

VOICES FROM THE FRONTLINE

FEATURE

A refugee's call to end war and conflict

Zaynab Ali Abdi

PERSPECTIVES

Reproductive rights, nuclear testing on indigenous land, democracy, the future of work, and the war in Ukraine

Nathan Law, Kate Dearden, Loretta Ross, Sue Coleman-Hasseldine, and Samir Ghannam

INTERVIEW

Zeinab Badawi

Rianna Nayee

LAST WORD

The fate of the UN amidst a 'polycrisis'

Comfort Ero



The United Nations Association – UK (UNA-UK) builds movements, delivers expert insight, and designs campaigns to inspire a global community united in its pursuit of equality, sustainability and peace.



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Letter from the Editor

Marissa Conway

Upon the publication of UNA-UK's 2023 magazine, it is evident that our world faces a multitude of intricate geopolitical challenges, both locally and globally - a 'polycrisis', as described by Dr Comfort Ero in the last article of this issue.

These challenges are deeply interconnected, collectively eroding the pillars of equality, sustainability, and peace. Communities worldwide grapple with economic disparities, mis- and disinformation, the ascent of populist politics, the grave consequences of climate change, and, in numerous regions, outright war.

These issues are further exacerbated by the ever-shifting web of power dynamics amongst states, where power is often perceived as a finite resource. This strains international cooperation and poses a formidable test to the resilience of multilateral institutions.

However, amidst these challenges, hope emerges. Despite the

contemporary problems we face, as well as those that have persisted for generations, there is an abundance of individuals who dedicate their skills, time, and energy to shaping a world characterised by compassion and justice. This issue, entitled Voices on the Frontline, celebrates these agents of change and shines a light on the many amongst us who use their voices to demand a brighter future. Despite the many obstacles ahead, there is a flurry of research, advocacy, diplomacy, policy innovation, and collective action, all united by a shared commitment to build a better world.

Some of the contributors have dedicated their careers to building expertise on certain issues, bringing a wealth of understanding, data, and research to the table to share evidence and best practices to push for better policies and government action. In this issue, they share their opinions about the challenges ahead and what we can all do.

UK-based Kate Dearden, Head of Research, Policy & External Relations at Community Union, speaks to the changing nature of work due to technology and the rise of non-traditional employment, emphasizing the need to update workers' rights to provide greater security and protection.

US-based Loretta Ross, a professor and reproductive rights activist, highlights the importance of an intersectional reproductive justice movement that includes considerations of race, economic justice, LGBTQ+ and immigrant rights, and emphasises that fighting against abortion bans must involve leaders from many different demographic groups.

Other contributors share their personal stories, which are a sometimes overlooked but exceptionally powerful tool in catalysing empathy and pointing to the real-world consequences of policy



decisions. The firsthand knowledge that comes from lived experience is essential to ensuring that policies are not only well-intentioned but also effectively address the needs and challenges faced by the communities they serve.

Nathan Law, the youngest lawmaker in the history of the Legislative Council of Hong Kong and now on asylum in the UK, reflects on his journey as a democracy advocate and emphasizes the need for global solidarity to counter authoritarian regimes' erosion of human rights.

Zaynab Ali Abdi, author of this issue's feature piece, shares her journey as a refugee and the challenges faced by her family as they fled conflicts in Yemen and Somalia, ultimately stressing the importance of telling stories to humanise the refugee experience and remind the world that behind each statistic is a person with a story and a voice.

Publishing an issue that spans the wide spectrum of today's polycrisis means that some topics are inevitably not touched upon despite their pressing urgency. You're invited to visit our website and read more about UNA-UK's work on issues like climate change and lethal autonomous weapons in our reports, briefings, statements, and past magazine issues.

The timing of this magazine's production also means that recent events, notably the escalation of violence in Palestine, are not referenced in this issue, though our recent statement and list of suggested actions can be found on our website.

We dedicate this issue to the 108 relief workers from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East who have been killed in their efforts to provide life-saving aid to Gaza's 2.2 million people.

Above all, this issue underscores the interwoven nature of local and global challenges and spotlights the remarkable individuals who are actively striving to improve our world. The stories and insight within remind us that collective action alongside shared commitments to a more equal, sustainable, and peaceful world isn't just a vision for the future—it's a current reality.

Together, change is always possible. ✨

Marissa Conway

CEO of UNA-UK



10 changemakers to watch

Building a more equal and peaceful world means tackling the challenges and crises we face today head on. In this issue, we're highlighting ten changemakers from around the globe who are at the forefront of movements to create systemic change, ensure justice, and build a better world.

1 & 2



Daniela Philipson and Ana Velasco

CO-FOUNDERS OF INTERNATIONAL FEMINISTA

Daniela and Ana are the co-founders of Internacional Feminista, a Mexican civil society organization that analyses international relations and foreign policy from a gender perspective, promoting dialogue on gender, international relations, and security in Latin America.

Ana is a research associate at the Institute for Intercultural and International Studies at the University of Bremen whose doctoral research project examines state formation in Mexico through the exercise of political violence towards Indigenous populations. She is a specialist in the Women, Peace and Security agenda

in Latin America and a fellow at the American NGO Women in International Security (WIIS).

Daniela is a PhD candidate in Politics and International Relations at Monash University whose research focuses on the effects of militarization on gender-based violence in Mexico. She is a Fulbright-Garcia Robles scholar and was named a Next Generation Gender, Peace, and Security Scholar WIIS in 2021.

Follow **Daniela and Ana** on X and learn more about their work on Feminist Foreign Policy at www.internacionalfeminista.com

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Lilian Olivia Orero

FOUNDER OF SAFEONLINE WOMEN KENYA (SOW-KENYA)

Lilian Olivia is the Founder of SOW-Kenya, an innovative non-profit organization dedicated exclusively to addressing online violence and fostering safe digital ecosystems that empower women and girls.

She is a lawyer based in Nairobi as well as the youngest member of the Civil Society Regional Reference Group for UN Women's Spotlight Initiative Africa Regional Program. Lilian is an award winning researcher and writer spanning the domains of digital rights, artificial intelligence, data governance, and gender issues, and was named as a 2023 Mandela Washington Fellow.

Follow **Lilian Olivia** on X and learn more about SOW-Kenya at www.linkedin.com/company/safeonline-women-kenya

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Kirthi Jayakumar

FOUNDER OF THE GENDER SECURITY PROJECT

Kirthi Jayakumar founded and runs The Gender Security Project, which works at the cusp of gender, security, peace, and conflict through research, reportage, and documentation.

Kirthi also set up the CRSV Observatory, dedicated to documenting and studying conflict-related sexual violence, and is the Head of Community Engagement at World Pulse. She coded an app for survivors of gender-based violence called Saahas and founded the Red Elephant Foundation, a civilian peacebuilding initiative that works for gender equality through storytelling, advocacy and digital interventions.

In 2023, she served as an advisor to the Women7 (W7) under the Japanese Presidency of the G7, and previously (2022) did so under the German Presidency of the G7. Kirthi is a Vital Voices Engage Fellow, and a former Vital Voices Lead Fellow.

Follow Kirthi on [LinkedIn](#) and learn more about The Gender Security Project at www.gendersecurityproject.com.

