European External Action Service (EEAS)

United Nations: Speech by High Representative Kaja Kallas at the annual UN Security Council session on EU-UN cooperation

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Madam President,

Excellencies,

It is an honour to address the United Nations Security Council.

I would like to thank also the Danish Presidency for scheduling this meeting. And I wish you the best for your Presidency at this very critical time.

This year marks 80 years since the foundation of the United Nations. And it is facing unprecedented pressure.

We see blatant violations of the UN Charter.

We see attempts to replace the rule of law with the rule of force.

The rules-based international order, enshrined in the UN Charter, is a set of universal principles that create conditions for peace, prosperity, human rights, dignity and development for all.

80 years on, we see these principles under heavy fire.

My message to you today is simple: whether we are talking about support…

to international law, international humanitarian law and human rights,

to UN-led peace efforts,

to security,

to boosting multilateralism,

to humanitarian efforts, or

to funding

…the EU will remain the United Nations's reliable partner of choice.

Let me take each of those six points in turn.

First, the EU calls for the respect of international law, international humanitarian law and human rights in every context they are at risk or actively violated. Be it in Gaza, Sudan, the DRC, Myanmar, Haiti or Ukraine.

Yet, for three long years, we have been witnessing an illegal war of aggression aimed at destroying a Member State of the United Nations.

Russia continues its unprovoked full-scale invasion; it continues to attack, destroy, kill civilians, spread false narratives, deny its war crimes and evade responsibility.

Let us not forget that two weeks ago, in this chamber, Russia vetoed the Council's support to Ukraine's territorial integrity and to peace in line with the UN Charter.

The UN Charter is sacrosanct for a safer world. Be it in Ukraine or any other country.

That is why the European Union has supported Ukraine, in line with its right to self-defence under the Charter.

And why we also stand firmly with Ukraine for a just and lasting peace in line with the UN Charter.

It is the spirit of the resolution promoted by Ukraine and the EU which was adopted by the General Assembly with large support of the UN membership.

Europe has learnt from its own history that giving in to aggressors' demands leads to more violence.

Let's be clear: this war can end instantly if Russia – the only one responsible – withdraws its troops and stops bombing Ukraine. Russia can stop this war any time – but it has chosen not to, despite all the efforts so far. Because it has not achieved its war aims. This has not changed.

Ukrainians do not want to be part of Russia. They have fought against this for three years. They deserve to choose their own future. And we should all stand by them.

This war is neither a "European war" nor a conflict between neighbours, nor a proxy war.

Ukraine is a sovereign state of 40 million people that has fought for three years to survive and keep its independence.

The consequences extend far beyond Ukraine, disrupting global food and energy markets.

Also because Russia has brought others – North Korea, Iran – to support its colonial battle too.

North Korea's arms transfers to Russia, the presence of troops on the ground, as well as its nuclear weapons programme are serious violations of international law and Resolutions of this Security Council.

Iran's military support to Russia, including the delivery of ballistic missiles, is a major threat to international security.

Therefore, we must all focus our efforts on achieving, swiftly, a just and lasting peace in Ukraine.

Secondly, EU support to UN-led and international peace efforts. While these efforts are going on in all corners of the world, my first thought is of Gaza.

The ceasefire in Gaza is holding but remains fragile.

Thanks to the EU's border mission in Rafah, by 8th of March, over three and a half thousand people had crossed into Egypt, including over two thousand people requiring medical treatment. Work is still ongoing.

Too many civilians have been killed – on both sides. It is critical that both sides uphold their commitments to international and humanitarian law and phase two talks succeed.

It is imperative that the delivery of humanitarian aid is not politicised or conditional. Any and all blockades to delivery of aid at scale must be lifted.

The EU has been the number one provider of humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people, both in Gaza and also in the West Bank. We intend to stay this course.

The total humanitarian support of the EU and the Member States in the last two years is almost €1.5 billion. Last year alone we granted additional €120 million to this effort.

While the EU Rafah border mission is our concrete contribution to supporting the ceasefire on the ground, the two-state solution remains the only avenue that will bring sustainable peace and security to the Middle East.

For that reason, the EU supports diplomatic efforts through the Global Alliance for the Implementation of the two-state solution. We stand ready to work with Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and regional and international actors.

