



# General Assembly

Seventy-eighth session

**109**<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting  
Tuesday, 10 September 2024, 10 a.m.  
New York

Official Records

*President:* Mr. Francis . . . . . (Trinidad and Tobago)

*The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.*

## Statement by the Secretary-General

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

**The Secretary-General:** We close the seventy-eighth session of the General Assembly after a tumultuous year — a year of continued poverty, inequality and injustice; a year of division, violence and conflict; a year that was once again the hottest on record. But this session is also closing at a time of growing hope and inspiration about what we can achieve if we work as one. That spirit of solidarity shone through the Assembly's accomplishments over the past year.

Using the timeless tools of diplomacy, dialogue and debate, the General Assembly at its seventy-eighth session worked to deliver solutions and hope for people and planet alike. At every step we could count on the now outgoing President, His Excellency Mr. Dennis Francis. With consummate skill, stewardship and dedication, under the theme of peace, prosperity, progress and sustainability, he brought the needs of small island developing States such as his own to the Assembly. He convened the high-level meeting on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response last September. He was invaluable to the success of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Summit, which resulted in a strong show of political support for an SDG stimulus and for reforming the global financial architecture so that it can better serve developing countries. He has been tireless in raising the alarm and inspiring action

on rising sea levels, convening leaders and taking his message to key gatherings around the world. He convened the first-ever Sustainability Week at the General Assembly — a week-long series of events around tourism, infrastructure, transport, energy and debt. I appreciate his leadership in advancing the preparations for the Summit of the Future this month, and his tireless advocacy of gender equality and youth participation.

On behalf of the entire United Nations family, I thank you, Mr. President, for your efforts over the past year. We look forward to collaborating with your successor, His Excellency Mr. Philemon Yang of Cameroon, in carrying this work forward in the coming session.

The United Nations, and the multilateral system itself, is only as effective as Member States' commitment to it. The challenges facing humankind are not insurmountable if we work together. As we celebrate the achievements of the General Assembly at its seventy-eighth session, let us also look to the seventy-ninth as a moment when the world can deliver the trust, solutions and peace that the world needs. At every step, members can count on my full support.

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

## Statement by the President

**The President:** The President on whom the sun is setting will now address the Assembly. I stand before you this morning one last time in my capacity as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-eighth session, a role that for me has been the honour and

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 AB-0928 ([verbatimrecords@un.org](mailto:verbatimrecords@un.org)). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (<http://documents.un.org>).



privilege of a lifetime. I could not have fulfilled that awesome responsibility without the trust, support and generosity of many, to whom I will forever be indebted.

First and foremost, I want to express my deepest gratitude to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for its trust and confidence in sending forth a nomination for this Office in my name. Trinidad and Tobago, the small island nation that I am immensely proud to call home, has been pivotal to my education and career advancement and will remain at the heart of my endeavours, whatever they may be, in the years ahead.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to all the nations of my region, the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States and the Caribbean Community, for their kind and faithful endorsement of my candidature and their steadfast support throughout my tenure. While I hope that I have made my country and indeed my region proud, it was never lost on me that this was in fact a global mandate, necessitating that I discharge the responsibility with the greatest possible commitment to serving all Member States with impartiality and equidistance and with equal measure as President.

During my tenure, I endeavoured to ensure that my guiding vision and its underpinning principles were firmly rooted in the Charter of the United Nations and the oath of office that I took one year ago. It has been my great privilege and indeed pleasure to have worked closely and collaboratively with our visionary Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. António Guterres, whose boundless devotion to United Nations ideals and principles, and to the practical realization of the promise of the United Nations, stands out as an example of true faith in multilateralism. I should like to thank him most sincerely for his exceptional leadership and for our very pleasant and candid exchanges, during which I benefited from his wisdom and experience.

We all know that it is all too simplistic to regard the presidency of the General Assembly as a one-person show — not a one-man show or a one-woman show but a one-person show — and it would therefore be remiss of me not to acknowledge the invaluable contribution and my deepest appreciation of the dedicated multinational team who made up the Office of the President during the seventy-eighth session. Carefully chosen with due attention to both gender parity and geographic representation, my team offered steady and tireless hands in diligently advancing the work of my Office, with great professionalism and dedication and strong team

spirit. I particularly want to thank my Chef de Cabinet, Ambassador Collen Vixen Kelapile, and my Deputy Chef de Cabinet, Ms. Inga Kanchaveli, whose expertise and effective management of the team were instrumental in ensuring that the Office rose to the occasion during a session marked by extraordinary challenges.

