

**Address of
Mr Andrej Plenković
Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia
at the 72nd session of the
General Assembly of the United Nations
New York, 21st September 2017**

Mr. President,

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me use this opportunity to offer my sincere condolences to all those affected by the destruction wrought by hurricanes **Irma** and **Maria** as well as to the people of **Mexico**, who have been hit by successive earth quakes these past few days.

1992-2017

25 years ago, my country's first president, **Franjo Tudman**, addressed the General Assembly as Croatia was being admitted to the United Nations, bringing us back into the fold of **free nations**.

At that time, **he appealed to the international community to help end the aggression against Croatia** and establish lasting peace.

Since then, my country has been **rebuilt, modernised** and profoundly **transformed** and has become **one of Europe's top tourist destinations**.

Today, Croatia is a **Member State of the European Union and NATO**.

Building on its unique historical circumstances we are now actively participating in **peacekeeping operations** around the globe and provide **development aid** to societies in need.

I address you as the Prime Minister of a country which has during this relatively short time served on the **Security Council**, has presided over the **Economic and Social Council** and the **Peacebuilding Commission**, and which is currently a member of the **Human Rights Council**.

International order

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today we celebrate the International Day of Peace.

I would like to reiterate that Croatia as a peace-loving nation, as symbolised here in the UN by the recently restored "Peace monument" of our great sculptor Antun Augustinčić, is a strong advocate of a **rules-based international order**.

At the national and global level, we believe that institutions need to be more open to the public and genuinely involve people in their decision-making.

It is only through active and informed citizenry that **we can make governments accountable** and create **credible institutions**.

Only well-functioning institutions assure implementation of the **rule of law**.

Such citizens' involvement brings a welcomed mix of representative and participatory **democracy**, by bringing forward substantiated arguments and avoiding superficial and **misleading populism**.

Croatia puts great emphasis on *peace, justice and strong institutions* as one of the seventeen goals to transform our world.

Our own experiences

Building state institutions was a particular challenge for a country which **achieved peace** and re-established its territorial integrity only 20 years ago.

Croatia is dedicated to assisting others in post-conflict transition with its own experiences in **reconciliation** and **confidence building**.

We were a **recipient** of international security assistance, including through several UN missions.

One of the most successful peacekeeping missions to date was **UNTAES** – the UN Transitional Administration in Eastern Slavonia, which ended in January 1998 with the peaceful reintegration of our formerly occupied territories.

We put at disposal this **unique know-how** and **extensive expertise** as a useful complementary contribution to the international community's efforts in similar situations, such as with the implementation of the Minsk Agreements in **Ukraine**, where we can draw **many parallels**.

Reform of the UN

Mr. President,

Discussing strong international organisations globally means **addressing the strength** of this august institution – the United Nations – as well.

As the world changes, our firm belief is that **the UN must also keep up and change**.

Croatia supports the Secretary-General's drive to **reform** the Secretariat, especially in **peacekeeping** and **development**.

Secretary-General's "surge in diplomacy" is also a **much needed development**.

Central to UN reform is **reform of the Security Council**.

It is vital that its membership – both permanent and non-permanent – is **regionally balanced** and more **reflective** of the world seventy years into the organization's life.

In particular, we believe that the path to achieving this goal would be expedited by **enlarging** both categories of membership – permanent and non-permanent members – including through ensuring that the **Eastern European Group** is better represented in the Security Council's non-permanent membership.

Migrations

Mr. President,

One of the effects of **globalisation** is that the world is faced with an unprecedented number of people on the move.

Refugee crises and mass migration are a reality.

One in 30 people around the world are migrants.

Croatia in the past has been faced with acute **refugee and migrant crises**.

The approach we took has always been – and will always be – one that puts **people first**.

In the context of the upcoming negotiations on the **Global Compact on Migration**, we would advocate an approach to human mobility that prioritises safety, dignity and human rights and fundamental freedoms of all migrants, no matter where they come from and where they are headed.

As with all global challenges, here too **a holistic approach is required**.

We therefore need to work together to **fight the root causes of mass migrations** – be it poverty, failing States and wars or climate change and natural disasters – while standing against exploitation and abuse in the context of human trafficking and people smuggling.

In the framework of the European Union Croatia is working with its partners on stemming illegal flows of people, especially from the **Eastern Mediterranean – Balkan route**, while at the same time providing concrete support to countries of origin to address root causes, in particular through its **development aid** programmes.

Preventive diplomacy and conflicts

Mr. President,

In addressing crises across the globe our focus should be on **early-warning, prevention and diplomacy**.

Any post-conflict measure **comes too late**, especially in terms of human life.

Conflicts need to be dealt with on a case-by-case basis and require **tailor made approaches**.

While a consistent approach of the UN – and in particular the Security Council – to conflicts is essential for the Organization's credibility, copy-pasted "**one-size-fits-all**" approaches are **not** the most effective way to proceed.

In understanding the situation and risks on the ground we must in particular **draw on the knowledge and experience** of local populations, neighbouring countries and regional organizations.

Croatia believes that when addressing conflicts and crises – be it in **Syria, Libya, Iraq, Yemen** or anywhere else in the world – it is important to have a **global comprehensive approach** based on **solidarity** and **coordinated international effort** under strong UN leadership.

One that would include political, humanitarian, socio-economic, stabilisation and security elements, and where reconstruction goes hand in hand with **reconciliation**, and building **resilience**.

Peacekeeping operations

Our contribution to peacekeeping operations will continue to be an important component of our foreign policy, both through direct participation and in terms of **sharing our experiences and expertise** or know-how.

Croatia has contributed to **19 UN peace-keeping operations** to date and we are currently preparing our contribution to **UNIFIL** in Lebanon.

