



**New Zealand Permanent Mission to the United Nations
Te Aka Aorere**

United Nations General Assembly: 76th General Debate Statement

**New Zealand Statement delivered by
Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand**

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY



E ngā Mana, e ngā Reo, Rau Rangatira mā o tēnei Whare Nui o te Ao

Prestigious people, Speakers of note, Chiefs one and all of this General Assembly

Ngā mihi mahana ki o koutou katoa, mai i toku Whenua o Aotearoa

Warm greetings to you all from my home country of New Zealand

Nō reira, tēnā koutou katoa.

Greetings to you all.

Mr President,

Mr Secretary-General,

Friends,

I greet you in te reo Māori, the language of the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand.

As I deliver this address to the General Assembly from here in New Zealand, it strikes me that even when global events threaten to disconnect and divide us, a shared instinct to connect with one another, still prevails.

I have often described New Zealand as being remote, but connected. The COVID-19 pandemic has made both parts of this statement truer than ever. In some ways, we now feel that remoteness more keenly. The vast ocean surrounding our islands have taken on an even greater significance in a time when our border controls are our first line of defence against a highly contagious, global virus.

Despite this physical distancing, the pandemic has demonstrated more starkly than ever just how closely connected we all are. We live in a world where domestic decisions made half a world away, are as significant to us as those made by our nearest neighbours.

In many ways, COVID-19 is an illustration of global transboundary problems at a local level. Here is an invisible threat, which no one is safe from, and the very thing keeping us safe – is each other. We have placed our trust in the actions of neighbours and strangers – to wear masks, to distance, to get vaccinated and support others to do so, and we live collectively with the consequences.

It has been a privilege for me as a leader, to witness the practical application of New Zealanders' values to these challenges.

Values like manaakitanga and whanaungatanga, which in the Māori language mean kindness, and a shared sense of humanity and connectedness. Values like kotahitanga, or a shared aspiration and unity towards a common goal.

These values have seen New Zealanders take care of one another, and work together to limit the transmission of COVID-19 in our communities.

Now these values are not unique to New Zealand. They are universal. They underpin the Charter of the United Nations. One need only read the preamble to see them reflected back at us.

No community, nation, or region acting alone can address COVID-19. It is a complex, global problem that requires a global solution. Equitable access to safe and effective vaccines for everyone is essential to our response and recovery.

New Zealand is working with others, especially Australia, to support full vaccine coverage for Pacific island countries. And the COVAX Facility is doing essential work distributing vaccines worldwide. But more must be done to support this effort. New Zealand is proud to have been amongst the first countries to donate doses to the COVAX Advance Market Commitment in addition to our financial support.

New Zealand continues to work in WTO and APEC to support a waiver of intellectual property protections for vaccines and other measures to increase availability.

Without equitable access for all, we risk further variants developing which could undermine or undo our progress.

At the same time that the direct impacts of COVID-19 have brought immeasurable pain to many across the world, it has also exacerbated and further complicated other existing global challenges. We know what these challenges are. We articulated them as areas of action in the UN Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Declaration.

The pandemic has been the ultimate disrupter. It has changed our realities, and given us cause to pause and reflect. In the disruption is an opportunity for us to reset. To adjust some of our fundamental settings to put us in a better position to respond to our shared challenges.

We have heard so much about ‘building back better’. We must do better. Like the drafters of the Charter, we owe future generations our commitment to hand down a better world forged through cooperation.

Fortunately for us, we already have a blueprint for such a world in the Sustainable Development Goals, and the 2030 Agenda. The 2030 Agenda recognises that as our shared challenges are interconnected, so too must be our responses. As we face a series of interlinked global crises that demand action, now is the time for us to recommit to the SDGs.

COVID-19 cannot be an excuse for not achieving the SDGs. In fact, it’s a further reason why we must.

There is perhaps no better example of a global crisis that demands action than climate change.

Climate change is one of the most pervasive crises of our time. From rising sea levels to shifting weather patterns, the impacts are global in scope, unprecedented in scale, and happening right now.

