

# Introduction

Opening by the Secretary-General

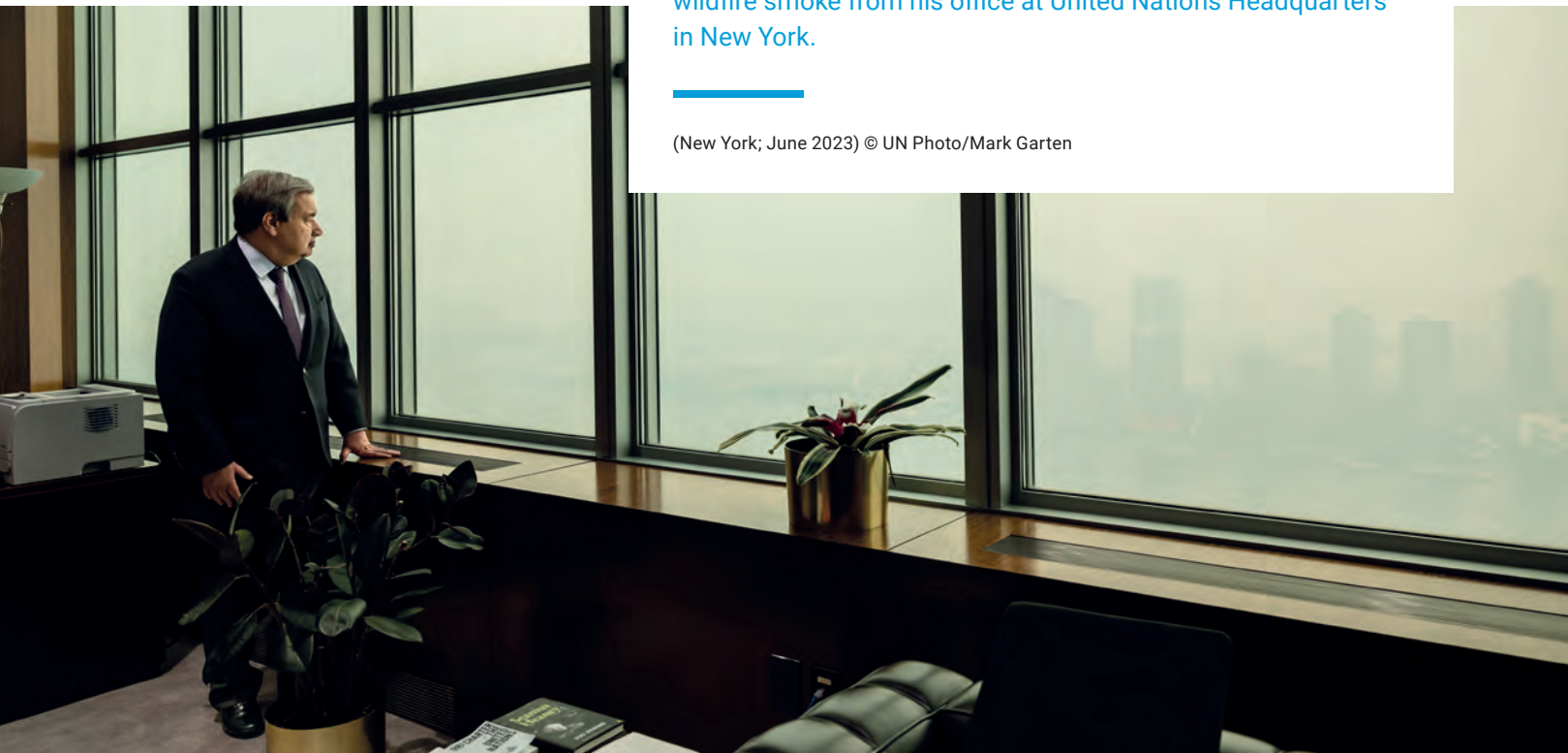
## Highlights from across the United Nations system

A view of the Sustainable Development Goals pavilion during the Sustainable Development Goals Summit in September 2023.

