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President: Mr. Shahid (Maldives)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Commemorative meeting on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade

Agenda item 120

Commemoration of the abolition of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade

The President: In accordance with paragraph 4 of resolution 73/345 of 16 September 2019, the General Assembly will hold a commemorative meeting on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Statement by the President

The President: Over the course of four centuries, more than 15 million men, women and children from across Africa were subjugated, shackled and involuntarily transported to the Americas. Many perished on that journey, succumbing to its appalling conditions. For those who survived, a life without compassion, joy and freedom awaited. Their remaining days were filled with torture and forced labour.

That was the brutal reality of the transatlantic slave trade, which to this day remains the largest forced movement of a people in history. Slavery was meant to take away the names, individuality and legacy of its victims. By documenting, sharing and reflecting on their stories, we prevent them from fading into obscurity and we reaffirm their individual human worth.

That is why today we observe the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, on the theme “Stories of courage: resistance to slavery and unity against racism”. It is our obligation to continue to raise awareness of the pernicious legacies of slavery, including racism, discrimination and social injustice, while also celebrating the bravery of those who stood up against that brutal system. We must never forget, and we must always contemplate, the lessons of that tragic chapter in our history. And as we do so, we must acknowledge certain facts without equivocation, including the fact that many people of African descent were stolen from their homes, put in chains, separated from their families, bought, sold, abused, tortured and violated in body and spirit. That collective trauma, endured for hundreds of years by successive generations, cannot be expected to heal quickly. To this very day, the consequences of the transatlantic slave trade — and the racist attitudes that facilitated it — still endure and affect the lives of many people of African descent.

Years ago, I visited Goree Island in Senegal, which was the largest slave-trading centre on the West African coast from the 15th to the 19th centuries. Packed into small cells, the enslaved were chained and shackled. Their only escape was through the small door of no return through which every man, woman and child walked to the slave boat to be shipped across the Atlantic Ocean to build the new world.

Slavery was not only a dreadful individual ordeal but also a cultural trauma whereby a group of people were subjected to such inhuman pain and torture

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that it dehumanized their existence, their group identity, values, feelings and cultural worldview. As acknowledged by the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, people of African descent continue to disproportionately suffer the consequences of the slave trade and colonialism. They experience multiple and aggravated forms of discrimination. That discrimination often intersects with, and is amplified by, other forms of prejudice, targeting language, religion, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, disabilities or birth status, among many other aspects. And in recent years, the coronavirus disease pandemic has been a compounding factor, as it has put an immense strain on social systems and laid bare the stark inequities faced by individuals in already marginalized communities. Standing in solidarity with victims is the bare minimum we can do. We must act to address these inequalities.

Last week, I visited the *Ark of Return*, the United Nation's permanent memorial to the victims of the transatlantic slave trade. It stands as a reminder that only by acknowledging history can we understand how it continues to inform and affect the present, only then can we properly address the injustices that still linger. And only by addressing those injustices can we truly honour those victims who fell prey to one of the most vicious institutions ever devised by humankind.

In that spirit, let us honour the memory of the victims by standing up against racism and discrimination, by calling for greater commitments to social justice and by celebrating the equal worth and dignity of all our communities, irrespective of caste, creed or skin colour. With hope and conviction, let us resolve to write a new chapter in our history, filled with justice and equality.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Secretary-General António Guterres.

The Secretary-General: It is my privilege to join the General Assembly as we pay tribute to the victims and survivors of the transatlantic slave trade.

There is much that we know about the trade in enslaved Africans, and today is a day we remember the crime against humanity, the unprecedented mass human trafficking, the degrading economic transactions and the unspeakable human rights violations. But there is also much that we do not know, and today must be a day of learning.

Behind the facts and figures are millions of human stories — stories of untold suffering and pain, stories of families and communities ripped apart, but also stories of awe-inspiring courage and defiance against the cruelty of oppressors. We need to tell those stories of righteous resistance, from Zumbi dos Palmares in Brazil and Queen Nanny of the Maroons in Jamaica to Queen Ana Nzinga of the Kingdom of Ndongo in present-day Angola, Toussaint Louverture of Saint-Domingue in present-day Haiti and many more.

We also need to hear the stories of prohibitions of slave trade in the imamate of Futa Toro in present-day Senegal during the reign of Abdul Kader — well before abolition movements gained momentum in Europe and the Americas. We will never know every act of resistance, great or small, that slowly but surely triumphed over injustice, repression and enslavement. But those accounts are crucial to our understanding of a past whose most pernicious cause and most persistent legacy stains our present: racism.

The transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans was instrumental in shaping modern conceptions of race. To rationalize the inhumanity of the slave trade, Africans were portrayed as less than human. Racist tropes circulated widely, legitimized by pseudoscience and enshrined in law. Over 200 years after the end of the transatlantic slave trade, the vicious lie of racial supremacy remains alive today. Indeed, it finds new resonance and amplification in online echo chambers of hate. Ending slavery's legacy of racism is a global imperative for justice, which implicates us all — we are all responsible for standing up and speaking out in solidarity against racism wherever and whenever we encounter it.

The transatlantic slave trade marked a brutal rupture in African history and thwarted the continent's development for centuries. At the same time, the prosperity achieved across so much of the Western world was possible only through the exploitation of African slave labour and know-how. It devastated the economies of those it enslaved and enriched the colonizers.

We must reverse the consequences of generations of exploitation, exclusion and discrimination — including their obvious social and economic dimensions — through reparatory justice frameworks. Acknowledging past wrongs, tearing down statues of slavers and seeking forgiveness cannot undo the crimes. However, they can

sometimes help free the present and the future from the shackles of the past.

(spoke in French)

But past wrongs must not distract us from present-day evils. Outside Africa, people of African descent are often among the last to benefit from health care, education, justice and opportunities of all kinds. The African diaspora has enriched societies around the world, and yet its members still face marginalization, exclusion and unconscious bias; their lives are still darkened by the long shadow of slavery.

On this International Day of Remembrance, let us honour the victims of slavery, memorialized by the *Ark of Return*, which stands in the plaza just outside this Hall as a constant reminder of the courage of slaves. It calls on us to stand united against racism, to fight inequality and injustice, to learn and teach about the past and to build societies based on dignity, respect, justice and opportunities for all.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

Before proceeding further, and as indicated in my letter dated 4 March, I would like to consult members with a view to inviting Ms. Nikole Hannah-Jones of *The New York Times Magazine* and creator of the 1619 Project, to make a keynote statement on this occasion.

If there is no objection, may I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly, and without setting a precedent, to invite Ms. Nikole Hannah-Jones to make a keynote statement at this commemorative meeting?

It was so decided (decision 76/557).

The President: In accordance with the decision just taken, I now give the floor to Ms. Hannah-Jones.

Ms. Hannah-Jones: It is my deepest honour to speak before the General Assembly today on this International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

I have dedicated my life's work to excavating the modern legacy of transatlantic slavery. My thoughts are therefore never far from what has become the defining subject of my journalism and what I believe continues to be the defining undercurrent of life in the Americas: the legacy of slavery.

I stand before the Assembly the great-great-grandchild of enslaved men and women born in the

United States of America, part of the millions who lived and died under the brutal, immoral and inhumane system of chattel slavery that existed for the first 250 years of the land that would come to think of itself as the freest nation in the history of the world.

We gather in this Hall to mark the global trade that took some 15 million beloved human beings across the Atlantic in the holds of barbaric ships — the largest forced migration in the history of the world and one that would reshape the entire Atlantic world and transform the global economy. We must never forget the scale and depth of the horrors that people of African descent suffered in the name of profit — profit that enriched the European colonial Powers and built the nascent economy of the United States. We must never forget how the systems of slavery collapsed, only to be reborn in other such models of violent and racist economic exploitation as what we benignly call Jim Crow in the United States, but what is more aptly called apartheid. But on this solemn day of remembrance, the looking back cannot be and should not be solely defined by African-descended people's enslavement. Just as defining — just as important to remembering the legacy of transatlantic slavery — are the stories of Black resistance that would, more than any other force, lead to slavery's collapse in our hemisphere.

No people voluntarily submit to their enslavement, and, by obscuring the role of Black resistance in our collective rememberings of the transatlantic slave trade, we continue to do the work of those who sought to justify slavery by stripping us of our collective humanity. People of African descent resisted their enslavement from the moment of their capture. They resisted on the long walk from the interior of Africa to the coast. They resisted in the castles before being dragged out to the waiting ships. They resisted so frequently on the water that the slave ships had to be specially designed to try to prevent mutiny. The ocean became the final resting place of thousands of Africans who resisted by choosing a final swim with the ancestors over enslavement in a strange land.

As we remember our brutal enslavement by people who believe themselves to be civilized, even as they tortured, abused and murdered other human beings for profit, for sugar for their tea, for molasses for their rum, for cotton to wear, and for tobacco to smoke, we must remember most the fierce Black radical tradition of resistance that did not begin with anti-colonialism efforts on the continent or with civil rights movements in the

United States and other places, but with, as the scholar Cedric Robinson argued, the *cimarrones* of Mexico, who ran away to indigenous communities or form their own fugitive communities known as *palenques*. We must remember Yanga, who led a community of fugitive Africans and fought the Spaniards so fiercely that they won their status as a free Black settlement. We must remember Brazil's *quilombolas*, including Palmares, a fugitive Black community that would endure for 90 years in the Portuguese colony that would import more Africans into slavery than anywhere else in the Atlantic world. We must remember the Maroons of British and French Guiana, Cuba and the United States and the Bush Negroes of Suriname, who, for five decades, fought against their oppressors who were attempting to re-enslave them. We must remember the revolts of enslaved people in Jamaica in 1690, in New York City in 1712, Queen Nanny in 1720, the Stono Rebellion in 1739, and Tacky's Rebellion in 1760.

We must remember the most successful uprising of enslaved people in the history of the world — the Haitian Revolution, where enslaved people rose up and defeated three mighty colonial empires, becoming the first nation in the Americas to abolish slavery and establishing the world first free Black Republic in audacity for which the Western world has punished Haiti ever since.

We must remember revolts in Barbados in 1816, the Baptist War in Jamaica in 1831, and Nat Turner's Rebellion that same year in the United States, as Black people attempted to make manifest the words of Patrick Henry, the famed American revolutionary, who proclaimed "give me liberty or give me death", even as he enslaved African human beings for profit.

