

The United Nations in Tumultuous Times



Debra DeLaet
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We are living in a time when governing elites across the globe are disengaging from global institutions that have contributed to peace, stability, and prosperity since the end of World War II. These are tumultuous times for U.S. foreign policy, and the future of global institutions can seem uncertain.

The UN is facing an [acute budget crisis](#). According to Catherine Pollard, Under-Secretary-General for Management, Strategy, Policy, and Compliance, unpaid assessments from member states have contributed to a cash deficit that will contribute to critical spending constrictions if timely payments of these arrears are not made. UN [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres has already imposed temporary hiring restrictions this year. The current [President of the General Assembly](#), Dennis Francis (Trinidad and Tobago), issued a statement saying "Our ability to finance and design appropriate support structures to implement all UN mandates determines whether people will eat or go hungry; take shelter or go unprotected, attend school or spend yet another day without access to education."

The Biden Administration's [2024 Budget](#) fully funds the UN. However, the House of Representatives put forward a [FY24 State-Foreign Operations](#) (SFOPS) bill that would eliminate all funding for the UN regular budget. If this bill moves forward, the United States would lose its vote in the UN General Assembly. Because the United States is assessed [twenty-two percent of the UN's regular budget](#), a U.S. decision to withhold funding for the organization would be catastrophic not only for the United Nations but for U.S. global leadership. [As stated by Peter Yeo](#), President of the [Better World Campaign](#), "When the U.S. withdraws from multilateral organizations, America's rivals take over. If we want to cede our leadership on the global stage, this is how you do it."

The House proposal to eliminate UN funding goes against broad support for the United Nations among the U.S. public. According to [recent polling](#), a strong majority—73%—of the American public supports U.S. engagement with the United Nations. This support is bipartisan, with two-thirds of Republicans and 86% of Democrats believing in the importance of the United States maintaining an active role in the United Nations. Over half of U.S. voters believes that the United States should pay its UN dues for the regular budget in full, and an even larger majority (almost 60%) supports paying dues to the UN peacekeeping budget. Although this broad, bipartisan support is significant, it is important to acknowledge that it has been declining in recent years. For example, in 2019 70% of U.S. voters supporting paying our dues to the UN in full and on-time.

Declining support for the United Nations comes at a time when the need for multilateral diplomacy is greater than ever. The UN is playing a critical role in facilitating multilateral diplomacy seeking to mitigate the [humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza](#). While UN officials and diplomats from countries across the world are striving to negotiate a political solution to the crisis in the Middle East, UN agencies are playing a key role in [providing essential humanitarian aid](#). With the resumption of hostilities, Volker Türk, the [UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), has called for all parties to come together to negotiate a ceasefire that will allow UN agencies and other actors to ensure aid gets to people who need it.

Advocacy News



Happy
Holidays!

ADVOCACY NEWS IS GOING GREEN!

In alignment with our commitment to sustainability, Iowa UNA is prioritizing the electronic distribution of our advocacy newsletter. We will distribute Advocacy News via email and also will publish it on our website and social media platforms. If you prefer to receive a hard copy, please email debra@unaiowa.org.



The violent conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East present UN supporters with a paradox. On the one hand, the inability of the United Nations to prevent this violence is partially responsible for declining support. Although public dismay at the inability of the international community to prevent or resolve such conflicts is understandable, it reflects a misunderstanding of the nature of the UN as an international organization. The UN is not a world government. It does not and cannot impose solutions to global challenges. The [UN Charter](#) protects the sovereignty of its member states. The veto power of the permanent members of the Security Council—China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States—means that the Security Council is unable to authorize enforcement action in cases involving the permanent members or their allies. Nevertheless, the UN plays an

essential and sometimes unrecognized role in helping to forge diplomatic solutions to pressing global problems. Former U.S. Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, and other foreign policy experts have stated [some version of the following quotation](#): “If the UN didn’t exist, we would have to invent it.” There are no existing alternatives to the UN for institutionalized multilateral diplomacy.

A retreat to isolationism and disengagement from global institutions will not serve the long-term security interests of the United States. Moreover, any U.S. retreat from the UN will lead to setbacks to global initiatives to forge cooperative solutions to the major global challenges of our time, including the climate crisis. The work of the UN has fundamentally contributed to improvements in global health, peacekeeping, and the development and advancement

of global human rights norms. As we commemorate the [75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (UDHR), it is especially important to recognize the essential role that the UN played in creating and codifying human rights norms that have mobilized human rights activism and advocacy across the globe.

