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Speech by Catherine Colonna at the United Nations General Assembly [fr]**GENERAL DEBATE
OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY****New York, 21 September 2023**

President of the General Assembly,
Heads of State and Government,
Ministers,
Ambassadors,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to speak before you on France's behalf.

As I do so, I realize how important our common Assembly is, this Assembly of all our nations, who have freely decided to unite their destinies and act for the common good. That is the spirit in which I speak before you. The spirit of those who, almost eight decades ago, surrounded by the ruins of the world, wanted to bring relations between States into a new era. An era where everyone understands that the defence of their interests relies on respect of common principles. An era in which everyone understands that today's strong may be tomorrow's weak, and that the enemies of yesterday can be today's friends. That is the path that France and Germany have taken. An era in which power is governed by law. An era in which humankind's common challenges are at last addressed together, and it is no longer "every man for himself".

That is what we have learned to do in Europe, overcoming centuries of conflict through cooperation and trust. It is this care for the common good, this spirit of the United Nations, that governs France's international action. It is the spirit of a power that is confident in its principles, acting in solidarity and, always, collectively, for the common good.

What are our principles?

They are those that have been reaffirmed with landslide majorities by this Assembly in its condemnation of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, three times already. Nothing, morally or legally, will ever justify invading one's neighbour, seeking annexations through disgraceful manoeuvres and martyring populations.

France defends the simple principles of equality among States, and respect for their territorial integrity and sovereignty. Those principles are sacrosanct.

France also defends the principle of food security. Who could believe, despite the confusion and the propaganda that certain parties are wantonly spreading, that he who destroys grain and silos has the slightest care for global food security, when he is its enemy? What we are seeing is the expression of pure brutality, capable of using all weapons, even hunger, in an attempt to revive an imperialist dream.

In this context, others, like France, are taking tangible action: financing the deliveries of the World Food Programme to the most fragile States; facilitating the export of Ukrainian grain via the European Union's Solidarity Lanes; and financing ambitious programmes around the world to develop local agriculture and to support school canteens.

France also defends the principle of the inviolability of the historic heritage of nations, the legacy of humankind's cultures. In Mosul and Timbuktu yesterday, in Odesa and Lviv today, everywhere, France supports the efforts of those who defend the historic treasures that hatred threatens to destroy.

Lastly, and of course, France supports the fight against impunity. Our support to the International Criminal Court can be seen everywhere, like in the Sahel, to try jihadists that France pushed back yesterday and which again threaten a whole region; and in Ukraine, where the population are daily victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

What is happening in Ukraine is a problem for us all. If we allow our common principles to be transgressed there, they will be transgressed everywhere. If we allow an aggression to be rewarded, there will be more aggressions, there or elsewhere.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Russia's war of aggression is also a blow for the most vulnerable countries. It means we all have a duty of solidarity today.

In 2022, France became the fourth-largest actor of this solidarity, joining three friendly powers: the United States, Japan and Germany. That is the result of a patient investment that I am proud to present to you.

France stands in solidarity with those threatened by hunger. The appeal made a few days ago to preserve agricultural infrastructure; the massive increase in our food aid to almost €1 billion now, which goes to 67 countries, including, this week, Nigeria and Sudan; the hosting of the upcoming meeting of the School Meals Coalition in Paris on 18 and 19 October; and the replenishment consultation of the International Fund for Agricultural Development in December, which aims to bring in a replenishment of \$2 billion, are all illustrations of that solidarity.

Our solidarity efforts also seek to enable access for all to the funding needed to fight poverty and bring about energy transitions, in line with the ambitious United Nations agenda for the Sustainable Development Goals. The French President took the initiative of organizing the Summit for a New Global Financing Pact in Paris on 22 and 23 June, which sketched out a path to increase public and private finance to address the challenge of international solidarity. This summit produced immediate positive results, like the signing of a Just Energy Transition Partnership (JET-P) in Senegal and the agreement on Zambia's debt.

Commitments which France has been working for years to fulfil have been met, like the reallocation of 100 billion special drawing rights. The Paris Agenda for Peoples and the Planet that emerged from the June Summit set down clear principles to address the challenges of poverty and of climate change and biodiversity loss, so as to ensure no country need choose between these goals. France calls on all States who have not yet done so to endorse the Paris Agenda.

Our solidarity effort is also that of a country that has surpassed its climate finance promises by more than a billion euros, bringing it now to €7.6 billion as of 2022. It is that of a country that will continue to work tirelessly to protect our planet's lungs. In June 2025, France will host the United Nations Ocean Conference, which it is co-organizing with Costa Rica, in order to strengthen the protection of the oceans, which are an essential carbon sink, as much as possible. I am counting on your support and on your commitment to protecting forests and building partnerships for their conservation.

