



**New Zealand Permanent Mission to the United Nations
Te Aka Aorere**

United Nations General Debate of the Seventy-Ninth Session

**New Zealand Statement delivered by
Rt Hon Winston Peters, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of
Foreign Affairs and Minister for Racing of New Zealand**

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY



'The Spirit of San Francisco'

Mr. President.

Nearly four score years ago, nations exhausted from a cataclysmic World War came together in San Francisco to create the United Nations Charter. Forged in the immediate aftermath of that war, then New Zealand Prime Minister Peter Fraser held "the greatest hopes" for the Charter's success, which he believed would be predicated on the "sincerity and moral determination" of its members.

But the beginning is a delicate time, and Fraser was also a realist. He understood the Charter was imperfect. From the earliest debates in San Francisco, New Zealand fought against the veto rights bestowed upon the Great Powers.

Fraser warned that "The veto which can be exercised by one of the Great Powers both in regard to itself and other nations is unfair and indefensible and may, if retained and exercised, be destructive not only of the main purposes of the international organization, but of the institution itself."

But Fraser knew that the United Nations Charter could only be secured with the Great Powers' agreement. And though he considered the Charter imperfect, he thought those imperfections could "be overcome if the spirit of San Francisco is carried into the operation of the Charter."

The spirit of San Francisco incorporated the hope that the Great Powers behave prudently, for as Winston Churchill said, "The price of greatness is responsibility."

But today the spirit that created the United Nations Charter is sagging under the weight of its own potted history. Power waxes and wanes so yesterday's 'Great Powers', today's Permanent Members of the Security Council, are challenged by periods of competition or worse, abuse of the veto.

This has serious implications for all states and the conduct of our foreign affairs. While some Permanent Members exercise restraint in their use of the veto, others consistently and frequently abuse this power.

When Russia, a permanent member of the Security Council, illegally invaded its neighbour, it did not just violate Article 2, paragraph 4 of the Charter, it acted in utter contempt of the Charter. Russia then vetoed a draft Security Council resolution condemning its actions and calling for the immediate withdrawal of its forces from Ukraine. Not only does Russia lack the sincerity and moral determination required to make the United Nations work, but its delinquency should be a clarion call for long overdue Security Council reform.

As Prime Minister Fraser said back in 1946, when referring to the veto's risks, that "it is very bad if one nation can hold up the advancement of mankind."

The world of 2024 looks very unlike the one of 1945, and so our collective institutions need to evolve and reflect contemporary realities. We need a UN Security Council that looks more like today's world, and we need veto reform.

Tensions and imbalances – between the desire for a rules-based international order that protects small states against aggression, and the unjustified exercise of power by certain Great Powers – have only grown these past eight decades.

Yet small states matter now as much as they did then. New Zealand holds the foundational belief that all states are equal and that our voices matter as much as the more powerful states represented here. It is the quality of our arguments and the principles of justice that inform them, not the size of our militaries, that should hold sway here.

We smaller nations face many of the same challenges and share the same concerns. As my colleague from Singapore, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, put it at this year's East Asia Summit Foreign Ministers Meeting in Laos:

"The problem for us is that every small state that wants territorial integrity to be respected, that wants its political independence to be guarded, that depends on the UN Charter to plan long-term, must view an invasion of a smaller neighbour by a larger neighbour...as a full-frontal point of anxiety."

We agree. We small states need today's superpowers to talk more, seek better understanding between them, and develop ways of compromising more. Rather than a zero-sum game, effecting better relations between

today's "Great Powers" only enhances global stability, and that is what we smaller nations seek.

The regional and global challenges we face are stark, the worst the world has faced since World War II. Those challenges are complex and daunting.

Across the globe, armed conflict is once more on the rise; hard fought development gains are being reversed, human rights challenged and eroded, and geostrategic tensions are threatening global security and stability.

Growing distrust and division is making international cooperation more difficult, placing the United Nations under strain, and hindering the organisation's ability to find effective solutions.

The world is facing a myriad of regional and global crises. We see multiple, intersecting, and mutually reinforcing crises of conflict, climate change, and increasingly, a crisis of trust in our institutions. So the challenges we face in the General Assembly are stark, the worst in several generations.

