

'Historic' moment: Palestine takes reins of developing country's Group of 77

"Palestine and its citizens have first-hand experience of some of the most challenging and dramatic global issues we face" [said](#) Mr. Guterres in his remarks at the annual ceremony for handover of the rotating Chairmanship of the G77.

Egypt was the previous Chair of the bloc, a coalition of 134 developing countries, along with China.

The decision to elect Palestine as 2019 Chair of the G77 was taken in September 2018 by the foreign ministers of the Groups' member States.

A month later, the UN General Assembly [approved a resolution](#) that enabled Palestine – a [non-member Observer State](#) at the world body – additional [privileges and rights](#), such participating in international conferences held under its auspices, for the duration of its role as G77 Chair.

"You are well-placed to take up the chairmanship of this important group of countries," Mr. Guterres said today.

As multilateralism continues to come under "intense pressure from many sides", the UN chief underscored the importance of the G77 and China's continued support.

"The Group of 77 and China has demonstrated strong leadership throughout 2018 and proved once again to be a central force in demonstrating that multilateralism is the only way to address our shared challenges," said Mr. Guterres.

He credited the Group and the prior Egyptian presidency as having been "at the heart" of the progress made in challenges that ranged from climate change to rising inequality and fast changing and new technologies.

He singled out Egypt's "highly effective" leadership and advocacy on finance for developing countries to meet their climate action commitments.

He called the group "instrumental" in achieving both: a comprehensive agreement that deals with migration in all its dimensions, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration; and a Development System to eradicate poverty, implement programmes on a national level and to position development "at the centre of UN activities".

"You help to keep the United Nations focused on the issues that count for the most vulnerable, and we owe you a debt of gratitude for your extremely constructive role", the Secretary-General said.

With climate action at the forefront, Mr. Guterres laid out how critical a year 2019 will be for ending poverty, reducing inequalities, and transiting to more inclusive and sustainable economies.

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“If we do not put policies and commitments in place to launch a decade of climate action by 2020, it will be too late to avoid catastrophic climate change with unforeseeable consequences” he argued. “Many of the Group of 77 countries would be among the first and worst to suffer.”

He urged the G77 to bring “solutions and commitments” to, among others, the Climate Summit in September and enumerated other upcoming events in need of the bloc’s support, including the General Assembly’s High-Level Political Forum; the high-level meeting to review progress made on the SAMOA pathway for Small Island Developing States to help lay foundations for progress on the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs); and the Second High-level UN Conference on South-South Cooperation in Buenos Aires, Argentina, this coming March.

“I anticipate that the G77 and China will have a central role in all these negotiations and processes, and I urge you to consider them in an integrated, coherent and unified way” urged the UN chief.

Mr. Guterres recalled that last week he informed Member States about the serious financial challenges facing the Organization and appealed to the G77 to support his proposals to the General Assembly over the coming months aimed at putting the UN on “sound financial footing,” saying “we must press on and keep up the momentum won over the past weeks and months.”

“In this period of transition and change, we count on the continued engagement and support of the Group of 77 and China,” concluded the Secretary-General.

On Monday, the UN chief met with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas before handing over the Chairmanship, when he offered his congratulations, wished the Group a successful year and reiterated that the two-State solution is the only viable option to sustainable peace.

Triumph of multilateralism

Calling the work of the outgoing Egyptian Chair, “impeccable”, General Assembly President Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garces, underscored the importance of the G77, which represents 80 per cent of the world’s population.

“Not only is the work of the Group vital to defending the interests of the global South and promoting economic and social equality in the world, but it must now do so in a more complex international context” that is growing more polarized, she said.

Dubbing it “an historic moment”, Ms. Espinosa recalled the years it took to get to this point and the critical role the General Assembly played.

In 2012, the Assembly accorded non-Member observer status to Palestine, which, among other things, gave it the right to make statements, submit and co-sponsor proposals and give explanations of vote.

“That today we can celebrate this handover of the Presidency of the Group of 77 and China is without a doubt a triumph of multilateralism and a demonstration of the important role of the most democratic and representative organ of the United Nations”, she stated.

For his part, President Mahmoud Abbas said Palestine would use its chairmanship to preserve the multilateral international order and strengthen ties with its UN partners.

“People are the real treasure for nations,” he said, “and real and sustainable development can only be achieved when opportunities are enhanced to ensure for all people, full and free participation in all relevant matters in life”.

He stated that under the guiding principle of “unity in diversity”, the G77 focus on the least developed countries, small island developing States, middle income countries, and peoples living under colonial and foreign occupation, “so as to ensure no one is left behind.”

Top UN officials condemn ‘horrible terrorist act’ in Nairobi

Following a deadly terrorist attack in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, on Tuesday, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, and the President of the UN General Assembly, María Fernanda Espinosa, condemned the act and said they stand in solidarity with the Kenyan people.

