

The Secretary-General's press conference on 2024 priorities

08 Feb 2024

Dear members of the Media.

Yesterday, I addressed the General Assembly focusing on priorities for this year and beyond.

It is a long and detailed agenda – but the varied challenges are connected by a common thread.

Peace.

The need for peace in all its dimensions because peace is the tie that binds.

But, too often, we face instead a gordian knot.

On issues of peace and security – we face rising conflict and geopolitical divisions.

On issues of peace within communities – we see rising polarization.

On issues of peace with justice – we have rising inequalities.

On issues of peace with nature, we have rising global emissions and global temperatures.

We are at a moment of truth – but we have a breakdown of trust.

Trust in institutions. Trust in leaders. And also trust in governments and multilateral institutions.

The way to restore trust is by making a real and positive difference in people's lives. By solving people's problems.

Yesterday, I presented a clear-eyed, sober assessment of the world. This is no time for pulling punches.

We have a number of existential challenges:

The age-old nuclear threat.

The climate emergency and the dangers posed by unchecked artificial intelligence.

But we are not sufficiently united and organized to respond effectively to any of them.

On top of that, we face a multiplication of conflicts and geopolitical divides.

Much can be done across the board.

To end conflict, to effectively address threats posed by Artificial Intelligence, to take climate action, to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

But it will require a serious conversation between developed and developing countries; between rich and emerging economies; between north and south, east and west.

It will require reforming institutions that were built by a bygone world, for a bygone age.

Starting with reform of the Security Council and the Bretton Woods institutions.

We are no longer in a world of two superpowers or in a unipolar world.

Multipolarity creates opportunities for justice and balance in global relations.

But when multipolarity is not accompanied by effective, renewed and inclusive mechanisms of multilateral governance – the risks multiply.

So, this is a year for focusing on the future – and we have our Summit of the Future in September and this is a year for focusing on people's challenges also today.

We have institutions that need to be aligned with our times. And we have principles to guide us, that we must preserve in all situations.

Respect for the United Nations Charter.

Respect for international law and international humanitarian law.

Peace with justice that addresses inequalities.

Following those principles will lead us to the pathways to solutions that I laid out yesterday.

The New Agenda for Peace. The SDG Stimulus. The Global Digital Compact. The work of the Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence. The Climate Solidarity Pact. And much more.

And on the peace and security front, I believe it is especially critical to find solutions to two burning conflicts that are having profound global consequences: Ukraine and Gaza.

This month marks the two-year anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

It is essential that we work for a just and sustainable peace, but a peace in line with the UN Charter and international law.

And in Gaza, the situation just keeps getting worse.

In addition to the death and destruction from military operations -- starvation and disease are bearing down on Palestinians in Gaza.

Despite some limited steps, our humanitarian operations continue to face denials of access, delays, impediments, and multiple dangers– including live fire.

One of our convoys was damaged by Israeli naval artillery earlier this week.

Just 10 out of 61 planned aid convoys to the north reached their destination in January.

Let's be clear: Denial of humanitarian access means denial of humanitarian relief for civilians.

Food and water are needed for a desperate population. Medicine and fuel are needed for the desperation in hospitals. And other life-saving supplies for a population in a terrible situation.

I am particularly worried by reports that the Israeli military intends to focus next on Rafah.

Half of Gaza's population is now crammed into Rafah. They have nowhere to go.

They have no homes – and they have no hope.

They are living in over-crowded make-shift shelters, in unsanitary conditions without running water, electricity and adequate food supplies.

All of this underscores the need for full respect for international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians and ensuring their essential needs are met.

We are clear in condemning the horrific attacks of Hamas. We are also clear in condemning the violations of international humanitarian law in Gaza.

We need an immediate humanitarian ceasefire.

We need also the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.

And we need real, visible, concrete steps towards a two-State solution – based on UN resolutions, international law and previous agreements.

Repeated bloody hostilities, and decades of tensions and occupation, have failed to provide a State for the Palestinians, or security for Israelis.

In the Middle East and around the world, we need peace in every sense.

Our world cannot afford to wait.

And I thank you for your attention.

New York, 8 February 2024