

United Nations 70th general debate begins today

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United Nations: Over 150 world leaders will descend here today for the UN General Assembly's annual General Debate where issues like sustainable development, climate change, refugee crisis, terrorism and tackling ISIS would occupy the centrestage.

The UN General Assembly session this year will see an unprecedented attendance by global leaders as they will gather to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the founding of the UN.

Several world leaders, include Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Pope Francis arrived in the city days before the opening of the General Debate to attend the UN Sustainable Development Summit hosted by Secretary General Ban Ki-moon where the ambitious post-2015 development agenda was adopted.

With world leaders slated to adopt a climate change agreement in December in Paris, the effects of climate change and commitments by the countries to cut emissions is expected to be the focus of several leaders.

Apart from sustainable development, the threat of terrorism and efforts to tackle the global scourge as well as defeating ISIS will also occupy centrestage.

World leaders are also expected to address the spiralling refugee crisis with a call to nations to embrace more migrants fleeing terror and persecution in troubled hot spots Iraq and Syria.

Ahead of this 70th anniversary General Debate, Ban will present his annual report on the work of the Organisation.

This year's Assembly President Mogens Lykketoft of Denmark will deliver the keynote opening speech and will be followed by Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff, whose country holds the traditional role of first national speaker.

She will be followed by US President Barack Obama as leader of the host nation.

Other top leaders addressing the Assembly on the first day of the Debate, which continues until October 3, include leaders from around the world. Many of the leaders have already participated in the three day summit that launched the 2030 Agenda. Modi addressed the Sustainable Development Summit on September 25.

Since the Indian leader will leave for India later today, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj will address the General Debate on October 1, a day after Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif addresses the gathering.

By tradition, each year, the Secretary-General draws lots to select which among the UN's 193 Member States will occupy the first seat in the General Assembly Hall throughout the yearlong session, and this year Ban Ki-moon picked Tuvalu, a low-lying developing state of some 11,000 people in the South Pacific whose very existence is under dire threat from rising seas brought on by human-caused climate change.

Tackling climate change is one of the major objectives of the ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which the Assembly adopted on Friday.

Composed of 17 goals and 169 targets, the Agenda is an essential plank in the effort to wipe out poverty, fight inequality and enhance medical and educational access over the next 15 years. Unchecked climate change could

undermine all the other goals.

The new agenda is people-centred, universal, transformative and integrated. It calls for action by all countries for all people over the next 15 years in five areas of critical importance: people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership.

The agenda recognises that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with a plan that builds economic growth and addresses a range of social needs, while tackling climate change.

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