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Speech by the President of Poland at the 80th session of the UN General Assembly

President: The United Nations was established 80 years ago. This anniversary shows how far we have come, but also how many challenges still lie ahead. Today, we know that international cooperation is not an option, but a necessity.

Distinguished Mr. President,
Your Excellencies,
Esteemed Delegates,

I am standing here for the first time as President of the Republic of Poland. I feel proud, but at the same time, I am aware of the serious challenges we face today as an international community. This is because the world has changed completely since the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

On 24 February 2022, we were all brutally awakened from our blissful dream of the “end of history” – history has not ended and history will not end, we must be aware of this. We were awakened from our blissful dream in which we strive for universal peace and compliance with international law. These are probably the words most often repeated in this forum. That dream, ladies and gentlemen, no longer exists, and we often repeat words that do not reflect the reality that surrounds us in Central and Eastern Europe and in other regions of the world from which you have come.

National borders ceased to be inviolable, and international law—previously considered the compass of the world order—began to be treated as a suggestion rather than a rule.

Let me remind you that shortly after the outbreak of the war, Polish men and women demonstrated incredible solidarity with the fighting Ukrainian nation. We opened our borders and our homes and provided material, financial, military, as well as diplomatic assistance. Today, more than one million Ukrainian refugees live in Poland.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is not only the most serious conflict in Europe since World War II, but also a turning point. The existing international order is crumbling before our eyes.

The world has entered a new and dangerous era of rivalry between great powers – breaking rules and testing how far one can go before someone says a resolute “enough.” The principle of sovereignty? Increasingly trampled upon. The prohibition of aggression? Reduced to a dead letter. Instead of law, an attempt to use naked force.

We are standing at a turning point in history at a time when the decisions made today will have consequences for decades to come. We must all be aware of this, and we all take responsibility for it.

That is why now, as a community of democratic states – or states aspiring to democracy – we must view the current situation as a battlefield for principles, the observance of which may determine the future of our civilisation. I think this is actually the last moment to take concrete action.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Russia's aggression against Ukraine is not merely a regional conflict. It is a test of whether the principles on which the UN is based will stand the test of time or whether they will succumb to the weight of imperial and colonial ambitions of a state that considers itself above the law and has repeatedly ignored the resolutions of this Assembly – this Assembly and other assemblies. And we all, in a sense, take responsibility for this by continuing to share words about peace and security, which must be heard, but that should be followed by concrete action.

Moscow speaks of the need to address the “root causes of the conflict.” I share this view, but I believe that the root causes of Russian aggression are primarily ideological. Russia refers to an imperial vision that treats entire nations like colonial property, denies them sovereignty, claiming that they are artificial constructs, and justifies the invasion as a “historical correction.”

We in Poland, in Central and Eastern Europe, have known this for at least 86 years. It is the same set of terms that also appears in the 21st century. During our plenary discussions and subsequent meetings. For us in Central and Eastern Europe, this set of concepts is nothing new. Whether it was Poland, the Republic of Poland in the first half of the 20th century, or Ukraine today.

As a historian, I view the present also through the lens of the past. After centuries of conquests, wars, partitions, deportations, rapes, and crimes, Russia has not abandoned its imperial ambitions even in the 21st century.

One of my great predecessors, the late President Lech Kaczyński, understood this perfectly well when he spoke in front of the Georgian parliament in 2008. His words have since stood the test of time. He said then that “today Georgia, tomorrow Ukraine, the day after tomorrow the Baltic States, and later perhaps it will be time for my country, Poland!”.

When Russia attacked Georgia, it was not clear to everyone that this was only the beginning of the Kremlin's new imperialism.

Unfortunately, the wind of history, which we know and understand so well in Poland, is beginning to blow again. Once again, we are experiencing Russian imperialism also on our soil. Two weeks ago, on the night of September 9-10, the largest attack by Russian drones on the territory of a NATO member state took place. Dozens of drones violated my country's borders deliberately – because, I assure you, it was not a coincidence – it happened on orders issued in the capital of a country that is a permanent member of the Security Council.

