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ADVANCEMENT AND GLOBAL DIALOGUE

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Presentation of the High Commissioner's Annual Report

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PRESENTATION OF THE ANNUAL REPORT

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

Conflicts are spiralling. Depicting the military escalation between **Israel and Iran** as deeply worrying, the High Commissioner joins all those appealing for de-escalation and urgent diplomatic negotiations to end these attacks and find a way forward. The High Commissioner calls for full respect of international law by both sides, in particular the protection of civilians in densely populated areas.

Meanwhile, **climate chaos** is raging on. In every region of the world, **economic uncertainty** is taking root while technology is developing uncontrolled and at dizzying speed. Behind each crisis, people are suffering. The international community must never lose sight of this fact.

International law and human rights as blueprints for a better future

The United Nations was founded to end war, reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights and promote justice and international law. For 80 years, those promises helped deliver a greater



measure of peace and sustainable development. Life expectancy increased by 25%. The number of people with a basic education doubled. States agreed on wide-ranging laws of war. They adopted treaties on women's rights, on the environment, on disarmament, and on the prevention of genocide. Despite edging close to **nuclear annihilation** several times, reason prevailed. Global agreements have proven themselves over decades, providing a vision for a better future.

Today, the world is witnessing dramatic steps to weaken them, creating **a more dangerous world for us all**. Can we sit by as global security and prosperity are undermined and as the rule of law is eroded? Can we continue as usual, while powerful countries cast aside the agreements that underpin our lives? Can we risk massive conflict based on leaders' personal assessments and agendas? We must ask ourselves, is this the world the framers of the Charter imagined?

We must answer with the strongest possible defence of international law and human rights. The current trajectory of **escalating conflict** and **blatant disregard** for international human rights and humanitarian law is indefensible. Civilians are deliberately attacked. Parties to conflict starve and rape as weapons of war. Life-saving humanitarian aid is obstructed and humanitarian aid workers are targeted. Accountability is often absent.

Unspeakable civilian suffering in the Middle East

Israel's means and methods of warfare are inflicting horrifying, unconscionable suffering on Palestinians in Gaza. More than **55,000 Palestinians** have been killed, including many thousands of children, according to the Ministry of Health in Gaza, and the attacks continue unabated. Israel has weaponised food and blocked life-saving aid. The High Commissioner urges immediate impartial investigations into **deadly attacks on desperate civilians** trying to reach food distribution centres. Disturbing, dehumanising rhetoric from senior Israeli government officials is reminiscent of the gravest of crimes. Israel's refusal to allow international journalists to report from Gaza has helped its armed forces and Hamas to avoid transparency and accountability. The facts speak for themselves.

Everyone in government needs to wake up to what is happening in Gaza. All those with influence must exert maximum pressure on Israel and Hamas to put an end to this unbearable suffering. In the **West Bank**, no day passes without attacks by Israeli security forces and settlers killing, detaining, and forcibly displacing Palestinians. Settlements are illegal. Annexation is illegal. Attacks on Israelis by armed civilians also continue in both Israel and the occupied West Bank. All of this is deeply worrying.

Only an **immediate ceasefire**, leading to a **two-state solution** with Gaza as an integral part of the Palestinian state, can offer sustainable peace. All Israeli hostages must be freed immediately and unconditionally. All Palestinians detained arbitrarily must be released.

The High Commissioner further voices concern over air and drone strikes by Israel in **Lebanon**, including in southern Beirut, which have killed civilians and destroyed homes and medical facilities. The High Commissioner urges full respect for the ceasefire to enable reconstruction and the return home of displaced people on both sides of the border. At this critical juncture, it is key for the international community to support the Lebanese government's efforts for much-needed institutional reforms and socio-economic recovery.



From Eastern Europe through the Asian and African continents – The peace imperative

In **Ukraine**, as ceasefire talks stall, the conflict is escalating. Civilian casualties have increased significantly this year as Russian armed forces used long-range weapons against cities and drones in frontline areas. While there have been exchanges of prisoners of war and, in some cases, civilian detainees, many are still in captivity. The High Commissioner urges the Russian Federation and Ukraine to commit to a full exchange of prisoners of war and for the immediate release of Ukrainian civilians detained in Russia. A comprehensive ceasefire is urgently needed, thereby leading to a peace agreement in line with the UN Charter and international law.