Our solidarity effort is that of a country which will always be committed to the promotion and defence of human rights. The 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights will be celebrated in Paris and Geneva this December. It will be an opportunity to pay tribute to those who fight to defend rights and freedoms, and to safeguard human dignity. These are rights to which we all aspire, all across the globe. I am thinking of women's rights, particularly in Afghanistan, where women are repressed purely based on their gender, by a Taliban regime that has tragically made a policy of segregation and violence against women a central tenet of its political identity.

Our solidarity also goes towards those who fight for others, sometimes at risk to their lives. I am thinking of the UN peacekeepers, as well as the 116 humanitarian workers who were killed, and those who were injured or kidnapped in 2022. We must protect them better, and France will remain fully engaged at their sides, as we did this week with our humanitarian partners here at the United Nations.

Based on these principles, France will always be ready to carry out collective action to serve the common good.

In terms of the climate, today we can see how a lack of ambition can result in disasters. Extreme weather events, fires and flooding have marked this year, all around the world, and resulted in tens of thousands of victims. The last IPCC report and the summary produced ahead of COP28 should sound the alarm bells. We cannot look away. On the contrary, we must take action, fast and collectively to tackle these common challenges, which no nation on this planet can escape. It is urgent, but possible.

To do this, we have a method. A tried and tested method, which helped us achieve results in the past. It is that of the Montreal Protocol, which enabled humanity to solve the ozone layer problem. It is the method we used to together reach the Paris Agreement in 2015. It is also this method which should swiftly enable the BBNJ treaty to enter into force, to protect marine areas; and it is the method that will help us fulfil the ambitious aims of the Kunming-Montreal agreement on biodiversity, and adopt – we hope, as it is much needed – a legally binding agreement to eliminate plastic pollution.

This method, which is the only valid method to go beyond awareness-raising and act with determination, commitment and responsibility, is multilateralism. And in the face of climate destruction, the demolition of our natural environment, the widespread loss of our biodiversity, you can count on France to continue taking the initiative.

The multilateral method is also the one which enables us to resolve the increasing number of international crises.

In Nagorno-Karabakh, the international community must ensure that a population subjected to nine months of a relentless blockade and a recent campaign of bombing and destruction, at last has their rights and security guaranteed. A diktat imposed on a besieged civilian population cannot be a solution, and the threats made against Armenia itself and the attacks that have already been observed on its territory must cease.

In Africa, we believe in African solutions to African crises, and we support the African regional organizations whenever they seek support from their partners. We are doing so in Niger, where France supports ECOWAS in its efforts to restore constitutional order, undermined by force as democratically elected President Mohammed Bazoum faces an attempted coup d'état.

In Sudan, a murderous war has been raging for more than five months. Civilians are the first victims of an atrocious, unacceptable conflict. It is the duty of the international community to continue working tirelessly to find solutions to achieve peace. Once again, we ask the belligerents to cease the fighting and spare civilians, allow a humanitarian truce and bring about an inclusive political solution.

Nor can we become accustomed to the conflict in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which has for too long been driven by the same motivations and hurt the same people. There, too, France is providing support to regional conflict resolution mechanisms, to facilitate a negotiated, peaceful solution.

France is and will remain a reliable, consistent ally to African regional organizations when they fight for peace, development, democracy and the security of the continent.

In a changing Middle East, France is also playing its part, tirelessly supporting dialogue and cooperation. We will continue to take part, at the invitation of our Iraqi partner, in the so-called Baghdad process, in this unprecedented format of dialogue among all countries in the region and which will soon meet again to work on tangible projects to respond to the clear need for cooperation among these countries.

Between Israelis and Palestinians, we will also continue our efforts for peace, guaranteeing both peoples a State, and secure and recognized borders based on the 1967 Lines. The two-state solution is the only path to just and lasting peace.

In a changing environment, the United Nations must also adapt. France supports the ambitious reform agenda of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and actively contributes to the work ahead of the 2024 Summit of the Future. We must also find new momentum for Security Council reform. I am thinking of the expansion of the Council, where we have long supported greater African representation, including among the permanent members, and the G4 candidacy. I am also thinking of regulation of the right to veto in the event of mass atrocities, which would lay the groundwork for renewed effectiveness of the Security Council.

President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

France, true to its tradition, will be present so that we may, together, our United Nations, tackle global challenges, threats to international peace and security and attacks on our shared principles. To do this, the Secretary-General, António Guterres, can count on the unwavering support of France.

The time to act is now, together, for the salvation of us all.

Thank you.