

Our Common Agenda



The choice before us is clear. Unless the bene-

increased the risk of direct confrontation among external actors, who, in certain situations, have become conflict parties in their own right. Non-State armed groups, including terrorist groups, have proliferated, and many of them retain close linkages with criminal interests. These groups often engage in illicit trafficking and diversion of small arms and light weapons and have access to the latest technology, as well as military-grade weapons acquired from poorly secured stockpiles and transfers from the illicit market, or from States themselves. The growing complexity of the conflict environment has made conflict resolution more difficult, as local and regional dynamics intersect in complex ways with the interests of external parties, and the presence of United Nations-designated terrorist groups operating across regions presents a host of challenges. Conflicts also exacerbate pre-existing patterns of discrimination. Misogyny, offline and online, fuels gender-based and sexual violence in all pa e

– is unpredictable. Advances in the life sciences have the potential to give individuals the power to cause death and disruption on a global scale.

The emergence of powerful software tools that can spread and distort content instantly and massively heralds a qualitatively different, new reality. As my policy brief on the integrity of public information¹¹ illustrates, misinformation, disinformation and hate speech are rampant on social media platforms and are deadly in volatile soci-

economically disadvantaged and youth. However, they can also be destabilizing if not managed properly. Failure to tackle head-on the challenges posed by climate change, and the inequalities it creates, through ambitious mitigation, adaptation and implementation of the loss and damage agenda, bolstered by adequate climate finance, will have devastating effects, for the planet as well as development, human rights and our shared peacebuilding objectives.

A NORMATIVE CHALLENGE

One of the greatest achievements of the United Nations is the development of a body of international law that governs relations among sovereign States. International law fosters predictability of behaviour, which increases trust. Even as Member States recognize and emphasize the importance of international law, it is sometimes challenged. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation represents one of the latest such challenges. Each violation of international law is dangerous, as it undermines one of the purposes of the United Nations contained in Article 1 of its Charter.

As we mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, human rights are facing a pushback in all regions. We see a significant global retrenchment of human rights¹⁶ and an erosion of the rule of law, including in contexts of armed conflict. Despite the recognition that the rule of law is the foundation for fair, just and peaceful societies, we are at grave risk of a rule of lawlessness, which would exacerbate global instability and turmoil. Growing polarization among States has also

begotten competing interpretations of human rights norms. There are increasing challenges

Principles for an effective collective security system

have proven effective in helping parties overcome mutual mistrust¹⁸ and can help build trust in national institutions. Various initiatives led by the United Nations to promote military transparency, such as the United Nations Report on Military Expenditures¹⁹ or the Register of Conventional Arms,²⁰ are designed to increase inter-State trust and confidence-building through enhanced transparency.

If trust among States is vital for international cooperation, trust between Governments and their people is integral to the functioning of societies. Over the past several decades, a consistent finding is that trust in public institutions has been on the decline globally.²¹ Low levels of trust indicate low social cohesion, which in turn is often closely linked to high levels of economic, political and gender inequalities.²² The waves of protests that have occurred globally throughout the past decade are an example of the growing alienation of citizens, in particular young people, who do not trust public institutions and other institutional mechanisms to peacefully address grievances, in particular in a context where civic space has become narrower.

SOLIDARITY

A community of nations must be underpinned by a sense of fellowship that recognizes a collective duty to redress injustices and support those in need. My report on Our Common Agenda was, at its core, a call for more solidarity. The asymmetries and inequities that exist among and within States, and the structural obstacles that sustain these, are as much a barrier to peace as they are for development and human rights.²³ If the purposes of the Charter are to be achieved, redressing the pervasive historical imbalances that characterize the international system – from the legacies of colonialism and slavery to the deeply unjust global financial architecture and anachronistic peace and security structures of today – must be a priority.

The concept of solidarity is embedded in the work of the United Nations. In the Millennium Declaration,²⁴ the General Assembly recognized solidarity as one of the essential values for the twenty-first century, noting that global challenges must be managed in a way that distributes the costs and burdens fairly in accordance with basic principles of equity and social justice. The concept of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capacities, in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, for example, is grounded in this idea. Sustainable Development Goal 17²⁵ – revitalizing the global partnership for development – remains a yardstick: from fair trade and technology transfers to debt relief and higher levels of development assistance, it outlines measurable actions to redress imbalances at the global level. Together with the wider 2030 Agenda, its reach goes beyond sustainable development and provides us with a blueprint for addressing underlying causes of conflict comprehensively.