Sudan is plunging deeper into chaos and lawlessness without the attention this situation demands. Hostilities have intensified in North Darfur and Kordofan, marked by grave violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. OHCHR documented a tripling in the number of arbitrary killings of civilians between February and April. This was largely due to summary executions by the Sudanese armed forces of alleged collaborators in Khartoum. The High Commissioner remains deeply concerned at the situation in El Fasher, which has been under siege by the rapid support forces for over a year. Horrified by widespread sexual violence, including against children, and attacks on humanitarians, the High Commissioner urges the international community to press for a political solution to stop the flow of arms and to curb the business interests that are fuelling this conflict. All parties must be held accountable.

The escalating hostilities in **South Sudan** are extremely worrying, threatening the country's already fragile peace process. In the first quarter of 2025, OHCHR documented that 739 people were killed, more than 650 injured, almost 150 abducted, and 40 subjected to sexual violence. The High Commissioner urges the parties to cease hostilities, resume dialogue, and uphold the 2018 revitalised peace agreement.

The High Commissioner remains deeply concerned about the human rights situation in the **eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)**, on which he will provide a briefing in the afternoon of Monday, 16 June, within the framework of the Enhanced Interactive Dialogue on eastern DRC.

In **Myanmar**, the military exploited the turmoil caused by the earthquake in March to double down on attacks against civilians, while restricting humanitarian access even further. Military operations have continued with reports of attacks on schools, religious sites and other protected locations. This violence must end. The High Commissioner urges the parties to comply fully with international law, including the measures already ordered by the International Court of Justice to protect the Rohingya.

Horrified by the attacks near Pahalgam in **India-administered Kashmir**, the High Commissioner calls for perpetrators to be brought to justice. He urges both India and Pakistan to ensure the ceasefire holds, to prevent hateful rhetoric and disinformation, and to re-establish essential water-sharing arrangements.

The High Commissioner renews his call for the immediate and unconditional release by the *de facto* Houthi authorities in **Yemen** of personnel from the United Nations, civil society



organisations, and diplomatic missions, including eight OHCHR staff. These detentions are an affront to the international community.

Human rights situations requiring close and urgent attention

Haiti is collapsing into a tumult marked by huge suffering. Over 2,600 people have been killed and 957 injured between January and May. The gangs are strengthening their grip on the capital and extending their influence to the regions of the north and the south, killing and raping people and burning houses, schools, churches, and businesses. Formation of self-defence groups who are entirely unaccountable is gravely concerning. The High Commissioner strongly hopes that the judiciary meetings planned in April to fight against or campaign against sexual violence, corruption, and other crimes will be established as soon as possible. The High Commissioner calls for a United Nations mission on a multinational basis to support security.

Libya is holding by a thread. The confrontations in Tripoli last month led to many civil victims and threaten a fragile reconciliation and peace process. Security forces and armed groups are killing and kidnapping. The High Commissioner expresses deep concern at the persistence of abuse and the violations of rights of migrants and refugees. The High Commissioner calls on the authorities to investigate the discovery of dozens of corpses in detention centres.

In **Syria**, the announcement of easing and lifting sanctions and the creation of national commissions for transitional justice in disappeared persons are true opportunities. However, the High Commissioner remains deeply concerned by the persistent information of violations of rights of certain communities. Calling for a strengthening of protection and responsibility measures leading to greater accountability, the High Commissioner awaits for the outcomes and the investigation into the violence that caused hundreds of deaths in the coastal regions earlier this year. He further calls on the authorities to ensure that the perpetrators are held responsible in line with international standards. A significant presence of OHCHR in the country will be essential to support a transitional justice process and a victim-focused approach.

As political tensions in Ethiopia are growing in **Tigray**, the High Commissioner invites all stakeholders to undertake constructive dialogue and guarantee the implementation of a ceasefire. He further invites the authorities to protect civil space, so essential in the run-up to elections next year. It is crucial that an end be put to arbitrary detentions and the intimidation of media professionals and journalists, and that there be full respect for procedural guarantees.

Other crises also calling for urgent attention

Military authorities in the **Sahel** have consolidated their grip on power, frustrating the democratic aspirations of their people while the human rights situation worsens. In Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, thousands of civilians have been killed in attacks by extremist armed groups. In this context, OHCHR has also received reports of civilians killed by government forces and their auxiliaries in all three countries. All responses to security threats must respect international law.

