

VIDEO MESSAGE
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
TRANSCRIPT

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INTRODUCTION

Mr President,

It is a pleasure to give Australia's National Statement to the General Assembly.

Here in Canberra, I'm on the ancient land of the Ngunnawal people — one of Australia's many Indigenous peoples who have cared for this continent for 60,000 years.

Our First Peoples remind us that caring for country — and for each other — is the essence of our shared humanity.

The past year has been one of extraordinary adversity, as the world has struggled and dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic — and it continues to rage.

Yet it has also borne witness to humanity's remarkable resilience and creative ability to overcome problems; to deliver solutions.

Each generation navigates its own destiny amidst anxiety and hope.

Ours is no different.

Today, I would like to speak about three of the most pressing global challenges that together we face.

Challenges that shape our times.

1. The global COVID-19 pandemic and economic recovery

Mr President,

COVID-19 has tested the world like nothing in our lifetime.

We mourn the millions lost.

And millions more who have suffered such terrible illness.

After so much heartache and so much sorrow, there is hope now and a way forward.

The development of a safe and effective vaccine — vaccines, so many of them — has been one of the greatest achievements of modern times.

Our collective task though now is to roll that out — a global vaccine rollout, the largest in world history.

Here in Australia, more than 70 per cent of our adult population has had the first dose of the vaccine, and more than half will have had two doses.

We know vaccinations work.

They lower the risk of transmission.

They significantly lower the risk of hospitalisation, severe illness and death.

And high vaccination rates are the pathway to taking back so much of what we have lost, and to living with this virus — confidently, safely, securely and prosperously.

Vaccinations are the key to keeping our neighbours safe also.

Australia has been helping countries across our region battle this pandemic — with personal protective equipment, testing equipment, medical personnel.

And now we're doing everything we can to help them with access to safe and effective vaccines.

None of us are safe unless all of us are safe.

So this is the most urgent priority for Indo-Pacific nations.

Already, we've delivered more than three million doses to countries across our region — and millions more doses are on their way.

We've also contributed \$130 million to the COVAX Advance Market Commitment, which has delivered over 51 million doses to Southeast Asia and 1.7 million doses to our Pacific family and Timor-Leste.

And we're investing more than \$620 million to procure millions of vaccine doses, and providing technical advice, training of health workers, and cold chain support to our friends and our neighbours.

Now this includes a \$100 million contribution to the Quad Vaccine Partnership with our good friends the United States, India and Japan.

This will support a boost in production by at least one billion doses by the end of 2022, and provide access to vaccines and delivery support to countries across the Indo-Pacific.

This is the right thing to do.

It will help slow the spread of the virus — and, we hope, prevent variants emerging.

As well, we must prevent future pandemics and Australia supports the calls for a stronger, more independent World Health Organization, with enhanced surveillance and pandemic response powers.

This should be the duty of every single member of the World Health Organization to share that ambition for a World Health Organization that can seek to protect us all in these circumstances.

And we also need to accelerate efforts to identify how COVID-19 first emerged.

Australia called for an independent review, and sees understanding the cause of this pandemic, not as a political issue, but as being essential, simply, to prevent the next one.

We need to know so we can prevent this death and this calamity being visited upon the world again.

That can be our only motivation.

2. Strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific region

Mr President,

COVID-19 has underscored the vital importance of international cooperation and coordination.

The patterns of cooperation that have sustained our prosperity and security for decades — they're under increasing strain.

And so are the institutions that have helped maintain that rules-based international order for over seven decades now.

The global strategic environment has rapidly changed, indeed deteriorated in many respects, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region where we live here in Australia.

The changes we face are many ...

... whether it's tensions over territorial claims ...

... rapid military modernisation ...

... foreign interference ...

... cyber threats ...

... disinformation ...

... and indeed, economic coercion.

Meeting these challenges requires cooperation and a common purpose among like-minded nations, and all who share that purpose of peace, stability and security — to enhance these as the outcomes that benefit all peoples from wherever they come and whatever their perspectives.

Australia's interests are inextricably linked to an open, inclusive and resilient Indo-Pacific.

A region where the rights of all states — no matter how large or how small — are protected.

This is what we believe.

Australia continues to work constructively on this goal — with agency and purpose and commitment, passionately building a network of partnerships and relationships that support these goals, contributing to.

With our Pacific family — through the Pacific Islands Forum.

With our ASEAN friends — very much at the heart of our own Indo-Pacific vision.

Through the Quad, with a practical agenda for peace, contribution and security in our region.

With our many bilateral strategic partners — comprehensive strategic partners.

And with our longstanding friends and allies — the United States and the United Kingdom.

Strengthened of course further last week with the announcement of our new Enhanced Trilateral Security partnership — AUKUS.

Designed to further the cause of peace, stability and security in the Indo-Pacific region for the benefit of all who live within that region.

It is essential that countries pursue these interests in ways that are mutually respectful and support stability and security.

