

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

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Global Update

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Mr. President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

As we meet, conflicts are spiraling.

The military escalation between Israel and Iran is deeply worrying.

I join all those appealing for de-escalation and urgent diplomatic negotiations to end these attacks and find a way forward. And I call for full respect of international law by both sides, in particular the protection of civilians in densely populated areas.

Meanwhile, climate chaos is raging on.

And in every region of the world, economic uncertainty is taking root, while technology is developing uncontrolled, and at dizzying speed.

Behind each crisis, people are suffering. We must never lose sight of this fact.

The United Nations was founded to end war, reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, and promote justice and international law.

For 80 years, those promises helped to deliver a greater measure of peace and sustainable development. Life expectancy increased by 25 years. The number of people with a basic education doubled.

States agreed on wide-ranging laws of war. They adopted treaties on women's rights, on the environment, on disarmament, on preventing genocide.

Despite edging close to nuclear annihilation several times, reason prevailed.

Our global agreements have proven themselves over decades, providing a vision for a better future.

Today, we see dramatic steps to weaken them, creating a more dangerous world for us all.

Can we sit by as global security and prosperity are undermined?

Will we watch as the rule of law is eroded?

Can we continue as usual, while powerful countries cast aside the agreements that underpin our lives?

Can we risk massive conflict based on leaders' personal assessments and agendas?

We must ask ourselves, is this the world the framers of the Charter imagined?

And we must answer with the strongest possible defence of international law and human rights.

The current trajectory – of escalating conflict and blatant disregard for international human rights and humanitarian law – is indefensible.

Civilians are deliberately attacked.

Parties to conflict starve and rape as weapons of war.

Life-saving humanitarian aid is obstructed, and humanitarian aid workers are targeted.

And accountability is often absent.

Mr. President,

Israel's means and methods of warfare are inflicting horrifying, unconscionable suffering on **Palestinians in Gaza**. More than 55,000 Palestinians have been killed, including many thousands of children, according to the Ministry of Health in Gaza, and the attacks continue unabated. Israel has weaponized food and blocked lifesaving aid. I urge immediate, impartial investigations into deadly attacks on desperate civilians trying to reach food distribution centres. Disturbing, dehumanizing rhetoric from senior Israeli government officials is reminiscent of the gravest of crimes.

And Israel's refusal to allow international journalists to report from Gaza has helped its armed forces and Hamas to avoid transparency and accountability.

The facts speak for themselves. Everyone in government needs to wake up to what is happening in Gaza. All those with influence must exert maximum pressure on Israel and Hamas, to put an end to this unbearable suffering.

In the West Bank, no day passes without attacks by Israeli Security Forces and settlers killing, detaining and forcibly displacing Palestinians. Settlements are illegal; annexation is illegal.

Attacks on Israelis by armed Palestinians also continue, in both Israel and the occupied West Bank.

All of this is deeply worrying. Only an immediate ceasefire leading to a two-state solution, with Gaza as an integral part of a Palestinian State, can offer sustainable peace. All Israeli hostages must be freed immediately and unconditionally. All Palestinians detained arbitrarily must be released.

I am concerned by air and drone strikes by Israel in **Lebanon**, including in southern Beirut, which have killed civilians and destroyed homes and medical facilities. I urge full respect for the ceasefire to enable reconstruction, and the return home of displaced people on both sides of the border. At this critical juncture, it is key for the international community to support the Lebanese Government's efforts for much-needed institutional reforms and socio-economic recovery.

In **Ukraine**, as ceasefire talks stall, the conflict is escalating. Civilian casualties have increased significantly this year, as Russian armed forces used long-range weapons against cities and drones in frontline areas. While there have been exchanges of prisoners of war and, in some cases, civilian detainees, many are still in captivity. I urge the Russian Federation and Ukraine to commit to a full exchange of prisoners of war, and for the immediate release of Ukrainian civilians detained in Russia. We urgently need a comprehensive ceasefire leading to a peace agreement in line with the UN Charter and international law.

Sudan is plunging deeper into chaos and lawlessness, without the attention this situation demands. Hostilities have intensified in North Darfur and Kordofan, marked by grave violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. My Office documented a tripling in the number of arbitrary killings of civilians between February and April. This was largely due to summary executions by the Sudanese Armed Forces of alleged collaborators in Khartoum.

