Statement on behalf of Ireland

by

Ambassador Geraldine Byrne Nason

on the occasion of the

'International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace'

United Nations

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Madam President,

Thank you for convening this important meeting. It is hard to imagine a topic that requires our determined focus more than this. It embodies the real life test we face every day as we cross the threshold at the UN endeavouring to live out our commitment to multilateralism in our day to day jobs. This is not theory, it is practice. But of course the scale of the challenge seems enormous from our perch as we face headlong into the major challenges before us as a global community – climate change, migration, sustainable development, conflict prevention. The fact is that we have two choices, a choice of acting collectively, or a choice of acting alone in our own self-interest. If we each choose the latter course, we know from history that the likely outcomes will be profoundly negative, even dangerous.

By any standards, Ireland is a small state – a status we proudly share with the large majority of UN members in this room today. Maybe because of that, we are even more keenly aware of the
value of multilateralism. We will shortly celebrate the centenary of our independence, but we only truly found our voice on the world stage on the day we joined to the United Nations in 1955, we never forget that. Similarly, our economic development benefited greatly from our membership of the European Union. Strong and stable multilateral structures have allowed Ireland and many other states to prosper and have our voice heard. Even the largest and most powerful countries require and benefit from a stable and predictable multilateral order. Some of us seem to just need more reminding than others that the problems of today are problems without passports and simply cannot be addressed without a stable rules-based order. That’s the reality, whatever our size.

What do we need to do to support multilateralism in 2019?

I would highlight the following:

First, our shared institutions must reflect the world as it is, and must demonstrate their value. We need, for example, more women at the top of all our institutions. We need to reform the Security Council, so that Africa and other regions are properly represented. We need to reform the way the UN operates, to make sure it is delivering on the ground for those most in need.

Second, we need to stand by our commitments. The resolutions of the Security Council, for example, are binding on all members, but are frequently ignored. International law, and international humanitarian law, are fundamental to how nations interact. It is vital to uphold the applicability of international law, and to ensure accountability for violations. In the same vein, when sovereign Governments collectively agree Declarations and other outcomes, we should recognise these as clear political commitments, not aspirations to be discarded when no longer convenient. We must implement the Paris climate agreement, Agenda 2030, and the Global Compact on Migration. We must ensure there is the necessary financing to allow these agreements to be implemented.

Third, Madam President, we must be creative. We need, in particular, to find new ways of operating in language and in law. For example, the relationship between the UN and regional and sub-regional organisations needs to be radically developed. We also need a much deeper level of cooperation with civil society and indeed the private sector.

Finally, we need to connect with our citizens. The UN achieves things every day, from providing life-saving humanitarian assistance, to standing up for human rights, or brokering peace agreements. We need to be much better at communicating these successes to the public, particularly the young, and inviting their feedback on all our actions.
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