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Heela Yoon

FOUNDER OF AFGHAN YOUTH AMBASSADORS FOR PEACE ORGANIZATION (AYAPO)

Heela is the founder of AYAPO, a grassroots NGO working in the Eastern provinces of Afghanistan focusing on UNSCR 1325 and 2250 and local peacebuilding.

Through AYAPO, Heela has trained more than 100 young girls in Nangarhar, Laghman, and Kabul on gender equality, leadership, and first responders to a humanitarian crisis. Heela is the Integration Officer at International Rescue Committee, and has worked with the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders as a Cora Weiss peacebuilding fellow.

She has also worked with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan as a program coordinator for the United Nations Population Fund and was the civil society briefer for the 64th Commission on the Status of Women.

She was awarded one of the young emerging peacemakers from Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice, is in the 30 for 2030 youth leadership network with UN Women, is a Young Leader for the SDGs, and is a Global Partnership for Education UK Youth Leader.

Follow Heela on [LinkedIn](#) and learn more about AYAPO at ayapo.org.

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Nhial Deng

SOUTH SUDANESE REFUGEE, WRITER, YOUTH ADVOCATE, AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZER

Nhial spent 11 years in the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya and now attends Huron University in Canada.

As a youth leader and community activist in Kakuma, Nhial initiated several projects in the camp to help young people build better futures such as the Refugee Youth Peace Ambassadors and SheLeads Kakuma.

Currently, Nhial is working on Kakuma Book Drive, a global student-led solidarity movement working towards mobilizing 10,000 textbooks, laptops, and funding for a library & community centre for young people in Kenya's Kakuma refugee camp.

In recognition of his community work and advocacy efforts, Nhial has received numerous accolades, including the World Vision Hero for Children: Courage Award 2023, Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee Award, and most recently, the prestigious Global Student Prize 2023.

Follow [Nhial on X](#) and learn about SheLeads Kakuma at sheleadskakuma.org.

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Angelika Arutyunova, Nino Ugrekhelidze, and Sadaat

COLLABORATIVE CEECCNA REGIONAL FUND CO-FOUNDERS

Angelika, Nino, and Sadaat are co-founders of the CEECCNA Collaborative Fund, a new foundation guided by intersectional movements from Central and Eastern Europe, Caucasus, and Central and North Asia (CEECCNA regions) to raise, leverage, and move more resources to grassroots organizers and historically and presently excluded communities in crises.

Angelika is a feminist social justice consultant promoting women's, youth, and LGBTIQ rights and philanthropy, supporting organizations to develop strategies, conduct research, facilitate convenings, and advocate for resourcing movements. She co-founded FRIDA The Young Feminist Fund and has worked for the Global Fund for Women, the Association for Women's Rights in

Development (AWID), and was Program Director for AWID's International Feminist Forum in Brazil in 2016.

Nino is a feminist activist and philanthropic advocate with expertise in building context-responsive and community-centred emergency and long-term grantmaking and programmatic strategies in regions affected by wars and crises. She has worked with AWID, FRIDA The Young Feminist Fund, Taso Foundation - Women's Fund in Georgia, and currently serves as a regional advisor to the Urgent Action Fund. Nino also co-founded the #CookingUpResistance initiative as a space to connect virtual kitchens and radical feminist political analysis and to raise funds for communities directly impacted by crises.

Sadaat is a feminist activist working on gender justice, digital security, cyberfeminism, climate and environmental justice, sexual and reproductive rights, and disability rights. She has been active in various grassroots and regional initiatives connected to feminist, LGBTIQ, and human rights movement building in Kyrgyzstan and wider Central Asia since 2010. She has worked for Bishkek Feminist Initiatives and FRIDA The Young Feminist Fund as well as acting in regional advisory roles at several international feminist, LGBTIQ, and human rights grantmaking funds.

Learn more about Angelika on her [website](#), follow [Nino on X](#) and learn more about the fund's inception [here](#).

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Mayada Adil

YOUNG LEADER FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS) 2022-2024

Mayada Adil is a Young Leader for the SDGs, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015. The SDGs outline common aspirations for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, such as gender equality, responsible consumption and production, and no poverty. In addition to this work, Mayada is a doctor and a fashion designer. She has been recognized by the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth for her work in advancing Agenda

2030 and contributing creatively to advance and amplify youth voices in human rights, the SDGs, peace, and health equity around the globe. Mayada creates strategies and policies to strengthen the meaningful participation of youth in high-level decision-making spaces, a crucial component of achieving the SDGs by 2030.

Follow Mayada on [Instagram](#) and learn more about the SDGs at sdgs.un.org/goals.

Finding my voice in the wilderness

A refugee's call to end war and conflict

Zaynab Ali Abdi

My heart ached with the memories of that fateful December in 2014 when I had to leave my younger sister Sabreen behind in Egypt. We had already been through so much, fleeing from Somalia and Yemen and living with distant relatives in Egypt, patiently waiting for our American visas to be processed. It was the most bitter of farewells, but we clung to the hope that it would be temporary. Temporary pain, temporary displacement and a temporary goodbye.

Life in the United States was a whirlwind of emotions. I reunited with my mother, whom I hadn't seen in fourteen years. Despite the biting cold of Minneapolis, I was grateful for the warm welcome and the chance to build a new life and make new friends. The diversity in my school surprised me, where I met other displaced refugees like myself. I still remember them and the stories we all shared. From Somalia, Yemen, Ethiopia, Egypt, Syria, Bangladesh, Mexico - there were many other stories from globally displaced people.

The story of how I ended up in America, away from the home I had known, goes back to my early childhood in Yemen. My mother came to Yemen when she was young due to the civil war that erupted in Somalia. Until recently, I haven't heard much of the story of my people in Somalia from my mother. I know she went through so much trauma and I can't fathom what it did to her. I have little to no memories of my time in Somalia.

My sister and I grew up away from our parents and were raised by our grandmother, who filled the void. She was the heart of our family, and I felt her presence every day. Our grandma read to us and told us stories of our ancestors. She was so proud of our Arab heritage - we had a book of Arabic poems she would recite to us with a gleam in her eye. She was the embodiment of pure joy. I still remember the day she passed away. It was a loss that left a deep gap in my life, so profound that I thought it would never heal. Even to this day, I have so many questions left unanswered and more memories I want to create with her.

As the Arab Spring protests began to shake Yemen, we witnessed the upheaval, uncertainty, and ever-growing threat of violence.

My uncle, a victim of the violence, was shot on his way home from work. The military had mistaken him as being part of the protesters who were causing destruction. The country became a minefield, and we were living in fear. You never knew who to trust.

The tipping point came when I overheard teachers talking about a bomb threat at my school. It felt like we were living in a war zone and I knew it was only a matter of time before our lives were in grave danger. This was when I reached out to my mother, who had been in the United States for years, and she advised us to go to Egypt where distant relatives lived.



It was not the future I wanted. I clung to the familiar memories of Yemen and of my grandmother. But safety became the priority. We left for Egypt, where we stayed with relatives while we waited for our visas. Life there was challenging. I contracted tuberculosis and despite the harsh treatment, I kept my condition a secret from my family to avoid causing them more anguish. My health eventually improved but the uncertainty of our future hung over us.

