

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Remarks of the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Vienna
International Conference: “Reinvigorating the United Nations”
Friday, January 27, 2023, Diplomatic Academy of Vienna**

Ambassador Brix,

Secretary-General Launsky-Tieffenthal,

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to join you today, to discuss a highly relevant topic at an important moment for the world.

For almost eight decades, the United Nations has been at the heart of an international order espousing equality and friendly relations among nations, peaceful resolution of disputes, and international cooperation to address global problems and promote human rights.

The pursuit of those principles was imperfect, but it made for a more peaceful world.

Now, that international order is coming under threat, and we may be facing a turning point in history.

The principles embodied by the UN are being tested, and we must do everything we can to safeguard them.

Conflicts and violence are engulfing the world, with around a quarter of the global population living in conflict-affected areas, while simmering tensions threaten to explode elsewhere.

War in Ukraine; death in the Middle East; lawlessness in Haiti; escalation in the Pacific; a surge of terrorism in the Sahel, and the list goes on. Stability is eroding every day, everywhere.

Divisions between East and West grow dangerously deep, while the economic gulf between the global North and South expands.

The COVID-19 pandemic threw global inequalities into sharp focus; while some contemplated vaccine options, others had neither vaccines nor hospital beds. Meanwhile, Oxfam estimates that the richest one per cent of people have acquired almost two-thirds of all new wealth since 2020.

The divides are just as deep in domestic and regional contexts, with politics becoming polarized and extremism running rampant in many parts of the world.

Globalization is put in question, while events continue to show just how interconnected our world is.

The expansion of digital spaces, and the growing amount of time people are spending online, have given rise to security risks and blind spots, as well as difficult questions about privacy, freedom, and responsibility.

Hateful and inciteful rhetoric spreads with alarming ease, and misinformation wins too many battles against facts.

At the same time, access to technology and digital advantages remains deeply unequal, furthering divisions.

Trust is dangerously in short supply: trust between nations, trust between generations, trust between different segments of society, and trust of people in their governments.

All of this against the backdrop of a planet that we are cooking into oblivion, as climate change threatens irreversible damage.

The chaotic state of the world translates into direct and severe impact on people's lives every day.

A record 100 million people were forcibly displaced last year.

Gains against poverty are being lost, and human rights progress is being reversed.

In Afghanistan, women and girls have been denied their right to education, an astonishing reversal that shows just how far back we can go.

It is a bleak and alarming picture, but it confirms, rather than questions, the importance of the UN.

When the world has needed transformative action, the UN has historically proven to be crucial.

It was the UN that provided the platform to move from a world where nearly a third of all people lived in territories reliant on colonial powers, to the post-colonial world we live in today.

It was the UN that brought the countries of the world together to elaborate a universal declaration on human rights.

In my own country, Egypt, when conflict broke out in 1956, it was the UN General Assembly that chose to stand united for peace, and helped stop the hostilities.

And through the years, the UN has been a voice and a defender of the marginalized and the vulnerable.

Specialized agencies with global reach have been established to help refugees, to support children, and to stand up for women and their rights.

The UN has also been a powerful voice for mother earth, promoting science and calling for the urgently needed course-correction towards a greener future.

Today, the UN system is present and delivering aid in conflict and crisis areas around the world, feeding the hungry, healing the sick, and helping those in need.

When food prices soared, the UN brokered the Black Sea Grain Initiative, which has facilitated the export of more than 18 million metric tons of grains and foodstuff.

When COVID gripped the world, the UN pushed for equitable vaccination through COVAX, and made the case for Africa's need for vaccines.

As violence spreads, more than eighty-seven thousand UN peacekeepers around the world are putting their lives on the line every day to protect people.

Meanwhile, the UN remains the platform for dialogue, with its unmatched convening power.

Even amidst historic divisions, the world can still come together at the UN, to work towards peace and to pool expertise and resources to solve global problems.

Here in Vienna, the UN system presence exemplifies the power of multilateral action.

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime, which I have the honour to lead, is helping countries address challenges such as organized crime, corruption, terrorism, and violent extremism, providing assistance in the face of growing risks and vulnerabilities.

The International Atomic Agency is playing a crucial role in preventing nuclear catastrophe in Ukraine.

UNIDO is promoting and accelerating sustainable industrial development.

And the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization Prep-com is helping to keep a watchful eye on nuclear testing.

Excellencies,

The UN is taking the initiative to adapt to the needs of our age, and to right the course on our path to the Sustainable Development Goals.

During the last few years, the United Nations Development System has been undergoing extensive reform, to provide clearer frameworks that meet needs on the ground, ensure synergies, and maximize impact.

The UN is present and delivering. But challenges at hand are unprecedented, and we must break new ground.

Leading the way is the Secretary-General's report on 'Our Common Agenda', launched in 2021, and currently guiding action across the UN system.

The report outlines a vision to accelerate the implementation of existing agreements, most notably the 2030 Agenda, underlining trust, inclusion, sustainability, justice, prevention, and partnership.

It specifically addresses the need to upgrade the UN to meet modern challenges, pursuing a new "UN 2.0" through: better data and analysis; innovation and digital transformation; strategic foresight; performance and results orientation; and behavioural science.

The report on Our Common Agenda also envisions a stronger multilateral system centred around the UN, including a New Agenda for Peace with greater investment in peacebuilding, reshaped responses to violence, and new ideas for risk reduction and adaptation.

Inclusion is at the core of the UN's future.

Gender equality has become a priority across the UN, both in our work and in our offices; a new UN Office on Youth has been established; and the role of non-governmental stakeholders is growing across the UN.

Meanwhile, the Secretary-General's Call to Action on Human Rights, launched in 2020, remains highly relevant to fight back against dangerous reversals.

Equally important are his repeated calls to fix an unequal international financial system, to relieve developing countries of debt, and to agree on a global SDG Stimulus Package for countries of the Global South.

There are signs of hope.

The COP27 climate conference took a historic step towards climate justice by establishing the long-awaited loss and damage fund.

And as we look forward, I am hopeful that the 2024 Summit of the Future will be an opportunity to revitalize multilateralism, and to make further progress towards a stronger United Nations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The United Nations is striving to rise to the challenges ahead.

But that is only half of the equation.

The other half lies with the Member States of the UN, and their willingness to support the organization, uphold its values, and abide by the international order.

Their commitment to invest human and financial resources is also paramount.

The world does not need a new order. It needs to return to order, and to protect the values that have brought us so far since 1945.

We need to restore the belief in multilateral solutions and collective action, and to breathe new life into multilateralism, with the UN at its heart.

We simply need to commit to truly work together, for justice and for peace.

The ones with the most at stake are people and societies. They must take the lead in calling for a world united.

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Young people in particular must speak up and be heard. They are the voice of tomorrow.

Civil society organizations are important advocates for the values of the UN Charter.

Academia is a defender of reason and the virtues of a rules-based international order.

The United Nations can only be as strong as the faith that people, societies, and countries have in what it represents.

At this pivotal moment, let us preserve the belief that security and prosperity are a shared global responsibility, and that a world working together is a better world.

Thank you.