I would also like to take this opportunity to say how deeply appreciative I am to the Member States that generously seconded staff to my team, a preponderant majority of which are from the global South. They are Algeria, Azerbaijan, China, Equatorial Guinea, Estonia, India, Indonesia, Germany, Libya, the Maldives, Mauritania, Namibia, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago and Viet Nam, as well as Japan, which provided support for the retention of a capable diplomat. The Office's mandate would not have been achievable without the contributions generously provided to the Trust Fund, including to finance the Fellowship Programme of the Office of the President of the General Assembly. I also want to express my sincere appreciation to the General Committee membership, the Chairs of the Main Committees and the co-Facilitators and co-Chairs for this session, as well as to my Vice-Presidents, who supported the work of my Office and often stepped in when conflicting commitments summoned me to attend to other matters.

I hope that members will agree with my assessment that it has certainly been an eventful seventy-eighth session. We began in September with an especially hectic though successful high-level week — featuring the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Summit and the High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development, as well as a number of other significant achievements for multilateral diplomacy. In its very first resolution adopted during the session (resolution 78/1), the General Assembly endorsed the landmark political declarations adopted by leaders at the SDG Summit. The Assembly reaffirmed its shared commitment to ending poverty and hunger everywhere, combating inequalities within and among countries and building peaceful societies that leave no one behind. Additional political declarations followed on universal healthcare, pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, and the fight against tuberculosis, raising even higher the ambitions for making progress on critical global health issues.

I am pleased that the progress delivered during the high-level week was further built on by the first-ever Sustainability Week, a flagship initiative of my

presidency. Held last April, it consolidated several high-level events into a single compact period, focused strongly on sustainability, with the aim of galvanizing momentum ahead of the Summit of the Future, another pivotal moment when world leaders will soon gather here in New York to inject fresh energy into our multilateral system.

Beyond those high-level achievements, I am very gratified by our efforts to advance the priority of gender equality. That includes the re-establishment of the Advisory Board on Gender Equality and the work accomplished with my Special Adviser on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, Ambassador Keisha McGuire, whom I thank for ensuring that all the major initiatives and messaging in the Office of the President of the General Assembly were consistently aligned with a strong focus on gender. I am especially heartened by our success in achieving gender parity among speakers and panellists at General Assembly meetings, and we must strive to ensure that it remains a consistent feature as we move forward into the seventy-ninth session and beyond.

The wise counsel and cooperation I received from my Board of Advisers on least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and small island developing States (SIDS) helped to highlight the legitimate concerns of exceptionally vulnerable Member States in General Assembly discussions and beyond.

My now popular — if only by name — Gayap Dialogues assisted immensely in fostering trust and solidarity among Member States and provided a platform to address pressing global issues and facilitate open exchanges beyond the constraints of formal United Nations meetings. The spirited debates in the Dialogues led to concrete outcomes, such as the informal consultation that I convened ahead of the drafting of the Security Council's annual report (A/78/2).

I take great satisfaction in having continued the Fellowship Programme of the Office of the President of the General Assembly this year, providing young diplomats from six underrepresented countries the opportunity to work within the United Nations system and gain hands-on experience in multilateralism. It is my sincere hope that they will use that experience to enrich their diplomatic careers and enhance their nations' effective participation in multilateral negotiations.

A key aspect of the work of the Office of the President of the General Assembly is ensuring our relevance to all of our 8 billion global constituents. To that end, I visited 31 countries, engaging not only with Heads of State and Government but with a wide range of stakeholders — students, young people, parliamentarians, civil society organizations, women's groups, community leaders, refugees and forcibly displaced populations. During those visits, I witnessed first-hand the remarkable and impactful work being delivered by United Nations country teams, sometimes in difficult circumstances. We owe a debt of gratitude to our front-line operatives, who despite budgetary constraints and other frustrations, proudly and selflessly fly the United Nations flag, bringing much-needed relief, hope and support to missions around the world, including the dispossessed and marginalized. I made it a priority to connect with youth and civil society on those visits. The interactions provided valuable insights into the diverse perspectives and expectations for the future of our multilateral system. My visits to Haiti, South Sudan and Ukraine were especially poignant, as those nations are facing conflict, insecurity and aggression. The United Nations efforts in those regions are truly life-saving, and I conveyed a message of solidarity and unwavering support that was well received. While circumstances frustrated my desire to meet with Israelis and Palestinians on the ground in the vicinity of the theatre of ongoing action, the developments there remain uppermost in my mind, and I have discussed the situation with every relevant leader, including His Holiness Pope Francis. It is my sincere hope that the ongoing efforts will produce a ceasefire, even if temporary, and that that can somehow lead to a political process towards achieving long-lasting peace, for the sake of the peoples of the region.