Then, in December 2014, came the news that I had been approved to go to the United States. It was my ticket to safety and a better life. But as my sister Sabreen and I were preparing to leave for America, the unimaginable happened. Her visa didn't get processed, and I felt the loss of saying goodbye to another loved one.

My arrival in the United States should have been a moment of jubilation and hope, but the shadow of Sabreen's absence weighed heavily on me. We kept in touch through Facebook calls, eagerly waiting to be reunited. But as months passed, her enthusiasm waned, and she began contemplating a risky journey to Europe by boat in pursuit of a better life. The danger of such a voyage terrified me, but she was determined as it was her only option.

Living in a war zone meant that Sabreen didn't have any income. She then discovered the cost was \$2,200: \$100 for the ticket to Alexandria, \$100 to stay in a place until it was safe to travel, and the remaining \$2,000 to board the boat to Italy. These numbers were unattainable for refugees. However, my determined sister was able to finance it with support from others.

With this voyage came great risks. There were many uncertainties looming over us, the biggest one being that my sister was at risk of imprisonment. As she started the journey, she knew she could not turn back. Eventually, they reached the Mediterranean Sea and were herded into small fishing boats. A man confronted them about giving up their money and possessions. Panic set in, and Sabreen and her friends clung to their faith for support. Their journey was perilous, filled with uncertainty and danger and she was paralyzed with fear.

After nine gruelling days, they spotted land on the horizon. Tears streamed down Sabreen's face as she sobbed with gratitude, having begun to think she would never see land again.

They were rescued by the Italian coast guard and finally taken to safety, leaving behind the treacherous voyage across the Mediterranean. However, with no resources, my sister could not reach out to us.

I saw news stories about refugees who had drowned trying to make it to Greece or Italy. I could only think of my sister. Several months passed, but I still regularly checked Facebook throughout the day awaiting a message from Sabreen. With each passing day that I didn't hear from her, I was consumed with worry. I read so many terrible stories online about young refugee girls who were deported. Where would she go if that happened to her? Back to Yemen? There was nothing for her there.

Above all, my biggest fear was the dangers of sex trafficking that many refugee girls fall victim to. I read a particular story of a Syrian refugee who went to Europe, only to be put in a brothel and sold to men. When I informed my mother of this, her heart shattered. She had been on the phone with the US Embassy in Italy almost daily, doing everything she could to get Sabreen to Minnesota. Nothing was happening. We felt so helpless.

Finally, one night, I logged on to Facebook and saw a message from Sabreen. 'I made it to Italy. I'm safe,' it read.

She had been sent to a refugee camp in Holland. She could finally access Wi-Fi and we were finally able to talk. My heart felt at ease the moment I heard her voice; it was really her, and she wasn't alone. She found a community of other displaced people. I couldn't stop smiling as she introduced me to her new friends. She sounded happy – so much happier than she had been in Egypt. But more than that, she sounded hopeful.

I did not know how harrowing her journey was back then. We did not ask for too many details. Instead, we looked to the future and brainstormed ways to be reunited. We kept in touch through Facebook. However I couldn't stop thinking about the hundreds of people who drowned on their journey to safety, or the families who are still waiting for information about their lost ones in that blue, dark, haunted sea.

There are many stories like this, but instead of conclusions, they are left untold, with so many voices still unheard.

I am lucky to share my story, but I also have a deep desire to make a difference.

I started to advocate for the rights and well-being of refugee youth, understanding that their voices were often unheard. With limited resources, I started organizing informal gatherings through youth-centred spaces where young refugees could discuss their experiences, hopes, and dreams.

I started giving speeches and leading discussions on the challenges refugee youth faced, from limited access to education to the mental health toll of displacement. I wanted other refugees to feel comfortable claiming their space in this world, a world that sees them as numbers rather than humans. According to a 2023 UNHCR report, over 110 million people are currently displaced, and that number is increasing as we witness the war that is taking place in Gaza, where thousands of people are being killed and thousands and millions of people are being displaced again from their homes. These are not only numbers; they represent people's sisters, brothers, mothers, fathers, grandparents, children and so on. These numbers included Sabreen and myself.

Our collective message as refugees is simple but profound: war and conflict have far-reaching consequences, causing immeasurable suffering, displacing millions, and destroying dreams. We want to humanise the refugee experience to remind the world that behind each statistic is a person with a story and a voice.

As we started to speak out more and more, we realized that our stories had the power to move mountains. Our cause grew, and slowly but steadily, the global refugee movement began to gain strength. We saw people from all walks of life and from different corners of the world standing in solidarity with us.

As I stand on the frontlines of the refugee movement, I often think back to a dream I had as a child – the dream of becoming a doctor. While I may not have taken the traditional path to healing, I believe that in my role as a refugee advocate, I am working towards a different kind of healing – the healing of a world scarred by conflict.

In a world where refugees often face isolation, discrimination, and despair, the voices of young refugees and displaced stories serve as a beacon of hope. Our stories serve as testaments to the indomitable human spirit, resilience, and unwavering determination to make the world a better place. And so, our story continues – a tale of love, sacrifice, and unwavering hope. ✕

Zaynab Ali
Abdi

Author and Futures &
Strategies Fellow at
UNDP



The importance of global solidarity in protecting democracy



Nathan Law

In June 2020, I left Hong Kong with a heavy heart, carrying only a suitcase and a backpack. After graduating from a master programme at Yale University, I returned to my home city with the intention of continuing my fight for democracy. However, the situation had changed, and it was no longer safe for me to continue my work due to the implementation of the [National Security Law](#). In April 2021, I was granted asylum in the UK, a surreal experience that speaks to the threat that dictatorship and authoritarianism pose to the world. Hong Kong is just one part of this puzzle.

As an activist committed to the fight for democracy and human rights, I have faced many challenges on my journey. My involvement in the [Umbrella Movement](#) of 2014 and my tenure as the youngest legislator in Hong Kong's history in 2016 were met with fierce opposition, including imprisonment for peaceful protest. This has shown the trajectory of the political deterioration in Hong Kong.

Working overseas has presented unique challenges as I navigate new cultures, languages, and political landscapes. However, I believe that

building a strong diaspora community is key to continuing the fight. I have founded a non-profit organization that aims to preserve Hong Kong's unique culture and identity, and I have worked with high-level officials to push forward bills and legislation that address human rights violations in Hong Kong and China.

In the protest movement of 2019, we had a motto of "be water," meaning that we must adapt to different scenarios by changing our forms.

Since living in exile, my duty is to become a voice of Hong Kong internationally, and to unite our people across the globe.

The erosion of basic human rights and the rule of law in Hong Kong sets a dangerous precedent for other authoritarian regimes around the world. For now, Hong Kong jails have been packed with thousands of political prisoners. The weaponization of the legal system is a common tool of dictators to quash protests, as in Iran, Myanmar, Thailand and many other countries with resistance movements. It is crucial that we stand in solidarity

with those fighting for their rights and freedoms and that we hold the Chinese Communist Party accountable for its human rights violations.

It is only through global solidarity and collective action that we can counter this threat and defend democracy and human rights. By supporting and amplifying the voices of dissidents, reforming international governing bodies and pressing authoritarian governments, we can fortify the defence of democracy and address the problem of authoritarian expansion actively.

