

ADDRESS TO THE 76TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

(21 SEPTEMBER 2021, NEW YORK)

Esteemed President,

Distinguished Heads of State and Government,

Honourable Secretary General,

Dear Delegates,

On behalf of myself and my Nation, I greet you with my most heartfelt feelings.

I wish the 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly to be beneficial to our countries and to all humanity.

I am very pleased to be at the General Assembly again after two years and to address you, my dear friends.

As humanity, in the last two years, we really went through painful days.

We lost 4.6 million people, including our friends, relatives and loved ones, in the Covid-19 pandemic, qualified as the biggest health crisis of the last century.

Despite all the efforts displayed and the progress made in vaccination, we still witness the continuation of the negative effects of the pandemic.

It is in such an atmosphere that we are holding the 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

I do believe that the messages of solidarity and cooperation which we will convey here will not only support the fight against the pandemic, but also increase the hopes of billions of people who are going through difficult times.

Our General Assembly needs to be strengthened so that the international community can contribute more effectively to the solution of global issues.

I would like to express my gratitude to Mr. Volkan Bozkır, President of the 75th General Assembly, for his fruitful work towards that direction.

I do believe that Mr. Abdulla Shahid, who assumed the Presidency of the 76th General Assembly, will carry the flag he took over to greater heights.

As Turkey, we will continue to fulfil our responsibilities, so that the General Assembly can carry out its activities in the most efficient way.

On this occasion, I congratulate Mr. Guterres, who once again assumed the duty of United Nations Secretary General, and wish him continued success.

It is extremely fitting that this year's General Assembly is being organized under the theme "Building Resilience Through Hope".

First of all, I would like to express one reality, no matter how painful it may be.

Unfortunately, during this pandemic which reminded us again that we are one big family as humanity, the solidarity test did not go well.

Especially the underdeveloped countries and poor segments of society were literally left to their fate in the face of the pandemic.

The distorted structure of the global system, which rather creates problems instead of solutions, deepens those problems and condemns them to insolvency, also holds its share in the increased loss of life around the world.

At a time when millions of people have lost their lives and tens of millions of people are suffering in the grip of the virus, it is a disgrace for humanity that vaccine nationalism is still being carried on through different methods.

It is clear that a global disaster such as the Covid-19 pandemic can only be overcome through international cooperation and solidarity.

It is not possible for any country to survive safely on its own, before all countries are free from this pandemic.

We hope that the will which shall be displayed in the General Assembly will constitute a turning point in understanding this truth.

In addition to the importance of global cooperation during the pandemic, we had the opportunity to observe the high level that medical science has attained.

We took pride in the fact that the first vaccine approved by the World Health Organization has been developed by two scientists of Turkish origin, living in Germany.

We, as Turkey, have tried to share the capabilities at our disposal with our friends and brothers and sisters, from the first day, in line with our belief "let the people live so that the state can live".

While providing on one hand the best health service to our citizens, on the other hand, we also sent medical aid to 159 countries and 12 international organizations.

On this occasion, I would like to inform that we will offer in the near future our national vaccine, TURKOVAC, to the benefit of all humanity, together with our nation.

We support the initiatives towards strengthening the World Health Organization and preparing a convention against pandemics.

We also emphasize, in particular, that a reasonable balance should be established between the protection of public health and the continuation of social and economic life.

Distinguished Delegates,

The events that we lived through remind us of some realities again.

Our joys like our sorrows, our sufferings like our successes, and our problems like our solutions are common.

When one acts with a *fait accompli* logic, the entire humanity pays the bill, not just only certain major countries.

We witnessed lastly in Afghanistan, and in a very painful way, that problems cannot be solved by imposing methods that do not take into account the realities and the social fabric on the ground.

The people of Afghanistan have been left alone with the consequences of instability and conflicts that have lasted for more than 40 years.

Regardless of the political process, Afghanistan needs the help and solidarity of the international community.

We hope that peace, stability and security will be established in the country as soon as possible, and that the Afghan people will find relief.

