

20 September 2022 - Seul le prononcé fait foi

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# Speech by the President of the French republic at the United Nations General Assembly.

President of the General Assembly,  
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations,  
Heads of State and Government,  
Ministers,  
Ambassadors,

It is an honour for me to speak before this Assembly on behalf of France. At this point in time, I am thinking of those who have fought in my country and everywhere in the world for France to be free. Of those who in the past have considered that the destiny of Europe did not leave them indifferent, whether they come from Africa, Asia, Oceania or America, because a part of their freedom and the future of the world was at stake there. I am thinking of those who wrote our Charter and built the walls of this organization to avert the worst, which occurred twice in the 20th century, bringing untold sorrow to mankind.

Let us not forget this debt. It serves the interests of all our countries and indicates the path to peace. It reminds us that there is no other legitimate centre of power than that where the Nations sovereignly decide together. It tells us that the universality of our organization serves no hegemony nor geopolitical oligarchy. Yet, this legacy, our organization, along with our choices as Nations, are today facing a choice.

We have now one simple choice to make, and that is between war and peace. On 24 February, Russia, a permanent member of the Security Council, fractured our collective security with an act of aggression, invasion and annexation. It deliberately violated the Charter of the United Nations and the principle of the sovereign equality of States. On 16 March, the International Court of Justice stated that Russia's aggression was illegal and ordered Russia to withdraw. Russia decided, with such action, to pave the way for other annexation wars, today in Europe, but perhaps tomorrow in Asia, Africa or Latin America.

We may say what we like. I have heard a number of discussions and a number of people speak. However, of one thing I am certain: right now, as I am speaking to you, there are Russian troops in Ukraine and to my knowledge, there are no Ukrainian troops in Russia. This is an irrefutable fact that we must all accept. The longer this war lasts, the more it threatens peace in Europe and peace in the world. It is leading us towards wider, more permanent conflict, where everyone's sovereignty and security are determined solely by power relations, the size of armies, the solidity of alliances and the intentions of armed groups and militia. Where those who see themselves as strong seek to subjugate those they consider to be weak using all possible means.

What we have been witnessing since 24 February is a return to the age of imperialism and colonies. France refuses to accept this and will determinedly seek peace. In this regard, our position is clear and it is in promoting this position that I have pursued dialogue with Russia – even before war broke out – throughout these past months. And I will continue to do so because that is how we will seek peace together, seeking peace through initiatives taken in the years and months prior to the conflict to avert it.

Seeking peace since 24 February, with the humanitarian, economic and military support that we have provided the Ukrainian people to exercise their right to self-defence and safeguard its freedom, seeking peace through our condemnation of the invasion of a sovereign State, the violation of the principles of our collective security, and war crimes committed by Russia on Ukrainian soil, and through our rejection of impunity. The international justice system should establish the crimes and try the perpetrators.

Seeking peace, lastly, with our will to curb the geographic spread and intensity of the war. It is up to us in this regard to support the efforts of the International Atomic Energy Agency to prevent the war's consequences for nuclear safety and security, as we will do in the future alongside Ukrainians whose sovereignty over their plants is not up for discussion. We managed to have an IAEA mission visit the plant and draw up a report independently. We are working together to prevent the risk of an accident that would have devastating consequences.

All of us here today know that peace can only be restored with an agreement that complies with international

law. Negotiations will only be possible if sovereignly, Ukraine wants it and Russia agrees to it in good faith. We all know as well that negotiations will only be successful if Ukraine's sovereignty is respected, its territory liberated, and its security protected. Russia now needs to understand that it cannot impose its will through military means, even by cynically accompanying them with sham referendums in the bombed and now occupied territories. It is up to the members of the Security Council to state this loud and clear and it is up to members of this Assembly to support us on this path to peace.

From this stand, I call on the United Nations members to take action so that Russia renounces its choice of war, assesses the cost for itself and all of us and ends its aggression. This does not mean taking sides between the East or the West or between the North or South. It is the responsibility of all those who are committed to the Charter and to our most precious good – peace – because even beyond war, there is a risk of dividing the world because of the direct and indirect consequences of the conflict.