I remain deeply concerned about the situation in El Fasher, which has been under siege by the Rapid Support Forces for over a year. I am horrified by widespread sexual violence, including against children, and attacks on humanitarians. I urge the international community to press for a political solution, to stop the flow of arms, and to curb the business interests that are fueling this conflict. All parties must be held accountable.

In **Myanmar**, the military exploited the turmoil caused by the earthquake in March to double down on attacks against civilians, while restricting humanitarian access even further. Military operations have continued with reports of attacks on schools, religious sites, and other protected locations. This violence must end. I urge the parties to comply fully with international law, including the measures already ordered by the International Court of Justice to protect the Rohingya.

I remain deeply concerned about the human rights situation in the east of the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** and will provide a briefing later today.

The escalating hostilities in **South Sudan** are extremely worrying, threatening the country's already fragile peace process. In the first quarter of 2025, my Office documented that 739 people were killed, more than 650 injured, almost 150 abducted,

and 40 subjected to sexual violence. I urge the parties to cease hostilities, resume dialogue and uphold the 2018 Revitalized Peace Agreement.

I was horrified by the attacks near Pahalgam in Indian-Administered Kashmir. The perpetrators must be brought to justice. I urge both **India** and **Pakistan** to ensure the ceasefire holds, to prevent hateful rhetoric and disinformation, and to reestablish essential water sharing arrangements.

I renew my call for the immediate and unconditional release by the de facto Houthi authorities in **Yemen** of personnel from the United Nations, civil society organizations, and diplomatic missions, including eight of my own staff. These detentions are an affront to the entire international community.

Monsieur le Président,

Un certain nombre d'autres crises exigent également une attention urgente.

Haïti s'enfonce dans la tourmente, provoquant d'immenses souffrances. Au moins 2 680 personnes ont été tuées et 957 blessées entre janvier et mai. Les gangs renforcent leur emprise sur la capitale et étendent leur influence dans les régions du nord et du centre, tuant et violant des personnes, et incendiant des maisons, des écoles, des églises et des commerces. La formation de groupes d'autodéfense qui n'ont aucun compte à rendre est préoccupante.

J'espère que les pôles judiciaires convenus en avril pour lutter contre les violences sexuelles, la corruption et d'autres crimes seront mis en place sans tarder, et j'appelle à un soutien important à la mission des Nations Unies et la mission multinationale de soutien à la sécurité.

La **Libye** ne tient qu'à un fil. Les affrontements du mois dernier à Tripoli ont fait de nombreuses victimes civiles et menacent le processus fragile de réconciliation. Les forces de sécurité et les groupes armés tuent, enlèvent et détiennent leurs opposants politiques, en toute impunité. Je suis consterné par la persistance d'abus et de violations commis contre les migrants et réfugiés et j'appelle les autorités à enquêter sur la découverte de dizaines de corps dans des sites de détention.

En **Syrie**, l'annonce de la levée des sanctions et la création de commissions nationales pour la justice transitionnelle et les personnes disparues représentent de vraies opportunités. Toutefois, je suis préoccupé par des informations persistantes de violations contre certaines communautés, et j'appelle à renforcer les mesures de protection et de responsabilisation. Nous attendons les résultats de l'enquête sur les violences qui ont causé la mort de centaines de personnes dans les régions côtières plus tôt cette année. J'exhorte les autorités à veiller à ce que les auteurs soient tenus pour responsables, dans le respect des normes internationales. Une présence

significative de mon Bureau dans le pays serait essentielle pour soutenir un processus de justice transitionnelle global et centré sur les victimes.

En **Éthiopie**, les tensions politiques augmentent à nouveau au Tigré. Je demande à toutes les parties prenantes d'entamer un dialogue constructif, et de garantir la mise en œuvre de l'accord de cessation des hostilités. J'appelle également les autorités à protéger l'espace civique qui est si essentiel dans la période qui précède les élections l'année prochaine, à mettre fin aux détentions arbitraires et à l'intimidation des journalistes et des professionnels des médias, et à veiller au respect des garanties procédurales.

Mr. President,

A number of other crises also call for urgent attention.

Military authorities in **the Sahel** have consolidated their grip on power, frustrating the democratic aspirations of their people, while the human rights situation worsens. In **Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger**, thousands of civilians have been killed in attacks by extremist armed groups. We have also received reports of civilians killed by Government forces and their auxiliaries in all three countries. All responses to security threats must respect international law.

