that we are in this together.

Since the start of the crisis, the critics of multilateralism have been more vocal. The pandemic has been used to justify unilateral steps and to weaken the rules-based international system. International organizations have been reproached and the need for international cooperation has been questioned. Such criticisms are not baseless, but their conclusions are misguided. We should not be mistaken — no State can combat this pandemic alone. Social distancing will not help at the international level. Unilateralism will only strengthen the pandemic. It will move us further away from our shared goal.

At this time of crisis, it is our responsibility to strengthen people's faith in multilateral cooperation and international institutions, with the United Nations at the centre. We need to continue a frank, transparent and results-oriented dialogue about what went wrong in our efforts to contain the virus and what we must do to avoid a similar situation in the future. We will also need to ask and answer questions about how vaccines for the coronavirus disease can be distributed fairly and equitably. This is not just a question of health and economics but also of ethics in the most profound way.

Given the recent developments, I have been carefully reflecting on my priorities. Confronting the

effects of the coronavirus in all its dimensions will be an overarching priority of my presidency. At the same time, we must not forget our existing challenges.

First, the seventy-fifth year of the United Nations should be a time to revitalize the spirit of cooperation that laid the foundation of the Organization. In recent years, the trust deficit among nations has impeded the work of the United Nations. Member States have failed to compromise. When there is compromise, it is based on the lowest common denominator.

At times, that has been the case for the General Assembly, as it has been for the Security Council. As President of the General Assembly, the most representative and most democratic organ of the United Nations, I will endeavour to build trust among Member States. I will do my best to build consensus around the important and timely issues on our agenda, from arms control and human rights to climate and sustainable development.

Secondly, during the seventy-fifth session, the General Assembly should reflect on its own work and embrace reforms in order to be effective and relevant. We need to enhance coherence by addressing gaps, overlaps and duplication where they exist.

The pandemic-related restrictions could be an opportunity to streamline our agenda without compromising on substance. I am aware that this is a delicate task, but I will put my best efforts towards an outcome that realizes success from this dreadful pandemic and that sees this house come out stronger and more united with results to show for our efforts.

Thirdly, in order to improve the delivery of our mandate, we need to hear from the people we serve. I see this Hall as the Parliament of humanity, and I intend to use this platform to amplify the voices of the most vulnerable people in the world. Here, in the chief deliberative, policy-making and representative organ, we must consider the concerns of all people in need or under oppression. I will work with Member States to ensure that they have a voice. I also intend to use these good offices to highlight the importance of the impartial and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid and full respect for international humanitarian law in conflicts and crises.

Fourthly, as we enter the decade of action to implement the Sustainable Development Goals, it is clear that we are not on track. Throughout my term,



I will promote the use of emerging technologies and strengthened data and results-oriented action to ensure that no one is left behind.

Finally, in this seminal year for women's empowerment, I will also champion gender equality across the agenda of the seventy-fifth session, which, as evidenced, supports greater levels of peace and prosperity.

With those thoughts in mind, I look forward to reinforcing our partnership, which I believe is essential to the effective stewardship of this Organization. I will ensure that my efforts complement those of the Secretary-General, including by supporting the implementation of the United Nations reform agenda to make the Organization more responsive and effective. I will also work in close cooperation with the Presidents of the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council to coordinate our activities for the maximum effect. Efficiency, effectiveness, accountability and non-discrimination will be the guiding principles of my presidency. I will represent the membership as a whole. I will listen to the views of all Member States equally. I believe that we need to lead by example and inspire the world, and I will work to that end. The General Assembly cannot stand idle while human beings suffer. That is against the principle of collective responsibility that underpins the Charter of the United Nations.

As the seventy-fourth session draws to a close, I want to thank you, Mr. President, for your considered and steady leadership as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session. You once described yourself as a perpetual student. Your efforts to navigate the General Assembly in these difficult times proved that you are also a fast learner. Since the start of the pandemic, the Office of the President of the General Assembly, under your direction, has guided the work of the General Assembly transparently and effectively. You have shown strong leadership. I look

forward to continuing to champion the priorities of your term, including poverty eradication and inclusive and equitable education for all. Those Sustainable Development Goals are crucial to the future prosperity and peace of our planet.

On behalf of all Member States, I would like to once again thank you and your team, Mr. President, and I look forward to continuing to work with you as the Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the United Nations. I ask Member States to give President Muhammad-Bande a big round of applause.

I shall now take the oath of this hallowed Office.

I solemnly declare that I shall truthfully perform my duties and exercise the functions entrusted to me as President of the General Assembly of the United Nations in all loyalty, discretion and conscience, and that I shall discharge these functions and regulate my conduct with the interest of the United Nations only in view and in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the code of ethics for the President of the General Assembly, without seeking or accepting any instruction in regard to the performance of my duties from any Government or other source external to the Organization.

**The President:** I thank His Excellency Mr. Volkan Bozkir, President-elect of the seventy-fifth session, for his statement and for taking the oath of office.

#### **Closure of the seventy-fourth session**

**The President:** I would now like to invite the President-elect of the seventy-fifth session to meet me at the side of the rostrum for the handing over of the gavel. The seventy-fifth session will open immediately after the adjournment of this meeting. I declare closed the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly.

*The meeting rose at 3.35 p.m.*