



GENEVA CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
ADVANCEMENT AND GLOBAL DIALOGUE

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Opening of the 58th Session

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WELCOME AND INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

H.E. Mr. Jürg LAUBER, President of the United Nations Human Rights Council

We gather here at a time of profound global challenges – conflicts, inequalities, the erosion of fundamental freedoms and an alarming backlash against human rights in many parts of the world. The very principles upon which the United Nations was founded 80 years ago are being tested. This milestone anniversary should serve as a moment of reflection.

Are we living up to the promise of the UN Charter and the core international human rights treaties? Are we doing enough to protect the most vulnerable? And most importantly, are our efforts making a real difference on the ground where it matters most? History has shown that when human rights are weakened, crises deepen, conflicts escalate, and societies fracture. Today, we see this playing out in real time. Mounting attacks on civic space, attempts to silence independent voices, and the shrinking of hard-won human rights protections.



An action-oriented Council driven by the voices of victims of human rights violations

These trends demand our urgent response. Amid these difficulties, we must remember why we are here. Our responsibility is not just to debate or adopt resolutions. It is to make tangible, positive impact on people's lives. Over the next six weeks, the victims and survivors of human rights violations and abuses must remain at the centre of our discussions and actions. Their voices must guide our work and their dignity must be our priority.

This Council was created to be a forum for dialogue, cooperation, accountability, and action. Let us rise to this challenge with renewed determination. Let us reaffirm that human rights are not optional. They are universal, indivisible, interdependent, and essential for peace, security, and development. As we begin this session, I urge all of us to engage in meaningful and respectful discussions, to listen to those most affected, and to ensure that our words translate into action.

ADDRESSES DELIVERED BY DISTINGUISHED GUESTS

H.E. Mr. Philemon YANG, President of the United Nations General Assembly

The three pillars of the United Nations are deeply interwoven. Upholding human rights is fundamental to achieving lasting peace and security, and constitutes a sound basis for the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We face serious global challenges. From armed conflicts and climate change to widening inequalities and deepening poverty, we are witnessing a sharp decline in human rights. There are growing violations and often brazen disregard for international humanitarian law. Those violations have devastating consequences.

Even war has rules – Upholding humanitarian access, dialogue and accountability

More than 300 million people now require humanitarian assistance. The urgency of this moment cannot be overstated. In every conflict, victims are often women, children, and minorities who bear the heaviest burden. The human suffering and destruction of infrastructure in Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, Myanmar, Haiti, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo are intolerable. These injustices must end. Even war has rules. Civilians must never be targets.

The recent special session and the establishment of an independent fact-finding mission to investigate and document human rights violations in Eastern **Democratic Republic of Congo** are good signals. This Council has once again demonstrated its ability to act swiftly to address violations and uphold accountability. The long overdue ceasefire in **Gaza** and the recent hostage release deal offer a glimmer of hope. The success of the ceasefire is of decisive significance. Only full implementation can secure a lasting ceasefire and ensure the uninterrupted flow of humanitarian aid. A just and lasting peace in the Middle East depends on a two-state solution. That solution will enable Israel and Palestine to coexist in peace and security in accordance with international law and United Nations resolutions.

More broadly, dialogue must remain at the heart of conflict resolution. Dialogue is a powerful weapon which human beings must use for peace to prevail everywhere. We are approaching the 80th anniversary of the United Nations, an occasion the General Assembly will commemorate



this year. Our calls for global peace must be more resilient, harnessing the powerful symbolism of this milestone year.

Last September world leaders unanimously adopted the Pact for the Future along with its annexes, the Global Digital Compact and the Declaration on Future Generations. The Pact charts a decisive course toward a more just, equitable and sustainable world, one where human rights are upheld for all everywhere. Our Pact for the Future reaffirms international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and international humanitarian law. Our challenge now is implementation. Implementation is a task that will require full global mobilization with robust engagement from governments, United Nations agencies, international and regional organizations, as well as civil society. Implementation of the pact is a process whose time has come.

