

In Bali, UN chief Guterres outlines importance of international financial cooperation for sustainable development

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has called for a surge in investment, long-term financing and global stability to overcome the obstacles to inclusive, resilient and environmentally sustainable global growth.

Addressing finance ministers and central bank governors at International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s [International Monetary and Financial Committee](#) (IMFC), in Bali, Indonesia, the [UN chief](#) cautioned that high debt in many countries are limiting fiscal space and taking away much needed resources vital to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

“This underlines the importance of international cooperation and of the full motivation and attraction of the private sector to fully play its role in the 2030 Agenda [for Sustainable Development],” said Mr. Guterres

In that context, he highlighted the importance of the full implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and recalled his Strategy to support Financing the 2030 Agenda, [which he launched ahead of this year's high-level general debate](#) at the UN General Assembly.

The Strategy sets out three priority action areas: aligning global financial and economic policies with the 2030 Agenda; enhancing national and regional sustainable financing and investment strategies; and encouraging financial inclusion and equitable access to finance for all, particularly for women and youth.

Finance ministries and central banks are critical to all three areas, said Secretary-General Guterres, noting that with active engagement and cooperation, they can lead the way in framing policies needed to stabilize financial flows and minimize disruptions.

“You bear the responsibility for formulating national budgets that support national sustainable development strategies that are fully aligned with the 2030 Agenda. You can set your fiscal policies to create positive incentives for longer-term sustainable investments and a transition to sustainable, equitable and inclusive growth,” he said.

Strong international cooperation can also put an end to practices such as illicit flows of capital, money laundering and tax evasion, which drain vital resources away from developing countries and strengthen good-governance and tax-systems, added Mr. Guterres.

Climate action ‘a matter for each one of us’

Concluding his address, the Secretary-General highlighted the urgency to combat climate change.

Recalling the recent report by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which issued a [stark warning on global temperature rise](#), Mr. Guterres, underscored the urgent need to curb greenhouse gas emissions “if we want to avoid that the targets of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change become irreversibly unattainable.”

“We have technology on our side, the green economy is more and more the best path for development. But political will is still lacking,” he said, urging “a meaningful price on carbon, to end fossil fuel subsidies, to invest in climate-friendly infrastructure that does not lock us for decades into an unsustainable path.”

“This is not a matter for Ministers of the Environment. This is a matter for all political leaders in today’s world. This is a matter for each one of us.”

[Human Rights Council election: 5 things you need to know about it](#)

The United Nations General Assembly held secret-ballot elections for the [Human Rights Council](#) (HRC) on Friday. As of 1 January next year, the [18 newly-elected States](#) will serve for three years on the UN’s highest inter-governmental body, mandated to protect and promote human rights worldwide.

While the institution has been the subject of controversy since its creation in 2006 – culminating in the withdrawal of the USA this past June – UN [Secretary-General António Guterres reiterated](#) that it plays “a very important role” in the UN’s human rights architecture.

1. First of all... how does it all work?

Elections to the Council happen annually, with countries serving for three years on a rotational basis, as some of the seats expire on 31 December every year. There are 47 seats, equitably distributed according to five regional divisions.

Countries need a minimum of 97 votes to get elected, and everything happens by secret ballot. This year, 18 seats were up for election: five for Africa, five for Asia-Pacific, two for Eastern Europe, three for Latin America and the Caribbean, and three for Western Europe and other States.

2. So... who's in and who's out?

After Friday's election, here's how the Council will look from 1 January:

- **IN, elected this year:** Argentina, Austria, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Czech Republic, Denmark, Eritrea, Fiji, India, Italy, Philippines, Somalia, Togo and Uruguay.
- **IN, continuing their terms:** Angola, DRC, Egypt, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tunisia, Afghanistan, China, Iraq, Japan, Nepal, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia, Ukraine, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Mexico, Peru, Australia, Iceland, Spain, and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
- **OUT, because they didn't apply for a second consecutive term:** Belgium, Burundi, Ecuador, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Panama, Slovenia and Switzerland.
- **OUT, because after two consecutive terms, they're not eligible for re-election:** Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Kenya, the Republic of Korea, the United Arab Emirates, Venezuela and Germany.