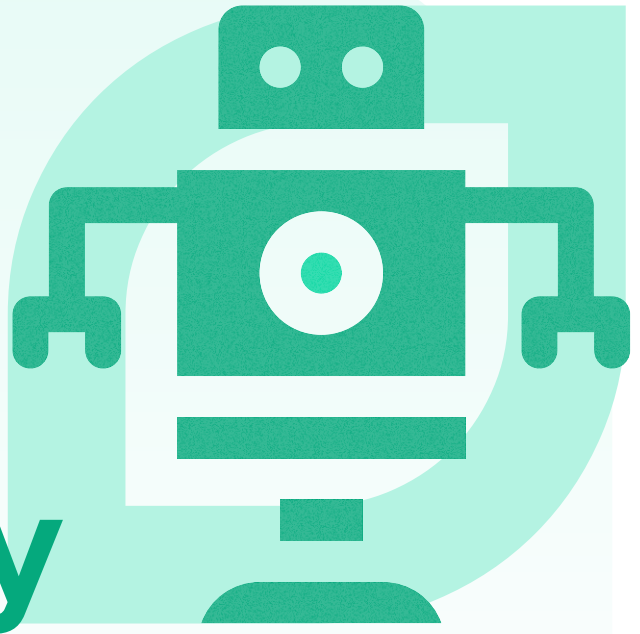
Let's act before it's too late. ✖

Nathan Law
Kwun-chung

Activist and politician
from Hong Kong.
Follow Nathan on X
[@nathanlawkc](#).



A labour market fit for the 21st Century



Kate Dearden

Technology is dramatically reshaping the jobs people do and how they do them, by enabling new ways of working and new business models. People are now more likely to move sectors, change careers, and combine different approaches to work. Recent estimations show that as many as 20% of workers are now in non-traditional roles, from freelancers and subcontractors to agency and gig workers.

This changing nature of work calls into question our system of workers' rights which has fallen far behind today's blended labour market. Workers are taking on greater risks with less security and protection in exchange for more flexibility in their work. We need to end this trade-off and instead deliver on a vision that makes new methods of labour function well for everyone in a meaningful, fair, and decent way. Rather than inhibiting innovation, we must make innovation work for everyone.

Without making the changes our labour market so desperately needs, we will continue to hold our economy back, continue to hinder our productivity growth and continue to exacerbate existing inequalities.

OECD data indicates that the UK had a higher level of income inequality than most European OECD members in 2019 and ranks just two places behind the United States.

That is why we desperately need an overhaul of workers' rights in the UK to prevent an economically damaging race to the bottom on wages and standards. This can look like extending basic health and safety rights for self-employed and freelance workers to allow them to withdraw their labour if they find themselves in unsafe or dangerous situations at work. It can look like delivering sick pay for every worker regardless of how much they earn a week or if they are self-employed. Stronger rights can result in access for trade unions to reach workers on online platforms by giving them the knowledge they need to exercise their rights. An overhaul of workers' rights means flexible working can be available from day one for all employees, not just as something that can be requested.

Though the **Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Bill** passed earlier this year, the necessity for a wider employment bill with the introduction of a single enforcement body for

employment law, allowing bad practice to be challenged, still stands. It is a great missed opportunity that it will not be delivered in this Parliament. As a consequence, the UK will have even further to catch up in responding to the challenges we face and building an economy and labour market fit for the 21st century. It's clear we need a new deal for working people to strengthen workers' rights and make Britain work for working people.

Right now, we have a real opportunity for the UK to get ahead of the change and champion the new and different ways of working we see in our economy. That starts by modernising our legal frameworks to discourage poor standards and low wages, raising the floor of rights for everyone, and most crucially, empowering all workers along the way. ✖

Kate Dearden

Head of Research,
Policy and External
Relations at Community
Trade Union



We don't own this land. We are a part of it



Sue Coleman-Haseldine

I am a Kokatha woman from Ceduna, in South Australia. Our home is desert country, with sacred rockholes, big skies and warm sands, extending across vast horizons. We share country with unique animals and wildlife. We have plants that have been our medicine and our food for generations beyond time.

For those who do not know about the connections to lands and waters that Aboriginal Peoples have, it may seem a world away, to think of our desert homes as a place of plenty. But it has always been this way. The land is us and we are the land. My country and I are forever connected – both a responsibility and a gift passed on through time, and one I pass to the next generations. This connection can never really be broken.

This connection though was threatened in 1770 when Lieutenant Cook came and began the colonisation of what is now known as Australia. Those who came here from Europe believed these lands were empty and able to be taken. The many troubles that began with claims to our country have been made worse by military and nuclear projects.

The British government used traditional lands of Aboriginal Peoples for nuclear weapons tests in the 1950s and 1960s. As the first mushroom clouds were carried on the sea winds and spread across the land, they did not consider Aboriginal people at all. When the bomb tests came to the desert country, they took some people

from their lands, ignored others, and contaminated so many places, including the country of my people.

I was a small child when the **British government tested nuclear weapons in the South Australian desert near my birthplace, on Kooniba Mission.**

Living downwind, the impact of these tests has been felt throughout my life.

Today, we continue to deal with the harms from nuclear weapons testing. My family and the wider community are haunted by high rates of cancer and chronic illness. Those weapons tests impacted our lands, our bodies, and the lives of our next generations. As a grandmother of 15 and great grandmother of 11, including one who has been lost to us, my care for the next generations is deeply felt. The future forever belongs to these next generations.

Today we face a lot of new threats from militarism and nuclear projects. We see proposals for nuclear waste dumps, for rocket launch facilities, and for new nuclear submarines and other military projects through the AUKUS agreement. The concerns of Aboriginal Peoples are rarely taken into consideration. Those who are pushing these projects don't want to hear no – they don't want to talk about the links we have to country, the obligations we have to stay connected to people, culture and land.

And it is not just Aboriginal People. Whether you are black, white or brindle, these sorts of projects steal

from us all. There are so many problems for all peoples around Australia and around the world. None of these are answered by more guns, more rockets and bombs, more nuclear waste dumps or more war. There are no winners in war.

We don't own this land. We are a part of it. We want to protect it. We want others to understand it.

If we seek out things that only get destroyed or destroy other people and places, we all lose. We need to look to connection to country to stay strong and build better futures for all of us, no matter where we come from.

I have spoken to governments around the world about the importance of a nuclear free future, and a world without nuclear weapons. Some have listened, others are slow to come to this conversation. But we will persist, because it is a matter of all of our lives.

We are committed to looking after our people, cultural knowledge, lands and waters and all living beings who rely on them. We want the rest of the world to show that same care. ✖

Aunty Sue Coleman-Haseldine

Sue is a Kokatha woman from Ceduna in South Australia, a downwind survivor of British nuclear testing and an advocate for Indigenous Peoples rights.



Race and reproductive rights in the United States



Loretta Ross

Since the U.S. Supreme Court eliminated the federal constitutional right to abortion in *Dobbs vs. Jackson Women’s Health* (2022), I’ve been asked: what did the pro-choice movement do wrong? The question points to an inaccurate, blame-the-victim analysis.

