

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
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BRIEFING TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
New York, 21 January 2022

Excellencies,

We begin another year in the grips of a global pandemic.

COVID-19 continues to upend lives, plans and hopes.

The only certainty is more uncertainty.

Meanwhile, inequalities are growing.

Inflation is rising.

The climate crisis, pollution and biodiversity loss rage on.

We face a cauldron of political unrest and ferocious conflicts.

Mistrust among world powers is reaching fever pitch.

And the information superhighway is clogged with hatred and lies, giving oxygen to the worst impulses of humanity.

Excellencies,

We know all this.

Now is not the time to simply list and lament challenges.

Now is the time to act.

All these challenges are, at heart, failures of global governance.

From global health to digital technology, many of today's multilateral frameworks are outdated and no longer fit for purpose.

They do not protect critical global public goods that are intended to support humanity's wellbeing -- from the global economy and finance systems to the health of our planet.

Nor are multilateral frameworks delivering on our common aspirations for peace, sustainable development, human rights and dignity for all.

My report on Our Common Agenda is a starting point to addressing these challenges and threats, based on unity and solidarity.

Developing countries need this more than ever.

Excellencies,

I want to begin the year by raising five alarms -- on COVID-19, global finance, climate action, lawlessness in cyber space, and peace and security.

We face a 5-alarm global fire that requires the full mobilization of all countries.

First, we must go into emergency mode in the COVID-19 battle.

Omicron is yet another warning.

The next variant may be worse.

Stopping the spread anywhere must be at the top of the agenda everywhere.

At the same time, the virus cannot be used as cover to undermine human rights, shrink civic space and stifle press freedom.

Governments have also imposed disproportionate restrictions that penalize developing countries -- for example, what I described as "travel apartheid".

Our actions must be grounded in science and common sense.

The science is clear: Vaccines work. Vaccines save lives.

Last October, the World Health Organization unveiled a strategy to vaccinate 40 per cent of people in all countries by the end of last year, and 70 per cent by the middle of this year.

We are nowhere near these targets.

Vaccination rates in high-income countries are seven times higher than in the countries of Africa. At this rate, Africa will not meet the 70 per cent threshold until August 2024.

Manufacturers worldwide are now producing 1.5 billion doses per month.

But the distribution is scandalously unequal – and we need to convert vaccines into vaccinations everywhere.

Instead of the virus spreading like wildfire, we need vaccines to spread like wildfire.

We need all countries and all manufacturers to prioritize vaccine supply to COVAX and create the conditions for the local production of tests, vaccines and treatments around the world.

This includes pharmaceutical companies more rapidly sharing licenses, know-how and technology.

We must also fight the plague of vaccine misinformation.

And we must do much more to ready our world for the next outbreak in line with the recommendations of the independent panel on pandemic preparedness, including strengthening the authority of the World Health Organization.

Excellencies,

Second, we must go into emergency mode to reform global finance.

Let's tell it like it is: the global financial system is morally bankrupt.

It favours the rich and punishes the poor.

One of the main functions of the global financial system is to ensure stability, by supporting economies through financial shocks.

Yet faced with precisely such a shock – a global pandemic – it has failed.

Lopsided investment is leading to a lopsided recovery.

Low-income countries are experiencing their slowest growth in a generation.

Sub-Saharan Africa could see cumulative economic growth per capita over the next five years that is 75 per cent less than the rest of the world.

Many middle-income countries are ineligible for debt relief despite surging poverty, and the growing impact of the climate crisis.

Women and girls, who represent the majority of poor in most regions, are paying a high price in lost healthcare, education and jobs.

Unless we take action now, record inflation, soaring energy prices and extortionate interest rates could lead to frequent debt defaults in 2022, with dire consequences for the poorest and most vulnerable.

The divergence between developed and developing countries is becoming systemic – a recipe for instability, crisis and forced migration.

These imbalances are not a bug, but a feature of the global financial system.

They are inbuilt and structural.

They are the product of a system that routinely ascribes poor credit ratings to developing economies, starving them of private finance.

