

[‘I don’t like to give up’: veteran UN envoy reveals how two decades of quiet diplomacy gave birth to North Macedonia](#)

Last June, a [historic agreement](#) settled a 27-year-long name dispute between two countries, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece. One man, [Matthew Nimetz](#), patiently led the negotiations on behalf of the United Nations for over two decades and he told UN News, in an exclusive interview, that his faith in a positive outcome never faltered.

When the UN-brokered “Prespa Agreement” between Athens and Skopje was ratified by the two countries’ parliaments and formally entered into force on 12 February , recognizing the “Republic of North Macedonia,” his mission was finally accomplished.

In a delightful twist of fate, due to various circumstances, the agreement had been signed by the Prime Ministers of Greece and North Macedonia seven months earlier, on 17 June: Mr. Nimetz’s 79th birthday.

Wanting to know more about the kind of determination it took to keep going over the years , *UN News* invited him to talk about the highs and the lows of the marathon effort, as he prepares to walk away from his position as Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General, a role he has occupied since 1999, for the princely salary of US\$ 1 per year.

Why did it take so long to negotiate a few words? What is really at stake behind the name of a country? What other names were thrown in the ring? Did he ever feel like giving up?

With UN News’s Elena Vapnitchnaia, Mr. Nimetz looked back on his extraordinary labour of peace, and shared some of his more personal recollections of an odyssey in the service of the UN, that ultimately, ended in success:

[Stateless Rohingya refugee children living in ‘untenable situation’,](#)

UNICEF chief

With around half a million in effect, stateless Rohingya refugee children living in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar camp, the United Nations Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) chief stressed on Friday that the international community must address their "untenable situation" and "[invest](#) in this generation".

While the massive humanitarian effort so far – led by the Bangladesh Government with international support – has saved countless lives, these children are becoming increasingly anxious about their futures, and vulnerable to frustration and despair.

"The obligation we have as a global society is immense: to give children and young people the world has defined as 'stateless', the education and skills they need to build decent lives for themselves," said UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore, after visiting the world's largest and most congested refugee camp over two days earlier this week.

With the right investment, the Rohingya can be an asset to their community and to the world – *UNICEF chief*

In Myanmar, most Rohingya have no legal identity or citizenship, denied documentation by the Burmese Government. And since August 2017, when the vast majority were forced to flee for their lives from into Bangladesh, children are not being registered at birth. They lack any legal identity and official refugee status.

Until conditions in Myanmar allow those eligible to return home, Rohingya children remain a minority without status, according to UNICEF. They are excluded from a formal education curriculum and in desperate need of skills.

"Without a legal identity, they are at the mercy of traffickers and drug dealers", said UN Humanitarian Envoy, Ahmed Al Meraikhi, who accompanied Ms. Fore.

He stressed that we must agree collectively to "invest in this generation of Rohingya children, so that they can better navigate their lives today, and be a constructive part of rebuilding Myanmar's social fabric when they are able to return".

Currently, UNICEF reaches 155,000 children ages 4-14 with a learning programme that progressively includes higher quality and more structured learning and skills.

In 2019, it is prioritizing older adolescents to improve foundational literacy and numeracy, along with relevant vocational skills. The UN agency will also strongly focus on supporting the local host community in Cox's Bazar, one of the poorest districts in Bangladesh.

“This is crucial work, but a drop in the bucket of need. This is an untenable situation,” Ms. Fore said. “A generation of Rohingya children and young people cannot be left without the education and skills to build a life for themselves.”

UNICEF Bangladesh is appealing for \$152 million in 2019 to provide 685,000 Rohingya refugees and host community residents with critical support. As of February, it has received only 29 per cent of the funding.

“If they become self-sustaining”, Ms. Fore asserted “their communities will also become self-sustaining and flourish”.

“With the right investment, the Rohingya can be an asset to their community and to the world”, concluded the UNICEF chief.

‘Comprehensively include migrants’ or Sustainable Development won’t happen: General Assembly President

Migration and sustainable development are “deeply interconnected” and the [2030 Agenda](#), the UN’s blueprint for a sustainable future for all, will not be achieved if we do not “comprehensively include migrants,” the President of the General Assembly said on Wednesday.

Mariá Fernanda Espinosa, was speaking to delegates at a meeting on migration held at UN headquarters in New York, anchoring her address to the seventh target of Sustainable Development [Goal 10](#) (SDGs), which aims to “facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.”