- Achievements of the United Nations
- Eight priority areas of the United Nations Secretariat
- Expenditures across key priority areas
- Summit of the Future
- Turning vision into action

The Secretary-General, António Guterres, observes haze due to wildfire smoke from his office at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

(New York; June 2023) © UN Photo/Mark Garten



“At every step, our Organization and our personnel will continue to stand in solidarity with the people of the world through these trying times, as we seek to forge a more peaceful, healthy, equal and prosperous future together.”

António Guterres,  
Secretary-General

I am enormously proud of the staff of the United Nations, who are operating and delivering on their mandates in a fractured and sometimes dangerous world. Despite the obstacles in their way, their commitment to a better, brighter future shines through in all that they do. Their resolve is to achieve results for the people of the world and to deliver the help and the hope that every person deserves – and that the human family needs today, more than ever.

The past year<sup>1</sup> has tested humanity in every way. Crises and challenges have placed the better future people want and need further out of reach. Conflicts, deepening poverty and inequality, hunger and poor economic prospects for developing countries are being made worse by widening geopolitical divides and mistrust. **The climate emergency reached terrifying new heights, with 2023 being the hottest on record.** Human rights abuses, discrimination against minorities, women and girls, rising extremism and a surge of hate speech online and in the streets are sowing discord and mistrust across communities, countries and entire regions.

The urgent business of rescuing the Sustainable Development Goals and the fight against climate change has been **stalled by a lack of sufficient investment and political will.** Many developing countries are drowning in debt and lack the necessary resources to invest in a sustainable future for their people.

<sup>1</sup> In line with the regular budget of the United Nations Secretariat, the reporting period is from 1 January to 31 December 2023. Given the peacekeeping budget period from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024, and the presentation of the report to the General Assembly in September, a few key highlights from the first months of 2024 are also included.

# Achievements of the United Nations family in 2023

The United Nations Secretariat is part of the wider United Nations family, with over 100 bodies and organizations, including some 30 agencies, funds and programmes (see chart on page 110 for all entities in the United Nations system). Every year, the United Nations supports hundreds of millions of people with over \$60 billion in assistance.

## Food security

**152M**

people received food assistance to improve their food security

## Children

**133M**

children vaccinated against measles, including 32M+ in emergency situations

## Water and sanitation

**36M**

people gained access to safe water that is available when needed

## Health and well-being

**15M**

refugees, asylum seekers and others of concern in 77 countries received essential health services

## Climate action

**178M**

hectares of protected area created or received improved management in 56 countries

## Peace and security

**\$203M**

approved in 36 countries and territories for peacebuilding initiatives

## Human rights

**56**

countries supported, to significantly increase the protection and promotion of human rights in selected human rights areas

## Women

**92**

law-making processes supported during adoptions, revisions or repeals, to advance gender equality in 23 countries

## Livelihoods

**9M**

people in fragile contexts supported with jobs and livelihoods

# Eight priority areas of the United Nations Secretariat

**35,000+**

Secretariat staff delivering results across eight priority areas:

## Sustainable development

United Nations country teams led by resident coordinators working in 162 countries and territories to help to implement the 2030 Agenda

## Peace and security

Deployed 50 peacekeeping operations, special political missions and support offices to prevent conflict and support peacebuilding

## Development in Africa

Helped 54 countries to address development challenges and promote sustainable development and the implementation of Agenda 2063

## Human rights

Facilitated assistance for 60,000 survivors of torture in 92 countries and 12,000+ survivors of contemporary forms of slavery

## Humanitarian assistance

Helped to mobilize \$23B to assist 128M people across 74 countries and territories

## Justice and international law

Managed information on 648 multilateral treaties addressing matters of worldwide interest

