

Statement
by His Excellency Mr. Petro Poroshenko, the President of Ukraine,
during the General Debate of the 71st session
of the United Nations General Assembly
(21 September 2016, New York)

Distinguished Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of Ukraine, I sincerely congratulate honourable Mr. Peter Thomson on his election as President of the 71st session of the United Nations General Assembly.

I pledge Ukraine's full support for all your endeavours.

In one of the worst years of the 20th century, Ernest Hemingway wrote an inspiring humanistic novel.

In the epigraph to the novel, he quoted English poet John Donne [Донн]:

*"No man is an island,
Entire of itself,
Every man is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.¹
Any man's death diminishes me,
Because I am involved in mankind..."*

These words embodied the essence of moral and historical transformation the humanity underwent in the wake of the two world wars of the 20th century.

We entered the third millennium with a strong sense of being united – as a new humankind for which there is no such thing as 'someone else's pain'.

What has happened to this feeling?

Where has it gone?

Where has the drive to isolate oneself on an "island" come from?

Why is it that new politicians come to power on various continents calling to ignore someone else's pain?

Why is that cynicism, not seen since the times of Hemingway's novel, has settled down in our lives under the guise of pragmatism?

What does make Evil so strong and Good so weak nowadays?

¹ В епіграфі далі йде фраза: "if a Clod bee washed away by the Sea, Europe is the lesse, as well as if a Promontorie were, as well as if a Mannor of thy friends or of thine owne were;"

"No man is an island" – this is also about those in power.

This is also about our Organization.

Mr. President,

In these days, the world has been driven to more and more instability.

Some have been affected more, some less.

But never since the end of the Cold War have international norms and principles been unilaterally defied on such a scale and with such brutality.

The Charter of the United Nations – the document underpinning our responsibility for maintaining the world order – has never been questioned.

And never has a Security Council member been a major violator of the UN Charter while being at the same time the instigator of, and active participant in, a conflict as well as its mediator.

As a result, global instability is no longer a subject of academic debates.

This is actually the biggest threat facing humanity nowadays.

Our future, the future of our children and our Organization depend directly on how we manage to overcome this threat.

I see only two ways out of this situation:

- either we recognize the problem and spare no efforts to address it on the basis of shared values and principles,
- or deceive ourselves by the illusion of stability, turn a blind eye to obvious facts and leave the future of the United Nations – this unique platform for common action – at the mercy of one player who blatantly violates the UN Charter.

In the latter case, we will shortly face severe disappointment.

The price for this short-sightedness has long been known –it is human lives.

In the last century, humanity paid an enormous price following two world wars – about 70 million.

Isn't it enough?

Hence, I wish to reiterate – we can no longer afford the Security Council deadlocked on key issues of international peace and security.

Limiting the use of the "veto" power in decision-making on conflict prevention and resolution should become a priority task within the Security Council reform.

The suspension of the use of veto in cases of mass atrocities, as well as in cases when a UN Security Council member state is a party to a dispute, should become a rock-solid rule without exceptions.

The Council must become a truly democratic and representative body free from the relics of the past.

There is a critical need to make our Organization capable of addressing effectively acts of aggression and to bring those responsible to justice.

Otherwise, no nation, no UN Member State can enjoy sustainable security and development.

Another threat to international peace and security that requires urgent attention of the world community is hybrid wars.

As President of the state, which has become a testing ground for new methods of hybrid warfare, I already drew international attention to this threat at the last session of the General Assembly.

Over the past year, the practice of hybrid warfare has only spread.

Its effects have been seen in Europe, America and beyond.

Political pressure, blatant propaganda, interference with electoral processes, economic coercion, secret subversive and military operations, cyber attacks, misuse of diplomatic measures – these are modern unconventional methods of undeclared wars.

It is time for the Security Council to go resolutely and effectively into this issue.

Ukraine is ready to further the discussion on what and how the Council can do to tackle this threat.

In view of the recent developments on the Korean peninsula, the future of the nuclear non-proliferation regime is a cause of increased concern for my country.

As you well know, Ukraine voluntarily dismantled its own nuclear arsenal, the third largest in the world at the time with from 2800 to 4200 tactical nuclear warheads, in exchange for security, sovereignty and territorial integrity assurances under the 1994 Budapest Memorandum.

