



# THE UN & YOU

BY TERESA KOTTURAN, SCN • SEPT. 2017

## The Global Leaders Gather in New York for the 72nd UN General Assembly

Heads of States and Ministers from all the Member States of the United Nations gathered from September 18, 2017 to participate in the annual debate on the theme: “Focusing on People – Striving for Peace and a Decent Life for All on a Sustainable Planet.” The leaders were expected to launch discussions on the global challenges of the day – poverty, hunger, conflicts, refugees, the unprecedented natural disasters and the nuclear threats - for a common international response.

In his address to the world leaders, the Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stated, “we are a world in pieces. We need to be a world at peace.” He also said that the ‘world is seeing insecurity rising, inequality growing, conflict spreading, climate changing, societies fragmenting and political discourse polarizing.’ He called on the global leaders to come up with a political solution for the current nuclear threat that

looms on the horizon. He said ‘this is a time for statesmanship; we must not sleepwalk our way into war.’ On terrorism, he said that it is not enough to fight terrorists in the battlefield, but we need to address the root causes of radicalization. He called for a “surge in diplomacy’ and “a leap in conflict prevention for tomorrow. Only political solutions can bring peace to the unresolved conflicts in Syria, Yemen, South Sudan, Afghanistan and elsewhere. He called on the



Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed

authorities of Myanmar to end the military operations in the Rakhine - which is driving thousands Rohingya Muslims to flee - and to provide access to humanitarian service and address the grievances of the people.

While it is important not to link any one weather event with climate change, we are witnessing the impact of extreme weather all over the world and it may become the new normal – this is what scientists are predicting. The Secretary-General also urged the Governments to implement the historic Paris Climate Agreement. There is an urgency to control carbon



72nd UN General Assembly President Miroslav Lajcak

emissions to control the rising temperatures.

According to the Secretary-General, migrants, refugees and the internally displaced persons are not the problem we face today; 'the problem lies in conflicts, persecution and hopeless poverty.' Migration should be an option for all, not just for the global elite. Safe and orderly migration should be the norm of the day.

The 72nd President of the UN General Assembly, Miroslav Lajcak urged the world leaders to engage in working for the people and keeping promises made to curb poverty, advance prosperity and protect the planet. The three areas he would like to focus are – 'peace and prevention,' 'people and planet' and 'prosperity.' According to him, "we are spending too much time and money reacting to conflicts and not enough on preventing them." He called for integrating prevention with development and human rights work. In this regard he stated, 'when people can live decent lives – when rights are respected – when rule of law is present in everyday life- it is harder to turn societies to conflict.

He called on the world leaders to change the way they work on a daily basis and engage in real dialogue, not a succession of monologues. "We cannot call for an end to business as usual – and then continue to do business as usual." People everywhere would like to see a change in the way the UN operates around the

world; to make that happen, the world leaders should start it in New York.

Every Member State and people around the world has been calling for the Reform of the UN, to be fit for the needs of 21st century. On September 18, the Secretary-General held a meeting with world leaders, pledging to overhaul the United Nations to 'make the world body more responsive to the people it serves and less on process, more on delivery and less on bureaucracy.' "To serve the people we support and the people who support us, we must be nimble and effective, flexible and efficient," he stated. He would like to see an end to the 'fragmented structures, Byzantine procedures and endless red tape.' 128 countries have signed a ten point 'Political Declaration which expresses support for UN Reform. Mr. Donald Trump, who was present at this meeting called for "truly bold reforms" and pledged the support of his administration and agreed to be "partners in your work."

The UN also held a High-Level Meeting on the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. The Secretary-General stated, 'sexual exploitation and abuse has no place in our world; it is a global menace and it must end.' It is a demonstration of political commitment at the highest level in condemning and committing to combating this scourge. He called on world leaders, heads of international and regional organizations and civil society leaders to stand with

him in solidarity to condemn the scourge of sexual exploitation and abuse.

The SG has appointed a new Victims' Rights Advocate, Ms. Jane Connors of Australia will develop a system-wide mechanisms and policies to promote reliable gender and child sensitive processes for victims and witnesses to file complaints.

In 2016 the Secretary-General had established a Trust Fund for victims of sexual exploitation and abuse and Member States who contributed to his fund were recognized while others were encouraged to participate. 57 Heads of States have signed on to the Circle of Leadership on the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation in the United Nations operations announced on that day.

Launch of Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC) by International Labor Organization (ILO), UN Women and the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) took place on September 18 to raise up the women's pay across the world to equal men's. It hopes to put an end to the biggest injustice, penalizing women deliberately and sidelining them from mainstream society. In 2014, on an average the women earned 17% less than men. Equal pay for equal value of work is not only the right thing, but the best thing to do. Equal pay for women translates into lifelong benefits for them as well as their families, especially in reducing poverty and in creating inclusive societies.

Another important meeting – Conference on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) took place during the 72nd General Assembly. CTBT bans nuclear testing on the Earth's surface, in the atmosphere, underwater and underground. "A CTBT that is in force would be a milestone on the road to a world free of nuclear weapons. It has the potential to prevent a nuclear arms race and an escalation of regional and bilateral tensions," said Mr. Antonio Guterres. It is especially the need of the hour, to diffuse tensions in nuclear hotspots, such as the Korean Peninsula. We need to de-escalate the crisis from getting out of hand. The CTBT has provided the world with global high-tech monitoring systems for nuclear explosions, something no single country could achieve. The absence of the CTBT's entry into force prevents the use of on-site inspections. Since the adoption of the CTBT in 1996,

183 countries have signed it and 166 countries have ratified it; yet the future of the test ban remains in jeopardy, since eight states – China, Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, Pakistan, the United States and North Korea have not ratified it.

On this day, another Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, world's first legally-binding treaty adopted on July 7, 2017 by 122 votes in favor, was opened by signing at a UN ceremony. 50 States, including the Holy See have signed the Treaty and three States deposited their instruments of ratification with the UN. This Treaty is the product of increasing concerns over the risk posed by nuclear weapons and it is an important step towards the universally-held goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.

An important Side Event during the week was "The Protection of Religious Minorities in Conflict sponsored by the Permanent Mission of Hungary to the UN, the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the UN and the Institute of Cultural Diplomacy. In his address, Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher noted that 'war and conflict regularly provide the backdrop for religious minorities to be targeted for persecution, violence, enslavement, exile, murder, ethnic cleansing and other crimes against humanity.'" He listed several essential elements needed to protect religious minorities, like equality before the law, regardless of religion, race, and ethnicity, based on the principle of citizenship; mutual autonomy and positive collaboration between people.

The past week saw the heads of States participating in the GA and many other important meetings. If you would like to more about these events and issues, please go to the UN website – UN Web TV for the archived events to listen.