We must remember such freedom fighters as Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass and Gabriel Prosser. We must remember that it was not merely the Enlightenment ideas or some reckoning among white abolitionists that brought the end to the system that had enriched colonial Powers, but that abolition was propelled by constant revolt that forced colonial Powers to realize that, as scholar Mary Reckford wrote, it would remain more expensive and dangerous to maintain the old system than to abolish it.

Black people were actors in their own freedom. Obscuring and marginalizing stories of Black resistance serves to justify the hypocrisy of colonial Europe and the United States, by insinuating that had slavery been

so bad, surely African peoples would have fought harder against it. These are lies of omission that, in the absence of truth, warp our collective memory.

Resistance must therefore be central to any remembrances of the transatlantic slave trade and must be connected to the ongoing resistance movements in the fight for Black liberation across the globe.

I stand before the General Assembly today, a recipient of that tradition of resistance. My father was born in a little shack in 1945 on a cotton plantation in Greenwood, Mississippi. He was born into a family of sharecroppers who toiled within the violently enforced system of labour exploitation that emerged at the end of slavery. He was born into a strictly apartheid state where Black people could not vote, use the public library or attend schools with white children, and were lynched for such things as starting a union, walking into a room where a white woman was alone, failing to get off of the sidewalk fast enough in deference to a white person, or the greatest crime of all in the American South — having the audacity to be a financially prosperous Black person.

In Greenwood in the 1940s, life was so devastating that Black children could be put to the fields as early as the age of three to start carrying water to workers, so when my father was two years old, my grandmother Arlena Paul, a Black woman sharecropper, packed a suitcase and loaded her two young children on a northbound train and escaped the apartheid of the American South.

My grandmother had a fourth-grade education, and she would spend the rest of her life as a domestic and a janitor. But that single act of resistance — leaving the racial caste system of the American South with nothing but the determination that her own children would not pick cotton like she had, like her parents had, like her enslaved grandparents before her had — set into motion the events that would lead me to stand before this body today, addressing the Assembly that represents all the nations of the world. Hers was an act of resistance that mirrored those of millions of enslaved Black people who resisted every day in ways big and small. She, like our ancestors, resisted, in order to plant the seed for freedoms and opportunities that she would never see for herself. It is that history, that understanding that leads me to argue that the defining story of the African diaspora in the Americas is not slavery but our resistance to it, of people determined to be free

and societies that did not believe that they had a right to freedom. We must acknowledge that history, as the legacy of slavery can be seen all around us.

Today the descendants of slavery fight to resist their conditions in the societies that once enslaved them. They suffer the highest rates of poverty, the highest rates of incarceration, the highest rates of death and the highest rates of violence. The tradition of resistance continues, in protest against police violence and inequality, from Brazil to Cuba to the United States.

But we the people of the African diaspora should not have to find ourselves still resisting. It is long past time for the European colonial Powers and for the United States of America to live up to their own professed ideas, to become the great and moral nations that they believe themselves to be. It is not enough to simply regret what was done in the past; they are obligated to repair it.

As I stand before representatives of the countries that once enslaved African peoples and the peoples who were once enslaved as we collectively remember this day, the way for me to honour those who toiled and died and fought is to say this clearly and without flinching: it is time for the nations that engaged in and profited from the transatlantic slave trade to do what is right and what is just. It is time for them to make reparations to the descendants of chattel slavery in the Americas. That is our global truth, the truth that we as human beings understand with stark clarity. There can be no atonement if there is no repair.

It is time, it is long past time for reparations for the transatlantic slave trade, all the devastation that it has wrought and all the devastation that it continues to wreak. I thank the members of the Assembly very much for their attention as we all remember that crime against humanity together.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Lesotho, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. Monyane (Lesotho): Each year we gather to commemorate and mark the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The theme for 2022, “Stories of courage: resistance to slavery and unity against racism”, is even more pertinent as it relates to the reality faced by people of African descent, who continue to

face racism and have to rise o challenges in their very existence and daily lives.

Allow me, Mr. President, on behalf of the Group of African States, to thank you for having organized this event to mark this day. Today more than ever, we are called on as one family to strengthen our ties and close ranks in our vision for humankind as we move forward from those troubled moments of our history.

We affirm the need for us all to resolve to adopt all the measures necessary to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms and manifestations, and to prevent and combat racist doctrines and practices in order to promote understanding among human beings and to build an international community that is free from all forms of racial segregation and racial discrimination.

Indeed, we are convinced that any doctrine of superiority based on racial differentiation is false, morally condemnable and socially unjust. Racial discrimination is deplorable, and there is no justification in theory or in practice anywhere across the globe.

We are disappointed and alarmed that manifestations of racial discrimination based on racial superiority, hatred and policies of apartheid, segregation or separation are manifest in today’s purportedly civilized world. A case in point is that currently students of African descent are facing discrimination and racism as they strive to flee from conflict in areas in Ukraine to safe havens across the borders of nations. Injustice against any person is injustice to all.

In that connection, we believe that reparations for slavery and colonialism include not only justice and accountability for historic wrongs but also the eradication of the scars of the racial inequality, subordination and discrimination that were built under slavery, apartheid and colonialism. We recognize that racism is a global concern and that tackling it should be a universal effort by all of us.

The transatlantic slave trade is often studied and discussed at the macro level. It was a phenomenon characterized by unprecedented mass human trafficking, degrading economic transactions and unspeakable human rights violations. But examining the transatlantic slave trade at the micro level reveals its true brutality. Behind the facts and figures are millions of human stories, the stories of those who were ripped from their homelands and families, the stories of those who fought against the oppressors, the stories of those

who triumphed against all odds to win their freedom, many of whom won that freedom only in death.

Those stories continue today as people across the globe keep struggling together against the transatlantic slave trade's most enduring legacy: racism. Among the human stories are triumphs of cultural transfer from Africa during the transatlantic slave trade. Those people, despite the atrocious consequences of great suffering, held on to the most precious part of their humanity that none could ever take from them.

Through the legacy of their culture, music, storytelling, customs, dance, art and food, they transformed the places they found themselves in, and the rich contribution of the African culture shaped societies throughout the Americas and still serves as a powerful unifying force.

Just a few examples illustrate that cultural history. African jollof rice is a popular dish in the Dominican Republic, alongside cassava and sweet potatoes in Brazil and in the Caribbean countries and beyond.

The African drumbeat is the foundation of music in the Americas, and the intricate cloth and weaving is a tradition carried on from generation to generation. The culture and artistic, scientific, economic and political contribution of people of African descent have triumphed over adversity. Through art and cultural experiences, people of African descent have shared the obstacles, resilience and defiant joy of their lives. They shout with joy and life in a universal language of dance, art and music that enables us to connect the past, present and future, a recognition of the transformative capabilities of African culture in Africa and beyond. In that vein, therefore, the African Union celebrated the theme of culture and heritage in 2021.

Lastly, Mr. President, last Thursday you led us on a visit to the Ark of Return, a stark reminder of the journeys that started at the Ark of No Return, those journeys of slavery, but which is hugely symbolic of the hope of redemption.

I would refer to a song by a renowned African musician, Letta Mbulu, the lyrics of which talk about the willow tree, which wept, the African river, which cried, and the motherland, which lost its people. The Ark of Return, that hope of redemption, also tells of that. The African willow tree will not continue to weep in vain. The African river will not continue to cry in vain. The motherland will not continue to lose her

children to the sea in vain. Let us therefore all together join hands to celebrate one another and enjoy our human diversity — *Umoja*.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Nauru, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Asia-Pacific States.

Mrs. Dongobir (Nauru): I have the distinct honour to speak on behalf of the Asia-Pacific Group as Chair for the month of March. Allow me to convey our appreciation to you, Mr. President, for having convened this special meeting to commemorate the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, with its theme, "Stories of courage: resistance to slavery and unity against racism".

On 25 March each year, the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery is commemorated to honour the memories of those who suffered and died during the transatlantic slave trade, one of the darkest chapters in human history, which lasted four centuries.

The slave trade is among the worst violations of human rights in the history of humankind and grounded in social and economic inequality, hatred, racism and prejudice, which continue to affect people of African descent today. We reaffirm the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which proclaimed that no one shall be held in slavery or servitude and that slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

In accordance with resolution 73/345, we recognize that too little is known about the transatlantic slave trade and its lasting consequences. We stress the importance of educating current and future generations about the causes, consequences, lessons and legacy of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade and the right to seek just and adequate reparation, remedy and satisfaction. We also acknowledge the efforts made to date to raise public awareness on the subject.

This year's theme, "Stories of courage: resistance to slavery and unity against racism", is one way of educating the public on the transatlantic slave trade. Behind the facts and figures are millions of human stories, families being ripped away from their homeland, unspeakable human rights violations and stories of those who fought against their oppressors and triumphed against all odds to win their freedom. It is a reminder to us all that the Ark of Return, a permanent memorial at the United Nations to honour the victims

of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, serves as a reminder that slavery has no place in our world.

As the Secretary-General said in his message on this day, today people of African descent continue to confront racial discrimination, marginalization and exclusion. In that regard, the Asia-Pacific Group stands in unity to strive for the elimination of racism and racial discrimination in all its forms.

The Asia-Pacific Group also expresses its profound concern over the rise in violence and hate crimes against Asians and people of Asian descent, including Asian diplomats in New York City. We call upon the concerned Government to fulfil its commitments and take real measures to address systematic racism, racial discrimination and hate crimes.

We note with appreciation the report of the Secretary-General on the programme of educational outreach on the transatlantic slave trade and slavery (A/76/134), which aims to address that gap in knowledge and appreciation by raising awareness. The report appropriately describes the positive support of Member States aimed at enhancing public awareness.

Moreover, we again welcome the theme for the International Decade 2015-2024 as proclaimed by the General Assembly being “People of African Descent: recognition, justice and development”, with one of the objectives being to promote a greater knowledge of and respect for the diverse heritage, culture and contribution of people of African descent to the development of societies.

To conclude, the Asia-Pacific Group stands together with the international community in commemorating this important event. We commend the efforts made by Member States and other stakeholders in the promotion of the awareness of transatlantic slavery. We look forward to working with all other regional groups to address the pernicious and persistent consequences of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade for our common future and present and coming generations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Mexico, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Mr. De La Fuente Ramírez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

We would like to extend our appreciation to you, Mr. President, for having convened this plenary meeting in commemoration of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. We also thank the Secretary-General, António Guterres, and Ms. Nikole Hannah-Jones for their contributions today.

