Full Text Speech by Michael D. Higgins, President of
Ireland
United Nations Summit of the Future
UN, New York
Sunday, 22nd September 2024

− President of the General Assembly,
− Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
− Secretary-General,
− Excellencies,
− A chairde, friends,

− We find ourselves in the gravest of circumstances.
Circumstances to which it is not sufficient nor morally
acceptable that we offer any passivity in the face of
what are existential challenges, ones that question our
very definition of humanity.

− We must not allow ourselves to become desensitised by
the daily loss of life, so much of it avoidable, in a
discourse that has become dominated by the politics of
fear.

2

− The prospects as to whether International Law can
survive, what is a reflection of it or, at best, a
conditional commitment to it, and any of the
institutions associated with it, means that this United
Nations meeting is a crisis meeting.
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− Those agreements released an inter-generational
feeling of hope among the people of nation states that
we were willing to change our assumptions as to how
we saw the connection between society, economy and
ecology.

− We are challenged however by the fact that our delivery
on commitments made on sustainable development and
climate change have been so much less than what was
committed.

− Despite our hopes that the United Nations 2030
Agenda would constitute a shared blueprint for peace
and human development, founded on ethics and
drawing on human rights and dignity, today just .12 6

5

− As a response, it is my strong belief that a new,
inclusive globalisation from below can achieve a new
invigorated United Nations, one that will include food
sufficiency, led by those on the ground,
accompanied by, and delivering, universal basic
services which will enhance democracy, improve
participation and give the leadership we need.

− Our joint commitment to the 2030 Agenda constituted
one of the great moments for humanity, yet our hearts
darken as it fades ever further away, with a widening
gap between ambition and action.

− This Summit must have the courage to recognise what
we can agree on as fundamental proposals to guide an
effective United Nations of the future. It must be
decided at this meeting that we need and will commit to
reform of the United Nations and its related
multilateral institutions.

− In envisaging a United Nations of the future,
a United Nations that can serve the peoples of the
planet, we must have the courage to look at not only
its current weaknesses, but at those abuses of power

6

that have consciously undermined the United Nations
since its foundation in 1945.

− We need a different, inclusive version of the United
Nations that speaks for the possibilities and
vulnerabilities of the peoples represented in their
diversity by membership of the United Nations.

− Yes, we are dealing with new circumstances, but it
must be recorded that it has been the pursuit of narrow
interests that has frustrated so much of the normative
intentions to which nations were asked to subscribe,
sought to support, hoped for, from membership of
the United Nations.

− For example, the United Nations of the future cannot
afford to have permanent members who continue to
abuse what is a veto position.

− The United Nations cannot sustain a regular
contradiction of the general value positions taken at the
General Assembly by their mitigation and rejection at
the Security Council that is not representative of the
global community.

7

− Today I make a strong and urgent appeal for countries
to support the United Nations to fulfil its commitments
to the Sustainable Development Goals ² particularly
that of ´]HURKXQJHUµ

− We look to a continent of the young, Africa, with hope,
a continent that has the promise to make a new journey
of sufficiency, food sovereignty and resilience. Yet, in
our global response, we must acknowledge that there
are no single set of circumstances that describe all
African countries.

− Our response to assisting Africa in its journey to food
sovereignty must be rooted in achieving African agency,
breaking dependencies, enabling Africans to decide
their future through policies that will include ground-based communal strategies and the prioritising of
smallholders. Such an approach, avoiding top-down

8

achieving the Sustainable Development Goals,
and a better economics for a future in which Africans
will want to participate in good government.

− How are we to honour the commitments made in 2015
to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030?

− We must ensure that our words ring with authenticity,
that we redouble our efforts to meet the demands of the
present without jeopardising the interests of future
generations, that we have the courage to confront the
actions of those who seek to accumulate without limit
responsibility.

