

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks at a United Nations General Assembly Leaders' Reception in New York City

September 19, 2023

[President Biden's opening remarks were inaudible because the microphone was turned off. First Lady Jill T. Biden turned on the microphone, and the President continued his remarks as follows.]

Hello, hello? There you go.

Everybody, welcome. *[Laughter]* My fellow leaders and friends, it's an honor to welcome you here tonight. And I first want to thank Governor Hochul. I don't know where—the Governor is here somewhere.

Gov, great to see you. Kathy, thank you very much for everything this great city has done to make this General Assembly a success.

And I'm also grateful to the director of Met, Max Hollein. Max, thank you and—for allowing us to gather here in this beautiful hall.

Seventy-seven years ago, at the grand hall in London, our forebearers gathered for the first United Nations General Assembly. With honors—World War II and the horrors of it weighing on their hearts and the hopes of humanity resting on their shoulders, they opened the Assembly by declaring, quote, "The whole world now waits upon our decisions . . . looking to us to show ourselves capable of mastering our problems." End of quote.

Ladies and gentlemen, we gather once again in the halls of history, with the whole world looking at us to lead, to prove ourselves worthy, to show ourselves capable of coming together to master the challenges of our time.

Like our predecessors, we face a moment of great upheaval, a moment where basic principles like sovereignty, territorial integrity, universal human rights are being tested.

You know, the moment—a moment in historical challenges, from accelerating climate crisis to a once-in-a-century pandemic, have exposed inequity and exacerbated insecurities across the world.

A moment where a member of the United Nations Security Council has launched a brazen and brutal attack against the people of Ukraine, attacks that go against the very character of the United Nations, against the very principles that have been the cornerstone of peace and prosperity since the first Assembly 77 years ago.

Earlier today I stood before the General Assembly and asked my fellow leaders a question: Will we do what we must be—must be done to address these challenges? Will we live up to the promise we made to ourselves and to each other and to generations to come?

There can only be one answer to those questions: We must. We must. We must. And because of all the leaders in this room, I know that we will.

Over the past 2 years, I've seen how all of you have worked to open the immense opportunities in the face of such immense challenges. How, together, we bridged the public and private sector to pioneer new ways forward on everything from technology to health care to human rights. How, day in and day out, you have worked to support the world's most vulnerable.

So tonight my message is simple: Thank you. Thank you, thank you. And keep it up.

Folks, our world stands at an inflection point, where the decisions we make now are going to determine our future for decades to come. And we need you to help us set the course on a more stable and secure path. We need to continue tackling the challenges that most affect people's lives, from conflict to climate change to corruption and beyond.

We need you to partner with one another and with leaders around the world to sustain and update the institutions that have supported decades of progress since World War II.

We need you to help us unlock the trillions of private investment needed to accelerate progress and meet our highest hopes for humanity: ending hunger, eliminating poverty, expanding access to clean water and clean energy, reducing gender inequality, and increasing the quality of education and decent work, safe infrastructure.

Reaching these hopes will take all of us. So let me close with this.

This museum—and if you haven't had a chance to go through it, if you've not tonight, come back—contains some of the world's greatest artifacts and artworks, including some of the copies of work of one my favorite poets, an Irishman named Seamus Heaney.

He wrote a poem called "The Cure at Troy." And it seems appropriate tonight. He said: "History says, don't hope on this side of the grave. But then, once in a lifetime, that longed-for tidal wave of justice rises up, and hope and history rhyme."

Ladies and gentlemen, this is an age where we can once more make hope and history rhyme if we stick together, where together—and only together can we bend the arc of history in a better direction.

Like our forebearers all those years ago, the world is not only waiting on us, it's depending on us to master our challenges, to prove ourselves capable of forging a better future for humankind, one of greater dignity, opportunity, and security for all.

So thank you all for being here. And I look forward—I look forward—to working together with all of you in the years ahead.

May God bless you all, may God protect our troops. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:29 p.m. in the Charles Engelhard Court at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 20.

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