

'Proving our worth through action': 5 things Guterres wants the UN to focus on in 2019

Despite countless “headwinds” and “ills”, the United Nations has “made a real difference” in 2018 and will need to achieve even more in 2019, as the planet faces “a world of trouble”. That was the New Year message from UN Secretary-General António Guterres on Wednesday, at UN headquarters in New York, as he presented his top five priorities for the year ahead: diplomacy for peace; ambitious climate action; acceleration towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); better governance over new technologies; and stronger UN values worldwide.

“The truth is that the experience of last year proves that when we work together and when we assume our responsibilities, we get things done,” said Mr. Guterres, as he proceeded to highlight some of the UN’s most outstanding achievements of 2018.

Among the successes, he cited progress towards forging a peace in Yemen, the Korean peninsula, and South Sudan; and between former enemies Ethiopia and Eritrea.

He also highlighted the “successful outcome” of the UN climate conference in Poland last December, which resulted in overall consensus on how to implement the 2015 [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change. Other major international achievements of 2018 include the global compacts on migration and refugees, renewed engagement for peacekeeping operations, and major steps taken to reform the UN.

“As we look ahead to 2019, I won’t mince words,” he said. “While recognizing the progress we are making, we cannot be complacent. To meet the needs and expectations of the people we serve, we must accelerate our work,” he stated, before laying out his top five priorities for the year.

1. A surge in diplomacy

“Partnerships are fundamental”, said the Secretary-General, especially in Africa, as the UN strives to “consolidate gains towards peace on the continent,” in particular in the Sahel, Mali, South Sudan, Somalia, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Other conflicts where effective diplomacy will be critical and require the “unity and support of the Security Council” to overcome deadlocks are Yemen, Libya, Syria and Afghanistan.

“As we strive to end conflicts around the world, we understand that lasting peace must be based on a broad consensus of society, with women as full

participants in all peace processes,” the UN chief added.

2. Greater ambition on climate action

Noting that “there is no greater challenge to the world of today and tomorrow” than climate change, Mr. Guterres reminded Member States that by 2020, under the Paris Agreement, they “are meant to assess progress and submit new pledges to meet the goals to which they agreed”.

“And by 2050, we need to reach net zero global emissions,” he stressed, explaining that this will require enhanced efforts now, both to reduce emissions and to seize the opportunities of a clean, green energy future.

“That is why, I will convene a Climate Summit on September 23rd to mobilize action by political leaders, the business community and civil society,” he explained, adding that “we need greater ambition – ambition on mitigation, ambition on adaptation, ambition on finance and ambition on innovation.”

3. Powering ahead with Sustainable Development

“Despite considerable efforts from Governments and many others, the transformative changes demanded by the 2030 Agenda are not yet being made,” regretted the UN Secretary-General.

He called on Member States to have a “sharper focus on what works in reducing poverty and inequality, and in delivering strong and inclusive economies while safeguarding the environment – and we need increased financing for those solutions.”

In September, right after the Climate Change Summit, the UN chief has invited heads of State and Government to gather for another summit, focused on how to accelerate action towards the SDGs, and three other prominent meetings on financing for development, universal health coverage and the risks faced by Small Island Developing States.

“I urge you all to do your utmost to make September 2019 a defining moment for stopping runaway climate change, achieving the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) and building a fair globalization,” he said.

4. Addressing the challenges presented by new technologies

Acknowledging new technologies that “can turbocharge” the world’s efforts for peace and sustainable development, the UN chief warned that they “are also outpacing our capacity to reckon with their profound impacts”.

The UN’s efforts on this front will focus in 2019 on “reducing digital inequality, building digital capacity and ensuring that new technologies are on our side as a force for good,” he said.

5. Reaffirming the UN’s values worldwide

“What guides us is a set of values – the universal values of the United

Nations Charter that bind us together,” said the Secretary-General, citing peace, justice, human dignity, tolerance and solidarity.

“Today, those values are under attack around the world,” he warned, explaining that “an ideological battle is taking place,” and that “we hear the troubling, hateful echoes of eras long past, and noxious views moving into the mainstream”.

The UN Secretary-General called for deeper efforts to “show that we understand people’s anxieties, fears and concerns” and to “address the root causes that lead people to feel marooned in our rapidly changing world”.

“Let’s keep showing all people that we care,” he concluded. “Let’s keep proving our worth through action.”