3. What does the Council actually do?

In a nutshell, the HRC is a multilateral forum to discuss anything relating to human rights issues around the world.

In addition to launching fact-finding missions and establishing commissions of inquiry into specific situations, it meets three times a year to review the human rights records of all UN Member States, in a special process designed to give countries the chance to present the actions they have taken, and what they've done, to advance human rights. This is known as the Universal Periodic Review.

This video explains it all in a simple way:

4. How come some countries accused of human rights violations still serve?

The HRC was created in 2006, following a proposal by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan. In a report titled "[In Larger Freedom](#)", he noted that the Commission on Human Rights, created in 1946, was suffering from "declining credibility and professionalism" and was "in need of major reform". Subsequently, based on his recommendations, the Human Rights Council was [established](#) by the General Assembly to replace the Commission and several measures were put in place to try and avoid the same problems that eventually arose with the Commission.

For example, as it is understood that the Council can only be as effective as its Member States, the election process was placed directly in the hands of the General Assembly, the only UN organ where every one of the 193 countries has equal voting weight.

In addition, the geographical group divisions and seat allocations are meant to prevent disproportionate focus on just a handful of regions and countries,

and ensure that every country has a chance of fair consideration.

Finally, during the elections for each regional group, the General Assembly allows extra blank slates: this should theoretically ensure there are more candidates than available seats, enabling a competitive process. However, if – as was the case this year with 18 candidacies for 18 available seats – no extra countries apply, then no competition occurs, and whichever Member State applies, is likely to get elected.

5. So does the HRC make a difference for human rights worldwide?

Although human rights have always been a very sensitive matter for Member States, the Human Rights Council remains an essential part of the UN's human rights architecture.

[The Council has the power](#) to adopt resolutions, launch fact-finding missions and investigations, and establish commissions of inquiry. In particular, the HRC can appoint independent experts on specific issues. At the moment, there are 44 [thematic](#) experts and 11 [country](#) ones appointed to monitor and report on human rights issues as requested.

All these mechanisms allow for grave violations to be highlighted and brought up on the global stage for examination, discussion and, whenever feasible, action.

[Continuing incarceration of women's rights activists in Saudi Arabia, 'reprehensible': UN experts](#)

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The detained have been charged for being involved in pro-democracy demonstrations, and previously campaigning for the right of women to vote and drive. In late June, a long-standing ban on women driving in Saudi Arabia, was lifted by royal decree.

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penalty for asserting her fundamental right to peaceful assembly.

– *UN Experts on Human Rights*

The group of nine independent experts – UN Special Rapporteurs and working group members – said they condemned the actions of the Saudi authorities in continuing to detain the women rights defenders, “in the strongest possible terms,” calling for their “immediate and unconditional” release.

A group of those indicted – Samar Badawi, Nassima Al-Sadah, Nouf Abdulaziz, Mayya Al-Zahrani, and Hatoon Al-Fassi – are being held in detention, without any channels of communication. The five were particularly active in demonstrations for women’s rights.

In Friday’s statement, the experts urged Saudi authorities “to immediately make the whereabouts of these five human rights defenders known and to grant them access to their families and lawyers.”

The group of women also include Israa Al-Ghomghan, who faces possible execution despite being denied representation during her trial, and is being tried in Riyadh’s Specialized Criminal Court, an entity set up for terrorism-related cases.

“It is reprehensible that Ms. Al-Ghomagham is facing the death penalty for asserting her fundamental right to peaceful assembly,” the UN experts stressed.

They added that women rights defenders are subject to particular risks and vulnerable to widespread gender-based discrimination, signaling the Saudi administration’s duty to its people.

“We wish to remind the Saudi Government of its obligation to protect and promote the rights of all human rights defenders as they peacefully carry out their legitimate work,” said the experts.