I am concerned by growing instability in **Nigeria**, which threatens to spill across borders. Armed groups have intensified killings, abductions, sexual violence, and forced recruitment, while intercommunal violence between farming communities and herders is increasing.

I am encouraged that the Interim Government and political parties in **Bangladesh** are making progress through dialogue. I urge meaningful advances on reforms, to create the environment for free and inclusive elections. However, I am concerned about recent changes to legislation to allow the banning of political parties and organizations and all related activities. This unduly restricts the freedoms of association, expression, and assembly.

My Office hopes to reach agreement on our expanded presence soon.

Mr. President,

Around the world, at least 625 human rights defenders and media workers were killed or disappeared in 2024, according to data gathered by my Office. That is one every 14 hours.

In many places around the world, civil society and the media are being vilified, harassed, and silenced. But it is precisely civil society and the media who hold power to account, and must be protected.

In a troubling trend, authorities in several countries with upcoming elections, including **Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Honduras, Peru and Uganda**, among others, are banning public gatherings, detaining opposition leaders, undermining civil society and attacking human rights defenders. I am closely following the recent developments in **Bolivia**. Electoral integrity must be preserved ahead of elections in August. Dialogue and respect for the rule of law must prevail.

In **Somalia**, the arrest and detention of journalists and media workers is undermining freedom of expression and creating a climate of fear. Some 26 journalists and media workers have been arrested in Mogadishu so far this year.

My Office is documenting increased arbitrary detentions and intimidation of political opponents and media workers in **Venezuela**, following the 2024 elections. I have serious concerns about torture and ill-treatment in detention and violations of due process. I will provide an update on 27 June.

In **Türkiye**, I am concerned about mass detentions, including of opposition figures, on charges of corruption and terrorism. All those detained for the legitimate exercise of their rights must be released immediately.

In **Georgia and El Salvador**, new laws make it more difficult for NGOs and independent media to access foreign funding. This could harm their ability to operate freely and effectively. Similar legislation is under discussion in **Hungary**. I urge the government to reconsider.

In the **Russian Federation**, I remain deeply concerned by the ongoing suffocation of dissenting voices, civil society, lawyers, and the independent media. Criminal charges and harsh sentences for people who criticize state policy or legislation are contrary to international human rights standards.

During my visit to **Serbia** last month, I was struck by the courage and resilience of young people, who have mobilised for accountability, transparency and the rule of law. Their voices need to be heard and respected.

I continue to engage directly with **China** on a wide range of issues. I am concerned about lack of progress on much-needed legal reform to ensure compliance with international human rights law. I also regret that there has not yet been a resolution to the individual cases we have raised. My Office continues to receive worrying reports of violations in Xinjiang, including undue prison sentences, incommunicado detention, and restrictions on fundamental rights. In Hong Kong, the continued application of national security laws raises serious concerns about the shrinking of civic space. In

Tibet, there are ongoing infringements on cultural and other rights. I call for the release of all individuals detained for exercising their rights, and to align legislation and policies with international human rights law.

Mr. President,

Social tensions are often rooted in systemic, long-standing discrimination based on race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, migrant status, caste, and other characteristics.

Policies to tackle such discrimination have had important successes in all regions of the world.

Some call these DEI policies. I call them standing up for equality.

When we look at the pushback against such policies, we see it for what it is: a fundamental misrepresentation that reveals a strategic decision to scapegoat vulnerable groups.

Discrimination is neither rare nor random; it is widespread. Across 119 countries, one in five people reported experiencing discrimination in the past year, according to data gathered by my Office.

Colonialism's brutal legacy persists. Racism remains a scourge.

People of African descent continue to suffer disproportionately from excessive use of force, including deaths at the hands of law enforcement, in **Brazil, the United States, and beyond.**

Data gathered by my Office shows that worldwide, women face discrimination at more than double the level experienced by men.

In parts of the Russian Federation and the United States, there are severe restrictions on women's reproductive rights and rights to healthcare. These rights are essential to women's participation and leadership in every aspect of life.

More broadly, I call on all states to implement gender quotas for women's political representation, and I regret that some countries are abolishing them.

In Iran, I note the temporary suspension of the so-called Hijab law and I urge its full repeal, along with all related laws and practices that restrict the rights of women and girls.