Regretfully, all these assurances remained just a piece of paper. Let's be frank, we failed to pass exam with the Budapest memorandum. Then democratic world lost its first battle – it was not only about Ukraine, but also about credibility of agreements.

However, Ukraine as a responsible international actor has always been and remains a committed advocate of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.

Thus, timely and effective action of the international community – the Security Council in the first place – in response to the North Korean nuclear test is one more exam for all of us.

We must not allow plunging the world into a new nuclear arms race.

Huge global instability and ever-growing security challenges increasingly demand strong leadership both in states and in international organizations.

The United Nations is no exception.

This year, we will appoint the next UN Secretary General.

I believe that the candidate for this important position, in addition to his or her highly professional skills, must be:

First, uncompromised on respect for the UN Charter;

Second, ready to use decisively all tools at his or her disposal, including those provided under Article 99 of the UN Charter, in case of a threat to peace and security.

We expect that both the Security Council and the General Assembly will make the right choice.

Ukraine, as a current non-permanent member of the Security Council, will work consistently to this end.

Mr. President,

This year, we have witnessed a gruesome series of terrorist attacks.

Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Burkina-Faso, Turkey, Belgium, France, Germany – and this list unfortunately is not complete.

The tentacles of terrorism are wrapping more countries and continents.

It is obvious that such a large-scale threat can be confronted effectively only through joint efforts.

In this context, protection of critical infrastructure from terrorist attacks should become our joint endeavour.

Banking and finance, telecommunications, emergency services, air and railway transportation, energy and water supply – all will be put at risk.

Even worse, they can result in numerous victims among civilian population.

We'll continue calling for the Council's action in response to this growing problem.

In this regard, we welcome the initiative of the United Kingdom to convene a Security Council ministerial meeting to discuss terrorist threats to aviation security.

This should become a powerful signal that the Council is ready to act resolutely to prevent future tragedies.

Tragedies like the downing by the terrorists of the Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17 over Donbas two years ago.

The scrupulous technical investigation carried out by an international team made it possible not only to uncover details but also to put together the whole picture of this horrible crime.

Now we have to ensure the proper implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 2166, regardless of Russia's shameful veto on a decision to establish an international tribunal under the UN aegis.

The joint team composed of Malaysia, the Netherlands, Australia, Belgium and Ukraine continues the criminal investigation.

We must set up an efficient mechanism to bring to justice all those responsible for this catastrophe.

Our moral duty is to ensure that not only perpetrators but also masterminds of this crime whose orders killed 298 innocent people be punished accordingly for what they did.

Mr. President,

Since 2014, Ukraine has learned from its own tragic experience what foreign-grown terrorism feels like.

The terrorist component of the undeclared hybrid war that Russia wages against Ukraine is evident.

Dramatically, it has become a daily routine in the occupied areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine.

For over two years of this tragedy, Ukraine has received extensive and irrefutable evidence of direct involvement of Russia, its state agencies and officials in financing, sponsorship, and coordination of terrorist groups which have committed countless crimes against my compatriots.

The shocking reality is that there is a roughly 38,000-strong illegal military force in Donbas and its large part is regulars and mercenaries from Russia.

This force is armed to the teeth by Russia.

And this is no exaggeration – they have at their disposal some 475 tanks, 948 armoured vehicles, 208 multiple launch rocket systems.

Russia keeps sending weapons, ammunition and manpower to Ukraine through the uncontrolled part of the Ukrainian-Russian state border.

Sending by roads and by rail, on a daily basis.

At the same time, the Russian side continues insisting at all forums, including the UN, that it has nothing to do with all of this and that the Russians are not there in Ukraine.

Even hypocrite Soviet leaders could hardly compete with the outright lies and manipulations deployed by the Kremlin today.

Yes, they used to threaten the world with using nuclear weapons, just like Russia is doing now.

However, when shown the US intelligence aerial photos, even Khrushchyov could not but recognize that the Soviet missiles were stationed in Cuba.

Today, in response to thousands of available photos, videos, eyewitness and other evidence of the Russian military presence in Donbas, Russia only goes over and over again with a cynical recitation "We are not there".

Russia used to say the same about Crimea. "We are not there". And then a sham referendum was conducted at the Russian gunpoints. And a few days ago, a contradictory statement by Russian president that Crimea was annexed "in accordance with the UN Charter".

Do we really refer to the same Charter?