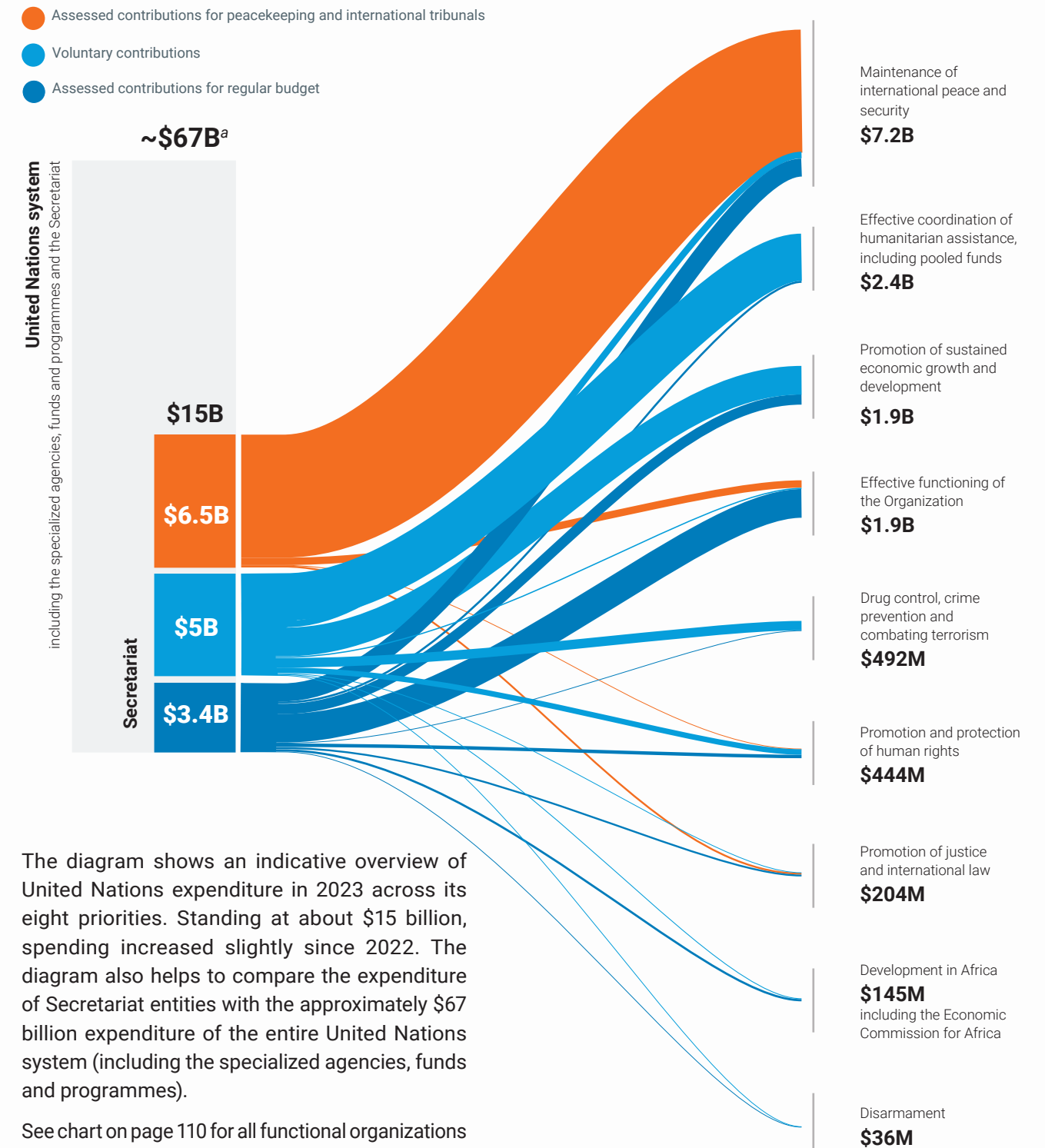
## Disarmament

Channelled funds to 112 arms control-related projects benefiting 148 Member States

## Drugs, crime and terrorism

Trained 3,000+ criminal justice and counter-terrorism officials from 75 Member States and enhanced membership in the Trafficking in Persons Protocol, with 182 States parties

## Expenditures across key priority areas in 2023



The diagram shows an indicative overview of United Nations expenditure in 2023 across its eight priorities. Standing at about \$15 billion, spending increased slightly since 2022. The diagram also helps to compare the expenditure of Secretariat entities with the approximately \$67 billion expenditure of the entire United Nations system (including the specialized agencies, funds and programmes).

See chart on page 110 for all functional organizations of the United Nations system.

<sup>a</sup> Amount refers to 2022

The above diagram is provided for illustrative purposes only. The financial years for the regular budget (2023) and for peacekeeping operations (2022/23) differ. Allocation of resources to priorities is based on the United Nations programme budget. Data for the United Nations system is based on indicative reports to the secretariat of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination. For detailed information, please refer to the audited financial statements.