The majority of Americans [support abortion rights](#). *Dobbs* is the result of strategic choices made by abortion opponents who have been forced to pursue a pack-the-courts strategy following repeated electoral and legislative losses. As I like to say, they “cheat because they can’t compete”. They’re now faced with the dual reality that, post-*Dobbs*, voters in places like Kansas, Kentucky and Michigan have acted to protect state-level abortion rights, and white people are predicted to be only a minority of the U.S. population [by 2050](#).

This racial analysis is important because the goal of the anti-abortion movement is not just to ban abortion in all 50 states, it’s also to attack [contraception](#), [IVF](#), [HIV/AIDS medication](#), [marriage equality](#), [LGBTQ+ rights](#), and [racial justice](#). To fight back and forge ahead, we need an intersectional reproductive justice movement whose analyses and strategies include race, economic justice, LGBTQ+ and immigrant rights, not just gender – and in which women of colour, who bear the brunt of the restrictions, don’t have to be on the front lines of every battle.

Restricting birth control, for example, is a strategy fuelled by the white supremacist “great replacement theory” to increase the number of white babies born. For that reason it’s appropriate for white women to be in the leadership of the fight to protect abortion – if they have an analysis of how race intersects. And since the reproductive justice framework was developed in 1994 it’s been embraced by progressive white women who prioritize a critique of white supremacy in their analysis.

We need a similarly nuanced approach when countering abortion bans based on motives: Black women need to lead the struggle against race-based PreNDA bills (Prenatal Nondiscrimination Acts), and Asian women need to lead the fight against gender-based ones. Opponents are creating abortion bans based on people’s motives, which are irrelevant for a medical procedure that only requires the date of the last menstrual cycle. The good news is reproductive justice advocates are working in exactly this kind of strategic alliance.

The beauty of reproductive justice is that it’s a human rights-based framework which asks, what are the issues in a person’s life before they get pregnant? What factors lead to choosing abortion over birthing and raising a child? What conditions make it possible to raise healthy, joyful, productive children that benefit society? Access to housing, health care, child care, education, physical safety, and a livable wage all affect

reproductive decisions and shape the reproductive justice analysis. White youth are also cause for hope. Among adults under age 30, 74% say abortion should be legal in all or most cases and **56%** of white voters aged 18-29 voted for Biden in the 2020 presidential election, the only white demographic that didn’t vote for Trump.

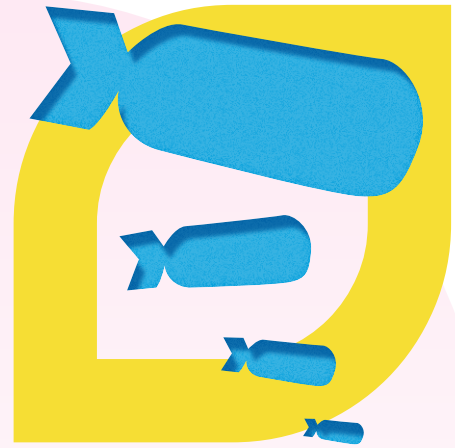
This is the first time in the history of the U.S. that a segment of the white population did not vote for the candidate best representing white supremacist ideology. Millions more youth will soon be eligible to vote, a prospect that frightens anti-abortionists as young people in the US have [more progressive views](#) on abortion. So while abortion opponents resort to leveraging structural inequities to block people from claiming their human rights, we have the winning arguments, a powerful and expansive movement, and the voters to prevail in the long term. With truth, history, and time on our side, we shall overcome. ✖

Loretta Ross

Academic, feminist, and activist who advocates for reproductive justice, especially among women of colour.



600 days of war



Samir Ghannam

October 16, 2023 marks 600 days of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In 600 days, around 7 million Ukrainians have been displaced internally, and more than 6 million have sought refuge in other countries. In 600 days, about one in three displaced Ukrainians has developed PTSD, every fourth Ukrainian reported a family member being mobilized to war, and every fifth Ukrainian was separated from a family member.

As a result, many Ukrainians are living in an increasing state of anxiety and fear about the future. It is not clear when and how the war in Ukraine will end, whether there will be a home to return to, and how much more suffering we are likely to endure. Unfortunately, after almost two years of war, there are no signs of lives returning to normality. As winter approaches, many anticipate that Russia will repeat its missile strikes on Ukrainian energy infrastructure to terrorise the population by deliberately depriving people of heating, electricity, and water. The usage of winter and cold weather against Ukrainians is aimed at destroying morale, further damaging psychological and physical well-being, and forcing more Ukrainians out of the country.

While women, children, and the elderly still have an opportunity to move outside Ukraine, many choose to face danger rather than live a life as a refugee. UNHCR estimates that around 3.5 million refugees who left Ukraine have decided to return home. Navigating bureaucracy in a foreign language is challenging and some

refugees feel like they lack an adequate support system to assimilate into a new environment. The uncertainty of available housing or the inability to find jobs makes it impossible for refugees to find solid footing outside Ukraine. In addition, about 82% of Ukrainian refugees, who are mostly women and children, are separated from at least one immediate family member, leading to feelings of helplessness and a desire to be back home. The only feasible solution to this problem is to end the war as soon as possible under terms that will guarantee justice and long-term peace for the Ukrainian people.

To achieve this goal and reduce Putin's ability to continue this war, Western countries have employed two primary tools: economic sanctions against Russia and the provision of defence systems and weapons to Ukraine. While these tools have significantly bolstered Ukraine's ability to defend itself, there is still work to be done in these two areas.

One of the key sanctions introduced by the European Union, G7 countries, and Australia was a \$60 price cap on Russian oil exports and an export ban on equipment and technology that could be used by Russian forces. While these measures were effective when they were first introduced, Russian oil is now trading well above \$60, and companies around the world knowingly and unknowingly continue to sell high-tech equipment to Russia. These trends are concerning, and efforts must be redoubled to enforce the price cap and export ban.

Although Western countries have provided significant military support to Ukraine, the delayed delivery and insufficient quantity of weapons have often limited the Ukrainian army's ability to defend itself.

Given Putin's refusal to consider troop withdrawal, the most effective way to establish long-term peace is to increase military aid to Ukraine. Continuous setbacks for the Russian army are likely to further undermine the current Russian regime in the eyes of its supporters. Moreover, by enhancing the military capabilities of the Ukrainian army, the prospects of peace negotiations that align with Ukrainian terms are enhanced, ultimately bringing an end to the conflict and deterring other regimes from embarking on unprovoked military ventures.

600 days of war is 600 days too many. It is imperative for Western governments and their leaders to increase their already significant support so the people Ukrainian no longer suffer. ✖

Samir Ghannam

Samir Ghannam is a Ukrainian and a senior lecturer at the University of Technology Sydney's Business School



The power of storytelling



UNA-UK interviews Zeinab Badawi

Rianna Nayee

In this interview we sat down with broadcast journalist, film-maker and writer, UNA-UK Patron and recipient of the 2020 Sir Brian Urquhart Award, Zeinab Badawi. In 2017, she transformed UNESCO's General History of Africa into a 20-part TV series for the BBC, a systematic look from the origins of humankind to the modern era of Africa's history. All episodes are available to watch online on BBC Africa YouTube. Read the wide-ranging discussion on people-centred storytelling, challenges the UN faces, UN leadership and her upcoming book on the history of Africa.