Credit ratings agencies are de facto decision-makers in the global financial system.

They should be accountable and transparent.

Developing countries also suffer from a lack of transparency around Official Development Assistance, climate finance, and more.

This enables re-labeling and double-counting.

These imbalances are also the result of a disconnect between the real and the financial economies; between working people and money markets.

We requested and applauded the International Monetary Fund's decision to issue Special Drawing Rights last year.

But according to the rules, the vast majority of those SDRs went to the biggest and richest economies that need them least. That is why redistribution is so important.

And so are efforts such as the creation of the IMF Resiliency and Sustainability Trust to address injustices by providing more long-term, low-cost funding to poor and vulnerable countries.

Excellencies,

Since the start of the pandemic, I have called for reform of the global financial system to support the needs of developing countries, through an inclusive and transparent process.

To build a strong recovery, governments need the resources to invest in people and resilience, through national budgets and plans anchored in the Sustainable Development Goals.

All countries must be able to invest in strong health and education systems, job creation, universal social protection, gender equality and the care economy, and a just transition to renewable energy.

This requires a serious review of global financial governance mechanisms, which are dominated by the richest economies in the world.

Financial metrics must go beyond Gross Domestic Product, to assess vulnerability, climate, and investment risks.

Credit ratings should be based on comparable fundamentals and evidence, rather than harmful preconceptions.

Reforming the global financial architecture requires an operational debt relief and restructuring framework.

It means redirecting Special Drawing Rights to countries that need help now.

It requires a fairer global tax system, in which some of the trillions amassed by billionaires during the pandemic are shared more broadly.

It means addressing illicit financial flows, which drain more than \$88 billion annually from Africa alone.

It requires boosting the resources of Multilateral Development Banks so they can better support developing economies, both directly and by leveraging private investment.

In 2022, I will continue pushing for these fundamental reforms, and use the convening power of the United Nations to boost investment in the SDGs.

I count on your support.

Excellences,

Third, we must go into emergency mode against the climate crisis.

The battle to keep the 1.5-degree goal alive will be won or lost in this decade.

And we are far off-track.

Our planet has already warmed by around 1.2 degrees.

The consequences have been devastating.

In 2020, climate shocks forced 30 million people to flee their homes -- three times more than those displaced by war and violence.

Small island nations, least developed countries, and poor and vulnerable people everywhere, are one shock away from doomsday.

Numbers don't lie.

We need a 45 per cent reduction in global emissions by 2030 to reach carbon neutrality by mid-century.

Yet, according to present commitments, global emissions are set to increase by almost 14 per cent over the current decade.

That spells catastrophe.

This year, we need an avalanche of action.

All major-emitting developed and developing economies must do much more, much faster, to change the math and reduce the suffering – taking into account common but differentiated responsibilities.

A growing number of countries have committed to significant emissions reductions by 2030.

Others, including some big emitters, have an economic structure – namely high dependence on coal – that stands in the way.

They need resources and technology to accelerate the transition from coal to renewable energy.

That is why I am appealing for the creation of coalitions to provide financial and technical support for each of these countries that need assistance.

Developed countries, multilateral development banks, private financial institutions and companies with the necessary technical know-how – all need to join forces in these coalitions to deliver needed support at scale and with speed.

At the same time, every country must strengthen their Nationally Determined Contributions until they collectively deliver the 45 per cent emissions reduction needed by 2030.

No new coal plants.

No expansion in oil and gas exploration.

Now is the time for an unprecedented investment surge in renewable energy infrastructure, tripling to \$5 trillion dollars annually by 2030.

This is particularly urgent in emerging and developing economies.

A strong reliance on renewable energy is crucial to avoiding the present fluctuation in fossil fuel prices.

Every sector and every industry, including shipping and aviation, must be on a trajectory to reach net zero emissions by 2050.

Wealthier countries must finally make good on the \$100 billion climate finance commitment to developing countries, starting in 2022.

Developing countries cannot wait any longer.

And we need a radical boost for adaptation

The Glasgow commitment to double adaptation finance -- from \$20 billion -- is an urgent priority and a good first step, but we would still be far behind.

