

At UN, Syria slams US for 'supporting terrorism', thanks Russia for cooperation

Denouncing the United States for supporting terrorism and war crimes in his conflict-torn country, Syrian Deputy Prime Minister Walid Al-Moualem reported to the United Nations General Assembly on Saturday that the seven-year war is almost over, calling all those opposing President Bashar al-Assad terrorists.

"To the disappointment of some, here we are today, more than seven years into this dirty war against my country, announcing to the world that the situation on the ground has become more secure and stable and that our war on terror is almost over, thanks to the heroism, resolve, and unity of the people and the army, and to the support of our allies and friends," he told the Assembly on the fifth day of its annual general debate.

He delivered a withering attack on the US-led "illegitimate international coalition" supposedly formed to combat terrorism in Syria. "The so-called international coalition has done everything but fight terrorism," he said. "It has even become clear that the coalition's goals were in perfect alignment with those of terrorist groups; sowing chaos, death and destruction in their path."

"The coalition destroyed the Syrian city of Raqqa completely; it destroyed infrastructure and public services in the areas it targeted; it committed massacres against civilians, including children and women, which amount to war crimes under international law. The coalition has also provided direct military support to terrorists, on multiple occasions, as they fought against the Syrian army.

"It should have been more aptly named 'The Coalition to Support Terrorists and War Crimes'," he declared holding up Russia, as an example of legitimate international cooperation.

Mr. Moualem also denounced Turkey for supporting terrorism and committing direct aggression against towns in northern Syria in violation of the country's sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity as well as of international law.

"Since day one of the war on Syria, the Turkish regime has trained and armed terrorists, turning Turkey into a hub and a corridor for terrorists on their way to Syria," he said.

While he stressed that Syria had eliminated all its chemical weapons, he accused the rebels of using them to falsely incriminate the Government and provoke "wanton aggression" launched by the US, France, and the United Kingdom in April in response.

With the situation becoming ever more stable, Mr. Moualem invited the millions of refugees who have fled their homeland over the past seven years to return. "All conditions are now present for the voluntary return of Syrian refugees to the country they had to leave because of terrorism and the unilateral economic measures that targeted their daily lives and their livelihoods," he declared.

"The return of every Syrian refugee is a priority for the Syrian State. Doors are open for all Syrians abroad to return voluntarily and safely,' he said, adding that thanks to Russian help his Government will spare no effort to meet the basic needs of the returnees.

[Full statement available here.](#)

India 'will not let you fail' to reach Sustainable Development Goals, Foreign Minister tells UN

India is "totally committed" to achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) said Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj on Saturday, addressing the United Nations General Assembly's annual debate, promising to get there ahead of time, thanks to an "unprecedented economic and social transformation", now underway. India is "totally committed" to achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) said Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj on Saturday, addressing the United Nations General Assembly's annual debate, promising to get there ahead of time, thanks to an "unprecedented economic and social transformation", now underway.

Ms. Swaraj said that it had been a "common refrain" since the SDGs were agreed by 193 countries in 2015, that it would only be possible to reach the 17 Goals, if India was fully onboard.

"I assure this august gathering...that India will not let you fail", she said, adding that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the "world's biggest exercise in poverty elimination and social transformation" – in line with key goals on poverty, equality and economic development – was already showing results.

She pointed to the recent inclusion of more than 320 million Indians in the formal banking system, the launch only last week of "the world's biggest health insurance programme", and a housing scheme which was on target to provide 21 million new homes by 2022. At the heart of it all, she said, was the "radical" empowerment of women, with "the welfare of women" at the core of all socio-economic development initiatives.

Turning to what she called, “the existential threats of climate change and terrorism”, Ms. Swaraj urged developed nations who had “exploited nature for their immediate needs” to help “lift the deprived, with financial and technical resources”, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in line with the [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change.

In the fight against international terrorism, she accused neighbouring Pakistan of duplicity: “Pakistan’s commitment to terrorism as an instrument of official policy has not abated one bit”, she claimed.

On the state of peace talks between the two States, she said that it was “a lie” that India had been responsible for sabotaging the process. “Talks with Pakistan have begun many times. If they stopped, it was only because of Pakistan’s behaviour,” she said, claiming that it was Pakistan sabotaging any hopes of dialogue. Even this past week, she said she had been obliged to cancel a meeting suggested by Pakistan’s Foreign Minister at UN Headquarters in New York, after “terrorists” had allegedly killed three Indian soldiers, asking delegates in the Assembly: “Does this indicate a desire for dialogue?”

Finally, Ms. Swaraj moved on to reform of the United Nations, which is a key priority of [Secretary-General António Guterres](#). “Reform cannot be cosmetic,” she said: “We need change to the institution’s head and heart to make both compatible to contemporary reality.”

