

December 2023

country report

Multilateral Dialogue Geneva



Geneva Barometer

The 'Geneva Barometer' takes an occasional look at selected developments among international organizations based in Geneva (October to December)

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Russia's aggression on Ukraine already presented a major challenge for the United Nations. However, the terror attack by Hamas on Israel on the 7th of October 2023 and Israel's military strike in defense are not only putting the multilateral and humanitarian system under immense pressure but polarize and divide the International Community.

Although the conflict and the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza are omnipresent in the international Geneva, the fundamental debates and the negotiations for humanitarian resolutions are still taking place in New York – in the UN Security Council as well as in the UN General Assembly. So far, no emergency session has been convened by the UN Human Rights Council. Instead, the main voices heard in Geneva are by Representatives from the Humanitarian and Human Rights sector who criticize the on-going violations of international humanitarian law by all conflict parties and demand an immediate humanitarian pause in fighting.

But not only the current crisis and conflicts are intensifying the criticism of double standards of the West by states who self-identify as the Global South. The perception of a lack of solidarity particularly during the pandemic, reluctance on issues such as transfer of technologies as well as the transactional approach by some Member States all feed into an increased polarization. They impact as well on positions and claims during multilateral negotiations in areas as trade or global health.

75 years after the Universal Declaration of Human

Rights has been passed, its principle of universality has not only been defied by conflicts and wars but also by the attempt of states to reinterpret it.

The stress test for international norms and multilateral institutions does not only play out on an ideological level but manifests itself profoundly in its financing.

The UN organizations in Geneva had to turn out their lights and closed their doors from the 20th of December to the 7th of January 2024 to save money. The subsequently highlighted financing gaps in humanitarian assistance will cost human lives.

The general UN-Budget showed in the third quarter of 2023 a financing gap of USD 216 Million. Established reserves must be tapped, and besides of reducing infrastructure costs the Secretary General has also put a moratorium on staff recruitment. Largely to blame for this dire financial situation is the lack of payment discipline amongst Member States in relation to their assessed contributions. Only 141 Member States (out of 193) had paid fully their assessed contributions by 12th of December 2023. The UN's largest contributor, the US are largely to blame for the lack of predictable financing not only at UN Headquarters but also amongst smaller UN organizations. UNAIDS, for example, depend largely on financing by PEPFAR, a program currently blocked by US Congress.

In this context, it will become essential in 2024 to move from mere lip-service to concrete actions to safeguard the stability and predictability which we achieved by building a rules-based international order after the Second World War.

Global Health

WHO Executive Board approves consensus resolution on health and humanitarian situation in Gaza

The Executive Board of the World Health Organization (WHO) adopted a Resolution on Humanitarian Aid to the Occupied Palestinian territory on December 10¹, following an intense debate. For the first time, a UN body issued a consensus statement on the current conflict without direct reference to Hamas and Israel. The WHO resolution focuses exclusively on humanitarian aid and mandates WHO to present plans for the reconstruction of Gaza's devastated health system.

Although U.S. Ambassador Sheba Crocker considered the reference to a humanitarian ceasefire in the preamble dangerous and dissociated herself from it, the consensus on the text was not blocked. Canada and Australia also shared this concern. WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus praised the resolution not as a solution, but as a starting point for tackling the crisis. The resolution's operational impact for the WHO remains to be seen. Ahead of the next World Health Assembly end of May, the Director-General is expected to coordinate with donors to ensure funding for immediate health needs and the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the health system in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

During the negotiations, Germany emphasized Israel's right to self-defence in accordance with international law. It deplored the fact that the resolution did not call for the release of the hostages and an end to Hamas' rocket attacks. The German ambassador Nikola Gillhoff also complained that the misuse of civilian, especially medical, infrastructure for military purposes is also not condemned.

Convening of a meeting of the Executive Board focused on a single health and humanitarian crisis was an unprecedented step in WHO history. The Israeli ambassador to Geneva, Meirav Eilon Shahr, vehemently criticized this, calling the resolution a "moral failure of the WHO" due to the lack of mention of Israeli hostages.

