



General Assembly

Seventy-fifth session

93rd plenary meeting

Friday, 23 July 2021, 10 a.m.

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Official Records

President: Mr. Bozkir (Turkey)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Konfourou (Mali), Vice-President, took the Chair.

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

Agenda item 7 (continued)

Organization of work, adoption of the agenda and allocation of items

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): Members will recall that the General Assembly concluded its consideration of agenda item 24 at its 62nd plenary meeting, on 28 April 2021. In order for the Assembly to take action on the draft resolution before it today, it will be necessary to reopen consideration of agenda item 24. May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to reopen its consideration of agenda item 24?

It was so decided (decision 75/504 B).

Agenda item 24 (continued)

Eradication of poverty and other development issues

Draft resolution (A/75/L.108)

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh to introduce draft resolution A/75/L.108.

Ms. Fatima (Bangladesh): On behalf of Antigua and Barbuda, Ireland, my own delegation, Bangladesh, and 101 co-sponsors, as of the last count, I have the honour to introduce the first-ever United Nations draft resolution

on vision, entitled “Vision for Everyone: accelerating action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals”. This draft resolution is proposed under agenda item 24, “Eradication of poverty and other development issues”, and is contained in document A/75/L.108.

Ambassador Walton Alfonso Webson, Ambassador Geraldine Byrne Nason and I thank all delegations for their valuable contribution and support in finalizing the draft resolution for adoption today. This important task could not have been accomplished without the visionary leadership of my fellow co-Chair of the Group of Friends of Vision, Ambassador Webson of Antigua and Barbuda. He could not be here today, as he has to attend to some pressing national priorities back home. I pay special tribute to him for his invaluable contribution to generating awareness and action on this highly important issue. I would also like to thank the members of the Group of Friends, who provided key support to advance this cause over the past years. We are grateful to the World Health Organization, other United Nations colleagues and our friends in civil society for their steadfast support and contribution to our efforts. Our special thanks go to our experts for their tireless efforts to reach consensus on this landmark draft resolution.

Allow me to take this opportunity to thank the 101 co-sponsors. We sincerely hope that more States will join this important draft resolution before its adoption this morning.

It is critical to convey a strong message from the General Assembly of our unequivocal commitment to ensuring proper eye-care facilities for everyone,

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everywhere, in order to prevent conditions that can lead to serious and permanent damage. We must take this opportunity to change the lives of millions who are living in blindness or with impaired vision.

This draft resolution is a long-overdue recognition of the central role that healthy vision plays in human life and for sustainable development. Millions of people globally lose their vision needlessly. That phenomenon largely impedes their ability to contribute to their full potentials to the socioeconomic development of their societies. The draft resolution before us has the potential to reverse such a situation.

For those living with sight loss, the cost to them and their societies is enormous. Loss of learning and loss of earning deny them the opportunities to live in dignity and prosperity. On average, sight loss costs the global economy the staggering amount of \$411 billion in productivity each year. Access to eye-care services can increase household per capita expenditure by 88 per cent and the odds of obtaining paid employment by 10 per cent. Therefore, the imperative to act on vision is not simply moral or ethical; the economic cost is equally untenable.

We cannot achieve our overarching vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of leaving no one behind without urgent actions in this area. We must harness the economic potentials of those who suffer from blindness or impaired vision by enhancing their economic potentials, employment prospects and workplace productivity.

Eye health is becoming one of the fastest growing areas of public health concerns of our time, and we cannot deny its strong interlinkages with the poverty and inequality that exist both within and among nations. More than 90 per cent of the 1.1 billion people worldwide who have vision loss live in low- or middle-income countries. They share a common challenge. They do not have access to the most basic eye care, and that leads many of them to life-long visual impairment and even blindness. In turn, families and communities become trapped into the cycle of poverty and inequality.