She said “the importance, influence, respect and value of this institution is beginning to ebb” but also made a rousing defence of multilateralism, saying that reform was essential if it was to thrive.

“We will never weaken the multilateral mechanism. India believes that the world is a family, and the best means of resolution is shared discourse...The UN cannot be run by the ‘I’, it only works by the ‘We’”.

[Full statement available here.](#)

[UN Chief praises efforts to reduce tension on Korean Peninsula](#)

UN Secretary-General, [António Guterres](#), has welcomed the latest efforts made towards building trust and reducing military tension on the Korean Peninsula, following his meeting with North Korea’s Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho on Friday, during High-Level week of the General Assembly.

In a [statement](#), the UN chief expressed hope that recent positive developments, in particular the important summits between the leaders of North Korea, officially known as the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea

(DPRK) and South Korea (officially the Republic of Korea), and between North Korea and the United States, will contribute to “an atmosphere conducive to advancing sustainable peace and complete and verifiable denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions.”

The conversation with Ri Yong Ho took place the day after the US Secretary of State chaired a ministerial level Security Council meeting on North Korea.

During that meeting, Mike Pompeo said that North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and President Donald Trump “share a common, personal understanding of what must take place” to transform relations between the two countries.

The Secretary-General pledged his “commitment and readiness of the United Nations system to further assist the parties in any way they deem appropriate.”

[Massive earthquake in Indonesia leaves hundreds dead: UN chief ‘deeply saddened’](#)

Following a major, 7.5 magnitude earthquake in Indonesia’s Central Sulawesi province on Friday, the United Nations Secretary General [António Guterres](#) has said he’s “deeply saddened” by the “terrible loss of life” and injuries from the disaster.

Casualty numbers are expected to rise, and thousands of buildings in the city of Palu, Central Sulawesi, have collapsed. A tsunami was also triggered by the earthquake, generating waves of up to 3 metres (10 feet) high, according to reports.

Rescue efforts are reportedly underway, but are hampered by a major power cut, and a landslide that has blocked the main road to Palu.

The UN chief has extended his condolences to the families of the victims and to the Government of Indonesia, adding that the United Nations stands ready to support the Government-led ongoing rescue and relief efforts.

On Day four of UN Assembly debate, leaders from vulnerable island States turn out in force to plead for climate action

Island States have spoken on previous days, but on Friday a total of 10 island leaders took turns explaining to world Heads of State and Government not only the catastrophic impacts of climate change caused by centuries of industrial pollution from northern nations, but the disadvantages they face in the financial domain as soon as they improve the lot of their people.

A jumble of acronyms, but little action

As soon as a country [graduates](#) from the status of low income country – or [least developed country](#) (LDC) in UN parlance – with an annual per capita gross national income (GNI) below \$1,005, to middle-income country (MIC), with a GNI between \$1,005 and \$12,235, it loses access to concessionary financing, as St. Lucia's Prime Minister Allen Michael Chastanet [explained](#), noting the acronyms weighing down his Caribbean State.

"I stand before you today as a leader of a [small Island developing State](#) – a SIDS, which is also a middle- income country – a MIC,' he said.

"The world acknowledges our 'acronyms,' but little or nothing changes... We continue to struggle under the weight of international frameworks that do not provide an enabling environment for my country to chart an effective sustainable development path, or even to be able to take control of our own destiny."



UN Photo/Kim Haughton

Paris Accord can help turn the tide to fund climate action

From the Pacific island nation of Samoa, Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, said it was a [moral imperative](#) for the world to act decisively

and collectively, calling for full implementation of the [Paris climate accord](#) that seeks to keep the increase in global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels.

“Climate change poses the single greatest threat especially to small Island developing states like Samoa, not through our doing or choice,” he said, alluding to the fact those most vulnerable to climate change’s impact are those who contributed least to global warming.

“The Pacific region is already facing the destructive impacts of climate change and disasters – cyclones, floods, droughts. Sea level rise and ocean acidification are taking their toll on the health and the wellbeing of our peoples, environment and economies. Disaster-related economic losses in Pacific island countries as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) are higher than almost anywhere else in the world,” he added.

“The United Nations remains our last best hope to provide the political will and the necessary commitment to turn the tide against climate change.”



UN Photo/Kim Haughton

From the Indian Ocean, Prime Minister Pravind Kumar Jugnauth of Mauritius [took a global view](#) of the issue.

“As we have seen in California, the Carolinas, the Philippines, China, Europe and elsewhere, the frequency of extreme weather events demonstrates that the impacts of climate change can affect every country on every continent. Hurricanes, floods, droughts, and wildfires are becoming deadlier,” he warned.

“Without a renewed global commitment to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change and adapt to its effects we will fail to meet the targets of the Paris Agreement, and endanger our planet as well as our own survival.”