Like many other countries, apart from **UN peacekeeping operations**, we also participate in international operations led by other organisations (**EU, NATO and OSCE**).

Human rights

Human rights and fundamental freedoms are universal values.

We should **spare no effort** in their promotion and protection.

Any **violation of human rights** requires an immediate and appropriate response.

We advocate **tighter links** between the Human Rights Council and the Security Council.

We also acknowledge the importance to the principle of **Responsibility to Protect (R2P)** and take particular pride in the fact that one of Croatia's top diplomats leads the UN's efforts in this respect.

We **welcome the establishment of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism** because it is evident that there is a real need for strategic coordination and leadership to our global counter-terrorism **efforts**.

It is also necessary that we continue working on preventing and countering **radicalisation** and violent **extremism**.

North Korea

Mr. President,

Croatia fully supports recent unanimous Security Council action on **North Korea**, whose actions represent a direct **threat to international peace and security**.

We appeal to North-Korean authorities to discontinue developing and testing **nuclear weapons** and to fully meet their commitments under international law, relevant UN Security Council **resolutions** and global **non-proliferation regime**.

International law

Mr. President,

Adherence to the standards, principles and rules of international law and their faithful implementation represent a firm **foundation** for lasting **peace** and **stability** worldwide, to which we are **deeply attached**. In that regard I would particularly like to recall the principles of **good faith** and **free consent**.

We believe that **disputes should be resolved through peaceful means and in conformity with international law**.

It is of the utmost importance that all **international adjudications** meet the **highest legal standards** and fully respect their relevant rules.

Compromising the impartiality or independence of international adjudicators and tribunals, as was the case in the terminated **Arbitration Process** between **Croatia and Slovenia**, makes their decisions **legally void** and left Croatia with no choice other than to **withdraw** from the arbitration process.

We consider that this example of **undermining** the rule of law is a **discouragement** for States considering third-party dispute settlement.

At the same time, we want to **solve** the open border issue with our neighbouring friend and ally, **Slovenia**, through **bilateral dialogue**.

In addition, Croatia strongly supports full and unequivocal implementation of all applicable rules of **international humanitarian and criminal law**, as well as full investigation and punishment of all **atrocities**.

South East Europe

Preserving **peace and stability in South East Europe** is obviously of key importance for my country.

While the world faces many overwhelming challenges, we should bear in mind that **regional stability** in South East Europe is **still to be entrenched**.

By transferring our knowledge and promoting the **integration of the countries of Southeast Europe to the European Union**, and NATO – if they wish so – Croatia actively encourages **stability** in the region.

We believe in **building strong societies in our neighbourhood**, aiming to shift away **from** containing crises **towards prevention**, political **dialogue** and active **engagement**.

This is especially important in neighbouring **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, where proper implementation of the constitutional equality of its three constituent peoples – Bosniaks, Serbs and **Croats** – is a prerequisite for ensuring the full functionality and stability of the state and its European integration process which we **wholeheartedly support**.

Development

Mr. President,

Two years ago, through the adoption of the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, the international community properly recognized the **limits of reach** of individual governments.

Universal challenges indeed demand our **joint response**.

In addition, **cooperation** with academia, the business community and civil society **is indispensable**, but it would be unwise not to also tap the **ideas and ingenuity of each individual** in our respective societies.

Especially of our **youth** who is, in the age of modern **technology**, absorbing **knowledge** and acquiring **skills** in a faster and more open manner.

Thus it is our global task to adjust our **educational systems** to form the future responsible **citizens**, to give them **job opportunities** and fit the real needs of our labour markets.

Coming from Croatia, the homeland of **Nikola Tesla**, the great inventor, I cannot but stress how vitally important it is that **the UN facilitates a transformation towards the age of digital economy** and narrows the digital divide, which could generate new inequalities.

Eradicating poverty remains our primary development objective, since it is a cause and consequence of conflict, instability and crises.

But it is only by paying equal attention to transformational, **cross-cutting elements** – such as human rights, equality, good governance, the rule of law and inclusive societies – that we will be able to achieve true **sustainable development**.

Climate change

As we are witnessing the **daily erosion of climate conditions and increasing natural disasters**, more is required from humanity.

This **burden** is ours to bear.

In the recent months, unfortunately, **my country** was not spared wildfires and floods either, which reached **unprecedented dimensions**.

These increasingly worrying warnings are **a call to action** – without delay.

Croatia has already demonstrated its dedication to global efforts to preserve the **environment** by ratifying **the Paris Agreement**.

Two days ago I expressed our principled support to the new French initiative – the **Global Pact for the Environment** – aimed at better coordinating global action against **climate change**.

In the context of sustainable development, **synergies between global, national and local policies** need to be **strengthened**.

We believe that next year's **High Level Political Forum** will offer a platform to discuss efficient measures for a true transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies, such as the **pivotal goal** of making cities and human settlements inclusive and safe, while granting their inhabitants a **proper quality of life**.

Conclusion

Mr. President,

Croatia's commitment to multilateralism is unwavering.

We believe in the UN system and our joint potential to promote effective, inclusive and sustainable global governance, based on the rules and principles of international law.

It is with this aspiration in mind that Croatia joined the United Nations 25 years ago.

A quarter of a century later, I stand before you with the same noble ambitions and responsibility – for the respect of **human rights** and fundamental **freedoms, democracy** and **economic betterment**, for **solidarity** with humans living in precarious conditions and for common issues concerning **our planet**.

Only with joint vigour to that end, we can advance and materialize our professed **common goals and values**.

It is incumbent upon us to do so, and the time is now.

Thank you.