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Official Records

President: Mr. Bozkir (Turkey)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 115 (continued)

Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/75/1)

The President: I would like to thank all representatives for attending this meeting today. This debate on the report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/75/1) is being held at the start of the new year, rather than in October, for only the second time. This reform allows Member States sufficient time to reflect on the report and gives the Secretary-General the opportunity to present his priorities for 2021.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General in advance for his presentation. I know that the membership has been particularly looking forward to this engagement with the Secretary-General to hear his assessments of the challenging year just past, as well as his perspective and priorities for 2021.

On behalf of Member States, I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report, which explains in detail what our Organization is doing day in and day out, around the clock, around the world, to help save millions of lives; to assist more than 80 million refugees and displaced people; to enable 2 million women and girls to overcome complications from pregnancy and childbirth; to bring and keep the peace and to protect civilians, with more than 40 political missions and 95,000 peacekeeping troops, police and civilian personnel; to provide electoral

assistance to 60 countries each year; and to protect human rights, to help victims of torture and to hold perpetrators accountable.

Last year we celebrated 75 years since the signing of the Charter of the United Nations and, on that special occasion, recognized in various formats the many achievements of the United Nations since its establishment. This year, as we look forward to our common future in the context of recovering from the coronavirus disease pandemic, it is clear that the world requires even more, not less, global cooperation.

We all know that the pandemic has exposed existing vulnerabilities in our global and national socioeconomic and health systems, as well as large scale inequalities within and between countries, thereby exacerbating the complex economic, humanitarian, security and human rights challenges we face. Those challenges require a more effective, coherent and timely response by the broader United Nations system.

During this most trying of times, the Assembly continues to work and lead as the primary political forum of the world, in support of Member States' efforts. Since the beginning of the session and per established practice, we have held regular coordination meetings with the Secretary-General and the Presidents of the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council, with the aim of improving coordination across the entire United Nations system, to break down silos and bring the pillars of our Organization together, to better respond to our collective challenges and deliver on our respective mandates.

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As President of the General Assembly, I stand ready to continue working with the United Nations membership and the Secretary-General to advance efforts to revitalize multilateralism, implement the much-needed reform agenda and strengthen the United Nations by addressing the financial difficulties and improve its effectiveness and accountability, in order to make the future we want and the United Nations we need a reality.

Before proceeding further, as I stated in my letter dated 22 January, the Secretary-General will make a statement to brief on his priorities for 2021, after which the formal meeting will be suspended for an informal meeting for comments and questions.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General.

The Secretary-General: The year 2020 was a global annus horribilis — a year of death, disaster and despair. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic unleashed havoc in every country and every economy. We lost 2 million lives, including many dear members of our United Nations family.

The human toll continues to multiply. The economic costs continue to mount: 500 million jobs gone, extreme poverty back up to levels not seen in a generation, inequalities widening and hunger rising again.

And global fragilities continue to be exposed.

We have declared war on nature, and nature is striking back. The climate crisis is raging. Last year natural disasters caused \$210 billion in damage and incalculable human costs. Biodiversity is collapsing.

Meanwhile, geopolitical tensions are undermining our collective efforts for peace. Humanitarian needs are escalating. Forced displacement reached record levels last year. And even the risk of nuclear and chemical proliferation grows.

Human rights face a backlash. Hate speech is booming. Lawless behaviour in cyberspace has created a new domain for the propagation of crime, violence, misinformation and disruption. And COVID-19 has had an especially pernicious impact on the world's women and girls.

The year 2020 brought us tragedy and peril. The year 2021 must be the year to change gears and put the world on track. We need to move from death to health, from disaster to reconstruction, from despair to hope and from business as usual to transformation.

The Sustainable Development Goals are more important now than ever. And now is the time to secure the well-being of people, economies, societies and the planet. It is possible, so we must make it happen together.