I know that here, in this Assembly, many are harbouring a feeling of injustice with regard to the dire energy, food and economic consequences that Russia's war has had. I also know that some countries here have remained neutral in a way with regard to this war, but I want to say to you very clearly today: those who would like to imitate the cause of the non-aligned movement by refusing to express themselves clearly are mistaken and bear a historic responsibility. The cause of the non-aligned was a cause for peace. The cause of the non-aligned was a cause for the sovereignty of States and for the territorial integrity of each of them. That is what the cause of the non-aligned was. In spite of themselves or secretly with a certain complicity, those who are silent today further the cause of a new imperialism, of a modern cynicism that breaks up our international order without which peace is not possible.

Russia is working to implant the idea today of a double standard, but the war in Ukraine should not be a conflict anyone feels indifferent about. It is close to Europeans who have chosen to support Ukraine without entering into war with Russia. It is far from many of you, but we have all felt the direct consequences and we all have a role to play to end this war because we are all paying its price. Because of its very foundations, this war launched by Russia flouts the principles at the heart of our organization, and flouts the principles of the only international order possible, the only order that can guarantee peace; in other words, respect for national sovereignty and intangible borders.

In this regard, without confusing causes and consequences, who here can defend the idea that the invasion of Ukraine did not warrant punishment? Who among you could consider that the day on which something similar is done to you by a more powerful neighbour, silence of the region and the world would be the best response? Who can support that? Who can believe that it would suffice for Russia to win this war for us to move on to something else? Nobody. Contemporary imperialism is not European or Western. It takes the form of a territorial invasion backed by a globalized hybrid war that uses energy prices, food security, nuclear safety, access to information and movements of people as weapons to divide and destroy. That is how this war is undermining all of our sovereignties.

Therefore, France will stand with the free peoples of the United Nations to address the consequences of the conflict and all the inequalities that it is exacerbating by challenging bloc geopolitics and exclusive alliances because, beyond the direct consequences of the war, the risk we are now facing is that of a new partitioning of the world. Some would have us believe that there is the West on one side that will defend outmoded values to serve its interests and on the other side, the rest of the world that has suffered so much and seeks to cooperate by supporting the war or by looking the other way. I object to this division for at least two reasons.

The first is by principle, and I just mentioned it. Our organization champions universal values, let us not allow the mistaken idea to take hold that there is something regional or adaptable in the values of the Charter. Our organization has universal values and the division in the face of the war in Ukraine is simple: are you for or against the law of the strongest and failure to respect the territorial integrity of countries and national sovereignty? Are you for or against impunity? I cannot imagine any international order or lasting peace that is not based on respect for peoples and the principle of responsibility. Therefore, yes, our values are universal and that is why they can never serve a power that violates these principles. And when, in recent years, we have taken liberties with these same values, we were wrong, but that cannot under any circumstances justify trampling on what we collectively built after the Second World War.

When I hear Russia say that it is ready to work on new cooperation, on a new international order, without hegemony, which is great, but based on what principles? Invading a neighbour? Not respecting borders of those I don't like? What order is hegemonic today if not Russia? What is being proposed to us? What is being sold to us? What dream is being sold on the good faith of some of us here today? Nothing that lasts for long. Let us not give into cynicism that is breaking up the order that has built us and that alone has enabled us to maintain international stability because these values – the respect for national sovereignty, the integrity of borders – and I assure you, we were wrong every time we took liberties with them – they are the values that we built after the Second World War, after colonialism. Let us refuse to have history falter under the pretext that today it is other

geographic regions that are affected and let us not give in.

The second reason I object to this attempt to partition the world is pragmatic. Behind the emerging divisions, there is an attempt to partition the world that ramps up tension between the United States and China. I believe this is a disastrous mistake for us all because it would not be a new Cold War. Several powers of disorder and imbalance are taking advantage of this period to multiply regional conflicts, return to the path of nuclear proliferation and reduce collective security. I therefore think that we must do everything we can to ensure that this new division does not happen because our challenges are growing in number and urgency and require new cooperation.

