



Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Delegates, President Lepre,

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to welcome so many high-level delegates, Heads of Government, Ministers, and Ambassadors from our 172 Member States today. I warmly welcome you to the twentieth UNIDO General Conference. It is impressive that many of you have come to Vienna to attend this General Conference in person. We are delighted to have you here! This underlines the importance of UNIDO for your countries.

As a special guest of honour, I greet the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, His Excellency Mr. Abiy Ahmed, together with his wife and his delegation. It is a special pleasure and an honour for UNIDO and this General Conference. Thank you for your participation.

I also greet my other special guests and speakers here today: from the Asia region and G77 and China, I welcome the China International Trade Representative and Vice-Minister of Commerce, His Excellency Mr. Wang Shouwen. Representing the Latin America region, the Minister of Production of Peru, Her Excellency, Ms. Ana Maria Choquehuanca De Villanueva. From Central-Asia, we are honoured by the presence of His Excellency Deputy Prime Minister Mr. Baymyrat Annamammedov from Turkmenistan.

I am particularly pleased to welcome two new Member States to the UNIDO family: Palau joined at the beginning of the year and South Sudan in the summer. We are honoured today to welcome here the Foreign Minister of Palau, His Excellency Mr. Gustav Aitaro. We are proud that 172 countries are now members of UNIDO.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me give a short review: 2015 was a year of hope and new beginnings! The world committed itself to the 2030 Agenda, aiming to create a world without hunger and poverty and to end the glaring inequality between rich and poor. Additionally, in 2015 the world committed to the Paris Agreement, pledging to limit and combat climate change.

Eight years later at the end of 2023, where do we stand today? Poverty, hunger, and injustice continue to increase worldwide. 10% of the affluent primarily in industrialized countries own 80% of the wealth. Climate change is advancing and CO2 emissions are on the rise.

What are the challenges today? The after-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, wars and their consequences and climate change hit the poorest of the poor in the Global South hardest, even though they are not themselves responsible for these issues.

These countries struggle with the impacts of climate change they struggle with energy and food supply crises and related rising costs for energy, food and fertilizer, resulting in dramatic inflation and debt crises.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The time has come for a new global contract between the rich and the poor, a new “World Future Contract”. More global solidarity is needed. We need to rethink the global economy. We require new rules for globalization, to foster fairer globalization with development opportunities for all.

The industrialized countries must fulfil their promises and commitments. Specifically, the 0.7% of GNI for development target must be treated as mandatory. Countries who call for spending 2% on defense should at least be willing to allocate 0.7% to development cooperation. Climate change is a matter of justice and thus a new global burden-sharing mechanism is necessary - a worldwide Green Deal is required.

The question of the century is this: how to provide food and electricity every day to billions of people in the Global South. How to offer hundreds of millions of people a perspective for the future: decent jobs and better living conditions. We must consider that the world population grows by 215,000 people every day and nearly 80 million every year. The population of Africa is set to double by 2050. Food, energy, jobs, and infrastructure are needed!

The world community must provide answers to these challenges. There is a deficit in political action and will. We stand at a tipping point in history, and a fundamental change is necessary - in politics, in our economies, in global cooperation.

It would be possible to take first steps next week at COP28. Industrialized countries need to agree there on new binding rules that they must follow to meet climate targets. The G20 are responsible for nearly 80% of all CO2 emissions, 54 African countries in turn for only 4%. Such steps forward also involve establishing a new financing system for investments in developing countries. Developing countries need an economic perspective. SDG8 calls for decent work and opportunities for all, assuming an annual growth of at least 7% economic growth.

This can happen, and it requires certain important decisions: Debt relief for all Least Developed Countries. Access to the international financial system and substantial investments. To reach the SDGs not billions, but trillions of dollars are necessary. Yet what is the reality? Currently, LDCs have almost no access to the financial market and pay exorbitant interest rates for loans. In contrast, industrialized countries support their economies on the level of trillions of dollars while simultaneously reducing global investments in development cooperation. This is unacceptable!

In addition to achieving the 0.7% development target, it is essential to implement mandatory regulations for fair global supply chains. Two examples illustrate how unfair global trade is: in the countries of the Global South, 150 million people work in the production of coffee and tea. Workers on plantations receive a wage of 15 cents per hour. I have visited such plantations and spoken with the workers there. The price for 1 kilogram of raw coffee beans is €0.50-€0.70. On the other hand, here in Vienna, the cost of 1 kilogram of coffee is then €12 to €15. Where and to whom does the added value go? We need a reversal of this system, emphasizing local value addition and fair wages for farmers on-site.