Health and climate at COP28 for the first time

COP28 in the United Arab Emirates hosted its first Health Day, culminating in the endorsement of a Declaration on Climate and Health.² More than 140 countries and the European Union took a stand and emphasised the critical link between climate change and human health. The statement emphasizes the urgency of action, highlighting the health benefits resulting from reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It calls for climate action, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions, tackling air pollution, promoting active mobility, and switching to sustainable, healthy diets. The non-mention of fossil fuels in the statement caused controversy in the negotiations.

For the first time in 28 years of UN climate negotiations, the political declaration focuses on the health impacts of climate change. Although not legally binding, it serves as a call to action outside the formal UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. The United States and the European Union top the list of signatories, while India, South Africa and Russia have not yet signed. These political commitments were not only verbally expressed, but also reaffirmed financially. More than USD 1 billion has been pledged for climate and health solutions to support in particular low-income countries.

Dr Maria Neira, the WHO Director of Public Health, Environment and Social Determinants of Health, called the first Health Day at a COP historic and groundbreaking. The participation of 50 health ministers and 110 high-level health delegates underscored the global urgency to address the link between climate and health.

As with previous COP declarations, it remains to be seen whether the signatory states will walk the talk, enabling further progress in international cooperation for a healthy and sustainable future.

Pandemic agreement: Controversy over core content and key moments in global health negotiations

The 7th meeting of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Body (INB) on the Pandemic Agreement, which took place in two parts in November and December, marked a decisive step in efforts to

¹ The resolution can be found [here](#).

² The full text of the declaration can be found [here](#).

reach an international agreement to deal with global health crises. The negotiation text³, published on 16 October, has been significantly streamlined compared to previous versions. One of the central controversies was sparked by the temporary suspension of intellectual property rights and the benefits for information-sharing countries. The pharmaceutical industry expressed significant concerns, describing the proposed texts as "harmful".

The INB focused on key issues such as prevention, surveillance, sustainable production and technology transfer. The atmosphere of the talks seemed to be clearly marked by the will to conclude the negotiations in time for the next World Health Assembly in May 2024. However, the range of topics discussed in the context of the negotiations on a pandemic agreement in connection with the modifications of the International Health Regulations (IHR) is extensive, demanding and the goal hardly achievable within the given time frame.

In the session itself, Articles 10 and 11, which deal with sustainable production, technology transfers and the temporary suspension of intellectual property rights, remained particularly controversial. Some European countries, including Germany, Sweden, Ireland, the United Kingdom, as well as the United States, expressed their displeasure and pleaded for the issue of intellectual property to remain within the competence of the World Trade Organization, where it is also on the agenda of the next meeting of the Ministerial Conference at the end of February. The EU has also been critical of inadequate prevention and funding issues. On the other hand, the Group for Equity⁴ criticised among others the fact that the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) is no longer reflected in the negotiating text.

To structure the work, sub-working groups have been formed⁵ to focus on certain controversial articles:

- Articles 4 (Pandemic Prevention and Surveillance), 5 (One Health) and 6 (Pandemic Prepar-

edness) under the Japanese Presidency (Co-Facilitators: India, the United Kingdom and Tanzania)

- Articles 10 (Sustainable production), 11 (Transfer of technology and know-how) and possibly 13 (Supply Chains and Logistics) chaired by Egypt (Co-Facilitators: the Philippines and the US)
- Article 12 (Access and Benefit-Sharing (PABS)) under the Thai Presidency (Co-Facilitators: Australia, Ethiopia and Norway)
- Articles 19 (Implementation capacities and support) and 20 (Financing) chaired by Brazil (Co-Facilitators: Canada and Malaysia)

The progress of the negotiations in the sub-working groups seems to depend largely on the chairmanship of the meeting. On the positive side, expert hearings in informal briefings are to be made possible in the future.

In the subsequent meeting of the Working Group on the Revision of the International Health Regulations (IHR), it was proposed to establish a single monitoring and compliance body for the Pandemic Agreement and the amended IHR to avoid duplication of structures.

New compromise proposals are to be developed by mid-January and then circulated by the INB office. The eighth meeting of the INB is scheduled for 19 February to 1 March 2024 to further discuss the proposals developed in the working groups and the negotiating text.