The High Commissioner voices concern over growing instability in **Nigeria**, which threatens to spill across borders. Armed groups have intensified killings, abductions, sexual violence and forced recruitment, while inter-communal violence between farming communities and herders is increasing.



Encouraged by progress through dialogue between the interim government and political parties in **Bangladesh**, the High Commissioner urges meaningful advances on reforms to create an environment for free and inclusive elections. However, he expresses concern over recent changes to legislation to allow the banning of political parties and organisations and all related activities. This unduly restricts the freedoms of association, expression and assembly. The Office of the High Commissioner hopes to reach agreement on its expanded presence soon.

Every 14 hours, one media worker or human rights defender is killed or disappeared

Around the world, at least 625 human rights defenders and media workers were killed or disappeared in 2024. According to data gathered by OHCHR, that is one every 14 hours. In many places around the world, **civil society and the media are being vilified**, harassed and silenced. But it is precisely civil society and the media who hold power to account and must be protected.

In a troubling trend, authorities in several countries with **upcoming elections**, including Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Honduras, Peru and Uganda, among others, are banning public gatherings, detaining opposition leaders, undermining civil society and attacking human rights defenders. The High Commissioner is closely following the recent developments in **Bolivia**. Electoral integrity must be preserved ahead of elections in August. Dialogue and respect for the rule of law must prevail.

In **Somalia**, the arrest and detention of journalists and media workers is undermining freedom of expression and creating a climate of fear. Some 26 journalists and media workers have been arrested in Mogadishu so far this year. OHCHR is also documenting increased arbitrary detentions and intimidation of political opponents and media workers in **Venezuela** following the 2024 elections. Expressing serious concerns over cases of torture and ill-treatment in detention and violations of due process, the High Commissioner will provide an update on Friday, 27 June.

Turning to **Türkiye**, the High Commissioner voices concern at mass detentions, including of opposition figures on charges of corruption and terrorism. All those detained for the legitimate exercise of their rights must be released immediately.

In **Georgia** and **El Salvador**, new laws make it more difficult for NGOs and independent media to access foreign funding. This could harm their ability to operate freely and effectively. As similar legislation is under discussion in **Hungary**, the High Commissioner urges the government to reconsider it.

In the **Russian Federation**, the High Commissioner remains deeply concerned by the ongoing suffocation of dissenting voices, civil society, lawyers and the independent media. Criminal charges and harsh sentences for people who criticise state policy or legislation are contrary to international human rights standards.

During my visit to **Serbia** last month, the High Commissioner was struck by the courage and resilience of young people who have mobilised for accountability, transparency and the rule of law. Their voices need to be heard and respected.

Continuing to engage directly with **China** on a wide range of issues, the High Commissioner concerned about lack of progress on much needed legal reform to ensure compliance with



international human rights law. He further regrets that there has not yet been a resolution to the individual cases OHCHR has raised. The latter continues to receive worrying reports of violations in Xinjiang, including untrue prison sentences, incommunicado detention and restrictions on fundamental rights. In Hong Kong, the continued application of national security laws raises serious concern over the shrinking of civic space. In Tibet, there are ongoing infringements on cultural and other rights. The High Commissioner calls for the release of all individuals detained for exercising their rights and to align legislation and policies with international human rights law.

Backlash against equality policies

Social tensions are often rooted in systemic, long-standing discrimination based on race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, migrant status, caste and other characteristics. Policies to tackle such discrimination have had important successes in all regions of the world. When looking at the pushback against ‘standing up for equality policies’ as the High Commissioner qualifies such policy action, we see it for what it is - a fundamental misrepresentation that reveals a strategic decision to **scapegoat vulnerable groups**.

Discrimination is neither rare nor random. It is widespread. Across 119 countries, one in five people reported experiencing discrimination in the past year, according to data gathered by OHCHR. Colonialism’s brutal legacy remains. Racism remains a scourge. People of African descent continue to suffer disproportionately from excessive use of force, including deaths at the hands of law enforcement in Brazil, the United States and more. Data gathered by OHCHR shows that worldwide, women face discrimination at more than double the level experienced by men.

