

## General Debate of the 76th Session of the General Assembly

“Building Resilience through hope to recover from COVID-19, rebuild sustainability, respond to the needs of the planet, respect the rights of people, and revitalize the United Nations”

*24 September 2021*

Mr. President of the General Assembly,

Mr. Secretary-General,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

In recent years we have witnessed a progressive weakening of multilateralism, which has guaranteed peace, security and prosperity since the post-war period.

However, we are now facing problems that we cannot solve on our own.

I am referring to the pandemic, and to the risk of new and dangerous variants of the virus.

Climate change and the protection of biodiversity.

The economic recovery and the fight against inequalities and food insecurity.

Conflict resolution and the fight against terrorism.

These issues are at the heart of today’s General Assembly and of our Government's agenda.

They are also at the core of the Italian Presidency of the G20, whose motto is “People, Planet and Prosperity”.

We need to relaunch multilateralism, and make it effective to meet the challenges of our times.

More than a year and a half after the beginning of the global health crisis, we can finally look at the future with greater optimism.

The vaccination campaign gives us confidence in our ability to return to a new normal.

In Italy and in Europe we have reopened most economic activities.

Students have returned to schools and universities.

After months of loneliness, our social life has finally resumed.

However, the pandemic is not over and even when it will be, we will have to deal with its consequences for a long time.

Globally, we face dramatic differences in the distribution of vaccines.

In high-income countries, more than 65% of the population has received at least one dose.

In the poorest ones, only 2%.

These disparities are morally unacceptable: fewer vaccinations mean more deaths.

And as long as the virus continues to circulate freely, it can mutate in dangerous ways and put even the most effective vaccination campaigns at risk.

We need to increase the availability of vaccines for poor countries and overcome logistical hurdles to distribute them where they are most needed.

Furthermore, we must preserve at the global level the free circulation of vaccines and of the raw materials needed to produce them.

Italy gives its full political and financial support to the COVAX Facility.

We intend to triple our donations from 15 to 45 million doses by the end of 2021.

The huge differences in vaccination campaigns risk worsening inequalities between countries.

The pandemic has had a negative social and economic effect on everyone, but the consequences for lower-income countries have been particularly severe.

Even before the health crisis, these countries had significant economic vulnerabilities, starting with their debt levels.

Many of their citizens lived below or just above the poverty line.

Advanced economies have been able to use monetary and fiscal policies more robustly to contain the economic shock.

They spent 28% of their 2020 gross domestic product to stimulate growth – compared with just 7% and 2% in emerging and low-income economies.

Economic divergence risks erasing years of progress in the fight against poverty, making it even more difficult to achieve sustainable development goals.

Concerns about food systems have become even more urgent.

Extreme weather conditions and supply chain disruptions have contributed to the increase in food prices.

In August the food price index rose by 32% compared to a year earlier.

According to the FAO, last year more than 2,3 billion people did not have access to adequate food on a regular basis.

Under the Italian Presidency, the G20 has adopted a package of economic measures to help the world's most fragile countries overcome the effects of the pandemic and assist them in their development.

We supported the decision by the International Monetary Fund to issue new Special Drawing Rights for a total of \$650 billion.

Of these resources, \$33 billion are destined to African countries, and we are working to further increase this share.

We have accelerated the refinancing of 'IDA-20', the World Bank's fund for the poorest countries.

The Italian Presidency intends to facilitate comprehensive and sustainable debt restructuring in countries with excessive debt levels.

Italy has also taken specific action on food security.

Together with the FAO, we have created the "Food Coalition" to combat malnutrition caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and we have hosted in Rome the Pre-Summit on Food Systems.

Nevertheless, we must be ready for even more ambitious action to support poorer countries, particularly in Africa.

Italy intends to continue to ensure its support for the African continent, which is increasingly central for security and economic growth globally.

We must increase investment, to enable Africa's youth to participate fully in its social, economic and political development.

The other emergency that we have placed at the core of our G20 Presidency agenda is climate change.