Investments in sustainable development will reduce migration

In order to reach this target, she said, migrants must be included in policies and activities aimed at expanding access to education, health services, housing and basic services, to ensure the building of peaceful and inclusive societies.

The General Assembly president said that the best way to end forced migration once and for all, was to reach the SDGs, as this will mitigate the “adverse drivers” that make people leave their homes in search of a better life: “no-one decides to leave behind their family, their land and their belongings without a powerful reason for doing so.”

Ms. Espinosa insisted that the needs of migrant women – who make up over half of the migrant population across the world – must be specifically addressed: they face more restrictive labour policies than men, they are more vulnerable to violence and exploitation, and women and girls represent 71 per cent of all human trafficking victims.



UN Photo/Loey Filipe

General Assembly President María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés addresses the high-level debate on international migration and development.

Benefits outweigh challenges

With around 85 per cent of migrant workers' earnings remaining in their host countries, Ms. Espinosa said that the evidence shows that the benefits of migration outweigh the challenges. Hundreds of billions of dollars are also sent to developing countries in the form of remittances, a contribution estimated to be three times the size of all official development aid, budgeted through 2017.

“Thus migrants contribute to progressing towards the specific goals of the 2030 agenda such as the [reduction of poverty](#), [eradication of hunger](#) and the [promotion of health](#).”

Ms Espinosa called for a well-informed debate that would help to overcome the prejudices association with migration, and for joint efforts to eradicate negative and discriminatory language used in relation to migrants.

The UN's landmark [Global Compact for Migration](#), agreed last December, which seeks to ensure that all aspects of international migration are dealt with by countries in a safe and orderly way, “does not affect the sovereignty of any state,” she said. “On the contrary, it bolsters it. No state, however powerful it may be, will be able to resolve alone the challenges posed by migration. The Compact fosters cooperation between states as is the best tool to address international migration.”

The meeting, a high-level debate on migration and development, was convened by the General Assembly to assess the progress of [Sustainable Development Goals](#) related to migration. The conclusions of the debate will feed into two events that will review the progress of goals and targets relevant to migration.

The first is the [high-level political forum on sustainable development](#) in July 2019, whilst a summit of the political forum, in which issues surrounding migration will be discussed, is to take place during the general debate of the next session of the General Assembly, in September.

[Keep Africa's guns 'from firing in the first place', UN political chief urges](#)

Noting that two years of joint UN-African Union (AU) efforts have strengthened the continent's ability to detect and defuse crises before they escalate, Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, said that while "silencing the guns for good requires the participation of all", it also means "keeping them from firing in the first place".

Silencing the guns for good requires the participation of all –
UN Political and Peacebuilding chief

Adding that resilient societies were key to the objective, she argued the need for building strong institutions, good governance and encouraging inclusive politics.

While acknowledging that the continent has, in recent years, made "great strides" in deepening democracy and democratic institutions, she pointed out that numerous challenges remained, such as the "marginalization of certain groups from political processes, the prevalence of a 'winner-take-all' approach, corruption, and the mismanagement of natural resources".

Ms. DiCarlo noted that "progress has slowed" in efforts to increase women's leadership and meaningful participation in political processes, stressing: "We must redouble our efforts in this critical pursuit".

She maintained that in line with the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development and the African Union's own Agenda 2063, the UN continues to work with the AU and the Regional Economic Communities to help build strong national institutions and address the root causes of armed conflict.

"Across the continent, entrepreneurship is up, access to education has

increased and child mortality has declined”, she observed, recalling the Secretary-General’s declaration that “a wind of hope is blowing in Africa”.

African countries themselves “have a central role to play” in silencing the guns at home, but “it is vital that the international community lend its support”, she said.

African countries ‘trapped in a vicious cycle’

Ramtane Lamamra, AU High Representative for Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020, told the Chamber that the tremendous efforts “to make peace a viable and lasting reality across the continent” has resulted in “notable progress” in preventing, managing and resolving conflicts in Africa.

He said joint initiatives in recent months steering countries away from crisis, were responsible for “generating optimism about a Continent emerging from the shadows and moving steadily to restore peace and stability.”

However, many countries remain “trapped in a vicious cycle of violent conflict and its deadly consequences” owing to transnational crime, terrorism, and the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons”, he stated, adding that ungoverned spaces; corruption and illicit financial flows; and illegally exploiting natural resources, further exacerbated the situation.