Comprehensive commitments to equity and burden-sharing have been made explicit in the climate action,²⁶ humanitarian²⁷ and sustainable development²⁸ agendas. They are equally integral to international peace and security. The global partnership for peacekeeping is an exam-

A vision for multilateralism in a world in transition

Achieving peace and prosperity in a world of interlocking threats demands that Member States find new ways to act collectively and cooperatively. My vision for a robust collective security system rests on Member States moving away from a logic of competition. Cooperation does not require States to forgo their national interest, but to recognize that they have shared goals. To achieve this vision, we must adapt to the geopolitical realities of today and the threats of tomorrow. I propose a series of foundational steps which, if implemented by Member States, would create opportunities and momentum currently lacking in collective action for peace. These building blocks, as well as the actions proposed in the next section, take into consideration the recommendations put forward by the High-level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism.

The Charter and international law Without the basic norms enshrined in the Charter – such as the principles of sovereignty, non-intervention in domestic affairs and the peaceful settlement of disputes – international relations could degenerate into chaos. The obligation for Member States to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, as contained in Article 2 (4) of the Charter, remains as vital as ever. The legitimacy of collective enforcement actions authorized by the Security Council must be carefully safeguarded.

Diplomacy for peace. The driving force for a new multilateralism must be diplomacy. Diplomacy should be a tool not only for reducing the risks

of conflict but for managing the heightened fractures that mark the geopolitical order today and carving out spaces for cooperation for shared interests. This demands, above all else, a commitment to the peaceful settlement of disputes. The underutilization of the different tools referred to in Article 33 of the Charter remains

However, these structures have deteriorated in the past decade and have not kept pace with the shifting geopolitical environment. We need durable and enforceable mechanisms, in particular among nuclear powers, that are resilient to shocks which could trigger escalation. Efforts to enhance the transparency of military posture and doctrines, including those related to new technologies, are critical. Avoiding direct confronta-

related death rates. My vision for A New Agenda for Peace is designed to boost progress towards this goal. Violence perpetrated by organized criminal groups, gangs, terrorists or violent extremists, even outside of armed conflicts, threatens lives and livelihoods around the world.

Recommendations for action

PREVENTION AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL: ADDRESSING STRATEGIC RISKS AND GEOPOLITICAL DIVISIONS

In an era of global fragmentation, where the risk of bifurcating politics, economies and digital spheres is acute, and where nuclear annihilation and a third world war are no longer completely unthinkable, we must step up our global prevention efforts. The United Nations should be at the centre of these efforts; to eliminate nuclear weapons, to prevent conflict between major powers; and to manage the negative impacts of strategic competition, which could have implications for the poorest and most vulnerable countries. By helping Member States manage disputes peacefully and preventing competition from escalating into confrontation, the United Nations is the pre-eminent hub of global prevention efforts.

ACTION 1: ELIMINATE NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Fifty-five years since the adoption of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the nuclear disarmament and arms control regime is eroding, nonproliferation is being challenged, and a qualitative race in nuclear armaments is under way. Member States must urgently reinforce the barrier against the use of nuclear weapons. The statement by the permanent members of the Security Council in January 2022, reaffirming that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought, was a welcome step. However, risk reduction does not suffice when the survival of humanity is at stake. The non-proliferation regime needs to be buttressed against a growing array of threats.

Non-proliferation and disclosure of nuclear weapons information are essential for global security.

ACTION 2: BOOST PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY IN AN ERA OF DIVISIONS

One of the greatest risks facing humanity today is the deterioration in major power relations. It raises anew the spectre of inter-State war and may hasten the emergence of blocs with parallel sets of trade rules, supply chains, currencies, Internets or approaches to new technologies. Diplomacy

Recommendations

ACTION 6: ADDRESS THE INTERLINKAGES BETWEEN CLIMATE, PEACE AND SECURITY

It is critical to find concrete and mutually beneficial ways to address the effects of the climate crisis and respond to the urgent call for action from countries on the front lines. Increasing climate-related investment in conflict contexts is critical: only a very small share of climate finance flows to these countries, where compounding risk factors increase vulnerability to climate shocks. Climate policies must be designed in such a way that they do not lead to adverse effects on societies and economies and do not lead to the emergence of new grievances that can be instrumentalized politically. A business-as-usual approach will fail in a warming world. Innovative solutions to address the climate crisis, protect the most vulnerable, tackle the differentiated impacts on women and men and promote climate justice will send a resounding signal of solidarity.