At this tumultuous time, we urge our members to redouble your efforts to advocate for constructive U.S. engagement with and support for the United Nations. It is understandable that many people may question the value of existing institutions during times of violence and insecurity. During such times, it is more important than ever that you engage in conversations with your friends and neighbors about the critical role that the UN plays in promoting peace and security, providing humanitarian aid and support for refugees, and advocating for sustainable development and human rights.

CLIMATE JUSTICE AND INJUSTICE

Jozef Figa
Advocacy Committee Member 

Consider the following proposition: All people have the right to fair treatment, which ensures the health and well-being of themselves and their families through the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.

I hope this sounds familiar. It blends the beginning of Article 25 of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) with the Environmental Protection Agency’s definition of [environmental justice](#). But the EPA has also incorporated social inequalities into its definition. One way to look at inequalities is to understand them as the unequal access to good things in life. Clean air and clean water are increasingly becoming scarce items, and the lack of the access to them is defining environmental injustice.

Consider a few examples: Szopienice was a settlement built in 1860 around a non-ferrous metals smelter in what is today’s Upper Silesia region of Poland. It eventually became a city, and then it was incorporated into Katowice, that is, into the region’s capital. Studies conducted in 1937 and in 1970s documented a high rate of lead contamination among Szopienice’s children. The consequences included anemia and mental underdevelopment.

The smoke and the resulting film that was covering Szopienice would look familiar to today’s inhabitants of Department 93, about 8 kilometers away from Paris. The nearby metallurgical factories appear to be designed to ensure that their smoke falls into working class, immigrant ghettos. This particular pattern of [environmental racism](#) repeats itself in the predominantly African American St. James Parish in Louisiana, otherwise known as “cancer alley.”

There are various types of environmental injustice, and Iowa is not free from them. [Padmore Mantley](#), an Iowa State University researcher, found out that 7.4% of Iowans are exposed to elevated nitrate levels

in water. But this is the average. The number is 10% for low-income communities, almost 10% for lowans 65 and older, 9% for lowans of color and almost 9% of children under 5. The disparities are far more dramatic for north-east and east central Iowa.

Environmental injustice it is not only the problem of local racism, classism, or ageism. It is built into climate change. For example, greenhouse emissions accumulate. Since 1750, the USA has emitted 25% of all global greenhouse gasses. Africa emitted 3%. In general, people benefit from wealth and infrastructure that are the results of the energy that was produced decades ago. Between 1990 and 2015, the wealthiest 5% of the global population were responsible for 36% of global emissions, while the poorest half for only 6%. In 2018, 20 corporations were responsible for 1/3 of global emissions of fossil fuels and cement. But, when it comes to the consequences of climate change, sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and small islands are the most vulnerable – and the least responsible for climate change.



The SDG's and the Environment



Nancy Porter

Advocacy Committee Member

Climate action—[Sustainable Development Goal 13](#)—was the United Nations' [Goal of the Month](#) in November 2023. More and more people across the globe recognize the importance of taking action to address the climate crisis.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a framework for responding to the global environmental crisis. Ensuring access to safe drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene is one of the most important Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). [SDG 6](#) calls for countries to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water for all. The need for water is essential to human life. It's in all living things, from desert to ice to the bottom of the ocean. Water makes life possible on Earth. But 2.2 billion people lacked access to clean drinking water in 2022, and over 2.4 billion people currently live in water-stressed countries. SDG 6 identifies 6

targets for countries to try to improve access to clean water and sanitation.

[SDG 12](#) focuses on ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns. Its targets include reducing food waste, promoting the sound management of chemicals and hazardous waste, promoting recycling, and the use of renewable energy. This goal calls for reduction in the use of plastics. Plastic waste [can persist in the environment for centuries](#). Burning plastic puts toxins in the air that cause the air quality index to reach dangerous levels, contributing to numerous health problems. [According to The Plastic Problem](#), a PBS News documentary, plastic pollution is one of the biggest global environmental problems.

[SDG 13](#) calls for countries to take urgent action to protect the climate. It calls for countries to strengthen resilience



and the ability to adapt to the climate crisis, to integrate climate change measures into national policy, to strengthen international law, and to improve education and awareness.

