

UNGA72 AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL STATEMENT

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Mr President

The United Nations was founded in response to the horrors of World War II. Nations resolved to prevent a repeat of that catastrophic global conflict. Over the decades since, we have worked together to build an international rules-based order that ensures disputes can be resolved peacefully and that interests of less powerful nations can be protected from the overt or coercive pressure of more powerful states.

It dictates how nations should behave and towards each other. That order has supported and enabled the greatest economic expansion in human history.

There have been times over the past seven decades when the rules-based order has been under pressure.

We are now in a time when the challenges to that order are increasing.

The UN Security Council is the custodian of international peace, and security.

Yet the authority of the Council is being challenged, undermined, even ignored.

The most egregious example is North Korea.

The regime of Kim Jong Un is openly defying the UN Security Council.

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Its illegal nuclear and missile programs violate multiple UNSC resolutions. The security of millions of people is at risk as a result of North Korea's refusal to abide by international laws and norms.

The International Monitoring System of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty confirms that North Korea is the only state that is currently testing nuclear weapons and the only state to do so this century.

The Security Council has responded with tough new economic sanctions. It is crucial that all UN member states and especially the Permanent 5, who have a particular responsibility, strictly implement these sanctions to compel North Korea to abandon its illegal programs.

The authority of the Council must be defended and upheld.

Australia will play its part in helping to resolve this crisis.

We have already put in place a range of autonomous sanctions, beyond that mandated by the Security Council. We will explore further options, should North Korea continue its flagrant disregard of the views of the international community, as upheld by the Council.

The rules-based order is also being challenged by non-state actors, terrorism and violent extremism.

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Global terrorism – and the extreme Islamist ideologies driving it – must be confronted and defeated.

Many nations including Australia have suffered terrorist attacks.

We can most effectively combat and defeat terrorism if we work together, sharing our knowledge and resources.

Our work continued this week at a meeting of the Global Counter-terrorism Forum.

The use of chemical weapons presents another serious threat to the rules based order.

We know they were used in Syria.

Australia supports the work of the UN - and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons - in identifying those who deployed these appalling illegal weapons.

This work must continue.

Australia chairs the 42-member Australia Group, which works to prevent the spread of chemical and biological weapons.

Our rules based order has been supported by institutions and over the decades, UN peacekeepers have become the defining image of the UN response to conflict and security threats.

Fifteen peacekeeping missions are currently deployed across four continents.

Often they are the only authority preventing civil breakdown and lawlessness in countries already suffering from conflict, poverty and despair.

Australia has been a long-term supporter of UN peacekeeping.

Last week in Canberra we commemorated the 70th anniversary of the first such mission, noting that in 1947 Australia was the first nation to deploy into the field, military observers to the then-Dutch East Indies ceasefire. We have contributed to 20 more UN missions.

We support the work that is underway to ensure UN peacekeepers are better trained, better equipped, more effective and act with greater integrity.

Peacekeepers operate in dangerous and unpredictable environments and represent one of the most important global investments in peace and security.

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Australia welcomes the new UN Secretary General who has committed to reforming the UN, to make it more effective as the defender and upholder of the rules based order.

Australia fully supports Secretary General Guterres in that endeavour.

The UN must focus on conflict prevention as that is more effective than dealing with the tragic consequences of conflict.

UN management systems must be made more efficient and accountable.

There must be more women in senior positions.

To achieve reform, Secretary General Guterres needs the full support of member states.

The standing of the UN is maximised when we work together for the common good.

Recent successes prove this to be true – the global arms trade treaty, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Sustainable Development Goals.

If we are to meet the challenges of our age, we must be guided by a spirit of cooperation and compromise.

Central to our task is to achieve sustainable and inclusive development. The United Nations must play a more effective and agile role.

The UN development system should be more focused on sustainable economic development to provide employment opportunities and facilitate partnerships with the private sector.

Economic development and security are interlinked. One cannot be achieved without the other.

Each country has to find its own model for prosperity and stability. However there are many lessons to be learned from other nations, and much support is available for nations seeking to establish regulatory frameworks in particular, to support private investment that grows economies and generates employment.

Economic resilience can be undermined by natural and man-made disasters.

With the 2030 agenda, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction and the World Humanitarian Summit's Grand Bargain, there is a blueprint for global action on those problems which can only be addressed by working together on challenges that don't respect national borders.

These include climate change, diseases including malaria, managing our precious water resources and modern slavery.

It is an unpalatable truth that forced labour, child labour, human trafficking and modern slavery are rampant in the world today.

Australia has strongly committed to working with the international community to urgently address these egregious crimes.

Last month Australia and Indonesia jointly launched the world's first regional business government partnership to address modern slavery, and have continued our advocacy with other nations this week. We will end these abhorrent practices.

Australia is a strong supporter of the Paris Agreement, and here at the UN we have voiced our support specifically on risk mitigation for coral reefs, which are among the most valuable environments on our planet.

They support more biodiversity than almost any other ecosystem, are vital to the world's fisheries, protect our coastlines and generate significant tourism revenue. Coral reefs sequester four times more carbon than forests, and are a vital element in our global efforts to reduce emissions.

Worldwide, more than 30 coral reefs are listed as World Heritage sites, and 29 are under stress. As the custodians of the Great Barrier Reef and with our extensive experience in reef management, we are seeking to bring our expertise to other locations. We hope to serve on the World Heritage Council next year.

Australia has worked with other countries on each of these issues during the past week.

We are mindful that no matter how much we work on building strong, resilient societies, crises will still occur.

Australia has been a strong contributor to relief efforts in Iraq and Syria, as well as in South Sudan, Somalia and Yemen, where there are significant numbers of displaced people, at increasing risk of famine. Australia is also supporting those displaced by conflict in Rakhine State, Myanmar. We are contributing to funding life-saving food for up to 300,000 people.

Australia also seeks to serve, for the first time, on the UN Human Rights Council from next year.

I am grateful for the strong support from so many countries for our candidacy.

If elected, we will be a principled and pragmatic member of the Council.

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Australia will be the first nation on the Council from the South West Pacific.

We will have an agenda relevant to our region and globally.

Empowering women and girls to reach their full potential lifts a country's productivity and underpins stability.

We will support freedom of expression.

The number of journalists and human rights defenders detained, abused or killed each year should be of grave concern to us all.

We will support good governance and strong democratic institutions.

Similarly, we will promote strong, independent national rights institutions - to raise awareness of human rights, to address violations and to hold to account those responsible for abuses.

Australia is proud to be the home of the world's oldest continuous culture and we will strive to advance the human rights of indigenous peoples around the globe.

Australia reaffirms our commitment to the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

We will also work with other members to enhance the effectiveness of the Human Rights Council, so that its work can make a meaningful difference to the lives of individuals around the world.

The Council must remain relevant to the broader international agenda, making a contribution to building stable, prosperous and compassionate societies.

We all strive for an environment in which countries can grow and prosper, in which individuals can aspire to a life unburdened by the threat of violence and driven by a shared vision of peace, compassion and community.

Australia, for its part, will work with others to protect an international order that ensures all states can pursue their interests securely and that supports cooperative responses to global challenges.

The United Nations can become an even more powerful force for stability in an uncertain world.

It can live up to the ideals and universal principles on which it was founded.

The people of our world expect this body to inspire the best in human nature and that is our duty.

Thank you.