Recommendations

- Recognize climate, peace and security as a political priority and strengthen connections between multilateral bodies to ensure that climate action and peacebuilding reinforce each other.
- For the Security Council, systematically address the peace and security implications of climate change in the mandates of peace operations and other country or regional situations on its agenda.
- Establish, under the aegis of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a dedicated expert group on climate action, resilience and peacebuilding to develop recommendations on integrated approaches to climate, peace and security.
- Establish a new funding window within the Peacebuilding Fund for more risk-tolerant climate finance investments.
- For the United Nations system, regional and subregional organizations, establish joint regional hubs on climate, peace and security to connect national and regional experiences, provide technical advice to Member States and help accelerate progress on this agenda.

ACTION 7: REDUCE THE HUMAN COST OF WEAPONS

At the heart of our peace and security engagements is a commitment to save human beings from violence. Armed conflicts are increasingly fought in populated centres, with devastating and indiscriminate impacts on civilians. Pursuant to Article 26 of the Charter, we must reverse the negative impact of unconstrained military spending and focus on the profound negative societal effects of public resources diverted to military activity rather than sustainable development and gender equality – an issue long emphasized as a concern, including in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action³⁸ – and adopt approaches underpinned by the imperative to address the humanitarian, gendered, disability and age-related impacts of certain weapons, methods and means of warfare. Member States should commit

Small arms and light weapons and their ammunition are the leading cause of violent deaths globally, in conflict and non-conflict settings alike. As recognized in my Agenda for Disarmament, their proliferation, diversion and misuse undermine the rule of law, hinder conflict prevention and peacebuilding, enable criminal acts, including terrorist acts, human rights abuses and gender-based violence, drive displacement and migration and stunt development. Regulatory frameworks and policy measures are essential, but insufficiently implemented. Addressing factors that can affect

by complex domestic, geopolitical and transnational factors, serve as a stark illustration of the limitations of ambitious mandates without ade-

ACTION 10: SUPPORT TO AFRICAN UNION AND SUBREGIONAL PEACE SUPPORT OPERATIONS

The proliferation of non-State armed groups that operate across borders has presented a major and growing threat in several regions of Africa, as have other conflict drivers and crises related to the interlocking threats described above. This calls for a new generation of peace enforcement

State behaviour. However, additional action is needed, and States should take concrete measures to prevent the extension and further escalation of conflict to the cyberdomain, including to protect human life from malicious cyberactivity.

Peace and security implications of artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence is both an enabling and a disruptive technology increasingly integrated into a broad array of civilian, military and dual-use

Improve global anticipation, coordination and preparedness to address biorisks

Risks to global biological and health security are diverse and interconnected. They go beyond the overt hostile use of biology in the form of development and use of biological weapons⁴² and include a range of actions that can undermine biological and health security.⁴³ Technological advances and the complex synergies and interactions between them continue to erode the barriers to the development of biological weapons. The number of people around the world who can manipu-

Recommendations

- Identify emerging and evolving biological risks; reinforce anticipation, coordination and preparedness for such risks, whether caused by natural, accidental or deliberate release of biological agents, and work with the United Nations system to provide options for strengthened prevention and response.
- Develop measures to address the risks involved in biotechnology and human enhancement technologies applied in the military domain. To do so, (i) set norms, rules, and principles of responsible behaviour on military uses of human enhancement and degradation technologies, including to increase transparency around defence planning and practices, and work with other stakeholders to set out guidelines and policies for responsible research; (ii) for States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction (Biological Weapons Convention) and the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (Chemical Weapons Convention), explore the potential implications of advances in neurobiology and related converging technologies for the respective governance regimes.

STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL GOVERNANCE

ACTION 12: BUILD A STRONGER COLLECTIVE SECURITY MACHINERY

The organs of the United Nations are vital for harmonizing the actions of Member States to attain common goals. However, some of their structures have become anachronistic and should be urgently updated for a more effective collective security system.

Reform of the Security Council

A Security Council that is more representative of the geopolitical realities of today, and of the contributions that different parts of the world make to global peace, is urgently needed. Most Member States acknowledge this, even if concrete progress remains elusive. But reform of Security Council membership must be accompanied by a genuine democratization of its working methods as outlined below.

Recommendations

- Make urgent progress in the intergovernmental negotiations on the reform of the Security Council to make this body more just and representative.
- For the Security Council, democratize its procedures as a way to enhance its ability to reach consensus and make the results of its decisions more durable, including by

Elevating the work of the Peacebuilding Commission

With its strong focus on national ownership, the Peacebuilding Commission can serve as a space for Member States to address issues that lie between peace and development, such as the links between inequalities, violence and conflict; the importance of the 2030 Agenda for prevention and peacebuilding; or the linkages between development, climate change and peace. It can create opportunities for South-South and triangular cooperation and help accompany countries that are exiting the Security Council's agenda. The 2025 review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture should operationalize the recommendations below and consider what adjustments need to be made in the Peacebuilding Commission's methods of work, composition and support capacities so that it can effectively perform these functions.

Recommendations

- Enhance the role of the Peacebuilding Commission as a convener of thematic discussions on cross-pillar issues, with a focus on the interdependent and mutually reinforcing nature of peace and development.
- Create a mechanism within the Commission to mobilize political and financial support for the implementation of the national and regional strategies suggested in action 3; and formalize the Commission's relationship with international financial institutions and regional development banks in order to align financing instruments with national priorities and enable the Commission to fulfil its mandate in marshalling resources for peacebuilding.
- Formalize the participation of regional and other organizations in the Commission to enable holistic engagement, coordination and inclusiveness in the deliberations of the Commission.
- The Security Council, the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Human Rights Council should ensure that the Commission is consulted in their proceedings. The Security Council in particular should more systematically seek the advice of the Commission on the peacebuilding dimensions of the mandates of peace operations.

Annex I

CONSULTATIONS WITH MEMBER STATES AND OTHER RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS

The Secretariat undertook consultations through three main channels: Member States and regional organizations; civil society; and the United Nations system.

Endnotes

- 1 Declaration on the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, para. 1.
- 2 Nan Tian and others, "Trends in world military expenditure, 2022", SIPRI Fact Sheet, April 2023.
- 3 Kristalina Georgieva, "Confronting fragmentation where it matters most: trade, debt, and climate action", IMF blog, 16 January 2023.
- 4 Report of the Secretary-General on the state of global peace and security ([A/74/786](#)).
- 5 Peace Research Institute Oslo, "New figures show conflict-related deaths at 28-year high, largely due to Ethiopia and Ukraine wars", 7 June 2023.
- 6 Uppsala University, "Armed conflict by type, 1946–2021", Uppsala Conflict Data Programme database. Available at https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/charts/graphs/png_22/armedconf_by_type.png.
- 7 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "Global trends 2022", 2022 Available at www.unhcr.org/global-trends.

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- 34 United Nations, "Our Common Agenda policy brief 6: reforms to the international financial architecture", May 2023.
- 35 United Nations, "The highest aspiration: a call to action for human rights", 2020.
- 36 See General Assembly resolution [76/305](#).
- 37 United Nations, "Our Common Agenda policy brief 6: reforms to the international financial architecture", May 2023.
- 38 www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/01/beijing-declaration.
- 39 See www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2021/09/un_2.0_-_quintet_of_change.pdf.
- 40 www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-outer-space-en.pdf.
- 41 United Nations, "Our Common Agenda policy brief 5: a global digital compact – an open, free and secure digital future for all", May 2023.
- 42 The development and use of biological weapons is effectively prohibited by the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction.
- 43 Examples include disinformation campaigns, refusal to share knowledge, vaccines or therapeutics, failure to provide adequate resources for research on diseases that mostly affect the global South, guarding intellectual property at the expense of human lives, or exploitative private sector practices in rolling out vaccines and medications to developing countries.
- 44 <https://dppa.un.org/en/new-agenda-for-peace>.