As Turkey, we will continue to fulfil our fraternal duty towards the Afghan people during their difficult days.

Ten years have gone by in the humanitarian drama in Syria, which caused the death of hundreds of thousands of people and the displacement of millions of people before the eyes of the whole world.

While our country embraces close to four million Syrians, we are also combating on the ground terrorist organizations that have drowned the region in blood and tears.

We are the only NATO ally which has fought DAESH *corps-à-corps* and defeated this terrorist organization.

Again, with our presence on the ground, we were able to stop the massacres and ethnic cleansing activities committed by the PKK terrorist organization's extensions in Syria.

As a result of our efforts, and at the expense of martyrs, we were able to ensure the voluntary return of 462 thousand Syrians to the areas we provided safety for.

In a similar way, thanks to our presence in Idlib, we saved the lives of millions of people and prevented them from being displaced.

The international community cannot allow the Syrian crisis to linger on for another 10 years.

We need to display a stronger will to find a political solution to the problem, based on the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254, and in a way that will meet the expectations of the Syrian people.

We welcome the extension of the United Nations humanitarian assistance mechanism, which is delivered to north west of Syria via Turkey, for 12 months.

We hope that the conciliatory approach displayed on this issue will also be emulated in order to bring forward the political process, and ensure the voluntary, safe and dignified return of asylum seekers.

I would like to reiterate before you that making any distinction between terrorist organizations in the region and using them as subcontractors is unacceptable.

Acts of terrorism in different countries of the world over the past 10 years have shown that terrorism is not only our common enemy, but that of all mankind.

Our struggle against terrorist organizations that threaten the territorial integrity of Syria and our national security will continue with determination.

In our country, with the exception of Syrians, there are also migrants under various statuses, the number of which exceeds one million.

Because of developments in Afghanistan, we are faced with the possibility of an inflow of migrants also from this country in the last period.

As a country that saved human dignity in the Syrian crisis, we no longer have the potential, nor the tolerance to absorb new immigration waves.

On the basis of fair burden and responsibility sharing, it is high time for all stakeholders to do their part on this issue.

A concrete attitude now needs to be displayed against those who erode the 1951 Geneva Convention and international humanitarian law.

Distinguished Delegates...

Thanks to our strong support for international legitimacy in Libya, a ceasefire was declared, and then the Presidential Council and the National Unity Government were formed.

We will continue to support the efforts of the National Unity Government to provide public services, unify all institutions and organize elections in a timely manner.

I reiterate my call to the international community to stand by the legitimate government, which represents all regions of Libya.

One of the most important problems that fuels instability and threatens peace and security in our region is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

As long as the persecution of the Palestinian people continues, lasting peace and stability in the Middle East is not possible.

For this reason, occupation, annexation and illegal settlement policies must absolutely and immediately be brought to an end.

We will continue to stand up against the violation of the international status of Jerusalem which is based on the United Nations Resolution of 1947, and against violations of the sanctity of the Haram al-Sharif and of the rights of the Palestinian people.

The peace process and the vision of a two-state solution must be revived without further delay.

The establishment of an independent and contiguous Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital, on the basis of the 1967 borders, remains among our primary objectives.

Important steps have been taken recently with regard to stability in the Caucasus.

By using its right of self-defence, Azerbaijan has ended the occupation of its own territory, which has been the subject of Security Council decisions which were not implemented for years.

This development has also enabled the opening of new windows of opportunity in the region for lasting peace.

We are determined to support every positive step that will be taken by the parties.

We attach importance to the protection of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, including the Crimea, whose annexation we do not recognize.

Within China's territorial integrity perspective, we do believe that more efforts need to be displayed regarding the protection of the basic rights of the Muslim Uyghur Turks.

We maintain our stance in favour of solving the ongoing problem in Kashmir for 74 years, through dialogue between the parties and within the framework of relevant United Nations resolutions.