Regressions on women’s rights

In parts of the Russian Federation and the United States, there are severe **restrictions on women’s reproductive rights** and rights to health care. These rights are essential to women’s participation and leadership in every aspect of life. More broadly, the High Commissioner calls on all states to implement gender quotas for women’s political representation. On this point, the High Commissioner regrets that some countries are abolishing them. In **Iran**, the High Commissioner notes the temporary suspension of the so-called hijab law, thereby urging its full repeal along with all related laws and practises that restrict the rights of women and girls. In **Afghanistan**, the *de facto* authorities continue to enforce a systematic policy of erasing women and girls from public life. Even their voices are silenced outside the home, and women are banned from higher education and most employment.

Further pushbacks on the rights of other groups

Disability rights also face pushbacks after years of progress. Some countries are reducing accessibility and cutting funding for access programmes, and influential figures have openly mocked people with disabilities. **LGBTIQ+** people continue to face legal restrictions, hate speech and even violence. In West Africa, draconian laws threaten to criminalise consensual same-sex relations and restrict the work of human rights defenders supporting LGBTIQ+ people. In Argentina and the United States, government officials have made statements vilifying transgender and non-binary people while restricting their rights. Georgia, Hungary, Slovakia and Türkiye are among countries that have adopted or are considering laws that could prohibit



LGBTIQ+ advocacy and ban pride marches and educational material in schools. In Uganda, the Anti-Homosexuality Act fuels systemic violence and discrimination. At least 70 cases involving 88 victims were documented in the first four months of this year.

Migrants and refugees are also targeted by hate speech, unjust legal restrictions, scapegoating and other forms of discrimination in many parts of the world. In Tunisia, **anti-migrant rhetoric** from public officials has fuelled physical attacks and online hate campaigns. Close to **640,000 Afghans** returned to their country from Pakistan and Iran in recent months. More than 250,000 of them were forced to do so. Regardless of legal and documentation status, Afghans forced to return may encounter serious protection risks, especially women and girls who face severe persecution. **Migrant workers** from Myanmar face deportation from Thailand, sometimes followed by conscription into the Myanmar Armed Forces. The High Commissioner is disturbed by reports that the immigration authorities in the Dominican Republic deported pregnant women migrants from Haiti and those who had just given birth.

In **Europe**, the High Commissioner is concerned about the fact that several leaders recently called for changes to the interpretation of human rights law on complex issues of **migration governance**. The High Commissioner urges EU countries to put human rights at the centre of new regulations on returns and migration governance more generally, including by expanding safe and regular pathways. In the **United States**, the arrest and deportation of large numbers of non-nationals, including to third countries, raise serious concern over respect for their rights. As people protest against these developments, the High Commissioner urges the authorities to respect the right to peaceful assembly and to uphold human rights in law enforcement, including by refraining from any resort to military force when civilian authorities are capable of maintaining public order.

Amidst disturbing pushback, human rights enjoy support worldwide

As disturbing as all this pushback is, we must not fall for the hype. This is not a global phenomenon. The vast majority of countries around the world continue to support the expansion of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Half the world's population now benefits from effective national human rights institutions that work with OHCHR. That figure has tripled in the past two decades. And policies to promote equality are working.

In Brazil and Nigeria, for example, quotas for **minorities and marginalised groups** have contributed to greater representation in education and employment. Countries including Bolivia, Chile, Fiji, and Peru have implemented initiatives to promote the participation of **Indigenous peoples**, including reserving seats in national parliaments. The government of Guatemala has started to hold monthly meetings with Indigenous peoples and people of African descent, leading to several local agreements on territorial claims.

Thailand recently became the first country in Southeast Asia to legalise **marriage equality**. Timor-Leste recently passed a law stipulating that police must carry out their duties without discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation. Pakistan has outlawed **child marriage** in Islamabad, a historic legal breakthrough.



The first resolution on discrimination based on work and descent, adopted by the **African Commission on Human and People's Rights**, is an important step to address deep-seated stigma. In Somalia, the new National Disability Rights Bill provides a framework for action and inclusion. Around the world, the High Commissioner is pleased to see governments working to implement their pledges under the **Human Rights 75 Initiative**, with new laws on access to information, reforms to criminal justice systems, and stronger engagement with human rights mechanisms.

Climate change and trade war shockwaves

Many of the poorest people in the world are falling even further behind with their rights to food, health, and adequate standard of living under assault. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is slipping out of reach. More than half of low-income countries are currently in or at high risk of debt distress. Many are also on the frontlines of the **climate crisis**, and the development finance they desperately need is dwindling as major economies shift their priorities, expand defence budgets, and cut development finance.

