

Madagascar: UN chief commends leaders, State institutions following 'historic milestone' election

Following a run-off election for the Presidency of Madagascar which saw former leader Andry Rajoelina declared the winner on Tuesday, the UN chief has commended all those who contributed to the "peaceful and orderly" voting process that began at the end of November.

[Secretary-General](#) António Guterres said [in a statement](#) that "the Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) and the High Constitutional Court (HCC), civil society and religious leaders, as well as the leadership of the Government", should be "commended for being part of this historic milestone."

In a hotly-contested campaign, 44-year-old Mr. Rajoelina won the 19 December run-off with more than 55 per cent of the vote, while his main rival for the Indian Ocean island's top job, another former President, Marc Ravalomanana, took more than 44 per cent, in figures released by the HCC, and quoted in media reports.

[World Bank figures](#) show that in 2017, around three-quarters of Malagasys were living in extreme poverty, earning \$1.90 or less per day. This is despite steady improvements to the economy overall since constitutional order was restored, in 2014 following 5 years of political crisis. President-elect Rajoelina, first served during that period as President of the transitional Government.

"The Secretary-General notes the announcement of the final results...and congratulates President-elect Andry Rajoelina," said the statement. "He also commends all stakeholders for the peaceful and orderly conclusion of the presidential election."

"The Secretary-General will continue to follow developments in the country through his Special Adviser, Mr. Abdoulaye Bathily, with the support of the [United Nations Country Team](#), and in close coordination with the African Union, the Southern African Development Community and other international partners," the statement continued.

The fifth-largest island in the world, located off the coast of southeast Africa, Madagascar is also home to many unique animal species including its famous lemurs; and a centre for vanilla and cloves production, as well as tourism.

[FROM THE FIELD: “Hope” as UN Peacekeepers push deep into Mali](#)

UN peacekeepers in Mali have given what villagers in a remote part of the West African country have called a “real glimmer of hope.”

Senegalese troops from the UN mission, [MINUSMA](#), patrolled southeast of Mali’s central Mopti region to create what the force commander called a “protective presence” and to provide medical consultations. MINUSMA’s civilian peacekeepers offered guidance on human rights and other issues.

Mali has been suffering from instability and insecurity after extremists took over the north of the country in 2012. Some 3.2 million people require humanitarian assistance.

[Read more](#) about the villagers MINUSMA peacekeepers met on patrol.

And for more photos of MINUSMA’s work in the field see [here](#).

[How to stay in shape and step up support for refugees](#)

At a time of year when many resolve to get fit, the UN refugee agency, [UNHCR](#), has launched a campaign to raise awareness of the huge distances many are forced to cover to escape persecution, in search of a better life far from home.

The [1 Billion Miles to Safety](#) campaign calls on people around the world to collectively cover the approximate distance travelled by refugees every year, using fitness apps or the campaign website – www.stepwithrefugees.org – to log their contribution towards the global total.

UNHCR estimates that in 2016, Syrian refugees travelled more than 240 kilometres to reach Turkey, South Sudanese refugees travelled more than 640 kilometres to reach Kenya, and Rohingya refugees in Myanmar travelled approximately 80 kilometres to reach Bangladesh.

“Every day, we are inspired by the acts of kindness from people who are doing their very best to improve life for refugees: the activists, the communities hosting refugees, businesses, donors, volunteers’” said UNHCR Deputy High Commissioner Kelly T. Clements. “This campaign will encourage people to support refugees through something they are already doing – walking, cycling,

running,”

Ms. Clements added that it is vital to be reminded of the real and dangerous journeys that refugees are forced to take, especially when there are many misconceptions routinely shared about them. As the Secretary-General [said](#), on the adoption of the UN’s [Global Compact for Migration](#) on December 10, 2018, “There are many falsehoods about the world’s migrants. But we must not succumb to fear or false narratives. We must move from myth to reality.”

The campaign [Website](#) contains several stories of those forced to flee their homes, such as [Opani](#), who covered 60 miles with her infant daughter to escape her village in South Sudan, which was threatened by war and violence, arriving at a UNHCR registration centre in Uganda 7 days later.

As an example of how you can show solidarity with refugees without straying far from home or enduring the life-threatening journeys they undertake, take a look at this [article](#) by UNHCR web editor Tim Gaynor, who trekked 128 miles across France on the Camino de Santiago.

[THE COMMITTEES: ‘All roads lead to the Fifth’](#)

Ambassador Gillian Bird, the Permanent Representative of Australia to the UN and the current chair of Fifth Committee, explained the unique role of the Committee to *UN News* in an exclusive interview.

“The Committee is responsible for all of the administrative and budgetary matters of the UN, every year it considers and approves the Organization’s budget,” she said.

Given the enormity of the issues it has to consider – from reports of the Board of Auditors and overseeing the UN’s expenses and human resource management, to financing UN peacekeeping operations – delegates and staff often find themselves in UN Headquarters at weekends and burning the midnight oil on week nights.

Ambassador Bird, who earlier in her diplomatic career served as a delegate to the Fifth Committee, said that her priority as the chair is to try to move away from this stressful 24/7 work schedule.

“I think we all work better if we are not working around the clock and on weekends.”

During its current, 73rd session, the Fifth Committee [successfully concluded](#) the main part of its work on 22 December, having started on 9 October.