Today we honour and remember the 15 million women, men and children from Africa who suffered and died because of the transatlantic slave trade, a system of global exploitation that for more than 400 years unjustly linked the economies of three continents. The transatlantic slave trade was the largest legally established forced migration in history. That dark chapter was one of the greatest atrocities and injustices in human history. The terrible system of the slave trade affected not only people from Africa and their descendants but also indigenous peoples, whom we also commemorate today.

We are here today to not only remember those who suffered the inhuman injustices of slavery but also to honour and recognize the bravery of those who fought against their oppressors and resisted the slave trade system, as well as those who continue to fight against racism today.

We echo the call of the Secretary-General for reparative justice as an essential element of achieving racial equality and undoing the extensive repercussions of centuries of colonialism and slavery. The Ark of Return, adjacent to this building, is a reminder not only of what happened in the past and its consequences but also of our common commitment to protecting the intrinsic, equal and inalienable rights of all human beings.

To a large extent, Afro-descendants of the Americas and the Caribbean are also a legacy of the transatlantic slave trade. Throughout the generations, Afro-descendants have enriched our societies and identities. Today we honour the innumerable and immense contributions that people of African ancestry have made to our region.

While it is true that slavery has been abolished, its effects remain present in contemporary versions of the racism and racial discrimination felt by millions of people throughout the world. We must redouble our efforts to eliminate systemic discrimination from our societies, institutions and norms within the framework of this Decade for People of African Descent and beyond.

The elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance are priority areas for our region and must also be in the work of the Organization. We would highlight the need to work with the Permanent Forum of People of African Descent to promote their full political, economic and social inclusion in the societies in which they live.

Although the slave trade has been abolished, there are still various kinds of modern-day slavery. Today more people are subject to modern slavery than throughout the four centuries of the African transatlantic slave trade. According to the International Labour Organization, more than 40 million people are currently the victims of modern-day slavery. Boys and girls represent one quarter of those victims, while 71 per cent of enslaved individuals are women, and 99 per cent of victims of sexual slavery are women and girls.

It is clear that slavery today reflects the gender inequality of our time. Slavery is illegal, but it exists and persists within an economy of global exploitation, forced labour and forced servitude, including domestic servitude, human trafficking, sexual slavery, early and forced child marriage, the recruitment of child soldiers, and human trafficking for organ harvesting are just some of the worst manifestations of modern-day slavery.

We must take collective action to dismantle the transnational criminal structures that support these and other kinds of exploitation. The fight against modern-day slavery is a necessary condition for not leaving anyone behind and to move forward with sustainable development. In order to do so, the protection and promotion of human rights, efforts to operationalize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action are vital. In order to respond to the painful lessons of yesteryear, we must address the issues of today. We have to honour the victims of slavery from the past by protecting the most vulnerable from contemporary forms of slavery.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States.

Mr. Kridelka (Belgium): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

The transatlantic slave trade is an unparalleled tragedy that persisted for more than four centuries and involved unspeakable atrocities and the cruel enslavement of millions of Africans, many of whom perished during the horrific journey across the Atlantic. We must never forget the unbearable hardship or the tragic deaths of the millions of men, women and children who died as a result of the brutality of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. We pay our solemn respects to the countless victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade and to their descendants.

We need to share the stories of those who were forcibly taken from their homelands and sold as slaves, the stories of those who courageously fought against their oppressors and against the inhuman practices of slavery. We need to teach young people about the history of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade and about the devastating consequences and long-lasting impact.

It is critical that we also shed light on the heritage and important contributions of people of African descent and that we pay tribute to their many achievements. We need to redouble our efforts to ensure the full realization and enjoyment of the human rights and fundamental freedoms. Moreover, we must acknowledge that racism against people of African descent is in part an enduring legacy of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade.

We are committed to addressing the root causes of racism and taking concrete action to prevent and eradicate racial discrimination and to combat racism, xenophobia and related intolerance. Racial discrimination is unacceptable affront to the human dignity of all persons, and we must therefore unequivocally condemn and confront racism whenever and wherever it occurs.

We urgently need to dismantle racist structures, as we can move forward from the past only by addressing ongoing racial inequalities and injustices. To that end, it is critical that we renew our commitment to the full and effective implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Today's observance should also encourage us to act in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which proclaims that no one shall be held in slavery or servitude and that slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

Today traffickers exploit and profit at the expense of adults and children by compelling them to perform labour or engage in commercial sex. While women and girls make up the majority of identified victims of these widespread, abhorrent practices, many more individuals, including men and boys, are also impacted by those often hidden crimes.

(spoke in French)

It is vital that we abide by our obligations under international law, particularly the Convention to Suppress the Slave Trade and Slavery. We call on those States that have not yet done so to ratify the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, and to effectively implement them. We must step up our efforts to eradicate all forms of human trafficking and contemporary slavery, as set out in the 2030 Agenda, and to guarantee justice, accountability, dignity and freedom for all.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United States of America, who will speak on behalf of the host country.

Ms. Lee (United States of America): I have the unique honour of addressing members on this important occasion as both a member of Congress and one of this year's United States Congressional Delegates to the General Assembly.

As we commemorate the abolition of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, let us reflect on the profound words of self-emancipated enslaved person, abolitionist, orator, global luminary and diplomat Frederick Douglass. "Abolition of slavery", he said, "had been the deepest desire and the great labour of my life". Those words prompt our remembrance of the victims and descendants of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade.

The transatlantic slave trade forced millions of people from their homes, families, societies and countries and subjected them to exploitation and dehumanization, creating a global enterprise of unparalleled wealth for Western nations and fuelling the global economy. Chattel slavery remains an immoral and indelible stain on the history of the United States and the Western hemisphere, and the collective chronicle of our inhumanity.

We acknowledge the myriad atrocities of slavery and continue to grapple with the racial, ethnic, gender, economic, social and political hierarchies it created. And yes, we must honour the victims of slavery by dismantling its institutional remnants, such as racism, discrimination, economic inequity, marginalization and systematic underdevelopment.

The United States must address the multidimensional legacies of slavery through an unprecedented commitment to racial equity, justice and inclusion within our borders and throughout our global affairs. We have demonstrated our commitment nationally through a Government-wide approach to addressing systemic inequity.

Today the President of the United States, Joseph R. Biden, will sign the Emmett Till Antilynching Act of 2022, recently passed by the United States Congress. It has been over 120 years since Congress' first attempt to criminalize the horrendous act of lynching. And yes, today it will be finally made a federal hate crime.

Members of both the House and the Senate have supported legislation that acknowledges and addresses the remnants of our racialized past resulting from the institution of chattel slavery. Legislation like H.R. 19, urging the establishment of a United States commission on truth, racial healing and transformation; H.R. 40, urging the establishment of a commission to study and develop reparation proposals for African Americans; and H.R. 1280, the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, are all examples of how Congress is grappling with the need for systemic change and redress.

And last year, President Biden signed into law legislation making Juneteenth — that is, 19 June — a national holiday. It was on that day in 1865 that Union soldiers arrived in Texas to announce that Black people were free — two and a half years after the Emancipation Proclamation. That announcement was made in Galveston, Texas, which is the home of my grandfather and my great-grandmother.

On the global stage, we championed the establishment of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent and supported the International Independent Expert Mechanism to Advance Racial Justice and Equality in Law Enforcement. And I personally fought for our participation in the movement to establish the beautiful permanent memorial to and remembrance of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade in a prominent spot at the

United Nations. And I was honoured to witness the establishment of the International Decade for People of African Descent.

Despite those promising efforts, there is still so much work to do to achieve full equity, in the United States and globally. We must therefore embrace this momentous occasion as a clarion and dynamic call to engage and to move forward.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Barbados, who will speak on behalf of the Caribbean Community.

Mr. Jackman (Barbados): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the 14 member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

First, I would like to express our appreciation to you, Mr President, for giving the Caribbean Community the opportunity to speak at this important moment.

It will have escaped no one in this Hall that the Caribbean societies, in whose name I have the honour of speaking today, were subjected to the scourge of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade we are remembering today.

The iniquity of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade and their contemporary consequences are increasingly well understood and documented, due in no small part to the efforts of the United Nations and its Member States.

Today's commemoration is part of a larger fabric of research, recognition and, we hope, reparations, which is being woven into this multilateral system: the International Decade for People of African Descent, which concludes in 2024; the UNESCO Slave Route project; the establishment by the General Assembly in 2021 of the Permanent Forum of People of African Descent; the 2021 report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on Promotion and protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of Africans and of people of African descent against excessive use of force and other human rights violations by law enforcement officers (A/HRC/47/53), which sets out the ambitious Four-point Agenda Towards Transformative Change for Racial Justice and Equality (A/HRC/47/53, annex); and the *Ark of Return*, which stands on these very grounds.

Those are all valuable contributions to the debate and must inform necessary action at the national,

regional and, crucially, international levels if we are truly to understand the past and meaningfully address the current, multidimensional modern-day legacies.

Your own words, Mr. President, those of the Secretary-General and of others who have spoken at this meeting today provide clear guidance.

The theme for this commemoration, "Stories of courage: resistance to slavery and unity against racism", draws the connection between that blood-soaked chapter in our history and the contemporary challenges faced by Caribbean and other societies shaped by slavery and the transatlantic slave trade.

It has long been the view of the Caribbean Community that we must together take further steps to address both the historical roots and the contemporary branches of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. The only tool to achieve that goal is reparatory justice.

At the high-level event held in September of 2021 to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, speaker after speaker from both sides of the Atlantic made that call for reparatory justice. At their historic inaugural meeting last year, the Heads of State and Government of the Caribbean Community and the African Union agreed that reparatory justice must be pursued.

The Caribbean Community has been actively pursuing that goal through many channels, including through the CARICOM Reparations Commission, which has put forward a 10-point plan, a plan that has striking similarities to the Four-point Agenda Towards Transformative Change for Racial Justice and Equality of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. A full and good-faith implementation of the Durban Declaration and Plan of Action also shows us the way forward.

All of us here today, in this global community Hall, can and must go further together in addressing past and present injustices.

Mr. Rodrigue (Haiti) (*spoke in French*): Before I begin my remarks, I would like to state that the delegation of the Republic of Haiti fully associates itself with the statements made by the Permanent Representatives of Mexico, on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, and of Barbados, on behalf of the Caribbean Community.