More and more attention is being paid to the global climate crisis. The SDGs identify important steps to promote sustainable development and climate action, and we need to continue our education and advocacy. Our planet is worth it.

SO MANY CRISES – SUCH A SHORT ATTENTION SPAN



Alice Dhale
Advocacy Committee Member

Just over two years ago, the world's attention was riveted on Afghanistan, where the Taliban had returned to fill the void left by the abrupt departure of U.S. and allied forces that had kept them at bay since 2001. Almost immediately, [Afghan women and girls](#) began to lose their autonomy and their place in their society. The Taliban replaced the hard-won Ministry of Women's Affairs with the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice and began to issue a long list of restrictions on women and girls. Girls were no longer able to attend school beyond the 7th grade, and those already enrolled in secondary schools were not allowed to take university entrance exams, effectively ending their educations. Women lost their jobs and businesses and were forbidden access to parks, public baths, and other places in their communities. A strict dress code was imposed, and women and girls were required to have a male family member as a chaperone to travel any distance from home. Those who ignored or protested against these restrictions faced unlawful detention and violence. Women who had served as judges, government officials, university professors, journalists, artists and community activists fled the country if they were able. Those left behind moved from house to house, staying with trusted friends and relatives, hoping to stay alive long enough to obtain a visa and a route to safety. The international diplomatic community, news media, and civil society around the world was focused on the plight of the women and girls of Afghanistan.

Then, on February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. More than eight million Ukrainian refugees fled into neighboring countries in Europe. Men between the ages of 18 and 60 were not allowed to leave with their families but had to stay behind to defend the country. Russian attacks targeted civilian infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, churches, museums, apartment buildings and power plants. Grain storage and shipping facilities were destroyed, creating food shortages and rising prices in countries that depend on Ukrainian exports. As the troops advanced, [they left evidence of torture, sexual violence and unlawful killings](#) behind. Ukrainian children were taken from occupied territory and indoctrinated in Russian schools and camps. Elderly people were left behind in ruined homes without access to food, water, medical care and fuel during the winter. Western governments and news media rushed to Ukraine's defense, and Afghanistan was forgotten.

On September 16, 2022, Zhina Mahsa Amini, a young woman from the Kurdish region of Iran, died in custody after her arrest for wearing "improper" hijab. She had been riding in her brother's car when she was detained by the "morality police", beaten in a police van, and later taken unconscious to a hospital, where she died. A photo of her lying comatose in the hospital and a crackdown on protests at her funeral set off a [movement in the streets](#) under the slogan "Women, Life, Freedom". Thousands of Iranians turned out to demonstrate in the streets. Women took off their headscarves, burned them in bonfires, cut their hair, danced and demanded their autonomy. Although the authorities responded brutally with hundreds of arrests, injuries and deaths of protesters, the demonstrations continued for months, and the Iranian people began to believe that after years of oppression under a theocratic regime, they were finally making progress toward regaining their freedom. The world was mesmerized by their courage and watched in fascination. But Ukraine and Afghanistan were forgotten.

Early on the morning of February 6, 2023, a [magnitude 7.8 earthquake](#) struck southern Turkey and northern Syria, followed by another quake the following day and many aftershocks. More than 52,000 people lost their lives, and millions more were displaced from their homes. An estimated 658,000 people lost their jobs and livelihoods. There was an immediate need for food, water, shelter and medical care. Humanitarian organizations and UN agencies raced in to help, and Iranian protesters, the war in Ukraine and Afghan women were forgotten.

Tensions between the Sudanese Armed Forces and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces had been simmering for years,





but on April 15, 2023, [armed conflict broke out](#) in Khartoum, the capital city of Sudan. Combatants went from house to house looting, sexually assaulting women and girls, and looking for men fighting with the opposite faction to kill. Hospitals were targeted for violence and had to close for lack of medicine and supplies, just when medical care was desperately needed. With a history of atrocities committed in Darfur in western Sudan during earlier conflicts, the international community watched with trepidation, fearing that the violence would spread to that area again, which indeed it did. So attention shifted, at least for a short time, to Sudan, and Turkey, Syria, Iran, Ukraine and Afghanistan were forgotten.

