



Dear Mr President of the General Assembly,

Dear Mr Secretary General,

Dear colleagues, Excellences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

That at least, some of you can meet in person after two complicated pandemic years fills me with some optimism. Optimism that science can and does offer solutions – and that if we respect scientific recommendations, we will overcome the challenges ahead.

Indeed, we are in a much better place than a year ago. Vaccines offer a clear path out of the pandemic – but where the scientists have succeeded – in sequencing the virus or producing safe vaccines – the politics are still failing.

A year ago, we made promises and pooled resources. More than 5 billion vaccine doses have been administered across the world – but nearly 75% of them are in just ten countries. Fifty countries have less than a 5% vaccination rate, with half of them just a 1% rate. This is a failure of politics projected onto the world stage in real-time.

Vaccine egoism will only delay the pandemic's end and lend time to new more lethal mutations. Solidarity should be our binding principle, not an option. Vaccines must be accessible to all and Slovakia will continue supporting the COVAX effort.

Even as we get close to defeating Covid-19, let us not rush into business as usual, just because we can. Our memory of how things were must be complemented by our reflection on whether they were right.

Secretary-General Guterres rightly said that we have our common agenda. Slovakia fully subscribes to the priorities laid out in this report.

Simply put, our common task is saving our planet. Previously, the Earth was whispering but now she is screaming that she cannot hold us any longer, that humankind is too heavy a burden to carry. Saving the planet is not *a* promise we make today for our successors to implement it later.



We have hesitated for so long that we have run out of generations of political leaders who can talk the talk but do nothing. This task is upon us today.

Saving our planet means accelerating our response to the climate crisis. The findings of the recent IPCC report might be shocking. Yet, they are just stating facts. In less than six months, we were able to strike a deal on global fair taxation. We must equally strike a deal to prevent global carbon leakage. The upcoming COP26 in Glasgow must set the pace for a much swifter adaptation and radical emissions cuts.

Slovakia will reduce our emissions by 55% by 2030 and become climate neutral by 2050, along with the rest of the European Union. By 2023, coal will no longer be used to produce electricity and heat. In the coming years, we will spend almost 6% of our GDP on economic recovery: one-third of that will go into our green transition.

None of this will be easy. Per capita, Slovakia is the biggest car producer in the world. Clean mobility, locally developed and produced greener batteries will decarbonize transport in Slovakia and elsewhere. We are ready to share our solutions – and learn from the best.

We must decouple economic growth from the degradation we have been causing to the planet – and support those most affected, those forced out of their homes by floods or drought, or those losing jobs as we close down the most polluting factories. The Green Climate Fund must be properly funded and accessible.

At the Kunming summit, we must all play our part to protect biodiversity. In Slovakia, half of the national parks' territory will be free of human intervention by 2025. In 10 years, this will be three-quarters of our national parks.

Excellences,

Unless we stop global warming, future generations will suffer. Our failure will damage multilateralism and spur violence.



Saving our planet, therefore also means upholding a rules-based international order and the rule of law, at home and abroad. Violation of these rules endangers everyone, not only those directly affected in Ukraine, Syria, Myanmar, or the Sahel region.

It is the UN Security Council's main responsibility to maintain international peace and security. Too often, we see it unable to act. Stopping violence and providing humanitarian access is not something to bargain about – it must be our utmost priority.

We must make our own democracies more resilient and support those demanding their basic rights – including the freedom of speech or assembly – are respected. These rights are not a menu for governments to choose from. Citizens must exercise them freely: in Belarus where 650 people are prosecuted on political grounds, such as the social scientist Valeria Kostyugova – or in the occupied Crimea, or Venezuela, Russia, or Xinjiang.

Distinguished Assembly,

The developments and lessons learnt from Afghanistan will be high on our agenda, and rightly so. This reflection is necessary. But we must also urgently provide humanitarian assistance to the people in Afghanistan, 40% of whom are facing acute food insecurity.

Over the past two decades, girls and women in Afghanistan could exercise their legitimate rights. These must not be taken away. Together with the Prime Minister of Iceland, the Prime Minister of New Zealand, and other women political leaders we launched a call to support Afghan girls and women. I invite you to join forces to ensure this turns into concrete steps.

My final point is about inclusiveness. We cannot save our planet if we leave out the vulnerable – the women, the girls, the minorities. The silent pandemic of gender-based violence can prove lethal to the health of our societies. Our long-term strategies, however brilliant, will become short-lived history if we do not involve young people.



To conclude, let me recall the words Pope Francis addressed to our youth during his recent visit to Slovakia: “Do not be dismayed or yield to those who tell you that nothing will ever change.”

We can change the world around us for the better. Let us start now.

Thank you.