



General Assembly

Seventy-eighth session

84th plenary meeting

Monday, 3 June 2024, 3 p.m.

New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Francis (Trinidad and Tobago)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Address by His Excellency Mr. César Bernardo Arévalo de León, President of the Republic of Guatemala

Statement by the President

The President: We gather today in the spirit that we are stronger together, bound by the principles of consultation, inclusion and solidarity that have underpinned multilateralism for nearly 80 years. They have been the standard bearers of the presidencies of the General Assembly since the founding days of our venerable institution, principles that for decades have enabled the globalization and integration of societies and systems at breakneck speed — and, most unfortunately, principles from which geopolitical tensions and mistrust appear to be breaking today.

We are seeing the devastating consequences of that in the more than 36,000 Palestinians and 1,500 Israelis killed in the relentless, unnecessary violence in Gaza and the continued unlawful aggression against Ukraine, among numerous other simmering conflicts around the world, which demand that we understand the necessity of returning to our multilateral roots as our best chance of surmounting them. Our commitment to multilateralism is enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and in our collective pledge to protect future generations from the scourge of war. It is at its best when we assert our faith in fundamental human rights, when we uphold the dignity of all human beings and when we stand firm together, in support of equality between men

and women and among nations large and small. I invite every Member State to seize the opportunity offered by today's address by His Excellency Mr. Bernardo Arévalo de León, President of Guatemala, to recommit to multilateralism.

In that spirit, I was pleased to facilitate the request from the Permanent Mission of Guatemala to convene today's plenary meeting. On behalf of the Assembly, I extend a sincere welcome to the President of Guatemala. We are all aware that Guatemala, a loyal member of this Organization, is also a diverse and multicultural nation with a rich heritage and strong resilience woven into its vibrant social fabric. The road to peace was not the work of any one Government, political party or social group. Several Administrations played their part with strong support from the United Nations, a broad spectrum of civil society organizations and La Unida Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca. Those myriad efforts spanned years, showcasing the determination of all parties, working as one, to deliver on the highest aspiration for any society: peace. As a result, the people of Guatemala brought an end to an era of terrible violence and ushered in a new era of tranquillity and sustained stability. All Guatemalans should be rightly proud of all that they have accomplished.

As I conclude, it is worth emphasizing that Guatemala's success speaks clearly to the value of working together for the greater good. Looking ahead, the Summit of the Future, in September 2024, is the opportunity for Member States to work together to reinvigorate and strengthen multilateralism by building more effective and inclusive systems, networks

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). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (<http://documents.un.org>).

24-15506 (E)



Accessible document

Please recycle



and relationships that align with the demands of an increasingly multipolar world and that fulfil the central promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development — to leave no one behind. As the intergovernmental negotiations on the Pact for the Future advance, I encourage delegations to engage meaningfully in a spirit of compromise, steering the negotiations towards a successful summit in September. Once again, I urge Assembly members to use this once-in-a-generation opportunity to redefine multilateral cooperation, to return to the foundational principles of the Charter of the United Nations, to restore the credibility of the multilateral system for generations to come and to recapture the once awesome authority and legitimacy of this unique Organization.

Address by Mr. Arévalo de León, President of the Republic of Guatemala

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Guatemala.

Mr. Arévalo de León, President of the Republic of Guatemala, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Arévalo de León, President of the Republic of Guatemala, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Arévalo de León (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for me to address this exalted forum for the first time as the President of the Republic of Guatemala, a small country belonging to a region that forms a bridge between the Americas.

Guatemala is the cradle of one of the most splendid civilizations that humankind has ever seen. At its pinnacle, the Mayan people, with whom the vast majority of Guatemalans continue to identify, developed over thousands of years, before the first Europeans set foot on the continent, their science and knowledge, which have endured generations of plunder and exploitation. That people understood the reverence for, and the value of, nature, and the need to preserve and safeguard our shared home, that the future of humankind is inextricably bound to the stewardship of its environment. The peoples of Central America have always known that a decent life for our peoples is necessarily tied to the well-being of our world as a whole.

I come from a country in which our people take great pride, despite the difficulties that we have had to face at many points in our history. It is a country in which, for many, the door to development has long remained shut; a country in which conflict and violence have riven our communities and scarred our families; a country in which the enjoyment of fundamental freedoms and human rights has been denied to the vast majority; a country in which, for a lack of a future, many of its young people have had to migrate to seek refuge elsewhere. But we, a plural and diverse nation, have not yielded in the face of those difficulties. Our determination to secure well-being and peace for all those who inhabit the beautiful land that we call Guatemala has allowed us to chart a course away from the spectre of violence and authoritarianism and towards a fair and decent life and towards development that embraces each of our communities and is based on peaceful coexistence among our four peoples, who are determined to forge our destiny in peace, labouring honestly to care for our families. Our challenges are not over: we continue to face considerable development deficits; we are still struggling to spurn old as well as new forms of authoritarianism and to fortify our democratic institutions; and we continue to resist the provocations entailed by fear and violence in what are turbulent, polarizing and uncertain times for millions in our country and worldwide.

