



Media Update-2

27 May 2021

United Nations REMARKS

REMARKS BY H.E. MR. VOLKAN BOZKIR PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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- as prepared for delivery -

Excellencies,

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

It is a true privilege to speak to you, here today in Islamabad. I am most grateful to meet members of the diplomatic community, the civil and military personnel who are leading a life of service.

Preparing for today, I began to reflect upon the milestones of my Presidency thus far. Throughout the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly, in the most challenging times in modern history, the membership has recommitted to multilateralism, time and time again.

Yet no one would have thought, at this time last year, as I sought election as President of the General Assembly, the United Nations headquarters had closed their doors, because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Little did any of us

realise, the impact the pandemic would have, on how we go about our work, and our daily lives.

This was the first domino to fall. It catalysed a series of political, economic, and social challenges , which required a multilateral response. People were suffering. Those who were in the most precarious situations prior to the pandemic, were pushed closer to the brink, at risk of being left behind permanently.

My challenge was to resuscitate the international community. As Member States came to terms with the health crises, and related crises within their own borders, it was up to me, as President of the General Assembly, to rally the membership, to commit to collective solutions, for the people we serve.

If this past year has taught us one thing, it is that nothing is certain. We need to evolve in pace, with the rapidly developing world we are operating within. Make no mistake, I repeat again that, multilateralism is the only path forward.

The people of the world, made this quite clear, when surveyed last year. They want a United Nations, that is fit for purpose, able to meet the challenge of the day. The United Nations we need, for the future we want.

However, we have a long way to go, before we meet the targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, uphold universal human rights, or achieve peace worldwide.

COVID-19 has resulted in a loss of lives, and livelihoods. The impact of the pandemic, has hit the most vulnerable the hardest.

As we face the deepest global economic recession, since the Great Depression:

- Global extreme poverty numbers are expected to rise, as 115 million people are on the verge of falling into extreme poverty.
- 235 million people, will need humanitarian aid this year.
- Approximately 690 million people are at risk of malnutrition.

This has knock-on effects,

- In 22 countries, violence and conflict are the root causes of the hunger.



- Millions of people are on the move: displaced, due to conflict, persecution, hunger, and climate change.
- Women and girls have experienced gender-based violence, at an unprecedented rate.
- Children are at high risk for child labour, child marriage, and trafficking.
- Xenophobia, racism and discrimination on ethnic and religious grounds, are on the rise.
- Violence against members of religious groups and places of worship, have been increasing.

Excellencies,

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

We need to take urgent action now, to reverse these trends. The multilateral system has suffered a great trauma as a result of this pandemic. Business as usual will not put us on the road to recovery. Now is the time for the defibrillator. We need to shock the system.

That is what we are doing. The United Nations is working to meet the needs of the people we serve, when they need us most. The General Assembly is calling on all Member States, to come forth with solutions, to the most critical problems facing the people we serve.

Just last week I convened a meeting on the situation in Palestine, following a joint request from the Chair of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Chair of the Arab Group. I convened this meeting in large part to compensate for the silence and deadlock in the Security Council. The Security Council must shoulder its responsibilities and overcome yet again its paralysis on this longest-standing item on its agenda. Inaction on this issue undermines, and indeed hinders, the ability and credibility of the Council and the United Nations regarding other pressing peace and security matters. I hope that we will hear a unified voice from the Security Council on this important and urgent subject.

As for the General Assembly, we assumed our responsibility under the Charter of the United Nations and met to address the grave violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. These violations caused



the loss of lives for hundreds of innocent Palestinians, the majority of whom were children and women.

The announcement of a ceasefire, as the UN General Assembly was still in meeting, was a significant development. As I emphasized in my “Appeal for Peace”, it also showed that, when the General Assembly takes the lead, and member states speak up together, we get results.

I avail of this opportunity to commend His Excellency the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan for taking the time to participate in this meeting in person, and for his strong stance in support of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

We have a duty, to prevent any further erosion of international law. It is critical to support those who survived the attacks, since they remain dependent on a weak health care system, with inadequate equipment and constant drug shortages. The COVID-19 pandemic is a further setback to the already dire situation.

Moving forward, the institutional record of the UN clearly prescribes how to translate words into action when it comes to the Palestinian issue.

We need:

- a swift return to negotiations,
- with the goal of ending the occupation,
- addressing all final status issues, including the status of Jerusalem,
- and achieving two independent, sovereign, viable States: Israel and Palestine, living side-by-side in peace, security and mutual recognition, within recognized borders on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States.

I assure you, the General Assembly will not relent, until there is peace in the Middle East.

Excellencies,

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

I am also aware of the situation in Jammu and Kashmir.