Trade

Outlook on the 13th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO)

Preparations for the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) of the World Trade Organization hosted in Abu Dhabi by the United Arab Emirates on 26-29 February 2024 are in full swing.

However, the room for manoeuvre that negotiating parties must reach compromises and agreements is even less than usual in the super election

³ The text of the negotiations can be found [here](#).

⁴ The Group for Equity includes Bangladesh, Botswana, Brazil, China, Dominican Republic, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Co-

lombia, Malaysia, Mexico, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, South Africa, Tanzania and Thailand. An overview can be found on the [map of the month of July](#).

⁵ An overview can be found in the [map of the month of December](#).

year of 2024. Next year, elections will be held in the United States, Taiwan, South Africa, India, Indonesia.⁶ In addition, the European elections and a new EU Commission will not only provide new impetus but will also bring about delays. Further elections could also be triggered in the United Kingdom. In countries such as India, the United States and South Africa, WTO decisions are often viewed critically, and the negotiations are used to demonstrate political strength domestically. In addition, Indian politicians have repeatedly used WTO negotiations in the past to portray themselves as strong negotiators in the interests of their own people and as advocates for the Global South.

In October during the General Council, WTO members agreed on assistance for Least Developed Countries (LDCs) following their graduation from LDC status. Moreover, the initiators of the Joint Statement Initiative for Investment Facilitation, Chile and South Korea, are seeking to integrate the adopted text as an open plurilateral agreement under Annex 4 of the WTO Agreement. However, a so-called "mini-ministerial conference" at the end of November, in which 25 WTO members took part to give momentum to the deadlocked agricultural negotiations, failed to have the desired effect, as the members merely repeated their already known positions. There are also difficult weeks ahead regarding the negotiations on fisheries subsidies. The Director-General hopes to announce the entry into force of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies by the end of February. To do so, however, it must be ratified by two-thirds of the members. Currently, only 56 members (29 +27 EU member states) have submitted their ratification instruments. In addition, there are other critical issues that need to be clarified, such as the dismantling of subsidies that contribute to overcapacity or overfishing.

WTO Reform

One of the organisation's most pressing challenges is the WTO's reform negotiations. Although members underlined the need for reform during

the last ministerial conference, far-reaching breakthroughs are not foreseeable at present. Recently, the WTO Council for Trade in Goods adopted a report on 127 steps to improve the Council and its subsidiary bodies. Under the aegis of the Deputy Permanent Representative of Guatemala, Marco Molina, negotiators met in four informal rounds to discuss, for example, the expansion of the deliberative function of the WTO.⁷ As far as the negotiations on the revival of the dispute settlement mechanism are concerned, an agreement that could also be agreed by the United States does not seem foreseeable. The U.S. negotiators are taking part in the talks and issued their negotiating positions in July.⁸ However, the document also makes it clear that the U.S. government wants to retain its 'policy space' as much as possible. The US rejects binding case law, i.e., interpretation of WTO legal texts, and calls for the renegotiation of already settled disputes to correct "misinterpretations".⁹ The U.S. has long criticized the "overreach" of the WTO Appellate Body and has blocked the subsequent nomination of its members.

TRIPS Waiver 2.0

Questions about the extension of the patent exemption for COVID-19 vaccines (so-called TRIPS waiver) will also be discussed at the ministerial conference in Dubai. The adopted "Geneva Package" of MC12 provided that the members would decide within six months on the extension of the TRIPS waiver to COVID-19 diagnostics and therapeutics. However, the deadline was extended at the request of the United States, among others, as they wanted to subject the question of applicability of the waiver beyond the production of COVID-19 vaccines to a review by the U.S. Commission on International Trade (USITC).¹⁰ The report, published in October, contained little new evidence - particularly regarding the effectiveness of compulsory licensing - and did not provide any conclusions or concrete recommendations. Also, on the TRIPS waiver an agreement seems difficult to obtain, as there are no discernible changes in the po-

⁶ Elections are also being held in the Russian Federation.

⁷ The aim is to give members within the WTO more space for discussion without pressure to negotiate to discuss different approaches to trade-related issues (e.g., industrial policy or climate issues). The EU put the proposal into writing [here](#) in February .

