

Statement by Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi at the General Debate of the 73rd Session of the UN General Assembly

Madam President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I begin by felicitating Madam Maria Fernanda Espinosa Graces upon her election as President of the General Assembly.

The stewardship of this session by an accomplished leader of her ranking and stature, would undoubtedly lend to the proceedings of this Assembly greater credence and strength. I also commend Miroslav Lackjack for his able guidance of the previous session. We appreciate Secretary General Antonio Guterres for his exemplary leadership of the organization, and support his efforts to instill a new sense of mission and direction in the United Nations.

Our profound condolences over the passing away of former Secretary General Kofi Anan, who was a leading light and a driving force in taking the UN agenda forward into the twenty first century.

We expressed deep sympathy and condolences to the government and people of Indonesia for the damage caused by the earthquake and subsequent Tsunami.

Madam President,

Two months ago, the people of Pakistan voted for change, for reform and for a fundamental shift in their paradigm of governance. They opted for a Pakistan, confident and compassionate, open and articulate, peaceful and principled. A Pakistan that will engage with its neighbourhood and the world on the basis of equality and respect; a country that will seek resolution of conflicts and convergence of interests; and a state that will build upon common understandings, reciprocal commitments and shared ideals. Pakistan will brook no compromise on the interests of the nation, the sovereignty of the State, or the security of its people. Our Government is keen to pursue a policy of partnerships for peace, security and prosperity in our immediate neighbourhood and beyond. We seek a peaceful environment to promote our development agenda both at the national level and in our region.

Madam President,

I stand before this Assembly as the representative of a quintessential developing country, that has at its heart, the welfare of its people. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Imran Khan, we have begun giving shape to the vision of a new Pakistan through a set of integrated policies and programmes.

Madam President,

The world faces a moment of inflection. The very foundations, the very principles on which the edifice of global order is constructed are under assault.

Inequality within and among nations is on the rise. Forces of protectionism, populism and isolationism are gaining currency. Intolerance is ascendant over acceptance; rhetoric over reason, and power over principle. Where the world needs bridges, we see fortifications; where it needs highways, we see blockades, and where it yearns freedom, we see cages. New forms and manifestations of imperialism are appearing. Multilateralism is on a path of retreat. Unilateralist tendencies are growing. Long standing legal norms are being eroded for strategic and commercial considerations. Dark clouds of trade wars are looming large on the horizon. Challenges of climate change, environmental degradation, pandemics, transnational organized crime and sustainable development are becoming ever more complex. The post-world war idealism is giving way, slowly but surely, to a hardened, militaristic approach. This trend, Madam President, is not only regressive, it is downright dangerous.

Madam President,

We note with concern seismic shifts in the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East. As existing conflicts exacerbate, new threats have emerged. Competing interests of regional and extra regional powers are deepening long standing fissures, and widening the fault lines, even as the tragedy of Palestine continues to fester. In these uncertain times, the global community appears to be in desperate quest for leadership, a vision, and an order.

Madam President,

Consider the issue of striking the right balance between freedom of expression and sentiments of a people. Where there ought to be empathy, understanding and compassion, we see caricatured, ill informed, jaundiced judgments. Recently, Muslims across the world, were pained at a planned competition of cartoons of our Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him). This deeply hurt Muslim sentiments and sensibilities. On its part, Pakistan will continue to collaborate with friends and partners, on the UN and OIC platforms to reverse the growing tide of bigotry, build cross-cultural understandings, and promote dialogue amongst civilizations.

Madam President,

The theme of this year's General Assembly session is not only apt but also mirrors the priorities of my Government. As we embark upon our journey of change and reform, Pakistan stands ready to strengthen its partnership with the UN family of institutions. Alongside like-minded States, we will continue Madam President, to be a leading voice for comprehensive reform of the UN Security Council, to make it more democratic, representative, transparent and effective. We will continue to oppose the creation of new centres of privilege and prestige, in defiance of principles of democracy, and the Charter's core tenet of sovereign equality of member states.

Madam President,

Since its inception, Pakistan has been an ardent adherent of the UN Charter, and an active participant in the UN processes. Pakistan has served seven terms on the UN Security Council, five Presidencies of the Economic and Social Councils, and four terms at the Human Rights Council. This is reaffirmation of faith of the international community in Pakistan. We have championed the cause of the peoples of Africa and Asia to exercise their inalienable right of self-determination and wrest independence from the yoke of colonial rule. As we pay tribute to the memory of Nelson Mandela Madiba, we are reminded of the high ideals he sacrificed so much for. The best way to honour the legacy of this great leader is to continue to fight the good fight, for freedom, for dignity and for equality.