The gender dimension of vision impairment is another phenomenon of great concern. It is no coincidence that 55 per cent of blind people are women and girls. They are 8 per cent more likely to be blind than men are and 15 per cent more likely to have moderate to severe vision impairment. It is imperative to adopt a whole-of-society approach to tackling these

issues in a holistic manner. There must be a paradigm shift in our approach to addressing such vicious cycles of poverty and inequality, which are closely linked with vision loss.

However, it is not only poverty and inequality. Vision loss can also be linked to other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as Goal 2, on hunger, Goal 3, on health, Goal 4, on education, Goal 5, on gender inequality, Goal 8, on decent jobs, and so on.

The recently published *Lancet Global Health Commission on Global Eye Health: vision beyond 2020* revealed that, in low- and middle-income countries, children with vision impairment were two to five times less likely to be in formal education. The provision of glasses was found to be one of the most effective health interventions for children's educational attainment, reducing the odds of failing a class by 44 per cent.

Eye care can be transformative. An eye test for a child can be the difference between getting an education and not getting one. A pair of prescription glasses can make the difference between going to work and not going to work. Corrective eye treatment can be the difference between improved eyesight and total loss of sight. Vision care and eye health for all can be the difference between the fulfilment of the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda and not achieving such aspirations.

The draft resolution before us encourages Governments to take a whole-of-Government approach to eye health, linking vision to advancing other development priorities. It invites international financial institutions and donors to provide appropriate and targeted finances. It calls on the relevant United Nations institutions to support the global efforts to achieve vision for everyone in order to achieve the SDGs.

The adoption of today's draft resolution on vision would be a watershed moment in the global efforts for vision care. Preventable sight loss is a global challenge that needs a global solution. We cannot hope to end poverty, end hunger and end illiteracy without making eye care central to our global efforts. The draft resolution that we have before us can make a world of difference to the lives of billions and their families and communities. We may not be able to restore the eyesight of the millions who have already lost their vision, but our timely actions can prevent millions more from falling into the same trap and ensure a life of hope and aspirations for the visually impaired.

Let me conclude by calling on the Assembly to adopt this draft resolution with a strong mandate and thus send a strong message of hope to the millions of visually impaired. That can be our solemn pledge from this historic seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): We shall now proceed to consider draft resolution A/75/L.108.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/75/L.108, entitled “Vision for Everyone: accelerating action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals”. For the Assembly’s information, the draft resolution has closed for e-sponsorship.

I give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

Ms. De Miranda (General Assembly Affairs Branch): I should like to announce that, since the submission of the draft resolution and in addition to the delegations listed on the document, the following countries have also become sponsors of draft resolution A/75/L.108: Albania, Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, the Bahamas, Bahrain, Barbados, Belarus, Belize, Bhutan, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cabo Verde, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Côte d’Ivoire, Cuba, Cyprus, Denmark, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Estonia, Fiji, France, the Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guyana, India, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Lesotho, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Micronesia (Federated States of), Mongolia, Morocco, Namibia, Nauru, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, the Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palau, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, Portugal, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation, Rwanda, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, San Marino, Senegal, Serbia, Seychelles, Singapore, Spain, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, Uganda, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Viet Nam and Zambia.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/75/L.108?

Draft resolution A/75/L.108 was adopted (resolution 75/310).

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): Before giving the floor to speakers for explanations of vote after the voting, may I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Leiby (United States of America): The United States is pleased to join the consensus on resolution 75/310 and reaffirms its position on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as detailed in its explanation of position delivered on 1 September 2015.

We are pleased that the resolution includes rights-based language related to persons with disabilities, including those with vision impairments.

Ms. Zalanyi (Hungary): Hungary would like to extend its appreciation to the co-facilitators for their tireless work and commitment in the elaboration of resolution 75/310. Hungary is firmly committed to ending vision impairment and blindness globally by 2030. Putting an end to that scourge requires effective action by Governments in terms of prevention, the provision of adequate, affordable and inclusive health services, and comprehensive socioeconomic support for those marginalized and those most left behind.