Presidential initiatives with human rights as their cornerstone

Organizations in Geneva will play a critical role in that process. Protecting human rights and dignity is a cornerstone of my presidency of the General Assembly. Human dignity makes it possible for us to attain excellence and happiness. Last month, I convened one of my first signature events, ‘**Preserving Human Dignity in Armed Conflict**’. I was heartened by the strong political will of Member States to uphold and reinforce their commitment to international humanitarian law. We will continue mobilizing advocacy to eliminate **child labour** in all its forms, including its use in armed conflict. To advance this goal, I will convene a discussion on child labour focused on protecting children and upholding their dignity. I will also focus on advancing the rights of older persons. In the coming months, I will convene a high-level meeting to consider the recommendations of the **Working Group on Aging**. Older persons must have full enjoyment of their human rights.

Moreover, I will continue to address the enduring injustices of racism and colonialism. We will uphold the spirit that guided Member States’ decision last December to declare a **Second International Decade for People of African Descent**. This decision reaffirms our collective commitment to achieve recognition, justice, and development for people of African descent. To advance this commitment, I will convene the annual commemorative meetings for the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the International Day of the Remembrance of Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Earlier this session, I joined the Gender Champions Network. In doing so, I play to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment. We will integrate the gender perspective throughout the General Assembly’s work and my activities. I have re-established the **Advisory Board on Gender Equality** to focus on women’s economic empowerment that is necessary for the implementation of gender-related commitments in the Pact for the Future. We are happy that the Human Rights Council has followed this good practice. Additionally, I have appointed co-facilitators to lead consultations in preparation for a high-level meeting. This meeting will commemorate the **30th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women** and the landmark Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Beijing+30.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the **World Programme of Action for Youth**. This underscores the critical role of young people in driving inclusive and sustainable development.



We will convene Member States in May for a discussion on how **digitalization can enhance the SDGs**. We are convinced that digitalization will empower young people in Africa. Throughout each of these engagements, I will emphasize the indispensable contribution of civil society to advancing human rights. The work of civil society is vital both to this Council and to the broader human rights agenda.

Honouring the immense legacy of Nelson Mandela

That is a message I delivered at my Town Hall with civil society organizations held in New York just two weeks ago. We will also host the annual high-level debate on crime prevention that will mark the 10th anniversary of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, the **Nelson Mandela Rules**. The high-level debate on crime prevention will address the global prison challenge that would mark the 10th anniversary of the Nelson Mandela Rules to ensure humane treatment of prisoners.

This year, we will also be awarding the Nelson Mandela Prize. This award is given every five years to two individuals who have dedicated their lives to serving humanity. I invite Member States and all the relevant stakeholders to submit nominations before the end of this month so that we can identify individuals who would honour the legacy of Nelson Mandela. The prize will coincide with the celebration of the Nelson Mandela International Day on 18th July. Excellencies, all these topics are closely related to my vision. These topics aim to promote human rights and preserve human dignity for all everywhere.

Fully upholding the centrality of the UNHRC and its complementarity with the UNGA

As President of the General Assembly, I aim to advance the global human rights agenda. We are mindful that strengthening cooperation between the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, two vital pillars of the United Nations, has never been more urgent. I urge all Member States to ensure that the Human Rights Council remains a platform for genuine dialogue and meaningful cooperation to promote and protect human rights for everyone everywhere.

Greater resources and support are essential to enabling the Council to fulfill its mandate effectively, particularly as global challenges continue to increase. I look forward to working with all of you to further promote cooperation and complementarity between the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly. Our shared goal is upholding human rights and dignity for everyone everywhere.

H.E. Mr. António GUTERRES, Secretary-General of the United Nations

This session begins under the weight of a grim milestone - the third anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, in violation of the UN charter. More than 12,600 civilians killed, with many more injured. Entire communities reduced to rubble. Hospitals and schools destroyed. We must spare no effort to bring an end to this conflict, and to achieve a just and lasting peace in line with the UN Charter, international law and General Assembly resolutions. Conflicts like the war in Ukraine exact a heavy toll. A toll on people. A toll on fundamental principles like territorial integrity, sovereignty and the rule of law. And a toll on the vital business of this Council.



