

'Warp speed' technology must be 'force for good' UN chief tells web leaders

Technological advances are happening “at a warp speed,” United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said on Monday in Lisbon, Portugal, as a major three-day Web Summit got underway.

He pointed out more than “90 per cent of the data that exists today in the world was created in the two last years,” noting that what while it used to cost \$1 million to store a megabyte of data, the current price tag is less than two cents.

Technologies like blockchain – digital records linked together using encryption – or gene testing are now common technologies, he continued.

“Artificial intelligence is everywhere, helping to buy and sell shares, helping police surveillance and even helping people to choose their soul mates,” he said.

He asserted that technology is yielding enormous benefits, providing cures for disease, fighting hunger, boosting economic development and growth globally, and effectively addressing world problems.

However, acknowledging that globalization is imbalanced and unequal, the UN chief cited the 2030 Agenda and [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) as the UN's blueprint to help reverse inequality.

Machines that have the power and the discretion to take human lives are politically unacceptable, are morally repugnant and should be banned by international law – *the Secretary-General said to thunderous applause*

He said the speed of cutting-edge technology was essential to achieving the SDGs: “[UNICEF](#) is now able to map the connections between schools in remote areas”, he asserted, adding that the [World Food Programme](#) (WFP) is using blockchain to track payments to aid recipients and the High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) is using biotechnologies in identification, to better support and protect refugees.

Mr. Guterres cautioned that the world is not preparing for the social impact of the “fourth industrial revolution”, which includes new job creation but also redundancy for some jobs made obsolete by technology, saying that it would result in unemployment and societal disruption.

He stressed that while “a massive investment in education” and “a new generation of safety nets” will be needed, more must be done to address this challenge.

Turning to the question of artificial intelligence he said machines were doing more and more tasks formally reserved for humans, and increasingly do them better, like medical diagnosis and police surveillance.

However, “the weaponization of artificial intelligence is a serious danger,” spelled out the UN chief, cautioning against the impact of technology on warfare.

“With the weaponization of artificial intelligence, the prospect of autonomous weapons that can select and destroy targets will make it very difficult to avoid escalation of conflicts and to guarantee the respect of international humanitarian law and international human rights law,” he underscored.

To thunderous applause, the Secretary-General stated that: “Machines that have the power and the discretion to take human lives are politically unacceptable, are morally repugnant and should be banned by international law.”

Because tech moves so fast, new platforms need to be created to address these problems he said emphasizing that he wanted the UN to be a platform, where various groups can come together to discuss and agree on protocols and other mechanisms that allow for cyberspace, the internet and AI “to be essentially a force for good.”

[UN recorded 64 new allegations of sexual exploitation or abuse in the past three months](#)

Across its various offices, agencies, and partner organisations implementing its programmes, the United Nations received 64 new allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), involving 77 victims, between July and September, UN Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric said on Monday.

“Please note that not all the allegations have been fully verified and many are still in the preliminary assessment phase,” he told journalists at UN Headquarters in New York, adding that these quarterly updates are part of the Secretary-General’s initiative to “increasing transparency” on this issue.

Of those 64 allegations, six involved peacekeepers, 33 involved personnel from UN agencies, funds and programmes and another 25 concerned non-UN staff working with organisations implementing UN programmes.

Most of the reported incidents – 30 of them – allegedly took place in 2018;

another 15 are said to have happened in the years going back to 2015. The date is unknown for 19 of the allegations reported.

Out of 77 reported victims, the overwhelming majority are women (42) and girls (24), while two men and one boy also report having suffered from SEA. The age or gender of the remaining eight survivors is unknown.

The vast majority of them, 55, suffered from what is categorized as sexual exploitation, defined as “any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another”.

Another 16 are considered to have suffered from incidents categorized as sexual abuse, defined as “the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions”.

Another four were classified as of an unknown nature, and two were unsubstantiated following an investigation.

The alleged perpetrators are 66 men, one woman, and two individuals whose gender is unknown.

Of the 39 allegations related to UN personnel, one was not substantiated, 22 are at various stages of investigation, and 16 are under preliminary assessment to determine whether there is sufficient information to investigate.

Regarding the 25 allegations relating to non-UN implementing organisation staff, two have been substantiated through an investigation and the perpetrators were dismissed by their employer. One allegation was not substantiated, 14 are at various stages of investigation, seven under preliminary assessment and one allegation was closed at the request of the victim.

“The efforts to implement the Secretary-General’s strategy to combat sexual exploitation and abuse continue to be strengthened,” said Spokesperson Dujarric.

In September, a [Circle of Leadership](#), embodying world leaders’ commitment to eradicating SEA across the UN system was launched. As of today, 49 heads of State and Government, 22 heads of UN entities and 72 global leaders have joined the movement.

In addition, over the past few weeks, an electronic tool called “Clear Check,” developed to screen UN staff dismissed as a result of substantiated SEA allegations, or who resigned or were separated during an investigation, started being rolled out across the entire UN system.

From the Field – Green shoots of peace in South Sudan

Some 5,000 seedlings of trees indigenous to South Sudan are being distributed to schools, sports centres and other public meeting places by the UN peacekeeping mission in the country, UNMISS, as part of its commitment to countering climate change.