[UN welcomes ‘milestone’ release of 833 children from anti-Boko Haram force in NE Nigeria](#)

The United Nations welcomed on Friday as an “important milestone” the release in Nigeria of 833 children by the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF); a group formed in 2013 to protect communities and support the country’s security forces against Boko Haram extremists.

“This is an important development for boys and girls of north-east Nigeria whose lives have been deeply affected by violence and insecurity,” said the UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, [Virginia Gamba](#). “I also want to highlight that today’s release of children is the result of months of productive work and collaboration between the CJTF and the United Nations... We expect more children to be separated from the CJTF soon.”

For over nine years, Nigeria’s north-east has been in the grip of a brutal conflict between various non-state armed groups, including Boko Haram, and the Nigerian military. This has resulted in the recruitment of thousands of children by the various militias.

This release by the CJTF comes after it was named in the UN Secretary-General’s Annual Report for Children and Armed Conflict and an [action plan](#) was subsequently developed and signed in September 2017. In the agreement, the group committed to ending and preventing the recruitment of children and agreed to release all children from their ranks.

The United Nations has supported this process by providing training and awareness raising sessions to members of the CJTF and communities.

This is the first formal release since the agreement, but the [UN Children’s Fund](#) (UNICEF) estimates that another 600 boys and girls remain within the ranks of the CJTF in the city of Maiduguri, and many more youngsters remain in other armed groups, either in combat or support roles.

“The release of these children from CJTF shows commitment to implement the provisions of the Action Plan and to uphold international humanitarian law, human rights laws as well as other regional and national legislations, protecting children’s rights,” said Pernille Ironside, Deputy Representative of UNICEF in Nigeria.

We have an opportunity to help these children heal and rebuild their lives – Special Representative Virginia Gamba.

Special Representative Gamba noted that the Nigerian authorities will be providing reintegration services to all children released today, with support from UNICEF and other child protection organizations.

“We have an opportunity to help these children heal and rebuild their lives,” said the Special Representative. “I call on all those who can support this process to work with us to ensure they have access to the best possible services.”

Since 2017, UNICEF and its partners have supported the Nigeria authorities in its efforts to reintegrate more than 8,700 children released by parties to the conflict. This work has involved tracing their families, getting them home and offering psychological and economic support, an education, vocational trainings, as well as helping them overcome the stigma they face from their association with armed groups.

While today's release of children is an "important milestone" for the protection of children in Nigeria, Ms. Gamba regretted that children in the country's north-east continue to be subjected to grave violations.

During the first six months of 2018 alone, 37 children, the majority of whom were girls, were used as 'human bombs' to harm civilians. During the same period, 349 children were killed or maimed, and another 140 children were abducted.

The Special Representative also expressed concern over children detained by the authorities for their – or their parents' – alleged association with non-state armed groups. Calling on the Nigerian Government to consider these children primarily as victims, she appealed for a handover of these children to civilian care "without delay".

[UN chief praises Malaysia's death penalty repeal as 'major step forward'](#)

Malaysia has announced that it plans to abolish executions, a move hailed by United Nations chief António Guterres on Thursday, as a "major step forward."

The nation joins some 170 other States that have implemented a moratorium, or ended the practice of the death penalty; a policy that the Secretary-General endorsed earlier this week, commemorating the World Day against the Death Penalty, on 10 October.

Spokesperson for Mr. Guterres, Stéphane Dujarric, said in a statement that the UN chief saw the decision as a stride toward eliminating the death penalty worldwide.

"The Secretary-General commends this decision as a major step forward in a global movement towards the universal abolition of the death penalty," said the statement.

In the United States on Thursday, the Pacific north-western state of Washington's supreme court also announced that it was striking down the death penalty on constitutional grounds, making Washington one of 19 US states who've imposed a ban.

[Earlier this week](#), the UN Chief urged all nations to "put an end to the death penalty now," noting that in some parts of the world, executions are still carried out in secret, or without due process.

Mr. Dujarric said that in Secretary-General's salute to Malaysia's repeal, the chief "seizes this opportunity to call on all countries which still

retain it, to follow the encouraging example of Malaysia.”