This is not merely disrespect for centuries-long principles of international relations, written and unwritten legal and ethical rules. This is downgrading of diplomacy as such.

I believe it is time for our Organization to work out serious safeguards against abuses of trust of the world community by some UN member states.

It is necessary to elaborate mechanisms how to officially document evidence of the aggression of one country against another and to envisage clear responsibility for the aggressor in line with the UN Charter principles.

In its third year, the aggression against my country continues bringing pain and suffering to the Ukrainian people.

2,000 people have been killed over the past year.

The total death toll of this war in the heart of Europe inflicted on us has amounted to 10,000 people.

Hundreds of hostages remain in unlawful captivity in Donbas and in Russia.

I was shocked to know that recently Russia-backed illegal armed formations in the occupied areas of Donbas took children hostages.

They showed a video of interrogation of teenagers who they absurdly accuse of conspiring and carrying out subversive operations.

This behaviour is out of place in the 21 century.

We call UNICEF to intervene and prevent abuses and tortures of these children.

Another heartbreaking story.

A few days ago, one Ukrainian hostage, volunteer, Volodymyr Zhemchugov, was eventually set free.

After one year in captivity without proper medical assistance, this completely blind man without hands said the words which are a quintessence of what is happening in Donbas.

I quote: "I am a native of Donbas, an ethnic Russian, a former miner. But, people like me in Donbas, patriots of Ukraine, were not fooled by Russian propaganda. We started to resist Russian occupation, to resist the country that set off the war against Ukraine". However, he expressed strong belief that soon peace will be restored on his native land – Donbas - and people will return to a normal life.

In this regard, I would like to emphasize once and again – Ukraine remains committed to the settlement of the situation in Donbas by political and diplomatic means.

We are a peaceful nation.

It was never – under any circumstances – our intention to start any conflicts with our neighbors.

Over the past year, we have consistently demonstrated – in deed – that we are ready to move forward on implementation of the Minsk agreements, a comprehensive peace plan agreed in September 2014 and confirmed in February 2015.

Yet, we have constantly faced resistance of the Kremlin and its proxies who do their best to delay the peace process and to shift responsibility for their own destructive actions onto Ukraine.

We rely that Russia will abandon this approach to give a chance to the comprehensive settlement.

Let me stress again: the Minsk documents entail, by and large, clear guidelines for each side on what must be done.

Ukraine has done a lot and will continue doing its part.

Now it is time for Russia and its proxies in the Ukrainian Donbas to start implementing their part:

Set the captives free, stop shooting, withdraw weapons, let the OSCE carry out its mandate and watch over the Ukrainian-Russian border without hindrance, withdraw Russian weaponry as well as regular and irregular military units.

The occupying state does not limit itself to combat actions in Donbas only. It also carries on its repressive policy in Crimea.

Once thriving and free, now the Crimean peninsula has become a “grey zone” where people are effectively deprived of all protection.

The judicial and penitentiary systems in Crimea have been converted by Russia into a tool of repressions.

As has been already the case so many times in history, most of the victims are Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians.

The latest stroke in this picture is the ban by the Russian occupation authorities on the activities of the Mejlis, the self-governing body of the Crimean Tatar people.

Add to this the arbitrary detention of Ilmi Umerov, Deputy Head of the Mejlis, in a psychiatric facility for 20 days.

In fact, the outrageous practice of punitive psychiatry, which had been widely used by the Soviet repressive machinery, is now back in service for Russia.

We urge Russia to grant unimpeded access of international human rights organizations to both Crimea and Donbas, and implement the decision of UNESCO Executive Board on establishing monitoring in Crimea at the institutional level.

The residents of the peninsula must be protected from discrimination and repressions.

The genocide of the Crimean Tatar people who already experienced the tragedy of forced deportation 70 years ago must not repeat.

In Ukraine, we highly appreciate the contribution of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN Human Rights Council to addressing the current human rights situation in my country, including in occupied Crimea.

This year, we intend to bring this matter to the attention of the UN General Assembly and to submit a respective draft resolution on the human rights situation in the territory of the occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol.

This resolution shall become an impartial assessment of the human rights situation in the occupied territories by the entire UN family.

People in these territories have the right to be protected.

Their children have the right to be protected.

And it is our responsibility, as the United Nations, to protect them.

I appeal to all UN member states to support the initiative of Ukraine.