# Summit of the Future

The seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations came at a time when the world was confronting the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the persistent threat posed by climate change, the challenges and opportunities presented by technological advances and slow progress on the Sustainable Development Goals. **These are all global challenges that require global solutions and international cooperation.** However, the multilateral organizations that have long led such efforts have proved to be inadequate and outdated.

In recognition of those challenges and our unprecedented interconnectedness, Member States pledged to strengthen global governance and asked the Secretary-General for recommendations on how to equip the international system to address current and future challenges (see General Assembly resolution 75/1).

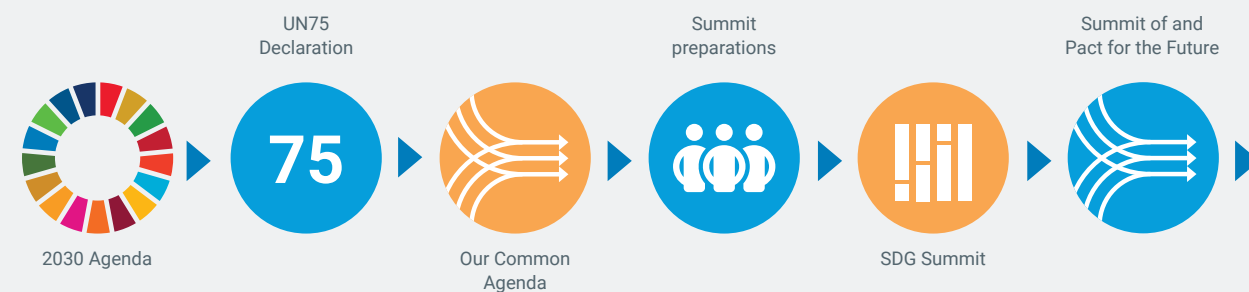
The Secretary-General responded with a report entitled “Our Common Agenda”, in which he called for solidarity among people, countries and generations and a corresponding renewal of the multilateral system to accelerate the implementation of existing commitments and fill gaps in global governance. In his report, the Secretary-General **proposed the Summit of the Future as a way to forge a global consensus on what our future should look like and what we can do today to secure it.**



Over 2,000 participants gather in Nairobi for the United Nations Civil Society Conference leading up to the 2024 Summit of the Future.

(Nairobi, May 2024)  
© UN Information Service Nairobi

## Road to the Summit of the Future



## Secretary-General's Policy Briefs

The Secretary-General published a series of 11 policy briefs under Our Common Agenda to aid negotiations on the Summit. The briefs were crafted through extensive consultations with Member States, the United Nations system and various stakeholders. Scan the Quick Response (QR) Code to learn more about the policy briefs.



## Scope of the Pact for the Future

On 1 September 2023, the General Assembly adopted its decision 77/568, in which it outlined the scope of the document to be entitled “A Pact for the Future”, which would comprise a chapeau and the following five chapters: Sustainable development and financing for development; International peace and security; Science, technology, innovation and digital cooperation; Youth and future generations; and Transforming global governance.

## Preparatory Ministerial Meeting for the Summit

On 21 September 2023, the President of the seventy-eighth session of the General Assembly, Dennis Francis, convened the preparatory ministerial meeting for the Summit of the Future. The meeting marked a significant step towards the highly anticipated Summit and provided a platform for Member States to share their visions and priorities.

The meeting built on the outcomes of the Sustainable Development Goals Summit, with a focus on expectations for tangible and action-oriented results. The gathering was aligned with General Assembly resolution 76/307, on modalities for the Summit of the Future.

## Summit of and Pact for the Future

In response to Our Common Agenda, Members States agreed to hold the Summit of the Future, a once-in-a-generation opportunity to mend eroded trust and demonstrate that international cooperation can effectively achieve agreed goals and tackle emerging threats and opportunities. This would be achieved through the Pact for the Future, an action-oriented outcome document to be negotiated and endorsed by Member States at the Summit of the Future in September 2024.



A displaced boy from Khan Yunis sits with his beloved birds in Rafah City, in the Gaza Strip. He brought them on his journey, despite the upheaval, and hopes for an end to the war so he can return home.

