

Statement by
H.E. Robert Abela, Prime Minister of Malta
at the
High-level meeting to commemorate the seventy-fifth Anniversary of the United Nations
Item 128(a)
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“The future we want, the United Nations we need: reaffirming our collective commitment to multilateralism”

Secretary General,

President of the General Assembly,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is highly significant that at the moment the world is gripped by a global pandemic, we come together through virtual means, to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations. In a matter of weeks, the pandemic manifested itself as the largest global challenge in the history of the United Nations. As the Final Declaration, which we endorse today, rightly states, ‘There is no other global organization with the legitimacy, convening power and normative impact as the United Nations. No other global organization gives hope to so many people for a better world and can deliver the future we want. The urgency for all countries to come together, to fulfill the promise of the nations united, has rarely been greater.’

Mr President,

Today, the 21st September, Malta celebrates 56 years of Independence, but what is also noteworthy is that Malta became the 114th member of the United Nations Organisation on the 1st December 1964, only a few weeks after gaining Independence. On the raising of the flag the then Maltese Prime Minister, Dr George Borg Olivier, emphasized Malta’s position between East and West, Europe and Africa, and spoke of Malta’s aspirations for peaceful development. Now that Malta had taken her place among the free nations, the Prime Minister pledged Malta’s contribution towards world peace in that, ‘spirit of heroic determination, in defence of traditional concepts of freedom and civilisation’, which have characterized Malta’s long history.

As a reflection of Malta’s early commitment to Multilateralism, Malta sent a resident Ambassador to the UN even before doing so for Italy and Libya, our closest neighbours. Of particular note is that besides

security, the other two preoccupations of the Maltese government at the time were economic viability of the islands and political stability, and the United Nations was viewed as the main channel for addressing these preoccupations.

Mr President,

Notwithstanding limited resources, my country has made significant economic and social progress since the days after independence, and membership of the European Union in 2004 has bolstered our ability to face these challenges raised by rapid globalisation. What is however significant, is that as a small state within the European Union, our commitment to multilateralism has never wavered, because we deeply understand that simple bilateral action can never address the global challenges we faced, and continue to face, such as regional security, migration and climate change. Only through addressing challenges in solidarity with partners can we truly ensure that no one is left behind.

We must recall that the bitter experience of the inter-war years, culminating in World War II, has shown how a lack of international cooperation gave rise to economic depression and armed conflict. If the United Nations did not exist, we would need to invent it. The multilateral system and processes in place since World War II have underpinned the growing openness and interconnectedness of our economies. The truth is these processes have allowed for the most rapid sustained global economic growth in history, with hundreds of millions of people lifted out of poverty only in the past 35 years.

Yet, it is also true that these same processes have at times been unable to respond sufficiently fast, or effectively, to the challenges posed by globalization and its effects. It is for this reason that many people also see multilateral processes as opaque and slow. However, this does not mean that they are irrelevant or unnecessary. On the contrary history has shown us that without the current multilateral processes with the United Nations at its core, we would have needed to invent them to avoid greater discord, anarchy and conflict. The world needs these checks and balances. The international community cannot function properly without a rules based system, guiding principles and overarching values.

As the 75th Anniversary Declaration highlights, our world is not yet the world our founders envisaged 75 years ago. It is plagued by growing inequality, poverty, hunger, armed conflicts, terrorism, insecurity, climate change, and pandemics. People in different corners of the world are forced to make dangerous journeys in search of refuge and safety. The least developed countries are falling behind. All this calls for greater action, not less. When Member States lend their will and resources to the collective efforts of the Organization, powerful results have been seen. Through the Global Conversation launched by the Secretary-General this year, we have listened to the concerns and aspirations of the people. In this regard, I state without any reservations that we are here to respond.

Mr President,

Just before the pandemic struck late last year, in a speech at the Paris Peace Forum, the Secretary General drew parallels with the geopolitical landscape in the early 20th Century, and described today's world as neither bipolar, unipolar, nor multipolar, but rather "chaotic and uncertain". He identified five fault lines that threatened the world and made a strong appeal to avoid this 'Great Fracture' and preserve a global system, a universal economy that respects international law, a multipolar world with solid multilateral institutions.

In my view, it has to be recognized that the COVID 19 pandemic has made this world even more chaotic and uncertain, but I believe that the Secretary General's prescription still holds. I completely agree that if we fail to act now, history will remember that we had all the means needed to fight back, but that we chose to remain idle. Solutions exist and if countries find the political will to act, honour pledges to cut emissions, and mobilize funding for sustainable development, catastrophe can be averted.

The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us in the most powerful way that we are closely interconnected and only as strong as our weakest link. Only by working together and in solidarity can we end the pandemic and effectively tackle its consequences. Only together can we build resilience against future pandemics and other global challenges. Multilateralism is not an option but a necessity as we build back better for a more equal, more resilient, and more sustainable world. The United Nations must be at the center of our efforts.

In this regard, my country believes that it is critical that multilateralism rapidly adapts to the challenges of today and tomorrow, and seek to make the Organisation more effective and agile. In my view, to achieve this, I think that multilateralism will have to be more inclusive in two ways. First, in the sense of giving influence to a wider range of countries and consulting more thoroughly with stakeholders, including civil society. Secondly, more attention should be paid to ensuring that the growth yielded by the global economic system is inclusive, both across countries and within them. All international policy initiatives – and domestic ones, too – should have as their goal broad-based increases in people's well-being. This is all the more critical in the very challenging economic landscape we are all faced with during the pandemic.

Mr President,

In conclusion, it has to be admitted that the COVID-19 pandemic caught us off-guard. It has served as a wakeup call for improving our preparedness for not only health related crises, but also other challenges and crises. We need to strengthen international cooperation, coordination, and solidarity. It is important to learn, share experiences and information to reduce risks and make our systems more resilient.

We must all focus our efforts towards the sustainability of our planet, as well as the welfare of generations for decades to come. It is only through reinvigorated global action and by building on the progress achieved in the last 75 years, can we as leaders remain determined to ensure the future we want. To achieve this, we need to be ready to mobilize resources, strengthen our efforts and show unprecedented political will and leadership. The challenges appear significant, but the will to overcome them remains unwavering.