Climate change touches all of our lives, but countries in the Pacific are some of the most affected, despite having contributed least to the problem. Pacific leaders view climate change as the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the region.

Any global response that fails to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels is unacceptable. This is our goal, and our collective efforts must achieve it. The latest science from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is stark.

The climate crisis cannot be beaten through incrementalism. The science demands that we do so much more.

New Zealand has made the 1.5 degree limit the heart of our domestic climate change legislation. We have committed to a 2050 target and we are revising our Nationally Determined Contribution.

As we mitigate, we must also adapt. This year New Zealand conducted its first national climate change risk assessment to tell us where to focus our effort, and within two years we will have a national adaptation plan. But we have already begun our journey. New Zealand has a programme to plant for instance, one billion trees by 2028. This will store carbon, but it will also support forest resilience, prevent erosion, improve biodiversity, and support our rural and indigenous communities.

Lifting the ambition of our nationally determined contributions is vital, but there are also collective actions we need to take.

This includes bringing an end to fossil fuel and other environmentally harmful subsidies. It includes pooling our resources and knowledge through the Global Research Alliance so that we can grow more food without growing emissions. It includes negotiating an agreement on climate change, trade and sustainability. New Zealand is actively pursuing all of these outcomes.

We must collectively address the unjust and potentially destabilising consequences of climate change.

For Small Island Developing States, one of the gravest consequences is sea-level rise. The ocean is central to the culture and livelihoods of the peoples of the Pacific. Pacific countries have also planned their economies and long-term development in reliance on the maritime zones and resources guaranteed to them under the Law of the Sea Convention.

It is only right that as an international community, we work to ensure the maintenance of those zones and rights in the face of climate change-related sea-level rise.

As a contribution to this objective, I was pleased to join my fellow Pacific Islands Forum Leaders in issuing the 'Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the Face of Climate Change-related Sea-Level Rise', in August this year.

Climate change is closely interlinked with another crisis of a planetary scale – that of global biodiversity loss.

As much as we are all interconnected as nations, so too are we connected with nature and the services it provides. We depend on it for the air we breathe, and the economies we have built. Biodiversity loss threatens our well-being, our prosperity, and our health. It will both accelerate climate change, and make its impacts worse.

This is a challenge that requires us to work across barriers and silos. For New Zealand's part, we have adopted the Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020 – Te Mana o te Taiao – which will guide our actions domestically for the protection, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity.

We simply cannot achieve the 2030 Agenda unless we unite with collective ambition to reverse biodiversity loss by 2030. We have an opportunity to do this by adopting and implementing an ambitious and transformational post-2020 global biodiversity framework at the upcoming Conference of Parties. New Zealand is committed to this, and I urge you to join us.

As with biodiversity on land, ocean biodiversity is equally important. New Zealand looks forward to concluding the negotiations on an UN treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of high seas biodiversity.

But as we turn our mind to the challenges we face globally, we must turn to the most important thing of all – he tangata, he tangata, he tangata – it is people, people, people.

More than 120 million people have been pushed into extreme poverty as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Inequality within and between countries has deepened.

These consequences were never inevitable, and there are steps we can take to reverse these trends and improve the lives of those impacted.

Too many people go hungry every day. New Zealand invests heavily in sustainable food production, and what we produce feeds many times our own population. But we have seen that at the global level, food systems are neither sustainable nor resilient. They suffer from, and contribute to, the overlapping impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss. Transformational change is needed to ensure that everyone has access to the nutrition they need.

This week's Food Systems Summit is an important step, and it must be the beginning of an ongoing effort. We will do our part in supporting these efforts, including on initiatives that acknowledge the leadership of indigenous peoples in food systems and increase global ambition to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture.

For our part – this is an area where we are working hard, with a unique agreement between our food sector, government and Māori to reduce agricultural emissions through a pricing mechanism. We are determined to show the world what is possible.