Madam President,

Pakistan remains one of the oldest, largest and most active contributors to UN Peacekeeping operations the world over. The Pakistani blue helmets have laid lives in the cause of global peace. We are proud of their sacrifices. Pakistan remains also host to one of the oldest peace keeping Missions, the UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP). We greatly value UNMOGIP's contribution in monitoring ceasefire along the Line of Control in Jammu & Kashmir.

Madam President,

Pakistan desires a relationship with India based on sovereign equality and mutual respect. We seek resolution of disputes through a serious and comprehensive dialogue that covers all issues of concern. We were to meet on the sidelines of this UNGA Session to talk about all issues with India- India called off dialogue the third time for the Modi Government – each time on flimsy grounds. They preferred politics over peace. They used the pretext of stamps issued months ago, of a Kashmiri activist and depicting grave human rights violations, including pellet gun victims, as an excuse to back out from the talks.

Dialogue is the only way to address long standing issues that have long bedeviled South Asia, and prevented the region from realizing its true potential. The unresolved Jammu and Kashmir dispute hinders the realization of the goal of durable peace between our two countries. For over seventy years now, it has remained on the agenda of the UN Security Council and a blot on the conscience of humanity.

For seventy years the people of occupied Jammu & Kashmir have struggled for their rights of self-determination in the face of overwhelming oppression and gross violations of their fundamental human rights by the Indian occupation forces. There can be no lasting peace in South Asia without a just settlement of the Kashmir dispute based on the UN Security Council resolutions and the will of the Kashmiri people.

Pakistan welcomes the recently released report by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. The report rightly lifts the veil from decades of obfuscation and chronicles the massive ongoing violations of human rights in Indian Occupied Kashmir. It vindicates our

position. No longer the excuse of terrorism can be used to continue to systematically oppress the Kashmiri people. Pakistan endorses the UN Report and calls for early institution of a Commission of Inquiry under UN auspices to investigate and fix responsibility. We will welcome the Commission to Azad Jammu & Kashmir, and hope that India too, will do the same.

To divert the world's attention from its brutalities, India frequently violates the ceasefire along the Line of Control in Kashmir. Despite numerous violations Pakistan has acted with restraint. But if India does venture across the LoC, or acts upon its doctrine of "limited" war against Pakistan, it will evoke a strong and matching response.

Madam President,

Strategic stability in our region has been and continues to be undermined. This is evident in different ways-by introduction of destabilizing weapon systems, pursuit of discriminatory approaches by certain states to supply advanced military hardware and sensitive technologies, and adoption of offensive force postures and doctrines, that imagine conflict beneath a nuclear threshold.

Under the circumstances, Pakistan has no option but to maintain a minimum credible deterrence. We have been advocating for many years now, a Strategic Restraint Regime for South Asia. Pakistan is ready to engage with India for meaningful confidence building, risk reduction and avoidance of arms race.

Madam President,

Let me also reiterate Pakistan's continued support for strengthening of regional organizations as a platform for poverty alleviation and socio-economic uplift. The regional body for South Asia, SAARC has been rendered ineffective due to the intransigence of one country. We remain fully committed to a functioning SAARC that can improve the lives of the people of the region.

Madam President,

Afghanistan and together with it, Pakistan, has suffered heavily at the hands of global power play, strategic miscalculations and cognitive dissonance. That there is no military solution to the war in Afghanistan is now a foregone conclusion. It is time to act upon that conclusion. A negotiated settlement has assumed urgency in the face of the worrisome and growing presence of Daesh in Afghanistan. Pakistan will continue to lend its support to an Afghan owned and Afghan led process of peace and reconciliation. On the bilateral plane, our two countries have operationalized the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity. It lays down the blueprint for extensive engagements in all areas of common interests. Pakistan has hosted the longest protracted refugee presence of modern times. Our role and sacrifices can perhaps be better appreciated when juxtaposed against the rising tide of anti-immigrant sentiments in nations, more resourceful and developed than ours, that have faced the brunt of fewer immigrants, over a shorter timescale. Because of this protracted situation, Afghanistan's security has a direct spill over impact on our own security and stability. We look forward to the safe, dignified and voluntary return of Afghan refugees to their homeland.

Madam President,

For the past seventeen years, Pakistan at great cost of life and resources, has been combating the fires of terrorism and extremism. By the determined operations of our armed forces, and the full support of our people, Pakistan has turned the tide against terrorism. With the deployment of 200,000 troops, Pakistan has conducted the largest and most effective counter terrorism campaign in the world. Peace and security have returned to our cities and towns. In our own national interest, and in line with our National Action Plan, we will continue to strengthen our counter terrorism frameworks and regimes. Pakistan continues to face terrorism that is financed, facilitated and orchestrated by our eastern neighbour. We wanted to sit with India to discuss all issues, including terrorism, that have created violence in our cities and towns, and have led to tens of thousands of casualties of innocent Pakistanis. Pakistan shall never forget the mass murder of more than 150 children in a Peshawar School, the terrible Mastung attack and many others that have links with terrorists supported by India. And we will never forget the terrorist attack in India against Samjhota Express carrying innocent Pakistanis – and now its confessed perpetrators are being allowed to walk free.