Because we want to maintain an open, rules-based international system that supports peace, prosperity, human dignity and the aspirations of all sovereign nations.

A global order where sovereign nations can flourish, free from coercion, because of collaborative and purposeful action.

Enables them to correspond and engage in a fellowship, that is supported by a rules-based order.

Rules that have underpinned regional peace and prosperity, such as through the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which we affirm as Australians and which we will always honour.

We must reinforce a sustainable rules-based order ...

... while ensuring it is also adaptable to the great power realities of our time.

The United Nations must continue to reinforce the international rules-based order, and preserve the institutions that uphold that order and ensure they're effective, as the mechanisms, the dialogue and adjudication that buttress and hold together this all-important order.

Australia also values the rules and institutions that foster international trade ...

... which creates wealth and brings nations together ...

... and is vital to our recovery from the economic costs of this pandemic.

3. The challenge of climate change & transitioning to a net-zero global energy economy

Finally Mr President,

Australia is determined to play our part in meeting the global challenge of climate change, as the world makes the transition to a net-zero global energy economy — a new energy economy.

Australia has a proven track record when it comes to setting, achieving and exceeding our commitments to responsibly reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

We exceeded our Kyoto commitments.

Our emissions in the year to March 2021 were 21 per cent below 2005 levels.

That is a strong record of achievement.

And it's been achieved by Australians right across our community — our businesses, individual households, small businesses, our institutions, our governments.

In Australia, we already have the world's highest uptake of rooftop solar. And we're deploying renewable energy at nearly eight times the global per capita average.

We are well on the way to exceed our 2030 Paris commitment of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 26 to 28 per cent below 2005 levels.

We will meet it and we will beat it — and we'll beat it strongly.

And we are committed to achieving net zero emissions.

My Government, the Australian Government, will release our Long Term Emissions Reduction Strategy ahead of the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow at COP26.

We know the world is transitioning to a new energy economy.

It's no longer about if — or even when for that matter.

It's about how.

How we achieve the reduction in global emissions — in our own emissions, in individual nations' emissions — while still lifting living standards across all nations.

And the answer, as history has shown us time and time again, it's technology — practical, scalable and commercially viable technologies.

That's why we're investing around \$20 billion to commercialise promising new technologies like clean hydrogen, green steel, long duration energy storage and carbon capture — vital to meeting the global task to achieve net zero emissions.

And we want to work with everyone, other countries, to commercialise these technologies, and ensure they're scalable and accessible, as soon as possible.

This is critical for the good of developing countries, who we all know face the steepest challenge in reducing their emissions.

Developing countries need job-creating investment in the same productive, commercial technologies, energy technologies, available to advanced economies, like Australia.

Australia is a reliable partner during this time of transition.

We know that if we can support developing economies to embrace and use the technologies that achieve net zero emissions, and see their economies grow and increase their jobs, that is not only wonderful for those economies and their peoples, but it also is good for Australia.

We know that their success will also be our success.

And so we are blessed here in this country with natural resources, including transition fuels, and the resources needed for the new energy economy.

And we will apply them.

We will apply them in our region as we continue to work with our Southeast Asian partners and to assist them make their energy transitions successfully through finance, through trade and capability building.

We have one global atmosphere — and it's in our shared interests to work with each other in this way.

That's why we're helping other countries reduce their emissions and build resilience to climate change, too.

It's why we've set aside \$1.5 billion in practical climate finance globally — and it will have a particular focus on our Pacific family, dealing directly.

We're up for this global challenge.

We're up for achieving net zero emissions — a challenge that we know will be met in partnership.

And that unless we all get there — well, we will not achieve our goal.

4. Australia's liberal democratic values

Mr President,

Australia has always sought to make a positive contribution to meeting global challenges.

Our voice is clear, it's direct, it's respectful, it's constructive.

It reflects our confidence in who we are and what we stand for.

We are a proud, liberal democracy.

We believe in a world order that favours freedom — an order that was established through the fine institution of the United Nations that we gather around through these contributions and that supports the dignity and free expression of all people.

We believe in human rights, in gender equality and the rule of law — and we back that up with how we pursue these things in our own country, in our own society, and how we raise our own children.

Australia was one of eight countries only involved in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

And we continue to strengthen the international human rights system.

And we will continue to raise our voice on important issues like the rights of women and girls, the rights of Indigenous peoples, the global abolition of the death penalty.

Because respecting the rights and freedoms of the individual is intrinsically important — it is fundamental to our values as a people and as a nation.

It lifts all societies and nations, too — delivering better outcomes through economic inclusion, women’s empowerment, environmental sustainability, rising living standards, and so much more.

Australia’s actions are guided by our belief in the inherent dignity of all people.

Everywhere, no matter the circumstances.

Mr President,

We learned through the pandemic that every moment of challenge requires us to think anew, to engage with each other, to learn as you go.

It is an experience understood by many others.

And so we will continue to meet this moment, with dialogue, with partnership.

Thank you, Mr President.

[ENDS]