



Predsednica Republike Slovenije

NATAŠA PIRC MUSAR

**Address
by the President of the Republic of Slovenia Nataša Pirc Musar
at the traditional New Year's reception for the Diplomatic Corps**

Brdo pri Kranju, 22 January 2024

Check against delivery.

*Prime Minister,
President of the National Assembly,
Doyen of the Diplomatic Corps,
Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, and other distinguished guests,*

At the end of last year, we mourned the passing of a great European, Jacques Delors, who left us with the powerful message "Don't be a pessimist. Or an optimist. Be an activist."

Regrettably, 2023 was not an encouraging year.

It did not see an end to the war in Ukraine, but it did see the outbreak of a new and tragic conflict. The second half of the year saw a brutal attack on innocent civilians in Israel by Hamas, followed by Israel's violent assault on Gaza.

In Gaza, civilian casualties are mounting and have become collateral damage. Some 25,000 people have been killed and 57,000 wounded, most of them children and women. We are witnessing a trampling of humanity and a blatant disregard for humanitarian and human rights law. All of this unfolded in a year that marked the 75th anniversary of the adoption of one of the greatest documents in history – the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In the past year, I shook hands with many world leaders. Among the first I met was Pope Francis, a tireless advocate of peace, warning against the toll of excessive wars.

Yet the war in Sudan quietly persists, with Darfur already becoming a land of widows, alongside conflicts in Yemen, Haiti and Myanmar and upheavals in the Sahel. There are currently more than 55 conflicts worldwide, the highest number in the last 100 years.

How many peace efforts have already been made to put an end to them?

In 2023, we marked the death of Benjamin Ferencz, the youngest prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials. Ferencz sought peace through justice, his motto being: Law. Not war. According to Ferencz, the path to peace involves three unwavering steps: Never give up. Never give up. Never give up.

He understood that there can be no peace without justice, a principle he defended in his decades-long efforts to establish the International Criminal Court. Without holding those responsible for crimes to account, a true and just peace remains unattainable. Not in Ukraine, Gaza, Israel, Sudan or Myanmar.

On a positive note, last year we were delighted to see the election of the distinguished Slovenian judge Beti Hohler as a new member of the International Criminal Court. Thank you all for your support in this endeavour.

Amidst the ongoing bloody conflicts, we must not allow other challenging but overlooked developments to go unnoticed in the media.

We cannot turn a blind eye to the plight of Afghan girls who are denied access to education and a future. Nor can we ignore the plight of refugee children who are denied the opportunity of an education. Let us remember the Iranian girls who are bravely fighting for their rights, alongside the 250 million girls and boys around the world who still lack access to education. Let us also remember the children who bear lasting physical and psychological scars as a result of the violence they experienced in their formative years. These lives will require support long after the guns have fallen silent.

Research suggests that the trauma of war will affect 11% of Ukrainian men and women, and similar applies to the citizens of Gaza. Slovenia is actively involved in both Ukraine and Ramallah through its NGOs and international organisations, including the ITF. Over the past 25 years, the ITF, with the support of your nations, has been instrumental in assisting countries with mine clearance, rehabilitation, and psychosocial support for women and children.

Ladies and gentlemen,

2023 also marks a year of climate extremes: by some estimates it was the hottest year on record. In places like Arizona, even the hardy cacti succumbed to drought. At the UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries in Doha, I met the Prime Minister

of Tuvalu, an island nation in the Pacific Ocean. He advocates sovereignty without territory, predicting that his country will disappear within a few decades due to rising sea levels.

Throughout the year, weather disasters continued to batter our planet, and Slovenia was not spared. We faced the worst floods in the history of our independent country, which affected two-thirds of our territory and led to the first-ever internal displacement of the Slovenian population.

In the midst of these challenges, however, we also witnessed remarkable solidarity among neighbours and foreigners alike. There has been a resurgence of community spirit and collective solidarity among all of you and your countries.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to each of you and your nations for your extraordinary response and support. The friendships forged in rebuilding the bridges that were washed away strengthen the bonds between our countries.

Slovenia actively participated in the UN Climate Change Conference COP28 in Dubai, pledging a contribution of EUR 1.5 million to a new loss and damage fund to help the most vulnerable and impoverished countries cope with the effects of climate change. In my speech in Dubai, I emphasised the importance of climate justice, highlighting that the wealthiest 10% of the global population bear responsibility for over 50% of greenhouse gas emissions, while the poorest 50% contribute a mere 7%.

A notable development in the COP28 agreement is the commitment to transition away from fossil fuels and to promote the use of renewable energy – the first such commitment in 30 years. A more ambitious agreement is needed, however, including a clear commitment to phase out greenhouse gases, emissions and fossil fuel subsidies.

