



# Media Note

New York

18 September 2023

## UN General Assembly Insights: Tuesday 19 September

World leaders are in New York for the UN General Assembly high-level week, and will participate in a host of summits and side-events on global issues. Over the course of the week, Crisis Group will highlight upcoming meetings with a focus on peace, security and current conflicts. We will release a note each evening commenting on the next day's events. *These notes are for attribution, and quotations from Crisis Group staff are available for use by the media.*

### 1. The Big Event: The leaders speak

Leaders will congregate in the General Assembly Hall for the beginning of this year's "general debate", which is a series of formal speeches rather than a real debate. Secretary-General António Guterres will kick off proceedings with his annual report at 9am. Guterres has recently struck a gloomy note when describing world affairs – warning of a "great fracture" between geopolitical and economic blocs. It's a theme he may repeat, but he will also likely urge his audience to intensify cooperation on economic development, climate change and new challenges such as artificial intelligence.

Participants will be especially eager to hear from three leaders giving addresses on Tuesday morning. These are President Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil, President Joe Biden of the U.S., and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine, who will be in New York in person this year.

This is Lula's first appearance in the general debate since 2010. In a tradition dating to 1955, Brazil will give the first national statement. Lula is likely to talk about Brazil's ambitions for its presidency of the G20 in 2023-34 – which including promoting social inclusion, sustainable development and reforms to global governance – but may annoy Western leaders by calling for an early diplomatic solution to Russia's war on Ukraine, when they do not see that as a realistic option. This is a theme that Lula has pressed this year.

Crisis Group Latin America Director Ivan Briscoe says:

Brazil's new foreign policy looks to maintain strong relations with all global powers, Dialogue and engagement are Lula's preferred methods, on issues ranging from Russia's aggression against Ukraine to the long-running political crisis in Venezuela. Western leaders including President Biden want to embrace Lula as a partner, but some believe that Brazil could do more to defend democracy, human rights and international law.

Speaking after Lula, President Biden is likely to both repeat his criticisms of Russia's full-scale assault on Ukraine and emphasize that the U.S. wants to address challenges in the developing world.

Crisis Group U.S. Project Director Michael Hanna comments:

Biden's speech at the UN comes at a time of meaningful transition in the international system. The administration is increasingly cognizant of the ways that the international order is changing, with some powers aiming to assert their independence from the U.S. and others working to undermine its power. Many UN members are critical of the yawning gaps between U.S. pledges to assist them on challenges like climate adaptation and the limited resources the U.S. has actually invested in doing so. Biden needs to reassure his audience that the U.S. will genuinely help them address problems such as mounting debts burdens.

President Zelenskyy – who was only able to address the General Assembly via video last year -- has an opportunity to urge non-Western countries to offer Ukraine greater diplomatic support. (Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will give his country's address on Friday.) But he may also disappoint some non-Western leaders, like Lula, who would like Kyiv to move towards early peace talks with Russia.

Crisis Group UN Director Richard Gowan says:

Crisis Group's past analysis of General Assembly discussions of Ukraine shows that many non-Western members of the UN want a diplomatic solution sooner rather than later. Zelenskyy has recently emphasized that there is no prospect of serious negotiations with Russia at present, and Ukraine may face a long war. This is a good moment to lay out his position on diplomacy clearly to the General Assembly to counter calls to enter negotiations soon.

## **2. In Focus: Women and Counter-Terrorism**

On Tuesday morning, members of the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum – a framework for informal exchanges on national approaches to terrorism – hold a ministerial meeting on the margins of the General Assembly, convened by Egypt and the European Union. The focus will be “women as drivers of peace and innovation in responding to terrorism and violent extremism.”

Floor Keuleers, Crisis Group's Senior Analyst for Gender and Conflict, says:

Women are not passive onlookers when violent insurgencies break out. They are directly involved in both fuelling violence and making peace. Efforts to counter terrorism will be setting themselves up for the best results if they address the full breadth of women's experiences and roles, and are tied to structural efforts to boost women's political participation and influence.

## **3. Crisis Group Will Also Be Watching...**

Colombia, the UK and a group of non-governmental organisations co-host an event on “countering threats based on sexual orientation and gender identity in mass atrocity prevention” on Tuesday afternoon.

Crisis Group Gender Project Director Cristal Downing says:

While conflict actors including states and non-state armed groups have long targeted individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity, this has only become a serious topic of conversation at the UN in the last two years. It is good to see Colombia and the UK making a push to expand this conversation further at the General Assembly.