⁸ The statement of the United States can be found [here](#).

⁹ The Reuters news agency reports [here](#) from a conversation with the US ambassador to the WTO, Maria Pagan.

¹⁰ The press release on the USITC report can be found [here](#).

sitions of the members (yet). Proponents of the extension of the TRIPS waiver call for distributive justice and regret that no decision has yet been made. In addition, they criticise the complexity of the waiver, which in their view makes it impractical. Opponents of the waiver, on the other hand, point out that the waiver has not been used and there is no evidence that weakening intellectual property protections would contribute to a better distribution of COVID vaccinations. Rather, they see the problem in the logistics and distribution of the vaccines.

E-Commerce Negotiations

The reluctance of the United States regarding multilateral trade agreements within the framework of the WTO can be seen, among other things, on the issue of e-commerce. At the beginning of October, the U.S. withdrew its support for text proposals under the Plurilateral Initiative on E-Commerce (JSI E-Commerce), citing a possible reduction in its policy space.¹¹ Observers suspect that the US withdrawal is a tactic to contain and regulate the major American digital platforms.

The action, which took members by surprise, was met with concern not only among the other WTO members of the initiative. American politicians and stakeholders also see this as a weakening of their own positions and an advantage for the expansion of China's digital model worldwide.¹² The remaining members are therefore trying to prepare a draft decision on the basis of the issues on which agreement has already been reached (e.g. the recognition of electronic signatures to facilitate global goods). More sensitive topics, such as questions about data protection, have been excluded for the time being. The number of "parked" paragraphs currently stands at 13.

WTO budget negotiations

In the context of global inflation and rising expenditure by the organization, the members of the World Trade Organization agreed at the last General Council of 2024 to increase the budget by 3.6%, bringing it to just under 205 million Swiss

francs per year.¹³ This increase also extends to the following year 2025, as this is a double budget. On the one hand, this increase marks the end of a decade of zero nominal growth to finance adjustments to inflation rates or changes in contractual conditions with service providers. On the other hand, the decision fell far short of the expectations of Director General Ngozi, who had aimed in particular for a flexible increase in staff numbers. However, renegotiations are not completely excluded and might occur during 2024.

UNCTAD eWeek

After 126 sessions, contributions from 624 speakers and about 1200 participants,¹⁴ the eWeek (formerly E-Commerce Week) of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) ended in Geneva on 8 December. The conference creates an important space for discussion to publicly discuss the challenges posed by increasing digitalization. This year's edition was primarily about solutions to bridge digital divides, be it in the field of connectivity, the unequal connectivity of women and men or in the use of new technologies, such as generative artificial intelligence (AI). The focus of the conference was on practical examples and policy approaches that can also be transferred to other countries and regions. This year, for the first time, an AI application was used, which summarized all sessions and enabled data analysis of the topics and arguments.¹⁵

Digital Affairs

ITU World Radiocommunication Conference in Dubai and Annual Meeting of the Partner2Connect Project

From 20 November to 15 December, the member states of the Telecommunication Union (ITU) met in Dubai to discuss the update of the ITU Radio Regulations. The international conference takes place every four years and regulates the use of radio frequencies worldwide and is binding under international law. Since the radio spectrum and also the determination of satellite orbits are finite

¹¹ The USTR-Statement can be found [here](#).

¹² The Reuters news agency reported [here](#).

¹³ The German Ambassador to the WTO, Dr. Bettina Waldmann, chaired the Budget and Finance Committee, which recommended the adoption of the budget.

¹⁴ A summary can be found [here](#).

¹⁵ More details and access to the reports can be found [here](#).

resources, the adoption of these legally binding treaties is all the more crucial. Whereas in previous years the conference was dominated by the allocation of mobile radio frequencies, the satellite issue has overtaken mobile radio frequencies.¹⁶ In recent years private players, such as Elon Musk's Starlink program or companies that are in Chinese hands, have secured strategic spectrum to expand satellite systems. In the medium term, the expansion of these space projects will also serve the development of global and satellite-based Internet infrastructure.

