

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Directors,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

It is a great honor for me to be opening the debate here today at the 21st Forum 2000, an initiative which I believe is particularly useful.

The event's ambition, as set out by its founders Vaclav Havel, Elie Wiesel and Yohei Sasakawa, of providing a platform to meet, engage in dialogue and shed light on the world, is a highly topical one.

At a time when we are all confronted by countless, varied and rapid upheaval, the nature of which is sometimes violent and sometimes disturbing, we, more than ever need to step back, to seek to understand, and to collectively come up with novel answers which are tailored to these new challenges.

Among these challenges, those currently facing our political institutions, whether national or multilateral, are numerous. They are the result of the convergence of several crises, and our difficulties in resolving them.

There are economic difficulties, which seem to loom ever larger. There are inequalities, which seem to be forever widening. There are security threats of a new kind. There is the growing scarcity of some of our natural resources. There are weather disasters, which are increasing in number and intensity. There is desertification, which is accelerating. There is migration, with its associated tragedies playing out before us on a daily basis.

Yet faced with these major challenges, our political tools today seem powerless. Our traditional categories of analysis appear obsolete, our governments impotent, our means of action inadequate. Peoples feel concerned that the future is depriving them of their ability to act, at the very moment when the world is becoming more threatening.

It is then tempting to compare the current situation with how things were just a few decades ago.

The problems that had to be tackled seemed simpler then. They appeared to be clearly confined to the level of individual nations.

The main threats were to be found at the borders. Trade was regulated by the authority of states. Natural heritage was managed without worrying about a future that we wanted to believe, would be everlasting.

This situation no longer exists today. Instead, complexity and uncertainty seem to have the upper hand. Complexity and uncertainty which states no longer seem to be able to control. It is therefore easy to blame them for every illness. It is even easier to call for an impossible return to the past, as many anti-establishment movements are doing, demanding that states regain their omnipotence in order to revive old ways.

Personally, I do not believe that this option is possible, or even desirable. We will not abolish the complexity of the world. We will not re-establish its former compartmentalization. We will not undo the incredible movement towards openness, knowledge and awareness; at the roots of our new perspective on the challenges of this century.

That said, we must not declare nation states to be defunct. I am convinced that they continue to be a vital component of collective action. A component which is no doubt in need of reform. But one which must, above all, be supplemented.

To explain this, I would like to talk about a subject which is particularly dear to me, and which lies at the heart of many of the problems we are facing today: protecting the environment. I would like to speak from my own experience, both as a head of state and as the leader of an NGO, since a large part of my environmental work is done through the Foundation which I established in 2006, a year after my accession to the throne.

My Foundation is dedicated to combating climate change, safeguarding biodiversity and conserving the planet's water resources. It operates on all continents, with a focus on three priority areas: the Mediterranean, the Polar Regions and the least developed countries. It consistently acts in support of or in partnership with other organizations: scientific laboratories, local NGOs, major international NGOs, companies and public institutions.

Our ambition, both global and local in scope, our ability to take action in a variety of ways, and the importance we attach to adapting to the constraints of our partners and the realities on the ground, are key assets when it comes to protecting the environment.

For, confronted with a challenge that calls into question the majority of our economic models, involving local populations, raising awareness and talking to as many people as possible is paramount.

To build a new development model, we must be able to act as locally as possible, and we must persuade our peers to change along with us. This is particularly true against a background of crisis and difficulties, which can encourage people to turn away from issues they consider to be less pressing – even if this would be a mistake.

This is the reason why I created my Foundation, which has led or supported close to 400 projects throughout the world during its first ten years of operation. For I was convinced, as Vaclav Havel wrote, that “the coming together of citizens in organizations, movements, associations and unions is a necessary condition for the functioning of any well-structured civil society.”

However, taking this initiative was not, for me, about calling into question the legitimacy, relevance or ability to act of nation states, especially the one which I lead. On the contrary, it was about making available the means to act in a more comprehensive and more flexible way.

While we need everyone's commitment if we are to save this planet, there are responsibilities that cannot be delegated.

In particular, there are the responsibilities of states, which are instrumental in many areas. Whether it is combating land pollution, setting up areas to protect biodiversity, taking measures to promote energy transition, or

establishing water treatment and supply systems, states can and must act.