At the same time we must include making trade more open and inclusive. COVID-19 disrupted global supply chains, while at the same time it illustrated the importance of open trade to protecting the health of people and lifting them out of poverty and hunger. We must commit to ensuring the flow of essential goods and services, and reject any temptation to turn inwards and focus on protectionism.

We know that poverty and inequality drive conflict and instability, and we are also seeing this, in heightened civil unrest and conflict. Humanitarian crises have worsened. We are seeing this in Afghanistan and there are many more.

As an international community we must rise to the challenge of meeting the growing humanitarian need. But we also have to intensify our efforts to prevent conflict and build peace. New Zealand looks forward to playing a part in this effort as we join the Peacebuilding Commission in 2022.

As leaders, we have a responsibility to foster and sustain peace in our societies. We know what the necessary conditions are. Yes, this includes the absence of poverty, hunger, and material deprivation. But it is also something more. Peaceful societies are inclusive societies, where diversity is embraced and everyone has both the means and the opportunities to contribute to the fullness of their potential. Where women and girls are lifted up and encouraged to exercise their voice and their agency.

Whatever our political or constitutional systems, no nation will ever be truly peaceful in the absence of these basic conditions, founded on the fundamental and equal rights of every person.

And where peace fails, we must all do our part to strengthen and improve respect for the laws of armed conflict, and to enhance the protection of civilians. Preventing both the use of illegal weapons, and the illegal use of legal weapons, is essential, as is ensuring there is no impunity for any such use. This work is a shared responsibility, and one which we pursue alongside our tireless efforts to rid the world of nuclear weapons and the spectre of a conflict that no one can recover from.

All of these challenges we share might cause us to re-examine our response to being so interconnected. We have a choice. To approach our shared challenges from a place of fear, hoping to protect narrowly defined interests by turning inwards. Or we can reaffirm our trust in cooperation, understanding that our greatest fears can only be tackled by concerted collective action.

Our forebears were once at this fork in the road. They chose the path of trust. They founded the United Nations.

It is times like these when we have the most to gain by reminding ourselves of what the Charter's preamble says. It speaks to a concern for future generations. It speaks about universal observance of human rights, respect for international law, and living together in peace as good neighbours. It speaks about uniting our strength, and combining our efforts to accomplish our aims.

These words of determination were in response to the devastation of war. They apply equally to the collective challenges we face today, and if we are to resolve these in an enduring way, we must look beyond government.

Inclusive multilateralism is one in which our common understandings are enriched by diverse perspectives. As governments, we owe it to ourselves to be open to the expertise and partnerships offered by stakeholders, whether they are from civil society, industry, or indigenous groups.

I have seen in the progress we have made through the Christchurch Call to Action, what can be achieved when governments, industry, and civil society work together in a multi-stakeholder capacity to eliminate terrorist and violent extremist content online, and I am utterly committed to further efforts on this important work.

New Zealand is committed to advancing Our Common Agenda, and sadly, as we have seen in recent times, an essential element of this is preparedness.

No one can argue for instance that the global community as a whole was adequately prepared for a global pandemic. It is clear that we will face further global health risks, and we have no excuses for remaining unprepared.

New Zealand strongly supports the ambitious and practical approach of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response. We will not just passively support the Independent Panel's recommendations. We will actively engage on work streams to develop a pandemic treaty, convention or other international instrument; to improve global surveillance, validation and early response; and importantly, to strengthen the World Health Organisation.

If there is any lesson we can draw from the events of the past 18 months, it is the need for more, and better, cooperation. And with the need for better cooperation, comes the need for responsive and adaptive global institutions, including the United Nations.

I commend and thank the Secretary-General on his report and recommendations to advance Our Common Agenda. These provide us with a roadmap for a more inclusive and effective multilateralism. One that includes a voice for the needs of future generations and leaves no one behind.

As leaders, we have the power to shape our shared institutions and to make them fit for purpose. We must not shy away from this task.

I can think of no better way to reaffirm our kindness towards one another, our shared humanity, and our unity.

I hope you will join us.

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou katoa.