

Message from President of the General Assembly

His Excellency Mr. Dennis Francis
to the Annual Assembly of the
Association of Former International Civil Servants

To be delivered by Ms. Inga Kanchaveli, Deputy Chef de Cabinet

21 May 2024

Distinguished Former International Civil Servants,

I deeply regret that I am unable to honor your kind invitation by joining you in-person, due to other competing work demands that necessitated that I be away from New York.

But it is my honor to send to you this message, with my best regards, as you gather today for your Annual Assembly at UN Headquarters.

As former UN staff members, in your professional lives you dedicated yourselves to the noble goals of the United Nations.

Through years of dedication and hard work in the service of humanity – not necessarily in the most comfortable or safe locations – you can and should feel a great sense of satisfaction and, indeed, pride that you have contributed in no small way to the effort that lies at the very heart of the UN’s mission - to make people’s lives better by relieving suffering and pain and providing hope, so that they may live lives of dignity in being better positioned to provide for themselves and their families in safety and security.

I therefore congratulate you on your unwavering commitment to the purposes and principles of the United Nations, and I know that you continue to cherish and promote our common goals in your hearts and minds today as proud UN retirees.

There is much more you contributed to, but in summary I can simply say:

- You are the ones that promoted the UN development, peace and human rights pillars.
- You are the ones that helped set up delicate peace-keeping operations, and served in some of the harshest environments around the world.
- You are the ones that arranged for the Security Council to meet.
- You are the ones who spent sleepless nights with Fifth Committee and ACABQ to prepare for approval of budgets and balancing of our limited resources.
- You are the ones that made sure the General Assembly convened multitudes of mandated meetings, Conferences and Summits and other major events, and operating strictly in accordance with its rules and procedures.
- You are the ones that provided the necessary interpretation and translation services often going beyond regular hours in order to facilitate decision – making and thus helped to maintain the true character of the UN as an intergovernmental community of multiculturalism and multilingualism.

And, you are the ones that I am in awe of – as I think of your extraordinary dedication to accomplish these and many other goals so vital for our common good and what the United Nations is today.

I know that many of you continue to serve the UN system in one capacity or another – and that UN organizations continue to benefit from your vast knowledge and experience in their operations.

It was almost a year ago when I was elected as the 78th President of the General Assembly. Building on the enormity of your joint and several contributions, I pledged to focus primarily on four critical pillars of our work at the United Nations, my four watchwords, **Peace, Prosperity, Progress** and **Sustainability** for all.

Nine months into my mandate, I still firmly believe that these constitute supreme objectives that the international community must relentlessly pursue – given that

the **imperative for peace** in places like Gaza, Ukraine, Yemen, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti and elsewhere is especially more daunting, and worryingly, appears to be the growing ease with which to discard and deny basic human rights around the world, including painfully, the most fundamental right of all, through the use of what could, on the face of it, be adjudged to be genocide.

As the United Nations, we continue to count on you activism in retirement to help us halt the current trajectory of disappointment and disillusionment from overshadowing the possibilities of a world of boundless opportunity – so that through processes such as the **Summit of the Future in September** we can realize a world in which nations and peoples can unify, in common purpose, to deliver credible progress towards the SDGs while capitalizing on new opportunities such as artificial intelligence and digitalization.

As President of the General Assembly, I firmly believe the multilateral system is vital to global efforts to achieve these grand and transformational objectives.

In this regard, the Summit of the Future in particular is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to bolster international cooperation meaningfully and to renew our solidarity on the critical challenges confronting our civilization in the Twenty -first century.

It is a one-of-a-kind opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to the United Nations Charter, existing commitments including the SDGs, and to address the gaps in global governance and move towards a reinvigorated multilateral system best positioned to positively impact people's lives.

Your own Association – which I am aware was founded in 1970 with the support of former Secretary-General U Thant – has over the years worked tirelessly to promote the goals and values of the United Nations and the wellbeing of all those who, like you, served our Organization.

Once again, I applaud the work that your Association is doing not to only advocate for the United Nations but also for former UN staff and their issues of concern.

I am also aware that you are one of **over 60 UN retiree Associations** around the world who come together in the **Federation of Associations of Former International Civil Servants (FAFICS)** which represents retirees in key UN bodies – bound together by the spirit of voluntarism.

I wish you every success for your Annual Assembly today and for your vital work in the months and years ahead.

All those who have given so much of themselves to the system, to serving the “we the peoples of the United Nations” know that there is no greater honour than serving something bigger and better than oneself.

In closing, I ask you to honour those of our fallen colleagues who lost their lives while serving the great ideals and principles of our organization by observing a minute of silence both for them and to honour their families.

Thank you most sincerely for your devoted service to this uniquely special organization, without which the world would be well-nigh dammed to repeat the mistakes of the past to the detriment of us all.

I thank you.