UNMISS/Eric Kanalstein

Mango, lemon, guava, and teak trees were planted by school children in October at the Exodus Junior Academy in the capital, Juba.

The headmaster of the school, Sokiri Ambamba George, said the trees will enhance his students' understanding of the environment.

Some of South Sudan's natural habitat has been damaged during the 5-year long civil conflict there, but it's hoped a commitment to peace by warring parties will enable the environment to recover as more trees are planted. Those trees will help to reduce the harmful greenhouse gasses that are causing climate change.

On the [International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict](#) which is marked annually on 6 November, [read more here](#) about the green shoots of peace in South Sudan.

Prosecution of Paraguay judges over peasant 'massacre' ruling could undermine rule of law: UN expert

The planned prosecution of Supreme Court judges who acquitted 11 peasant farmers jailed over the death of police officers during a violent land eviction in 2012, known as the Curuguaty Massacre", could undermine the rule of law, a UN expert said on Monday.

"These are fundamental elements in the full enjoyment of human rights," UN Special Rapporteur on independence of judges and lawyers, Diego García-Sayán, said in a [press release](#).

"It is the obligation of the State to ensure judges be allowed to decide the case before them impartially," he added.

No judge should be removed, or be subject to judicial or disciplinary proceedings as a result of exercising their judicial responsibilities – *Diego García-Sayán*

In June 2012, according to news reports, more than 300 police officers took part in an operation to remove a group of farmers and their families who were living on State-owned land in Paraguay's Curuguaty district.

The eviction order was reportedly issued after a prosperous family, who said they had been gifted the land by former dictator, Alfredo Stroessner, alleged that the "campesinos", or peasant farmers, were in fact living on private property.

Media reports said that 18 campesinos were convicted on murder charges, while no police officers stood trial for the farmers' deaths. The massacre occurred at a time of political change, with the election of Paraguay's first progressive president in 60 years.

In July, Paraguay Supreme Court Justices acquitted 11 people, and ordered the release of four campesinos who remained imprisoned, after judges agreed the trial failed to prove them guilty of the crimes for which they were charged. The 2012 trial was reportedly marred with irregularities, including allegations of violations of due process and the right to defense.

In August this year, the Prosecutor-General filed a case against the three judges who acquitted the campesinos: Cristóbal Sánchez, Arnaldo Martínez Prieto and Emiliano Rolón Fernández.

Mr García-Sayán said in his statement on Monday that “no judge should be removed, or be subject to judicial or disciplinary proceedings as a result of exercising their judicial responsibilities.”

The entire investigation process has caused uproar, ignited local human rights protests, and brought the country’s long history of [unfair land distribution](#) and peasant prosecution to the surface once more.

A 2018 [World Bank census](#) shows that more than 70 percent of land in Paraguay is occupied by just one percent of farm businesses, making it the country with the highest level of land inequality in the world.

[Ending use of chemical weapons in Syria: ‘still work to be done’, says UN disarmament chief](#)

As inspections and investigations continue into several reported instances of chemical weapons use against civilians in Syria, the United Nations High Representative on Disarmament Affairs, [Izumi Nakamitsu](#), told the Security Council on Monday that much remains to be done to end their use, and called for international unity.

In more than seven years of brutal civil conflict, the [Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons](#) (OPCW) and the UN, through a Joint Investigative Mechanism, found evidence for [multiple instances](#) where chemical weapons – including sulfur mustard and sarin – were used by the Syrian Government forces as well as non-state armed groups.

In 2013, the UN Security Council adopted unanimously [resolution 2118](#), which called on Member States to implement a programme to eliminate the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian conflict.

The effort, led now by the OPCW, has made some additional headway: the inspection of two facilities is currently underway in Barzah and in Jamrayah; a fact-finding mission was carried out in September in Douma into allegations of use and conclusions are expected to be released shortly; five other incidents of alleged use of chemical weapons in 2017 are also currently being investigated.

However, five years after the Security Council’s resolution was adopted, High Representative Nakamitsu said “there is still work to be done.” She referred for example to “allegations regarding a possible planned use of chemical weapons in Idlib” – the last area of the country under rebel control where millions of civilians are sheltering – which are “continuing to surface”.

“So long as the use of chemical weapons is ongoing, or the threat of their use lingers, we must retain our focus on this issue and not allow ourselves to become inured to it,” she stated.

Stressing that “unity in the UN Security Council is required,” she noted that “the identification and accountability of those responsible is imperative”.

In June, the OPCW Secretariat was given the task by the parties to the [Chemical Weapons Convention](#), to “put in place arrangements to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic”.

Calling on the Security Council to “re-establish the norm against chemical weapons,” she said that “the use of these weapons must always be seen as a violation of a deeply-held taboo”.

“The vitality and credibility of the broader disarmament and non-proliferation architecture depends upon it”.

Following Ms. Nakamitsu’s briefing, Representative of the United States of America, Jonathan Cohen, expressed support for the UN-led political process to end the war in Syria, and noted that “chemical weapons have no place in our world”.

Rejecting the facts as presented by the UN disarmament chief, the Russian Ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia, stated that “chemical stockpiles were withdrawn from Syria under the oversight of the OPCW,” that “the facilities of the former military chemical programme have been destroyed” and that “the inspection measures have become futile”.