However, our experience has shown that conflicts can be overcome when the people believe that a better life is possible and when from that hope a genuine vocation for peace crystallizes and is expressed by society at large. My Government is the fruit of that hope and of the determination of Guatemalan society to overcome a murky and dark chapter in our history, in which State institutions were co-opted by criminal political networks focused on illicit enrichment at the expense of the greater good. In 2023, that hope saw citizens give their resounding verdict at the ballot box, leaving no doubt about their fervour for transformation and change. It had been a complex electoral process, in which a corrupt minority sought illegally to thwart the freely expressed will of the people through the spurious weaponization of the legal system in the electoral process, but we prevailed thanks to a robust civil society, which, drawing on the leadership of the ancestral indigenous authorities, fought decisively to prevent our democracy from crumbling. At those difficult times, the efforts made by Guatemalan society received support from all corners of the globe. The Inter-American Democratic

Charter — that embodiment of the democratic vocation of the peoples of our hemisphere — enabled our regional organization, the Organization of American States, to deploy observation and support mechanisms that were key in revealing the spurious nature of the challenges to the electoral process. The Governments of nations from different continents and regional organizations supported our struggle, condemning the coup attempts, and social organizations of all kinds conveyed to us their support and solidarity. Moreover, the Secretary-General and various organizations unequivocally declared their support in this forum, in defence of our people's right to democracy.

Guatemalans live in a democracy today thanks to the solidarity and the overwhelming support that we received from the international community, and today, from this forum, we reiterate our gratitude to the nations of the world that stood with us in this struggle for justice and development and that, we trust, will continue to stand with us in our future. But beyond gratitude, I would like to emphasize that our experience demonstrates the importance for each of our nations of an international system based on cooperation and solidarity — a system endowed with the rule of law and institutions that govern our coexistence in this shared home that is the planet and that enable us to develop, as nations and as an international community, in peace and harmony; a multilateral system in which we have made progress since 1945, when the horrors of the Second World War made it clear that the alternative would have been to go on, condemned to live from war to war.

Guatemala considers multilateralism to be one of the key tools with which to create a fairer and more sustainable world, through the search for collaborative and coordinated approaches to problems that, although they occur in each of our countries, are in fact common challenges that we can tackle more effectively if we do so as one humankind. The global challenges that we face at this point in time are enormous: the challenges of climate change or migration caused by poverty or war; eradicating hunger and overcoming poverty; and the quest for well-being and equal justice for all nations.

Multilateralism reminds us that diplomacy, cooperation and dialogue constitute the only mechanism that we have to comprehensively and peacefully address the global challenges that we face. It shows us that, by uniting our efforts, we as countries can take actions that would be impossible to take individually. At the heart of that reality is our collective faith in the inherent dignity

and worth of the human person, in the importance of a system of law that is based on the principle of equality among nations, large and small, and in the need to create conditions conducive to preserving justice and freedom in the world.

Our Organization has a broad agenda in the different areas of the pursuit of peace and of development, along with a specialized organizational structure that provides us with an effective framework for addressing challenges. However, we need to go deeper in facilitating progress on clear and precise goals and timelines, because the poverty, precarious conditions and scarcity that the vast majority of the world's population is enduring will not allow us to wait any longer. As a Government, we received a mandate from the people of Guatemala to make development the central objective of our Administration, and improving people's quality of life is our compass. And it is in fulfilment of that mandate that our Government is committed to working actively within the framework of our Organization, aware that there is no better guarantee of the progress of Guatemalans than the progress of the world as a whole.

Consequently, as an expression of that spirit of collaboration, I believe that it is important to share with the General Assembly one of the main lessons that our society has learned in its political development in recent decades: ethics and integrity in public service are necessary and irreplaceable conditions for sustainable development. Countries that do not successfully tackle corruption will always carry an immeasurable burden that will make their path to widespread well-being and shared prosperity impossible.

Corruption was long considered a secondary problem associated with the quality of governance, almost an inevitable deficiency. But the world's recent experience, and certainly that of my country, show that corruption is much more than that: it is a structural problem that vitally affects the functioning of States and that has taken on threatening characteristics and dimensions in the context of the globalization of the planet. Corruption renders any effort to achieve development impossible, by diverting to private pockets resources that which should be invested in the well-being of the people. Corruption erodes and eliminates the effectiveness of public institutions by supplanting the objectives that govern their operation. Corruption betrays democracy by distorting the principle of popular sovereignty that must govern its

institutions. Corruption makes justice impossible by conditioning the functioning of prosecutors' offices and courts on material transactions. A corrupt power undermines the principles of the freedom of peoples and fuels on injustice. Where there is no justice, there is no peace. We see it time and again: conflicts and wars are triggered by injustices and illegal actions, and corruption promotes both.