The latest UN IPCC report shows that, without immediate, rapid and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, we will fail to limit global warming to below 1,5 degrees above pre-industrial levels.

The number of climate-related natural disasters has increased fivefold since the 1960s.

Extreme weather events are expected to intensify over the next few decades.

Estimates from the World Health Organization show that climate change already causes 150,000 deaths per year, which could become 250,000 between 2030 and 2050.

We must act now to protect the planet, our economy and future generations.

As Presidency of the G20 and COP26 co-chair together with the United Kingdom, Italy intends to reach ambitious goals on the three pillars of the Paris agreement: mitigation, adaptation and finance.

Over the next decade, we must reduce as much as possible CO2 emissions produced by fossil fuels and other greenhouse gases, including methane.

And we must work to adapt our infrastructure to climate shocks, that have become increasingly frequent and violent.

Italy strongly supports the leading role of the European Union in the ecological transition, and in particular its commitment to a 55% reduction in CO2 emissions by 2030 and to net zero emissions by 2050.

However, the EU currently accounts for only 8% of global emissions, while G20 countries are responsible for 75%.

The fight against climate change requires multilateral engagement and pragmatic cooperation among all major global players - both rich and emerging economies.

We must act in an effective, coordinated and simultaneous manner, whilst always respecting national specificities.

We intend to reach a global agreement to stop the use of coal as soon as possible, and, consistently with this objective, block the financing of new projects of this kind.

We want to eliminate subsidies for fossil fuels and promote the use of renewable sources.

The environmental transition has significant costs and it is essential that governments stand ready to help citizens and businesses.

But it can also be an engine of economic growth.

According to a recent report by the International Renewable Energy Agency, the renewables sector could employ more than 40 million people by 2050.

In Italy and in the European Union at large we have embarked on a path of reforms and investment - "Next Generation EU" - to make the most of these opportunities.

We hope that the "Roundtable on Climate" promoted last Monday by Secretary-General Guterres and Prime Minister Johnson will give further impetus to the negotiations that will take us to the G20 Summit in Rome and to the COP26 in Glasgow.

Next week, 400 young people from all over the world will meet in Milan to present their proposals for the fight against climate change.

In recent years, young people have often been agents of change and have pushed us to do more. They will inherit the planet and it is our duty to listen to them.

In the past year, important issues affecting peace and security have resurfaced.

The main one is Afghanistan, where we face the risk of a social and civil catastrophe.

We must prevent the country from becoming once again a threat for international security.

I refer in particular to the presence of groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda and Daesh on Afghan territory.

The international community must cooperate effectively, starting with sharing intelligence.

Italy has long been involved at the international level in the fight against terrorism.

We must combine our security objectives with prevention, protection of human rights and respect for the rule of law.

And we must tackle both the economic and the social causes that lead to radicalisation and violent extremism.

In Afghanistan, we are witnessing the dismantling of the progresses made over the last 20 years in the protection of fundamental freedoms, especially for women.

All those who have signed the United Nations Charter and who adhere to the founding values of this Organization must commit to the resolution of this crisis.

The international community must stand united in demanding that all Afghan citizens can live in dignity, peace and security;

that the protection of vulnerable groups is ensured;

that women preserve their fundamental rights, first of all the right to education.

Italy has always been committed to promoting the respect of human rights in the world, in particular in the last three years with an active presence in the Human Rights Council.

The composition of the new Afghan government does not meet the expectations of the international community for a government that is inclusive and representative of the country's diverse ethnic, social and religious components.

The new rulers must prove with their actions, and not only in words, that they are committed to respecting individual freedoms.

We must also address the impact of the Afghan crisis on regional stability and security.

To address such a complex matter, we need a strategy that is as widely shared as possible.

Italy has taken action immediately to encourage the strongest possible coordination among the main global and regional players.

As G20 Presidency, we have made available the G20 platform, which is broad and inclusive by nature.

We have promoted a meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, in preparation for the extraordinary summit, which will focus on issues of humanitarian aid, security and human rights.