However, the holding of this commemoration of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade is of such significance for Haiti that it is important for us to share the voice of the first black republic to the General Assembly's tribute to the millions of men, women and children victims of the greatest human tragedy in universal history.

Slavery and the transatlantic African slave trade is, without a doubt, the greatest genocide the world has ever known. That is why we must go beyond a simple commemorative ceremony to substantively address this painful chapter of our common history. For the legacy of the slave system is still very much with us, and people of African descent remain the primary victims of the systemic racism resulting from colonialism and the African slave trade.

We must not forget the fact that the transatlantic slave trade constitutes the largest forced displacement of people in human history. According to UNESCO estimates, that criminal practice, which lasted for more than 400 years, led to the uprooting of 15 to 20 million Africans, who were kidnapped and forcibly dragged to the Americas to be sold like cattle.

The transatlantic slave trade was far from accidental. It had its roots in the racist ideologies that underpinned the slave system and colonialism. Many thinkers of the so-called Enlightenment vehemently advocated the thesis of the superiority of the white race over other races, especially the black race, which served as the basis or instrument for legitimizing the colonialist and slave system.

Fortunately, the Haitian Revolution of 1791 enlightened humankind by leading to the collapse of the system of domination and extreme exploitation of enslaved human beings based on ideological, political and economic motivations. That is why Haiti is recognized as playing a special and significant role in the history of the abolition of this inhuman and immoral practice. It has shown the whole world the way to freedom and human emancipation. The Haitian Revolution gave meaning to the notion of the dignity of the human person, the very foundation of the fundamental rights of human beings, the clear cardinal principle underpinning Haiti's quest for the independence it won in 1804.

It was precisely the Haitian Revolution that refuted and put an end to the premise of white superiority over Blacks. The Haitian Revolution is the only anti-slavery,

anti-colonial and anti-segregationist revolution. Those three fundamental characteristics make it unique in human history.

By advocating the equality of all human beings and the end of slavery and colonialism as sine qua non conditions for liberation, the Haitian Revolution universalized the principles of freedom and equality.

In that regard, in a famous lecture delivered in 1893 on the occasion of the inauguration of the Haitian Pavilion at the World's Fair in Chicago, Frederick Douglass, the famous American abolitionist, said:

"you and I and all of us have reason to respect Haiti for her services to the cause of liberty and human equality throughout the world ... She has grandly served the cause of universal human liberty ... We should not forget that the freedom ... that has come to the coloured race the world over, is largely due to the brave stand taken by the black sons of Haiti 90 years ago. When they struck for freedom ... they struck for the freedom of every black man in the world."

It is clear that this very welcome commemoration represents a break with the silence on this topic and fulfils a duty to remember this tragedy. However, I would like to take this opportunity to invite the Member States of the United Nations to better understand the root causes and long-term harmful consequences of the four centuries of the transatlantic slave trade and the participation of slaves in the construction of the societies that enslaved them. We must also combat contemporary forms of slavery, such as human trafficking and the exploitation of migrant workers.

At the same time, I invite the United Nations to continue to systematically implement large-scale awareness-raising programmes on the dangers of racism and prejudice of all kinds so that this human tragedy is never repeated. It is time to discuss in depth the issue of restorative justice for the victims of transatlantic slave trade, as its legacy continues. It is high time to move from words to action.

Mr. Romero Puentes (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): The commemoration of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade takes on particular significance in the face of alarming manifestations of racism, discrimination and xenophobia in some of the most developed societies.

This issue is of particular importance for Cuba, a country deeply proud of its African roots and heritage. We will never forget that some 1.3 million African slaves were forcibly brought to Cuba in order to replace the indigenous population workforce exterminated by Spanish colonialism.

In paying tribute to the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, we Cubans also pay tribute to the roots of our people. Our nation, culture, idiosyncrasies and popular religiosity are profoundly mestizo and cannot be understood without this African contribution. And neither can our struggles for independence and self-determination be understood without understanding the decisive contribution of the freed slaves and their descendants.

This crime against humanity, whose victims we remember today, is inextricably linked to the situation of structural inequality, racial discrimination, prejudice and exclusion that continues to affect people of African descent even now in the twenty-first century.

As expressed by the historic leader of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro, at the historic 2001 World Conference against Racism:

“The inhuman exploitation imposed on the peoples of three continents, including Asia, marked forever the destiny and lives of more than 4.5 billion people living in the Third World today whose poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and health rates, as well as their infant mortality, life expectancy and other calamities — too many, in fact, to enumerate here — are certainly awesome and harrowing. They are the current victims of that atrocity, which lasted centuries, and the ones who clearly deserve compensation for the horrendous crimes perpetrated against their ancestors and peoples.”

It is a moral duty to ensure that reparations and full compensation reach the peoples and groups affected by that heinous and unspeakable crime. Developed countries have profited from conquest, colonization, slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. They are therefore responsible for the extermination associated with them.

For that reason, we support the just claim raised by the member States of the Caribbean Community. It is also only fair that there should be special and differential treatment towards developing countries, particularly those in Africa, where their international

economic relations are concerned. As a general rule, those of us whose nations are yesterday's colonies are subject today to an unfair international order that has changed in name but not in essence, because it continues to promote the wealth of a few at the expense of the impoverished majority.

A telling example of the unfairness of the current international order is the unacceptably low level of access of developing countries to vaccines against the coronavirus disease. While developed countries are already administering booster doses, most of the developing world has not been able to acquire all the vaccines needed for the initial vaccination of their populations.

The best tribute we can pay to the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade in today's world, in addition to the necessary remembrance, is to show international solidarity with the countries from which those millions of people were snatched.

For that reason, and based on its humanist stance, Cuba has continued to strengthen its international cooperation programmes in the area of health, particularly with countries and territories in the Caribbean, Latin America and Africa, despite the unprecedented tightening of the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States against my country.

However, as long as the international community fails to address and solve the root causes of the inequality, exclusion, racism and discrimination that have survived slavery and which continue to be suffered by millions of people, particularly those of African descent, the tribute we pay today will be a mere formality.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): The commemoration of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, which was first celebrated in 2008 following the adoption of resolution 62/122, should be a day of deep reflection and retrospective examination of the sad and shameful treatment that for centuries was inflicted on Africans, namely, the slave trade — a gross violation of human rights, which became a lucrative multinational operation. Some practices of the slave trade were even legalized in some countries.

The transatlantic slave trade caused untold suffering. The millions upon millions of individual victims each had a story, a family, dreams and hopes.

Some 15 million Africans were violently and cruelly torn from their homes, separated from their families, treated as inferior beings and forced to march in chains for hours and days at a time from their communities in the interior of our continent to the coast, where they were to begin a journey of no return and a permanent separation from their families towards a destiny of terrible torment.

The slave trade was at the heart of deep structural inequalities, both economic and social. Those injustices and inequalities still affect black people and people of African descent around the world today, as we continue to see in the major crises taking place in the world. Black people are always treated in a discriminatory manner in a world where there is constant talk about the obligation to respect human rights and humanitarian rights.

The human beings who succumbed under the yoke of slavery had little refuge. They were left with their beliefs, their drums and their invincible will not to die. They were in danger of losing their identity and their reason for living.

On this International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea pays the most heartfelt tribute to the courage of the nearly 5 million Black men and women who succumbed under the yoke of slavery, and we celebrate their boldness. We celebrate Toussaint Louverture, Aimé Césaire, the Maroons and the brave fighters of Jamaica, Haiti, Peru, Brazil, Cuba, Barbados and others, as well as the entire African diaspora who rose up against humiliation — as the great Aimé Césaire depicted in his epic poem, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* — and who fought as embodied in the figure of the Haitian woman, the symbol of our pride. On this International Day of Remembrance, we also celebrate the memory of those who fought against such a terrible crime, grave intolerance, base injustice and flagrant violation of human rights. We celebrate those who, through their creativity, contribute to the struggle. Thus, we celebrate the architect Rodney Leon, who designed and built *The Ark of Return*, a permanent memorial in honour of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, which stands in the Visitors' Plaza of United Nations Headquarters and for whose construction the President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, His Excellency Mr. Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, made a significant contribution.

Mr. Afonso (Mozambique), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Allow me to conclude my statement by pointing out that we are all part of the same great family, that is, the family of humankind. In this great family, there should be no room for, or should there be, any degrading and discriminatory treatment of some of its members. All of us, from the Caribbean to Africa and everywhere else, let us say together, let us shout together and let us sing together: never again, never again and that racial discrimination and the treatment of black people as inferior beings cease. We are all part of the great family of humankind.

Mr. Gimolieca (Angola): My delegation welcomes the convening of this meeting, as it highlights stories of courage and the resistance to slavery and unity against racism. We align ourselves with the statement made by the delegation of Lesotho on behalf of the Group of African States.

The International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, celebrated on 25 March, also serves to highlight the demographic, cultural and ideological heritage of the African continent, which for more than 400 years saw its children traded as slaves across the Atlantic to North America, South America, Europe and beyond.

In approaching this subject, it is never too much to remember the historical causes, the consequences and the particularities of the trade — besides certainly analysing how various forms of integration were generated among Africa, Europe, the Americas and the Caribbean. The transatlantic slave trade was certainly the largest forced migration in history, with some 20 million men, women and children as victims. The number of victims of slave traders is estimated to have been even greater.

The current economic and social situation of the African continent is intrinsically linked to the consequences of the slave trade. History shows that the period between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries was one of economic stagnation in Africa, which fell farther and farther behind in economic progress as the years passed. It is no wonder then that some historians interpret that as a sign that the transatlantic trade was seriously holding back Africans' economy development.

On the other hand, although the economic consequences were the most obvious, the transatlantic

slave trade severely affected Africans' political landscape and set a disturbing precedent for the future. Politically, the brutal and arbitrary intervention and wars resulting from the competition between rival African rulers for control of the slave capture and trade left the continent in a fragile political situation. The slave trade had a negative impact on African societies and led to the long-term impoverishment of the continent. There are numerous examples of the slave trade causing the deterioration of national legal institutions, the weakening of States and political and social fragmentation.

Angola condemns the crimes against humanity committed during slavery and the transatlantic slave trade — the cause of profound economic and social inequality, hatred, bigotry and racism, which continue to affect people of African descent around the world.

