

# [New UN rights chief pledges to push back on 'centuries of prejudice and discrimination'](#)

The UN's newly appointed High Commissioner for Human Rights, [Michelle Bachelet](#), intends to push back "centuries of prejudice and discrimination" against vulnerable groups including women and the peoples of the Global South, by pushing for more consensus between Member States, she said on Monday.

Speaking for the first time at the [Human Rights Council](#) in her capacity as UN rights chief, she acknowledged that while political differences "may divide some of the countries in this room", she intended to bring her "lifelong dedication to reversing hatred and ensuring equality and respect for all".

Addressing the Council's 47 Member States, she said: "Your people seek a common agenda: rights, sustainable development and peace."

Drawing on her own country's experience, Chile, Ms. Bachelet insisted that despite the years of dark authoritarian rule that followed a coup d'état 45 years ago in the South American country, which profoundly affected her personally, the Chilean people now enjoy greater freedoms.

She touched only briefly on the fact that she herself had been a political prisoner – and not at all on her own experience of undergoing torture – a refugee, and subsequently a doctor who cared for child victims who had been tortured, as well as being twice-elected Chile's elected President, and being appointed the first head of UN Women, in 2011.

"My country has known the pain and terror of tyranny," she said. "But I am proud to say we have been able to surmount divisions and meet vast challenges – shaping institutions which enable greater participation, and greater freedom, justice and dignity, for our people."

## **Human Rights Council**

Turning to the Council – which has faced calls for reform, not least by the United States which withdrew its membership in June – Ms. Bachelet expressed how she "deeply admired" its work, along with the UN rights "treaty" bodies which scrutinize the human rights record of every state in the world; and numerous UN-appointed independent experts and fact-finding missions.

"Your expanding agenda and increased workload are not only a testament to the world's failures to uphold human rights, they are also a mark of your importance," she said, before repeating the words of the late UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan that "no country, no matter how powerful or wealthy" can hope to solve the issues which face States in today's complex, globalized

world.

I believe there should be more engagement by all Member States – not sterile disputes; not withdrawals; but collective, coordinated and cooperative work to sustain core principles – *rights chief, Michelle Bachelet*

“I am convinced that this Council must strive for consensus,” she said. “I believe there should be more engagement by all Member States – not sterile disputes; not withdrawals; but collective, coordinated and cooperative work to sustain core principles and common goals.”

While underscoring the “primary responsibility” of States to uphold the rights of their people, Ms. Bachelet emphasized that she would strive to ensure that they promoted “all human rights”: civil, political, economic, social and cultural.

“Irrespective of the type of political regime in a given country, the Human Rights Council has the duty to advocate and to assist transformative improvements in upholding all rights,” Ms Bachelet said.

In common with her predecessor, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, the rights chief highlighted specific countries where alleged rights abuses required further international attention.

## **Myanmar**

These included Myanmar, where the High Commissioner welcomed the International Criminal Court’s (ICC) recent finding that it has jurisdiction over deciding responsibility for the mass exodus of Rohingya Muslims, victims of what Zeid had emphatically called “a textbook case of ethnic cleansing”.

Welcoming the efforts of some Council Members to “collect, consolidate and preserve and analyse evidence of the most serious international crimes” in Myanmar, she called on the body to pass a resolution so that the UN General Assembly could endorse an independent mechanism that could complement the work of the ICC.

“This is an immensely important step toward ending impunity and addressing the enormous suffering of the Rohingya people,” she said.

## **Syria**

The “impending crisis” of Syria’s Idlib was also a matter of deep concern, she continued, given the potential impact of ongoing military operations in the north-western governorate, home to nearly three million people.

“The suffering of the people of Syria has been interminable and terrible,” she said. “I urge all nations to take all necessary action to urgently ensure their protection, as well as justice for the massive human rights violations that they have endured.”

Turning to the issue of migration, and amid reports of violence against migrants in Germany, the new human rights chief insisted that it was in States' interest to adopt policies that were "grounded in reality, not in panic".

## **Global Compact**

In December, States are due to adopt the Global Compact on Migration, Ms Bachelet noted, a balanced human rights document that aims to reduce the vulnerabilities of the world's 256 million migrants.

Historically, people have always moved in search of hope and opportunities, the High Commissioner said. "Erecting walls, deliberately projecting fear and anger at migrant communities; denying migrants fundamental rights by denying them the right to appeal...separating and detaining families...such policies offer no long-term solutions to anyone, only more hostility, misery, suffering and chaos."

---

## **'Great Pacific Garbage Patch' clean-up project launches trial run: UN Environment**

A trial run of an innovative system designed to clean up the world's seas and oceans, founded by UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)) "Champion of the Earth" laureate [Boyan Slat](#), has set off from San Francisco, in a bid to begin the removal of the so-called Great Pacific Garbage Patch.

This huge mass of marine debris, situated in the North Pacific Ocean, halfway between the Californian coast and Hawaii, is estimated by Mr. Slat's Ocean Cleanup organization to measure 1.6 million square kilometres – 3 times the size of France – and contain 1.8 trillion pieces of plastic. That amounts to 250 pieces for every person on the planet.

The long-awaited launch of the first deployable model of the marine litter collection system, named "System 001", took place on Saturday at the Golden Gate Bridge, following four years of research and adjustments.

It consists of a 600-meter-long floater that sits at the surface of the water, and a tapered 3-meter-deep skirt attached below.