From the start of the seventy-eighth session, a central theme guided my presidency — “Rebuilding trust and reigniting global solidarity: Accelerating action on the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals towards peace, prosperity, progress and sustainability for all”. Those four pillars of peace, prosperity, progress and sustainability encapsulate the essential priorities of our collective work. Peace holds the foremost position among them, not just as a guiding principle but as the very *raison d'être*, the alpha and omega, if you will, of the United Nations. It constitutes the very core of our brand. The Organization was forged in the fires of two cataclysmic wars, with the solemn vow of sparing future generations from the scourge of war. The United

Nations must rise to meet that highest calling and fulfil its mandate to maintain international peace and security, as conflicts proliferate from Ukraine to Haiti to the Middle East and Africa.

It is no understatement to say that the magnitude of man-made human suffering that we are witnessing around the world is simply staggering. Nowhere is that more apparent than in the Gaza Strip. Over the course of the past year, we have witnessed death and destruction on a scale not seen in decades. I continue to call for the full implementation of the relevant General Assembly resolutions, and in that regard I reiterate the Assembly's call both for a ceasefire and for the immediate and unconditional release of all the remaining hostages. In the same vein, also in line with the relevant General Assembly resolutions, I urge the Russian Federation to comply with international law by abandoning its aggression against Ukraine.

During its seventy-eighth session, the General Assembly continued and indeed heightened its activism in holding the Security Council accountable, including through its full implementation of the veto initiative, which brought much-needed transparency, ensuring that the voices of Member States in the elected Chamber are heard when the Security Council is paralysed as a result of the use of the veto. In furtherance of our efforts, my Office recently launched a digital handbook, as mandated by resolution 77/335. That resource offers a wealth of information on the Assembly's past actions related to matters of peace and security, serving as an invaluable guide for future endeavours. We must build on that momentum and continue to fulfil our mission for peace.

As we do so, we must remember that peace without human rights is no peace at all. Human rights are a cross-cutting issue, and in their absence conflict, strife and injustice will thrive. That reflection is especially poignant in this session, in which we marked the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It reminds us of the visceral importance of human rights and reaffirms our commitment to promoting and protecting them all around the world.

On a subject close to my heart, I engaged in challenging but illuminating discussions on reparatory justice with representatives of Member States in the context of my Gayap Dialogues. That issue resonates deeply with me, as a native of Trinidad and Tobago and a member of the Caribbean Community. I encourage

the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent to openly confront our history by continuing those discussions in hopeful anticipation of the proclamation of a second International Decade, with a clear focus on reparatory justice, recognition and equity. On the subject of equity, I am pleased that arrangements have been made with the Secretariat to ensure that once they are finalized, the Pact for the Future and its annexes will be issued as fully accessible documents. That is absolutely essential, given their importance and the need to ensure inclusivity and broad accessibility to United Nations materials.

The second pillar I chose was prosperity, a fundamental human aspiration. People across the world are motivated by the desire to build a better life for themselves and their families. Yet millions still live in abject poverty and hopelessness, enduring the indignities of deprivation and want. On our current trajectory, millions more will face poverty and hunger by 2030. Once again, it is the most vulnerable who are disproportionately affected — especially those in LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS. Many of those countries are trapped in debilitating debt cycles, forced to make impossible choices between meeting immediate socioeconomic needs and planning for the future, and they are exceptionally vulnerable to the ravages of climate-induced disasters.

It is time to focus squarely on financing for development and to move beyond gross domestic product per capita as the sole measure of a country's economic health. That is especially relevant for nations that must constantly divert scarce resources to address sudden shocks. Addressing the problem and consequences of debt in a meaningful way is essential. We must therefore strive to attain debt sustainability. To that end, I was pleased by the General Assembly's recent approval of the multidimensional vulnerability index (resolution 78/322). It is a critical step towards a more equitable and accurate assessment of vulnerability, guiding international support to where it is most needed.