(Rafah City; January 2024)  
© UNICEF/Eyad El Baba



“Our world is going through a tough time right now, but the impact made in the last 75 years is huge, and our potential – as one human family – to turn crises into opportunity and hope is enormous.”

**Amina J. Mohammed,**  
Deputy Secretary-General

Meanwhile, **multilateral principles built over decades are being ignored or flouted with impunity.** The Charter of the United Nations and international human rights and humanitarian law are being undermined, as parties to conflict target hospitals, schools, humanitarian aid and civilian infrastructure. Civic space is shrinking under authoritarian regimes, and journalists are killed and abused for doing their vital work.

The present report shows that, **despite the difficulties, progress is possible, and change is achievable.** Those results, however, can come at a tragic cost. **The past year witnessed the highest number of United Nations staff and humanitarian workers killed in our Organization’s history.** The vast majority were staff of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East working in Gaza. Our hearts go out to their families, friends and colleagues. **Their determination and sacrifice only strengthen our resolve to stand with the world’s most vulnerable people caught up in humanitarian emergencies.**

That dedication to staying and delivering on our mandate includes our staff members’ work to continue supporting people and communities when large United Nations missions, such as those in Mali and in Darfur (Sudan), draw down and close. Personnel across multiple agencies continue to maintain a presence in those locations, carrying out their vital and often life-saving missions.

In 2023, together with our partners on the ground, **we coordinated humanitarian response plans for 245 million people across 74 countries** and delivered life-saving assistance and protection to nearly 160 million people in urgent need. From food and nutrition to water and sanitation, to emergency education and health services, to shelter and protection, our staff stayed and delivered in countries rocked by ferocious conflicts. This includes Afghanistan, the Sudan, Yemen, the Horn of Africa and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. With our partners, we also responded to devastating disasters, including earthquakes in Morocco, the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye and floods in Libya, Malawi and Mozambique. **We achieved those results despite a record funding shortfall for humanitarian work.** The \$22.7 billion provided by donors covered just 40 per cent of the \$56.1 billion required for our life-saving work. Nevertheless, our humanitarian personnel and their partners on the ground spared no effort to reach those in greatest need.

Meanwhile, **the 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Summit rallied over 6,000 people across various public and private sectors** to accelerate progress towards achieving the Goals, only 15 per cent of which are on track. **World leaders welcomed our call for a Sustainable Development Goal stimulus of \$500 billion per year** and acknowledged the urgent need to reform the global financial architecture – including multilateral development banks – to enable developing countries to invest in the systems that their people require.



“A peaceful and sustainable future requires standing together in solidarity. Year in and year out, the United Nations is standing with, and delivering for, the people of the world.”

**E. Courtenay Rattray,**  
Chef de Cabinet



“Together, we must redouble our efforts to reinforce a multilateral system that delivers for everyone, everywhere, and that offers hope for a better, fairer, more peaceful and more sustainable world for the present and future generations.”

**Guy Ryder,**  
Under-Secretary-General for Policy

# Turning vision into action

In order to take us closer to fully implementing the 2030 Agenda, the Secretary-General's initiatives were launched to **advance our collective efforts to achieve the goals set out in Our Common Agenda**. Those initiatives are aimed at creating an inclusive and equitable world for all, by harnessing cutting-edge technologies and fostering digital cooperation. Through **digital solutions, innovation and scientific expertise**, the United Nations is committed to addressing global challenges and ensuring that no one is left behind in our journey towards a sustainable and prosperous future for humanity.



The Secretary-General, António Guterres (third from left), meets with the High-level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence.

(New York; December 2023) © UN Photo/ Eskinder Debebe



“The potential for artificial intelligence is extraordinary, particularly in the areas of health, food security, education and the green transition. We can harness this technology to get the Sustainable Development Goals back on track, but it must be done safely, inclusively and responsibly.”

**Amandeep Singh Gill**, Envoy of the Secretary-General on Technology



“Mainstreaming meaningful youth engagement across decision-making spaces at all levels is one of the greatest tools we have at our disposal when it comes to delivering on the 2030 Agenda.”

**Felipe Paullier**,  
Assistant Secretary-General for Youth Affairs

## The United Nations Youth Office

The United Nations Youth Office was established by the unanimous agreement of the General Assembly in 2023. The Office advocates the advancement of youth issues across the United Nations and enables meaningful, inclusive and effective engagement of young people and youth-led and youth-focused work in the Organization. Created pursuant to the report of the Secretary-General entitled “Our Common Agenda”, the Office signifies a new era for the global youth agenda.