Late last month, the General Assembly plenary acted on the recommendations of the Fifth, adopting 16 resolutions, including two resolutions on the scale of assessments, one for the regular budget and another for peacekeeping. Details can be found [here](#).

The Assembly also approved \$651.24 million for the UN's special political missions, a recommendation that came straight from the Fifth Committee.

What is 'scale of assessments'?

The scale of assessments is the share each UN Member State is obliged to pay to the regular and peacekeeping budgets of the Organization.

The term "scale of assessments" refers to the amount of money that the General Assembly determines should be assessed to finance the approved appropriation, divided among Member States, to pay expenses.

The "scale of assessments" is considered in depth every three years. It is determined based on the recommendations made by the Committee on Contributions to the General Assembly, for the body's final approval.



UN Photo/Michael Ali

Peacekeepers serving with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) partner with local organizations to provide medical and nutritional care to orphaned and otherwise vulnerable children in North Kivu province.

Working by consensus to find common ground

Another unique characteristic of the work of the Fifth Committee, is that it strives to make all its decisions by consensus. This working style is not a firm rule, but more of a tradition and a practice at the Fifth, and at times the discussions move into so called "informal informals".

Chairperson Bird explains: "Delegations discuss in a *really* informal setting,

for example the nearest available sofa, to try to find common ground.”

The negotiation process, is not easy, as Member States might have quite different positions or views on particular topics”. So, it does require a lot of patience and perseverance on the part of delegates, as well as a sense of creativity and the common desire to reach an outcome,” she said, noting that there are sometimes vote, but not many.

“Working by consensus sometimes makes negotiation more challenging but it does seem to create a sense of collegiality among delegates that I haven’t really seen in other committees or processes, it also leads to outcomes where everyone shares ownership”, added Ms. Bird.

For intrepid readers who want to know more about the fine details, go here: [The Process of Informals in the Fifth Committee.](#)

Heavy workload

While the main part of the Fifth Committee’s work concludes before the end of the year, because of its heavy workload, delegates get together once again in March and for a second resumed session to deal with administrative and budgetary aspects of UN Peacekeeping.

In addition to topics above, the agenda of the Fifth Committee this year includes reviewing the administrative and financial functioning of the UN; the programme budget for the biennium 2018-2019; improving the UN’s overall financial situation; the pattern of conferences; the UN pension system; administration of justice at the Organization; and the administrative and budgetary coordination of the UN with the specialized agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Full list and related documents [here](#).



MONUSCO/Alain Likota

MONUSCO’s medical personnel celebrated International Human Rights Day with free medical consultations at Kabare Prison, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. 10 December 2018.

Officials and the secretariat

Alongside Ms. Bird as the Chair, are three vice chairs, elected by the Committee. This year, the vice chairs are Fabio Esteban Pedraza-Torres (Colombia), Andre Lipand (Estonia), and Haseeb Gohar (Pakistan). Hicham Oussihamou (Morocco) is the current Rapporteur, tasked with preparing the Committee's report.

The officers are supported by a team of UN Secretariat staff, serving as the secretariat to the Fifth Committee. The current Committee secretary is Sharon Van Buerle.

Find resources, navigating the UN system, to reach Fifth Committee resources

The Fifth Committee, like other Main Committees, uses UN PaperSmart, the Organization's online platform providing delegates access to core documents. For delegates, Committee information, speaker lists, requests (and other resources) are all available through the e-deleGATE portal.

On the UN Official Document System, Fifth Committee documents are numbered using the pattern "A/C.5//." For example, the document A/C.5/73/1, contains the agenda items allocated to the Committee. All official documents are issued in the six main languages.

Official and open meetings of the Committee are carried live in [UN Web TV](#).

Additional information can be found at the Committee's [website here](#).

[UN Chief 'strongly rejects' Guatemala decision to expel anti-corruption body](#)

UN Secretary-General António Guterres has "strongly rejected" the Guatemalan Government's decision to unilaterally terminate the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala ([CICIG](#)), an independent body set up by the UN and Guatemala to investigate illegal security groups and high-level corruption in the country.

On Monday Guatemalan Foreign Minister Sandra Jovel met Mr. Guterres at UN Headquarters in New York and presented him with a letter informing the United Nations of the government's decision to terminate the Agreement, which established CICIG, within 24 hours.

In a statement, the UN Spokesman said that the Secretary-General "strongly rejects" the contents of the letter, adding that the United Nations has been

“constructively engaged with the Government of Guatemala, at various levels, over the last sixteen months, in accordance with Article 12 of the agreement creating CICIG.”

The mandate of the Commission is scheduled to end on 3 September, 2019 and the UN expects the Government of Guatemala to “entirely fulfil its legal obligations” under the agreement, and “abide by its international undertakings to ensure the protection of the CICIG personnel, both international and national”, said the statement.

In [September 2018](#), the CICIG Commissioner, Ivan Velasquez, was barred from re-entering Guatemala, and was asked by the Secretary-General to continue running the Commission from outside the country, until a solution could be found.

Mr Guterres recalled the important contribution to the fight against impunity made by the CICIG, which was set up in 2006 at the invitation of the government and was seen as an innovative initiative to strengthen the rule of law.

It was believed that criminal groups had infiltrated state institutions, fostering impunity and undermining democratic gains in the country following the country’s civil war, which ended in the 1990s.