Human rights as a shining light in the deepest darkness

Without respect for human rights - civil, cultural, economic, political and social - sustainable peace is a pipedream. Like this Council, human rights shine a light in the darkest places. Through its work, and the work of the High Commissioner's Office around the world, this Council is supporting brave human rights defenders risking persecution, detention and even death. This Council is working with governments, civil society and others to strengthen action on human rights. It is also supporting investigations and accountability.

Five years ago, we launched our Call to Action for Human Rights, embedding human rights across the work of the United Nations around the world in close cooperation with our partners. I will continue supporting this important work, and the High Commissioner's Office, as we fight for human rights everywhere. We have our work cut out for us.

Human rights as the oxygen of humanity

But one by one, **human rights are being suffocated**. By autocrats, crushing opposition because they fear what a truly empowered people would do. By a patriarchy that keeps girls out of school, and women at arm's length from basic rights. By wars and violence that strip populations of their right to food, water and education. By warmongers who thumb their nose at international law, international humanitarian law and the UN Charter. **Human rights are being suffocated by the climate crisis**. And by a morally bankrupt global financial system that too often obstructs the path to greater equality and sustainable development. By runaway technologies like Artificial Intelligence that hold great promise, but also the ability to violate human rights at the touch of a button. By growing intolerance against entire groups - from Indigenous peoples, to migrants and refugees, to the LGBTQI+ community, to persons with disabilities. And by voices of division and anger who view human rights not as a boon to humanity, but as a barrier to the power, profit and control they seek. In short, **human rights are on the ropes and being pummelled hard**. This represents a direct threat to all of the hard-won mechanisms and systems established over the last 80 years to protect and advance human rights. But as the recently adopted Pact for the Future reminds us, human rights are, in fact, a source of solutions. The Pact provides a playbook on how we can win the fight for human rights on several fronts.

Human rights through peace and peace through human rights

Conflicts inflict human rights violations on a massive scale. In the **Occupied Palestinian Territory**, violations of human rights have skyrocketed since the horrific Hamas attacks of October 7 and the intolerable levels of death and destruction in Gaza. I am gravely concerned by the rising violence in the **occupied West Bank** by Israeli settlers and other violations, as well as calls for annexation. We are witnessing a precarious ceasefire. We must avoid at all costs a resumption of hostilities. The people in **Gaza** have already suffered too much. It's time for a permanent ceasefire, the dignified release of all remaining hostages, irreversible progress towards a two-State solution, an end to the occupation, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with Gaza as an integral part.

In **Sudan**, bloodshed, displacement and famine are engulfing the country. The warring parties must take immediate action to protect civilians, uphold human rights, cease hostilities and forge



peace. Domestic and international human rights monitoring and investigation mechanisms should be permitted to document what is happening on the ground.

In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** (DRC), we see a deadly whirlwind of violence and horrifying human rights abuses, amplified by the recent M23 offensive, supported by the Rwandan Defense Forces. As more cities fall, the risk of a regional war rises. **It's time to silence the guns.** It's time for diplomacy and dialogue. The recent joint summit in Tanzania offered a way forward with a renewed call for an immediate ceasefire. The sovereignty and territorial integrity of the DRC must be respected. The Congolese people deserve peace.

In the **Sahel**, I call for a renewed regional dialogue to protect citizens from terrorism and systemic violations of human rights, and to create the conditions for sustainable development.

In **Myanmar**, the situation has grown far worse in the four years since the military seized power and arbitrarily detained members of the democratically elected government. We need greater cooperation to bring an end to the hostilities and forge a path towards an inclusive democratic transition and a return to civilian rule, allowing for the safe return of the Rohingya refugees.

In **Haiti**, we are seeing massive human rights violations, including more than a million people displaced, and children facing a horrific increase in sexual violence and recruitment into gangs. In the coming days, I will put forward proposals to the United Nations Security Council for greater stability and security for the people of Haiti, namely through an effective UN assistance mechanism to support the Multilateral Security Support mission, the national police and Haitian authorities. A durable solution requires a political process - led and owned by the Haitian people - that restores democratic institutions through elections.