Let me also say that the European Union firmly rejects any attempt at demographic or territorial changes. In Gaza. In other parts of the world. Anywhere. Consistent with the UN Charter and international law. At the same time, the security of Israel is paramount to a lasting political solution.

In this context, we welcome the Arab Recovery and Reconstruction plan recently presented at the Cairo Summit and adopted also by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). It is a serious plan for discussions on the future of Gaza and we will be discussing these ideas with our Arab partners.

We support a future state of Palestine with Gaza as an integral part of it. And we will work with the international community in rebuilding Gaza.

Our full support for the role of the UN and the UN Special Envoy is also the case in Syria.

The fall of the Assad regime marked a historic moment and a chance for all Syrians to rebuild their country. But it is essential for all stakeholders to engage in a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned dialogue.

The atrocities we witnessed over the last days are unacceptable and show how fragile the situation is. They cannot happen again. Perpetrators must be brought to justice.

In order for stability to take root, it is imperative for the transition to be peaceful and inclusive and for civilians to be protected in all circumstances, in full respect for human rights and international law. We urge respect by all external actors of Syria’s unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity.

In parallel we welcome key developments in the right direction of an inclusive transition with the agreement announced yesterday between the Syrian Democratic Forces and Damascus, which could pave the way for more stability and a better future for many Syrians.

On our part, and in order to help alleviate the dire socio-economic situation in Syria, the EU has suspended certain restrictive measures.

We hope this will give much needed breathing space. But we are ready to roll them back if we see any deterioration.

The 9th Brussels Conference next week – 17 March – will address the transition’s immediate needs. And I look forward to welcoming regional and international actors. This is a collective effort.

The European Union is ready to up its support for an inclusive transition; to address humanitarian needs; and to help towards economic recovery.

But we must continue to see the interim authorities taking the right steps and for all sides to refrain from violence immediately, in order for Syria to set off on the right foot on the long road ahead.

Beyond the Middle East, we should continue to work together to address the conflicts such as the one in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The recent Security Council resolution,

adopted unanimously, sends a strong message to those responsible for the current escalation that territorial integrity in Africa – or elsewhere – is paramount.

Excellencies,

My third point is security.

The EU-UN Strategic Partnership on Peace and Security is a longstanding strand of our cooperation. It demonstrates our shared commitment to global stability.

Concretely, the EU contributes to UN-led efforts through coordinated action, by providing funds, by concentrating on prevention as well as through our Common Security and Defence Policy. The EU provides predictable and sustained financing for peacebuilding. For example, we are maintaining our annual 3 million euro contribution to the UN Peacebuilding Fund in the current cycle.

And the EU Member States account for over a fifth of the UN peacekeeping budget.

Prevention is at the core of peacebuilding efforts and therefore of security and is far more cost-effective than responding to crises.

To reinforce these efforts, we are working to establish a Group of Friends on Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention.

But beyond all that, the EU is a security provider in its own right.

Since 2003, the EU has launched more than 40 civilian and military missions and operations globally.

21 of them are ongoing, and where we are often working hand-in-hand with the United Nations on the ground.

To name just a few, there is:

Operation Aspides that has already protected over 340 ships transiting the Red Sea,

Operation Atalanta to counter piracy in the Horn of Africa,

Operation Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is helping to preserve the stability of the country though its support for national authorities to maintain a safe and secure environment for all citizens.

Operation Irini to implement the arms embargo in Libya.

Collectively we can think about how peacebuilding and peace operations could better reflect the evolving peace and security landscape.

This year's Peace Building Architecture Review and the Peacekeeping Ministerial will offer an opportunity.

My fourth point this morning is that the EU remains steadfast in its commitment to multilateral solutions.

The adoption of the Pact for the Future last year demonstrates that this commitment is widely shared in the world.

Boosting multilateralism is obviously a matter of teamwork.

This is also why we engage with partners at the regional level.

Last year with the first ever EU-Gulf Cooperation Council.

This year with a Ministerial and Summit between the European Union and the African Union to mark the 25th anniversary of our partnership.

And with an EU-CELAC Summit.

There are many instances around the world of how multilateralism is the only way forward in solving issues.