We also support ensuring the safe, voluntary, dignified and permanent return of Rohingya Muslims, who are living in difficult conditions in camps in Bangladesh and Myanmar, to their motherland.

A fair, lasting and sustainable solution to the Cyprus issue is possible only through a result-oriented, realistic approach.

While the leader of one of the two peoples on the Island, which the United Nations considers as equal, can address you, it is not fair that the other leader cannot make his voice heard on this platform.

For a solution, it is necessary to reaffirm the sovereign equality and equal international status of the Turkish Cypriot people, who are the co-owners of the Island.

We support the new vision put forward by the Turkish Cypriot people for a solution.

I hereby call on the international community to evaluate the views of the Turkish Cypriots with an open mind and without prejudice.

The continuation of the calm environment in Eastern Mediterranean is in our common interest.

We hope that the problems regarding maritime boundary delimitation will be resolved within the framework of international law and good neighbourly relations.

For this, it is necessary, first of all, to abandon the understanding whereby Turkey, which has the longest coast in Eastern Mediterranean, is ignored in the region.

Our proposal to organize an "Eastern Mediterranean Conference", in which all actors in the region will take part for dialogue and cooperation, is still on the table.

Similarly, we believe that the problems in the Aegean Sea should be resolved through a bilateral dialogue.

We also maintain our determination in the European Union membership process.

We are in solidarity with the Continent and the African Union also today, drawing on the strength of our deep-rooted ties with Africa, which dates back centuries.

With this understanding, we continue our efforts to hold the Third Turkey-Africa Partnership Summit in Turkey in the upcoming period.

With our Asia Anew initiative, we are consolidating Turkey's unifying position between Europe and Asia.

Likewise, we attach great importance to developing our relations with Latin America and the Caribbean region, on bilateral and multilateral platforms.

Turkey has been and will continue to be alongside every step taken towards a safer, peaceful, prosperous and equitable world for everyone.

Distinguished Delegates...

While the Earth embraces millions of living species on its soil, it only expects us to respect the balance of nature in return for this generosity.

Unfortunately, mankind has recklessly used the resources the earth offered to us, in search of progress and development which it pursued throughout history.

At the end of this process which lasted for centuries, we are now facing threats entirely caused by man, outside nature's own balance.

The problems, which we may regroup under headings such as climate change, air pollution, water and food security, loss of biodiversity, have reached an extent that will steer the future of humanity into uncertainty.

Among these headings, climate change is one we should particularly focus on, as, beyond being an environmental problem, it leads to irreparable consequences.

Greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, which have increased by 50 percent compared to the pre-industrial period, literally elevate the world's temperature.

Indeed, for some time now, disasters have been occurring all over the world, caused by an increase of 1.1 degrees Celsius, compared to the pre-industrial period.

We are experiencing unusual events such as floods in Asia and Europe, hurricanes in America, drought in Africa, fires in the Mediterranean basin, rain fall on the peak of Greenland and snowfall in the deserts.

These disasters, not only cause damage to the environment and the ecosystem, but also threaten people's lives and properties.

In many places, people are collectively preparing to go to other places, to migrate.

The World has still not found a solution to the refugee problem caused by conflict-prone crisis regions such as Syria and Afghanistan.

At this time, we do not know how to deal with the migration of hundreds of millions of people, due to factors such as drought, food shortages and meteorological events.

The greatest impact of climate change will be seen on the populations living in the centres of big cities.

For example, the city of New York where we are now, has gone through difficult days as it has suffered from giant hurricanes within only a two-week time span, which in turn caused rainfalls witnessed only once every 500 years.

The destruction caused by the rains affecting the west of Europe has yet to be repaired.

Although we, as Turkey, produce the most rapid and effective solutions in this regard, we also had quite difficult days.

A significant part of the world infrastructure is a product of the last two centuries.

It is not possible to handle the ramifications of climate change with this infrastructure.

The continued rise in global temperatures, hence expectations for more intense rainfalls, must steer all of us towards new pursuits.

