



# General Assembly

Seventy-fifth session

**105<sup>th</sup>** plenary meeting  
Tuesday, 14 September 2021, 3 p.m.  
New York

Official Records

*President:* Mr. Bozkir ..... (Turkey)

*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. I am thankful to him, for he arrived just a few hours ago from Geneva to attend this meeting.

**The Secretary-General:** I am pleased to be with everyone in this Hall for the closing of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly, a session held under the shadow of a formidable foe — the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. By any measure, this has been the most challenging period facing the world since the Second World War. The pandemic has deepened inequalities, decimated economies at the global, national, and household levels, plunged millions into extreme poverty, shattered support systems and unravelled decades of hard-won development progress. This devastation has played out against the backdrop of ferocious conflicts and natural disasters that are putting millions of lives in jeopardy every day and a climate emergency that is literally setting our planet on fire.

*(spoke in French)*

These challenges are also a reminder that we will be able to get through this time only by standing together. We must work together as one human family. The United Nations was created precisely to overcome such situations — to bring the world — the whole world — together around common challenges, build consensus for action and always assist and protect the most vulnerable.

We can be proud that the Organization has remained operational throughout this difficult period, even though many aspects of our work have become virtual. Despite the restrictions, the intergovernmental bodies have never ceased their activities.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the 1,300 members of the Permanent and Observer Missions have joined us. During this seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly, New York headquarters facilitated nearly 850 face-to-face meetings, more than 3,000 virtual meetings and approximately 100 hybrid meetings. Nearly 1,500 meetings were provided with interpretation services, and, thanks to the determination — your determination, Mr. President — and the determination of Member States and our staff, the efforts paid off.

*(spoke in English)*

Throughout this difficult and historic moment, we have all been fortunate to rely on the leadership of His Excellency Mr. Volkan Bozkir, President of the General Assembly. And there is his stewardship: the General Assembly rallied around the need for a sustainable recovery rooted in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, scaling up for countries and communities as they rebuild systems shattered by the pandemic. President Bozkir made sure that the United Nations system and the Assembly's support strengthened health systems, delivered COVID-19 testing, treatment and equipment, and contributed to the most ambitious vaccination campaign in history. He drove the General Assembly's vital work in the areas of peace and security, disarmament, human rights,

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gender equality and sustainable development, and he oversaw the adoption of a number of major resolutions around key issues from peacebuilding to counter-terrorism, to preventing genocide and crimes against humanity, to strengthening the Economic and Social Council, to addressing climate change and ending human trafficking. All the more remarkable is that these resolutions were often discussed, debated and passed without the benefit of in-person negotiations and meetings.

In short, under President Bozkir's stewardship, the General Assembly has proven time and again, the value of multilateralism. It has shown what we can achieve by working as one. This is critically important as we continue supporting people and communities in the challenging months and years ahead.

The stakes are high, and the road ahead will be difficult. Trust and cohesion among all Member States are essential. Thanks to all States Members of the United Nations, this is the place where multilateralism comes to life.

I want to once again express my deepest gratitude to the outgoing President for his unwavering leadership over the last year. I thank him for his vision and his dedication.

And I thank all Member States for coming together during these unprecedented times. I look forward to continuing to work with them and the incoming President of the General Assembly, His Excellency Mr. Abdulla Shahid, at the seventy-sixth session of the General Assembly.

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

I will now deliver my closing statement.

It is an honour to stand in this Hall and close the seventy-fifth session of the United Nations General Assembly. This past year has been a marvellous journey.

I thank the General Assembly for electing me in an overwhelming democratic vote to join it for this session as its President. I am privileged to have served alongside its members. As the former Secretary-General Kofi Annan said,

“More than ever before in human history, we share a common destiny. We can master it only if we face it together. And that ... is why we have the United Nations.”

This year has been tumultuous, historic, transformative, unequal, challenging and groundbreaking. From the earliest moments of my presidency, we knew that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic would dominate our agenda. Since September 2020, reopening the United Nations to conduct our usual business and diplomacy safely was our utmost priority. We are not there yet, but I can now say that COVID-19 has reinforced our belief in a more effective and more responsive United Nations.

We started the session in a very different place from where we stand today. In September of last year, the United Nations was still closed. The General Assembly had postponed meeting after meeting. Vaccines — even credible testing — had yet to be developed. From the start of the session, I felt it was important to stand in solidarity with the 200,000 people working for the United Nations around the world. So many of them work with deep dedication in difficult circumstances. Some pay the ultimate sacrifice and lose their lives in the line of duty, such as Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld and Sergio Vieira de Mello. It was important to demonstrate that the General Assembly was working alongside them during this especially challenging moment in world history.