The first priority I want to underline for 2021 is to respond to COVID-19. Vaccines are the first great moral test before us. They must be seen as global public goods — people's vaccines — available and affordable to all.

The COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility urgently needs more resources to procure and deliver vaccines to low- and middle-income countries and to continue vital research and development. I thank the countries and organizations that are supporting COVAX, and the leadership of the World Health Organization. And I welcome new engagement by major developed countries. But the world is falling short. Vaccines are reaching a handful of countries quickly, while the poorest countries have almost none. Science is succeeding, but solidarity is failing. Governments have a responsibility to protect their populations, but COVID-19 cannot be beaten one country at a time.

If the virus is allowed to spread like wildfire in the Global South, it will inevitably mutate — it is mutating — becoming more transmissible, more deadly and, eventually, more resistant to vaccines, ready to come back to hound the Global North.

Moreover, recent studies have found that vaccine hoarding could cost the global economy up to \$9.2 trillion — with almost half of that impact in the wealthiest countries. That figure is over 340 times more than the \$27 billion funding gap for the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator. There is only one victor in a world of vaccine haves and vaccine have nots: the virus itself.

Today I am calling for six specific steps: prioritize health-care workers and those most at risk everywhere; protect health systems from collapse in the poorest countries; ensure enough supply and fair distribution, including by having manufacturers prioritize supply to COVAX; share excess doses with the COVAX Facility; make licenses widely available to scale up manufacturing; and boost vaccine confidence.

Our Verified initiative is fighting the infodemic, but there is no panacea in a pandemic. We must continue to take the scientifically proven steps that reduce transmission: wearing masks, physical distancing and

washing hands. To defeat COVID-19 is possible. We must make it happen together.

Secondly, the world cannot heal from the virus if economies are on life support. An inclusive and sustainable recovery must start now. We need massive investments in health systems everywhere — universal health coverage, mental health care, social protection, decent work and children safely back in school.

Developing countries have been drained of remittances, tourism revenues and earnings from commodities. Wealthier countries are implementing recovery and stimulus plans worth trillions of dollars. Yet the poorest countries have been able to spend only about 2 per cent of their small gross domestic product.

Recovery must be inclusive. No country should be forced to choose between providing basic services and servicing their debts.

The high-level events I convened last year with the Prime Ministers of Canada and Jamaica highlighted the urgent need for a quantum leap in financial support. That includes an expansion of the Debt Service Suspension Initiative of the Group of 20 (G-20), debt relief for all developing and middle-income countries that need it, increased resources for multilateral financial institutions and a new allocation of special drawing rights to the benefit of developing countries, and a voluntary reallocation of unused special drawing rights, as liquidity is crucial to prevent debt defaults.

Recovery must also be sustainable — embracing renewable energy and green and resilient infrastructure. Otherwise, we will lock in harmful practices for decades to come.

The 2030 Agenda points the way. A sustainable and inclusive recovery is possible. We must make it happen together.

Our third priority must therefore be making peace with nature. The year 2021 is a critical one for climate and biodiversity.

Last month I called on Member States to declare a climate emergency in their countries. Today I call on the international community to reach five key milestones by the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP-26) in November.

First, let us keep building the global coalition to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. The coalition now

represents 70 per cent of the world economy and 65 per cent of global carbon dioxide emissions. In the year ahead, let us ensure that it covers at least 90 per cent of emissions.

The G-20 countries and main emitters must lead the way. I call on every city, company and financial institution to adopt concrete road maps with clear intermediary milestones in order to reach carbon neutrality by 2050. Key sectors, such as shipping, aviation, industry and agriculture, must do the same.

Secondly, Governments must submit nationally determined contributions to cut global emissions by 45 per cent by 2030 as compared with the 2010 levels.

Thirdly, we need to achieve a breakthrough on adaptation, which cannot be the forgotten component of climate action. Donors and multilateral development banks should increase the share of adaptation financing from 20 per cent to at least 50 per cent by 2024.