The **Pact for the Future** calls for peace processes and approaches rooted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international law and the UN Charter. It proposes specific actions to prioritize conflict prevention, mediation, resolution and peacebuilding. And it includes a commitment to tackle the root causes of conflict, which are so often enmeshed in denials of basic human needs and rights.

Advancing human rights through development

The Sustainable Development Goals and human rights are fundamentally intertwined. They represent real human needs - health, food, water, education, decent work and social protection. With less than one-fifth of the Goals on track, the Pact for the Future calls for a massive acceleration through an SDG Stimulus, reforming the global financial architecture, and taking meaningful action for countries drowning in debt. This must include focused action to conquer the most widespread human rights abuse in history - inequality for women and girls. The Pact calls for investing in battling all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls, and ensuring their meaningful participation and leadership across all walks of life. Along with the Declaration on Future Generations, the Pact calls for supporting the rights and futures of young people through decent work, removing barriers for youth participation, and enhancing training. The Global Digital Compact calls on nations to champion young innovators, nurture entrepreneurial spirit, and equip the next generation with digital literacy and skills.



The rule of law and human rights in a symbiotic relationship

The rule of law, when founded on human rights, is an essential pillar of protection. It shields the most vulnerable. It's the first line of defence against crime and corruption. It supports fair, just and inclusive economies and societies. It holds perpetrators of human rights atrocities to account. It enables civic space for people to make their voices heard — and for journalists to carry out their essential work, free from interference or threats. It reaffirms the world's commitment to equal access to justice, good governance, and transparent and accountable institutions.

The realization of human rights through climate action

Last year was the hottest on record - capping the hottest decade on record. Rising heat, melting glaciers and hotter oceans are a recipe for disaster. Floods, droughts, deadly storms, hunger, mass displacement - our war on nature is also a war on human rights. We must choose a different path. I salute the many Member States who legally recognize the **right to a healthy environment** and I call on all countries to do the same.

Governments must keep their promise to produce new, economy-wide national climate action plans this year, well ahead of COP30 in Brazil. Those plans must limit the rise in global temperature to 1.5 degrees, including by accelerating the global energy transition. We also need a surge in finance for climate action in developing countries, to adapt to global heating, slash emissions and accelerate the renewables revolution, which represents a massive economic opportunity. We must stand up to the misleading campaign of many in the fossil fuel industry and its enablers who are aiding and abetting this madness, while also protecting and defending those on the front lines of climate justice.

Human rights through stronger, better governance of technology

As fast-moving technologies expand into every aspect of our lives, I am deeply concerned about human rights being undermined. At its best, social media is a meeting ground for people to exchange ideas and spark respectful debate. But it can also be an arena of fiery combat and blatant ignorance. A place where the poisons of misinformation, disinformation, racism, misogyny and hate speech are not only tolerated, but often encouraged. Verbal violence online can easily spill into physical violence in real life. Recent rollbacks on social media fact-checking and content moderation are re-opening the floodgates to more hate, more threats, and more violence. Make no mistake. These rollbacks will lead to less free speech, not more, as people become increasingly fearful to engage on these platforms.

Meanwhile, the great promise of Artificial Intelligence is matched by limitless peril to undermine human autonomy, human identity, human control - and yes, human rights. In the face of these threats, the Global Digital Compact brings the world together to ensure that **human rights are not sacrificed on the altar of technology**. This includes working with digital companies and policymakers to extend human rights to every corner of cyberspace, including a new focus on information integrity across digital platforms. The Global Principles for Information Integrity I launched last year will support and inform this work as we push for a more humane information ecosystem.



The Global Digital Compact also includes the first universal agreement on the governance of AI that brings every country to the table and commitments on capacity-building, so all countries and people benefit from AI's potential. By investing in affordable internet, digital literacy, and infrastructure. By helping developing countries use AI to grow small businesses, improve public services, and connect communities to new markets, and by placing human rights at the centre of AI-driven systems. The Pact's decisions to create an Independent International Scientific Panel on AI and an ongoing Global Dialogue that ensure all countries have a voice in shaping its future are important steps forward. We must implement them.

