

Madam President of the General Assembly,
Mr Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Heads of State and government,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen

“There are no winners in a zero-sum game”

It is a great privilege for me to stand before you today in New York. If we are gathered here, it is because of those who believed, after the tragedy of the Second World War, that an international order based on rules and dialogue – rather than just relationships of power – would lead us to peace and prosperity.

They were right. Because given the considerable challenges and transformations we must face in the world today, no person and no country has the capacity to stand alone. I am thinking here about globalisation, inequality, war and internal conflict, about extremism, migration flows and climate change, about health crises, the digital revolution.

It is our shared responsibility, the responsibility of each and every UN member State, to ensure that international institutions and organisations are up to the task of supporting us in this endeavour.

Unfortunately, there seems to be a tendency at the moment to seek the answers to these problems in nationalist isolation and in a growing mistrust with regard to cooperation between States.

A new international order is taking shape, with new actors, and a new middle class. Between 1990 and 2015 – thus in a single generation – the number of people affected by extreme poverty fell from two billion to 700 million according to the World Bank.

What is of great concern to us today, however, is that these changes go hand in hand with an erosion of the international system founded on the rule of law.

We are witnessing a real crisis in multilateralism – paradoxically at the very moment when we are trying to forge the main pillars of the global governance of the future.

As a country that is interconnected and open to the world, Switzerland is aware of the value of a working international legal order based on exchange and multi-stakeholder dialogue.

Such an order guarantees stability and is consistent with Swiss values as they are set out in our Constitution.

Crises are under way in many parts of the world. And some of them have been going on for a very long time.

I am thinking in particular about the Middle East, where reengaging in dialogue is the only option. Switzerland is working for a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians based on a negotiated two-state solution and in compliance with international law and relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

In Syria, the conflict has entered its eighth year with no real end in sight. The basic rules and principles of international humanitarian law and human rights are not respected. And in recent months the conflict has intensified further on various fronts. In Syria, over 13 million men, women and children are dependent on humanitarian aid. It is essential that we step up our efforts to find a political solution to this conflict. Only a negotiated solution which includes all sectors of Syrian society can guarantee lasting peace and sustainable reconstruction in Syria and the region.

In Yemen, too, the conflict has been going on for years. Millions of people are deprived of water, food and medical care because of the armed conflict. Switzerland calls on all parties to cease hostilities and come to the negotiating table to seek solutions to end this humanitarian crisis.

And here Switzerland remains ready and willing to play its part. For example by hosting peace talks in Geneva under the auspices of the United Nations.

Large-scale health crises accompany all of these conflicts. The spread of diseases, especially in war zones and refugee camps, is a major burden on weakened or ruined health systems. In this regard, it is vital to protect healthcare facilities and personnel in order to maintain working health systems and access to medical care.

The UN is the cornerstone of peaceful coexistence between all States in compliance with the rules we set down together. The United Nations is indispensable and ideally placed to tackle contemporary challenges, especially the fight against inequality.

But to fulfil this role, the UN must be strong. If it intends to make the maximum impact with the means at its disposal, it must adapt to an ever-changing environment and constantly re-examine its working methods.

Switzerland is therefore an active supporter of the reform programmes launched by UN Secretary-General António Guterres. These reforms in the areas of peace and security, development and management aim to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of the United Nations in the face of the current global challenges.

Switzerland is determined to build a better multilateralism. This multilateralism must be able to go beyond the talking stage and provide a response to those who are looking to authoritarian, unilateral approaches for solutions to the weaknesses in the current system.

We are engaged on multiple fronts. Today I would like to address the following points:

First, on the Sustainable Development Goals:

Switzerland is working actively towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

It has been working to put in place a robust monitoring mechanism, which provides for voluntary national reviews and reporting on progress made towards achieving the goals. Specifically, we have contributed with other countries to provide better statistical data.

Switzerland is playing its part through innovative projects in the areas of healthcare, education, energy and innovation.

But efforts still need to be made to combat global warming and the negative environmental impacts of economic development.

And I take this opportunity to stress the essential contribution of culture, of cultural diversity, to building a sustainable and successful society. Culture enables and stimulates economic, social and environmental sustainability. Culture must therefore occupy a central place in development policies. In a statement this January in Davos, we highlighted culture's essential contribution to our lives and the importance of a high-quality built environment.

Second, the Human Rights Council and the International Criminal Court:
Respect for human dignity and fundamental rights is not optional, it is an obvious necessity for any stable and sustainable development.

Switzerland strongly supports the work of the Human Rights Council and that of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, both based in Geneva, to enable them to fulfil their duty to strengthen, promote and protect human rights in the world.

International cooperation is also essential to preventing conflict and establishing a framework for lasting peace. I would like to mention in particular the fight against impunity. Switzerland worked for the adoption of the Rome Statute and the creation of the International Criminal Court exactly 20 years ago. It will continue to support this unique international cooperative effort in favour of the victims of the most serious crimes.

Third, on Switzerland's good offices and Geneva:
Switzerland intends to continue to build bridges, to support negotiations and mediations, and to use its diplomacy of good offices to help countries and international and regional organisations to find a solution to conflicts and to make progress on certain issues.

For example, we have actively contributed to the Global Compact on Migration negotiation process and we are grateful for the trust placed in Switzerland. The management of migration flows at the global level is an enormous undertaking which necessitates the participation of all relevant stakeholders.

In Geneva, Switzerland makes all of the preparations needed so that discreet peace talks of the kind undertaken by the parties to the conflicts in Syria or Yemen can take place.

Geneva is also home to several UN agencies – the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) – in addition to numerous international organisations.

Geneva can therefore serve as a platform for dialogue on new challenges at the interface between politics, society, innovation, science and economy.

I am thinking in particular of the areas of internet governance and digitalisation. These topics develop and increasingly require synergies and dialogue between the traditional spheres of international action.

Policies relying on trade protectionism and selfish interests are enjoying a certain popularity at present. They would like us to believe that the world is a zero-sum game. That there are no winners without losers. However, today as in the past, withdrawal, protectionism, threats and violence will not provide answers to the dysfunctions and the disparities of the world in which we live.

Worse still, such policies can only lead to a fall in trade and, ultimately, a decline in prosperity. It nurtures mistrust and isolation, which obstruct the sharing of ideas and innovations. Our world will be all the poorer both spiritually and culturally. We will be able to draw on fewer ideas to face future challenges. We will no longer benefit from each other's success stories. And we will set off alone in search of solutions for problems that can only be solved together.

The current malaise warns us that we must do everything we can to prevent a world in which we only look out for ourselves and to encourage a world of cooperation between states in which we strive for the common good, for causes such as peace, sustainable development and environmental protection.

We can only overcome the challenges – and sources – of growing inequality, demographic change or migration if we approach them in a spirit of mutual trust.

All States are winners if we see others as potential partners instead of competitors. All States are stronger if the international situation is more stable.

The world is not a zero-sum game. It is a positive-sum game, where cooperation creates only winners.

Thank you.