Fourthly, we must meet all financing commitments. Developed countries must fulfil their pledges to mobilize \$100 billion annually for climate action in developing countries, but that is not yet happening. It should include the full capitalization of the Green Climate Fund.

All development banks should align their portfolios with the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Sustainable Development Goals by 2024 and help mobilize private finance and investment through guarantees and partnerships. That will shift billions in financial flows. The United Nations-convened Net-Zero Asset Owner Alliance and the Global Investors for Sustainable Development Alliance are two critical elements of those efforts.

Fifthly, we must adopt transformational policies. It is time to put a price on carbon, stop building new coal power plants, phase out coal in countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development by 2030, and everywhere else by 2040, phase out fossil fuel finance, starting with the overseas financing of coal, end subsidies to fossil fuels, shift the tax burden from income to carbon and from taxpayers to polluters, make climate-related financial risk disclosures mandatory, integrate carbon neutrality into all economic and fiscal policies and decisions and, lastly, promote, fund and implement just transition plans.

Particular solidarity is owed to the world's small island developing States. Some face an existential

threat: their territories could disappear within our lifetimes. We must never allow any Member State to be forced to fold its flag because of a problem that is within our power to fix.

COP26, in November, will be a moment of truth for climate action. The fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity will provide a chance to halt the extinction crisis through a new post-2020 biodiversity framework. Let us not forget that 75 per cent of new and emerging human infectious diseases are zoonotic.

This year's high-level dialogue on energy will propose solutions for the shift to renewables and the expansion of energy access. As we prepare for the Ocean Conference in Portugal, the world must accelerate action to stop overfishing, drastically reduce pollution, including plastics, and promote the blue economy. The United Nations Food Systems Summit and the Global Conference on Sustainable Transport can transform those vital sectors.

The year 2021 will also be critical to advancing the New Urban Agenda, and, importantly, in our cities. To reconcile with nature is possible. Together, we must make it happen.

The fourth priority is to tackle the pandemic of poverty and inequality. More than 70 per cent of the world's people live with rising wealth inequality. But wealth is not the only measure. People's opportunities in life depend on their gender, race, family and ethnic background, whether they have a disability and other factors. Those injustices fuel each other, cause people to lose trust in Governments and institutions and resound down the generations.

The pandemic has made things worse. We see it in the way in which COVID-19 has preyed on the vulnerable and the marginalized. This week's report by Oxfam also found that simply the increase in the wealth of the 10 richest men — and they are men — during the crisis would be enough to prevent anyone from falling into poverty due to the virus and pay for COVID-19 vaccinations for all, everywhere.

I continue to call for a new social contract within countries to ensure that all people have prospects and protection. Education and digital technology must be the two great enablers and equalizers. Reforms to labour markets and forceful efforts against corruption,

tax havens, money-laundering and illicit financial flows will also be critical.

Societies must transform the world of care. Official development assistance remains a lifeline. It is time to redress the wrongs of the past and address the systemic injustices of our time. To keep our promise to leave no one behind is possible. Together, we must make it happen.

(spoke in French)

Human rights are under attack. The fifth priority must be to reverse that trend. Long before the pandemic, human rights were the target of increasingly serious assaults. The rule of law was at risk due to the fragility of judicial systems. Repressive political systems undermined fundamental freedoms. Atrocity crimes went largely unpunished. Women, girls, minorities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons faced chronic discrimination and violence.

Moreover, my call for action on human rights, the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech and the United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites all predate COVID-19. Today the pandemic has unleashed a new human rights crisis. Hate speech has spread. Some States have taken advantage of containment measures to control civic space and the work of journalists and human rights defenders. The disease has a disproportionate impact on minorities, people with disabilities and those living on the margins of society.