At the same time, the organization hosted the second annual meeting of the Partner2Connect program on December 12. The initiative was launched by Secretary General Doreen Bogdan-Martin and is expected to receive total pledges of USD 100 billion by 2026. The aim of this ambitious project is to expand global connectivity to provide access to digital technologies for the still unconnected 2.6 billion people and to enable a sustainable digital transformation. The pledges, which can be submitted by states, civil society organisations and economic actors, do not necessarily have to be of a monetary nature. During the event, the Secretary-General communicated that about USD 30 billion had been pledged to that moment.

Human rights

UN Human Rights Council in the shadow of the liquidity crisis

When the Geneva diplomats negotiated various resolutions during the longest September session in the history of the UN Human Rights Council from 11 September to 13 October, it had already been faintly indicated, but at the beginning of December it was clear that some of the newly established or extended mandates of special procedures or commissions of inquiry would only be able to be established with a delay. A total of 63 posts in over 10 mandates are currently affected by a hiring freeze and some of the investigative bodies have had to narrow the scope of their in-

vestigations and their upcoming reports, according to UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk.¹⁷ The reason for this is the liquidity crisis of the UN, once again triggered by unpaid membership fees from about 50 countries, above all the USA.¹⁸ If the crisis continues, this could not only lead to delays or partial delivery of services, including technical assistance by the Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR), but would also have a noticeable effect on the implementation of the core mandated work by the Council, Türk said.

Overall, the Council had already adopted fewer, but at the same time more, consensual texts in October than in the previous year. For the first time, this included the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan and the establishment of a regional office of the OHCHR for Caribbean community. On the other hand, the extension of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Russia, the establishment of a new working group on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas, a resolution on the right to development – which already included a draft of a new international pact and was sharply criticized by Western countries – as well as a new fact-finding mission (FFM) for Sudan were voted on.¹⁹ The names of the members of the FFM were only announced after a delay at the end of December.²⁰

Council members and secretariat for 2024: Russia's membership continues to be blocked, Africa provides president

On 10th October the UN General Assembly elected a total of 11 new members and re-elected four more (France, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba and China) from 5 regional groups to the 47-member UN Human Rights Council.²¹ While there was no competition in three groups (Africa, Asia-Pacific, Western European and other states), Peru lacked the necessary majorities in the Latin American group and Russia in the Eastern European group.²² Russia had entered the race against Albania and Bulgaria. While Russia received 83 votes, EU member Bulgaria received 163 votes, and Albania, which is currently also very active in the UN Security Council,

¹⁶ This is what Heise-Online reports [here](#).

¹⁷ The letter can [be viewed here](#).

¹⁸ More information [here](#) and [here](#).

¹⁹ Key voting results are graphically [displayed here](#), [all resolution texts and other voting results can be viewed here](#).

²⁰ More information about the fact-finding mission and the new members can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

²¹ The entire session can be followed [here](#).

²² A more detailed overview in our [Map of the Month October](#).

received 123 votes. As a result of Russia's war of aggression, the UN General Assembly suspended Russia's membership of the Human Rights Council in April 2022. At that time, only 24 states opposed the suspension and 58 abstained.²³ It is also striking that China received 154, the fewest in its own regional group. Germany will continue to be represented as a member of the Council until 2025 and will stand for re-election in 2026.

Regarding the strength of the new Council membership, a mixed picture emerges: While the newly elected members of the Asia-Pacific Group and the Group of Western European and Other States have a stronger human rights record than in the current Council, and it remains roughly the same in the Eastern European and African groups, the Latin American Group is particularly surprising, in which Cuba was re-elected despite the worst human rights situation of all new members.²⁴

In accordance with the principle of rotation, next year's President of the Council will come from the African group. He is expected to be elected on 10 January. The candidates nominated are the Moroccan Ambassador Omar Zniber and the South African Ambassador Mxolisi Nkosi. The vice-presidents have already been elected: the ambassadors of Finland, Lithuania, Paraguay, and Indonesia.²⁵

Human Rights Protection Begins at Home: Germany's human rights situation under review

On 9 November, the human rights situation in Germany was put to the test for the fourth time within the framework of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a peer review mechanism of the UN Human Rights Council. Germany received 346 recommendations from 123 delegates.²⁶ Numerous countries referred to the three reports that formed the basis of the review: the national report, a report from civil society actors, and a report with information from the UN system.²⁷ Their recommendations often addressed the issues of racial discrimination, hate speech, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia, as well as freedom of assembly in the context of pro-Palestinian demonstrations.