Mr. Lamamra emphasized that to prevent and resolve conflicts in Africa, the gap between political and military efforts must be bridged and there needs to be an investment in economic and social development.

Simeon Oyono Esono Angue, Foreign Minister of Equatorial Guinea – which is chairing the Council this month – chaired the debate and said that to effectively, verifiably and transparently silence Africa’s weapons, international support, especially within the Security Council, was imperative.

UN-AU partnership has brought dividends:

- Central to forging the [peace agreement](#) in the Central African Republic signed earlier this month.
- Sparked renewed hope by playing a major role in the signing of the revitalized peace accord in South Sudan.
- Supported Somalia’s State-building agenda to fight against violent extremism and restore peace and stability.
- Contributed to the peaceful process during Madagascar’s 2018 presidential election.
- Worked to ensure the peaceful conduct of elections throughout the continent.
- Worked to counter-terrorism and prevent violent extremism through a Memorandum of Understanding that increases cooperation and capacity-building for the AU, Member States and several sub-regional

organizations.

But he also stressed the “vital importance” of involving African citizens themselves, who are those bearing the brunt of conflict.

It is the “collective responsibility” of all African countries to prioritize its citizens’ participation in political and economic processes to promote equity and prevent violence “at all levels” he spelled out.

As Africa must address both “the symptoms and the root causes of conflicts” he asserted that it was vital that continent’s capacity to accelerate development and reduce poverty to eliminate the space for conflict and violent extremism be strengthened.

“Our lives depend on it”, he stated.

At the onset of the meeting, the Council passed a new resolution expressing concern that while the continent faces a challenging security environment, to create an Africa without conflict, it is essentially the responsibility of the AU, its member states and their people and institutions. It also takes note of AU efforts to counter transnational terrorism and, with sub-regional organizations, to conduct peace support operations.

[Yemen: ‘A great first step’ UN declares as aid team accesses grain silo which can feed millions](#)

The first assessment of a major UN aid storage facility in war-torn Yemen has been carried out since it was cut off by fighting last September, the Organization reported on Wednesday, hailing it as “a great first step”.

Briefing journalists in Geneva, the [World Food Programme \(WFP\)](#) confirmed that a team had reached the Red Sea Mills near the key port of Hudaydah on Tuesday.

It has appealed for sustained access to the site, which contains enough wheat to feed 3.7 million people for a month.

“The silos show evidence of damage by the fighting, but no apparent structural damage except the silo affected by a hit in late January, which basically resulted in serious fire damage to that specific silo,” said senior Spokesperson Hervé Verhoosel.

"We have now a first assessment, we'll probably need additional technical assessments," he added. In addition to fire damage to one silo, the assessment team found evidence of weevil infestation, but no water infiltration.

"Tuesday's visit was a great first step," Mr. Verhoosel said, noting that Yemen imports around 70 per cent of its daily food, fuel and medicines via Hudaydah port, which has been the focus of clashes between Government forces and Houthi opposition fighters, although a UN-backed ceasefire and troop-withdrawal negotiations are on-going.

'Sustained access' now needed

"We need now sustain access every day as much as possible for WFP's staff," he explained. "But also later for the mill's staff to access the facilities. That will be necessary before we can start again milling the wheat."

Samples of the grain have been sent for testing to check whether it is still edible. If so, the 51,000 tonnes of wheat can be processed at the facility, where equipment is largely untouched and the generators "appear to be in good condition", Mr. Verhoosel said, adding that more than 30,000 litres of diesel was still available.

The positive development is dependent on continued access being granted by the warring parties, who signed a UN-led partial ceasefire agreement in Sweden last December.

It follows a UN-led appeal for more than \$4 billion from international donors this year, to save millions in Yemen from starvation.

At the [pledging conference](#) in Geneva on Tuesday, when \$2.6 billion was promised, UN Secretary-General [António Guterres](#) warned of an "overwhelming humanitarian calamity", as a result of almost four years of fighting between supporters of Yemeni President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi and Houthi opposition groups.

Some 360,000 children are now suffering from severe acute malnutrition, Mr. Guterres said, before citing one credible report that more than 80,000 children under-five have died of starvation.

Echoing the dire needs in Yemen, WFP's Hervé Verhoosel expressed hope that UN-led efforts to secure a political solution to the conflict proved successful.

"We hope that both parties will basically keep this dialogue and we will be able to see the results of this dialogue on the ground," he said. "Access is very important and it's time to put as a priority, the civilians."