Building on more than a decade of work by the Envoys of the Secretary-General on Youth, the United Nations Youth Office addresses persistent challenges faced by young people worldwide, including access to education, employment and health services. Guided by the United Nations youth strategy, Youth2030, the Office enables intergenerational multi-stakeholder solidarity and strengthens youth engagement across all pillars of the Organization’s work. The establishment of the Office marks a breakthrough for the revitalization and expansion of United Nations engagement with young people, leveraging the latter’s immense social and economic potential.



## United Nations 2.0



United Nations 2.0 is the Secretary-General’s vision of a modernized United Nations system, with cutting-edge skills and forward-thinking culture for stronger results, better Member State support and greater impact on the Sustainable Development Goals. We are striving to achieve that vision with a powerful fusion of data, innovation, digital, foresight and behavioural science expertise – grounded in a culture that values agility, learning and curiosity to create an environment in which those skills can flourish.



## AI Advisory Body



The multi-stakeholder High-level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence is a multidisciplinary group of 39 experts in artificial intelligence from all regions. It was formed to undertake analysis and advance recommendations for the international governance of artificial intelligence. The Advisory Body released an interim report in 2023 and a final report in 2024, in which it highlighted the need for a global approach and actionable recommendations on governing artificial intelligence for humanity. This global, diverse and gender-balanced group is the first of its kind and has provided unique contributions on the opportunities, risks and international governance of artificial intelligence, now and in the future.



## Scientific Advisory Board



In August 2023, the Secretary-General appointed an advisory board to provide advice to United Nations leaders on breakthroughs in science and technology. The primary purpose of the Scientific Advisory Board for Independent Advice on Breakthroughs in Science and Technology is to offer recommendations for how the United Nations can anticipate emerging issues, manage risks and harness the benefits of science and technology across policies and programmes. The Board is composed of seven eminent scientists in the fields of artificial intelligence, environmental sciences and biology. It is supported by the chief scientists of the United Nations at FAO, UNEP, UNESCO and WMO, as well as the Envoy of the Secretary-General on Technology, the Rector of United Nations University and a diverse network of 11 global scientific organizations. The Board prepares briefings on emerging scientific topics, issues an annual horizon-scanning report and seeks to advance trust in science across the multilateral space.



## United Nations Futures Lab Network



The United Nations Futures Lab Network, proposed by the Secretary-General in his 2021 report on Our Common Agenda, was established in 2023 to support the Organization and the international community to be better prepared for major global risks, while ensuring that policy decisions take into account their impact on future generations. Driven by a global hub, the Futures Lab is a network that empowers the United Nations system and beyond to use futures thinking and strategic foresight in planning, policymaking and decision-making.



The Secretary-General visits Antarctica to see the impact of the climate crisis on the frozen but rapidly melting landscape.

(Antarctica; November 2023) © UN Photo/Mark Garten



### Human rights with the participation of all

We promoted and protected the work of human rights defenders and civil society organizations across all regions, supporting the work of 3,530 youth-led organizations, and engaged with 1,894 women's rights organizations. We helped to empower different voices, promoted participation in intergovernmental forums, convened a platform of networks for the protection of civil society actors at risk and advocated for human rights in the digital space.

Several key environmental initiatives were launched in 2023, including the Water Action Agenda, the Global Framework on Chemicals – For a Planet Free of Harm from Chemicals and Waste and **a landmark agreement by 175 countries to develop a legally binding treaty on plastic pollution**. With climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss still threatening the future of our planet, the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Dubai, concluded with **calls to transition from fossil fuels, operationalize the loss and damage fund and commit to sustainable cooling, methane reduction and an end to deforestation by 2030**.

Throughout 2023, the United Nations continued building on our work to defend and advance fundamental human rights, including those of women and girls. The United Nations trust fund in support of actions to eliminate violence against women, the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund and the Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women **collectively supported tens of thousands of women and girls around the world**. The United Nations also supported eight constitutional review processes to ensure that women's views were reflected and represented.