The recent imposition of **soaring tariffs** may seem like a high-stake poker game with the global economy as the bank. But the **shockwaves of a trade war** will hit least-developed countries with the force of a tsunami. Caribbean countries and small island developing states are among those that will suffer most. The impact on countries with large export sectors, including Bangladesh, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam, could be devastating. Higher tariffs could put health care, education, and the nutritious diet out of reach for many. Higher tariffs could also **roll back gains on gender equality**, as they have a disproportionate impact on women working in low-paid manufacturing jobs. Many least-developed countries have no social safety net, leaving people utterly unprotected. The High Commissioner is deeply disturbed by approaches that treat the poorest people on earth as collateral damage.

Long-term global stability requires a fundamental shift to human rights and **sustainable, inclusive development**, not trade wars or arms races. OHCHR is working around the world to realise the right to development. OHCHR is supporting over 80 projects in 38 countries, from Belize to Jordan and Kenya, with budget analysis, advice on debt servicing, and policies that promote a human rights economy.

Human rights as the compass for the development and use of digital technologies

Digital technologies and artificial intelligence systems offer huge potential, but they also have a dark side. If we do not act quickly, we might lose the battle, and there would be unpredictable consequences for the enjoyment of human rights from that. It is probable that artificial intelligence in military equipment has led already to loss of civilian lives. The possibility of **surveillance through artificial intelligence** is a grave risk to freedom of expression and privacy. The concentration of the development of AI in rich economies can perpetuate the **digital divide** and discrimination based on race and gender. Regulating this technology will require transparency. It will require an open mind and inclusion. Human rights point the way, reinforcing the rule of law, establishing clear legal frameworks and broad participation.



The High Commissioner rejects the argument that human rights somehow stifle innovation. On the contrary, innovation that ignores human rights has led to terrible consequences, from an algorithm that unjustly deprived families of social support to border screening that relies on profiling. Human rights are essential for innovation that delivers for people and planet, not just profits. The High Commissioner welcomes steps towards mandatory human rights **due diligence** in the development, deployment and use of AI technologies. Brazil, the Republic of Korea and the EU are considering such legislation. In some cases, data protection authorities are stepping up. Australia, France, Italy and the Netherlands took legal action against a facial recognition company for breaching people's **privacy**.

Momentum is also building towards protecting workers. For example, the **Hollywood Actors' Union** reached agreement with major studios on the use of AI in film-making. But we need much more. Many countries lack the legal frameworks and resources to meet the challenges posed by AI and could miss out on the opportunities it offers. The coming months will see critical decisions about regulation, including the establishment of two United Nations mechanisms. For the technology we want, these decisions and mechanisms must reflect the firm human rights commitments that are not least included in the Global Digital Compact.

Human rights as guardrails on power

Populists and authoritarians are working hard with their so-called 'culture wars' to distract people from today's real problems. But there is an alternative. It lies in **more human rights, not less**. Human rights provide stability and security in our troubled times. They are a bridge between governments and people, between generations past, present and future. They are guardrails on power, especially when it is unleashed in its most brutal forms.

The painstaking work of investigating and reporting abuses and violations, supporting human rights institutions and addressing human rights emergencies are the best tools we have to prevent and mitigate conflict and to build peace. The High Commissioner is deeply disturbed by **attacks on the international institutions** that underpin our rights, including the International Criminal Court (ICC). Sanctioning judges and prosecutors at national, regional and international levels for doing their jobs is an assault on the rule of law and corrodes justice. This is only the latest in a series of attacks on multilateral institutions and mechanisms, including the United Nations, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), Special Procedure mandate holders and more. Such attacks must stop.

Standing up for human rights in word and deed

The High Commissioner is further **deeply troubled by funding cuts** to his Office, to the human rights mechanisms and to OHCHR partners in civil society. Nearly three quarters of OHCHR partner organisations told OHCHR that they expect to lose more than 40% of their funding. That means fewer early warnings, less advocacy for people who are wrongly imprisoned, fewer investigations into abuses and violations and less accountability. Funding cuts to OHCHR and the broader human rights ecosystem **offer comfort to dictators** and authoritarians. But the vast majority and our global security will suffer. At this testing time, we need governments and societies to stand up for human rights in word and deed.