Today, although there are many steps left on the path to recovery, it is safe to say that we know our way. There are vaccines and testing capacities. Borders and economies are opening. Lives are resuming. This is progress.

This progress can be felt here at the United Nations, as well. While not yet fully open, we have, bit by bit, expanded in-person meetings and engagements. Various cafés and eateries have reopened, and the space for diplomacy has begun to re-emerge. We started the year limited to one representative per Member State in the General Assembly Hall. Currently, we are at 1+1. Next week it will be 1+3 for the general debate. Bilateral booths at Headquarters will also be provided.

I am happy and proud that all high-level and other meetings mandated for the seventy-fifth session have been held. We have had 105 formal plenary and 16 high-level meetings. We also have concluded a number of important processes that were postponed during the seventy-fourth session. The six Main Committees of the General Assembly successfully concluded their extensive work using hybrid working methods. We adopted 125 decisions and 328 resolutions. We

considered reports of the international tribunals, main organs and other bodies of the United Nations system. We conducted in-person meetings and elections, including the reappointment of Secretary-General António Guterres and the election of my successor, Abdulla Shahid.

Through the hybrid modality, a combination of in-person and virtual tools, those from outside New York have been able to join us in the General Assembly Hall on screens and participate in our discussions. While day-to-day diplomacy has been exceedingly challenging in a virtual environment, together we have tried our best to proceed. Together, we have demonstrated that leadership matters, solutions are possible and an inclusive, transparent and engaged General Assembly must be our priority.

I will forever be proud of the work we have done to reopen the United Nations. I am deeply grateful to the Member States, which have put their trust in me to pursue this path despite the doubts of some. There is an overwhelming consensus that the pandemic has created a once-in-a-generation opportunity to recover better and stronger. In order to do better together, learn and improve, I urge all members to use this momentum as they continue their work in the General Assembly to ensure that the agreements and decisions reached here are turned into real, lasting and sustained action on the ground and truly benefit those for whom they are intended.

Let me also share a quote from Dag Hammarskjöld:

“Never look down to test the ground before taking your next step; only he who keeps his eye fixed on the far horizon will find the right road.”

Notwithstanding, there are lessons that I have drawn in pursuit of our collective objective of promoting peace, security, social progress and a better standard of life in larger freedoms. Let me highlight a few.

First, there are many international organizations that address crises throughout the world. However, the General Assembly is the most representative global body. It is the single best platform to mobilize political will and incubate collective solutions to a global crisis. However, we are not using the platform effectively and efficiently. We are constrained by bureaucratic excuses and are sidestepping our responsibility out of a misaligned sense of keeping the peace. As President of the General Assembly, I have often been blunt.

Everyone knows that. Similarly, I will not hesitate in saying that our words continue to outpace our actions. While words encourage unity, they are simply not enough. The General Assembly and the United Nations must be seen to be acting to address the most critical challenges of our time.

Secondly, we must strengthen and unite behind the multilateral system. Our world is increasingly globalized, interconnected and interdependent. As such, nationalistic solutions will not overcome our challenges. It is my belief that a multilateral strategy may have helped to guard us better against the spread of COVID-19 and its variants and protect those most vulnerable. Despite having the tools available to pursue a multilateral approach, we have pursued a go-it-alone approach. This is unfortunate and has prolonged the pandemic. Let us heed the lessons from the past year. Let us strengthen the multilateral system. Let us put our faith in its ability to support all countries simultaneously.

Thirdly, the pandemic has unveiled the depths of global inequality. Simply put, not everyone has the option of working from home. Not everyone struggles with Zoom calls. Many do not even know what Zoom is. Hence, the third lesson — as we move forward, the United Nations and Member States must focus on the gaps that have been revealed to us. That must critically include the lingering and ever-widening digital divide. If we wish to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, inequality must be reduced.

Fourthly, more must be done to improve gender equality and provide greater protection of the rights of women. I do not wish to discount the progress that has been achieved. Indeed, there is much to celebrate, but let us be honest and clear that our society remains vastly unequal. Women are the first ones to bear the brunt of any challenging circumstances. That was especially visible during my visits to refugee camps on the Syrian-Turkish Border, Cox's Bazar and small island States affected by hurricanes. In addition, there have been sustained reports of increasing domestic violence against women throughout the pandemic. In recent weeks, we have heard alarming reports of violations against women and girls in Afghanistan, and the hard-won gains risk being lost. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will be impossible if we leave half the population behind.

