

Slovak Foreign Minister elected as President of 72nd session of the General Assembly

31 May 2017 – The United Nations General Assembly today elected by acclamation Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák of Slovakia as President of its upcoming 72nd session.

Following his election at UN Headquarters in New York, Mr. Lajčák outlined as the six priorities for his tenure: people; peace and prevention; migration; the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) and climate action; and human rights, which would guide his work as an overarching principle.

"I do believe we can do more to bring the UN closer to the world's citizen and make a real difference in their lives," he began. With a focus on quality, he pledged not to launch any initiative that would result in additional burden, particularly for smaller States. I would rather create a streamlined agenda organized in clusters.

"Indeed, it is a common goal to create a stronger United Nations able to meet the multitude of expectations placed upon it," he underscored. "To that end, I will facilitate a constructive, informed and open interaction among Member States and with the Secretary-General."

Mr. Lajčák called for greater trust between the UN and its Members, stressing that he would do his utmost to support progress on the United Nations reform agenda, which is vital to improve the efficiency and role of the General Assembly, as well as reform the Security Council into a twenty-first-century body.

Immediately after leaving the General Assembly Hall, Mr. Lajčák spoke to the press.

"I've always believed strongly in multilateralism, with the United Nations at the very centre of it, and I want to use my mandate, when I take over from the current president, to strengthen the role of the United Nations. We live in difficult times, and therefore I believe we need the UN more than ever, and we need a strong and efficient United Nations," he said.

Turning to peace and prevention, Mr. Lajčák explained: "As a professional diplomat, I really believe that we should invest more in preventing conflict, and thus saving human lives and also saving money. There is one important event that is already mandated for April next year, which we want to use to strengthen the importance of sustaining peace and preventing conflict."

"Migration is another priority," he continued. "We have to

deliver on the migration compact, so this will be one of the most urgent issues during the 72nd Session. The next one is to stay focused and keep the speed and attention when it comes to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals and also climate change.”

The Assembly President-elect then added that the “next priority is human rights – respect for basic rights and dignity of every human being. And this is an overarching principle that must be reflected in everything we do.”

Congratulations abound

In his remarks to the General Assembly, [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres offered his warm congratulations, [saying](#): “Foreign Minister Laj  k has always demonstrated an impressive command of all aspects of UN action and a strong commitment to the principles that govern our work.”

The UN chief highlighted Mr. Laj  k's strong commitment to the implementation of Agenda 2030 and the [Paris Agreement](#) on Climate change, adding that his “enthusiastic leadership in relation to the Oceans Conference represent a legacy that will never be forgotten in the United Nations.”

Mr. Guterres also lauded current President, Peter Thomson, saying: “You have guided this Assembly outstandingly well during the transition from one Secretary-General to the next – and you have fully supported my efforts to sharpen our focus on prevention, achieve reform, and better serve the peoples of the world.”

For his part, General Assembly President Thomson [offered](#) congratulations, highlighting that his successor brings “a dedicated work ethic, an unwavering commitment to multilateralism, and a wealth of experience to the role,” skills, he added “that will serve him, and the United Nations, well over the coming session.”

Mr. Thomson commented that he had been struck by Mr. Laj  k's “commitment to forging a United Nations fit for the 21st Century, an Organization that serves the people, one that is based on ethics and transparency, and one that promotes human rights and the rule of law.”

Finally, he expressed his confidence “that under Minister Laj  k's leadership, the United Nations will be strongly positioned to advance our global efforts to sustain peace; promote human rights; and stay the course on implementation of the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.”

Having served as a three-term Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovakia, along with the UN and European Union in a number of senior conflict prevention, resolution, and mediation role, Mr. Laj  k will assume the Presidency on 12 September.

Made up of all the 193 Member States of the UN, the General Assembly provides a forum for multilateral discussion of the full spectrum of international issues covered by the UN Charter. It meets in regular session intensively

from September to December each year, and thereafter as required.

[‘Warning signs are flashing’ in crisis-torn Central African Republic, warns senior UN official](#)

31 May 2017 – Despite “vast improvement” in security in parts of the Central African Republic (CAR), there are still deep tensions and some fear of a sudden relapse, a top United Nations human rights official said while visiting the strife-torn country.

Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Andrew Gilmour said he was struck by the improvements in the capital, Bangui, such as “bustling markets and signs of growing economic life” and a “police, justice and corrections institutions beginning to take form.”

In Bambari, within the Ouaka prefecture, where clashes between armed groups killed numbers of civilians and displaced a significant population, Mr. Gilmour saw a fledgling gendarmerie, police, judiciary and civil authorities.