Look at Pakistan: a third of the country has been flooded, over 1,400 dead, 1,300 injured, millions of people in emergency situations. Look at the Horn of Africa: the worst drought in 40 years and a rainy season which will probably be worse still. Half of humanity now lives in a climate danger zone. Our ecosystems are reaching the point of no return. Look at Somalia, Yemen, South Sudan, Afghanistan: famine is returning. The food crisis is affecting everywhere, and the most vulnerable are hardest hit. 345 million people around the world are experiencing acute hunger, including 153 million children. There are currently 55 civil wars being waged on our planet. There are 100 million displaced persons. While between 1990 and 2015, 137,000 people escaped extreme poverty every day, by 2030 some 345 million could slip back into it in conflict-affected countries.

The most vulnerable people are always the hardest hit by crises, climate disruption, pandemics and rising food prices. These threats are all still present, as well as terrorism which among other areas is affecting the Sahel and Middle East, and nuclear proliferation in Iran and North Korea, which we have not managed to curb. These are the emergencies facing us. And as time is short, the description I have just given is not exhaustive, but these emergencies are each time either the result of deep-rooted flaws in our international system which was able to reap the benefits of globalization but failed to contain its divisions, threats and imbalances, or the result of divisions among ourselves.

Our shared responsibility is to work to help the most vulnerable, those most affected by all these challenges. As Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, rightly said: today's era is not an era of war. Nor is it one of revenge on the West, or Western opposition to the rest of the world. It is an era for sovereign, equal countries to work together on today's challenges. That is why we must urgently create a new contract between North and South, an effective, respectful contract on food, climate and biodiversity, and education. Now is no longer the time for bloc geopolitics, but rather to build concrete coalitions for action in order to reconcile legitimate interests and the common good.

In the face of the world food crisis, France has now doubled its funding of the World Food Programme. With the European Union, we have established "Solidarity Lanes" to export over 10 million tons of grain over land since the spring. This was duly supplemented by the agreement of 22 July, made possible by the work of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and which enabled 2.4 million tons to be exported via the Black Sea, a route which is still in use. We led the Food and Agriculture Resilience Mission (FARM) initiative which supplies vulnerable countries for a low price with no political conditions and invests in the agricultural production of countries which no longer want to be dependent.

I would also like to announce that France will fund the export of Ukrainian wheat to Somalia in partnership with the World Food Programme. We will do this with solidarity, effectiveness and the requirement of full transparency.

Tomorrow, we will convene the African Union, the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the IMF, the development banks and the European Commission to build a viable mechanism for African access to fertilizers, again in addition to the Secretary-General's initiatives in this area.

On climate and biodiversity, in a few weeks we will meet at COP27 in Egypt. Here too, we must be clear on the meaning of just transition. Our first shared challenge is to eradicate coal. The crisis must not steer us off course. Unless we stop using it, we will exceed the 2°C limit by even more than predicted. I am willing to invest in Just Energy Transition (JET) financing coalitions, as, for example, we did in South Africa a few months ago, and we must maintain this approach.

But China and the major emerging countries must make a clear decision at COP. This is essential. In this regard, we must build coalitions of State actors with our major international financial institutions around the emerging powers to achieve comprehensive energy production solutions and to change industrial production models, which are the only way to enable these transitions.

Then, the G7 must lead by example. The richest countries must speed up their carbon neutrality programmes, but also make an effort to reduce their consumption and share green technologies. In this area, you know that you can count on the European Union. I think we must recognize that for poor countries, it is difficult to tackle extreme poverty while at the same time speeding up the transition. We cannot ask the 600 million people in

extreme poverty while at the same time speeding up the transition. We cannot ask the 600 million people in sub-Saharan Africa who still have no electricity to meet the same requirements as major emitters. That is why the financial solidarity and technological solidarity of the richest countries must be strengthened in terms of climate with regard to the poorest countries. They must provide financing, offer solutions and speed up this agenda as we did during the pandemic, but in a stronger, more effective, more determined manner.