The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan is certainly the most pressing and shared concern, not least because of the approaching winter season.

According to the *World Food Programme*, one in three people in the country is exposed to food insecurity.

Italy has confidence in the ability of the United Nations to coordinate the international humanitarian response, mobilise resources and ensure a rapid and coherent intervention.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for organising the “*pledging conference*” in Geneva on the 13<sup>th</sup> September, where countries pledged some \$1,2 billion in humanitarian aid for Afghanistan.

The extraordinary G20 Summit must give its utmost support to these objectives.

There has to be full, safe, unhindered and unconditional access for international organisations and humanitarian aid workers.

Italy is at the forefront in the response to the humanitarian crisis, for the benefit of the most fragile groups in Afghanistan and of those Afghans who have left - or will leave - the country.

We are also ready to intervene in support of neighbouring countries affected by refugee outflows.

We have decided to use resources previously earmarked for training Afghan security and defence forces for humanitarian purposes.

The crisis in Afghanistan, and in particular its rapid deterioration following the withdrawal of “*Resolute Support*”, demands a reflection on the future of international missions.

In particular, we must ask ourselves what are their objectives and what is the best way to pursue them.

However, international interventions remain an essential tool in supporting peace and security.

Italy reaffirms with conviction its commitment within the United Nations.

We are the largest contributor to the Blue Helmets among Western countries and the seventh largest contributor to the budget of UN peacekeeping operations.

Italian soldiers are deployed in five UN missions in Mali, Western Sahara, Cyprus, at the border between India and Pakistan, and above all in Lebanon, where we are in charge of the UNIFIL mission and deploy one of the largest contingents.

We are convinced that the European Union needs to strengthen its role in this field, in line with the ambitions of the European project and in full complementarity with the Transatlantic Alliance.

The focus on Afghanistan and Central Asia should not distract us from the instability that continues to affect the wider Mediterranean.

In particular, we support, multilaterally, bilaterally and within the European Union, the transition process in Libya for a sustainable and inclusive solution to the crisis.

Its aim is to renew the country’s national institutional framework in a unified manner, without external interference and under the aegis of the UN – as mapped out by the Libyans themselves.

The international community must work together with the Libyan institutions and the Libyan people to overcome the current stalemate.

Despite this critical juncture, we must ensure that elections scheduled for the 24<sup>th</sup> of December can take place and the ceasefire is fully implemented.

Another aspect of the Libyan crisis is migration. Its correct management requires a joint response from the international community.

We must fight effectively against human trafficking, ensure regular international mobility and protect people's lives.

It is essential to have multilateral action, based on the principle of a fair sharing of duties and responsibilities.

The European Union and its Member States must strengthen the dialogue on migration issues with the countries of origin and transit of migrants, in order to achieve joint responsibility in the management of flows.

These principles inspire the cooperation between the European Union and its African partners, of which Italy has been an early promoter and that we intend to strengthen.

I would like to express the Italian Government's sincere appreciation for the important work carried out by United Nations organisations in Libya and, more generally, in many areas of crisis. In particular, I am referring to the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Italy is committed to continuing to work to promote the universal values of peace and development, and the protection and promotion of human rights.

These are not only at the core of the UN's action, but they are also the basis of the Italian Constitution, the European Union and the transatlantic bond.

The principles that inspired the United Nations Charter, and that we recalled in our Solemn Political Declaration, adopted on the occasion of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Organisation, are still a point of reference today.

Within the UN, the Security Council must be able to continue to fulfil its role in safeguarding international peace and security.

We support the need for a consensual reform of the Security Council, to strengthen regional representation and ensure a fairer geographical distribution of seats through an increase in the number of elected members.

Our goal is to make the Council more representative, democratic, efficient, transparent and accountable.

The answer to the challenges we face - the pandemic, climate change and international crises - lies in effective multilateralism, based on inclusive and open dialogue.

Italy wants to continue to contribute with ideas and resources, for the benefit of the entire international community.