## The Ocean Cleanup/Pierre Augier

The system is carried by the ocean's currents and waves, passively catching plastic debris along the way.

Ocean Cleanup's research indicates that a scaled-up fleet of 60 such systems could eventually clean up 50 per cent of the patch in the next five years.

The trials are taking place 240 nautical miles into the Pacific Ocean. Once they are completed, the devices will be sent the remaining 1,000 nautical miles out to the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.

Mr. Slat, founded Ocean Cleanup when he was just 18, and he was named a "Champion of the Earth" by UN Environment the following year, in recognition of his quest to find a solution to the ever-growing global problem of plastic debris in our oceans.

[Champions of the Earth](#) is the UN's highest environmental honour, celebrating outstanding figures from the public and private sectors and from civil society whose actions have had a transformative positive impact on the environment.

Every year, at least 8 million tonnes of plastic leaks into our oceans. Besides washing up on our beaches and shorelines, plastic marine debris accumulates in five garbage patches around the world: the Great Pacific Garbage Patch is the largest.

---

## [Get off the path of 'suicidal emissions', UN chief Guterres to urge, in key climate change speech](#)

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres is to use a landmark speech later on Monday to urge greater involvement and leadership on the part of

everybody, to protect the planet and its people, from the disastrous consequences of runaway climate change.

“Climate change is undeniable” he will say at UN Headquarters in New York, and “the science is beyond doubt,” posted the UN chief in a [tweet](#), previewing his speech about an issue which he says poses an existential threat to humankind.

“It is time to get off the path of suicidal emissions,” he reiterated in the tweet.

Mr. Guterres is going to call on governments, businesses, scientists and consumers – “to make changes” and to “be the change” that will put the planet on a path to a better future.

In his speech – scheduled for 3 PM, Eastern Standard Time – Secretary-General Guterres will also outline his vision for a new [Climate Summit in 2019](#), which he will be convening to rally the international community, to step up action in key areas inclusive sustainable energy production, economic growth, green investment and better stewardship of natural resources.

The call for greater ambition on climate action comes amid record temperature rises and extreme weather events across the globe. The last few months alone saw devastating floods in southern India, wildfires in the United States and extreme heatwaves in Japan.

When world leaders signed the historic Paris Agreement on climate change in 2015, they pledged to stop temperatures rising by more than 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and as close to 1.5 degrees, as possible. But scientists and a major UN study, indicate that the target is already well off-track.

The UN chief’s message also comes ahead of the Global Climate Action Summit, to be held on the west coast of the United States, in San Francisco, from 12-14 September. National, regional and municipal leaders will gather with business people and philanthropic communities to underscore their commitment to climate action.

We will have more on this story, soon.

---

**[UN condemns ‘cowardly’ attack on Libya’s national oil corporation](#)**

## headquarters

The UN Support Mission in Libya ([UNSMIL](#)) has strongly condemned Monday's attack on the National Oil Company (NOC) headquarters in Tripoli.

An armed group reportedly stormed the building, which is in the centre of the city, and witnesses say they heard blasts and gunfire.

According to a security official at the site, at least two staff members and two gunmen were killed, and the NOC chairman was evacuated.

The attack comes a day after UNSMIL hosted a [meeting](#) in the western Libyan town of Zawiya, attended by the Libyan Government of National Accord, military and security chiefs, and armed groups present in around Tripoli.

That meeting ended with a commitment from those present to uphold a ceasefire agreed on 4 September, and develop a plan for withdrawing armed groups away from areas which include sovereign institutions and critical infrastructure, across the capital.

In a [statement](#), UNSMIL described the assault on NOC – Libya's primary source of national wealth – as "a blow against Libyans everywhere", called on the country's citizens to end conflicts and, in partnership with the international community, "eradicate the scourge of terrorism across the country."

The Mission expressed its deepest condolences to the families of the victims and wished a speedy recovery to the injured.

---

## 800,000 people commit suicide every year: WHO

Every year, close to 800,000 people commit suicide, the second leading cause of death amongst people aged 15-29 in 2016.

Ahead of [World Suicide Prevention Day](#) on Monday 10 September, a [toolkit](#) to help communities to prevent suicides has been released by the World Health Organisation, [WHO](#), and the Mental Health Commission of Canada.

Suicides happen in all countries and regions, whether rich or poor. However, most occur in low and middle-income countries, which accounted almost four-fifths of global suicides in 2016.

It is estimated that the method used for 20 per cent of global suicides is pesticide self-poisoning, most of which occur in rural agricultural areas in low- and middle-income countries. Other common methods of suicide are hanging and firearms.

In high-income countries, there is a well-established link between suicide and mental health issues such as depression and alcohol use disorders, but many suicides take place on an impulse, during moments of crisis.

The toolkit outlines ways to prevent this serious public health problem, one of which is knowledge of the most commonly used methods, and restrictions of access to these methods. Other examples include policies to limit alcohol and drug abuse, effective mental health care, and follow-up care for attempted suicide cases.

The document explains that, as well as the health sector, many sectors of society need to be involved in preventing suicide, including education, labour, agriculture and the media. These actors all need to work together if they are to have an impact on this complex issue.

**People commit suicide at all times of their lives, and each one, the report states, is a tragedy that affects families, communities and entire countries, and leaves behind long-lasting effects.**

In many countries, suicide remains a taboo subject. This can prevent those who have attempted suicide from getting the help they need. To date, only a few countries have included suicide prevention among their health priorities and only 38 countries report having a national suicide prevention strategy.