My fifth and final lesson is that the Sustainable Development Goals represent a blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. Implementing the Goals will help to protect us against future catastrophes. With the trajectory we are on, we will miss the 2030 deadline. It is unfortunate that I have to say that. The Assembly and the Member States that make up the United Nations must redouble efforts to implement the SDGs.

We were able to meet in-person to discuss the impact and implications of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the General Assembly's thirty-first special session on COVID-19, we agreed that frank and informative exchanges were needed to blunt the growing inequality of impacts within and among countries. I hope only that this session has helped to boost support for multilateral efforts to combat the disease and has encouraged cooperation and collaboration among States.

In a bid to streamline the work of the United Nations principal organs and ensure mutually reinforcing efforts, I have held monthly coordination meetings, with combined bimonthly trilateral meetings with the President of the Security Council and the Secretary-General. I have also frequently met with the President of the Economic and Social Council to ensure that our efforts were aligned.

Following a technical rollover last year, the Assembly agreed a strong consensus resolution on the revitalization of the General Assembly (resolution 75/325). We have achieved progress on some important issues, including the decisions to move the start of the General Assembly forward one week and to biennialize the resolution — a strong message and example from the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly to the Main Committees on the need to reduce the number of resolutions.

Since the beginning of my presidency, I have committed to strengthening the intergovernmental negotiations on Security Council reform, and I have worked to overcome the difficulties that were experienced this past session owing to COVID-19. The intergovernmental negotiations remain one of the most important processes. It is critical that efforts at reform remain driven by Member States. I know, and we witnessed, that differences exist, but in differences of views and perspectives lies progress.

Throughout my presidency, I have tried to bring a greater focus to countries in special situations. I

established the Board of Advisers on Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) to highlight the specific challenges that such countries face. The platform has been exceedingly valuable in generating a new way of collaborating at the political level within the United Nations. Recognizing the usefulness, the group wishes to forge a common agenda and to strengthen coordination within the three sets of countries. Building on their request, I propose that President-elect Shahid consider convening a high-level meeting of LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS in the coming year.

As a gender champion, I also established a gender advisory group to promote gender equality and women's empowerment within the General Assembly's work. To me, that was critical given the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of women and girls. Here at the United Nations, we must uphold and emulate the ideals that we advocate. In that regard, I am pleased by the election of an all-female Bureau of the Second Committee for the seventy-sixth session, as well as the gender balance in the election of the Chairpersons of the Main Committees. I encourage Member States to continue to put women candidates forward until we achieve a full gender balance in all elected positions in the Organization.

While I am proud of our high level of cooperation and coordination, the scale and evolving complexity of the challenges before us require changes to be made to the Organization. In that regard, allow me to present some recommendations.

First, the General Assembly must be strengthened. This organ is critical to the success of multilateralism. As an outsider, I saw progress but, frankly, it is too little and too late. Various reform processes are overburdened with a plethora of issues. There is a lack of political will to move ahead. We need to take a relook at those processes. We must prioritize and ensure that we equip this Assembly and the United Nations with the tools required to meet the twenty-first-century challenges. We must get ahead of the curve. There are far too many examples of the United Nations following the crisis instead of being ahead of it. We must ask ourselves why. This undisputedly demonstrates that the preventive diplomacy tools of the United Nations either are not being utilized or are not fit for purpose and need to be refurbished.



Relatedly, and as my second point, the Office of the President of the General Assembly needs the urgent attention of Member States. It must be further institutionalized and supported. There is a serious mismatch in the way that the Organization treats its employees and the world's highest political office. Delays and inefficiencies, resulting from a lack of staff and insufficient resources for that Office, are not acceptable. An enhanced cadre of professionals is needed to run the Office and to maintain the institutional memory. An effective political administration should be a priority for all members of this Assembly. I have made a set of recommendations to strengthen the Office of the President of the General Assembly in my handover report, and I hope that my brother, President-elect Shahid, will take them forward.

