

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**  
--  
**ADDRESS TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**  
**22 September 2020**

Excellencies,

In a world turned upside down, this General Assembly Hall is among the strangest sights of all.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed our annual meeting beyond recognition.

But it has made it more important than ever.

In January, I addressed the General Assembly and identified “four horsemen” in our midst — four threats that endanger our common future.

First, the highest global geo-strategic tensions in years.

Second, an existential climate crisis.

Third, deep and growing global mistrust.

And fourth, the dark side of the digital world.

But a fifth horseman was lurking in the shadows.

Since January, the COVID-19 pandemic has galloped across the globe – joining the four other horsemen and adding to the fury of each.

And every day, the grim toll grows, families grieve, societies stagger, and the pillars of our world wobble on already shaky footings.

We face simultaneously an epochal health crisis, the biggest economic calamity and job losses since the Great Depression, and dangerous new threats to human rights.

COVID-19 has laid bare the world’s fragilities.

Rising inequalities. Climate catastrophe. Widening societal divisions. Rampant corruption.

The pandemic has exploited these injustices, preyed on the most vulnerable and wiped away the progress of decades.

For the first time in 30 years, poverty is rising.

Human development indicators are declining.

We are careening off track in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Meanwhile nuclear non-proliferation efforts are slipping away — and we are failing to act in areas of emerging danger, particularly cyberspace.

People are hurting.

Our planet is burning.

Our world is struggling, stressed and seeking real leadership and action.

Excellencies,

We face a foundational moment.

Those who built the United Nations 75 years ago had lived through a pandemic, a global depression, genocide and world war.

They knew the cost of discord and the value of unity.

They fashioned a visionary response, embodied in our founding Charter, with people at the centre.

Today, we face our own 1945 moment.

This pandemic is a crisis unlike any we have ever seen.

But it is also the kind of crisis that we will see in different forms again and again.

COVID-19 is not only a wake-up call, it is a dress rehearsal for the world of challenges to come.

We must move forward with humility — recognizing that a microscopic virus has brought the world to its knees.

We must be united. As we have seen, when countries go in their own direction, the virus goes in every direction.

We must act in solidarity. Far too little assistance has been extended to countries with the fewest capacities to face the challenge.

And we must be guided by science and tethered to reality.

Populism and nationalism have failed.

Those approaches to contain the virus have often made things manifestly worse.

Too often, there has also been a disconnect between leadership and power.

We see remarkable examples of leadership; but they are not usually associated with power.

And power is not always associated with the necessary leadership.

In an interconnected world, it is high time to recognize a simple truth: solidarity is self-interest.

If we fail to grasp that fact, everyone loses.

Excellencies,

As the pandemic took hold, I called for a global ceasefire.

Today, I appeal for a new push by the international community to make this a reality by the end of this year.

We have exactly 100 days.

There is only one winner of conflict during a pandemic: the virus itself.

My original appeal was endorsed by 180 Member States along with religious leaders, regional partners, civil society networks and others.

A number of armed movements also responded —from Cameroon to Colombia to the Philippines and beyond —even if several of the ceasefires they announced were not sustained.

Enormous obstacles stand in the way: deep mistrust, spoilers and the weight of fighting that has festered for years.

But we have reasons to be hopeful.

- A new peace agreement in The Republic of the Sudan between the Government and armed movements marks the start of a new era, particularly for people living in Darfur, South Kordofan and the Blue Nile.
- In Afghanistan, the launch of the Afghanistan Peace Negotiations is a milestone after years of effort. How to reach a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire will be on the agenda. An inclusive peace process with women, young people and victims of conflict meaningfully represented offers the best hope for a sustainable solution.

In several situations, we have seen new ceasefires holding better than in the past — or in their absence, a standstill in the fighting.

- In Syria, the ceasefire in Idlib is largely intact. After more than nine years of conflict and colossal suffering, I renew my appeal for an end to hostilities across the country as we work toward convening the next round of the Constitutional Committee.
- In the Middle East -- with a period of calm in Gaza and annexation of parts of the occupied West Bank put aside at least for the time being -- I urge Israeli and Palestinian leaders to re-engage in meaningful negotiations that will realize a two state-solution in line with relevant UN resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements.

- In Libya, fighting has subsided but the massive buildup of mercenaries and weapons — in flagrant violation of Security Council resolutions — shows that the risk of renewed confrontation remains high. We must all work together for an effective ceasefire agreement and the resumption of intra-Libyan political talks.
- In Ukraine, the most recent ceasefire regime remains in place, but progress on the outstanding security and political issues under the Trilateral Contact Group and the Normandy Four format to implement the Minsk agreements will be critical.
- In the Central African Republic, last year's peace deal helped deliver a significant reduction in violence. Under the auspices of our UN peacekeeping mission— and with the backing of the international community -- the national dialogue is underway to support upcoming elections and continued implementation of the peace agreement.
- And in South Sudan, we have seen a troubling spike in inter-communal violence but the ceasefire has mostly held, with our UN peacekeeping mission providing support for monitoring as well as implementation of the peace agreement.

