

## UN chief hails ‘very important role’ of Human Rights Council, as US withdraws, citing alleged bias

In response to the withdrawal of the United States on Tuesday from the United Nations body which is designed to promote and protect human rights around the globe, [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) said that he would have “much preferred” the US remain.

In a statement issued by Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric, the UN chief said that the Geneva-based Human Rights Council was a part of the UN’s overall “Human Rights architecture”, which “plays a very important role in the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide.”

[The Human Rights Council](#) is a 47-member inter-governmental body within the UN system, that not only seeks to promote and protect human rights, but also addresses alleged rights violations and makes recommendations on them.

It’s a forum for discussing all thematic human rights issues and situations that require its attention, throughout the year. The members are elected by the UN General Assembly.

“The Secretary-General would have much preferred for the United States to remain in the Human Rights Council,” said the statement on Tuesday night.

The US announced its decision shortly beforehand, when according to news reports, UN Ambassador Nikki Haley appeared together with Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo. They accused the Council of displaying entrenched bias against Israel, and criticized what they said was the body’s willingness to admit nations which were themselves human rights abusers.

Ambassador Haley, according to reports, noted that the move did not signify in any way, that the US was retreating from its own human rights commitments.

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## UN chief calls for ‘solidarity, compassion and action’ on World Refugee Day

With more than 68 million people worldwide displaced due to conflict or persecution – roughly equivalent to the population of Thailand– the head of

the United Nations has called for unity and solidarity as a first step to support them.

The appeal by [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) comes in a video message for [World Refugee Day](#), observed this Wednesday, 20 June.

In it, he reported that a person was displaced every two seconds during 2017.

“On World Refugee Day, we must all think about what more we can we do to help.” The answer, he added, “begins with unity and solidarity.”

Mr. Guterres also expressed deep concern over the rise in the number of refugees who are not receiving the protection they are entitled to. He added that communities, or countries, that provide a safe haven for those fleeing war or persecution should be supported.

Later this year, a [Global Compact on Refugees](#) will be presented to the international community meeting at UN Headquarters in New York.

Mr. Guterres said it offers “a way forward” while also recognizing the contributions that refugees make to the societies hosting them.

“As long as there are wars and persecution, there will be refugees. On World Refugee Day, I ask you to remember them,” his message continued.

“Their story is one of resilience, perseverance and courage. Ours must be of solidarity, compassion and action.”

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## [‘No steps taken’ so far to end Israel’s illegal settlement activity on Palestinian land – UN envoy](#)

A senior United Nations official on Tuesday urged Israel to reverse course over illegal settlement construction on occupied Palestinian land, and for both parties to return to the negotiating table in pursuit of a lasting peace deal.

“The need to reverse, or at the very least contain the impact of negative trends – especially [illegal settlement activity](#), violence and incitement – is critical not only to preserve hope for a meaningful return to the negotiating table, but also to prevent the escalation of broader regional tensions,” UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov, told the Security Council.

Mr. Mladenov presented to the 15-member body the sixth quarterly report on the implementation of Council resolution 2334, covering the period from 26 March to 12 June this year.

“As detailed in the report, no steps were taken during the reporting period to “cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem’ as demanded by the resolution”, he said.

The July 2016 report of the Middle East Quartet – comprising the UN, Russia, the United States and the European Union – identified Israel’s settlement activity as one of the main obstacles to achieving a two-state solution, which is to establish a viable, sovereign Palestinian state that lives in peace and security with Israel.

In Tuesday’s briefing, Mr. Mladenov noted that some 3,500 housing units in settlements in what is known as “Area C” of the occupied West Bank had either been “advanced, approved or tendered”. One-third of those units are in settlements in outlying locations deep inside the West Bank.

Plans for 2,300 units were advanced in the approval process, while 300 units had reached the final approval stage. Tenders had gone out for about 900 units, he said. As in the previous period, no advancements, approvals or tenders were made in occupied East Jerusalem.

“I reiterate that all settlement activity is illegal under international law. It continues to undermine the practical prospects for establishing a viable Palestinian state and erodes remaining hopes for peace,” he said.

During the reporting period, Israeli authorities demolished or seized 84 Palestinian-owned structures, resulting in the displacement of 67 people and potentially affected the livelihoods of 4,500 others.

The reporting period was characterized by high levels of violence, including rocket attacks from Gaza, Mr. Mladenov said.

Since 30 March, during a series of protests in Gaza, 135 Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces. Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorists, have acknowledged that a number of their members were among those killed. Two Israeli soldiers were also injured during the protests, with at least five others injured as a result of rockets and mortars launched from Gaza.

Under the cover of the protests, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other militants engaged in violent and provocative acts, stated Mr. Mladenov.