Nagorno-Karabakh is a region within Azerbaijan populated for centuries by an Armenian majority. The two ethnic groups have disputed this territory for many years, and on June 15, 2023, Azerbaijan completely sealed off the Lachrin corridor, the only supply route into or out of the area. The blockade prevented food and other necessities from reaching the local population, and slow starvation began to set in. The [Azerbaijani forces seized control](#) of the region and announced that Nagorno-Karabakh would no longer exist by January 2024. Nearly all of the ethnic Armenians fled and have become refugees in Armenia. The world debated whether there was an ethnic cleansing or

genocide by starvation happening in Nagorno-Karabakh, and Sudan, Turkey, Syria, Iran, Ukraine and Afghanistan were forgotten.

On September 8, 2023, before most of the world even discovered the location on Nagorno-Karabakh, a devastating [earthquake struck Morocco](#). Nearly 3,000 people died, and an estimated 5,700 were injured, but because the epicenter of the quake was in a remote, mountainous area, help was slow to arrive. Houses in the villages were built with mud bricks, which quickly crumbled.

And before the international community could respond to the earthquake in Morocco, on September 11, 2023, after eight months of rain, [two dams collapsed](#) on the Mediterranean Coast of Libya, unleashing a flood on an area that was already saturated. Twenty-five percent of the city of Derna disappeared, and many of the residents were drowned or washed out to sea. Morocco, Nagorno-Karabakh, Sudan, Turkey, Syria, Iran, Ukraine and Afghanistan were forgotten while the world watched bodies wash up on the shore.

In early October 2023, a [series of powerful earthquakes](#) followed by many aftershocks struck western Afghanistan near the city of Herat. More than 2,000 people died, an estimated 90% of them women and children, and over a thousand homes were completely destroyed. With the coming of winter, many survivors are living in tents. Many families lost the livestock they depended on for food and income. Elderly people, female heads of household and unaccompanied children were left especially bereft. UN agencies and the humanitarian organizations still operating

in Afghanistan issued pleas for help, but a combination of Afghanistan fatigue, lack of relationships with a legitimate government and the emergence of yet another crisis distracted international attention, and the response was inadequate.

On October 7, 2023, the [ongoing hostilities](#) between Israel and Palestinian armed groups flared up when Hamas militants fired rockets and invaded Israel, retreating with more than 200 hostages. Israel retaliated with disproportionate and indiscriminate attacks, destroying hospitals, schools and homes, and inflicting death and injuries on thousands of civilians in Gaza. The whole world watched the escalating violence with alarm, and once again, Afghanistan, Libya, Morocco, Nagorno-Karabakh, Sudan, Turkey, Syria, Iran and Ukraine were forgotten.

All of these crises have occurred in just the past two years, and the list doesn't even include such previous and continuing tragedies as the [gang violence in Haiti](#), [ethnic conflict in northern Ethiopia](#), and the plight of [refugees and displaced people](#) around the globe. When asked what we in the international community can do to help, the answer is often, "Don't abandon us. Please help us make sure our voices are heard and we are not forgotten." Yet each time there is a new humanitarian emergency, the world is distracted and shifts its attention, empathy and support to the most recent crisis. The [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) states that all people are entitled to what they need to live in safety and dignity. By refusing to abandon those in crisis around the world, we promote universal human rights, including our own.



The Universal Declaration of Human Rights at 75



Amy Webb
Iowa UNA College Ambassador (Luther College)

Regardless of one's national or ethnic origin, color, religion, nationality, sex, language, or any other status, human rights are inherent to everyone. However, in a world that is becoming increasingly complex with escalating tension between great powers, crises in key regions, and the increased conflicts between extremist forces, [human rights](#) are under assault around the world. According to Article I of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."

The United Nations was founded in 1945 as a way to prevent war and advance human rights. The [United Nations Charter](#), an international treaty that UN Member states are bound to, is the UN's founding document. In 1948, the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) established human rights as part of international law, and the organization has since strove to

protect and promote human rights. It declares that human rights are universal and inalienable, meaning that these universal rights are inherent to all of us. Since the UN's founding, the work of the UN has codified the major principles of maintaining peaceful international relations, preventing and responding to conflicts, and opposing human rights violations.

December 10, 2023 will mark the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is Human Rights Day. The Declaration is made up of a preamble and [30 Articles](#) that establishes and promotes the rights, freedom, and dignity for all human beings. This was the first legal document that establishes that human rights are an inherent right and must be protected. Accordingly, this milestone document was drafted by representatives from a wide scope of cultural and legal

backgrounds from around the world, and provides the building blocks for future human rights conventions, treaties, and other legal institutions.