[Yemen: Security Council backs new mission in support of key port city truce](#)

The new special political mission will support the implementation of the December [Stockholm Agreement](#), consisting of three separate pledges between the two sides: halting hostilities in Hudaydah and mutually redeploying forces from the city and the ports, Salif and Ras Issa; a prisoner exchange mechanism; and a statement of understanding on the city of Taiz, where fighters have wrestled for control for years now.

According to news reports, both Houthi rebels and the UN-backed Government have accused each other of multiple ceasefire breaches, calling the terms flawed because they lacked precision. Adding more monitors, will allow for more accurate assessment.

Retired General Patrick Cammaert, chairs the Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC), and in accordance with the Security Council resolution, will now head up UNMHA, reporting to the Secretary-General through Special Envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths.

The UN Mission to support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA) will:

- Lead and support the Redeployment Coordination Committee to oversee the governorate-wide ceasefire, redeployment of force and mine action operations;
- Monitor compliance to the ceasefire in Hodeidah governorate and the

mutual redeployment of forces from the city of Hodeidah and the ports of Hodeidah, Salif and Ras Issa.

- Work with the parties to secure the city of Hodeidah and the ports of Hodeidah, Salif, and Ras Issa in accordance with Yemeni law.
- Facilitate and coordinate UN support to assist the parties to fully implement the Hodediah Agreement.

[More urgency needed to help increasing numbers 'locked out', before 2030, says UN's Bachelet](#)

In a special meeting of the [Human Rights Council](#) in Geneva to review progress on achieving the 17 [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) of the [2030 Agenda](#), Michelle Bachelet insisted that “overall, we are not on track” to meet its ambitious aims:

It is a promise extended to people previously locked out of development: the marginalized, disempowered and excluded communities – *UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet on the 2030 Agenda*

“The 2030 Agenda is a commitment to achieve greater international cooperation for a more equitable international order,” she said. “But above all, it is a promise extended to people previously locked out of development: the marginalized, disempowered and excluded communities; the millions of women, racial, religious and caste minorities, indigenous peoples, migrants, persons with disabilities, Roma and the poor.”

Acknowledging “tremendous progress in some countries” on tackling extreme poverty; mortality rates for the under-fives; and promoting education, particularly in Asia; Ms. Bachelet listed numerous obstacles that continue to prevent fair development for all.

Women’s inequality is a major impediment, she insisted, along with hunger, war and climate change.

44,000 each day forced to flee

“Conflicts are destroying people’s lives, hopes and ability to earn a decent livelihood in the places they were born,” she said. “44,400 people are forced to flee their homes every day because of conflict or persecution. Climate change is generating overwhelming environmental disasters, which devastate basic infrastructure and exacerbate tensions and conflicts.”

Questioning whether the world's nations were meeting the "great goal" of leaving no-one behind by 2030, the UN rights chief cited [International Labour Organization \(ILO\)](#) data, which indicated a growing gap between the rich and poor, despite workers' higher productivity.

"With just 12 years left to 2030, we need a greater sense of urgency about achieving the Agenda's promise to the world's people," she said, before explaining that the outcomes of the Human Rights Council meeting would contribute to the work of the High-Level Political Forum ([HLPF](#)) at the UN in New York in July – the organization's central platform for follow-up and review of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).



UN News/Daniel Johnson

UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet (right) and former High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson (left) speaking at a meeting of the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Equalities widening everywhere

At Ms Bachelet's side, former High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson echoed the need to address widening inequalities "both between and within countries", insisting that wealth and opportunities were "increasingly concentrating in the hands of the few".

Such inequalities, create winners and losers, Ms Robinson maintained, serving to "catalyse social unrest, deepen divides and increase xenophobia; all major concerns for the realisation of rights".

Ms Robinson, who heads a "climate justice" foundation which seeks to protect the rights of people who are affected by climate change, noted its impact on vulnerable communities.

"When dams flood the land of indigenous people, mining pollutes local water supplies and infrastructure projects displace impoverished communities,

development efforts are being realised at the expense of the realisation of human rights for all,” she said.

Governments in many parts of the world were “failing to provide essential services”, Ms Robinson continued, “including access to healthcare, education, quality housing, sanitation or drinking water with little accountability. Populations are routinely denied access to information and justice; this must change. Human rights norms constitute a bulwark against incoherent and unequal progress towards the SDGs and should be used as such.”