Calling it a “town without armed groups,” Mr. Gilmour said Bambari “represents a model of hope of the possible way forward,” due to the collaboration between Government forces, UN peacekeepers from the UN Integrated Stabilization Mission, known as MINUSCA, international partners and non-governmental organizations.

The senior UN official warned, however, that armed groups are coalescing and continuing with “atrocious attacks” against women and children, even as disarmament has stalled, attacks on peacekeepers continue, and deployed forces battle without sufficient resources.

“This is a time for leadership, strengthened partnerships, and a coordinated approach that puts Central Africans’ ‘Human Rights Up Front’,” Mr. Gilmour said referring to the UN initiative to prevent and respond early to large-scale human rights or humanitarian violations.

“Warning signs are flashing and must not be ignored,” stressed Mr. Gilmour.

Clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian, plunged the country of 4.5 million people into civil conflict in 2013. According to the UN, more than half the population is in dire need of assistance. Despite significant progress and successful elections, CAR has remained in the grip of instability and sporadic unrest.

Fresh violence surfaced earlier this year. As of May 2017, there were more than 500,000 internally displaced persons nationwide, a figure that had not been reached since August 2014.

[Act before time runs out, urges UNICEF, as Yemen grapples with 'unprecedented' cholera outbreak](#)

31 May 2017 – Amid an “unprecedented” increase in suspected cholera cases in war-torn Yemen – where medical facilities are teetering on the edge of collapse – the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) has stepped up its response but warned that time may be “running out.”

“More and more children die every day in Yemen from preventable causes like malnutrition and cholera,” said Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, in a [statement](#) yesterday.

“Anyone with a heart for children cannot let the situation continue. Stop the conflict [now],” he urged.

According to the UN agency, [more than 65,000 suspected cases of the deadly disease have been reported](#) in the country, of which about 10,000 were reported in the past 72 hours alone.

Some 532 people, including 109 children have succumbed to the disease over the past month. The numbers are feared to rise as more cases are verified.

Responding to the outbreak, UNICEF has sent in three aircrafts carrying over 40 metric tonnes of lifesaving supplies including medicines, oral rehydration salts (ORS), diarrhoea disease kits and intravenous fluids to treat more than 50,000 patients.

It is also helping provide chlorinated drinking water, disinfect wells and set up water filling stations and storage.

But needs continue to increase, with medicines and other vital medical equipment in short supply, said UNICEF.

This latest crisis comes as the country has been reeling under the effects of a conflict, now into its third year, that has rendered water treatment plants barely functional and water sources severely contaminated by sewage and uncollected garbage.

Half of the country’s health facilities aren’t working, and medical staff haven’t been paid for over eight months.

“The situation in Yemen is teetering on the verge of disaster [...] over 27 million Yemenis are staring at an unforgiving humanitarian catastrophe. The biggest victims of this man-made tragedy are Yemen’s most vulnerable population – its children,” underscored Meritxell Relaño UNICEF Representative in Yemen.

“The international community needs to support long-term investments in social services like water and sanitation. Otherwise, deadly disease outbreaks will strike again and kill many more.”

[Constrains on movement in occupied territories at root of Palestinian hardship – UN reports](#)

31 May 2017 – Israeli constraints on movement and economics, along with the blockade on the Gaza Strip and internal political strife, are at the root of Palestinian suffering in the occupied territories, according to two separate United Nations reports released as the Israeli occupation enters its fiftieth year.

“Occupation policies and practices remain the key cause of humanitarian needs in the oPt [occupied Palestinian territory],” the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)) said in its annual report.

David Carden, the head of OCHA in the occupied territories, attributed the hardship to a “pervasive” lack of protection and accountability for international law.

“At its heart, the crisis in the oPt [Occupied Palestinian Territory] is one of a [lack of protection for Palestinian civilians](#) – from violence, from displacement, from restrictions on access to services and livelihoods, and from other rights violations – with a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable, children in particular,” he said in the 2016 humanitarian overview, [Fragmented Lives](#).

Among the issues raised in the report were the restriction on Palestinian movement and access to basic services. Despite some easing of measures, OCHA noted that the number of Palestinians who Israeli officials allowed to leave Gaza had declined in the second half of 2016. The Rafah crossing – the sole crossing between Gaza and Egypt – was only opened for 44 days last year. While in the West Bank, OCHA recorded 572 movement obstacles, with an additional 110 obstacles in the Israeli-controlled Hebron city.

In addition, Israeli authorities in 2016 demolished or seized some 300 donor-funded structures provided as humanitarian aid to Palestinians, with a value

estimated at more than \$730,000.