I welcome the new momentum in the struggle for racial justice that we are seeing around the world today. Racial inequalities are undermining institutions, social structures and our daily lives. We must stand together amid the rise of neo-Nazism and white supremacy. The United Nations will never give up in its fight against racism and discrimination. There is no place for racism within our Organization, and we will continue to do our utmost to eradicate it. The full promotion and protection of all human rights are possible. Together, we must make that a reality.

The sixth priority is the achievement of gender equality, which is perhaps the greatest human rights challenge of all. COVID-19 has highlighted what is too often ignored. Women are essential workers who support others. Yet they are more affected by job losses and have been pushed into poverty in greater numbers. The pandemic has also created a parallel

epidemic of violence against women — domestic violence, online violence, increased child marriage and sexual exploitation.

At the same time, in dealing with COVID-19, women have shown their leadership. Women leaders have managed to keep prevalence rates lower than their male counterparts, and their countries are well on their way to recovery. The list of transformative effects when women participate as equals is long and continues to grow — more investment in social protection, more transparent governance and more sustainable peace processes.

Women's leadership and equal representation are key to the change that we need. It is time to change old structures and abandon old models. If the formal economy works, it is only because it is subsidized by women's unpaid care work. Investment in the care economy could stimulate economic growth and help recovery from the pandemic. It is time for more ambitious and targeted measures to end approaches and attitudes that deny women their rights and to stop making marginal adjustments. Gender equality is possible. Together, we must make it a reality.

(spoke in English)

The seventh priority for the year must be to heal geopolitical rifts and find common ground. To address today's roiling peace and security threats, we need to find a bridge back to common sense. We need a united Security Council, and we need to avoid a great fracture that would divide the world into two, working instead to ensure one world economy, one secure and open Internet, cybersecurity and respect for international law and for rules agreed to by all and adhered to by all. Any dysfunction in the relations among major Powers creates space for spoilers, and spoilers trigger and prolong conflicts. We cannot solve our biggest problems when our biggest Powers are at odds.

In the early weeks of the pandemic, I called for a global ceasefire to focus on the enemy that all countries are facing. We have seen some encouraging signs and new life breathed into faltering peace processes. Ceasefires and pauses in hostilities are more or less holding in a number of places, from Libya to Ukraine, from Syria to the Sudan and from Nagorno Karabakh to South Sudan. But elsewhere fighting continues and new conflicts have erupted.

In Yemen, which is on the brink of famine, I reiterate my call for a nationwide ceasefire, economic and humanitarian confidence-building measures and the resumption of an inclusive political process. In the Central African Republic, I condemn the increased violence by armed groups and call on the newly elected authorities to pursue peaceful and inclusive dialogue and national reconciliation. In Mali, attacks by extremist groups, human rights violations and violence across community lines continue in the context of challenging efforts towards the restoration of the constitutional order and the implementation of the peace agreement. In Afghanistan, violence continues unabated even if peace negotiations hold out the possibility of an end to decades of conflict.

There is no military solution to any of those situations. I call on all Member States to pressure all relevant parties to end those senseless wars. United Nations mediators and political missions continue to explore every opening.

The year 2021 must also be the year in which we restart the peace process in the Middle East and create conditions for the two-State solution.

In the Sahel, the Lake Chad basin, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique, we see terrorism increasing in the absence of effective security arrangements and insufficient capacity to address the economic, climatic and social root causes.

It is time to recognize the need for African peace-enforcing and counter-terrorism operations to receive a mandate from the Security Council under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations and sufficient and predictable funding, including assessed contributions.

Our peacekeeping operations are fully committed to the protection of civilians in volatile situations and provide vital support to peace processes. But they increasingly operate in areas where there is no peace to keep. Already this year, nine peacekeepers have been killed in hostile incidents.

We must ensure that every peacekeeping mission and every peacekeeper possess the full resources and equipment necessary to fulfil their duties. We will continue to implement the reforms of the Action for Peacekeeping initiative.

We need a global ceasefire, but we must also intensify our efforts to prevent crises from erupting in

the first place. Unity and peace are possible. Together, we must make them happen.