And in **Afghanistan,** the *de facto* authorities continue to enforce a systematic policy of erasing women and girls from public life. Even their voices are silenced outside the home, and women are banned from higher education and most employment.

Disability rights also face pushback after years of progress. Some countries are reducing accessibility and cutting funding for access programmes. Influential figures have openly mocked people with disabilities.

LGBTIQ+ people continue to face legal restrictions, hate speech and even violence.

In **West Africa**, draconian laws threaten to criminalize consensual same-sex relations and restrict the work of human rights defenders supporting LGBTIQ+ people.

In **Argentina** and **the United States**, government officials have made statements vilifying transgender and non-binary people, while restricting their rights.

Georgia, Hungary, Slovakia and Türkiye are among countries that have adopted, or are considering, laws that could prohibit LGBTIQ+ advocacy, and ban Pride marches and educational material in schools. In **Uganda**, the Anti-Homosexuality Act fuels systemic violence and discrimination. At least 70 cases involving 88 victims were documented in the first four months of this year.

Migrants and refugees are also targeted by hate speech, unjust legal restrictions, scapegoating and other forms of discrimination in many parts of the world.

In **Tunisia**, anti-migrant rhetoric from public officials has fueled physical attacks and online hate campaigns.

Close to 640,000 **Afghans** returned to their country from **Pakistan and Iran** in recent months. More than 250,000 of them were forced to do so. Regardless of legal and documentation status, Afghans forced to return may encounter serious protection risks, especially women and girls, who face severe persecution.

Migrant workers from Myanmar face deportation from **Thailand**, sometimes followed by conscription into the Myanmar armed forces.

I am disturbed by reports that the immigration authorities in the **Dominican Republic** deported pregnant women migrants from Haiti and those who had just given birth.

Here in **Europe**, I am concerned that several leaders recently called for changes to the interpretation of human rights law on complex issues of migration governance.

I urge EU countries to put human rights at the centre of new regulations on returns and migration governance more generally, including by expanding safe and regular pathways.

In the **United States**, the arrest and deportation of large numbers of non-nationals, including to third countries, raise serious concerns over respect for their rights.

As people protest against these developments, I urge the authorities to respect the right to peaceful assembly, and to uphold human rights in law enforcement, including by

refraining from any resort to military force when civilian authorities are capable of maintaining public order.

Mr. President, distinguished delegates,

As disturbing as all this pushback is, we must not fall for the hype.

This is not a global phenomenon.

The vast majority of countries around the world continue to support the expansion of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Half the world's population now benefits from effective national human rights Institutions that work with my Office. That figure has tripled in the past two decades.

And policies to promote equality are working.

In **Brazil and Nigeria**, for example, quotas for minorities and marginalized groups have contributed to greater representation in education and employment.

Countries including **Bolivia, Chile, Fiji, and Peru** have implemented initiatives to promote the participation of Indigenous Peoples, including reserving seats in national parliaments.

The government of **Guatemala** has started to hold monthly meetings with Indigenous Peoples and people of African Descent, leading to several local agreements on territorial claims.

Thailand recently became the first country in Southeast Asia to legalize marriage equality.

Timor Leste recently passed a law stipulating that police must carry out their duties without discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation.

Pakistan has outlawed child marriage in Islamabad – a historic legal breakthrough.

The first resolution on discrimination based on work and descent adopted by the **African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights** is an important step to address deep-seated stigma.

In **Somalia**, the new National Disability Rights Bill provides a framework for action and inclusion.

And around the world, I am pleased to see governments working to implement their pledges under our **Human Rights 75 initiative**, with new laws on access to information, reforms to criminal justice systems, and stronger engagement with human rights mechanisms.

Mr. President,

Many of the poorest people in the world are falling even further behind, with their rights to food, health and an adequate standard of living under assault. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is slipping out of reach.

More than half of low-income countries are currently in, or at high risk of, debt distress. Many are also on the frontlines of the climate crisis. And the development finance they desperately need is dwindling, as major economies shift their priorities, expand defence budgets, and cut development finance.

The recent imposition of soaring tariffs may seem like a high-stakes poker game, with the global economy as the bank.