For example, Somalia. We will continue to support Somalia's unity and territorial integrity and our Somalian partners, who are here in this Chamber, in your fight against terrorism.

We welcome the new African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission and support the AU/UN proposed hybrid financing option for AUSSOM as the first test case to implement resolution 2719.

Myanmar is another instance of multilateral problem solving.

The EU engages with ASEAN as well as opposition and pro-democratic forces with the aim of restoring Myanmar's democratic path, and restoring peace and stability.

But we also put our money where our mouth is: together with the EU Member States, in 2024 the EU was the second largest development donor in Myanmar.

In Haiti, the EU supports a stabilisation path leading to elections. We also support the Multi-national Security Support mission via a financial contribution of up to €10 million. We are working with the UN on how to operationalise it.

We support multilateralism not where and when it is in our interests but because it is always in the collective interest.

In this vein, the constant expansion of Iran's nuclear programme fully contradicts Iran's own commitments as endorsed by the Security Council (UNSC Resolution 2231).

At the same time, a multilateral approach, like the JCPOA was, is key. There is no sustainable alternative to a diplomatic solution.

My fifth point, on humanitarian work.

Humanitarian needs continue to rise globally.

Though others pull back, the European Union will always step up, with almost two billion euro this year alone.

In Sudan, for example, the war has caused the world's largest humanitarian crisis.

The EU supports all meaningful efforts to put an end to the war and continues to work hand in hand with international accountability mechanisms to bring perpetrators of atrocities to justice.

In 2024, the EU allocated close to €260 million to the humanitarian response to assist those in need in Sudan.

The European Union has also promoted a non-aggression pact with the warring parties for critical infrastructure such as dams and electricity grids. Regional and international pressure will be needed to help stop the destruction that is unfolding.

Another example is the EU's humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan, where the human rights situation continues to worsen, particularly for women and girls.

We commend the UN efforts to initiate an UN-led political process, reinvigorating the Doha Process. The EU stands ready to contribute where we can as a major donor, with a presence in Kabul.

Excellencies,

My sixth point is on financing.

The EU and our Member States demonstrate an unparalleled commitment to the UN's financial stability. By paying on time and by paying in full.

Collectively we are the single largest Official Development Assistance (ODA) donor worldwide. 42% of global ODA in 2022 and 2023 or well over €90 billion. Much of this goes through UN agencies.

The EU and EU Member States collectively make the single largest financial contribution to the UN system, year after year.

EU Member States jointly finance one quarter of the UN regular budget.

Together the European Union and EU Member States provide a third of all financial contributions to UN agencies, funds and programmes.

In 2022, our Member States' spent over €14 billion. The EU alone spends over €3 billion annually.

This is more than anyone else. We are a cornerstone of United Nations financing.

This is the most concrete example of our commitment and support to the UN.

Madam President,

Excellencies,

I would lastly like to refer to three cross-cutting threats to global peace and security.

First, terrorism, which affects us all.

Let me assure you that our commitment to fight against terrorism is resolute, anticipating threats and jointly working with partners.

Second, information manipulation and interference.

It is increasingly used as a tool of hybrid warfare for covert operations by various actors. The online environment presents particular opportunities to manipulate free, open and democratic discourse for political or economic gain. Recognising this urgent challenge, the EU strongly supports the UN's Global Principles for Information Integrity.

Third, increasing attacks on gender equality.

The Commission on the Status of Women is meeting this week. We also mark 30 years since the ground-breaking Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

We need to understand that gender equality is intrinsically linked to democratic resilience. The EU also fully supports the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

Excellencies,

As I wrap up, let me emphasise the important imperative to reform our multilateral system. We all agree that we need to reinvigorate the UN, to reflect the world of today.

Reform of the Security Council is a necessary condition for this body to fulfil its responsibility of ensuring the maintenance of international peace and security.

Concrete language on the Council reform in the Pact for the Future is an achievement that reflects the consensus among UN members.

The values and principles we adhered to eighty years ago remain the same.

The purpose of the United Nations remains the same.

The commitment of the European Union also remains the same.

Our geopolitical context is changing, but you can count on the EU as the UN’s most reliable, credible partner.

Thank you.

Closing remarks

Thank you, excellencies, for this very, very interesting debate.