Hundreds approached and attempted to breach the fence, burned tires, threw rocks and fire bombs at Israeli forces, launched incendiary kites and laid improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Palestinian protesters also damaged and looted equipment and installations on the Gaza side of the border at the Kerem Shalom crossing.

“I want to again reiterate the call of the Secretary-General on all to unequivocally condemn, in the strongest possible terms, all actions that have

brought us to this dangerous place and led to the loss of so many lives in Gaza," he said.

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## Migrant children at US border have right to protection and 'be with their families': UNICEF chief

Separating children from their families is in no-one's best interest – the head of UN Children's Fund [UNICEF](#) said on Tuesday – pointing to "heartbreaking" stories of infants who have been reportedly removed from their parents after entering the US from Mexico illegally.

In an appeal to the US regarding its recent policy change cracking down on migration at the border with Mexico, Executive Director Henrietta Fore said in a statement that children who were in need of international protection "have the right to be protected...and be with their families".

She underlined how for decades the US Government had provided support to "uprooted children" from Syria or South Sudan, Somalia, or Haiti, before warning that detention and family separation can create "toxic stress" which can impact on children's long-term development.

Ms Fore added that any youngsters forced to flee their homes should have access to essential services and be with their families, since this gave them "the best chance at a healthy, happy and productive future".

No appropriate reason to detain or jail children – *Joel Millman, IOM*

Echoing that message, UNICEF spokesperson Christophe Boulhierac, in Geneva, said that immigration and children's rights were not incompatible.

He told journalists: "I think our main role here is to make the point... that what's happening is not right and, and, more than that, immigration enforcement and protecting the right of children are not a zero-sum game."

Research showed that taking children into custody without their parents had an "immediate" and negative effect on their wellbeing, Mr Boulhierac said.

He highlighted research which showed that children who have not seen a parent for one month after the parents' arrest "experience more frequent changes in sleeping habits, anger and withdrawing from their family", compared with children who had seen their parents within the same period following their

arrest.

Responding to journalists' questions, Mr Boulhierac confirmed that the US is the only country which has signed but has yet to ratify the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child.

He cited Article 9 of the international accord, which specifies that a child "shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will" except after judicial review and only if it is "necessary for the best interests of the child".

On the same issue the UN Migration Agency [IOM](#) said that it agreed "almost 100 per cent" with the UNICEF statement.

"We feel in general no migrant should be detained for being a migrant," IOM spokesperson Joel Millman said, before adding that there was "no appropriate reason to detain or jail children".

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## [If we can build the International Space Station, 'we can do anything' – UN Champion for Space](#)

The sight of Earth, from hundreds of kilometers away in open space while you are tethered only to the International Space Station, is "absolutely amazing", said Scott Kelly, the UN Champion for Space and former US astronaut, stressing that the world we live on "is our only planet."

"Through that single visor, you see how fragile the Earth's atmosphere is ... it's almost like someone put this thin film over the surface of our planet and the first time you see it, you realize that is everything that protects us from space," said Mr. Kelly, delivering a keynote address at the UNISPACE+50 gathering in Vienna; a United Nations forum on the peaceful uses of outer space.

However, in spite of this breathtakingly beautiful sight, there are parts of the globe when viewed from space, that are almost always shrouded in pollution, he continued.

Humankind may get to Mars someday or elsewhere in the Solar System, but if it is to survive, it "needs to survive on earth" added the former NASA astronaut who spent over a year orbiting the planet.

In his address, Mr. Kelly described his life onboard the International Space Station, a structure measuring about 300 feet long and 200 feet wide and

orbiting between 280-460 kilometers in space.

This space station is the hardest thing we have ever done ... if we can do this we can do anything – *UN Champion for Space Scott Kelly*

Particularly poignant was his description of the time he left the station for his last time, onboard a Russian Soyuz spacecraft:

“We built this space station ... while flying around the Earth at 17,500 miles an hour, in a vacuum, in temperatures ranges of plus or minus 270 degrees”, he said, adding that they had connecting modules, “some of which had never touched each other before on Earth” which “put together astronauts and cosmonauts working in these very, very difficult conditions.”

“This space station is the hardest thing we have ever done ... if we can do this we can do anything,” underscored Mr. Kelly.

He linked this incredible feat of human ingenuity and perseverance with addressing the challenges confronting the vert survival of planet Earth.

If we want to fix the problems with the environment we can do that, expressed Mr. Kelly.

“After spending a year in space, I was absolutely inspired that we can dream it we can do it ... and most importantly, if we work as a team because teamwork makes the dream work. The sky is not the limit.”

*UN News is on location in Vienna covering UNISPACE+50 and its associated events. Follow us at [@UN\\_News\\_Centre](#) for news and highlights.*