We also urge you not to recognize the legitimacy of the Russian elections, which were held a few days ago in the occupied Crimea.

If you do recognize them this will play into the hands of the aggressor and encourage further repressions.

One more problem, which emanates from Russia's occupation of Crimea, is its intentions to deploy tactic nuclear weapons and means of delivery in the occupied peninsula.

This would destroy the global system of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and brutally violate Ukraine's non-nuclear status.

Moreover, Russia uses temporarily occupied Crimea for projecting its aggressive policies not only in Ukraine but also in other corners of the world, including in Syria where these policies go hand in hand with war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Today, the entire democratic world is deeply concerned with human rights violations and dire sufferings of the civilian population in Syria.

I believe that the full implementation of the 2012 Geneva Communiqué and the Security Council Resolution 2254 is vital for the settlement of this protracted and bloody conflict.

We draw particular attention to the need to remove a threat of use of chemical weapons in this country.

Our urgent priority is to improve the humanitarian situation and ensure access of the international humanitarian organizations to Aleppo and other cities in need.

We welcome the special meeting of the UN Security Council on Syria this morning, where I had an opportunity to express our views on this important issue.

I hope that this discussion will lead to meaningful decisions and tangible steps towards alleviating the plight of the Syrians.

Africa is yet another continent, which continues to suffer from numerous unresolved conflicts and requires our particular attention.

It should finally be seen as what it actually is – as a continent with untapped potential and opportunities for the rest of the world, rather than as a burden, as it used to be for many decades after centuries of colonialism and exploitation.

My country will spare no effort to support the African continent, and our African partners can fully count on Ukraine, including within the Security Council.

Mr. President,

Despite the ongoing challenges facing Ukraine, my country is fully committed to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, which were adopted by the UN General Assembly last year.

We keep on working to fulfil our commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals at the national level, in particular those related to ensuring healthy environment and sustainable energy supply, promoting gender equality, and fighting corruption.

As a member of the “Friends on Climate Change” group, Ukraine has contributed to reaching consensus on a universal agreement on climate change.

We have completed ratification procedures related to the Paris Agreement in a very short time, and deposited our instrument of ratification during today’s High-Level Event.

This year, we have also reached an important landmark – the completion of the UN Action Plan on Chernobyl as well as the Decade of Recovery and Sustainable Development of the Affected Regions.

However, there is a clear need for continued international efforts to mitigate the impact of the disaster at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant as well as to complete the respective projects.

I am pleased to note that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development addresses one of the biggest current problems – migration.

In recent years, we have witnessed unprecedented mass movements of refugees, asylum-seekers, migrants and internally displaced persons.

It is hard to imagine but today there are roughly 65 million forcibly displaced persons all over the world, including over 21 million refugees, 3 million asylum-seekers and over 41 million internally displaced persons.

Unfortunately, the above number of IDPs includes some 1.8 million of my compatriots who fled Donbas occupied and devastated by Russia.

No doubt, our main responsibility is to save lives of people and ensure protection to those who need it.

However, to respond to this global challenge in a comprehensive manner, we must address the root-causes of this phenomenon.

They include, first and foremost, armed conflicts, terrorism, sectarianism, and poverty. The New York Declaration we just adopted is the first step in this direction.

My government is committed to protecting the IDPs and has undertaken crucial measures to strengthen the national response mechanisms.

Particular attention has been paid to ensuring means of living for IDPs, as well as improving access to health care, education, housing and employment.

Mr. President,

70 years ago, one of the founding fathers of the United Nations, Prime Minister Winston Churchill said at the Westminster College:

"Our difficulties and dangers will not be removed by closing our eyes to them. They will not be removed by mere waiting to see what happens; nor will they be removed by a policy of appeasement".

These words have not lost their relevance today, either.

Churchill's vision of the United Nations as a vital "sinew of peace", as an essential policy foundation in international relations that must confront "*the two giant marauders – war and tyranny*", acquires a new reading for our times.

He called to "*adhere faithfully to the Charter of the United Nations and walk forward in sedate and sober strength seeking no one's land or treasure, seeking to lay no arbitrary control upon the thoughts of men*".

I trust that this very approach remains a powerful guide for all of us.

Moreover, it is the only possible way to preserve our unique Organization and prevent the world from the disaster of a new global catastrophe.

I thank you for your attention.