Among other things, it recommended the provision of human rights training for law-enforcement officials, as well as improved complaint mechanisms for hate crimes. The situation of migrants and refugees was also discussed. In this context, the ratification of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families was recommended particularly often. Other recommendations related to gender equality and violence against women, the increase in poverty due to the pandemic and inflation, children's rights, the situation of the elderly or disabled. The responsibility of companies, especially when it comes to arms exports or with regards to their impact on human rights abroad as well as climate action was also discussed. The voluntary contributions to the OHCHR, in which Germany ranks fourth after the European Commission, the USA and Sweden, were applauded.²⁸ Germany is currently examining which of the recommendations received can be accepted or merely noted. The official report on the UPR of Germany will be adopted towards the end of the 55th Council session which will take place from 26 February to 5 April 2024. Once adopted, implementation will start again, because: after the UPR is before the UPR.

75th anniversary of the UN Genocide Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Genocide Convention: new challenges in the digital space

On 9 December 1948, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly in Paris. Just one day later, on 10 December, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted. According to the UN High Commissioner, Volker Türk, the two foundational agreements remain deeply interconnected. For example, the declaration, together with the international treaties deriving from it serve as the best prevention tool since they identify root causes, provide practical solutions and guardrails. The

²³ A map with the vote in April can be found [here](#).

²⁴ An analysis of the human rights record of the new members can be found, among other things: [here](#).

²⁵ More information can be found [here](#).

²⁶ The entire session can be followed [here](#).

²⁷ All reports as well as other important background information can be viewed [here](#) and [here](#). A podcast on the review of Germany can be listened to [here](#).

²⁸ An overview is [here](#), a related map [here](#).

convention, which has now been ratified by 153 states²⁹ does not only criminalize genocide as one of the worst international crimes, but it also obliges states to remain vigilant about early warning signals and to push for measures to prevent it.

On the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Convention, the UN Human Rights Council in an intersessional meeting discussed the role of social media platforms on hate speech that could lead to genocide.³⁰ Prevention is one of the most important key principles, along with accountability, said Türk in his opening remarks. While careful preventive actions in the digital sphere were critical, attention was also needed on underlying ideologies and policies that promoted hatred, discrimination, and violence. Genocides were never committed without warning but were the result of serious human rights violations and recognizable patterns of systematic discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, or other characteristics.³¹ Most of the time, they are accompanied by statements by political leaders or public figures who dehumanize and demonize people from targeted communities. Disinformation campaigns can amplify this rhetoric and contribute to the normalization of violence. Accountability was key to ending a genocide and proving justice.

The commemorations were overshadowed by the conflict in Gaza. On 16 November, more than 30 independent experts from the UN Human Rights Council warned of a "genocide in the making". This was taken up by Pakistan, among others, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Israel, on the other hand, referred to Hamas' "genocidal ideology." So far, the High Commissioner has mainly referred to the war crimes that were committed by both sides.³²

A Foundation of Hope: 75 Years of the Universal Declaration

In October last year, High Commissioner Türk had taken office with the explicit aim to revive the global consensus on the universality and indivisibility of human rights. A year-long campaign with

regional consultations on this year's anniversaries – the 75th anniversary of the UDHR and the 30th anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action – culminated in a high-level event in Geneva in mid-December.³³ In view of current developments, the celebrations were called into question by several member states. Türk, on the other hand, countered that the protection and promotion of human rights is now more important than ever. It was not a failure of human rights, but rather their cynical disregard, the ignorance of alarm signals, including from his own office. Accordingly, the spirit, impulse and vitality that once led to the adoption of the Declaration needed to be rekindled. The aim of the event was therefore rather to reflect, take stock and develop a vision of human rights for the future. The event itself began with a minute of silence for all victims of human rights violations.