R.N. *This year's UNA-UK magazine focuses on voices on the front line – of crucial movements for equality, peace, and sustainability. Can you tell us about the importance of people-centred storytelling, including in your documentary series *The History of Africa with Zeinab Badawi*?*

Z.B. In storytelling one should always give people the courtesy of enabling them to tell their own story and not speak on their behalf. Once you accept that principle it's a very powerful one, because it has all sorts of implications in terms of agency, whether you are talking about development projects, whether you are talking about building constitutions for countries. By ensuring that people are the drivers of their own destiny through telling their

own history, they can challenge more effectively misleading preconceived notions.

The approach I followed in my TV series is mirrored in my book: An African history of Africa; that is to say, if I was filming for example in Algeria or the DRC, then it would be Algerians and Congolese who would relate their history; I see myself as an intercessor between them and the viewer or reader. In Benin in Nigeria, the man I interviewed about the Benin bronzes was from the very region itself. And although he had a fancy PHD from a German university, somehow what he said had greater credence because of who he was and where he came from. You knew that it was his history that he was telling you.

I've been involved in one way or another in the aid world for so many years. It's been dominated – it's better now of course – by a 'them and us' mentality and doing things to people rather than the people themselves working out what's best for themselves which others can then help facilitate. That's what I am doing with my history book and series, I was merely an enabler, facilitating their storytelling.

R.N. *You did extensive work with UNESCO for the series.*

Z.B. Of course, UNESCO is a very important part of the UN, and I worked in affiliation with them on my history

of Africa TV series. I would go regularly into the Paris headquarters to meet a lot of the fine civil servants there, in the Africa department mostly. I've seen the UN up close, and there are a lot of good honourable people there doing good honourable work.

R.N. *You were recently appointed a Trustee for International Crisis Group, which works to help prevent and mitigate deadly conflict. Is there a particular issue that you want to highlight?*

Z.B. As somebody born under an African sun, in Sudan, I am filled with sadness, dismay and frankly anger at the situation currently faced by the Sudanese. Caught in the crossfire of a senseless and deadly rival between two warring generals neither of whom have any respect nor regard for human life, we are witnessing a tragedy of catastrophic proportions in the country. Around ten thousand have been killed since the conflict started in April 2023, women and girls have been raped, homes ransacked, shops looted. The people of Darfur are seeing that conflict, which never really ended, flare up again. The capital Khartoum which accounts for around half of Sudan's GDP has endured terrible destruction, paralysing the economy, with millions either displaced or becoming refugees. So far negotiations have failed to bring a resolution. At least the civilians who back democracy



United Nations Headquarters, September 2022
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are trying to form a cohesive body to try to prove that they offer a real alternative to military rule. I am also one eighth Ethiopian, and the recent Ethiopian civil war has caused me a great deal of angst. Three quarters of a million people have died, some people say possibly more. And that's not even the wounded, or those who have suffered the most horrific war crimes, especially gender-based violence.

I fear this has set its development back many, many years. Ethiopia was looking forward to being a technological hub - and now this. Let's hope this peace process is going to hold, without any lingering resentments that just are buried only to resurface again in the future.

R.N. *You've interviewed people from all walks of life, including presidents and Secretaries-General at the UN. Are there any lessons you carry from these experiences?*

Z.B. One thing I've learned is that within the UN, a Secretary-General can do a lot, but their hands are also very tied in other ways, especially by the limitations of the P5 at the Security Council. I also find that politicians in their own countries, whose time in office is finite if they face genuine elections, are restricted in their efforts to turn substantial problems around. The cycle of re-election often means they lack the appetite to combat medium and long term challenges, such as climate change for fear of it reducing their chances of re-election.

The elimination of poverty has been a goal for so many decades and yet it's still with us. Is it a futile goal to have, to say "let's eliminate poverty?" If you don't start with that goal then you end up saying, well how much poverty are you willing to tolerate? What's an acceptable level? You have to be ambitious and say we want to eliminate poverty. But it's very difficult to do it in practice because there are so many variables, so many inputs.

When I talk to leaders and they come in with their ambitions, I think if you did an audit when they left office to try to see how much impact they've actually had - in and around the margins is where they can do things. They might say, look I've made primary school education free - but if the kids are going back to inadequate shelter, inadequate nutrition, no lighting at home to do their homework because there's no power, it takes them two hours to get to school and back - you wonder how effective that eye-catching achievement really is.

R.N. *What do you think are the biggest challenges that the UN faces today?*

Z.B. To maintain its relevance for the whole world. I think there is a feeling in the Global South, particularly because of the way that the Security Council operates, that it is just up to the P5, and their power gaze. People have been talking about reforming the Security Council for many years, but it never

seems to gain any real momentum. Also, countries that say we need to reform the Security Council system and membership need to agree amongst themselves – so that you don't have for example South Africa and Nigeria haggling around who is going to get the Africa seat, and similarly with India and Pakistan for an Asia seat. There are a lot of rivalries which hold up genuine reform. It's not just what the P5 think, it's important that those calling for reform have to come up with something around which they can all coalesce and not fall victim to regional rivalries.

R.N. Especially when there are discussions about the veto?

I think there is a sense that this is an institution that was shaped in the aftermath of the Second World War, and that it reflects the world as it was in the mid-20th century and not the 21st. I think that's the big challenge for the UN to stay relevant.

The UN is a large body, but the question is the geopolitics of it all and what people see. The UN has to do a better job at selling itself, by mentioning all the good stuff they do.

R.N. In 77 years, there has still not been a woman Secretary-General. What would you say if people were to question, why should we still care about the UN if it's facing this massive barrier?

Z.B. I think the successor to Secretary-General Guterres has a good chance of being a woman.

The UN should lead by example, as the custodian of universal values. With the Universal Declaration of Human rights, everyone has freedom of speech, freedom of expression, regardless of which part of the world you come from. And I think it must be seen to demonstrate those principles itself.

I'm always struck by when I go to the Headquarters of the UN in New York,

you see that wonderful wall with all the portraits of former SGs, and then you go: hang on, they're all men! Beginning to end. It really brings it home. That's not a good look for the UN in the 21st century.

It's not that there aren't women – there are plenty of women who are *overqualified* to do most of these jobs. It's just a question of making sure they get a place at the top table and that they are hired. I think the UN is unfortunately like the world at large, the upper echelons of power are male dominated, the UN is after all part of the world, it's not separate. But it needs to be better than that and lead by example.

R.N. Can you tell us about your history with UNA-UK and what drew you to our work initially?

Z.B. I've been linked to UNA-UK for 20 years, and I'm a patron now. It's a good place to interact with people from around the world.

It espouses the values of the UN – universal values around which everybody can coalesce. It's a kind of moral voice that's always constant in the world. What's not to like about a body such as the UN that upholds the values that the world has signed up to, even if they're not always honoured.

R.N. You received UNA-UK's Sir Brian Urquhart award in 2020 – presented virtually as we marked UN day. On that day you said “we need hope, wherever we are in the world” – what keeps you hopeful today?