Expressing “total solidarity with the people, the Government, and the President of Kenya”, Mr. Guterres condemned “the horrible terrorist act,” during a meeting at UN Headquarters in New York on Tuesday.

As for María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, she expressed her “most sincere condolences to the government and people of Kenya”.

“I stand in solidarity especially with the victims of these acts of violence and with their families,” she added, strongly condemning “these unexplainable acts of extreme violence.”

According to news reports, the attack took place in a Nairobi luxury hotel

complex, the DusitD2, in the Westlands neighborhood, where several armed assailants are reported to have opened fire and blasted their way into the compound. The reports state that the attack was claimed by the group Al-Shabab, an Islamist extremist group with ties to Al Qaeda, which has carried out many attacks across Africa in the past decade.

[International Criminal Court acquits former president Gbagbo of war crimes in Côte d'Ivoire](#)

Former President of Côte d'Ivoire Laurent Gbagbo has been cleared of crimes against humanity in Côte d'Ivoire by the International Criminal Court ([ICC](#)), it announced on Tuesday.

The development relates to bloody clashes in the West African nation that claimed a reported 3,000 lives following the [2010 election](#) in which current President Alassane Ouattara defeated Mr. Gbagbo.

In June, the Court – which has more than 15 other cases that are either ongoing or yet to commence, including against Mr. Gbagbo's wife, Simone – overturned the war crimes conviction of Jean-Pierre Bemba, former vice-President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

In a statement, the ICC said that both Mr. Gbagbo and co-defendant Charles Blé Goudé had [been acquitted](#) “from all charges of crimes against humanity allegedly committed in Côte d'Ivoire in 2010 and 2011”, relating to the alleged existence of a “common plan” to keep the former premier in power.

The crimes for which they were being tried included murder, rape and persecution.

The Hague-based court added that the order to release both men could be appealed by the prosecution in a new hearing on Thursday morning.

Ahead of a full statement explaining its decision, it noted that the Prosecutor had “failed to submit sufficient evidence” showing how both men had committed crimes against civilians, “pursuant to or in furtherance of a State or organizational policy”, nor the existence of “patterns of violence” indicative of a “policy to attack a civilian population”.

The ICC statement also explained that the Prosecutor had been unable to show that speeches by each man “constituted ordering, soliciting or inducing the alleged crimes...accordingly, there is no need for the defence to submit further evidence”.

The Trial Chamber's decision had been by majority, the ICC added, with Judges Cuno Tarfusser and Geoffrey Henderson in support of the acquittal, and Judge Herrera Carbuccion against.

The court noted that since the trial began in January 2016, some 231 days had been spent hearing the Prosecutor's evidence and 82 witnesses testified in court and through video link, while thousands of documents had been submitted into evidence, along with "hundreds of motions, requests and decisions".

After the prosecution's case was declared closed in June last year, both defendants filed motions for their immediate release, which were heard in October and November 2018.

The ICC was established by the Rome Statute of 1998 to prosecute the worst crimes against humanity, including genocide and war crimes.

The United Nations first acknowledged the need to establish such a court based on international cooperation in December 1948, with General Assembly resolution 260, which adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

After the International Law Commission was invited to study the "desirability and possibility" of setting up the court, a draft statute was drawn up in 1951, but not completed until 1998.

At this point, the General Assembly convened the UN Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court, which was held in Rome, Italy, from 15 June to 17 July 1998, "to finalize and adopt a convention on the establishment of an international criminal court".

[Thousands of Syrians in 'life and death' struggle amid harsh conditions in remote desert camp, UN warns](#)

Conditions in a makeshift Syrian camp near the border with Jordan are "increasingly desperate" and "have become a matter of life and death", United Nations officials warned on Tuesday, after at least eight children died there from extreme cold and a lack of medical care.

The development comes as the newly appointed UN Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Pederson, arrived in Damascus, for his first meeting with the Government, since taking over from veteran UN negotiator Staffan de Mistura.

In a message on Twitter, the Norwegian diplomat [said](#) he was "looking forward

to productive meetings” in the Syrian capital, which has been hit by seven years of fighting that has left hundreds of thousands dead.

Speaking to journalists in Geneva, [World Food Programme](#) (WFP) spokesperson Hervé Verhoosel echoed a warning from [UN Children’s Fund](#) (UNICEF) that children only months old are succumbing to the harsh winter conditions in the Rukban settlement at the south-western border of Syria with Jordan, which last received aid in November.

“The United Nations remains seriously concerned about the increasingly desperate conditions for more than 40,000 people staying at the Rukban site” he said. “The majority are women and children, who have been staying at the site for more than two years in harsh conditions with limited humanitarian assistance, access to medical care and other essential services.”