On cue, Tropical Storm Kirk barrels down on the Caribbean

Prime Minister Hubert A. Minnis of the Bahamas [highlighted](#) the enormous dangers facing the Caribbean islands, with economies dependent on tourism under dire threat.

“We see this in rising sea levels, the loss of coral reefs, the increased

volume of acid in our oceans, and more severe and frequent hurricanes and typhoons,” he said.

“Tourism is the world’s largest industry. It is also the lifeblood of the Bahamian economy. Millions of tourists travel to the Bahamas annually because of our beautiful turquoise waters and biodiversity,” he added, stressing the vital importance of the sustainable use of the world’s seas and oceans free from pollution, especially of plastics.

We see this in rising sea levels, the loss of coral reefs, and more severe and frequent hurricanes and typhoons – *Prime Minister Hubert of the Bahamas*

For fellow Caribbean leader, Prime Minister Timothy Harris of St. Kitts and Nevis, it was the unfairness of island States [paying for the sins of polluters](#) from elsewhere. “Climate change is largely the consequence of actions of more developed countries, their carbon emissions and harmful lifestyles. Yet SIDS pay an unfair price – a price so high that, for many of us, climate change presents an existential threat.”

He too criticized the financial quirk that punished middle-income countries for their progress. “We reiterate our calls for the international community to address with urgency the sterile measure of per capita income now employed,” he said.

“The international community cannot on the one hand claim to help SIDS while in the same vein classify us as middle- and high-income countries based on archaic financial models that ultimately deny access to critical developmental assistance and hinder investment financing.”



UN Photo/Manuel Elias

Prime Minister Prime Minister Timothy Harris of Saint Kitts and Nevis addresses the seventy-third session of the United Nations General Assembly.

It was a theme taken up by fellow Caribbean leader, Prime Minister Mia Amor Mottley of Barbados. “Barbados, the Caribbean and other small islands have had to [confront the reality](#) that our percentage in trade of goods and services is miniscule, but we are bound by the same rules that apply to those who dominate and can distort global trade,” she said.

“Small States like mine were shepherded out of agriculture and told that services were the route we should use for development. My country, for example, tried financial services pursuant to double taxation treaties, utilizing due diligence, operating a clean jurisdiction that is not a tax haven and complying with Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) requirements.

“Now we are being told our tax practices are harmful and unfair competition to those who still enjoy the bulk of the revenues in global trade and service.”

As if pre-planned to highlight climate change’s devastating effects, Tropical Storm Kirk churned past her country even as she addressed the Assembly, and she left UN Headquarters to return home.

[We] strongly urge the largest emitters of greenhouse gasses to take urgent actions in reducing this harmful emission. Reduce now or regret later – *Prime Minister Houenipwela of Solomon Islands*

But before she departed, Mrs. Motley, the island nation’s first woman Prime Minister, used the podium to make a fervent appeal for recognition of women’s role in humanity’s progress.

“This United Nations must show leadership in recognizing the talents and contributions of women to human civilization and progress,” she told the Assembly, explain that women have value and give much, whether they labour over smoking wood fires; whether [they] are trapped in poverty because of a lack of opportunity, equality and respect; whether they lead countries; whether they stay at home to care for families; or whether they come to the UN.”

Reduce now or regret later

In the exponentially vaster Pacific region, Fijian Prime Minister Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama [laid out the human toll](#). “I meet thousands of Fijian women, men and children every year who have suffered from the latest wave of climate-related impacts; the cyclones, the flooding, the prolonged droughts, and the steadily rising seas, he said.

“I meet with the farmers whose crops have been washed away, the teachers and students who have lost their schools and the families whose homes have been destroyed. They want their Prime Minister to demand that the world take action on their behalf.”



UN Photo/Kim Haughton

Fellow Pacific Islander, Prime Minister Charlot Salwai Tabimasmas of Vanuatu [demanded that the industrial world step up to plate](#) with the aid they pledged for climate mitigation. “The Governments of the industrialized countries promised to release \$100 billion a year in climate funds for vulnerable countries by 2020,” he said.

“We demand that the highest priority be accorded to these pledges and a concrete road plan to mobilize and constitute the promised funds be put in place in the shortest possible time, because climate change is raging fiercely.”

Solomon Islands Prime Minister Ricky Nelson Houenipwela also [called for collective global leadership](#) in climate change action and appropriate financial support.

“Solomon Islands joins other Pacific island States in strongly urging the largest emitters of greenhouse gasses to take urgent actions in reducing this harmful emission. Reduce now or regret later,” he warned.

Through their focus was on the potential climatic catastrophe looming over them, this is not to say that the island speakers ignored other world crises including conflict, security and development that figured in the speeches of scores of other world leaders who mounted the podium on day four.