Even where conflict is raging, we will not give up the search for peace.

- In Yemen, we are fully engaged in bringing the parties together to reach an agreement on the Joint Declaration comprised of a nationwide ceasefire, economic and humanitarian confidence-building measures, and the resumption of the political process.

Excellencies,

In areas where terrorist groups are particularly active, the obstacles to peace will be much more difficult to overcome.

In the Sahel and the Lake Chad region, we see the pandemic's over-lapping health, socio-economic, political and humanitarian impacts at play.

I am particularly concerned that terrorist and violent extremist groups will exploit the pandemic.

And we must not forget the dramatic humanitarian cost of war.

In many places, the pandemic coupled with conflict and disruption is dealing crippling blows to food security.

Millions of people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, northeast Nigeria, South Sudan as well as Yemen face the risk of famine.

Now is the time for a collective new push for peace and reconciliation.

I appeal for a stepped-up international effort — led by the Security Council — to achieve a global ceasefire by the end of this year.

We have 100 days. The clock is ticking.

The world needs a global ceasefire to stop all “hot” conflicts. At the same time, we must do everything to avoid a new Cold War.

We are moving in a very dangerous direction. Our world cannot afford a future where the two largest economies split the globe in a Great Fracture — each with its own trade and financial rules and internet and artificial intelligence capacities.

A technological and economic divide risks inevitably turning into a geo-strategic and military divide. We must avoid this at all costs.

Excellencies,

In the face of the all-encompassing challenge of the pandemic, the United Nations has mounted a comprehensive response.

The UN system, led by the World Health Organization, has supported governments — particularly in the developing world — to save lives and contain the spread of the virus.

Our global supply chains have helped to provide personal protective equipment and other medical supplies to more than 130 countries.

We have extended life-saving assistance to the most vulnerable countries and people – including refugees and those internally displaced -- through a Global Humanitarian Response Plan.

We have mobilized the full UN system in development emergency mode, activated our UN country teams and rapidly issued policy guidance to support governments.

The “Verified” campaign is fighting misinformation online —a toxic virus shaking the democratic underpinnings in many countries.

We are working to advance treatments and therapies as a global public good – and backing efforts for a people’s vaccine available and affordable everywhere.

Yet some countries are reportedly making side deals exclusively for their own populations.

Such “vaccinationalism” is not only unfair, it is self-defeating.

None of us is safe, until all of us are safe.

Likewise, economies cannot run with a runaway pandemic.

Since the beginning, we have pushed for a massive rescue package worth at least 10 per cent of the global economy.

Developed countries have provided enormous relief for their own societies. They can afford it.

But we need to ensure that the developing world does not fall into financial ruin, escalating poverty and debt crises.

We need a collective commitment to avoid a downward spiral.

One week from today, we will bring world leaders together to find solutions at a Meeting on Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond.

And in all we do, we are putting a special focus on women and girls.

Half of humanity is bearing the brunt of the social and economic consequences of COVID-19.

Women are disproportionately represented in the sectors hit hardest by job losses.

Women do most of the unpaid care work generated by the pandemic.

And women have fewer economic resources to fall back on, because their wages are lower, and they have less access to benefits.

At the same time, millions of young girls are losing their chance of an education and a future, as schools close and child marriage is on the rise.

Unless we act now, gender equality could be set back by decades.

We must also stamp out the horrifying increase in violence against women and girls during the pandemic, from domestic violence to sexual abuse, online harassment and femicide.

This is a hidden war on women.

Preventing and ending it requires the same commitment and resources that we devote to other forms of warfare.

Excellences,

Au-delà des mesures d'urgence, les efforts de relance d'aujourd'hui doivent jeter les bases d'un monde meilleur pour demain.

Cette relance est notre chance de réinventer les économies et les sociétés.

Nous avons les feuilles de route : la Charte des Nations Unies, la Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme, le Programme 2030 et l'Accord de Paris.

La relance doit renforcer la résilience.

Au niveau national, cela exige un Nouveau contrat social. Sur le plan international, un Nouveau pacte mondial.

Ce Nouveau contrat social doit permettre de bâtir des sociétés inclusives et durables.

L'inclusion implique d'investir dans la cohésion sociale et de mettre fin à toutes les formes d'exclusion, de discrimination et de racisme.

Elle suppose de mettre en place une nouvelle génération de politiques de protection sociale, comprenant notamment la Couverture sanitaire universelle et la possibilité d'un Revenu minimum universel.

L'inclusion consiste également à donner à toutes et à tous l'accès à l'éducation et à tirer parti des technologies numériques, les deux grands vecteurs d'autonomisation et d'égalité de notre époque.

Cela requiert des systèmes fiscaux auxquels tout le monde – particuliers comme entreprises – contribue équitablement.