They also reinforce the truism that the global geostrategic and security challenges faced in one era do not remain static. The world has changed, and so must we.

Indeed, each generation of decision-makers confronts new challenges as economies, demographics, technologies, and societies evolve, as do the power calculations that accompany disruptive change.

Old truths give way to new ones. The trick now, as it was then, is to have one's eyes wide open about the fundamental shifts that are taking place and be nimble enough to adapt to them. The need to adapt to changing historical contexts is also incumbent on the United Nations and its organisations. The rise of mini-lateral agreements is one sign of countries increasingly working together outside of the United Nations. Another is the sclerosis around necessary veto reform.

In the 10 months since returning for a third time as New Zealand's Foreign Minister, we have spoken widely with colleagues across the globe. Summing up those discussions in a recent speech in Tokyo, we said that never has it

been more apparent just how much diplomacy and the tools of statecraft matter in our troubled world.

And since war and instability is everyone's calamity, diplomacy is the business of us all. We observed that at this moment in time the ability to talk with, rather than at, each other has never been more needed.

Those who share our values, and even those who do not, gain from understanding each other's position, even when we cannot agree. From understanding comes opportunity and from diplomacy comes compromise, the building block of better relations between nations. We need more diplomacy, more engagement, more compromise.

As Churchill also said in his later years, "meeting jaw to jaw is better than war."

Never has it been more apparent just how much political leadership is required to respond to the international challenges we face. Leadership is needed to restore trust in our domestic and international institutions, forge unity, and fill the gaps when the international community, through the United Nations, proves unable to.

What does that leadership look like?

It is leadership that can discern future opportunity while understanding but not being trapped by historical constraints. It is leadership that is underpinned by a leader's strength of character – their courage, their purpose, and a commitment to educate, not dominate their citizens.

Given he will turn 100 in the next few days, we recall with admiration such leadership, exhibited by then President Jimmy Carter in 1978, in concert with Egypt's President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. They talked for 11 straight days at Camp David, from which emerged the Middle East Peace Accords between Egypt and Israel.

That peace has endured, and New Zealand is proud as a foundational member of the Multinational Force and Observers to have supported that peace since 1982.

The Accords reveal what is possible when leaders exhibit sincerity and moral determination, imbued by the spirit of San Francisco. We need more of this type of leadership and responsibility.

Contrast that leadership with the catastrophic and ruinous path that has been followed in Gaza. This misery was caused by both Hamas' monstrous terrorist attacks last year and the now overwhelming nature of Israel's response. We are most concerned about the generational consequences of this level of suffering and violence, with no end in sight and which sees us on the precipice of an even wider conflict.

Where is the sincerity and moral determination of today's leaders at the vortex of this unacceptable violence?

New Zealand has sacrificed many of its young men to wars in faraway lands. Fully 10 percent of the total population of New Zealand fought in the Great War, and we lost a fifth of them. So every year, on the Twenty-fifth of April, we commemorate their loss at Gallipoli, the site of terrible carnage.

This year in a dawn address we recalled that despite the horror of war on the Gallipoli Peninsula, fraternal bonds were forged between warring nations, countries who were once enemies became friends.

New Zealand never wants to experience the catastrophe of another World War. There must never be another San Francisco conference picking up the pieces after another descent into global annihilation and human suffering.

So we must do more. Demand more. And deliver more.

We must reject and resist those who seek to conquer and control.

We must always seek the path of peace because the lasting victories of humanity are those of peace, not war.

Finally, despite our frustration at the lack of political will required to adapt this organisation to fully meet the challenges of today, New Zealand's support for the United Nations remains unwavering. That commitment is unchanged from when Prime Minister Fraser expressed his great hopes for the Charter eight decades ago.

We believe effective multilateral diplomacy means taking responsibility for our obligations as member states. So, to that end, we announce today New Zealand's intention, as a voice for small states, to campaign for a seat on the Security Council for the 2039-40 term.

That intention is supported by our enduring hope:

- that the spirit of San Francisco can be reclaimed through the sincerity and moral determination of our diplomatic efforts;
- that we can all do better, and;
- that it reinforces our enduring support for the United Nations and the cause of peace.