We emphasize the centrality of evidence-based interventions at the national and local levels, identifying and focusing on populations that are at highest risk of vision impairment and those who face inequalities, and ensuring their access to the services that they need.

For Hungary, leaving no one behind is a universal term, and therefore we are concerned that singling out different actors and marginalized groups such as migrants in the seventeenth preambular paragraph of the present resolution might have an implication of excluding others who are equally in vulnerable situations. We believe that ending vision impairment and blindness requires action by all Governments, with the support of the international community, in ensuring the health and well-being of their own populations, thus enabling them to prosper and thrive in their homeland and preventing the need for displacement, which puts such populations in an even more precarious situation.

Hungary remains a committed global partner in the fight against vision impairment and blindness.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker in explanation of vote after the voting.

We will now hear those delegations wishing to make statements after the adoption of the resolution.

Mr. Konstantinopolskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, we wish to thank the authors of resolution 75/310, on “Vision for Everyone: accelerating action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals” — Bangladesh, Ireland and Antigua and Barbuda — for this beneficial initiative. We also value their leadership in establishing the informal Friends of Vision Group in New York.

In a context where almost one quarter of people globally have a vision impairment, a document on the contributions of ophthalmology services to sustainable development is much needed. Although the leading role in international cooperation for eye health belongs to the World Health Organization, the resolution demonstrates the link between vision and issues such as poverty eradication, economic growth, employment and healthy workplaces, education, safe roadway travel and so on. It allows the General Assembly, within its competencies, to contribute to global efforts in this area. Against the backdrop of the coronavirus disease pandemic, this is even more relevant, not only due to setbacks in the provision of eye-care services but also in the context of the symptoms of this new disease and its possible effects on a person’s eyesight.

The General Assembly’s attention to the socioeconomic aspects of vision impairment is also crucial in the context of the recently concluded 20-year global programme Vision 2020, which, according to experts, has decreased preventable blindness by more than 15 per cent worldwide. Further action here would be to address such issues as increasing awareness and education among the population on the importance of vision, to provide preventive care for these illnesses and their early diagnosis, the integration of ophthalmology into primary medical care assistance, and the implementation of modern medical technology as well as the sharing of expertise.

Ophthalmology in our country, Russia, has had a long tradition, beginning in the nineteenth century, when the first specialized eye-care hospital was established in Moscow and the second ophthalmology department in the world was opened in Saint Petersburg.

A pioneer in Soviet and Russian eye microsurgery was Dr. Fyodorov.

We continue to work at the national level. For example, for the past five years, the number of people with blindness or vision impairment per 100,000 Russian adults has decreased by more than 20 per cent and 29 per cent among children.

We are prepared to cooperate with interested partners within the United Nations system on issues related to maintaining eye health, and we fully support the beneficial initiative being discussed today.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker under this agenda item.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 24?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 14 (*continued*)

Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields

Draft resolution (A/75/L.116)

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Germany to introduce draft resolution A/75/L.116.

Mr. Sautter (Germany): It is with great pleasure that I hereby introduce draft resolution A/75/L.116, on “Tackling illicit trafficking in wildlife”, on behalf of Gabon and my own country, Germany.

The draft resolution that is before the General Assembly this morning is the fifth resolution on this important issue. Since the General Assembly adopted its first resolution on poaching and illicit wildlife trafficking, in 2015 (resolution 69/314), substantial progress has been made. But let me be clear: illicit wildlife trafficking continues to be one of the most profitable forms of organized crime and poses grave threats to biodiversity, to sustainable development, and in some cases, to stability and even to our own health.

We hope that today we can once again adopt this draft resolution by consensus to underscore our common continued commitment to jointly addressing the challenges posed by illicit wildlife trafficking. This

resolution has always stood out as a strong example of all States Members of the United Nations working together to address an issue of truly global concern. I hope that it will do so once again today.

I am very happy that well over 50 delegations from all regions of the world have already joined Gabon and Germany in sponsoring this draft resolution, and I hope that even more will do so this morning.