Access and eligibility systems must be reviewed to allow developing countries – to get the finance they need on time.

COP-27 in Egypt and the upcoming conferences focusing on biodiversity and oceans will also be important opportunities to protect our planet and all species.

The effort required is extraordinary, but so too are the possibilities for bold action when people work together.

We can draw inspiration from those with the greatest stakes in the future — young people.

As with so many other issues, young people are on the frontlines in pushing for progress. Let's answer their calls with action.

Excellencies,

The first three crises I have laid out — COVID-19, a morally bankrupt financial system, and the climate crisis — represent a triple emergency for developing countries and a triple multiplier of global inequalities.

They undermine human rights and are a powder keg for social unrest and instability.

In each, better global governance is sorely needed to restore fairness, rescue the Sustainable Development Goals, and live up to our commitment to uphold the

inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family.

Excellencies,

The **fourth area** is one where global governance barely exists at all. We must go into emergency mode to **put humanity at the centre of technology.**

Technology shouldn't use us.

We should use technology.

And if governed properly, the opportunities are extraordinary, especially if we can ensure safe and secure internet connectivity.

But growing digital chaos is benefiting the most destructive forces and denying opportunities to ordinary people.

In countries with low broadband connectivity, simply connecting schools to the internet can grow GDP by 20 per cent.

Realizing such benefits requires safely connecting the 2.9 billion people who remain off-line, mainly in developing countries.

Women still lag far behind men in terms of internet access.

This year's Transforming Education Summit will be an important opportunity to help close the digital divide, and ensure affordable, safe and secure internet services for all.

As we seize the opportunities of the digital world, risks like data misuse, misinformation and cyber-crime are already outpacing any meaningful efforts to address them.

Our personal information is being exploited to control or manipulate us, change our behaviors, violate our human rights, and undermine democratic institutions.

Our choices are taken away from us without us even knowing it.

The business models of social media companies profit from algorithms that prioritize addiction, outrage and anxiety at the cost of public safety.

We need strong regulatory frameworks to change this business model.

To address these issues, I've proposed a Global Digital Compact as part of the Summit of the Future in 2023.

The Compact will bring together governments, the private sector and civil society to agree on key principles underpinning global digital cooperation.

This will reinforce the ongoing coordinated approach on cyber security to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure.

And I've proposed a Global Code of Conduct to end the infodemic and the war on science, and promote integrity in public information, including online.

We look forward to developing this with governments, media outlets and regulators.

So many technological advances are underway in this domain. I continue to urge Member States to speed up work on banning lethal autonomous weapons, and to begin considering new governance frameworks for biotechnology and neurotechnology, as I outlined in Our Common Agenda.

Excellencies,

Fifth, we need to go into emergency mode to bring peace to a world that sees too little of it.

We face the highest number of violent conflicts since 1945.

Military coups are back.

Impunity is taking hold.

Nuclear weapons stockpiles now exceed 13,000 — the highest level in decades.

Human rights and the rule of law are under assault.

Populism, nativism, white supremacy and other forms of racism and extremism are poisoning social cohesion and institutions everywhere.

The pushback on human rights – especially the rights of women and girls – continues.

My Call to Action for Human Rights is a pushback against that pushback.

We will always push back – and push forward – to defend human rights.

Meanwhile, the climate crisis is fueling conflict and escalating humanitarian crises.

And terrorism remains a constant threat, further destabilizing some of the most fragile countries in the world.

Through our peacekeeping and peacebuilding capacities, the United Nations will always stand with and protect those who are caught up in the fighting, and work to build stronger, more resilient and peaceful communities.

And conflict prevention is at the heart of my proposed New Agenda for Peace.

I pledge to spare no effort to mobilize the international community – and step up our push for peace. Allow me to mention a few.

In Afghanistan, to provide a lifeline of help for the Afghan people, inject cash to avoid an economic meltdown, ensure full respect of international humanitarian law and human rights – particularly for women and girls – and effectively fight terrorism.

