

## Demeke Mekonnen's full speech on the 76th Session of the UN General Assembly



Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Ethiopia Demeke Mekonnen's speech delivered at the General Debate of the 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

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Mr. President,

Allow me to start by congratulating you and the sisterly country, Maldives, on your election as president of the Seventy-Sixth Session of the General Assembly.

My appreciation also goes to Mr. Volkan Bozkir, for his able guidance of the Seventy-Fifth Session.

Congratulations is also in order for Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, for once-again winning the vote of confidence to serve the United Nations.

I also thank the host country for the facilities availed to us in the midst of a global pandemic.

Mr. President,

This year's General Assembly takes place while we continue to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic rattled all aspects of public and private life. It also revealed the power of innovation and the enormous potential of scientific research to serve humanity.

I would like to take a moment to applaud the scientists, engineers, and everyone who have played a part in the discovery and rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Evidently, science can serve humanity only if good faith and rationality guides politics. Unfortunately, Africa, with negligible vaccination rate is left waiting for the drips from the surplus of others due to vaccine nationalism.

In addition, the economic devastation in developing countries from the pandemic is yet to be addressed by meaningful economic and financial measures.

We hope, countries with the means, would advance cooperation that is cognizant of the global nature of the problem. With this pandemic, there is no isolated safety. No one is safe until everyone is safe.

Mr. President,

The true dignity and freedom of people lies with their ability to sustain themselves. Poverty and dependence on foreign aid cause political, governance, security, and human development challenges.

Global-warming is the most alarming driver of poverty. Agrarian and pastoralist communities and economies like ours with these livelihoods face an existential challenge.

The impacts of climate change are destroying arable land and biodiversity thereby disrupting our food system. Production of cash crops suffer from quality and quantity problems. Perennial flood and drought are straining the emergency readiness we have in place.

The targets under the environment and sustainable development agenda are overdue and can no more be overtaken by events.

Hopefully, COP-26 will pave the way for climate financing and support to programs such as the Green Belt and Green Legacy afforestation initiatives that are restoring a long-lost ecosystem.

Mr. President,

In the past few years, we heard from this podium voices of justified concern and call for rule-based world order and viable multilateralism.

Ethiopia, has always been steadfast in its support for multilateral institutions. Our position emanates not from rhetoric but from our tragic ordeal during the days rule-based order was left in the shambles.

We commend the declaration of return and renewal of commitment to multilateralism. At the same time, we see a glaring need to reiterate the fundamental values of sovereign-equality, non-interference, and cooperation based on mutual benefit and respect.

Multilateralism stands on the shoulders of states that ably-guard their sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence. Multilateralism will meet its objective only if states are able and free to manage their domestic and external affairs.

Indeed, our human aspirations are inherently similar. However, our viewpoints that are underpinned by our diversity in cultures, history, and socio-economic reality will not always be fully-aligned.

This diversity shall be viewed as an asset and no one amongst us should wish to prevail over the other, especially when it comes to values and policies dealing with our internal and external affairs.

Mr. President,

Three years ago, my country, Ethiopia embarked on a promising journey of reform. The changes we introduced, ushered-in democracy, human rights, human development, and regional stability. It also opened avenues for dialogue and unity among divergent political and interest groups.

Tapping into Ethiopia's rich history and enormous potential, the reform charted our inevitable and bright future – placing Ethiopia as a new horizon of hope.

It overturned a complex network of corruption, illegitimate political power, and illicit financial flows – installed at the cost of national interest and the detriment of regional peace.

The reform, however, was not without challenges. As any other democracy, our democratic process is an attempt to find a balance between stability and disruption.

In Ethiopia, groups that consider equality as subjugation are making their best effort to create and prolong anarchy.

At the hands of these lords of instability, we went through unimaginably inhumane attacks against citizens, instigation of violence, and destruction of property, that culminated in an attack against the Ethiopian army.

On the night of November four last year, in a scheme orchestrated by a criminal group, the Ethiopian National Defense Force was attacked from within. The unsuspecting men and women in uniform were slain.

The Government of Ethiopia, took the necessary measures to avert the grave danger imposed on us.

Mr. President

While the government was addressing humanitarian needs, the disruptors applied their cruel design to aggravate human suffering.

We were also caught by surprise, and to-be-honest, unprepared for the twisted propaganda campaign.

Little did we know the power of privatized politics and foreign policy that clouds the truth from policy decisions.

The criminal enterprise and its enablers created and advertised horrific imagery of faked incidents. As if the real misery of our people is not enough, story lines are created to match not the facts but preconceived stereotypical attitudes.