Z.B. I think it's the human spirit that keeps me hopeful. And the resilience of people is what keeps me optimistic. The surprising resilience of people. People have very little, and yet they keep on going and there's something that sustains them, and I think one draws a lot of inspiration from them because they always hope that their situation will improve.

I think that that is best exemplified by African women. They are the strongest women I've ever met, in fact correction – they are the strongest human beings I've ever met. I'm telling you, if the whole world had an ounce of their strength, the whole world would be a better place, because boy oh boy they just keep on going through great adversity with great tenacity and they are truly an inspiration. On the other hand I do wonder if that resilience also means they have tolerated adverse conditions for too long.

R.N. You have a book out next year [April 18 2023] on the history of Africa. You've described this as “the book you've wanted to read yourself”. What has this process been like so far, have you learned anything unexpected?

Z.B. Don't write a book, that's all I can say! It is such hard work. 'An African History of Africa' published by the Penguin-Random House Group, is a grand sweep of the continent, so I think the most difficult aspect is trying to do justice to Africa's history – the continent with the longest history in the world. People may say “..you didn't cover this or that” but how could I in just one book? I drew on my travels to more than 30 countries and the people and academics I spoke to and naturally I will be reflecting what they told me. I want to be their voice. I do believe that if you read my book, you will be better informed about the occluded aspects of Africa's history and hopefully be encouraged to learn more about it. ✖

Rianna Nayee

Campaigns & Policy
Officer UNA-UK



Which voices are prioritised in UN leadership?

Bryony Pike

The United Nations system is made of up approximately 125,000 personnel around the world. Those in the most senior positions bear a huge responsibility to lead the organisation and its agencies to deliver on the UN's mission across the three pillars of peace and security, human rights and development. This is no small task, one that is increasingly challenging as the UN faces a credibility crisis, tensions between member states are on the rise, and as interconnected global crises escalate.

It's never been more necessary for the UN to be led by the most capable and qualified individuals from across the world, chosen on merit in a transparent and accountable way to ensure they have the strongest platform possible to do their job. Yet appointments for the UN's top posts are too often highly politicised, opaque, and inconsistent. Our Blue Smoke initiative is campaigning to address this issue; here are some facts which show what we're up against:

■ Gender Parity

In 2017, UN Secretary-General António Guterres pledged to reach gender parity among staff at the UN by 2028. In 2020, gender parity was achieved in most senior appointments (for those most directly under his control). Before this, the number of women who were appointed for senior positions had never been higher than 37% in any one year.

Today, women hold more than 60% of Senior Management Group positions.

This is far from the whole story. At the higher professional ranks (P4 and above) and in field operations, women remain significantly outnumbered. And perhaps most glaringly, two of the most prominent positions at the UN have a terrible record. Of the 78 Presidents of the General Assembly so far, only four have been women, and we are yet to see a woman occupy the role of Secretary-General.

■ Ringfencing

Ringfenced is not the terminology the UN likes to use, but it is an accurate description of how top jobs are monopolised by powerful states. 6 of the most important positions in the UN Senior Management Group are awarded repeatedly to nationals of permanent members of the Security Council (P5). For example, since 2007: US nationals have run the Department for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs; Chinese citizens have headed the Department of Economic and Social Affairs; and UK nationals have run the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Frenchmen have led the Department for Peace Operations since 1997, and Russians have been at the helm of either the UN Office in Geneva or Vienna since 1993.

This trend does not stop at the Senior Management Group. The World Bank Group comprises 5 organisations, 3 of which are specialised agencies of the UN; every president of the World Bank since its creation in 1946 has been an American man.

■ Regional Representation

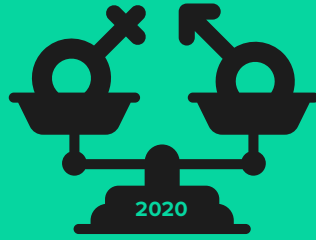
Between 1995 and 2022, states in the Western Europe and Other Groups region shared almost half of all senior appointments at the United Nations, despite only comprising 15% of member states and having a smaller estimated population than two of the UN's other five regions. At present, over 20% of Senior Management Group positions are held by nationals of P5 states; though proportionally the P5 represent just 2.5% of UN member states. ✖

Bryony Pike

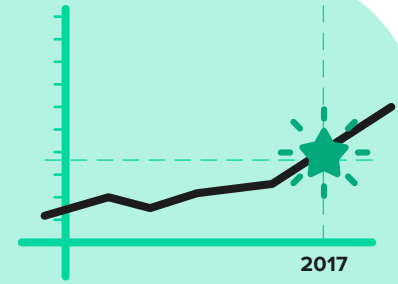
Head of Outreach,
UNA-UK



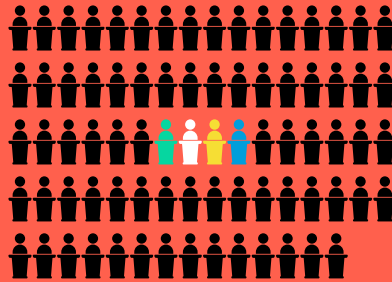
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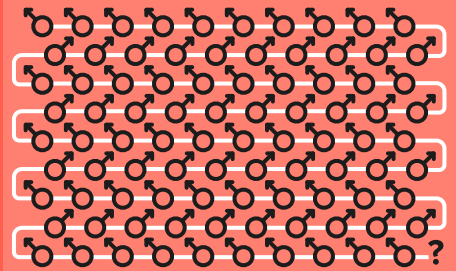
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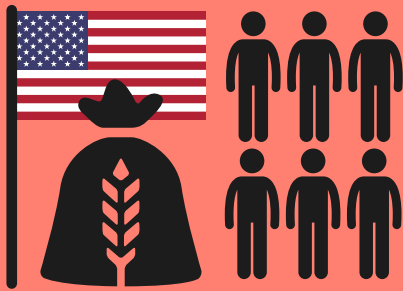
Today, women hold over 60% of SMG positions.



Of the 78 Presidents of the General Assembly so far, only 4 have been women.



By the time of the next appointment of the UN Secretary-General, there will have been 80 years of unbroken male leadership at the highest UN office.



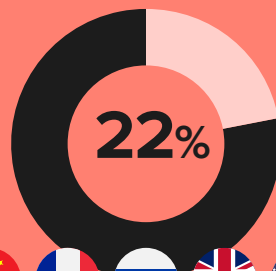
Over the past 21 years, the last 6 Executive Directors of the World Food Programme have been American.

Since 2007, 5 important roles have been solely held by nationals of P5 states including: the USG for the Department for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs; the USG for Social and Economic Affairs; the USG for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; the USG for Peacekeeping Operations; and the head of the UN office in Geneva or Vienna.

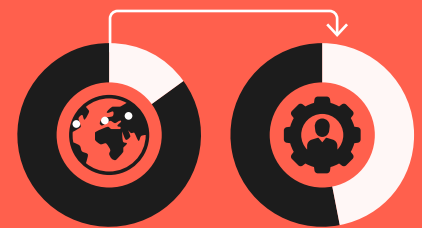


THE WORLD BANK

3 of the 5 organisations that make up the World Bank Group are specialised agencies of the UN; every president of the World Bank so far – there have been 13 – has been an American man.