In that context, I would like to emphasize that, in the specific case of Angola, 5 million persons were subjected to the slave trade beginning in the early fifteenth century. Data indicate that approximately 10,000 slaves left Angola annually in the 20 years between 1810 and 1830, at a time when many countries were already fighting against the slave trade.

To conclude, we reiterate the importance of implementing paragraph 4 of resolution 62/122 to enable people of African descent around the world to find their roots, retrace their identity and rewrite their proposed history.

Mr. Kuzmenkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank the President for convening today's meeting on such an important topic. We believe that it is particularly important to disseminate knowledge about the causes, consequences, lessons and legacy of the slave trade. We are convinced that present and future generations must not forget that tragic chapter of world history.

As we know, the United Nations was born in response to the horrors facing the world during the Second World War. Although the events of that war and the transatlantic slave trade are separated by a century and a half, the two historical events had much the same underlying causes. It is the perverse notion that one racial or ethnic group has some sort of superiority over another. That is why it is incumbent upon Members of the United Nations to take every step to preserve the memory of the victims of the slave trade and its consequences.

It cannot be denied that the transatlantic slave trade was one of the most heinous crimes against humanity, which remains wrongly silenced. No apology, let alone compensation, has ever been offered to the African peoples for the immense moral and material damage caused by the former colonial European countries.

Millions of inhabitants of the African continent were forcibly removed from their homeland, tortured and badly treated. Many of them died or lost their health working in inhumane conditions, while the European colonial Powers and the United States of America profited from the misfortune. The slave labour of Africans, appropriated by American businessmen, was largely responsible for the economic well-being and prosperity of American society.

The transatlantic slave trade is an example where a historical event has a truly global dimension and a clear impact on the present and the future, for that inhumane policy of the colonial Powers laid the foundation for systemic racism, racial discrimination, hate speech and xenophobia in the European Union and the United States. Ethnic and religious intolerance and migrant phobia are gaining momentum in European States. The United States ignores its own long-standing problems but tries to lecture other nations and countries.

Many States that do not want to go along with the self-proclaimed hegemon and defend their sovereignty and independent foreign-policy path are subjected to economic blockades, illegal unilateral sanctions and blatant interference. Such actions are contrary to the norms and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and we demand an end to them.

In addition, the United States authorities have been unwilling to try to address social problems, such as racism, rampant xenophobic ideas and the complete impunity of security and law enforcement agencies that mistreat black people.

We remember all too well how Western countries were very reluctant to establish the Permanent Forum of People of African Descent and did their utmost to prevent that body from effectively fulfilling its mandate. However, all those efforts were unsuccessful, and the Forum became a reality. We are counting on the members of the Permanent Forum to give their assessment of the crimes of Western colonizers.

The Russian Federation wholeheartedly condemns the policy of colonialism and expresses its support for

all peoples who suffered as a result of the slave trade. The time has come to raise the question of restoring historical justice and establishing responsibility for the crimes of colonialism. It is important that States Members of the United Nations remember that and discuss such issues.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in this commemorative meeting.

The Assembly has thus concluded its commemorative meeting to mark the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 120?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 15 (continued)

Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields

Draft resolution (A/76/L.42)

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Zambia to introduce draft resolution A/76/L.42.

Mr. Simbyakula (Zambia): My delegation has the honour to introduce draft resolution A/76/L.42, entitled “International Day of Plant Health”. We are most grateful to all delegations that actively engaged during the informal consultations, and their contributions through constructive engagement and flexibility are much appreciated.

Plants produce the oxygen essential for life on Earth and make up 80 per cent of the food that we eat. Yet they are under constant attack from pests and diseases, which destroy from 20 to 40 per cent of food crops every year, resulting in low yields and trade losses. That leaves millions of people without enough food to eat and has a negative impact, especially on poor rural communities, which derive most of their income from agriculture. Therefore, by protecting plants from invasive pests and diseases we can greatly contribute to food security, better nutrition, environmental protection, combating climate change and boosting economic development, as well as to achieving the goal of zero hunger.

In December 2018, the General Assembly adopted resolution 73/252, entitled “International Year of Plant Health, 2020”, which was aimed at raising global awareness about how protecting plant health was essential to our livelihoods by combating hunger and reducing poverty, as well as maintaining a healthy environment. Despite the setbacks brought about by the coronavirus disease pandemic, major activities were carried out at the global, regional and national levels with the participation of Government and non-Government actors, including the private sector, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders working together in observance of the importance of plant health to all forms of life on Earth and to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

In October 2020, the 27th session of the Committee on Agriculture of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) endorsed a proposal championed by Zambia for the International Day of Plant Health to be observed on 12 May every year. The 42nd session of the FAO Conference, held in June 2021, unanimously adopted conference resolution 6/2021, which unanimously endorsed the proposal as one of the key legacies of the International Year of Plant Health 2020.

I wish to underscore that the observance of the International Day of Plant Health will provide continuity to the efforts made throughout the International Year of Plant Health in 2020 and will continue to pursue the main objective of raising awareness of the importance and impacts of plant health in addressing issues of global significance, including hunger, poverty, threats to the environment and economic development. It will also remind Governments to take appropriate actions, such as policy formulation, capacity-building and investment in infrastructure aimed at promoting plant health and the control of plant pests and diseases, as well as implementing measures to combat climate change and human activities, which have also emerged as new and urgent challenges to plant health over the years.

The declaration of 12 May as the International Day of Plant Health has the support of the International Plant Protection Convention contracting parties, the FAO governing bodies, FAO members from all FAO regions and various partner organizations from various stakeholder groups.

In conclusion, let me also emphasize that the draft resolution text is based on the relevant documents of the

Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Plant Protection Convention and other organizations.

On behalf of all co-sponsors, I sincerely hope that this draft resolution will receive unanimous support in this plenary.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/76/L.42, entitled “International Day of Plant Health”.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

Ms. De Miranda (Department for General Assembly and Conference Management): I should like to announce that since the submission of draft resolution A/76/L.42 and in addition to the delegations listed in that document, the following countries have also become sponsors of the draft resolution: Angola, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Burkina Faso, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Japan, Mongolia, Namibia, Papua New Guinea, South Africa, Thailand, Turkey and Zimbabwe.

The Acting President: May I take it that the Assembly wishes to adopt draft resolution A/76/L.42?

Draft resolution A/76/L.42 was adopted (resolution 76/256).

The Acting President: The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 15.

Agenda item 20 (continued)

Sustainable development

Draft decision (A/76/L.45)

The Acting President: The General Assembly will now take action on draft decision A/76/L.45, entitled “Accreditation and participation of an intergovernmental organization in the international meeting entitled ‘Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all — our responsibility, our opportunity’”.

May I take it that the Assembly wishes to adopt draft decision A/76/L.45?

Draft decision A/76/L.45 was adopted (decision 76/558).

The Acting President: The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 20.

Agenda items 20 and 78 (continued)

Sustainable development

Oceans and the law of the sea

(a) Oceans and the law of the sea

Draft decision (A/76/L.44)

The Acting President: The General Assembly will now take action on draft decision A/76/L.44, entitled “Accreditation and participation of an intergovernmental organization in the 2022 United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development”.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to adopt draft decision A/76/L.44?

Draft decision A/76/L.44 was adopted (decision 76/559).

The Acting President: The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 20 and sub-item (a) of agenda item 78.

Agenda item 129 (continued)

Global health and foreign policy

Report of the Secretary-General (A/76/492)

Draft resolution (A/76/L.43)

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Norway to introduce draft resolution A/76/L.43.

Ms. Juul (Norway): The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is undoubtedly one of the greatest global challenges in recent history. It has revealed serious weaknesses in our preparedness, prevention and response to health emergencies. It has tested our ability to act as a global community and has revealed overwhelming inequities in today’s world. It will also test our ability to learn from our actions and move forward.

Our response to COVID-19 and the resulting economic crisis has been ad hoc. We must transform that into sustainable solutions for the long term.

Therefore, it is my honour today, on behalf of the core group of the Foreign Policy and Global Health Initiative — Brazil, France, Indonesia, Norway,

Senegal, South Africa and Thailand — to introduce draft resolution A/76/L.43, entitled “Elevating pandemic prevention, preparedness and response to the highest level of political leadership”. Allow me to highlight some of the main elements of the draft resolution.

First, it sends a clear message that we need to increase international collaboration and coordination on pandemic preparedness and response at the highest political level. We should do that by strengthening our implementation of the International Health Regulations — the sole legally binding instrument that defines countries’ rights and obligations to report public health events and emergencies that have the potential to cross borders.

In addition, we should support ongoing discussions in the World Health Organization (WHO) towards developing a convention, agreement or other international instrument so that the world will be better prepared and better able to respond to a new pandemic.

Secondly, the draft resolution calls on Member States to prioritize pandemic prevention, preparedness and response in their own national agendas, build resilient health systems and prioritize primary health care — ensuring a whole-of-Government and whole-of-society approach.

Thirdly, the draft resolution calls for more sustainable financing for pandemic preparedness and response. It underlines the importance of adequate and predictable financing of WHO to enable it to fulfil its core functions. Health security is a global public good, and it is our shared responsibility to ensure that we make the necessary investment.

Fourthly, the draft resolution places emphasis on access, including by underscoring the need to support the efforts of the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator in order to speed up the development and production of and equitable access to COVID-19 tests, treatments and vaccines, as well as recognizing the importance of a skilled health workforce, which is crucial to ensure that no one is left behind.

Fifthly, let us not forget that diseases of zoonotic origin are among the most likely sources of future pandemics. Yet there is currently no global agreement for how to monitor, manage or respond to those threats. The draft resolution therefore also calls on relevant institutions to develop options, for consideration by their governing bodies, to establish a common strategy,

including a joint work plan on One Health, to better address disease outbreaks.

In conclusion, no country can control a pandemic alone. We all depend on multilateral and multisectoral global collaboration. I would therefore also like to express my sincere gratitude to all delegations for the support, engagement and flexibility they show throughout this process. And I would like to extend a special thanks to our dear colleagues from Senegal for allowing us to finalize draft resolution A/76/L.43 in the resumed session of the General Assembly while they are formally chairing the Foreign Policy and Global Health Initiative.

Mr. Manalo (Philippines): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Friends in Support of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Health Care Facilities, made up of Colombia, Egypt, Hungary, Mauritania, Nepal, Poland, Slovenia and my own country, the Philippines.