The Government of Ethiopia meeting-out its obligation to fulfil humanitarian needs, the declaration of humanitarian ceasefire, the commissioning of investigations, and accountability measures have not mitigated the propaganda campaigns.

At this stage, we are nearly convinced humanitarian assistance is a pretext for advancing political considerations.

Accused by agenda-and-revenue driven media, convicted by misguided politics, we are now facing a unilateral coercive measure. Ethiopia opposed coercive measures, when it was applied against others, we advise against its application on Ethiopia. Prescriptions and punitive measures never helped improve situations or relations.

Mr. President

The prudent measures we will continue to take are commensurate with the existential challenge we face. Despite the undue pressure, we shall live up to the solemn obligation to preserve the sovereignty, territorial integrity and the political independence of Ethiopia.

While cooperation and concern from our friends is welcome, we underline the need to employ constructive approach, cultivate trust and create understanding. Attempts to extend support or

even opine on an internal issue of a state requires full understanding about the complexities of the problem.

It shall be noted, the challenge we are facing is not limited to the boundaries of Ethiopia. The entire region is facing the destructive path paved for it by this group. Supporting Ethiopia overcome this criminal group is helping sustain regional peace.

Dialogue has always been our preferred course of action. Accordingly, Ethiopia is open to candid initiatives for peace. In this connection, we will work with the African Union and the High Representative for the Horn of Africa towards an Ethiopia led national dialogue.

We only hope, the African Union will be given the space to apply its own wisdom.

I also underscore my government's unreserved commitment for the provision of humanitarian assistance and facilitate the operation of our humanitarian partners that adhere to the principles of neutrality, independence and humanity and the laws of the country. Apart from this, no excuse will justify any attempt to intervene in our internal affairs.

Mr. President,

Had it been for the plans of the internal and external destabilizers, Ethiopia would have turned into rubles where the greedy and the archaic feast and thrive.

Not only that, the political map of the Horn of Africa would have altered, worsening its existing volatility.

With the resilience of its people, and the foundational cultural and religious diversity that made up Ethiopia's society, Ethiopia will continue overcoming its adversaries.

Ethiopia will always be a beacon of freedom and symbol of peace. As a nation that had never posed threat to security of other states, we will maintain our support to regional and global stability.

At this historic juncture, Ethiopia demands and Ethiopia deserves a similar cooperation it extended to others in the aftermath of attacks targeting their institutions.

Mr. president,

The political and security landscape in Africa is on a path of adversity. Forcible overthrow of governments, joint military exercises, aggression, renewed appetite for intervention in sovereign countries, subversion and mercenaryism, normalized and renewed scramble for natural resources, secret military pacts, geo-political competitions and others are becoming pervasive.

Unless we swiftly change course, this will be yet another round to destabilize Africa and disenfranchise Africans in the determination of our destiny. We hope there will be more countries to lift the banner of multilateralism rather than the vagaries of unilateralism. Accordingly, Ethiopia stands ready to avail bilateral mechanisms and diplomatic solutions to resolve the border dispute with Sudan.

It is incumbent upon our two governments to work for peace for the sake of our people that have the strongest bond of fraternity.

Mr. President

The past year has also seen a milestone for the people of Ethiopia. Our experiment with democracy ascended one level with a free, fair, peaceful, and credible election with an unprecedented level of voter turnout.

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam – a hydroelectric dam project we fully financed underwent a second-year filling. Hopefully, we inspired others to develop local capability to plan, finance, and complete renewable energy projects.

However, our humble attempt to light the houses of millions of Ethiopians and create hope for our youth is politicized before global bodies. This peoples' project also received unending threats.

Ironically, we are accused and threatened for drinking from our water. On the matter of the Nile and the GERD, our confidence is in the might of the truth, wisdom and justice that has always defined our path for cooperation.

The generational desire to use our natural resources will not be stopped by a colonial legacy and monopolistic cause. We hope our negotiating partners are prepared for a win-win outcome under the African Union led process.

Mr. President,

I would like to conclude my statement with a very important note on the role of my country in peacekeeping.

Our troops successfully completed missions in Darfur and Abyei. They paid the ultimate sacrifice in the most isolated mission areas, facing active intercommunal clashes, unconventional warfare methods, border disputes, and unabated administrative obstructions.

Our troops have done justice to the most cherished name of their country through their service and sacrifice. I pay them my respects and express our pride.

With the impending transition of the peacekeeping mission in Abyei, I would like to convey our best wishes for our two neighbors to amicably resolve their territorial dispute. We hope the sacrifices we made will not be in vain.

I thank you, Mr. President, and assure you of Ethiopia's full support for successful completion of your PRESIDENCY OF HOPE.

I thank you