High Level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly

International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace

Statement by H.E. Lise Gregoire van Haaren
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NEW YORK, Wednesday, 24 April 2019
Thank you Madam President,

I would like to congratulate you on organizing today’s meeting. Multilateralism is under pressure at a time when we need it more than ever. I therefore agree with you that we should renew our commitment to multilateralism, to discuss the challenges and to seek ways to strengthen the multilateral system.

Our citizens expect solutions to cross border problems like climate change, irregular migration, terrorism. They are also calling for free and fair trade, sustainable development and respect for human rights. The United Nations has a key role to play in all of these areas.

In a number of areas, the UN has been very instrumental. For example by
- reaching agreement on the Sustainable Development Goals,
- on the Paris Climate Agreement,
- and by deploying tens of thousands of peacekeepers to stabilize fragile countries.

In other areas, the UN cannot make it happen. The most striking example being the conflict in Syria.
This is not the fault of the UN as an organization, but the fault of member states not being able to find agreement.

We also see a trend where countries are pulling back from multilateral organizations and agreements. Their argument is that they want to preserve their sovereignty.

But is that really the case? In our view, sovereignty is about a country being able to resolve problems and to tackle challenges in order to improve the life of its citizens. It is an illusion to think that by turning inward, problems will go away.

We need each other and have to be honest about these facts to our citizens. And in certain cases citizens need the help of the International Community to ensure their protection and rights if the government fails to do so.

We see international organizations as the UN, NATO, EU, WTO, the World Bank and the IMF as a way to boost our ability to solve the problems that we face on a global scale. If these organizations somehow did not exist, we would need to invent them.
This does not mean that all multilateral organizations are perfect; they are not. Some organizations are criticized for a lack of effectiveness or efficiency. However, it is too easy to discard organizations when they do not instantly produce the results that we want.

Instead of walking away, we should engage in improving these organizations and find solutions. This also means that we sometimes need to be critical and to push for reforms.

For example, the Netherlands has been investing in modernizing UN peace operations and to make them more effective by enhancing intelligence capabilities. A second example is the Funding Compact, which was agreed with the UN. In this Compact the UN commits to more transparency and accountability and the Member States commit to more long term and more core financing. A third example is the need to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse. Here we encourage the UN and other international organizations to step up their policies and implementation.
A better functioning of multilateral institutions also depends on respect for the international rules based order, on international justice and on accountability. International law, rules and commitments should be respected.

As Prime Minister Rutte pointed out at the General Assembly in September: We believe in the power of principles and not the principles of power to guide us towards a better future for more people.

The prime minister also stated that we are in favor of constructive multilateralism that is focused on solutions instead of a combative multilateralism focused on confrontation.

The UN has been able to do a lot of good work in the past 74 years. Next year we will celebrate its 75th birthday.

Let us make sure that we – the member states – enable this organization and other multilateral organizations to deliver the results that our citizens demand.

I thank you Madame president.