(spoke in French)

The eighth priority is to rebuild the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime, which is being severely eroded. Last Friday, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons entered into force. I call on all States to support the goal of the Treaty. Despite that development, we all should be alarmed by the deterioration of relations among nuclear-weapon States. I urge those States to find common ground at this year's Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

I welcome the decision of the United States and the Russian Federation to extend the New START Treaty for a maximum of five years, allowing time to negotiate further reductions. A world without nuclear weapons is possible. Together, we must make that a reality.

The ninth priority is to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by digital technologies, while guarding against the increasing dangers that they pose. During the pandemic, digital technologies have enabled societies to function and humankind to stay connected. But the pandemic has also highlighted the huge gap in access to such tools, particularly the existence of vast disparities between women and men. The digital divide is still not being bridged. Our goal is for everyone, everywhere, to have affordable, stable and safe access to the Internet by 2030 and for all schools to be connected as soon as possible.

We need to strengthen cybersecurity and promote responsible behaviour in that area. We need to establish a "ceasefire" in cyberspace, especially to stop cyberattacks on critical infrastructure. We need to tackle the problem of the spread of hatred, exploitation and misinformation online.

We need to address the use of our data. It is true that much of the information that we collect is used for positive purposes. But there is a growing demand for all of us to have a say in how the data is used, particularly to influence and control our behaviour. There is also growing concern about how Governments can use data to violate the human rights of disadvantaged individuals or groups. We need to bring together all stakeholders to look into those practices and patterns of exploitation and agree on a way forward that does not infringe on the privacy and dignity of everyone.

In that regard, we must continue the efforts that have been undertaken with all stakeholders to define international standards and appropriate tax regimes. The rapid development of artificial intelligence makes the issue of data management all the more pressing. Artificial intelligence holds great promise, but biased data can lead to dangerous biases in its application. Human beings must remain in control.

I continue to call for a ban on lethal autonomous weapons. Last year, I launched the Road Map for Digital Cooperation. In the year ahead, I will continue to do my utmost to implement it, including through the strengthening of the Internet Governance Forum. I welcome the intention of the President of the General Assembly to organize a debate on digital cooperation in April. An open, free and secure digital future is possible. Together, we must make it a reality.

(spoke in English)

The tenth priority must be a reset for the twenty-first century. Our governance of global commons, not just public health but also peace and the natural environment, needs to be reinforced and reimaged. The General Assembly has recognized the pivotal nature of this moment.

In the Declaration on the Commemoration of the Seventy-fifth Anniversary of the United Nations (resolution 75/1), Member States called on me to make recommendations to advance our common agenda. I am well embarked on a process of profound reflection, building on last year's UN75 global consultations. The challenges ahead clearly demand a more inclusive and more networked multilateralism.

I have also called for a new global deal among countries to ensure that power, benefits and opportunities are shared more broadly and fairly. Developing countries merit a greater voice in global decision-making. Young people must also be at the table as designers of their own future, not as recipients of decisions of elders who have — let us be honest — failed them in so many key aspects. My report in September should be seen as the beginning of that reset. Strengthening global governance to deliver global public goods is possible. Together, we must make it happen.

With the support of Member States, we have taken important steps to strengthen our United Nations. The pandemic has been the first major test of those reforms. I am grateful for members' feedback indicating that

the changes have improved our work. I am completely committed to continuing those efforts. The opportunity has been granted to us in the most unfortunate of ways. But crisis gives rise to change. We can move from an annus horribilis to make this an annus possibilitatis — a year of possibility and hope. It is possible to build the world we want. Together, we must make it happen.

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

As mentioned earlier, I will now suspend the meeting for an informal meeting for a question-and-answer segment. The formal meeting will then resume for delegations to deliver statements under agenda item 115.

The meeting was suspended at 1 p.m. and resumed at 3.15 p.m.