The multidimensional impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic remains one of the most pressing concerns that we face, as it has upended our lives, reversed years of sustainable development gains and deepened inequalities, particularly among the most vulnerable.

Our group supports the theme of this year’s global health and foreign policy draft resolution A/76/L.43 to elevate pandemic prevention, preparedness and response to the highest level of political leadership in order to ensure that we build back better from the current crisis and are better prepared for future health emergencies.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also revealed the urgent global need for improvement in access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services in health-care facilities. WASH is the first line of defence against COVID-19, a virus that thrives amid the inequities in our societies and our health systems. WASH services are therefore crucial to preventing the spread of COVID-19 as well as other diseases, safely treating those infected and preventing future pandemics.

Water, sanitation and hygiene services and health-care facilities are also fundamental for the provision of quality people-centred care, health security, preparedness and response efforts. Such services reduce exposure to diseases, as well as the transmission of diseases, and serve to uphold the dignity and human rights of all people, especially people in vulnerable

situations, including mothers, newborns, children and indigenous people.

WASH in health-care facilities is critical to prevent the deaths of millions who die because of unsafe, poor-quality health-care services. The lack of those essential services impacts nearly 2 billion people, and communities in low- and middle-income countries suffer greatest from that devastating health-care and economic problem.

Recognizing that crisis even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Secretary-General announced a global call to action in March 2018, emphasizing that access to WASH in health-care facilities is fundamental to the achievement of universal health coverage and critical Sustainable Development Goals, encompassing the end to poverty, improved education, reduced inequities, clean water and sanitation, better health and well-being for all.

Investments in, and improvements to, WASH services will serve as an indispensable first line of defence when the next pandemic emerges. WASH in health-care facilities is a necessary element for primary health care and a foundation of strong health systems.

We cannot overemphasize the essential role WASH plays in combating antimicrobial resistance, ensuring infection prevention and control, providing safe environments for maternal and child care and the most fundamental criteria in achieving the goal of universal health coverage by the year 2030.

The Philippines and Hungary, as co-Chairs of the Group of Friends in Support of WASH in health-care facilities, and the members of our group are committed to raising the profile of safe water, sanitation, hygiene and infection prevention and control in health-care facilities within the United Nations. We invite other Member States to join us in elevating this agenda, towards our shared commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in this decade of action, and in support of elevating the discussions on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response to the highest level of political leadership.

We stand ready to work with other groups of friends to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages and to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer.

Ms. Ludwig (European Union): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; and the European Free Trade Association country Liechtenstein, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

We would like to start by thanking Norway and the entire core group for their efforts and engagement on draft resolution A/76/L.43.

With the world still in the grip of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which is now entering its third year, the topic is of high relevance and importance: pandemics constitute a major threat to all our health and lives, economies and livelihoods.

This is a time for humankind to come together in solidarity and cooperation. Instead, Russia, in its brutal military aggression against Ukraine, with the involvement of Belarus, is indiscriminately targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure, including hospitals. Resolution ES-11/2, which we adopted on 24 March, demands full respect for, and protection of, all medical and humanitarian personnel, as well as medical equipment and facilities. We urge Russia to uphold the resolution fully and respect its obligations under international law. We are also concerned about the dire humanitarian situation in relation to several other ongoing armed conflicts.

Unfortunately, the current pandemic will not be the last one. Given its negative impacts on almost all aspects of human life, we need to do everything possible to prevent the emergence of new epidemics, prevent epidemics from becoming pandemics and prepare to better respond to future pandemics and other health threats.

In that regard, we especially welcome a number of important elements and commitments in the draft resolution, including with respect to increasing international coordination and supporting the process in Geneva on a World Health Organization (WHO) convention, agreement or other international instrument

on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response; prioritizing pandemic prevention and response in our national agendas, with full respect for human rights; achieving universal health coverage and building resilient and equitable health systems that are able to provide essential public health functions and health services during health emergencies; and acknowledging the importance of improved global, regional and local manufacturing — an approach the EU actively supports in several African countries already.

We also acknowledge the need to fully fund the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator, which is the most powerful and truly multilateral tool for delivering vaccines equally through the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access pillar. It also addresses the needs for therapeutics, diagnostics and the crucial aspect of health system strengthening and country readiness.

We clearly recognize the detrimental effects of COVID-19 on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. That needs to be urgently translated into effective countermeasures now, urgently. Gender equality is a prerequisite not only for building back better but also for effectively preventing and preparing against pandemics.

We are also happy to see an agreement on setting up another high-level meeting on antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in 2024, which seems quite far away, but more needs to be done to address the silent pandemic of AMR.

Addressing the challenges of human, animal and ecosystem health using a One Health approach is essential for tackling the root causes of pandemics. We are delighted to see that the call for closer cooperation among the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, WHO and the World Organization for Animal Health has resulted in the establishment of a quadripartite memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Environment Programme, which was signed in March.

Nevertheless, given that draft resolution A/76/L.43 is a fundamental draft resolution on health in the General Assembly, we are convinced the text would have benefited from also integrating some holistic aspects, such as an explicit acknowledgment of sexual and reproductive health-care services as part of essential public health.

With a view to the next global health and foreign policy draft resolution, we encourage the process to be

a little bit more transparent so that delegations can plan accordingly on the basis of an early shared timetable.

Mr. Prongthura (Thailand): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Health has been continuously gaining political attention in New York over the years but, in particular over the past two years, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has put health high on the agenda of the United Nations. That is why ASEAN believes that the annual draft resolution presented by the Foreign Policy and Global Health Initiative, entitled “Elevating pandemic prevention, preparedness and response to the highest level of political leadership” (A/76/L.43), is very timely and relevant.

ASEAN remains deeply concerned about the continued human cost and suffering as well as the severe disruption to societies and economies and the devastating impact on lives and livelihoods brought about by COVID-19, which have severely affected the region.

For our region to emerge more resilient and stronger, ASEAN will seek to fully and effectively implement ASEAN COVID-19 initiatives, such as the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund and in particular the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF) and its implementation plan, which serves as the region’s consolidated exit strategy from the COVID-19 pandemic. ASEAN is determined to work together through the five ACRF broad strategies around health, human security, economic integration, digital transformation and sustainability.

Under the broad strategy on health, ASEAN sees the need to enhance vaccine production and distribution in the region to put an immediate end to the COVID-19 pandemic, including through enhanced collaboration and the sharing of experiences with partners in research, development, production and the distribution of vaccines; providing equitable access to medicines for COVID-19; making COVID-19 vaccines available and affordable to all as global public goods; and preparing for other future public health emergencies.

That would also help strengthen vaccine security and self-reliance at the regional level in the longer term, which is a priority strategy for health in ASEAN, as affirmed by the ASEAN Leaders’ Declaration on ASEAN Vaccine Security and Self-Reliance.

We also believe that building resilient and strong health systems and achieving universal health coverage is the foundation of pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. We also place importance on enhancing the region's capacity to prepare for, prevent, detect and respond to public health emergencies and emerging diseases. In that regard, we look forward to the operationalization of the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases, which would serve as a centre of excellence and a regional resource hub.

We must also build resilience to emerging infectious diseases and future health threats, including antimicrobial resistance, which ASEAN recognizes as a risk to the environment and human health. ASEAN therefore welcomes the decision proposed in draft resolution A/76/L.43 to hold a high-level meeting on antimicrobial resistance in 2024.

In conclusion, ASEAN would like to reaffirm its commitment to continue working with the international community, especially with the World Health Organization and the United Nations, towards achieving healthy lives and well-being for all, in particular by ending the COVID-19 pandemic, emerging stronger and more resilient from the recovery process and being more prepared for future health emergencies and other shocks.

Mr. Abd Aziz (Malaysia): Malaysia associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Thailand on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. We are also pleased to co-sponsor draft resolution A/76/L.43 today.

As the Secretary-General said in 2020, “[t]he pandemic is a clear test of international cooperation — a test that we have failed.” (*S/2020/953, annex I*). His words are still relevant today. To date, more than 6 million people have perished owing to this pandemic.

Despite the scale and character of the pandemic, which knows no borders, the world today still witnesses a lack of global preparedness, solidarity and cooperation. The divide between the global North and South, including on matters concerning access to vaccines, still prevails. What is more disappointing is that suspicion and acrimony among some countries continue to foil much-needed trust and cooperation even in the face of shared challenges.

It is Malaysia's firm belief that global recovery can be materialized only when the pandemic is controlled. In that connection, greater engagement among countries and non-State actors on health issues should be prominently applied in foreign policy decision-making, including in the multilateral forums, such as the United Nations.

That must be our goal, for the simple reason that global health issues, such as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, have a widespread and severe impact on our work in advancing all three pillars of the United Nations, which I will briefly elaborate in three points.

First, on the pillar of peace and security, countries that lack robust and reliable health systems, particularly fragile and conflict-affected countries, often struggle to build or sustain peace. The lack or absence of trust in the institutions providing basic health services to the people may potentially lead to and prolong conflicts, respectively. Subsequently, a humanitarian crisis could occur, which may threaten national, regional and global peace and security.

Secondly, on the pillar of development, the pandemic has unleashed an unprecedented crisis, reversing progress on meeting all 17 Sustainable Development Goals, with the world's poorest and most vulnerable affected the most. It also continues to highlight inequalities among and within countries. In a larger context, the global health crisis continues to impact trade, foreign direct investment and economic growth.

The only path to an inclusive recovery is by vaccinating the world. As long as the virus is not dealt with equally, trade flows and global supply chains will continue to be severely disrupted, costing the global economy trillion of dollars and hindering countries' progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs.

Thirdly, concerning the human rights pillar, human rights are unquestionably critical in responding to and recovering from the pandemic. Health is a fundamental human right that is indispensable to the exercise of other human rights.

There is no alternative but to work together to ensure the availability, accessibility and quality of health care as a human right for all without discrimination, including access to the COVID-19 vaccine. Vaccine nationalism must end, as it only leaves the door open

for the emergence of new variants. The emergence of Omicron has further exposed that harsh reality.

A healthy population and planet are fundamental to prosperity, security and stability. In December 2021, Malaysia launched its framework for Malaysia's foreign policy in a post-pandemic world, which specifies three objectives in health diplomacy as follows: first, we aspire to become a responsible actor for global public health equity; secondly, we seek to build international partnerships on public health, research and vaccine development, and pharmaceutical capabilities; and, thirdly, we commit to multilateral approaches to public health and global challenges.