According to the [United Nations Foundation](#), their mission is to support the UN's work to help some of the most vulnerable people on earth. As the Foundation states, they strive to accomplish UN's human rights efforts through advocating for U.S. support on peacekeeping missions, raising awareness for UN's Central Emergency Response Fund, and upholding human rights including women's reproductive rights and LGBTI human rights.

A key tool for protecting human rights in conflict zones, [UN peacekeeping](#) helps countries torn by violence by providing security and peacebuilding support to help countries resolve upheavals peacefully. UN peacekeeping runs on

BECOME A MEMBER!

You can help the United Nations build a better world by becoming a member of the Iowa United Nations Association. Help us to continue to educate, inspire, and mobilize Iowans in support of the lifesaving work of the United Nations. Join here! You may join our Iowa Division or our chapters in Johnson County, Linn County, or the Cedar Valley. Individuals under the age of 26 years are eligible for free membership.



three principles: consent of the parties, impartiality, and non-use of force except in self-defense and defense of the mandate. While success is never guaranteed, UN peacekeeping has proven to be successful over the course of the past 60 plus years of its existence and has even won the Nobel Peace Prize

While we are all entitled to human rights, our actions can help change the world to ensure that others have their human rights. We are the change that the world needs. Spread the word on the importance of human rights through social media platforms with the hashtag [#StandUp4Human-Rights](#) to show your support.

It is vitally important to not let human right violations go unheard. Stop the spread of injustice throughout the world by advocating and getting your voice heard.



A Message from UNA-USA Regarding the Conflict in the Middle East.

We, at the United Nations Association of the USA, are horrified by the situation in the Middle East and call for the following immediate actions:

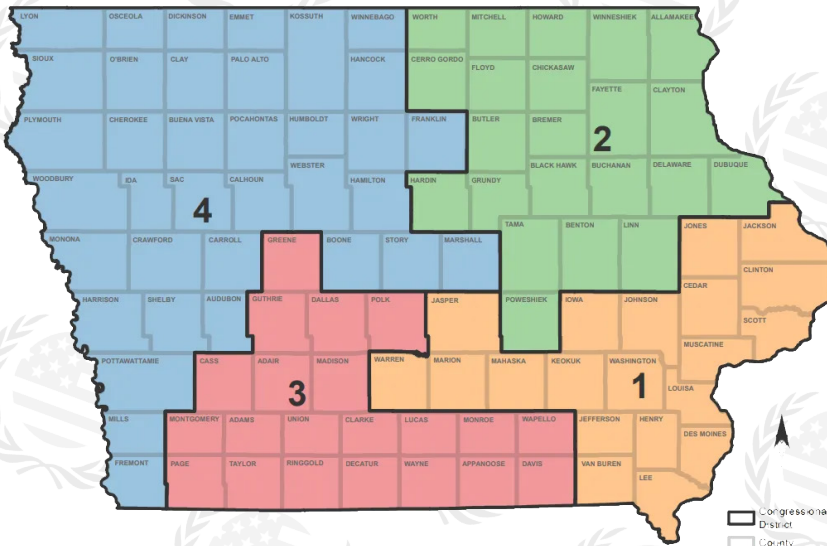
- An immediate humanitarian ceasefire between Hamas and Israel;
- Immediate and unconditional release of civilians held hostage by Hamas;
- Unimpeded humanitarian access to meet the urgent needs unfolding in Gaza;
- Compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law, including principles of distinction and proportionality.

We ask our partners here in the United States and abroad to join us in this call, until civilians in the region are secure from indiscriminate acts of war.

Furthermore, we call for all individuals to combat misinformation and disinformation, which is hindering the potential for a peaceful resolution. We encourage the utilization and circulation of factual information from reliable sources to enable a true understanding of this crisis.

DONATE!

Your generous donations help support our work in support of climate action, gender equity, human rights, and refugees. Please [donate here](#). You also may donate to Iowa UNA through Venmo@ [Iowa-UNA](#).



How to Contact Your Elected Officials

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District 4: Representative Randy Feenstra (R)
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District 1: Representative Mariannette Miller-Meeks (R)
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