I am aware, how an ordinary Pakistani must feel about Jammu and Kashmir, when they feel so strongly about Palestine. Jammu and Kashmir is just miles away from here.

There is little doubt in my mind that peace, stability, and prosperity in the South Asian region hinges on normalisation of relations between Pakistan and India.

This in turn is subject to the two countries, finding a resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute.

Throughout my term, and consistent with the UN policy, and applicable UN Security Council resolutions, I have encouraged all parties to refrain from changing the status of the disputed territory.

This dispute is as old as Palestine.

As President of the General Assembly, I call upon India and Pakistan, to pursue the path to peaceful resolution of the dispute.

Excellencies,

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

Similarly, it is critical to bring peace to Afghanistan.

Pakistan is a host to millions of Afghans. For 40 years, this country has borne the burden, when the international community's support dwindled. I commend the people of Pakistan, for hosting this community in need.

We also know that, lives of Afghanistan and Pakistan are now inextricably intertwined.

Peace in Afghanistan, is an imperative for Pakistan, to open a trade route to land locked central Asia.

Peace in Afghanistan is critical for securing benefits from China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

Peace in Afghanistan is central to the promotion of human rights.

Peace in Afghanistan must be Afghan led and Afghan owned.

I commend Pakistan's leadership, and its role in supporting the efforts to forge reconciliation, security and transition in Afghanistan.

Excellencies,

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

The General Assembly has also met multiple times to discuss the situation in Syria. A decade of death, displacement, and destruction has left the Syrian people with little hope. Aerial and artillery bombardments have reduced cities to rubble.

Starvation is used as a weapon of war.

Humanitarian needs are increasing, at a rate that existing capacities, may not be able to meet. More than half of the pre-conflict population is displaced.

I recently visited the Turkish-Syrian border, to meet with Syrian refugees in person, and my visit confirmed my conviction that, we must ensure the safe and unimpeded access of humanitarian assistance to Syrians, particularly in Northwest Syria, where the needs are most profound.

Furthermore, I remain deeply concerned about the situation in Myanmar. Just yesterday, I visited Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, where I heard the first-hand accounts of Rohingyas, who suffered unimaginable violence and persecution.

The safety and security of the Rohingya and other minorities, must be secured, in line with the order of the International Court of Justice which was issued last year.

I have called upon the global leaders and neighbors of Myanmar to continue to work resolutely, towards an end to the violence in Myanmar. I call on all leaders to act in the interest of Myanmar's democratic reform, engage in meaningful dialogue, refrain from violence, and to fully respect human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law.

Let us not forget that it is our shared responsibility,

"...to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women, and of nations large and small...",

in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. After seventy-five years, we must continue to strive, to uphold and promote the human rights of everyone, everywhere.

Excellencies,

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

There is no easy solution to these crises. However, when it comes to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have one key to unlock our collective recovery: vaccines. I welcome the recent steps taken within the World Trade Organizations. This will enable us, to expand vaccines for all. This is critical, as at this moment, only 0.3% of all vaccines have been given to low income countries. None of us is safe, until everyone is safe.

Widespread vaccination uptake will maximise the impact of the unprecedented fiscal injection into health services and social supports the Government of Pakistan undertook last year.

The digital technologies harnessed to disperse emergency cash assistance prior to, and during, the COVID-19 pandemic to 100 million of the most vulnerable citizens and small businesses, demonstrates how developing countries can leap-frog into the digital era, to support financial inclusion. This is essential, as we recover.

Indeed, the Decade of Action and Delivery to implement the Sustainable Development Goals has become the Decade of Recovery. This jeopardises our progress, as even prior to the pandemic, we have not been reaching global targets on time. The United Nations as an institution, cannot deliver the SDGs. It is government policies, and implementation of those policies, that will lead to progress.

I again avail of this opportunity to commend Pakistan for its commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The political will and leadership of the Pakistani government, on the establishment of Parliamentary Task Forces on SDG implementation, and its integration in Pakistan's Vision 2025 has been critical in translating the SDGs from policy to action.

Large-scale climate change mitigation measures, such as the planting of 10 billion trees in the next three years will have an enduring impact well past this Decade of Action, to implement sustainable development. Pakistan has demonstrated consistent thought leadership in nature-based solutions to

climate change, and I look forward to hearing of your plans, as we look ahead towards the COP in Glasgow.

Indeed, the upcoming meetings of the COPs of the three Rio Conventions present a historic opportunity to galvanize synergies across the climate, biodiversity and desertification, land degradation and drought agendas. I trust that Pakistan, will engage in the upcoming High-level Dialogue on Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought, which was postponed in light of the situation in Gaza but will take place in June.

