



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

The UN annual session – is it worth stopping the decline of the UN's authority?



Even before it begins in New York this week, the UN General Assembly annual session has presented an image of a second-rate diplomatic meeting from which no one has high expectations. World leaders will convene in person at the UN headquarters without the restrictions that accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic in recent years - meaning those who will travel to New York. However, there is not much enthusiasm regarding the reunion. The list of leaders who will not participate in the General Debate attracts more attention than those who will. US President Joe Biden will be the only leader of a permanent member of the UN Security Council who will speak before the General Assembly. The remaining 4 - Xi Jinping, Emmanuel Macron, Rishi Sunak and Vladimir Putin will not appear in New York. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will also not be among the participants.

This sends a strong message to small countries that, aside from the UN, do not have access to other significant international fora: even in the UN, the "big" countries are not particularly interested in dealing with their issues and concerns. The General Debate and most accompanying conferences will focus on developing countries. The summits will discuss climate change, global health care, pandemic prevention and development financing. Hundreds of secondary, specialised events will deal with similar topics, which all together should give the impression that this World Organisation deals with all problems.

Sustainable development goals are not being met

However, there will be very few practical effects and results from that abundance of discussions, because the UN has been losing its status as a leading multilateral platform year after year. The leaders will consider the pace and quality of fulfilling the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which should eliminate extreme poverty and improve social welfare and environmental protection by 2030. The UN members are exactly halfway through the period. In 2015, they made a commitment

to fulfil the SDGs by 2030.

Whatever they say during the high-level week at the UN will just be a series of excuses. Only 15% of the objectives are being met at the agreed-upon rate and quality, which has since been verified by other international organisations and UN member countries' national institutions. All other proclaimed goals are either not being fulfilled at the agreed pace or have not even started, and some have regressed.

The Security Council does not perform as the world's peacekeeper

No progress should be anticipated from this year's General Debate of the UN General Assembly, which will also discuss the need to reform the Security Council, the most influential UN body. Since the start of the Russian aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, the UN has had no answer to the fact that a permanent member of the Security Council has been grossly violating the Charter, the fundamental UN document it is supposed to protect. Due to this, the majority of UN members bypass the Security Council, reaching the decision to condemn the Russian aggression against Ukraine several times at the General Assembly, where Russia has no power of veto. But this is only a forced bypass, not proof of the vitality of the World Organisation, whose most influential body has been practically blocked by the will of Russia.

The President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, will be one of the central figures of this week's gathering of world leaders in New York. He will speak before the General Assembly on Tuesday and participate in the work of the Security Council a day later, probably with the head of Russian diplomacy, Sergei Lavrov, in the same hall. Last year, Zelensky offered a peace formula at the UN, which should have included punishing Russia for the crime of aggression and forming a special tribunal to discourage any future similar attack on world peace. In the past year, the UN has not been a

factor that increased the chances of peace, powerless to resolve the contradiction in which one of the 5 most significant keepers of world peace has actually been destroying that peace.

Even the UN Court is not effective regarding the aggression against Ukraine

Coincidentally or not, Russian aggression against Ukraine will be the subject of another significant UN body this week - its International Court of Justice in The Hague. The judges will continue (after a year and a half since the submission) deciding on Ukraine's claim against Russia that it committed aggression by abusing the UN convention on genocide. Neither this procedure nor any other UN activity will accelerate the cessation of Russian aggression against another UN member, even though its outcome in favour of Ukraine might be the basis for reparations or some other form of compensation in the future. UN Secretary-General António Guterres warned about growing world divisions at the last year's General Assembly. His alert will be confirmed in real time at the New York meetings of world leaders.

The mechanisms of global governance, crisis resolution, and even peace-making have moved from the UN to other international fora, which have proven to be more efficient and more adapted to contemporary world relations. The UN itself has contributed to a large extent to the loss of influence on world processes and particularly to the decline of its own authority.

Is there any chance of a Black Sea grain deal?

It is difficult to maintain the authority of a global peacekeeper whose Security Council includes a country committing aggression against another UN member and massive war

crimes. It is also difficult to maintain international authority regarding the protection of human rights, when Iran has been chosen as the chair of the UN Social Forum. It is impossible to maintain authority in global health cooperation when a representative of North Korea, a country whose population has been starving due to internal repression of the autocratic government, has been elected to the leadership of the World Health Organisation. The annual UN General Assembly has a chance to stop the decline of its own importance at least a little if it is a place where members could reach some significant agreements behind the scenes.

There are chances for that regarding the renewal of the Black Sea grain deal after the efforts of the two principal mediators - Turkey and the leader of the UN, António Guterres - to force Russia to return to the agreement from which it withdrew last July. If this comes true, it will probably be the only tangible achievement of the UN's annual meeting.