As a result, for the first time since World War II, Poland was forced to open fire on hostile objects over our territory.

As Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and President of Poland, I assure you that Poland will always respond appropriately and is ready to defend its territory!

The Poles were not intimidated by the Soviet hordes in 1920 and, defending European civilisation, defeated the Soviets. The Poles and the countries of Central Europe did not surrender their spirit of freedom and sovereignty during 45 years of Soviet colonialism after 1945. Neither Poles nor the countries of Central and Eastern Europe will be intimidated by Russian drones. However, ladies and gentlemen, that is not the point. The point is how long we will continue to allow such violations within our international community.

That is why Poland is allocating significant funds to the development of our defence capabilities, why we are building the resilience of our country, but also of our entire part of Europe. For the Baltic states, our friends, such as the Estonians, as well as Romania, have also fallen victim to similar provocations by Russia.

As a leader in the region, we are working to strengthen the close ties among the Bucharest Nine countries, which is why we are developing cooperation within the Three Seas Initiative. As the voice of the region, we emphasise that we do not consent to Moscow's ruthless acts of provocation against us and other European nations, testing our reactions and intimidating our societies. We do not consent to this.

Distinguished Delegates,

Before our very eyes, neo-imperial and neo-colonial Russia is attempting to destroy the architecture of international security, violating international law, reinforcing divisions, and striving to revive the Concert of Powers.

Many countries present in this room are well aware of the tragedy of borders drawn by force and decisions taken over the heads of nations. Historical experiences, often so difficult for my country, show that lasting peace cannot be built on rewarding aggression and that we cannot accept violations of the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Russia's current actions do not indicate a willingness to pursue genuine peace. Declarations of dialogue – which we are also familiar with – are accompanied by military offensives and further attacks, whose victims are civilians, including children. Whenever Moscow says 'peace', what it actually means is the capitulation of those it considers its opponents. Russia must end the war and take full responsibility for it. Holding Russia accountable should be our common duty. The perpetrators of all international crimes must be tried before the competent courts. I hope that this will happen in the near future. Otherwise, we will meet in the coming years, including during my presidency, and discuss things that should be obvious to all of us.

Poland supports the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court, and endorses the idea of establishing a special ad hoc tribunal to try the perpetrators of aggression.

No war can be profitable for aggressors. Wars cannot be profitable for aggressors in economic terms either.

States and nations deserve full compensation, including from those who started the Second World War. Because if we want to build a community of democratic states, a common European Union, we must agree that war cannot be economically profitable for any of the aggressors.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I mentioned, we are currently facing a whole range of global and local challenges.

The eyes of the world, and ours too, are now looking at the Middle East. Poland is following the situation in this region with concern, where the conflict has escalated as a result of the brutal attacks by Hamas on October 7, 2023. Israel, like any other country, has the right to self-defense. However, its actions must comply with international law, including humanitarian law.

Poland continues to advocate for a two-state solution to the conflict in the Middle East, in such a way as to give both: the Palestinians and the Israelis the right to live in peace and security. Poland consistently supports international efforts to improve the situation in the Middle East and calls on the UN to take action.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Poland has no colonial past, which is why we are a reliable and trustworthy partner for Asian and African countries. What is more, we ourselves were victims of colonial policies pursued by superpowers in the past. We therefore understand perfectly well the instruments used by neo-imperial powers- and we do not consent to their destabilization of certain regions of the world.

As President of the Republic of Poland, I will pay particular attention to developing our cooperation with various regions of the world.

I am referring to the African continent. We can all see how ongoing wars, conflicts, and terrorist attacks undermine the efforts of proud African nations to live and develop in safe and just conditions. The world must stand with all those affected by insecurity and help them restore peace. We do not consent to neo-imperial powers destabilizing regions such as the Sahel in order to arbitrarily manage global migration flows or impose migratory pressure. Nor do we consent to international criminal groups profiting from human trafficking and slave labor.

