

UNGA79 Plenary Speech September 2024

Mister President,
Esteemed Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As leaders from around the globe flock to the UN this week, they should only have one ambition: find a way out of conflicts in Sudan, the Middle East, Ukraine and all too many other places.

These conflicts are close to our homes and cities, bringing war and famine and terrible tragedies for families and societies.

When we take a brief look back in time, history teaches us a lesson.

Just after Andrey Sakharov had developed the first Soviet hydrogen bomb in 1955, the nuclear arms race and Soviet doctrine seriously troubled him.

Because he saw that human rights and human dignity were an absolute necessity, a precondition, not just for nuclear security, but for the prevention of war.

This fight for human rights defined him and turned him into an international advocate, culminating in the Nobel Peace Prize 20 years later.

In its remarks, the Nobel Committee noted that Sakharov “*fought against the abuse of power and all forms of violation of human dignity*”.

Looking at the world today, it is crucial to remember Sakharov’s legacy.

Across the globe, human dignity and the rule of law are receding and in many cases absent.

And where the respect for human life, and the promise of the rule of law fades, armed conflicts loom large.

History might not repeat itself, but it surely rhymes.

In the Middle-East, decades of dehumanizing the enemy has led to a vicious cycle of violence, resulting in the killing of over 40 thousand people in less than a year.

This manmade conflict has proven one of the deadliest in decades.

This conflict didn't start with the horrific terrorist attack against Israel, killing over 1,400 Israeli citizens, almost a year ago.

But on the 7th of October, Belgium immediately acknowledged Israel's right to defend itself and we called for the unconditional release of all hostages.

Early on in the Gaza war, my government warned against the lack of respect for International Humanitarian Law on both sides and the disproportionate attacks with blatant disregard for Palestinian civilian life.

Almost one year later we must sadly acknowledge that the extremes on both sides, still set the tone of this conflict. Fanatics believe that military power can end this conflict. This is a delusion.

To achieve peace, we need a proper roadmap, political courage, not mere tactics to remain in power another day.

We've been calling for an immediate and lasting ceasefire for many months, but it seems more distant than ever. Hostilities need to stop before the whole region becomes engulfed in violence.

Action speaks louder than words.

Belgium has imposed a weapons embargo.

We never ceased our support to UNRWA and other humanitarian organisations.

Together with the EU we have imposed sanctions on Hamas, but also on extremist settlers and settler organisations.

With every innocent life lost in Gaza and every discovery of a dead hostage, the prospects of future peace may seem more distant than ever. Today, Gaza lies in trouble. Over 15.000 people need prosthetics because of lost limbs. 10.000 of these victims are children. Where is the human dignity in all this?

However, there is a way out.

I'm convinced it starts with recognizing the right to exist of both Israel and Palestine, based on the 1967 borders.

We should all engage with Palestinian and Israeli leaders who recognize these rights and who oppose both antisemitism and anti-Palestinian.

Only then can we start articulating a viable pathway for a two-state solution.

Mister President,
Dear colleagues

Vladimir Putin has been waging war in Europe for more than two years now.

And there is one simple truth:

He can stop the illegal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine right now.

His madness continues to have devastating consequences for the Ukrainian people.

One man alone can stop the killing of thousands of civilians.

Can end the continuous violence against Ukrainians whose future he has put on hold.

Only he can end the shelling, the bombing, the indiscriminate attacks on bridges, roads and energy infrastructure, hospitals, schools and people's houses.

Widespread and disturbing brutality has been established by various Independent International Inquiries.

None of us can and should look away.

Over the past year the Belgian Ukraine fund spent 1.7 billion EUR on military equipment, humanitarian aid and the reconstruction of Ukraine's hardest-hit regions.

Belgium's development agency is helping Ukraine's recovery and its preparations for joining the European Union.

The people of Ukraine will be battling against another cold winter soon.

That is why we are winterising energy provision in hundreds of hospitals.

Over the past two years we have often been pronounced the words: "for as long as it takes".

We do not take this promise lightly.

As the Russians continue to bomb cities, Ukraine's call for more air defence is pure self-protection.

How else can they keep their citizens safe?

The build-up of a strong Ukraine F-16 force is an integral part of our support.

We will transfer all our fighter jets as they leave the Belgian Air Force.

The total amounts to at least 30 over the coming years.

We want to help protect the people of Ukraine. The aggressor shall not win.

And that is why our support for Ukraine stands strong.

To all of you who aspire to peace, it will only come about, when we force President Putin to stop his aggression against Ukraine.

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Il est clair que nous vivons dans un monde polarisé et profondément divisé.

Ce constat pourrait nous amener à croire que le multilatéralisme a échoué à tous les niveaux. Ce serait une erreur.

Il y a un an, un traité qui protège la biodiversité en haute mer (BBNJ) a été adopté.

Cette initiative collective prouve qu'il est encore possible d'être unis face à l'urgence climatique et environnementale.

La réponse mondiale au MPOX et la réaction du CDC (*centre de contrôle et de prévention des maladies*) africain à l'épidémie sont un autre exemple de progrès.

L'UE et la Belgique ont investi de manière significative dans la production et l'accès aux vaccins en Afrique.

Nous avons besoin de plus de solidarité et de coopération.

Ces mots peuvent paraître idéalistes et naïfs.

Mais nous ne pouvons relever les défis communs qu'en travaillant ensemble.

Partout dans le monde, les phénomènes météorologiques extrêmes se multiplient.

La semaine dernière encore, de fortes pluies ont provoqué des inondations dans de vastes régions d'Europe de l'Est et d'Europe centrale.

Notre planète et toutes les formes de vie qui s'y trouvent sont confrontées à d'énormes défis.

Ce n'est cependant pas le moment de désespérer et de revoir nos ambitions à la baisse.

Bien au contraire.

L'ingéniosité humaine, la concurrence durable et les changements de comportements bien ancrés peuvent atténuer les effets du changement climatique et nous aider à nous adapter.

Nous avons redoublé d'efforts afin de relever encore nos ambitions en matière de climat et des océans.

Nous sommes prêts à travailler avec nos partenaires, en particulier dans les pays d'Afrique les plus vulnérables, en leur fournissant des financements et en renforçant leurs capacités.

Cet automne, la COP sur la biodiversité à Cali et la COP sur le climat à Bakou seront à nouveau des moments clés pour l'avenir des populations et de la planète.

In all these years, talk about conflict prevention, peacebuilding and peacekeeping has multiplied.

Unfortunately, this has not stopped conflicts from becoming more numerous, deadly and enduring.

The number of aid workers killed has reached record highs.

Numbers of refugees continue to rise year after year.

Our common humanity seems to be in a deep crisis.

Which brings me back to the lessons Andrey Sakharov taught us.

Where human rights and human dignity are absent, conflicts loom large and the most vulnerable bear the brunt.

A new beginning, which the Pact for the Future calls for, must therefore start with our recommitment to the UN Charter, the Rule of Law and respect for human dignity.

I thank you