General Assembly Elects Slovakia Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák President of Seventy-Second Session, while Selecting Bureaux for Main Committees

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UN Meetings Coverage

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The General Assembly today elected Miroslav Lajčák, Slovakia’s Minister for Foreign and European Affairs, as President of its seventy-second session, while also selecting members to the Bureaux of its six Main Committees.

In accordance with tradition, the Assembly President’s election follows the system of geographical rotation whereby regional groups — the Eastern European States in the present case — putting a consensus candidate forward every year.

Following the election, the new President outlined six priorities, emphasizing first his intention to focus on people.  “I do believe we can do more to bring the UN closer to the world’s citizens” and make a real difference in their lives, he said.  The Sustainable Development Goals and climate action would also be important priorities, he said, adding that human rights would guide his work as an overarching principle.

He went on to highlight the importance of prevention and mediation in sustaining peace, and of calling attention to the issue of migration.  Emphasizing the importance of quality, he pledged not to launch any initiative that would result in additional burdens, particularly for smaller States, saying he would rather create a streamlined agenda, organized in clusters.

Indeed, creating a stronger United Nations, able to meet the multitude of expectations placed upon it was a common goal, he continued, adding that, to that end, he would facilitate a constructive, informed and open interaction among Member States and with the Secretary-General.  He called for greater trust between the United Nations and its members, stressing that he would do his utmost to support progress on the United Nations reform agenda.  He underlined the vital need to bolster the General Assembly’s role and improve its efficiency, and to transform the Security Council into a twenty-first-century entity.

Extending his congratulations, outgoing President Peter Thomson (Fiji) emphasized the Assembly’s critical role in setting the stage for peace and sustainable development amid massive global challenges — constant conflict, the largest refugee and humanitarian crisis since the Second World War, the spread of terrorism and the destructive effects of climate change.  He expressed confidence that, under Mr. Lajčák’s leadership, the United Nations would be strongly positioned to advance efforts to sustain peace, promote human rights and “stay the course” in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change.

Secretary-General António Guterres also congratulated the new President, commending his “impressive” command of the Organization’s work and strong commitment to its principles.  Mr. Lajčák had expressed his firm belief that “strengthening the UN is the best investment to achieve the universal desire for peace, development, equality and justice in the world”, he recalled.

Also congratulating the President-elect on behalf of regional groups were representatives of the following Member States:  Cameroon (African States), Marshall Islands (Asia-Pacific States), Poland (Eastern European States), Haiti (Latin American and Caribbean States), Austria (Western European and Other States) and the United States (Host Country).

Acting in accordance with tradition, the Secretary-General then drew lots to determine which delegation would occupy the first seat in the General Assembly Hall during the seventy-second session.  The Czech Republic’s delegation was picked for the first seat, to be followed in English alphabetical order by all the other countries, including in the Main Committees.

The Assembly also elected the following 21 Vice-Presidents of its plenary:  Afghanistan, Bolivia, Chile, Finland, Gabon, Ghana, Guatemala, Indonesia, Israel, Liberia, Madagascar, Morocco, Sri Lanka, United Arab Emirates, Vanuatu and Zimbabwe.  Also serving as Vice-Presidents were the five permanent members of the Security Council — China, France, Russian Federation, United Kingdom and the United States.

Prior to that action, the outgoing President expressed regret that out of 16 regional nominations, only two representatives had been female.  He encouraged Member States to consider what steps they could take to advance gender parity.

A number of delegates then expressed reservations about Israel’s election as an Assembly Vice-President, with Iran’s delegate representative emphasizing that Israel was “in no way qualified”, having occupied Palestinian lands and committed flagrant violations of international law for decades.  “Israel is no friend to the United Nations,” he stressed, disassociating his delegation from Israel’s election.

Qatar’s representative pointed out that the role of Vice-President demanded respect for United Nations decisions, whereas Israel saw itself as superior to its resolutions and violated them regularly.