A total of four key topics were discussed: new digital technologies, peace and security, climate and environment, and development and the economy.³⁴ It was pointed out several times that we are currently not witnessing a human rights crisis but rather a crisis of implementation. Referring to the more than 55 active conflicts worldwide, panellists emphasized that human rights are always on the side of the victims and positioned themselves on "Team Humanity" which lies beyond the lines of conflict – a proof that human rights can also create bridges across geopolitical divides, according to Türk.³⁵

To put human rights at the centre of all political decision-making and policies, states, but also non-state actors, the private sector, NGOs or members of parliament were invited to make concrete pledges. By the end of the event, a total of 286 pledges had been made by more than 150 states, as well as numerous others from non-state actors. Among other things, Germany pledged to support the largest possible number of UPR recommendations received, to address human rights challenge as a political priority in its bilateral relations and its international engagement, and to provide greater

²⁹ An overview of the ratification status can be found [here](#).

³⁰ Background information on the session can be found [here](#). The session itself can be viewed [here](#).

³¹ The High Commissioner's speech can be found [here](#).

³² Statement by the High Commissioner after his visit to Rafah can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

³³ A selection of tickets for the anniversary can be found [here](#).

³⁴ More background material can be found [here](#).

³⁵ The opening speech of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights can be viewed [here](#), the closing speech [here](#).

political and financial support to the OHCHR.³⁶ In view of the severe underfunding of the UN in human rights, this is urgently needed. Although constituting one of the three key pillars of the UN (alongside peace and security and development), human rights receive only 8.6% of the regular budget and the OHCHR merely 4.3%, wherefore it heavily relies on voluntary contributions.³⁷

Based on the debates and recommendations, the OHCHR will publish a vision for the future of human rights in early 2024, which will serve not only as a roadmap for the Office itself, but also as a concrete contribution to the Summit of the Future next year.

Humanitarian aid

Global Humanitarian Overview 2024 - no improvement, but a wake-up call

On 11 December, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) presented the global humanitarian overview for 2024: USD 46.4 billion will be needed next year to alleviate the suffering of at least 180 million people in need. Currently, 363 million people are considered in need. The numbers for the upcoming year indicate 300 million only – a result of an enormous effort to increasingly limit the focus of humanitarian agencies on the very direst needs.³⁸ Such a needs analysis, adapted to financial realities, which must leave millions of people in a gap in care, is dramatic.

The humanitarian system is currently facing its biggest funding crisis in years. With USD 21.28 billion, only 38% of the required funds were raised this year. Over the year, the drastic funding cuts had already forced humanitarians to cut back on food, water and health programmes, among other

things. Earthquakes in Syria and Turkey, the civil war in Sudan, and the war in Israel and the Gaza Strip also dramatically increased humanitarian needs — from USD 51.5 billion at the beginning of the year to USD 56.7 billion by the end of 2023. For 2024, Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths expects that the Middle East as a whole, including Gaza and the West Bank will be the area of greatest needs.

Forced displacement

Second Global Refugee Forum

The Global Refugee Forum is considered the most important international platform to support implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees, which was affirmed in 2018. The forum, which took place in Geneva from 13 to 15 December, was also dominated by the issue of underfunding in³⁹ times of increasing crises and conflicts, from Myanmar over Sudan to the war in Gaza. Philippe Lazzarini, head of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), was also present. 114 million people are currently already fleeing persecution, human rights violations or violence. Regarding Gaza, Grandi underlined that under all circumstances the already massive displacement crisis must *not* turn into yet another refugee crisis. To work together with states, NGOs or the private sector on solutions, 300 refugees were among the 4,200 participants as well. A total of 1,600 pledges were made for the practical implementation of the goals of the Global Compact on Refugees.⁴⁰ Germany participated with 35 pledges. In addition to Switzerland as co-host, this year's co-organisers were Colombia, France, Japan, Jordan and Uganda.

³⁶All pledges can be viewed here, Germany's pledges [here](#). An informative analysis of all pledges [here](#).

³⁷ More background information can be found [here](#), a map [here](#).

³⁸ The report can be found [here](#), the presentation can be seen among other things. [here](#), a press briefing with Griffiths [here](#).

³⁹ The UNHCR alone is USD 400 million short by the end of the year; the biggest funding gap in years.

⁴⁰ All pledges can [be viewed here](#).

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