After calling for Governments to link their efforts to limit global warming with implementation of the 2030 Agenda for rights-based sustainable development, Ms Robinson highlighted how the Human Rights Council had showed what was possible, by tasking its subsidiary bodies and investigators to incorporate the sustainable development goals into their reports.

“I urge all states and other actors to make use of the synergies between human rights and the 2030 Agenda,” she said, “by integrating development reporting with human rights reporting, and by working closely with rights holders, national human rights institution and equality bodies to ensure transparent and effective approaches.”

[Advancing multilateralism goes ‘hand-in-hand’ with work of the UN](#)

Convinced that “revitalizing the UN and advancing multilateralism go hand-in-hand”, Assembly President Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garces said that she was engaging with world leaders in New York and abroad, “to promote this objective”.

She also vowed to work on revitalizing the General Assembly, as well as on reforming the UN Security Council and aligning the UN’s objectives to the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development.

Calling the 2030 Agenda “a cornerstone of the success of multilateralism”, she stressed the importance of building greater public understanding and support for it.

Her second priority was on implementing two new global accords on [refugees](#) and [migrants](#), for which she had appointed two co-facilitators to consult with Member States on arrangements for the International Migration Review Forums – the primary intergovernmental platform for States to discuss implementing and share progress on the Global Compact.

“I will also continue raising awareness about the importance of an informed debate on international migration, which is based on facts and figures, to

help Member States develop their own policies and support the implementation of Global Compact for Migration” she stated.

I am committed to strive towards gender parity within the General Assembly and gender equality in its outcomes – *UN General Assembly President*

As a Gender Champion, Ms. Espinosa’s third priority focuses on gender equality and women’s empowerment.

“I am committed to strive towards gender parity within the General Assembly and gender equality in its outcomes, starting with my Office where gender equality is a reality”, she emphasized, noting her newly established Group of Gender Equality Leaders.

Fourth, under the priority related to the creation of decent work opportunities, she spotlighted the need to build on the momentum created around the review of Sustainable Development Goal 8 ([SDG 8](#)) in the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development ([HLPF](#)) under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council ([ECOSOC](#)) in July as well as the commemoration of the [100th anniversary](#) of the [International Labour Organization](#) (ILO).

Protecting the environment is Ms. Espinosa’s fifth priority.

Nearing the first milestones of the 2030 Agenda, she committed to encouraging all participants to work collectively on climate and environmental action, as “more needs to be done to prevent dangerous levels of global warming.”

“We need to see climate change response as an opportunity to set a course for a better future for human beings and towards a greener, cleaner and more sustainable world”, she maintained, particularly as it “is accelerating faster than our efforts to address it”.

On plastic pollution, she asked for partners in “walking the talk” by reducing single use plastics within missions and at UN facilities.

Under the rights of persons with disabilities, her sixth priority, she said that a Steering Committee on Accessibility at the UN had been launched in December on the eve of the [International Day for Persons with Disabilities](#).

Moreover, she plans to launch the campaign for the Universal Ratification of the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) this month and host a High-Level Event on Persons with Disabilities in June.

For her final priorities, peace and security, the Assembly President said she would seize on, or take advantage of, all existing mandates and events” to promote issues related to conflict prevention, peacebuilding and sustaining peace” to build more “peaceful and resilient societies.”

