Speech by Foreign Minister Maas at the general debate of the 73rd General Assembly of the United Nations

2018-09-28

Madam President,

Ladies and gentlemen,

A veteran of

UN

diplomacy told me the other day that every General Assembly has its own crisis to discuss, its own major topic.

So what is the big issue in 2018? Syria? North Korea? The Middle East? Or the dramatic global refugee situation from the Mediterranean to Venezuela?

If you take a step back, these disparate conflicts reveal a bigger picture and a distinct pattern. It becomes clear that we are indeed faced with a crisis – the crisis of multilateralism. And this crisis makes conflicts around the world appear irresolvable.

Ladies and gentlemen,

When I say they “appear” irresolvable, this reflects the faith we Germans have in multilateralism. In fact, Germany’s post-war success story is a success story of multilateralism.

Europe, which was scarred by war and destruction, was able to integrate in peace, security and prosperity thanks to our European neighbours’ courage in seeking reconciliation. The United States also played a very crucial role in Europe’s reconstruction.

The fact that it was this Europe that was able to become one of the United Nations’ most important partners is a triumph of multilateralism. We believe in the United Nations because international cooperation changed our own fate for the better.

Europe has proved to the world that multilateralism and sovereignty are not a contradiction in terms. On the contrary, in a world faced with immense global problems, we can only safeguard sovereignty if we work together!

The three words, “we the peoples”, express both our goal and how we will achieve it. That’s why the founders of the United Nations put these words right at the start of the Charter. They wanted to spell out that we need to work together to find solutions. They wanted to leave no doubt as to whom the United Nations and we as delegates serve – the people. The Charter’s promise is addressed to the people: namely, that we will defend your freedom and dignity at the United Nations in New York.

But does a boy in Idlib who lives in constant fear of the next air strike feel this? How does a girl in Africa feel when her life expectancy at birth is 30 years lower than in Germany?

To them, “we the peoples” are simply hollow words. If we do not act on their behalf, nothing will change. Kofi Annan once said: “We don’t need any more promises. We need to start keeping the promises we already made.”

When Germany joins the United Nations Security Council as a non-permanent member in a few weeks’ time, that will be what motivates us.

Thank you for the huge trust you showed in us through your votes. Your trust is an incentive for us to play our part in tackling the world’s crises – and to do so with courage and confidence, but without over-estimating ourselves. We want to work with you as a reliable partner who puts dialogue and cooperation at the heart of what we do.

In our view, “we the peoples” particularly refers to those who find it hard to be heard at the United Nations. And that means we will always seek dialogue with civil society – both in the Security Council and beyond.

However, “we the peoples” also means that the Security Council itself must become more representative and inclusive. The world’s population has more than tripled since 1945, while the number of

UN

member states has almost quadrupled. However, the Security Council has hardly changed at all. That’s why we should stop beating around the bush and finally start real negotiations on Security Council reform, as the vast majority of the member states has wanted for a long time.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Nowhere is the crisis of multilateralism more painfully evident than in Syria. The civil war has long since turned into a widespread regional conflict, with further potential for escalation in an already ravaged region.

This sort of war cannot be resolved by military means, as the regional players are too deeply involved and the individual stakes are too high.

With united diplomatic efforts, we did, however, manage to prevent escalation in Idlib. That is at least a glimmer of hope!

The agreement between Turkey and Russia must now be permanently implemented. But ultimately, and at long last, we need a political process. To this end, the talks must be held under the auspices of the United Nations.

In Resolution 2254, the Security Council itself showed the way. We must finally take this path to free and fair elections.

At that point, we will also be willing to shoulder responsibility for reconstruction. However, there is one line we will not cross – we will not become accomplices to a regime that long ago forfeited its political legitimacy.

Instead, we are doing our utmost to alleviate people's suffering. It is shameful that financial support is running out once again. As the second-largest humanitarian donor, Germany is willing to provide

UNHCR

with a further 116 million euros – that is, half of the amount currently needed – to help Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon. But others also need to step up. After all, the Charter talks about "we the peoples".

Disruptive foreign-policy approaches have also had a severe effect on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Many people are keen to make us believe that the negotiated two-state solution is obsolete. They want us to think it is now merely a term used in diplomacy and can no longer be achieved.

But whatever way you twist it, there will only be lasting peace if people can lead self-determined lives in security and dignity on both sides of the 1967 Lines. That's precisely why, even 25 years after Oslo, working on a negotiated two-state solution is still the right thing to do.

The conflict in Ukraine will also continue to occupy us. Along with France, Russia and Ukraine, we are working hard to implement the Minsk agreements.

The focus is on measures agreed a long time ago with a view to stabilising the ceasefire. All efforts are aimed at also keeping our discussion on a possible

UN

mission in eastern Ukraine on the agenda.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let us not forget that acute crisis management is at best a step towards peace. Lasting peace can only be achieved if we put a stop to the arms race. This is not some sort of nostalgic rhetoric from the days of the Cold War. The balance of terror of the past seems utterly benign compared with the scenario of a “multipolar” arms race with many unpredictable players.

In the case of North Korea, the Security Council’s united stance and the sanctions helped to pave the way back to dialogue. That was and remains the right course of action.