An urgent call to end the asphyxiation of human rights

We can help end the suffocation of human rights by breathing life into the Pact for the Future and the work of this Council. Let us do that together. We do not have a moment to lose.

H.E. Mr. Volker TÜRK, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The international system is going through a tectonic shift and the human rights edifice we have built up so painstakingly over decades has never been under so much strain. Today, we mark the third anniversary of the full-scale Russian invasion of **Ukraine**. At a time of escalating civilian casualties continued wanton destruction of urban areas and speculation about the war's trajectory, any sustainable peace must be anchored in the rights, needs and aspirations of the Ukrainian people; in accountability; and in the principles of the UN Charter and international law.

The decisions that are made today whether they foster justice or impunity will shape what follows in Israel and the **occupied Palestinian territory** where the suffering has been unbearable. I repeat my call for an independent investigation into grave violations of international law committed by Israel in the course of its attacks across Gaza and by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups. Any sustainable solution must be found must be based on accountability, justice, the right to self-determination, and the human rights and dignity of both Israelis and Palestinians. Any suggestion of forcing people from their land is completely unacceptable.

Societies threatened by inequalities, injustices and climate change

Beyond Ukraine and Gaza, conflicts and crises are tearing communities and societies apart - from Sudan to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Myanmar and Afghanistan. Social tensions are rising. Inequalities and injustices breed resentment often directed at refugees, migrants and the most vulnerable. Perversely, the richest one percent controls more wealth than the majority of humanity. The climate crisis is a human rights catastrophe crushing lives and livelihoods. Its cascading impacts on food security, migration, health, energy and water threaten human rights now and for generations to come, particularly for women and girls.

Digital technologies encroaching on fundamental rights and freedoms

Meanwhile, digital technologies are widely misused to suppress, limit and violate our rights through surveillance, online hatred, harmful disinformation, harassment and built-in discrimination. Artificial intelligence brings new speed and scale to these threats. The splintering



of social media platforms into self-selecting channels that cater to their audience contributes to the isolation of individuals. The atomization of societies and the loss of a shared public space and in some quarters human rights are being shunned, vilified and distorted. This is the backdrop against which my Office and the broader human rights ecosystem - including this Council - are working to promote and safeguard the rights of everyone, everywhere.

A low-cost, high-impact investment - Supporting OHCHR's invaluable work

Last year for example, my Office contributed to the release of over 3 000 arbitrarily detained persons. We took part in some 11 000 human rights monitoring missions, observed nearly 1 000 trials, and documented some 15 000 situations of human rights violations around the world. In addition to the daily interventions with governments, we issued about 245 statements casting light on human rights concerns. In some 130 countries, OHCHR's teams on the ground are supporting countries to improve their laws and institutions and to adopt social and economic policies that reinforce cohesion and address injustice. We contributed to human rights-based approaches to sustainable development, taxation and public spending from Cambodia to Jordan and Serbia. Support to my Office is a low-cost, high-impact investment. I call on you to go the extra mile to make sure that my Office, your own national human rights institutions, and human rights non-governmental organizations can continue to do this essential work.

Authoritarian strongmen and oligarchs crushing global consensus on human rights

Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and despite setbacks, we have made steady progress. Freedom expanded, particularly for oppressed communities. There was widespread understanding that human rights are the foundation of effective governance, sound economic policies, and social cohesion. Today, we can no longer take that basic understanding and progress for granted. The global consensus on human rights is crumbling under the weight of authoritarians, strongmen and oligarchs. By some estimates autocrats now control around one-third of the world's economy - more than double the proportion 30 years ago. Leaders cite national security and the fight against terrorism to justify gross violations. Hypocrisy, double standards and impunity have also played a part. Regional powers that are neutral or hostile to human rights are growing in influence.

