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Speech by Prime Minister Alexander De Croo at United Nations

Prime Minister Alexander De Croo addressed the United Nations General Assembly in New York. You can find the full speech below.

Speech Alexander De Croo - UNGA78

New York, Sept. 20, 2023

Mr. President,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Some people, also here in this room, are pessimistic about the state of the world today. But I beg to differ.

There are good reasons for optimism.

Since the start of the new millennium, we have made tremendous progress in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Today, there is more universal access to education than ever.

85% of young children worldwide are in primary education.

Since the start of the century, an additional 2 billion people have access to safe drinking water.

It shows that if we put our mind to it, and promises are followed by investments, we can make global progress.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Of course, the picture is not rosy across the board.

Our changing climate is reason for concern.

We witnessed some extreme climate events this year.

Forest fires in Greece, Spain, Canada and Hawaii.

Floods in Libya and Hong Kong.

Long periods of drought and water stress in my own country.

But also here: let's look at the trends rather than the events.

Let us look at our recent climate track-record.

And then we will see there is reason for grounded optimism.

A record-breaking 340 billion euro have been invested in renewable energy globally this year.

Prices of renewables keep on going down year after year.

Many climate analysts believe that carbon emissions will peak as soon as 2025; and will go down afterwards. Provided we keep up the investment pace in renewables.

The chair of the International Energy Agency called it "the 'beginning of the end' of the fossil fuel era".

He said it shows that "our climate policies do work".

So we should stop listening to the alarmists who proclaim that all is lost.

That we are on a road to nowhere.

How can we expect public opinion to rally behind the climate cause with such blatant defeatism?

We should not despair, we should organize.

We should speed up the green transition instead of talking ourselves down.

And in order to do this, we need to include our industry through a New Industrial Deal.

We will not build a climate paradise on an industrial wasteland.

We need our industry for their innovation capacity. To come up with tomorrow's climate solutions.

That is why Europe should not only be a continent of industrial innovation, but should remain a continent of industrial production.

Clean tech, for sure.

But also green chemistry, green steel production and green construction sites. All are needed to build our net zero future.

This New Industrial Deal will be one of the big priorities of the Belgian Presidency of the European Union starting on January 1st.

But to make this Industrial Deal a success, we should look beyond Europe.

We need partnerships. Especially between Europe and Africa.

The foundation stones are there.

Belgium has partnered up with countries such as Namibia, Morocco, and Egypt to accelerate the green transition.

In wind, in solar, in hydrogen.

Investments are pouring in, creating local employment, building up local expertise, soon exporting clean molecules from the shores of Africa to our North-Sea ports.

And we work at home as well.

Together with Germany, France, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Denmark, Norway, Ireland, and The United Kingdom, we are turning the North Sea into a green powerplant for Europe.

By 2030 we will reach 120 Gigawatt of wind energy at sea.

The equivalent of more than 50 nuclear plants. Enough to provide more than 100 million households with clean, affordable power.

We are making progress on the nuclear front as well.

Belgium has reached an agreement with its nuclear operator to prolong the lifespan of its two biggest power plants.

We will remain a nuclear nation.

And we will seek renewed, close cooperation with other nuclear nations.

Because to achieve climate neutrality, we will need both renewables and nuclear.

MIGRATION

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is vital to win the fight against climate change, since it is the single biggest disruptor in our societies today.

It causes young people to flee their home country 'en masse'.

This increased irregular migration deprives the South of their most important economic resource, their most vital potential, young people.

At the same time, the host countries in Europe are faced with an influx they can barely handle.

We are facing an uphill battle to accommodate all migrants and integrate them into our society.

The heart of the problem is that migration as we know it today, depends on sheer luck. The current model gives all the control and power to human smugglers.

They decide on life or death.

They decide on who enters a country and who does not.

This is simply unacceptable, unsustainable, and immoral.

A lose-lose for everyone involved.

We need to rebuild the current migration model.

That is why during the Belgian EU Presidency, we hope to conclude a new European migration pact.

A pact to make sure every EU country does its part of the work.

Enforcing solidarity, standardizing and fast-tracking procedures, working on common European readmission and return policies.

And last but not least, a pact to strengthen our common borders.

But a new EU migration pact is only part of the answer.

We should also work on one of the biggest root causes of migration, and that is poverty and the lack of economic opportunities.

Also here, as with climate change, partnerships are the answer.

Partnerships between Europe and the countries of transit and origin. Partnerships that build solid, inclusive institutions. To create equal rights and equal opportunities for all. Not just for a small, ruling class.

And, yes, fixing migration also means creating legal channels to Europe.

Through education and talent programs.

To strengthen the societies in the home countries.

Turning a lose-lose situation into a win-win.

So that young Africans can pursue the African dream and not have to risk their lives at sea for the European dream or the American dream.

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY – SAHEL & UKRAINE

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To empower people also means holding the powerful to account. Unfortunately, we live in a world in which more and more strongmen come to power.

Take the Sahel region: faced with a major security crisis.

Gripped by a perfect storm of terrorism, poverty and climate change.

This triple threat is undermining societies in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.

We need to stop the territorial and institutional disintegration of the Sahel.

Our track record in the Sahel should be reason for humility, but it should not lead to indifference.

The only way forward is to restore the rule of law.

Without it, self-government will never be possible.

Without the rule of law, the Sahel will always be a potential playground for foreign bullies, wherever they come from.

And it must be said that the clear and present danger is coming from a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

From Russia, that decided to throw all international rules overboard and to invade its neighbor.

From Russia, that is executing its opponents.

Russia created the Wagner group to bring death and destruction to Africa.

Plundering Africa while increasing the price of grain for the most vulnerable.

In fact, what Wagner and Putin are doing to Africa is exactly the same as in Ukraine.

Preventing Africa from flourishing.

Denying African country's their sovereignty.

And ultimately, like in Ukraine, to colonize.

Putin and Wagner want to turn back the clock.

They want to restore the old-world order as it was dominated by colonial powers.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The decolonization and emancipation of African, Asian and South American countries is the most important achievements in our post World Wars order.

We should protect this legacy. Shield it from new forms imperialism.

Each of us has a choice to make.

Whose side to pick: the side of the colonizer or the side of the victim.

When we make these choices, the best guiding principle I can think of is the UN Declaration of Human Rights.

We celebrate its 75th birthday this year.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights remains the spinal cord of all human rights treaties and instruments.

And in fact, the rights defined in the treaty are much older than 75 years.

The West African Mandinka nation, in what is nowadays Mali, had a constitution as early as 1200 AD.

It spoke of the sanctity of human life, women's rights, the right to an education, food security, and even to self-expression.

When the freed slaves of Haiti, at the start of the 19th century, finally had the freedom to choose their own destiny, they defined living in dignity as living in liberty and equality.

Let's remember these stories and recognize the true universality of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Let's also remember the progress we have made as a common humanity.

And when we look back on our achievements, know that they were always the result of hard work and of collaboration. More than ever we need the UN and the world to come together. To secure progress that

works for everyone.

I thank you.

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