However, North Korea must follow up its words with deeds – deeds that must lead to complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation. For this, Germany is prepared to contribute its know-how, including the expertise we gained during the difficult negotiations with Iran.

The nuclear agreement with Iran may not be perfect. But so far, it has prevented Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons and has averted an escalation that, three years ago, was highly likely. That’s not insignificant!

We Europeans therefore stand together by this agreement. We are working on keeping economic exchange with Iran possible, and we of course also call on Iran to continue to fully implement its commitments.

The fact that we stand by the JCPOA does not mean that we are turning a blind eye to Iran’s problematic role in the region, or to the dangers posed by its ballistic missile programme. That said, if there were no agreement, this would not make the search for solutions in Yemen, Syria or elsewhere any easier. Quite the opposite is true.

Disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation must generally become more of a focus of the United Nations’ work once again. We absolutely share Secretary-General Guterres’ view on this.

Our common rules must keep pace with technological developments. Otherwise, what currently sounds like science fiction may very soon become deadly reality – autonomous weapons systems, or killer robots, that kill without any human control. I ask that you please support, both here in New York and in Geneva, our initiative to ban fully autonomous weapons – before it is too late!

Ladies and gentlemen,

Not only in this domain is prevention the right answer.

The United Nations of the 21st century must tackle the root causes of conflict. These also include climate change.

Action based solely on nationalism, with the objective of putting “my country first”, reaches its limits here – not least because our climate knows no borders.

The alarm bells have rarely sounded as loudly as they did this summer – in almost all parts of the world.

Germany and the European Union stand by the Paris Climate Agreement. Moreover, we want to ensure that the Security Council makes the devastating effects that climate change can have on the security and stability of entire countries and regions an even greater priority.

We also need a quantum leap as regards post-conflict peacebuilding. That is why Germany will contribute at least 25 million euros to the Peacebuilding Fund this year. Over the last three years, Germany has tripled its contributions toward promoting stabilisation and preventing crises around the world.

Take, for example, Iraq, where the terrorists of “Islamic State” have for the most part been militarily defeated. Instead of leaving the Iraqi authorities to fend for themselves, we are training security forces, fostering administrative structures and providing civil support to promote stabilisation, reconciliation and inclusive reconstruction in the country.

Only when military measures are embedded in a clear political strategy will peacekeepers truly bring peace.

This is also the objective of Secretary-General Guterres’ peacekeeping reform efforts. It would be a mistake to limit our discussion to bartering over decimal points in scales for assessed contributions. Of course, efficiency is important – also for us Europeans, as the largest funding contributor.

However, discussing potential cost savings alone does not do justice to the benefits that peacekeeping missions bring, for example in countries such as Mali or Lebanon, which have held peaceful elections and enjoyed relative stability, in part thanks to the Blue Helmets and the political efforts of the United Nations. We Germans will continue to contribute – militarily, financially, and always also politically, through diplomatic efforts and by investing in stability and reconstruction.

After all, the success of

UN

missions hinges on member states’ political backing.

This is particularly true for Libya right now. To tackle the Herculean task of advancing functioning state structures, the United Nations needs our political support.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Peace is more than guns falling silent.

Only just societies will remain peaceful in the long term – societies in which men and women enjoy equal rights and in which women participate in all social decision-making. This is not only a matter of fairness and respect. It is simply about humanity and reason.

Kofi Annan taught us that “We will not enjoy development without security, or security without development. We will not enjoy either without universal respect for human rights.”

Seventy years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, its proclamation of dignity and personal freedom remains merely a distant promise for many.

In the Security Council, in the Human Rights Council or here at the General Assembly, we will demand accountability when human rights are trampled underfoot, whether this concerns human trafficking in Africa or attacks on the Rohingya in Myanmar.

Even in war, there are limits. We must hold to account those who wilfully attack humanitarian aid workers, hospitals or schools. Anyone who violates the most basic rules of human civilisation must be punished.

That also applies to those who use chemical weapons, thereby breaking a taboo that was respected for decades. This is why it is so important that the

OPCW

has meanwhile been authorised to find and identify those responsible. The perpetrators must be fully aware that there can be no impunity for crimes against humanity. Never, not anywhere!

In this regard, the International Criminal Court remains indispensable because it sends a clear message to the victims and the perpetrators of the most serious crimes that justice will prevail.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Earlier, I spoke about how we Germans in particular have faith when it comes to multilateralism. This faith is also based on the fact that the United Nations, time and again and despite all disagreements, delivers proof of what we can achieve through joint efforts.

I am thinking of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which remains our guiding principle for making this a better world for all people.

I am also thinking about the successful conclusion of the negotiations on the global compacts for migration and on refugees. The fact that more than 190 member states – countries of origin, transit and destination – reached agreement on such complex and controversial issues is a victory for multilateralism! It is a success achieved by truly united nations.

The United Nations is built on our courage to reach compromises. The Organisation grows with our desire to shape things. It thrives on our common pledge of “together first”.

Common ground is created when we put people at the heart of what we do. After all, the desire for peace, freedom and security, and the dream of a prosperous and dignified life, are things that all people share – whether they live in Baghdad, Berlin or Bamako.

The United Nations belongs to the people. It is to them that we owe allegiance. “We the peoples”!

Overview "Newsroom"

Source : https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/maas-general-assembly-un-2142300