The year was also an important one with regard to **strengthening the world's commitment to multilateralism and the values enshrined in the Charter**. In preparation for the Summit of the Future, we prepared and delivered a series of policy briefs on critical areas from peace and security to youth engagement and future generations. That work extended to governance of the digital world and artificial intelligence. For example, to combat the plague of mis- and disinformation, we continued our work to develop the United Nations Global Principles for Information Integrity.

All of this work requires constant strengthening of our operations around the world, led by our resident coordinators and United Nations country teams as they work with host Governments to accelerate efforts and scale up investments in the Sustainable Development Goals.

In addition, 2023 saw major strides made in our commitment to building a supportive and respectful workplace for our staff. Our commitment to living our values was reflected in **the establishment of the Anti-Racism Office**, a new parental leave policy, progress under the United Nations System Mental Health and Well-being Strategy and renewed efforts to combat sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse.

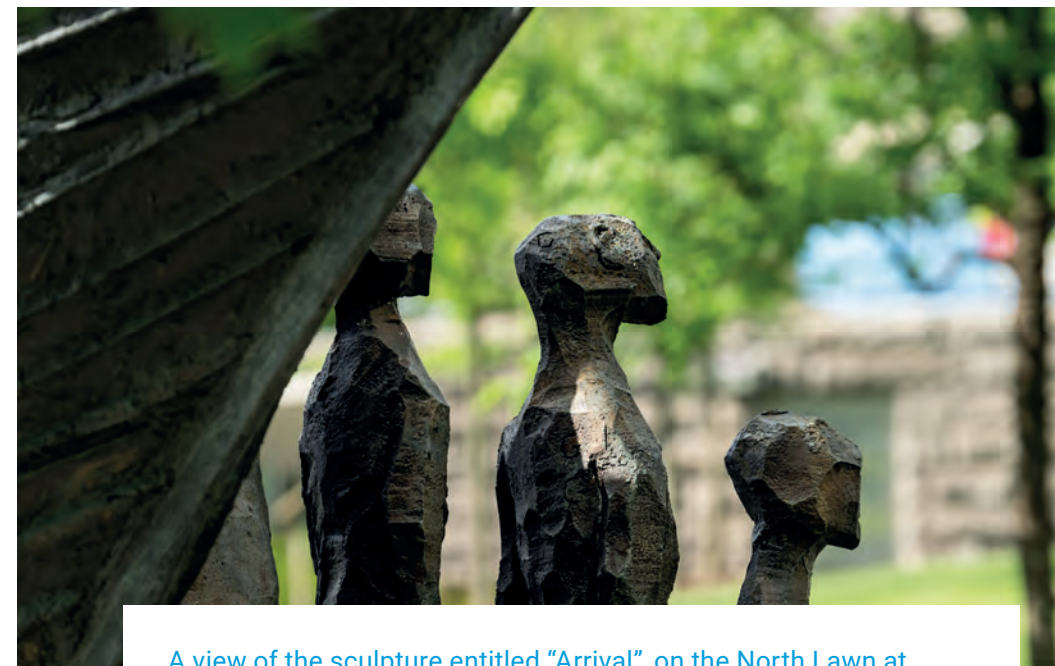
Ultimately, the effectiveness of our work depends on the availability of cash. We have taken stringent measures to conserve cash to mitigate the impact of the liquidity crisis on our regular budget operations. Late and non-payments of contributions for peacekeeping operations have undermined our ability to pay for contingent-owned equipment. We will continue to seek lasting solutions to ensure we deliver on our mandate as effectively and sustainably as possible.

At every step, **our Organization and our personnel will continue to stand in solidarity with the people of the world** through these trying times, as we seek to forge a more peaceful, healthy, equal and prosperous future together, and a world that leaves no one behind.



Through the interactive photographic exhibit, "Peace Begins with Her", the United Nations paid tribute to the contribution of women peacebuilders and peacekeepers in ending conflict and building sustainable peace.

(New York; October 2023)  
© UN Photo/Loey Felipe



A view of the sculpture entitled "Arrival", on the North Lawn at United Nations Headquarters. The sculpture is a symbol of hope and resilience in pursuit of a better future, in a world that leaves no one behind.

(New York; May 2024) © UN Photo/Mark Garten