But the shockwaves of a trade war will hit Least Developed Countries with the force of a tsunami. **Caribbean countries** and **small island developing states** are among those that will suffer most. The impact on countries with large export sectors, including **Bangladesh, Cambodia, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam**, could be devastating.

Higher tariffs could put healthcare, education and a nutritious diet out of reach for many.

Higher tariffs could also roll back gains on gender equality, as they have a disproportionate impact on women working in low-paid manufacturing jobs. Many Least Developed Countries have no social safety net, leaving people utterly unprotected.

I am deeply disturbed by approaches that treat the poorest people on earth as collateral damage.

Long-term global stability requires a fundamental shift to human rights and sustainable, inclusive development – not trade wars or arms races.

My Office is working around the world to realise the right to development.

We are supporting over 80 projects in 38 countries, **from Belize to Jordan and Kenya**, with budget analysis, advice on debt servicing, and policies that promote a human rights economy.

Sr. Presidente,

Las tecnologías digitales y los sistemas de inteligencia artificial ofrecen un gran potencial. Pero también tienen un lado oscuro. Si no actuamos rápidamente, podemos

perder la batalla y con consecuencias imprevisibles para el disfrute de los derechos humanos.

Es probable que el uso de la inteligencia artificial en sistemas militares ya haya contribuido a una gran cantidad de bajas civiles.

La vigilancia masiva facilitada por la inteligencia artificial plantea graves riesgos a los derechos a la privacidad y a la libertad de expresión.

La concentración del desarrollo de la inteligencia artificial en economías ricas amplía la brecha digital; y los sistemas de inteligencia artificial pueden perpetuar la discriminación basada en raza y género.

Regular esta tecnología requerirá transparencia, mente abierta e inclusión.

Los derechos humanos nos muestran el camino, al reforzar el Estado de Derecho, estableciendo claros marcos legales y asegurando una amplia participación.

Mr. President,

I reject the argument that human rights somehow stifle innovation.

On the contrary.

Innovation that ignores human rights has led to terrible consequences, from an algorithm that unjustly deprived families of social support, to border screening that relies on profiling.

Human rights are essential for innovation that delivers for people and planet – not just profits.

I welcome steps towards mandatory human rights due diligence in the development, deployment and use of AI technologies. **Brazil, the Republic of Korea and the EU** are considering such legislation.

In some cases, data protection authorities are stepping up. **Australia, France, Italy and the Netherlands** took legal action against a facial recognition company for breaching people's privacy.

Momentum is also building towards protecting workers. For example, the Hollywood actors' union reached agreement with major studios on the use of AI in filmmaking.

But we need much more.

Many countries lack the legal frameworks and resources to meet the challenges posed by AI, and could miss out on the opportunities it offers.

The coming months will see critical decisions about regulation, including the establishment of two United Nations mechanisms.

For the technology we want, these decisions and mechanisms must reflect the firm human rights commitments that are, not least, included in the Global Digital Compact.

Mr. President, distinguished delegates,

Populists and authoritarians are working hard with their so-called culture wars to distract people from today's very real problems.

But there is an alternative.

It lies in more human rights – not less.

Human rights provide stability and security in our troubled times. They are a bridge between governments and people; between generations past, present and future.

And they are guardrails on power, especially when it is unleashed in its most brutal forms.

The painstaking work of investigating and reporting abuses and violations, supporting human rights institutions, and addressing human rights emergencies are the best tools we have to prevent and mitigate conflict; and to build peace.

I am therefore deeply disturbed by attacks on the international institutions that underpin our rights, including the International Criminal Court. Sanctioning judges and prosecutors at national, regional or international levels, for doing their jobs, is an assault on the rule of law and corrodes justice.

This is only the latest in a series of attacks on multilateral institutions and mechanisms, including the United Nations; the International Court of Justice; Special Procedures mandate holders, and more. They must stop.

I am also deeply troubled by funding cuts to my Office, to the Human Rights Mechanisms, and to our partners in civil society.

Nearly three-quarters of our partner organizations told my Office they expect to lose more than 40 percent of their funding.

That means fewer early warnings; less advocacy for people who are wrongly imprisoned; fewer investigations into abuses and violations; and less accountability.

Funding cuts to my Office, and the broader human rights ecosystem, offer comfort to dictators and authoritarians.

But the vast majority, and our global security, will suffer.

At this testing time, we need governments and societies to stand up for human rights, in word and deed.

Thank you.