Allow me to express our sincere gratitude to all those who have crucially contributed to this draft.

First, let me thank my dear colleague from Gabon and his excellent team for their tireless work on this draft resolution and once again to commend Gabon's leading role in combating poaching and illegal wildlife trafficking. For Germany, it is an honour to co-chair the United Nations Group of Friends on Poaching and Illicit Wildlife Trafficking together with Gabon and to work together as co-facilitators of this important draft resolution.

We would like to thank the Secretary-General for his highly insightful report on the global status of illicit trafficking in wildlife, which informs our deliberations and our work on the draft resolution.

We are furthermore very grateful to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) experts on wildlife crime in Vienna as well as to their colleagues at the UNODC liaison office here in New York, for their important work.

The draft resolution was possible only thanks to the constructive engagement of so many delegations, from within the Group of Friends and beyond. Our gratitude goes to all of them for their support and their efforts. Negotiations were intense, not always easy, so I am very happy that in the end we all could agree on a strong text.

The draft resolution renews our joint commitment to effectively combating illicit wildlife trafficking at all levels. It draws attention to new developments and challenges that require our joint efforts, including those posed by the current circumstances of the coronavirus disease pandemic. Let me highlight just three of many new points now reflected in the draft resolution.

First, for the first time the draft resolution now recognizes that poaching and the illicit wildlife trade, and the ecosystem degradation and habitat loss that are their consequences, increase the risk of zoonotic

diseases emerging and spreading, leading in some case to epidemics and even pandemics.

Building on an understanding of the fact that human, animal, plant and ecosystem health are in fact inseparable, a One Health approach is recognized as an integral part of both the rationale for combating illicit wildlife trafficking as well as informing efforts to do so.

In that context, the draft resolution underlines the importance of Tripartite Plus, the cooperation between the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Organisation for Animal Health and the United Nations Environment Programme in order to ensure coordinated, intersectoral action at the global level.

Secondly, the draft resolution underscores the link between wildlife crime and financial crime and calls on Member States to strengthen the capacity of their relevant agencies to address this effectively. Illicit wildlife trafficking remains highly lucrative, thereby fuelling corruption, which not only exacerbates the damage done to habitats and ecosystems but can also undermine the stability of States.

Thirdly, as have so many things in the past year, illicit wildlife trafficking has moved online. The draft resolution therefore now also emphasizes the importance of developing strategies and technical tools to confront the increased use of online intermediaries. We need to be able to effectively deal with online marketplaces and social media forums that fuel illicit wildlife trafficking. The draft resolution therefore recognizes the need for increased technical and digital capacity-building.

We encourage all members to fully implement the commitments set out in the draft resolution without delay and further encourage them to work closely with the United Nations specialized agencies, the various Conventions and all other stakeholders that share our ambition to effectively tackle illicit trafficking in wildlife.

For our common fight against illicit wildlife trafficking to be successful, it is crucial that we as States Members of the United Nations keep on working together closely. I believe that the work leading to the draft resolution was a great example of this spirit across all regional groups. On behalf of Gabon, Germany and the Group of Friends, I would like to thank all colleagues very much once again for this great cooperation.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/75/L.116, entitled “Tackling illicit trafficking in wildlife”.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

Ms. De Miranda (Department for General Assembly and Conference Management): I should like to announce that since the submission of draft resolution A/75/L.116 and in addition to the delegations listed in that document, the following countries have also become sponsors of the draft resolution: Albania, Andorra, Angola, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Botswana, Bulgaria, Cabo Verde, Canada, Colombia, Côte d’Ivoire, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Estonia, Fiji, Finland,

France, Georgia, Greece, Guatemala, Guinea, Guyana, Hungary, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Mexico, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Namibia, the Netherlands, Palau, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, Romania, the Russian Federation, Saint Lucia, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Thailand, the United Kingdom, the United Republic of Tanzania and the United States.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): May I take it that the General Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/75/L.116?

Draft resolution A/75/L.116 was adopted (resolution 75/311).

The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.