I have a few comments.

First on multilateralism.

The United Nations was established after the Second World War so that there wouldn't be any wars anymore. So the United Nations Charter is a really good document based on the universal principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, everything that really protects countries.

We had a President who said that international law is a nuclear weapon for small states, Paul Henry Spaak said, there are only two types of states in the world, the small states and those countries who haven't realised that they are small states. So I think it's in our interest, everybody's interest, that international law is really followed.

Like many stressed here, these are also fundamental principles of the European Union. The European Union is also a peace project. As we still have wars in the world, we need to ask why is it so. What is international law really lacking? I think one of the elements is accountability. The United Nations Charter is a very good document with very good principles, but what happens if somebody really breaches those principles? There has to be accountability in order to prevent wars in the future.

The European Union is a good project. And as enlargement was mentioned, I'm very happy to say that there are many countries who want to join the European Union. It is a good organisation and a good example of multilateral cooperation. Of course we know that multilateralism is not always easy. We have 27 countries in the European Union. We need to reach decisions. That also applies to the United Nations. But I think it's important that we do.

Some mentioned nuclear proliferation. I think again, international law is extremely important, and the following of the UN Charter. Because if this is not the umbrella that protects all countries, then all the countries who are afraid of their neighbours will want to have a nuclear weapon, because this is the only tool that protects them from the attacks of their neighbour countries. And all the countries who have an appetite for their neighbours’ territories will want

to have a nuclear weapon, because threatening with a nuclear weapon gets them what they want. I think we don't want to live in such a world.

On maritime safety, what was pointed out by Panama, I think is a very, very important point. I think we need to develop international law further when it comes to maritime safety, because the world has changed. In the maritime area, we have now cables under the sea. We have new risks. And these risks can have a very big impact. I'm really looking forward to cooperating also with you in terms of developing these international laws even further. It’s a very important point.

Then on Gaza, we just had the Association Council, the European Union, with Israel, also pointing out those issues that were raised today. We also will have a high-level political dialogue with Palestine. And like I said in my intervention, we are supporting the two state solution. And in order to have the two states, we need to really have also support for the Palestinians and a Palestinian state, so that there would be more equal share there. I think here, it's extremely important that we will work together with the regional actors as well as the international actors to really achieve this, because this is for the stability and peace in in the Middle East.

Now listening to the Russian representative, I must say that I once again reiterate how much we need to fight misinformation and do it all together, because it was a good illustration of really rewriting history and presenting all these lies. Of course I don't have time to overturn them all here, but I think it's important that we work together to fight misinformation, because this is important.

Phobia is fear. If you take phobias as fear, then the question is why are countries afraid of Russia? If you look at the list that Russia has attacked, you take the 1940s – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, or take the 2000s – Georgia, Chechnya, Syria, Crimea, Donbas, Ukraine. None of these countries have ever attacked Russia. So it is clear that the countries who are neighbouring Russia are afraid of Russia because they are continuing to attack. These fears are not ungrounded, and therefore I think it's extremely important that we uphold the UN Charter, which says that you have to respect the territorial integrity sovereignty of another country, because this is the only thing that protects all of these countries.

On peace, of course everybody wants peace, and I don't know anybody more than the Ukrainians who want peace because they are constantly bombed, bombarded in Ukraine. Also Europe is a peace project, so we really want peace. But we also want this peace to last, and we also want the human suffering to end. We have the example where even if there is peace, it doesn't mean that the human suffering will stop if it is occupied territories. After the Second World War, there was peace, but there was a mass deportation of people, it was the suppression of language and culture. All these things are depriving the people and the states of the right to exist and the right to exist as independent countries. Therefore we are working for the peace to last. We are working for the human suffering to stop, whether it comes to

Ukraine or whether it comes to Gaza or the conflicts we have in Africa. I think this is what we need to work for.

And as a conclusion, I believe that despite all these problems, a fair, functioning, multilateral system is the only way to a peaceful, just and sustainable world. And as I was stressing in my intervention, the European Union is willing to do its share, and we are willing to work with all the countries who respect the United Nations Charter and all the principles and values in the UN Charter.

Thank you once again for this very, very interesting exchange. Thank you.

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