My third recommendation is on substance. During this session I have observed that too much of our work is focused on procedures at the cost of substance. Nowhere is that more visible than at General Assembly-led high-level meetings, for which we liberally develop mandates and say that every high-level meeting leads to results or is needed. Many of those engagements are poorly attended. We must continue to make efforts to restrict the number of high-level and mandated meetings during any given session. Quantity should not supersede quality. If we call a meeting a high-level meeting, we must ensure that there is in fact high-level engagement, and that necessitates a much more streamlined, priority-driven agenda.

My fourth point is that the focus on the most vulnerable must be strengthened. The General Assembly must continue to give a voice to those most in need. As I saw on my trips to the Syrian refugee camps, the Rohingya Muslim camps in Cox's Bazar and the volcano- and hurricane-affected areas of the Caribbean, there is a deep respect for the United Nations flag. Wherever I travelled in the world, the United Nations flag was applauded. It evokes feelings of respect, integrity and progress. The world sees the United Nations as a single entity. They expect the General Assembly, as the most democratic organ, to be their voice and to deliberate on their behalf. Above all else, that must be our priority.

Finally, there must be strengthened cooperation with the Security Council. The two organs are like limbs of the same being. If they work together, they can reach great heights. If they pull in opposite directions, they risk tearing the Organization apart. There are

synergies between the General Assembly and the Security Council that are not currently being exploited. We should take, for example, the General Assembly's work on Myanmar, Syria and Palestine, which supported that of the Security Council. The General Assembly cannot be reduced to a talking shop or merely focused on normative guidance of the development agenda. As the most representative organ of the United Nations, it must consider the most pressing political issues. The General Assembly must strengthen all the available tools at its disposal to address the key issues facing our planet and species.

As a citizen of one of the founding States of the United Nations, it has been an honour to hold this office. I thank the President of Turkey, His Excellency Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu for nominating me to this important post and for their strong support throughout my tenure.

I want to pay my particular thanks to Mr. António Guterres, our Secretary-General. His support was crucial to my work and to this session. I thank dear António very much from my heart. I thank his team, Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and his Executive Office for their cooperation despite the very challenging times that we collectively faced. I wish him a successful tenure ahead.

I would like to recognize the Governments that provided support to the trust fund in support of the Office of the President of the General Assembly and the secondees to staff my Office. The staff of the Office of the President of the General Assembly, so ably led by Ambassador Tegan Brink and Ambassador Farrukh Khan, was critical to the smooth running of the most representative organ of the United Nations. I am grateful to all those who have served with me this year.

I thank the States of the Western European and Others Group for their support and for endorsing my nomination with consensus.

I would be remiss if I did not thank the Turkish Foreign Ministry for lending me the services of its two sterling diplomats Ms. Ceren Özgür and Mr. Öncü Keçeli. They were the backbone and pillars of my senior Cabinet.

I am deeply grateful to the entire staff of the Secretariat, who ensure that the General Assembly functions efficiently and effectively every day, the Department for General Assembly and

Conference Management, the Department of Global Communications and the Department of Safety and Security for their dedication and distinction.

I also wish to pay tribute to all the exceptionally brave people who work for the United Nations the world over. I have been inspired by their dedication and commitment to the multilateral system, and I have been honoured to serve alongside them.

I wish President-elect His Excellency Mr. Shahid, my brother, a fruitful and impactful seventy-sixth session. There are certainly many challenges ahead, but my brother, Abdulla, has my full support.

I have left Member States and colleagues to the end. For weeks, I was trying to find a way to thank them for all the support that they have shown me — a way that could truly reflect my heartfelt feelings. Then, one day, I heard a song playing. It was sung by one of the best-ever artists and singers, Ms. Bette Midler, and produced by Mr. Arif Mardin, a Turkish musician with many Grammy awards and platinum records. I immediately understood that it was what I was looking for. Let me therefore end with the title and words of that song: I could fly higher than an eagle, for you were the wind beneath my wings. Fly high against the sky, so high I almost touched the sky, for you were the wind beneath my wings.

We are now coming to the end of the seventy-fifth regular session of the General Assembly. May I invite representatives to stand and observe one minute of silent prayer or meditation.

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

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

**Mr. Shahid:** 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 any other source external to the Organization.

**The President:** I thank His Excellency Mr. Abdulla Shahid, President-elect of the seventy-sixth session, for taking the oath of office.

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

**The President:** I would like to invite the President-elect of the seventy-sixth session, His Excellency Mr. Abdulla Shahid, to meet me at the side of the rostrum for the handing over of the gavel. The seventy-sixth session will open immediately after the adjournment of this meeting.

I declare closed the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly.

*The meeting rose at 3.45 p.m.*