I can see this in my country, where we have put in place an energy transition strategy, support for clean methods of transport and incentives to decarbonize the economy, with the aim of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050.

I can see this in the strong measures we have taken to combat pollution and severely restrict the use of plastics, which wreak so much destruction in our seas. I can see this in the success of the marine protected areas, which we have created in our territorial waters.

While they can't do everything, states can and must act to address the new challenges thrown up by the environmental issue. But they must understand that they are not alone, and that they need to join forces with NGOs and companies.

States also have a responsibility to support and reinforce multilateral efforts, which now seems to be the most suitable level to deal with many global problems.

This is the third level of the model that I want to propose today. Alongside and in partnership with NGOs, alongside and in close collaboration with nation states, multilateral institutions, more than ever before, have a critical role to play in responding to the challenges of this century.

On environmental issues in particular, their commitment is clearly essential. Faced with phenomena that unflinchingly transcend manmade borders, how could it be otherwise?

This is why I have been committed, since the Rio Conference 25 years ago, to numerous international negotiations focused on the environment, within the framework of the United Nations, or within regional frameworks. I am convinced that here too, progress is not only possible, it is already under way.

This is evidenced by the Paris Climate Agreement. Although it has now been weakened by certain unilateral decisions, it finally offers us a binding framework for combating the serious threat posed by climate change.

This is evidenced by the decisions regarding certain vulnerable areas which need to be preserved, such as the Ross Sea in Antarctica, where a very significant marine protected area – the world's largest – was created last year.

This is evidenced by the negotiations currently taking place at the UN to give the high seas, which represent nearly 50% of the Earth's surface, a status that will enable them to cope with the challenges of our era.

This is also evidenced by the action we have taken with regard to a number of endangered species, such as Mediterranean Bluefin tuna which, while it has not led to a ban on sales, has succeeded in saving this species.

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All these examples illustrate the importance of international action, in support of which states must mobilize and for which they must have the backing of civil societies.

Whether the issue is Bluefin tuna or the Paris Agreement, in every case it is the mobilization of civil societies that enables progress to be made, by coming up with solutions, by multiplying the impact of political decisions and, above all, by encouraging leaders to act.

This is also a characteristic of this era: citizens have the tendency to mistrust the capacity of nation states.

It is a new, unprecedented, global awareness, capable of expressing itself, taking action, and mobilizing throughout the world, thanks in particular to social media and digital technology.

This new awareness is without doubt the greatest innovation of our era, especially in the environmental field.

As someone who, as I mentioned earlier, took part in the first major international conference devoted to this subject in Rio 25 years ago, I can attest to the incredible change which has occurred, at the global level, over a quarter of a century.

Something which was previously a secondary concern for a handful of informed minds has become a key issue in international relations, bringing together more than 150 heads of state and government in Paris in 2015, and engaging the interest of millions of our peers who are mobilizing. It seems to me that never before in history has such a change in mind-set been achieved in such a short period of time.

The corollary is, of course, a greater appreciation of the world's misfortunes, a new awareness of dangers, which we didn't see before. But isn't this global awareness, shared by NGOs, states and international organizations, preferable to the blindness of those who would remain behind their borders, ignorant of what is going on elsewhere and what they might leave to their children?

This is the reason why, at the risk of coming across as an optimist, I want to focus today on the new opportunities opened up by this changing landscape.

The opportunities of a power which is no longer limited to nation states alone, but is now shared, between the awareness of responsible individuals, the mobilization of civil societies, NGOs and innovative companies, the determination of committed states, and the ambition of multilateral organizations seeking to establish new rules.

All of this is, of course, far from functioning perfectly as yet. The dangers, in terms of the environment, have never been so great, time is pressing, and we do not know whether we will be able of saving this planet, its biodiversity, its climate, its oceans, its balance.

But, since we have been asked today to consider what might be done to stop humanity hurtling towards disaster, it is on this aspect that I wanted to concentrate. On the need to develop action at other levels, in addition to those at the national level, and relying on the energy of individuals.

Because in the midst of all the uncertainties in our world, I believe that nothing would be worse than despair or a loss of interest in our shared future.

In conclusion, Elie Wiesel wrote in *The Testament* and I would like to quote his words: “The real danger, my son, is named indifference.”

Let us beware of this danger, and keep our peers from giving in to it. That is also the point of our meeting today.

Thank you.