Syria’s representative described Israel’s election as part of a “clear policy” by the Group of Western European and Other States, as well as the Assembly’s Fourth (Special Political and Decolonization), Fifth (Administrative and Budgetary) and Sixth (Legal) Committees.  Underlining that Israel was an occupying Power, he said its candidacy in elections for any United Nations entity was at odds with the Organization’s Charter.

The Assembly then held consecutive meetings of its six Main Committees to elect members of their respective bureaux.  It elected five Chairs by acclamation, while electing the Chair of the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) by secret ballot.

The First Committee (Disarmament and International Security) elected Mouayed Saleh (Iraq) as Chair; Terje Taadik (Estonia), Alfredo Toro Carnevalli (Venezuela) and Georg Sparber (Liechtenstein) as Vice-Chairs; and Martin Ngundze (South Africa) as Rapporteur.

As the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) opened its meeting, Haiti’s representative announced the unanimous decision by the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC) to nominate Rafael Darió Ramírez Carreño (Venezuela) as Chair, while emphasizing that no aspect of his country’s current political situation would prevent him from fulfilling his duty in that position.

However, the representative of the United States called for a secret ballot, expressing concern about the state of democracy in Venezuela and the ability of a representative of the Government of President Nicolás Maduro to serve as Chair of the Fourth Committee in a fair and apolitical manner.  To date, nearly 60 Venezuelans had died and hundreds had been injured or arrested in political protests, while thousands had fled to neighbouring countries, she said.  Noting that the Government was attempting to rewrite the Constitution and curbing political freedoms, she said the United States could not support the candidacy of Mr. Ramírez until democratic order was restored in Venezuela.

The Fourth Committee then elected Mr. Ramírez as its Chair after he received 133 votes, surpassing the required majority.

Mr. Ramírez (Venezuela) rejected the attempt by the United States delegation to alter the “posture and position” of the Latin American and Caribbean region as an attack on the multilateral system, aimed at imposing its own will.  “Today, we have taught [the United States] an extraordinary lesson in sovereignty,” he said, vowing to advance the Fourth Committee’s efforts to eradicate colonialism, including the dominion of the United States over Puerto Rico, among other territories.

Acting by acclamation, the Fourth Committee then elected Ahmed al-Mahmoud (United Arab Emirates) and Ceren Hande Őzgür (Turkey) as Vice-Chairs, and Angel Angelov (Bulgaria) as Rapporteur.

In a second secret ballot vote, the Committee elected Yasser Halfouni (Morocco) as the Vice-Chair by 88 votes to 58 for Zaina Benhabouche (Algeria).

The Second Committee (Economic and Financial) elected Sven Jürgenson (Estonia) as Chair; Malelaos Menelaou (Cyprus), Kimberly Louis (Saint Lucia) and Valérie Bruell-Melchior (Monaco) as Vice-Chairs; and Chipulu Luswili Chanda (Zambia) as Rapporteur.

The Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) elected Einar Gunnarsson (Iceland) as Chair; Nebil Idris (Eritrea), Alanoud Qassim M.A. al‑Temimi (Qatar) and Dóra Kaszás (Hungary) as Vice-Chairs; and Mariá José del Águila (Guatemala) as Rapporteur.

The Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary) elected Tommo Monthé (Cameroon) as Chair; Abbas Yazdani (Iran), Anda Grinberga (Latvia) and Julie O’Brien (Ireland) as Vice-Chairs; and Felipe Garcia Landa (Mexico) as Rapporteur.

The Sixth Committee (Legal) elected Burhan Gafoor (Singapore) as Chair, as well as Duncan Laki Muhumuza (Uganda), Angel Horna (Peru), Carrie McDougall (Australia) and Peter Nagy (Slovakia) as Vice-Chairs, with Mr. Nagy also elected Rapporteur.

At the outset, Mr. Thomson (Fiji) expressed his deepest sympathies following the terrorist attack earlier today in Kabul, Afghanistan, which claimed many lives, also extending condolences to all family members of the victims of recent terrorist attacks around the world.

The Assembly will reconvene at 10 a.m. on Thursday, 1 June, to discuss implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the Political Declarations on HIV/AIDS.