We also want to develop relations with the countries of Asia and the Pacific. The role of this region in shaping the international order in the 21st century has grown significantly. However, dynamic economic development is accompanied by growing geopolitical tensions, affecting stability, prosperity, and security also in other regions of the world.

As Poles, we are concerned about the negative impact of global crises. But I want to say openly, as President of Poland, that among you, in the international community, we are also deeply concerned and aware of the mistakes made by our Western partners, friends and neighbours. Yes, I agree with President Donald Trump that in recent years - as we Poles have warned, and as has also been signalled from Central and Eastern Europe - Europe has plunged into ideological madness, which has led to bad decisions on migration, to green madness and the Green Deal, which is destroying economic and agricultural markets. Yes, the same Europe, our friends and partners with whom we want to build a common EU has for many years subsidized the Russian Federation by buying cheap Russian gas. We in Poland and Central Europe know all this, and we are always happy when the leaders of Western European countries draw conclusions and listen to our voice.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Development and humanitarian aid are an integral part of our country's foreign policy to build global peace, security, and development. We see it as a joint investment in our future, security, stability, and prosperity. We are present with our support in many areas across Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East.

Distinguished Delegates,

Poland, a co-founder of the United Nations, is the world's 20th largest economy and a country that has successfully transformed itself over the past 30 years from a developing country into a developed country and from a centrally planned economy into a market economy.

This unique experience allows us to make a significant contribution to UN discussions on development, combining the perspectives of the global East and West, as well as North and South.

Given our potential and experience, we consistently seek to participate in the works of the G20, a format that serves as a bridge in these turbulent times. We hope that the invitation to cooperate and participate in the next summit of the group, issued by the United States, will translate into Poland's permanent presence in this community.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Human rights are one of the three main pillars on which the United Nations system is based. We cannot talk about true peace if we do not protect the human rights of everyone, without exception. Peace is not only the absence of armed conflicts, it is also justice, equality, and respect for human dignity.

Therefore, the protection of human rights must be a priority in any process of building peace and security.

We clearly see the dramatic consequences of Russian aggression, including in the area of human rights and humanitarian issues. The human rights situation in Belarus also remains a priority for us, Poles, and Poland.

We must also firmly defend human rights in their most fundamental dimension – the right to life of the defenceless from conception to natural death. We protect our families as a place of happiness, love and child-rearing. As Poland, we speak out loudly about the fate of one of the most persecuted groups in the world – Christians.

We consider the Human Rights Council to be the main human rights body within the United Nations system, playing a key role in ensuring compliance with human rights standards. That is why Poland has submitted its candidacy for membership of the Human Rights Council for the period 2029–2031. Our candidacy reflects our commitment to promoting and protecting human rights around the world.

Distinguished Mr. President,
Your Excellencies,
Esteemed Delegates,

The United Nations was established 80 years ago. This anniversary shows how far we have come, but also how many challenges still lie ahead. Today, we know that international cooperation is not an option, but a necessity.

It is unacceptable that aggressors begin to march with impunity through other people's territories, and perpetrators of war crimes sleep peacefully without accountability.

Let me remind you that after World War II, there was no room for relativizing crimes, at least in case of the most important commanders who gave orders. There was Nuremberg. There was a court. There was a name and a family name, there was a charge, and a sentence. Because it was not just about revenge – it was about principles. It was about ensuring that crime was not rewarded and that the law was not replaced by force.

Today, we must return to that spirit. We must build an international system of accountability that will not hesitate to call evil by its name, regardless of the flag it bears on its shoulder. We must make it clear: there are borders, human rights, and international law. And anyone who violates them should face severe consequences.

But it is not going to happen by itself. The world order is not given once and for all. It depends on us – on governments, institutions, but most importantly, societies.

As one of the Nobel Peace Prize laureates and Holocaust Survivor once said: “Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented”.

Let these words be not only a warning, but also a call to action. Here and now!

Thank you for your attention.

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