In Colombia, to sustain and deepen peace implementation and reinforce UN support.

In Ethiopia, to guarantee humanitarian assistance everywhere, end all hostilities, ensure a lasting ceasefire and the withdrawal of foreign forces, and promote an inclusive dialogue involving all Ethiopians.

In Haiti, to encourage and support Haitian-led solutions to end a deepening political and institutional crisis, craft a new constitution and plan elections in a secure and peaceful environment.

Regarding Iran, to support talks to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action as well as engagement between Iran and its neighbours.

In Israel-Palestine, to encourage parties to refrain from unilateral steps – including settlement expansion and violence – and to help revive the peace process and pave the way to ending the occupation and achieving a viable two-State solution.

In Libya, to promote dialogue, support presidential and parliamentary elections as soon as possible, and push for the coordinated withdrawal of foreign fighters.

In Mali, to continue working with all national and regional stakeholders towards the restoration of Constitutional order, to schedule elections with an acceptable timetable and strengthen the peace agreement.

In Myanmar, to work for the restoration of democracy, deliver humanitarian aid, and mobilise international support grounded in regional unity.

In the Sahel, to address the root causes of poverty, underdevelopment and governance challenges, and ensure robust support to the G5 Sahel and its Joint Force through predictable and sustained funding.

In Sudan, to help realize the people's democratic aspirations and support an inclusive intra-Sudanese political process.

In Syria, to advance the full implementation of Security Council resolution 2254, reconvene a credible Syrian-led, Syrian-owned, UN-facilitated Constitutional Committee, release detainees, and continue efforts to reach all in need with humanitarian aid.

In Ukraine, to reduce tensions, and urge that all issues be addressed exclusively through diplomacy.

In Yemen, to reach a lasting ceasefire, open access to the country and restart an inclusive political process to end the calamitous seven year-conflict.

On nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, to make the most of the Tenth NPT Review Conference, reduce nuclear risks and take steps towards nuclear disarmament.

And we will persevere in our efforts to prevent conflict, protect civilians and consolidate peace from the Western Balkans to the Caucasus ... from the Central African Republic to Cyprus to the Democratic Republic of the Congo ... from Iraq to the Korean peninsula to Lebanon ... from Mozambique to Somalia...from South Sudan to Venezuela to the Western Sahara and beyond.

This world is too small for so many hotspots.

We need a united Security Council, fully engaged in addressing them.

Geo-political divides must be managed to avoid chaos around the globe.

We need to maximize areas for cooperation while establishing robust mechanisms to avoid escalation.

And in all we do to secure peace, I am committed to ensuring that women are at the centre of our conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts.

We know that peace efforts are more successful and sustainable when women are a full part of decision-making and mediation and peace processes

We're increasing the number of women peacekeepers.

We now have more women leading our field missions than ever before — with parity among our Heads or Deputy Heads of missions.

And 40 per cent of the Peacebuilding Fund focuses on gender equality and women's rights.

We will continue building on this important work in the coming year.

Excellencies,

The sheer number of conflicts I have touched upon is yet more evidence that we spend much more money and resources managing conflicts than on preventing them and building peace.

We need to seriously review our priorities and resources across the peace continuum, strengthening investment in prevention and peacebuilding.

Across all these challenges, the world needs a strong and effective United Nations to deliver results.

Our reforms have been crucial and we've made significant progress over the last few years.

As we build on these gains, the continued support of Member States is pivotal — particularly with respect to the annual programme budget.

Excellencies,

Our responses to the five emergencies I have laid out today will determine the course of people and planet for decades to come.

We must go into emergency mode and put out this 5-alarm fire.

By fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.

Reforming the global financial system to ensure a just recovery.

Tackling the climate crisis.

Putting humanity at the centre of the digital world and frontier technologies.

And delivering sustainable peace.

My report on *Our Common Agenda* -- which strengthens Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals – offers a roadmap to gather the world together, in solidarity, to address these governance challenges and reinvigorate multilateralism for the 21st century.

Together, let's make 2022 a year in which we forge a new, more hopeful and equal path.

Thank you.