We wanted to share this evidence with India and the international community on who supported these acts of violence and terrorism. We have already shared this evidence with the UN. We have in our custody a serving Indian Naval officer, Commander Kalbhushan Yadav, who has provided us with the most incriminating evidence by accepting that he, on the instructions of his government, financed, planned and executed acts of terrorism and violence in Pakistan. This is but one Indian state sponsored official terrorist. Many more are launched inside Pakistan to create terror and mayhem by our eastern neighbour. And it is India, that in plain sight of the international community, perpetrates state sponsored terrorism in Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir and other parts of India. It is the concern of the United Nations, as Jammu and Kashmir remains on the agenda of the UN Security Council. And it is a matter of concern for the international community as humanity is being crushed and human rights being violated all over India, where people have stood up against oppression, occupation and to demand their fundamental rights. It is also a matter of concern of the international community that India has sponsored terrorism and aggression against all its neighbours.

Madam President,

The strongest antidote to the poison of terrorism is development that yields dividends. The vision of Belt and Road is a path-breaking initiative by a world leader of great sagacity and foresight to create a community of common destiny. It is a global common good beneficial to all. Our vision for China Pakistan Economic Corridor is to help translate our geo-strategic potential into geo-economic dividend. Pakistan looks to offer the vital connectivity nodes linking the Middle East with western China, and affording Central Asia the shortest most feasible access to the Sea.

Madam President,

The challenges of our times have enhanced, not diminished, the relevance of the United Nations. The United Nations must remain the central platform for dialogue and diplomacy. For the UN to remain relevant to the needs of the people and respond to the demands of the twenty first century, we believe that:

One: Sustainable development goals must be pursued in order to reduce inequality within and among nations. We hope the Secretary General's high-level event on Financing the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda, earlier this week, will serve as a catalyst for rapid progress towards realizing the SDGs.

Two: Corruption is a grave crime. Those who provide safe haven to ill-gotten wealth, are partners in the crime, and equally culpable. Existing international conventions on corruption do not go far enough in addressing this malaise. It is time to return the looted wealth to their rightful owners, the people, and to take to task, both the perpetrators, and their abettors.

Three: Climate change poses serious challenges to all States. The Paris Agreement must not be allowed to become hostage to sectoral interests. Even as Pakistan contributes minimally to global emissions, our country remains among the most vulnerable. Our Government completed the plantation of a billion trees project in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. We have now launched an ambitious project of planting 10 billion trees across Pakistan.

Four: A rules-based global order is vital for promotion of international trade in goods and services as well as global nuclear commerce and governance mechanisms. Carving out exemptions and bending established rules to suit partisan interests must be eschewed.

Five: An objective and transparent criterion must be evolved to facilitate trade in strategic goods and membership of groupings governing it. This is essential for countries pursuing economic growth and development.

Six: Sanctity and integrity of international agreements must be maintained. Strategic stability must be nurtured by policies of restraint and responsibility, not by considerations of profits and politics.

Seven: Technology and innovation are key to reshaping our states and societies. We must strike a prudent balance between guarding against misuse of emerging technologies and facilitating their access to developing countries. It is essential to develop universally agreed legal frameworks in the area of cyber security, lethal autonomous weapons system, Artificial Intelligence and weaponization of outer space.

Eight: Dislocation of people in recent years, primarily because of wars but also due to pervasive poverty, has energized the global debate on refugees and migrants. The deliberations leading to the Global Compacts on Refugees and Migrants represent a step in the right direction. The true litmus test of these compacts lies in the effective implementation of commitments.

Madam President,

Pakistan believes that a new consensus on peace, security and development, can and should be developed. A new paradigm for universal peace and prosperity is both desirable and achievable.

Pakistan will be a willing and able partner of the international community in this worthwhile pursuit.

Madam President,

The challenges ahead are daunting; the road forward, untraveled, the route uncharted. These times call for deliberation and diligence, but also cooperation and concerted action. They call for a truly united, United Nations.

The Kashmiri wife who lost her husband; the Kashmiri school boy who lost his eye sight and his future to pellet gun Injuries; the Syrian father who saw his child drown, the Palestinian girl who suffocates under siege, the African migrant willing to risk all for a better life, continue to look to this, the United Nations for support and succor.

Let us not fail them any longer.