We are doing our best to translate those commitments into action. For instance, Malaysia is currently hosting a regional hub for the United Nations Humanitarian Response Depot of the World Food Programme, which provides supply-chain solutions to the international humanitarian community, including humanitarian relief cargo shipments to support COVID-19 global operations. In addition, Malaysia is hosting a World Health Organization representative office, with six collaborative and research centres operating in four Government agencies and two public universities.

We are also proud to host the WHO Global Service Centre and joined the global COVID-19 vaccine development platform, the COVID-19 Vaccine Global (COVAX) Facility. In support of solidarity, humanity and multilateralism, we have contributed almost a million vaccines to Bangladesh, Laos, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Palestine. We remain committed to continuing to assist countries with low vaccination rates through the provision of COVID-19 vaccine contributions.

Malaysia also supports the call to solidify global solidarity in addressing the pandemic and for the vaccine to be considered a global public good. Beyond that, we need to also push for intellectual property waivers for life-saving vaccines and treatments during pandemics and to increase the capacity of many more countries to manufacture vaccines and treatments.

One of the greatest threats facing today's world is tiny and microscopic, but our collective action must be big and bold. Advancing foreign policy and global health interests must go hand in hand, as countries need to engage and act together to respond to the global health crisis and its devastating impact. Malaysia will continue to profess and promote those linkages, and we call all Member States to do the same.

Ms. Pullela (Australia): I am pleased to deliver this statement on behalf of Canada, New Zealand and my own country, Australia (CANZ).

Before I begin, I should like to note for the record that CANZ condemns in the strongest possible terms Russia's unprovoked, unjust and illegal invasion of Ukraine. The invasion is a gross violation of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law, including horrifying reports from the World Health Organization of dozens of Russian attacks on Ukrainian health-care personnel and facilities.

As the whole world is now witnessing, Russia's war on Ukraine will have many flow-on effects, including on global health, as food and energy security around the world is decreased and supply chains are disrupted. CANZ strongly supports Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and calls on Russia to immediately withdraw its forces from Ukrainian territory, consistent with the legally binding decision of the International Court of Justice.

We thank the Secretary-General for his report on global health and foreign policy, and commend his calls for ambitious action by Member States and international cooperation to reverse negative trends in health and development resulting from the impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. We also thank the Core Group of the Global Health and Foreign Policy Initiative, particularly Norway, for its stewardship of draft resolution A/76/L.43, which we are considering today.

The circumstances have not been straightforward this year given the fast pace of discussions on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response around the world. Since the high-level meeting on universal health coverage in 2019, we have witnessed the devastating and unprecedented impact of COVID-19 on global health and health systems. We have seen the critical importance of ensuring equitable access to vaccines and other medical supplies around the globe, and we remain committed to the goal of vaccinating 70 per cent of the world's population against COVID-19 by mid-2022, including by strengthening the systems that deliver vaccines, therapeutics, diagnostics and other health technologies.

We believe that the cost of ensuring universal health coverage as well as preventing and preparing for health emergencies is low compared with the cost of responding to crises such as COVID-19. We

must prioritize public spending on health and other social sectors as Member States continue to address COVID-related issues alongside maintaining essential health services.

As we have seen globally, women have a vital role to play in a strong, inclusive and sustainable recovery from the health and economic crises of COVID-19. They will be critical for future pandemics as well. But pandemics have a significant impact on women and girls, interrupting their access to education, economic opportunity, social protection and health services, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, and increasing the risk and severity of violence for all too many. That is also true for other marginalized groups, including people living with disabilities, members of the LGBTI community, indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities, all of whom have been disproportionately impacted by the health, economic, security and social impacts of the pandemic.

The world must remain committed to gender equality, the economic security and empowerment of women and their full, equal and meaningful participation in health and care work. That is critical to ensuring the health of our communities and our economies and for us to be best placed to meet future pandemics head-on.

We are committed to taking the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic to build a more agile and responsive global health system, with the World Health Organization at its core. We see a new international instrument on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response as an important avenue to achieving ambitious reform alongside implementing a broader agenda to strengthen the global health architecture.

We support an open, inclusive and transparent negotiation process that reflects the diverse experience and challenges faced by Member States, including in low- and middle-income countries and small island States.

Finally, we faced unusual circumstances in negotiating this draft resolution given the many discussions under way on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. We would like to encourage reflection by Core Group members, particularly next year's Chair, on working methods and timelines that would allow for truly meaningful and transparent consultations with the wider United Nations membership, both in New York and in Geneva. When the

draft resolution next comes forward for consideration, it will be important to ensure that it reflects developments in the global health and foreign policy space as well as the voices of all States Members of the United Nations. I would like to assure the Assembly of the continued constructive engagement of the CANZ delegations.

Ms. Sulaiman (Brunei Darussalam): At the outset, Brunei Darussalam aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Thailand on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Brunei Darussalam would like to express its appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report under this agenda item (A/76/492). The priority actions listed in the report deserve careful consideration in our continued efforts to recover from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

As rightly pointed out by the Secretary-General in his report, global health and foreign policy are inextricably linked. The political and socioeconomic dimensions of global health require solutions not only at the domestic level but also at the international level.

Many examples in the past have shown that the alignment of global health and foreign policy can generate significant benefits for the health of the planet and peaceful development and growth. Had global health been fully integrated into foreign policy leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, the world might have been better prepared to face the crisis with stronger and more resilient health systems.

The disconnect between global health and foreign policy was put on display during the COVID-19 pandemic, when countries started turning inward and became less willing to work with one another. During the early part of the pandemic, nationalism and protectionism became politically attractive in many parts of the world. Many countries unilaterally closed their borders, banned exports of critical medical supplies such as face masks, personal protective equipment, testing kits and ventilators, played the blame game and spread misinformation. However, the short-term gains from those actions did not last and have proved counterproductive.

As a small country dependent on free trade and open borders, Brunei Darussalam cannot afford to turn inward and shut its borders completely. Like many other countries, Brunei Darussalam has had to maintain a delicate balance between the need to save lives through

containing the spread of the virus and protecting livelihoods by keeping the economy open and running.

Early in the pandemic, we worked with our key trading partners to ensure that our trade lines remained open to facilitate the flow of goods and services. We also worked with our regional neighbours to establish reciprocal green lanes to facilitate essential business and official travel during the pandemic, including reciprocal mutual recognition of vaccination certificates.

In a spirit of solidarity, Brunei Darussalam also donated medical goods and equipment to support our friends in the region in their battle against the pandemic, which our friends also reciprocated. That is what it means to have multilateralism: to help one another when one is in need and to provide when we have the means to do so.

Brunei Darussalam's swift mitigation measures have been successful and prevented community infections for more than a year. Unfortunately, like many others, we were hit by a second wave of the pandemic, and cases of local transmission returned in August 2021. Immediately our Government ramped up our testing capacity, vaccination efforts and awareness programmes. We were able to do so successfully with the support of our private-sector partners and volunteers, especially with the active participation of our youth.

Today we are able to process up to 5,000 COVID-19 swab tests each day, helping to ensure that clusters are contained. We have also introduced mobile and drive-through testing and vaccination centres around the country to care for and protect our population.

A widespread contact-tracing mechanism through the use of an application called BruHealth continues to be used, which has effectively identified clusters of imported as well as locally transmitted cases. We continue to underline the significance of transparent communication and interaction between the Government and the public through daily press conferences hosted by the Ministry of Health, raising public awareness of the importance of physical distancing and self-isolation, as well as carrying out basic hygiene and sanitization.

Foreign policy also played an integral role in our national COVID-19 vaccination programme. Brunei Darussalam started vaccinating its population in April 2021, and to date more than 94 per cent of our population has received two doses of vaccine, of which

60.9 per cent have been boosted with a third dose. That achievement would not have been possible without the support and cooperation of our external friends and partners, the COVID-19 Vaccine Global (COVAX) Facility and the vaccine manufacturers.

Brunei Darussalam is committed to doing its part and to working with the United Nations to build a more resilient, equitable and inclusive global health system, based on the principle of delivering universally accessible, high-quality and affordable essential health care for our people. That includes calling for global support on mutual recognition of all vaccines and sources that are endorsed by the World Health Organization and doing away with policies dictating a restricted list of vaccines permitted for cross-border entry.

For all of the uncertainties over the past two years, the COVID-19 pandemic has made it clear that we all belong to one human race. We have more in common with one another than we ever thought. Only through global solidarity, working together and supporting each other, can we truly overcome this pandemic and pass what the Secretary-General termed the formidable test of leaving no one behind.

Mr. Guo Jiakun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has been ongoing for almost two years. The most serious pandemic in a century is still raging, with frequent viral mutations posing grave challenges to human life, health and sustainable development. Overcoming the pandemic at an early date and restoring economic growth are the top priorities of the international community.

I would like to make the following three observations.

First, in the face of the pandemic, we must uphold solidarity and cooperation to eliminate the immunization gap. The pandemic has once again proved that there is no insulated island with absolute safety in the world. Human society is a community with a shared future. The lives and health of people in developing countries are as precious and important as those of people in other countries.

Vaccines are the most powerful weapon against the virus. The key to current global anti-pandemic cooperation is to ensure the fair distribution of vaccines. All countries must honour their commitments instead of making empty promises. China was the first to propose making COVID-19 vaccines global public goods and is the biggest contributor to the fair

distribution of vaccines. So far, China has provided more than 2.1 billion doses of vaccines to more than 120 countries and international organizations.

One out of two vaccines used globally is made in China. China is a staunch supporter of joint vaccine production. It was the first to support a vaccine intellectual property waiver and took the lead in technology transfer to developing countries. To date, China has conducted joint production with more than 20 countries, with an annual production capacity of 1 billion doses.

As an active participant in multilateral cooperation on vaccines, China supports the World Health Organization in playing a central coordinating role in prioritizing the procurement needs of the COVID-19 Vaccine Global (COVAX) Facility. China has donated \$100 million to COVAX, with a supply of more than 200 million doses of vaccines.

Secondly, in the face of the pandemic we must uphold openness and inclusiveness and restore economic development. The global industrial chain and supply chain have been severely affected by the pandemic. The imbalance in the supply and demand structure has widened, and inflationary pressure has risen.