The report also noted the impact from the internal conflict among Palestinian politicians, with division between President Mahmud Abbas in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza.

“Suffocating” economic and labour market – ILO

The “stringent” restrictions on movement and economic activities are also cited by the International Labour Organization ([ILO](#)), where the Director-General each year reviews the situation for workers in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza, Israel and the occupied Syrian Golan.

The 2017 edition of [The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories](#) will be presented to the International Labour Conference in June.

The report noted that while economic growth is taking place in West Bank and Gaza, it “is not enough to improve livelihoods, and it barely translates into employment gains.”

“The harsh reality facing all efforts to strengthen the Palestinian labour market is the [control that the occupation exercises over the Palestinian borders](#) and the access to land, water and natural resources,” ILO Director-General, Guy Ryder, says in his foreword to the report.

“The space for opportunities to work, farm, produce and create jobs in the occupied territories remains severely constrained,” added Mr. Ryder.

According to the report, more than one-quarter of the Palestinian labour force is unemployed, rising to 40 per cent among young people.

The situation is “particularly dire” for the two million Palestinians living in Gaza, where 60 per cent of youth with school degrees are jobless, and where movement for work is next to impossible – further hampered by long waiting times and overcrowding at check points.

The report warns that as work prospects bleaken for Palestinian youth, the frustrations can fuel radicalization and violence.

Obstacles to state-building

The report calls for the reanimation of the peace process with a view to achieving the two-state solution.

“One of the aims of the Oslo agreements was to establish well-functioning labour markets for both Israel and the Palestinians. This remains little more than a distant aspiration,” Mr. Ryder said.

He called for the promotion and application of social justice and decent work as “vital cornerstones of the peace effort.”

In the report, the head of ILO also urged the international community to stay engaged in the Middle East, with a view to fostering peace and full statehood

for the Palestinians.

[Key trends for infrastructure development and industrialization in spotlight at special UN meeting](#)

31 May 2017 – The President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) told the body's special meeting today that infrastructure, industrialization and innovation are essential in global efforts to eradicate poverty as they enable growth and sustainable development.

“The [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development – and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) and targets – recognizes the importance of infrastructure, industrialization and innovation for eradicating poverty and expanding opportunities for people, especially the poorest,” said ECOSOC President Frederick Shava, citing the 15-year development framework adopted by 193 UN Member States in 2015.

Addressing the Council's [special meeting](#) on ‘Innovations for Infrastructure Development and Promoting Sustainable Industrialization,’ Mr. Shava said that the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 9 on infrastructure, industrialization and innovation will need to be prioritized in national, regional and global policy making.

The [one-day meeting](#) aims, among others, to highlight the challenges to building, maintaining and upgrading infrastructure and promoting industrialization, and related innovations, in developing countries, particularly in Africa and the countries in special situations; and to share knowledge, experiences and innovative approaches for the promotion and development of infrastructure and industrialization in all countries.

“Making progress on SDG 9 will have positive ripple effects on other [SDGs](#), such as SDG 1 to end poverty; SDG 2 on zero hunger; SDG 3 on health, SDG 4 on education, SDG 6 on water and sanitation, SDG 7 on affordable and clean energy, SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth; and SDG 11 for sustainable cities and communities, among others,” he said.

As someone who hails from Africa, Mr. Shava said he knows the potential the continent holds and the challenges it faces. Citing an estimate by the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UN-ECA), he said that about \$93 billion is needed to bring the continent's infrastructure up to speed over the next three years.

Also addressing the special meeting was Wu Hongbo, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, who highlighted “a catalytic and cross-

cutting role” of infrastructure development and sustainable industrialization to implement the 2030 Agenda.

“Access to infrastructure and the promotion of sustainable industrialization is essential for inclusiveness. It is essential so that no one is left behind and that there truly is sustainable development for all,” he said.

Mr. Wu went on to underscore some critical challenges, including the global infrastructure gap. The infrastructure financing gap in developing countries is estimated to be between \$1 trillion and \$1.5 trillion annually.

A second challenge is urbanization, he said, noting that the number of people living in cities in emerging markets is expected to double by 2030, adding another two billion people to urban areas.

And a third challenge is the importance of building and applying effective technology for resilient infrastructure and industrialization in rural areas, he said.

“The international community has committed to supporting efforts to ensure infrastructure development and sustainable industrialization. Now is the time to take action,” he said, citing four particular areas: integrated policy advice; capacity building; partnerships; and information and data on infrastructure for follow-up and review.