Beware of taking human rights for granted

Everywhere, we see attempts to ignore, to undermine and to redefine human rights, and to create a false binary that pits one right against another in a zero-sum game. There are concerted efforts to **chip away at gender equality** and the rights of migrants, refugees, persons with disabilities and minorities of all kinds. But human rights - from the right to food and adequate housing, to the rights to health and education and freedom of speech - are for everyone. We need an all-out effort by everyone to make sure that human rights and the rule of law remain foundational to communities, societies and international relations. Otherwise, the picture is very dangerous.

In previous centuries, the unrestrained use of force by the powerful, indiscriminate attacks on civilians population, transfers and child labour were commonplace. Dictators could order atrocity crimes consigning vast numbers of persons to their deaths. Be aware this can happen again, but we are far from powerless to prevent it. Our tools are the United Nations Charter, the



Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the body of international law and the institutions that work to implement them, including this Council, my Office, courts and the judiciary, civil society, independent journalists, and human rights defenders around the world.

Let us embrace the ‘politics of wisdom’ rooted in facts, the law and compassion

Today, we need an alternative vision. We need the ‘politics of wisdom’ rooted in facts, the law and compassion.

First, **human rights are about facts**. That is why my Office is monitoring documenting and reporting on violations and abuses in war zones and crises around the world. I will provide details in my global update next week. In addition to Ukraine and the occupied Palestinian territory, examples include the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Sudan and **Syria** where my Office has been documenting abuses and raising the alarm for a couple of years. Or **Afghanistan**, where we are reporting on the impact of gender apartheid on women and girls. Or **Haiti**, where my team has reported on the devastating impact of illicit flows of weapons. Never underestimate the power of **factual, legal and moral clarity**. Facts on their own can and must prompt action. When the red flags go up, they must trigger an immediate response - that is why the work of this Council and other human mechanisms is so important. While we cannot say exactly how much death and suffering has been prevented by these efforts, we know they make a difference.

Second, **human rights are about the law** which is a break on power, privilege and unrestrained profit. Some things are not for sale our international legal frameworks. Institutions, including the International Criminal Court, are fundamental to ensuring justice and achieving accountability for the most serious of crimes, preventing future violations, and making the world safer for everyone. Equally important are strong institutions at the national level to protect vulnerable persons and enable everyone to participate fully in cultural, religious, social, economic and public life. It is imperative that we stand up for these institutions when they come under attack.

Finally, **human rights are nothing without compassion**, the glue that unites us in our common humanity. We rarely hear about compassion from today’s leaders. But some of the most successful visionaries throughout history - including Nelson Mandela and Eleanor Roosevelt - have led through their remarkable compassion. Human rights go beyond thought leadership to heart leadership. They tap into some of our most cherished ideals of how people should treat each other and the meaning of human dignity. Because of that, they are widely popular. Human rights have been central to movements for equality and justice throughout history - from the anti-slavery, anti-racism, anti-apartheid struggles to the labour movement - from decolonization to the civil rights movement, the women’s movement, the LGBTIQ+ movement, Black Lives Matter, the indigenous rights movement, the disability rights movement, the climate justice movement and beyond.

The universal power of human rights

Human rights have universal power to move people to action in countries where human rights are not widely respected. People will risk their lives to defend them and I want to pay tribute to brave human rights activists and defenders everywhere. This is why even the most repressive governments often use the language of human rights to try to justify themselves. They know that



human rights abuses trigger revulsion and reduce their power and influence. Upholding human rights makes eminent sense for stability, for prosperity, for our better common future. Human rights are a winning proposition for humanity and we will continue to promote, protect and defend them around the world with humility, determination and an indomitable hope.

H.E. Mr. Ignazio Cassis, Head of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs

As every year, it is my great pleasure to welcome you here in Geneva. But today, I have mixed feelings. On the one hand, I am very proud and on the other, I am deeply worried. On the one hand, a **sense of pride**. On the 9 October 2024, the UN General Assembly elected Switzerland to the Human Rights Council for the next three years with 175 votes out of 190. The trust you have placed in my country honours us and I am very grateful for it. Geneva has also witnessed a historic moment when by acclamation our Ambassador Jürg Lauber was elected 19th President of the Human Rights Council. It is the first time that a senior Swiss diplomat has taken up that office. This is why I am proud. But let me move on to why I am worried. Our **planet is in a bad state**. As a physician, I cannot ignore that diagnosis.