Another example is textile production: A pair of jeans produced in Ethiopia or Bangladesh costs \$5 to manufacture and is sold in Vienna for \$50 or \$150. The value addition does not stay with the women involved in the production in Bangladesh or Ethiopia, as their earnings are as low as \$0.50 per hour. This is simply exploitation within global supply chains. We can and must change this.

A world without hunger is possible, and dignified work for all is our mission. UNIDO is your partner for fair value chains, working in collaboration with the WTO and the ILO. UNIDO is also your partner for sustainable industrialization, innovation, and access to energy for all. Many of our projects aim for these objectives. However, more investments are needed, as only a small fraction of global investments in renewable energy currently flow into developing countries, and only a few hydrogen projects are

being implemented there. UNIDO is your partner: we are leading a global alliance for green hydrogen, hydrogen from and for developing countries is the goal.

UNIDO is also your partner for food security, in agro-tech and the food processing industry. In collaboration with many member countries, we implement projects to increase agricultural productivity. Ethiopia is a good example: the Government, led by His Excellency Mr. Abiy Ahmed, focuses on progress through innovation. Ethiopia has tripled wheat yields in the last three years, transforming from an importer to an exporter. This development is also possible for rice, millet, corn, and other products. China and many Asian countries have successfully taken this path, lifting hundreds of millions of people out of poverty over the past decades.

The good news is that today we have the technologies, the knowledge, and the money available globally to achieve the SDGs. What is lacking is the political will to create the conditions for it. UNIDO is your project partner, but also your voice in the global community. Therefore, I urge the industrialized nations present here today to do more, to live up to their responsibilities. This is not about charity. It is about a fair partnership for a shared future. We all must understand: no global challenge can be resolved without investments in the future of people in the Global South.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You elected me as Director-General two years ago. I have taken on this task with joy and determination. We have reformed UNIDO, making it leaner, more efficient, and more effective. Our priorities are clear: “progress by innovation” with new investments, technology, and knowledge transfer through projects and partnerships in cooperation with you.

In 2021-2022, we faced challenging budgetary circumstances. Therefore, it is a particularly significant success that we are on a good track to increase TC implementation by 25% in 2023. This is also my goal for 2024. It is very important that we are making steady progress on gender equality and the empowerment of women. I would like to thank Ms. Ugaz for her work on our new gender strategy.

We have been strengthening our regional approaches and defined clear regional strategies – I thank Ms. Haidara for her work on this. We are implementing an Action Plan for Latin America. My goal is to increase our TC portfolio there and also to strengthen Headquarters with senior management positions for Latin American staff members.

In South-East Asia, we will continue our work on flagship initiatives such as industrial decarbonization, sustainable cities and e-mobility. In Eastern Europe we have signed new partnerships agreements with emerging donors. Moreover, we are starting a number of new Country Programmes and Programmes for Country Partnership with African states.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy and grateful that during the General Conference, new agreements will be agreed upon, including flagship projects with China, Saudi Arabia, Germany, and others.

We are preparing our Green Industrial Recovery Programme for Ukraine, which is supported by the EU, Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Japan, Poland and Switzerland. Italy, Japan, Scandinavian countries, and Switzerland have strengthened their programmes with UNIDO. While I cannot mention each and every partner individually, I would like to thank you all.

The European Union has selected UNIDO, together with ITC, as the main partner in the implementation of the €200 million program to support the African Continental Free Trade Area. The United Kingdom is now our partner in the implementation of the €80 million project in the field of climate protection. Many Member States and international organizations such as the Global Environment Facility, Green Climate Fund, Montreal Protocol, will expand their partnership with UNIDO, for which I am very grateful.

My special thanks also go to my leadership team, DDG Zou, DDG Yasunaga, DDG Haidara and Managing Director Beger, Director Ugaz, Chief of Cabinet Karl Pelikan, Head of Office Mattiat, and the entire UNIDO team, both here and in the field. Only together we are successful.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we must act and work on solutions. Allow me to conclude with a quote from Nelson Mandela: *“What counts in life is not the mere fact that that we have lived, it is what difference we have made to the lives of others.”*

Thank you very much!