Moreover, corruption is the oil that lubricates the trade in illicit substances, weapons trafficking and trafficking in persons. Corruption is a threat to democracy. Corruption is a threat to peace. Corruption is a threat to development. Guatemala acknowledges those facts, and our example serves to demonstrate that solidarity efforts involving multiple countries, with their diverse capabilities and experiences, can make an important contribution to the fight against corruption. In addition to facilitating the exchange of knowledge and experience, multilateral efforts engage Governments, incorporating additional avenues of accountability and horizontal responsibility.

Governments must not only be accountable to their people; they must also be accountable to their peers, because countries that spiral into corruption are a threat and a burden to their neighbours and to their region. Corruption in one nation is a problem for all nations, and it is up to all of us, in solidarity, to put a stop to it. In Guatemala, we are making tremendous efforts to combat corruption. To date, my Government has filed more than 84 complaints of major corruption with the Office of the Prosecutor. We have eliminated more than 1,300 positions in the public service that were part of mechanisms for buying consciences and clientelism. We formed a special commission, with the participation of civil society, which is responsible for identifying cases, schemes and patterns of illegal enrichment in order to report them immediately and, above all, to generate the knowledge that will enable us to design effective public policies to prevent and combat them.

In parallel, we are working with the legislative branch to enact key reforms in order to strengthen the justice system, because prosecuting corruption requires an independent and impartial judiciary. And in that regard, I have also requested that the Organization of American States send an observation mission for the selection process for the integration of our Supreme Court of Justice and courts of appeal, which must be renewed in October of this year; that process is under siege by the same criminal networks.

We believe that Guatemala's experience is valuable to our peers, and we make it available to all those who work for transparency in public institutions and against their corruption. That is because we firmly believe that our struggle is most effective when we do it in solidarity with other nations, as history has already shown us. It is because of this experience that we greatly value the international system's evolution during the second half of the twentieth century, with the building of institutions for cooperation and dialogue that host multilateral efforts. We are therefore very concerned about the weakening of that international order.

The number of violent conflicts in the world is on the rise. There are now more than 50 active conflicts, with an increase of 22 per cent in the past five years. The war in Ukraine, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the conflicts in the Sudan and Myanmar are examples that illustrate the collapse of the era of hope and of relative peace experienced during the first decade of this century. For countries such as Guatemala, the weakening of the international order based on equality between States and respect for international law and human rights is an existential threat. We cannot afford to return to might-makes-right schemes, which condemn us to endless cycles of conflict and violence. We must therefore review and perfect our institutions. Achieving ever-broader multilateralism requires the United Nations to be an effective, inclusive and harmonious institution. Our Organization's effectiveness has been hampered and paralysed by the irresponsible use of the right of veto in the Security Council, which has contributed to international discord and friction, rather than promoting peace among States, a principle that gives life to the work of this organ.

Collective responsibility in the face of the most serious injustices requires us to act deftly. We must work on renewing our Organization, with the aim of protecting everyone's interests, so that it is able to address collective threats and ready to mobilize State action to advance peace, international harmony and the defence of human rights, within the framework of the concept of human security. We must renew our commitment to that concept.

In the effort to build peace, we must also be more effective in the pursuit of development. Based on the commitment made in 2015, when we signed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Guatemala has renewed its fight against poverty to reduce inequalities and accelerate economic growth in a setting that is

compatible with the environment. However, in the context of deteriorating international institutions in which we find ourselves, humankind will find it difficult to respond to the overarching challenges it faces.

Progress is needed in a cycle of institutional review and reforms. The Economic and Social Council, in particular, must play a vital role in disseminating innovative practices to achieve the development goals that we have set for ourselves. One of the main challenges is effectively mobilizing adequate funding. Restrictive monetary policies and the strengthening of the dollar have significantly increased the resources required to close the investment gaps in infrastructure, decarbonization, education and health around the world. We must reform the global financial system to address future debt crises and effectively combat corruption.

Lastly, renewed multilateralism requires an update of the system of representation in the Organization. It is essential to strengthen the power of the General Assembly so that it can take action when the Security Council fails to maintain international peace and security. This Organization — our Organization — can do much more. This Organization — our Organization — must do much more. Rescuing multilateralism, as a fundamental

principle for the international system, is an urgent need and, for each of the nations that make up this forum, a firm commitment.

Guatemala is doing its part. The people of Guatemala have chosen a path of transformation for themselves. We are showing the world that, according to the sacred book of our Quiché Maya people, the Popol Vuh, even in the deepest darkness, the will for change can shine with its own light. However, this individual, national transformation, in all its complexity, will not be enough in and of itself to achieve our objectives. We need the world, with its nations and organizations, committed to a future of peace and development that inspired the creation of this body. Guatemala is enthusiastically willing to contribute its efforts to these objectives.

I ask members to see in my Government and in our people a permanent ally to achieve these objectives.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Guatemala for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Arévalo de León, President of the Republic of Guatemala, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

The meeting rose at 3.35 p.m.