According to experts, meeting the climate goals by 2030 will require shutting down about 240 average-sized thermal power plants per year, halting deforestation, increasing the share of solar and wind power to 24% per year, reducing meat consumption, and more. Is this feasible? It should be. The consequences of inaction are becoming clearer every year.

In 2023, we all met ChatGPT and the growing power of artificial intelligence. One of the great challenges of our time will be to establish global rules for the ethical use of AI. Again, the EU is taking the lead by spearheading the developing international standards through the AI Act.

Some warn that artificial intelligence has already hijacked language. It learns itself and creates stories that are not based on personal experience. How will we experience

stories created in this way in the future, especially if they are described as reality but are based on untruths?

The fear of disinformation is all the greater as we enter a major election year. As many as two billion people will go to the polls this year, from the USA, India, Indonesia and many African countries to two of our neighbours, Austria and Croatia. On top of that, there are the elections to the European Parliament.

This year's election cycle will be all the more important for defending effective multilateralism, international commitments on climate, respect for human rights, and the pursuit of a more tolerant and inclusive society.

But it is primarily we, politicians and public figures, who are responsible for tolerant public discourse. I am concerned that the migrant issue is being misused by some to fuel demagogy. Migration cannot be solved by putting up fences at borders and in people's heads.

We must solve the migration challenge together, at the European and global levels, by working together and taking into account all the causes and consequences.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Slovenia, which swears by international law as well as human rights and international cooperation, was chosen as a new member of the United Nations Security Council in 2023.

In the year of campaigning for the Security Council, we were told that membership of the Security Council would be a period of action.

You gave us a huge 153 votes, and we have accepted your support with great responsibility. We want to work closely with you.

We have entered the Security Council at a time when a permanent member of the Security Council is in flagrant violation of the UN Charter, when one permanent member is vetoing resolutions on Ukraine and another on the Gaza ceasefire. We have seen an unacceptable verbal attack on the UN Secretary-General.

Given the intertwined and complex nature of the crises, the world needs more cooperation between countries and strict respect for international law. It needs an effective UN to respond to global challenges more quickly.

The organisation will be 80 years old next year and in all this time has never had a female Secretary-General, and in 78 years only four women have presided over the General Assembly. That is one of the reasons why I proposed to the General Assembly

last September the so-called gender alternation in the post of President of the General Assembly, and we would be grateful for your support.

Let the year 2024 be a year of activism: for more humanity, for more cooperation, for more justice.

And for more Europe. For a greater Europe.

This year, the European Parliament's composition will change, there will be a new European Commission and a new President of the European Council. The next decade will be crucial for the green transition.

The elections to the European Parliament are an opportunity to show young people who were born in the EU the benefits of living in the EU. To make them aware that active citizenship activities are not just for their elders, that only active citizenship engagement will help in keeping democracy and freedoms on a high level in EU countries. According to an international survey of Europe's young people, we are seeing a sharp decline in civic awareness, with only 30% of young people showing an interest in social or political affairs.

This year will also mark, among other things, the 20th anniversary of Slovenia's accession to the EU and NATO. Being a member of both is something that identifies and guides us. Slovenia will strive for an even more integrated, stronger and larger European Union.

Slovenia is now surrounded only by EU Member States. Cooperation with our neighbours is crucial. The relations with our neighbours are intertwined in many areas as well as through minorities. Their rights must be consistently respected and their identities nurtured.

We also share concerns with our neighbours about the situation in the Western Balkans region. In 2023, there were positive developments regarding the enlargement of the European Union with Ukraine and Moldova, and we expect similar developments for Bosnia and Herzegovina and for Georgia.

This region needs Europe and Europe needs this region. And, as President of the European Council Charles Michel said in Bled, the region must be ready for EU membership by 2030.

In the context of regional integration, I am particularly pleased that the Brdo–Brijuni process continues to be so well received among the leaders of the region. The September Brdo–Brijuni summit meeting's atmosphere was constructive. Leaders agreed to put even more energy into solving common problems. In addition to the European Union accession processes, these include climate change and the future of

young people. I believe that this is also why, after two arid years, a joint declaration was adopted. I hope that, despite the many challenges in the region, this will be a milestone for even closer integration.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The year 2024 should therefore be a year of diplomacy, a year of mediation, a year of searching for ways for peaceful resolution of wars and conflicts.

A year of countries battling only on the sports fields of the Paris Olympics.

Paris is also the home of the headquarters of UNESCO, founded almost 80 years ago to promote cooperation in education, science and culture. In 1945, the preamble to the UNESCO Constitution said, among other things, that since *wars* begin in the *minds of men*, it is in the *minds of men* that the defences of peace must be constructed.

Almost 80 years on, and after far too many war victims in 2023, it is time to make this a reality.

I wish you and your families all the very best for the New Year and, above all, a peaceful and healthy 2024.

Thank you very much.

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