Amid security concerns, Jordan closed its border with Syria at Rukban as tens of thousands of Syrians arrived at the camp, fleeing expanded Russian and United States-led coalition air strikes against areas held by Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorists in central and eastern Syria.

Following the delivery of joint UN-Syrian Arab Red Crescent aid to Rukban in November, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock told the Security Council that “colleagues returned [shocked from what they saw on the ground](#), reporting grave protection issues, increasing food insecurity and no certified medical doctors among the stranded population”.

Mr. Lowcock warned then that “without sustained access, the situation of tens of thousands of Syrians – stranded in the harshest desert conditions – will only further deteriorate as the winter cold sets in”.

Echoing that message today, Mr. Verhoosel reiterated the call by WFP and the UN “for a second inter-agency convoy with critical assistance to take place as soon as possible”, urging “all parties to ensure safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access to people in need, in line with their obligations under international humanitarian law”.

The plight of those stranded in Rukban dates is not new, but the harsh winter and lack of regular supplies have made the situation much worse, according to UNICEF’s Geert Cappelaere, Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

“Needs for assistance in Rukban are [beyond urgent](#),” he said in a statement. “They are extremely acute and have become a matter of life and death.”

Mr. Cappelaere stressed: “Once again, UNICEF calls on all sides to urgently facilitate a humanitarian convoy to Rukban, including mobile health clinics, so that lifesaving supplies and services can be delivered.”

In eastern Syria, meanwhile, heavy violence in the Hajin area of Deir-Ez-Zor Governorate has displaced 10,000 people since December, the UNICEF official warned.

“Families seeking safety face difficulties leaving the conflict zone and wait

in the cold for days without shelter or basic supplies,” he said. “The dangerous and difficult journey has reportedly killed seven children, most of them under a year old.”

First aid in six months reaches families in western Yemen, ‘timelines’ slip over Hudaydah ceasefire talks

Thousands of families in conflict-affected communities south of the Red Sea port city of Hudaydah in Yemen have received aid for the first time since last July, the World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) said on Tuesday.

Spokesperson Hervé Verhoosel confirmed that Tuhayat and Darayhimi had been reached thanks to a partial ceasefire deal agreed at UN-led talks between Government forces and Houthi opposition militia in the west of the country:

“For the first time since the increase in fighting in Hudaydah in June 2018 WFP managed to assist hard-to-reach areas of Tuhayat and Darahimi,” he said. “This can be thanks to an inconsistent de-escalation over recent days following the December peace talks in Stockholm, Sweden.”

Aid was distributed from Hudaydah – a Houthi stronghold – and Aden, which is controlled by the internationally recognized Government of President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi.

“So far WFP has dispatched more than 3,334 metric tonnes of food assistance to these areas, and that is simultaneously from both Aden and Hudaydah,” the WFP spokesperson explained, adding that “8,125 households in Al Tuhayat have received enough assistance for two months and 2,662 families in Al Darayhimi, south of Hudaydah, have received food rations. Those are the first humanitarian shipments delivered since July 2018 when a WFP contracted truck was hit in the area.”

Last month, WFP scaled up the delivery of food and food vouchers to around nine million people in Yemen, up from seven to eight million in November.

The aim in coming weeks is to reach 12 million people to help avert famine in the country, which was already one of the poorest countries in the world before conflict escalated in March 2015.

“We will adapt on a daily basis to the security situation on the ground,” Mr Verhoosel said. “We encourage of course all parties to keep negotiating under the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy. The situation is better already, I mean, we are not exactly at the target, but we are not far away from the

target.”

UN monitoring team in Hudaydah continues work, but ‘timelines have slipped’

The UN monitoring team which is overseeing the implementation of the Stockholm peace agreement signed by Government and Houthi opposition leaders last month, is continuing its work, but the warring parties have refused to hold face-to-face meetings in recent days.

UN Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric [said on Monday](#) that the retired Dutch General, Patrick Cammaert, who is chairing the Redeployment Coordination Committee, has held two joint meetings involving both sides, but “in the last week, due to the inability of the parties to have a joint meeting” he had met them separately twice, “seeking to find a mutually acceptable way forward for the redeployment of forces from the three ports and critical parts of the city associated with humanitarian facilities, as provided for in phase one in the Stockholm Agreement.”

“While projected timelines have slipped, recent discussions have been constructive”, added Mr Dujarric, briefing reporters at UN Headquarters.

“The chair continues to encourage the parties to resume the joint meetings in order to finalize a mutually agreed redeployment plan. Currently, plans are being discussed on how to facilitate humanitarian operations.”

Hudaydah carries more than 70 per cent of all humanitarian aid and commercial goods into the war-ravaged nation, and future talks towards a lasting peace settlement for Yemen, rely on a ceasefire holding, in line with the agreement made in Sweden.