Achieving sustainable development and a sustainable economic recovery during the pandemic and coordinating the tasks of fighting the pandemic, stabilizing the economy and protecting people's livelihoods are common issues faced by us all. Last September, President Xi Jinping, during the seventy-sixth session of the General Assembly (see A/76/PV.3), proposed a global development initiative upholding the core concept of putting people first, following the guideline of pragmatic cooperation, advocating the spirit of open and inclusive partnership and calling on the international community to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The goal thereof is to promote stronger, greener and healthier global development, build a shared future for global development, devise a blueprint for international development cooperation and provide direction for advancing global development and international development cooperation.

The global development initiative is another important public good provided by China to the international community. The initiative is open to the world, and all countries are welcome to participate and

make joint efforts to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Thirdly, in the face of the pandemic, we must tackle both the symptoms and the root causes and improve the governance system. The COVID-19 pandemic is a litmus test of the global health governance system. We must strengthen the role of the United Nations and the World Health Organization, improve the global disease-prevention and control system, and better prevent and respond to possible future outbreaks. We must uphold the spirit of extensive consultations, joint contributions and shared benefits, and fully heed the views of developing countries and better reflect their legitimate concerns and demands.

It is essential to improve our capacity for monitoring, early warning and emergency response; for patient treatment during major pandemics; for contingency reserves and logistics; for fighting disinformation and for providing support to developing countries.

China has always been committed to pandemic prevention and response. It is open to any efforts and measures that will help strengthen global solidarity and coordinate responses to future pandemics and is willing to work with the international community to build a community with a shared future for humankind.

Mr. Romero Puentes (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has consistently made clear the inequitable international order in which we live. The most vulnerable countries and peoples have been the most affected, not only because of the direct impact of the virus on health but also owing to its socioeconomic consequences.

Contrary to the collective sentiment that should reign in such a reality, developed countries have engaged in a frenetic and irresponsible race with a view to securing for themselves alone vaccines and measures for protection against COVID-19. Similarly, throughout the pandemic, unilateral coercive measures have been strengthened against developing countries, violating the Charter of the United Nations and international law, and ignoring the calls by the Secretary-General and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to ease measures that impose additional difficulties on countries that have been affected as they try to respond to the pandemic.

We cannot forget that the challenges created by COVID-19 were added to the others that we were already

facing in terms of global health, which disproportionately affect the poorest countries, such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and non-communicable diseases. It is an unsustainable paradox that in a world with so much scientific development and so many economic resources, millions of people still die from curable or preventable diseases. So long as there is an order that privileges the few at the cost of the many, we will hardly move forward at all in the area of global health.

Over the nearly two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, Cuba has had to deal with, in addition to the issues related to that particular illness, the aggression of the United States Government, which has intensified, in an opportunistic and criminal manner, the longest economic, commercial and financial blockade ever imposed on any country and engaged in unconventional warfare aimed at destabilizing the country. The blockade impedes Cuba's access to equipment, technology, equipment, treatments and drugs from United States companies, which it is possible to obtain only at higher prices through intermediaries, or which must be substituted for by generic drugs that are less effective. That makes it harder for people to obtain, in a timely manner, medications that are required on a daily basis and creates scarcity among those used in hospitals.

In the face of that massive scarcity, the Cuban scientific community created three vaccines and two vaccine candidates of our own against COVID-19, which has allowed the country to fully vaccinate 89.4 per cent of our population, having administered as of 26 March more than 35 million doses.

In that effort, Cuba was the first country to start vaccinating children between the ages of 2 and 18 years old against COVID-19. That makes clear our strengthened scientific system and our technological innovation in the service of our people. We have also reiterated our willingness to work with other interested countries on agreements on the supply and production of vaccinations, as a modest contribution to the goal of attaining universal immunization soon.

While the United States tried to match the health services that we delivered to various nations, Cuba sent more than 4,900 personnel, organized into 57 medical teams, to 40 countries and territories affected by COVID-19 as a response to the requests that we received, guided by its deep sense of solidarity and humanism. We could do much more for the benefit

of our country in terms of health or in support of the efforts of other countries, including in the context of COVID-19, if we could just get access to the resources of which we are deprived by the blockage illegally imposed by the United States.

Cuba will continue to advocate for the promotion of a world that is more just for all nations and peoples, one in which solidarity, cooperation and multilateralism reign and priority is given to the full exercise of the right to health.

Mr. Konstantinopolskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank the core group of the Global Health and Foreign Policy Initiative, led by Norway, for introducing the draft traditional thematic resolution (A/76/L.43) and for the consultations held. The Russian delegation welcomes that document and supports its adoption by the General Assembly.

Despite the tight time frame and the intensive negotiation process, we have before us the text of a draft resolution that is concise and clearly focused on the topic. We are satisfied with this approach and are pleased that our main comments and priorities were taken into account. We welcome the reaffirmation in the draft resolution of the central role played by the World Health Organization (WHO) in multilateral efforts to protect against infectious diseases. We advocate for further strengthening WHO as a coordinator of international cooperation in this field.

In that context, we believe that it is vitally important that the document reaffirms the importance of the international health regulations as a key legal document on emergency preparedness in the health sector. We also agree with the provisions on a possible new legal instrument, under the auspices of WHO, that would tie in with agreements reached in the World Health Assembly.

The draft resolution rightly underscores the need for equitable access to coronavirus diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines, as well as the positive role played by various initiatives to address this crucial challenge. We are also satisfied with the draft resolution's focus on achieving universal health coverage, with particular emphasis on primary health care as key to this process. We also commend the decision to convene a high-level General Assembly meeting on antimicrobial resistance in 2024 and look forward to the close involvement of Member States in its preparation.

At the same time, we believe it would be counterproductive to attempt to pre-empt or hurry the outcome of the professional process agreed by Member States within to address the pandemic. That could include launching parallel initiatives in other United Nations platforms or outside the global Organization. Such an approach risks fragmenting this critical agenda and blurring its single understanding, which, in our view, does not serve the purpose of uniting the international community to prevent similar problems in future.

We must also respond to those delegations that, unfortunately, have once again used a sector-specific event in the General Assembly in order to continue the information war. Our delegation refutes the false accusations against us. We have informed the international community about the reasons and goals of our special operation in Ukraine multiple times, and they are well known. We will not repeat them again.

However, we would like to draw attention to the fact that States that claim that they support the real fundamental postulates of the Charter of the United Nations and international law have — for many years — trampled upon them and continue to do so. Or they prefer to manipulate and not notice an undesirable reality.

In that context, it is not clear why they did not respond or react to the heavy shelling of the hospital in Donbas by Ukraine's military. Why did they not bring up at the United Nations the issue of the consequences of the trade and economic blockade of Donbas, imposed by the Kyiv authorities, or the lack of access to medicines in hospitals in Donetsk and Luhansk? Why are they ignoring the nationalist battalions' use of civilian infrastructure for military purpose and civilians as human shields? What about the infamous statements made by the head of one Ukrainian hospital who called for violence to be carried out against Russian prisoners?

We call for the abandonment of double standards and for the work of the General Assembly to not be politicized. That is counterproductive and will not allow us to address any problems. There are other formats within the United Nations for that type of discussion. We do not plan on coming back to this topic again.

Mr. Mahmoud (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the delegations of the Member States of the core group of the Foreign Policy and Global Health Initiative, launched by the World

Health Organization, for presenting the draft resolution entitled "Elevating pandemic prevention, preparedness and response to the highest level of political leadership" (A/76/L.43). I also thank the delegation of Norway for facilitating consultations on the draft resolution, which coincides with the start of the third year of the General Assembly's international efforts to respond to the coronavirus pandemic and address its repercussions on our societies.

Three years into the pandemic, we are still witnessing the emergence of new mutations of the virus, despite scientific advances in the production and distribution of vaccines, as well as successful initiatives aimed at reducing the gap between production and demand. The ongoing situation therefore serves to emphasize the importance of providing vaccines to all countries, which requires a comprehensive approach based on the availability of political will at the highest levels, as well as facilitating more access to financing and related technologies. In that context, Egypt has called for an international strategy that takes into account the manufacturing capabilities of Member States, builds their capacities and organizes the transfer of technology, vaccines, medicines and raw materials. As indicated in the Secretary-General's 2021 *Sustainable Development Goals Report*, the achievement of the Goals was delayed even before the start of the pandemic, which confirms the need for concerted efforts to accelerate the pace of combating the virus and to enhance our ability to mitigate its economic and social repercussions.

Egypt has made many efforts to accelerate the pace of vaccinating its citizens, especially those most affected by the virus, in addition to working to locally manufacture vaccines and transfer the required technologies in the context of making Egypt a regional centre to export vaccines to all the neighbouring countries. The number of doses administered in Egypt has reached more than 76 million of different kinds, with an estimated 32 million people fully vaccinated.

Egypt has also started clinical trials for the Egyptian vaccine, EgyVax, which reflects Egypt's manufacturing capabilities, especially alongside Egypt's success in producing more than 30 million doses of the Sinovac vaccine in order to respond to local needs and contribute to the global supply chain. Egypt is also trying to provide locally made vaccines to neighbouring countries with low rates of vaccination. We are also collaborating with China in that regard. Perhaps the announcement of Egypt's inclusion among the African

countries receiving mRNA vaccine technology is the best evidence of Egypt's manufacturing capabilities in this field.

Those successes are the result of our efforts to raise the level of health services across the country. Egypt has implemented several comprehensive health initiatives under the slogan 100 Million Health, including the national campaign to eliminate the hepatitis-C virus and detect non-communicable diseases, the initiative to support the health of Egyptian women and other important initiatives, as well as launching the comprehensive health insurance project that covers all Egyptians and aims to alleviate the burden of health expenses on citizens and to achieve comprehensive health coverage by 2030.

At the continental level, Egypt recently ratified the convention to establish the African Medicines Agency, which seeks to enhance local capacities for manufacturing medicines in African countries and improve medical capabilities by addressing the gap in

the production of medicines and facing the challenges of medical industrialization in our African continent. In that regard, Egypt intends to host the first African medical exhibition, namely, the Africa Health ExCon forum in June, in order to respond to medical needs with products and services and to ensure that African countries have access to modern medical products.

In conclusion, the continued current situation requires concerted international efforts to overcome the ongoing challenges and ensure that the recovery process from the pandemic is comprehensive and successful. As noted in the draft resolution before us today, there is a need to strengthen international cooperation and coordination in order to enhance pandemic prevention and preparedness as well as ways to respond to them. In that context, I emphasize Egypt's full commitment to supporting efforts to promote regional and international health security.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.