Against this backdrop, we must also together protect our carbon sinks and treasures of biodiversity. Along with Costa Rica, France will host the 2025 UN Ocean Conference. Let us make it the COP21 for the Ocean.

With regard to health, we must learn from the COVID-19 pandemic. We must recognize that our first line of defence is the health systems and personnel in the most vulnerable countries. I will stress this crucial point at the Replenishment Pledging Session of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, to which France remains one of the leading contributors. We must also ensure that the WHO sets up early warning systems which we need to prevent the spread of other viruses and we must address human and animal health together. This is the very meaning of the "One Health" initiative which France is promoting along with several other countries.

As we are doing with the Global Partnership for Education, we must continue working so that children can go to school, after the pandemic deprived them of that right. It means fighting all inequalities at source and working for our shared future.

So as you see, on all these issues, we must build more cooperation, more partnerships between stakeholders and between West and South, and North and South. This means more commitment to our major institutions. With all this, we want to bring about the opposite of division. Who remained present during the pandemic? Who is proposing financing for the climate transition? Not those who are today proposing a new international order, who did not have a working vaccine, who showed little solidarity, and who are taking no climate action.

In the face of all these challenges, we must show more solidarity and cooperate more, but under no circumstances give in to fruitless initiatives. To achieve this, we must also be clear-sighted about the situation of the poorest and middle-income countries, be they in Africa, South America, Asia or the Pacific. The pandemic has further deepened inequalities, while the war and its consequences are compounding the difficulties for many of these countries. It is thus essential that the G20 meet the goal it set last year to raise \$100 billion from special drawing rights.

But we must be more ambitious and stronger. First based on the IMF's issuance of these special drawing rights, we must implement our commitments. So many countries, particularly in Africa, have still not received any of these funds, and we can no longer tell them that such and such a parliament is deadlocked or that a particular rule is a hindrance. It's impossible! We will not get there on time. But we must go even further as the difficulty is even bigger. We must increase reallocation of our drawing rights to 30% for the most vulnerable African countries and the poorest countries on the planet.

And along with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, we must re-examine our mechanisms, which are no longer suited to the current situation. The rules we apply today date back to the 1980s. The post-COVID-19 situation on our planet, with faster climate change and the collapse of biodiversity, and also due to imbalances stemming from the war, is increasing our solidarity requirements. We need a new financial pact with the South. That is our true front line, which must bring us together not against a shared enemy, not against false stories or revisions of history, but for the planet on which we all live and for equal opportunities for humanity.

That is our battle, one which unites us all. It simply requires us to make a little more effort, to respect our agreements, to be demanding and respectful of each other. But if together we cannot fight this battle, which is the real one, it will be the source of all future division and conflicts. I invite everyone who wants to build this new contract with us to attend the Paris Peace Forum on 11 November to prepare the G20 in Bali and move forward together, while never renouncing our shared values and guiding principles.

To get to the heart of things, let us not resign ourselves to the division of the world and increased threats to peace, let us not allow further crises to emerge, intractable conflicts to flourish and weapons of mass destruction to proliferate. These are risks we will no longer be able to control in the future without involving the regional powers most directly concerned. And it is precisely this work of involving regional powers which we want to undertake in the Middle East by following up on the Baghdad Conference which we held in 2021, for the stability of Iraq, Lebanon and the entire region.

The P5 Members are no longer the only ones with a say. And that say, which they undeniably have, can now only be effective if we can work more broadly on the international consensus required for peace. That is why I would like us to finally begin Security Council reform to make it more representative, enable it to welcome new permanent members and to continue playing its full role by restricting the use of veto rights in the event of

mass atrocities. We must work together to build peace and the modern international order to serve the goals of our Charter. On this path, the United Nations can unfailingly rely on France. And on this path, each country here today can do so too.

Thank you very much.