For example, it has now become mandatory for urban plans to be designed by taking into account the consequences caused by climate change.

Another danger awaiting our world is that forests, being among the most important carbon sinks, are now facing extinction due to land use on the one hand and fires on the other.

Another area affected by the increase in temperature is our seas.

Expanding water and melting glaciers have raised sea levels by 20 centimetres over the past century.

This figure is the fastest increase during the last three thousand years.

If effective measures are not taken and greenhouse gas emissions continue to increase, sea levels are expected to rise by more than one meter by the end of this century.

Such a rise means that an important part of coastal cities and island states will be wiped out from maps.

Of course, this situation will also be accompanied by new and massive waves of migration.

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that all these problems have come up only with a 1.1 degree Celsius increase in temperature.

I leave it to you to consider what we may encounter when this increase goes up to 1.5 Celsius, 2 Celsius and more.

Distinguished Delegates...

Thus, after all these developments, as world states, we came together in 2015 to fight climate change and agreed upon the Paris Climate Agreement.

The aim of the agreement is to limit global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius by the middle of the century.

However, the current trend shows that this is not quite possible, if precautions are not taken.

For this reason, first and foremost, it is compulsory for countries with historical accountability for the emergence of problems which led to climate change, to take responsibility.

It may be possible to prevent the coronavirus pandemic with the vaccines which we have developed.

However, it is out of question to find such a laboratory solution for climate change.

For this reason, also for climate change, we repeat our call that the "World is Bigger than Five", which we voice at every opportunity.

Whoever has done the most damage to nature, to our atmosphere, our water, our soil and the earth, and whoever has wildly exploited natural resources, should also make the greatest contribution to the fight against climate change.

Unlike the past, this time no one has the right to say "I am powerful, I do not pay the bill".

Because climate change treats mankind quite fairly.

It treats everyone the same, regardless of difference between European-Asian, American-African, rich and poor.

The duty for all of us is to take measures against this threat, with a fair burden-sharing, and to fulfil our obligations quickly.

As Turkey, we act with this understanding.

We are among the first countries to have signed the Paris Climate Agreement.

However, we had not yet put this agreement into effect, due to the injustices related to obligations.

I would like to announce to the whole world, here from the United Nations General Assembly, the decision we have taken following the progress made within this framework recently.

We plan to present the Paris Climate Agreement for approval to our Assembly next month, within the framework of our national determination contribution statement and in conformity with the positive steps which will be taken.

Before the United Nations Climate Change Conference, which will be held in Glasgow, we envisage to complete the ratification phase of the "carbon neutral" targeted agreement.

We consider this process, which will lead to radical changes in our investment, production and employment policies, as one of the main elements of our 2053 vision.

Of course, we have other steps with respect to climate change.

We prepared the action plan necessary for harmonization with European Union's Green Deal and put it into effect in the past months.

With the "zero waste" project led by First Lady, H.E. Emine Erdoğan, we increased our recycling rate by nine points in three years.

We increased our sink areas by increasing our forest assets from 20.8 million hectares to approximately 23 million hectares.

We increased the share of renewable energy sources in our electricity generation capacity to 53 percent.

We have been promoting the steps that will structure our industry in accordance with cleaner production activities for a long time.

We are determined to bring these efforts forward by receiving the necessary financial support.

Turkey is not indifferent to any global problem, crisis or call, and will also do its part on climate change and environmental protection.

Before I end my speech, I would like to reiterate our belief that “a fairer world is possible”, despite the difficulties we face.

In this vein, we continue to view the United Nations as the unique platform for solving issues that concern the entire humanity.

Our new Turkish House building located right in front of this building, which we inaugurated yesterday, is a testimony of our trust in the United Nations system.

As a country with one of the five largest diplomatic networks in the world, we have a strong presence in the field and at the table for conscientious and fair solutions in a very wide geography.

We can build a world of peace, stability, prosperity and happiness together.

I once again would like to greet you all on behalf of my nation, and wish the 76th General Assembly success.

May you remain in good health...