− We must place inclusivity centre-stage, accelerate
actions at these times of multiple, interlocking crises ²
food security, malnutrition and global hunger, climate
change and biodiversity loss, rising global poverty and
inequality, the pursuit of war over peace and
nuclear stockpiling.
− The failure to achieve peace, eliminate acute global
poverty, hunger, or the consequences of climate change
and biodiversity loss have been accompanied by a
return to an arms race. Last year, global military

9

expenditure increased by 6.8 percent to $2.44 billion,
increasing in all regions,

10

− Norwegian Church Aid has reported that servicing of
debt exceeds total social spending on health, education
and social protection combined in 33 countries. The
report finds that debt servicing exceeds education
spending in 104 countries, health spending in 116
countries, and social protection spending in 107
countries.

− Approximately 3.3 billion people ² almost half of
humanity ² live in countries that spend more on debt
interest payments than on the essential basic services
of education or health.

− We need to give our fullest support to campaigns such
as the much-needed global campaign to end hunger and
poverty, launched by President Luiz Inácio Lula da
Silva of Brazil, a campaign to which all members
can subscribe.

− In the interests of all, the few must indicate their
willingness to change if we are to avoid the horrific
consequences of climate change, lose prospects of
sustainability, and effectively prevent the
conclusion that, as a species, we have failed to

11

achieve peace, have instead become addicted to war,
have rewarded investors in instruments of death rather
than promoting sustainability.

− We can achieve the change that is necessary. It is
possible, but it is necessary to ask the questions that we
have not asked before, structural questions, such as
why we will not question the sources of what is an ever-increasing inequality.

− Is it because we have chosen to live with the
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− We must consider too how we cooperate, both to achieve
agreed goals and to tackle emerging threats and
opportunities. We must reinvigorate the structures and
the trust necessary for effective global governance.

− The United Nations is our most important shared
institution. It belongs to the people of the world and all
of the life forms on which the future depends. Our
multilateral system is broken. It requires urgent reform
so that we may mend the eroded trust, contribute to
reforms that will enable cohesion, inclusivity, belief in
multilateralism, tackle a democratic and legitimation
crisis.

− I suggest that it is useful to revisit those early
aspirations of the United Nations, of coming together to
achieve peace and end war. The hopes for the future of
the UN are best contributed by those who are willing to
make themselves aware of the worst of our present
circumstances and its horrific prospects for future
generations.

13

− The future of the UN and the future of the planet will
be determined by young people in continents like
Africa, generations who have contributed the least to
climate change, yet are paying the highest price. But
how can they respond when they are held back by a
necklace of debt?

− The UN cannot return with the same philosophy
driving the Bretton

14

without responsibility or transparency, and with
curtailment of the influence of the strongest economies.
Such reform gives best prospects of managing
migration both within and out of Africa.

− Actions that promote from the earliest years an
understanding of the importance of promoting
peacebuilding, peacekeeping and nuclear disarmament,
that prevent conflict and violence, must be our priority.
Ensuring cross-cutting themes, such as gender,
human rights, and climate are mainstreamed
throughout the Pact, is also a priority for Ireland.
− We have an opportunity at this Summit to decide
collectively and resolutely to make this decade the
decade in which we tackle, once and for all, the scourge
of global hunger, one that will see a shared
commitment to a global food-secure family, one
based on the firm foundations of respect for each
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wisdoms, founded on a recognition of the solidarity that
binds us together as humans, and an acknowledgement
of the responsibility we share for our vulnerable planet
and the fundamental dignity of all those who hold life
on it.

15

− By bolstering our collective efforts to guarantee the
achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by
2030, making an enhanced effort, we can recover that
lost authenticity in actions and words we need so that
we may play our part in the recovery of an inclusive
global multilateral discourse that can offer hope for all.

− Let us take meaningful steps to enable a fruitful
re-engagement with Madre Natura using the best of
tools available to us, including notably anthropology ²
indeed, all of the tools of social science.

− Fostering a renewal of trust and solidarity, making a
new beginning between peoples, countries and
generations has the potential to restore faith in a
reinvigorated multilateral system that can deliver
peace, sustainability and confront so many of our
shared challenges for present and future generations.

− Thank you.