Priority activities on the horizon

- 29 January: In collaboration with the UN Foundation, the first meeting of the Group of Gender Equality Leaders will be kicked off to accelerate women's empowerment.
- 31 January: Along with the President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), will brief Member States on aligning both body's work with the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).
- 4 February: Meeting with former General Assembly presidents on the theme: "Revitalization of the United Nations in favor of a strengthened multilateral rules-based system" to craft recommendations for a UN that delivers effectively and efficiently for the people.
- 14 February: Convene a joint briefing with the Special Envoy for the Climate Summit to outline the roadmap for preparations towards the [Climate Summit](#) in September.
- 19 February: Meeting with mayors and others under the theme: "From Global Issues to Local Priorities: The role of Cities in the Global Agenda, including Cities for Sustainable Development, Food Security, Nutrition and Climate Change" to share experiences of effective local practices and strategies to address global challenges, such as climate change, food security and malnutrition.
- 21-22 February: Will organize with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) the 2019 Parliamentary Hearing at the UN, on the theme: "Emerging challenges to multilateralism: a parliamentary response".
- 27 February: Will organize a High-Level Debate on International Migration and Development.
- 12 March: Convene a High-Level Event on Women in Power, dedicated to promoting women's leadership by bringing together senior leaders to share experiences and young women leaders to foster the environment of dialogue.
- 28 March: Host a High-Level meeting on the Protection of the Global Climate for Present and Future Generations of Humankind to pave the way for the Climate Summit.
- 9 April: In the context of the ECOSOC Youth Forum, conduct a Town Hall on the linkages between decent work and Youth, Peace and Security
- 10 April: In close collaboration with the [International Labour Organization \(ILO\)](#) and ECOSOC, convene a High-Level Event on "The Future of Work for Decent Work".
- 24 April: Host a High-Level Event on the International Day on Multilateralism to exchange views on its role with diplomacy in advancing of the UN's three pillars of sustainable development, peace and security and human rights.
- 27 April: Organize with Norway and Antigua and Barbuda during its annual 'Sailing Week', a festival to raise awareness, celebrate successes, and push forward progress to address plastic pollution.
- 13 September: Organize, a High-Level Event on Culture of Peace to shine a light on the observance of the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the [Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace](#).
- September: High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) will be convened for the first time under the auspices of the General

Assembly (HLPF Summit).

Looking back

Ms. Espinosa outlined the work the Assembly had already achieved since she took office in September, beginning with the “unprecedented” number of world leaders at the 2018 general debate, which sent “a strong message” in support of multilateralism and the Organization.

She noted that in Marrakech, “we adopted the [Global Compact](#) for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration”, and also the “so-called rulebook” for the [Paris Agreement](#) at the [Climate Conference](#) in Poland.

Among others, she: conducted a one-day High-Level Meeting on Middle-Income Countries that yielded concrete recommendations to address gaps in implementing the 2030 Agenda; launched a series of Morning Dialogues with Ambassadors on thematic issues challenging the Organization; and appointed 28 co-facilitators and co-chairs, almost 60 per cent of whom are women.

[Migration surge leaves children stranded, begging on Djibouti's streets](#)

Begging, scrubbing cars or selling themselves on the street for sex are a way of life for many children in Djibouti, according to a survey released by the International Organization Migration (IOM) on Tuesday.

Conducted in Djibouti City, the country's capital where most of the street children live, the survey enumerated the minors to understand how and why they end up on the streets while also identifying their priority problems.

The [Report on Street Children Living in Djibouti](#), diagnoses the children's living conditions and augments recent IOM reporting on “the robust movement of irregular migrants” through the Red Sea region, adding context to the disturbing situation.

In 2018, IOM recorded that [150,000 migrants arrived in Yemen](#), 20 per cent of whom were minors, exposed to dehydration, illness and human rights abuses, including trafficking.

One 12-year-old boy walked for one month and two days from Ethiopia to Djibouti. Four years later he spoke to IOM.

“I survived on the food that was given to me by strangers”, he said. “I

thought there would be more work in Djibouti. I am willing to do anything here – wash cars, clean windows – but I rarely find any jobs”.

Djibouti is a major transit location for those migrants, especially from Ethiopia, who seek to cross over to Yemen, and ultimately to the Arab Peninsula.

Many find themselves [trapped](#), unable to get to the coast through one of the driest and hottest places on earth.

The study amplifies the voices of under-age-17 minors living on the street – a total of 1,137 children, including 633 under age nine, including 195 girls; and 504 children from ages 10 to 17, 64 were girls.

“I came here with my mother, but when she moved on to work in Saudi Arabia, I stayed here”, a 17-year-old girl said.

“I have not seen her in eight years” she continued. “She wanted to bring me with her but I was too scared to go. I wash cars to make money, but I dream of being a pilot one day and meeting my mom in Ethiopia. I don’t remember Ethiopia, but I would like to go back one day.”

Reaffirming the Government’s commitment to tackling the issue head on, Moumina Houmed Hassan, Minister of Women and Family Affairs, listed the solutions of creating a coordination platform, reinforcing and developing reception facilities, establishing an identification system, defining basic minimum service and developing a national protection strategy.

Funding for the study was provided by the European Union through the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for the Protection and Reintegration of Migrants in the Horn of Africa.