22% of the Senior Management Group positions are held by members of the P5.



From 1995–2022, states in the Western Europe and Other Groups region shared almost half of all senior appointments at the UN, despite only comprising 15% of member states.

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The fate of the UN amidst a ‘polycrisis’



The Last Word is given to Dr Comfort Ero, recipient of UNA-UK's 2023 Sir Brian Urquhart Award and President and CEO of the International Crisis Group. Below is an excerpt from her award acceptance speech on UN Day, 24 October 2023.

From the mid-1990s until very recently, we witnessed the UN's role in conflict management rapidly expand. UN-backed diplomacy and the organisation's blue helmet missions were standard tools in the international toolbox to help countries reach political settlements and stabilise after protracted armed conflicts.

But Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 underscored the considerable upheaval the international system has undergone in the post-Cold War period. The unilateral [invasion of Iraq](#), the [intervention in Libya](#), the failure to grapple with [COVID](#), U.S. [retrenchment under Trump](#), and now the [Ukraine war](#) have all posed several serious questions about the global order, triggering a period of increased assertiveness from regional and middle powers, and sowed significant doubts about the multilateral institutions that oversee international peace and security.

In some of my previous speeches, including one that I delivered a year ago to ambassadors serving on the UN Security Council, I outlined how the world is confronting a “polycrisis”

– a series of systemic, mutually reinforcing shocks (including climate change, economic distress and food insecurity) that intersect with a darkening geopolitical picture.

Similarly, countries around the world are now navigating a polycentric system of power. State-based power is growing more diffuse, and today's array of multilateral institutions – whether the UN, international financial institutions, or coalitions like the G20 or BRICS – do not fit together neatly.

The impact of these crises is all too clear at the UN. The diplomacy needed to test new ideas or forge political compromises is now much harder to come by.

Tensions in the UN Security Council are running high. As we, at Crisis Group, observed last month in our annual publication on the UN, the Security Council has been slow and indecisive in reacting to crises in 2023.

While diplomats were previously able to separate political sparring on Ukraine from the organisation's other business, they have found it harder to make compromises on difficult issues this year.

There are too many instances where the UN no longer serves as the world's preeminent chamber for multilateral diplomacy. From the outbreak of war between Israel and Hamas to failed

efforts to end the conflict in Sudan and the persistence of Russia's aggression in Ukraine, it is clear that the room for major-power cooperation in the Council has shrunk.

Similarly, the organisation's future as a player in international peace and security looks uncertain, as the era of large-scale stabilisation missions is coming to an end.

Mali's decision to expel the UN blue helmet mission this June, despite the likely risks of renewed violence, underlined the Council's weaknesses and the vulnerabilities of such missions. The Congolese government is charting a similar path to accelerate the end of nearly two decades of UN peacekeeping in the country.

But in spite of these challenges, we do not predict the death of the UN. In fact, Crisis Group is convinced that the organisation can still play a role in maintaining international peace and security even if the geopolitical picture remains bleak.

For all its flaws, the Security Council is still available as a rare space for the major powers to make compromises where their interests do align. Even those countries who opportunistically

besmirch the organisation value the UN when they need to find common ground.

Progress requires the UN and its member states to continue pushing for the organisation to evolve, as it has so often done over the past 78 years.

I'd like to point out three ways that Crisis Group sees the UN's role evolving over the coming months.

First, the UN's relationship with the world is contingent on how it works with other organisations and coalitions of states.

Embracing this collaboration is key to the organisation's sustainability and evolution. We are seeing this most clearly when it comes to the decline of UN peacekeeping and the rise of other sorts of international security response.

Ad hoc interventions, such as the new UN-authorized and **Kenyan-led mission to Haiti** – the deployment of which is facing some legal challenges in Nairobi – are likely to fill the void left by blue helmet missions when support for them runs out. In parallel, diplomats at the Security Council and their counterparts at the African Union are debating whether, and how, to provide UN funding to African-led operations.

Though these arrangements are not without risk, they do demonstrate political solidarity and institutional creativity at this crucial moment when no organisation can tackle these challenges alone.

Secondly, the General Assembly and the Secretary-General should take on more proactive roles in guiding the multilateral system through periods of Security Council paralysis.

We are under no illusion that this will be easy considering the political challenges of big-power politics. But the UN, as the world's preeminent multilateral institution, should be prepared to take risks to defend the UN Charter.

Last year, countries in the General Assembly used the global forum to condemn Russia's war in Ukraine at a time when the Security Council could not.

Though the body's enthusiasm for discussing Ukraine has waned in recent months, diplomats are exploring how

they can work creatively within their mandate to engage on some of the most intractable peace and security issues, particularly when the Council is gridlocked.

At this moment of Council tension, we have also seen Secretary-General Guterres rely on the UN's good offices to help countries reach limited political agreements.

Though he often turned to the organisation's humanitarian arm to lead in situations where the UN's political leverage was limited, his efforts on the Black Sea grain deal are among his most important achievements in the past year despite the agreement's lapse in July.

The Secretary-General's voice can be the organisation's most important asset. In some of the most difficult situations – when Russia launched its assault on Ukraine, when the Taliban retook Afghanistan or amid today's unprecedented fighting between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip – the Secretary-General has offered both moral clarity and a call to action that is much needed.

As world leaders prepare to choose Guterres' successor in just under two years' time, we implore countries to not lose sight of the role that the world's preeminent voice can play when other parts of the institution fall short.

This will also require an individual who can find political power in the crevices of crises and use all available assets to pursue peace.

And thirdly, the UN's effectiveness will depend considerably on how it evolves to tackle the defining challenges of our future.

UN diplomats have spent much of the past two years debating potential overhauls of the multilateral system. **The Summit of the Future**, set to take place next September in New York, is meant to be the culmination of these efforts.

Guterres has prepared eleven different policy briefs to support this reform process, ranging from preparing for future pandemics to reforming the governance of international financial institutions to better reflect the needs of poorer countries.

In one of these briefs, **The New Agenda for Peace**, Secretary-General Guterres presents a cautious and often humble reckoning of the UN's capacity to navigate the challenges ahead.

The Secretary-General's analysis offers a sharp contrast to its namesake from 1992, the **UN Agenda for Peace**.

On one hand, it accepts that the organisation's peace and security tools are severely constrained absent more political support from member states.

On the other hand, it urges these same countries to let the organisation evolve to respond to many of the new security challenges confronting the multilateral system.

These are daunting tasks for a system that continues to face such significant obstacles. But I am convinced that for all of its flaws, the UN is not dead. It is not perfect, but it is not dead.

One could look at the state of world affairs and lose confidence in the project that is the UN. I challenge you not to.

Those who believe in the UN's potential must continue to press it to rise above geopolitical divides. The diplomatic dialogue it can convene is still needed to help resolve many of the world's most damaging crises. And, perhaps above all, it is meant to be the voice of the voiceless.

We must all work together to help support the UN in its journey to meet these aspirations.

See original here: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/comfort-eros-acceptance-speech-una-uk-united-nations-day-reception> ✂

Dr Comfort Ero

President and CEO of the International Crisis Group





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