Of course, planetary health is but one aspect of sustainable development where Pakistan is making gains towards the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals. I recently convened the High-level Thematic Debate on Digital Cooperation and Connectivity. The debate also highlighted the Digital Cooperation Organization, of which Pakistan was a founding member.

This initiative bringing together seven countries, with \$1.2 trillion in combined GDP, and a combined population base close to 480 million - 80% of whom are under 35 years of age-, is another example of Pakistan's pivotal role in South-South cooperation, to create a future where no one is left behind.

Excellencies,

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

Pakistan is ably represented in New York by His Excellency Munir Akram, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations, who is also the President of the Economic and Social Council for its 76th session. We have continuously worked towards maintaining the ongoing cooperation between the two organs, in order to enhance coherence and synergies across their respective works for the session.

This has been most evident in sustainable development issues relating to:

- infrastructure;
- countries in special situations – least developed countries, land-locked developing countries, and small island developing states;
- desertification, land degradation and drought and;
- financing for development.

Ambassador Akram has consistently highlighted the necessity for private sector engagement on financing, and the urgent response required for countries in significant debt-distress. Pakistan is demonstrating leadership at the highest levels of multilateralism, as one of the five heads of the principal organs of the United Nations.

I also commend His Excellency Imran Khan, for highlighting the importance of ending illicit financial flows at the General Debate earlier this year. For our best efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda will be derailed unless there is full financial transparency. It is critical that we work to end all criminal activity which jeopardize our efforts towards a safe, just, and sustainable future. I trust that, the UN General Assembly special session against corruption, which takes place next week, will accelerate multilateral efforts to end the scourge hampering our progress towards 2030.

In the same spirit, good efforts towards implementing the Sustainable Development Goals and maintaining peace will be undermined unless significant efforts are made to uphold the human rights of women and girls. If we are to create change, we need to move beyond rhetoric.

We need to end gender-based violence, for once and for all. Through stronger legislation against gender-based violence, reporting and redress mechanisms for victims, data collection, election observation, and violence monitoring, we will make progress. This will allow facilitate the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women, in society, the workforce, politics, and public life.

Women bear the brunt of conflict, and their needs must be met. Women need to be included in all elements of peacekeeping and peacebuilding. As an International Gender Champion myself, I firmly believe that the world must re-commit to the women peace and security agenda, twenty years after its creation.

Not only do women make a positive impact on peacekeeping environments, including in supporting the role of women in building peace and protecting women's rights. In all fields of peacekeeping, women peacekeepers have proven that they can perform the same roles, to the same standards, and under the same difficult conditions as their male counterparts.

Put simply: it is an operational imperative that we recruit and retain female peacekeepers. I commend the deployment of the first ever Pakistani female engagement team to South Kivu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I thank these distinguished peacekeepers for their service to humanity.

Indeed, I thank all of you who have served under the blue flag. You are the lifeblood of the United Nations.

Excellencies,

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

It is a privilege to address you here, in the National Defense University, which has been the home of many of Pakistan's peacekeeping personnel, over the six decades since the first deployment to the UN peacekeeping operations in Congo. I applaud the 4,732 men and women currently serving in nine UN peacekeeping operations around the world.

I commend the professionalism and dedication of the Pakistani military, police, and civilian personnel in these missions. Wearing the blue helmet, Pakistani peacekeepers are on the ground in some of the most dangerous missions in the world, putting their lives at risk to secure a better future for the most vulnerable people on this earth.

The scope and intensity of conflicts has changed dramatically since Pakistan first contributed troops in 1960.

Today we are seeking peace in an increasingly complex environment of parallel traditional and non-traditional threats such as climate change, rapid technological developments, famine, infectious diseases, scarcity of water and sanitation.

To this end, I welcome the gains made, advancing the Action 4 Peace – 'A4P' – initiative.

Excellencies,

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

From the moment I took office, my main concern and responsibility has been ensuring the uninterrupted and effective functioning of the General Assembly.

Since the beginning of the 75th session, the General Assembly has held all mandated events and high-level meetings, sometimes in an innovative hybrid format to allow virtual participation. This has been critical to ensuring the full implementation of mandates, enhancing dialogue and cohesion among Member States, and guaranteeing the Membership a strong, functional



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SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT GOALS

General Assembly that meets the challenges facing the nations of the world, and the people we serve.

I have now spent some time, elaborating on my views of multilateralism. But if I had to sum it up in one sentence, I would have to say this: I truly believe that the future of multilateralism lies in an agile, effective and responsive General Assembly, that is underpinned by political will, to uphold the rights of everyone, everywhere.

I thank you.