Il s'agit de placer les droits humains au cœur de tous nos efforts, dans la droite ligne de l'Appel à l'action en faveur des droits humains, que j'ai lancé cette année.

Cela signifie l'égalité des droits et des chances pour les femmes et les filles.

La pandémie a plus que jamais révélé l'efficacité des femmes lorsqu'elles tiennent les rênes.

Vingt-cinq ans après Pékin, la génération actuelle de filles doit être en mesure de réaliser ses ambitions et son potentiel illimités.

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Pour être véritablement durable, le Nouveau contrat social doit assurer la transition vers les énergies renouvelables et ainsi atteindre l'objectif de zéro émissions nettes d'ici à 2050.

Je demande à tous les pays d'envisager d'inclure six mesures positives pour le climat dans les efforts qu'ils déploient pour sauver, reconstruire et relancer leurs économies.

Premièrement, nous devons rendre nos sociétés plus résilientes et rechercher une transition juste.

Deuxièmement, nous avons besoin d'emplois verts et d'une croissance durable.

Troisièmement, les plans de sauvetages de l'industrie, de l'aviation et du transport maritime devraient être assortis de conditions de conformité aux objectifs de l'Accord de Paris.

Quatrièmement, il faut mettre un terme aux subventions aux combustibles fossiles.

Cinquièmement, il est impératif de tenir compte des risques climatiques dans toutes les décisions financières et politiques.

Sixièmement, il faut agir ensemble, sans laisser personne de côté.

Mais pour réduire véritablement les fragilités et les risques, et pour mieux résoudre les problèmes que nous avons en commun, nous avons également besoin d'un Nouveau pacte mondial au niveau international.

Ce Nouveau pacte doit permettre de garantir que les systèmes politiques et économiques mondiaux fournissent les biens publics essentiels à toutes les populations.

Aujourd'hui, ce n'est pas le cas.

Les structures de gouvernance et les cadres éthiques sont marqués par de profondes lacunes.

Pour y remédier, nous devons veiller au partage large et équitable du pouvoir, des richesses et des opportunités.

Le Nouveau pacte mondial doit reposer sur une mondialisation juste, fondée sur les droits et la dignité de chaque être humain, sur une vie en harmonie avec la nature et sur nos responsabilités envers les générations futures.

Nous devons intégrer les principes du développement durable dans tous les processus décisionnels, afin d'orienter le flux des ressources vers l'économie verte, durable et équitable.

Les systèmes financiers mondiaux doivent évoluer dans cette direction.

Le commerce doit être libre et juste, sans subventions perverses ni barrières qui défavorisent les économies en développement.

Le Nouveau pacte mondial doit aussi s'attaquer aux injustices historiques des structures de pouvoir sur la planète.

Plus de soixante-dix ans après leur création, les institutions multilatérales doivent être modernisées afin de représenter plus équitablement tous les peuples du monde, plutôt que de conférer un pouvoir disproportionné à certains et de limiter l'influence des autres.

Excelencias,

No necesitamos nuevas burocracias.

Necesitamos un sistema multilateral que innove constantemente, beneficie a las personas y proteja nuestro planeta.

El multilateralismo del siglo XXI debe actuar en red: debe ser capaz de vincular, a través de los diferentes ámbitos sectoriales y áreas geográficas, a las instituciones globales, desde los bancos de desarrollo a las organizaciones regionales, pasando por las distintas alianzas comerciales.

El multilateralismo del siglo XXI debe ser inclusivo: debe abrir la participación a un círculo mucho más amplio de actores, aprovechando las capacidades de la sociedad civil, las regiones y ciudades, las empresas, las fundaciones y las instituciones académicas y científicas.

Es así como garantizaremos un multilateralismo efectivo, a la altura de los desafíos del siglo XXI.

Dear friends across the world,

We cannot respond to this crisis by going back to what was or withdrawing into national shells.

To overcome today's fragilities and challenges we need more international cooperation — not less; strengthened multilateral institutions — not a retreat from them; better global governance — not a chaotic free-for-all.

The pandemic has upended the world, but that upheaval has created space for something new.

Ideas once considered impossible are suddenly on the table.

Large-scale action no longer seems so daunting; in just months, billions of people have fundamentally changed how they work, consume, move and interact.

Large-scale financing has suddenly proven possible, as trillions of dollars have been deployed to rescue economies.

In commemorating the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations, the General Assembly has invited me to report on our common agenda for the future.

I welcome this opportunity for a process of profound reflection.

I will report back next year with analysis and recommendations on how we can reach our shared aims.

Let us draw inspiration from our achievements across the history of the United Nations.

Let us respond affirmatively to the movements for justice and dignity.

And let us vanquish the five horsemen and build the world we need: peaceful, inclusive and sustainable.

The pandemic has taught us our choices matter.

As we look to the future, let us make sure we choose wisely.

Thank you.