We are living through a time of **geopolitical uncertainty** where diplomatic spaces are shrinking, humanitarian crises are multiplying and the vast majority of the global population is living under authoritarian regimes. We face immense challenges to which we must rise here in Geneva. It is our duty to act and we have the means with which to do so. These are the challenges I allude to. Let us take a look at 2024, a year marked by **major elections**. More than four billion citizens - that's more than half of the global population - went to the ballot box in 76 different countries. That was a genuine test for democracy at the global scale, the result of which is deep unease voters expressed genuine distrust vis-a-vis their elected representatives. Young people are becoming more radical, populist parties are gaining ground, and social networks are imposing unfiltered communication upon us. It seems as if the world is losing its bearings. There are five main reasons for this.

A profound crisis of trust coupled with the loss of reference points

First of all, globalization has reduced poverty, but it has left behind it areas of de-industrialization, in particular in the West. Second, the digital revolution is shaking up the job market. Third, identity claims - be they ethnic or sexual identity or other claims - have taken on a scale that is destabilizing many societies and many individuals. Fourth, social networks exacerbate divisions. Finally, the climate crisis is fuelling a sense of chaos which is worsening defiance towards people in governance. We see that there is a deep crisis of trust. We have also lost our points of reference. In this context, human rights are a fundamental bedrock upon which we can stabilize our societies. I am thinking in particular of individual rights and respect for privacy, the right to free and transparent elections, the right to work and economic stability, the right to freedom of expression - with the responsibility of the media being recalled - and also the right to a sustainable environment.

Time is not for division, but for concerted action



19 years on from the creation of the Human Rights Council in 2006, one is forced to note that the challenges are growing - the war in Ukraine and today we mark the third anniversary with a great sense of sorrow. You must also take into account the ongoing tensions in the Balkans, the conflict in the Middle-East, instability in Northern Africa and war in sub-Saharan Africa. The international context is increasingly alarming. While I was preparing this statement for the seventh consecutive year, my optimism gave way to increased realism. I am now convinced that it is more necessary than ever before to focus our efforts on the protection of fundamental rights, especially the right to freedom of expression, religion and association; the rights to life, to equality before the law and to education; the right to ownership and the total prohibition of torture and slavery. As we face threats against democracies, the Human Rights Council must act united and with determination. The time is not for division, but for concerted action in order to uphold the principles that guarantee peace and stability. This is something the Swiss presidency can achieve.

Human rights are not a luxury, but a necessity

The primary responsibility of the Swiss presidency is to ensure the smooth running of the Human Rights Council's work, thereby enabling it to fully deliver on its mandate. Human rights are not a luxury, but a necessity - as Ambassador Lauber said just after his election in December 2024. Switzerland is concerned by the decisions of some Member States to withdraw from the Council. Human rights are a matter of concern for all of us. Every member of the United Nations should shoulder its responsibilities. In this respect, the Swiss presidency is not merely an honour. It is a matter of responsibility. So, I would like to take this opportunity to express my full support to all those at UN New York and UN Geneva that will serve him well as he seeks to achieve this mission.

Switzerland's relentless commitment to IHL, human rights and multilateralism

Switzerland will continue to carry out with determination the responsibilities it has assumed over the past two years at the UN Security Council. Throughout this mandate, we have consistently underscored the importance of international humanitarian law and fundamental rights as pillars of peace and security. It is with the same commitment that we are preparing for our OSCE presidency in 2026, determined to strengthen dialogue and cooperation in Europe. Switzerland stands for effective targeted multilateralism rooted in the principle of subsidiarity. 80 years after the founding of the United Nations, the state of the world serves as a pressing reminder that our mission is far from complete.