The third pillar is progress. We live in an era of remarkable advances, the future beckoning us forward at dizzying speed. The world is undergoing unprecedented transformations, driven by revolutions in artificial intelligence, digital technology and scientific innovation. Those transformational breakthroughs hold the promise of a better tomorrow, offering enhanced standards of living and welfare



for everyone, everywhere, but only if progress along that path is inclusive. The benefits cannot be confined to a privileged few. They must be shared by all. Yet significant disparities persist, particularly where access to those powerful tools of progress is concerned. Gender and wealth inequalities continue to widen divides, including digital divides, leaving billions without the means to truly thrive in the twenty-first century.

Finally, sustainability is the linchpin of our global efforts, the watchword that binds all others together. For any advance in peace, prosperity or progress to be truly meaningful, it must also address the question of sustainability. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was imbued with immense hope and offered comprehensive, measurable targets to help the global community achieve its highest aspirations. Disappointingly, our lofty ambitions have been met with a sluggish pace of progress. We are far off track in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. And the Goals are not mere abstractions. They have profound implications for our people and our planet. If we do not meet the 1.5°C target established in the Paris Climate Agreement, millions in vulnerable situations around the world will suffer the devastating effects of climate change. Climate action dictates that we must not ignore the fact that August 2024 was the hottest month on record. Rising sea levels threaten to inundate small island developing States and low-lying coastal communities, displacing millions and posing real threats to livelihoods, heritage and identity — issues that leaders will address in depth during the upcoming high-level meeting on sea level rise on 25 September. Floods, hurricanes, drought and other disasters are proliferating, and the window for avoiding the most catastrophic impacts of global warming is rapidly closing.

Sustainability is the thread that connects all aspects of our work. It ensures that the foundation we lay today will support a stable, just and thriving world for generations to come. Individually and collectively, let us all therefore choose sustainability and recommit to this most critical endeavour, for it is only through sustainability that we can secure the future of our shared planet.

If there is one final message I want to leave with members, it is this. While the challenges we face may be complex, they are certainly not beyond our capacity to overcome. Together, acting in unison, we can create the outcomes that we need to build a secure and prosperous future. Indeed, we have a joint responsibility to

confront the challenges, so we must use every tool at our disposal. The most powerful, effective and perhaps most compelling of those tools is the multilateral system. I am deeply convinced that this institution, the United Nations, remains one of the greatest forces for good in the world, and that we must work hard to sustain its longevity. That conviction has been strengthened throughout my long career in diplomacy and during the eventful seventy-eighth session of the Assembly. It is the same conviction that I see in the faces of colleagues, dignitaries, civil society, indigenous and young people, and all who believe in the value of our fundamental mandate to serve and lift up “we the peoples”.

Let us rise to the occasion. Let us deliver on the promises we have made and work together in solidarity to build a future that honours the hopes and dreams of all peoples and truly unites the nations. Those aspirations are undoubtedly ambitious, but I am confident that with shared courage, resolve and the requisite political will, we can and will succeed. As has been said of the great Nelson Mandela, “It always seems impossible until it is done”.

Finally, I close by expressing my grateful thanks to the entire General Assembly for affording me this rare honour and for members’ enormous support and cooperation over the past year. I extend my best wishes for success to His Excellency Mr. Philemon Yang, President-elect of the General Assembly at its seventy-ninth session, and his team. I expect that under his leadership, the General Assembly will continue to advance its shared goals and meet the challenges ahead with wisdom and resolve. I would also like to express my deep appreciation to my wife, Joy, whose patience, understanding and encouragement freed me to concentrate on delivering on the job of President. As I yield the presidency to my colleague, I do so with a heart full of gratitude and hope for a better and brighter future for all, without exception, everywhere.

We are now coming to the end of the seventy-eighth regular session of the General Assembly. I would like to invite representatives to stand and observe a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

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

**The President:** I now invite His Excellency Mr. Philemon Yang, President-elect of the General Assembly at its seventy-ninth session, to take an oath of office in accordance with resolution 70/305, of 13 September 2016.

**Mr. Yang:** I, Philemon Yang, 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. Philemon Yang, President-elect of the seventy-ninth session, for taking the oath of office.

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

**The President:** I would now like to invite the President-elect of the seventy-ninth session, His Excellency Mr. Philemon Yang, to meet me at the side of the rostrum for the handing over of the gavel.

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

*The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.*