Lecture: Challenges to the Protection of Human Rights Today

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UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

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Lecture

Challenges to the Protection of Human Rights Today*

A Speech by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Michelle Bachelet**

Professor Grossman,

Dear students,

Thank you for inviting me to be with you today. I will try to be brief, as I have been asked to speak, but I also want to hear your thoughts on how we can protect human rights today.

At the outset, I would like to salute the Faculty of Law and its members and students for its long-standing commitment to international human rights law. Your innovative scholarship, research, and litigation have provided valuable contributions to international law, including U.N. human rights mechanisms. Several distinguished members of this Faculty are either current or former members of U.N. treaty bodies or special

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* This speech was given on April 11, 2019 by Michelle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, at the Academy for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, American University Washington College of Law. The speech was featured as the keynote for an event entitled "Challenges to the Protection of Human Rights in the 21st Century and the Role of the United Nations," which was co-hosted by the WCL International Law Student Association and the American University International Law Review.

** Verónica Michelle Bachelet Jeria was nominated to be the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2018 after serving two terms as the President of Chile from 2006 to 2010 and from 2014 to 2018. Between her terms as President of Chile, Michelle Bachelet was appointed to be the first executive director of the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.
procedure mandate holders. I salute the work you have done to elevate human rights standards on issues as varied as torture, sexual violence, and accountability for systematic violations.

We live in a paradox. Digital tools, the global economy, and even demographics are bringing people closer together;\(^1\) however, policy makers, the international community, and multilateral institutions are increasingly more fragmented.\(^2\) Leaders seem to be less committed to working together for the common good.\(^3\) They are turning away from shared principles and solutions to shared problems, which is leading to increasing suffering and chaos.\(^4\)

Justice brings peace. It does not eliminate disagreement, but when people have confidence in an impartial and independent structure of law and norms, they know they will be able to resolve their disputes peacefully. This is true within countries, as all the lawyers in the room are well aware, and it is true of disputes between countries as well, as long as the international rule of law retains the trust of all actors.\(^5\)

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2. See Press Release, Secretary-General, Amid Unsolved Conflicts, Growing Inequality, Multilateralism Needed More Than Ever to Achieve Peace, Secretary-General Says for International Observance, U.N. Press Release SG/SM/19552-OBV/1876 (Apr. 23, 2019) (arguing that multilateralism is essential to building a “safer, more just world for future generations” and must be reinvigorated).


4. Cf. Press Release, Secretary-General, supra note 2 (“[M]ultilateral efforts are under pressure from unresolved conflicts, runaway climate change, widening inequalities, and other threats.”).

Shared solutions work. Whether we are talking about shared laws, or an agreement on joint action to target a common problem based on shared principles, policies grounded in dialogue, built on inclusion, and guided by human rights goals make for more effective and better outcomes.

They have worked in the past to encourage peace and development, and they can work in the future – in your future: a future you will share with billions of other people across the world.

I have seen this myself: when I returned to my country, Chile, after years of exile from oppression; when I worked as a pediatrician in Santiago with children whose parents had been tortured, killed, or disappeared; when I became Minister of Health; when I was named Minister of Defence; and as a Head of State and Head of Government. Time and again in all these circumstances, I saw that human rights-based policies deliver better outcomes for people across the social and economic spectrum, and not only that – beyond the borders of the State. They encourage reconciliation. They prevent grievances, conflicts, inequalities, suffering, and discrimination of all kinds.

Policies that build social justice and social protection also promote stronger economies. They drive better frameworks for education,
health-care, and other basic services, and they feed into political systems, which actively embrace a range of noisy contributing voices.\textsuperscript{11}

Human-rights based policies build confidence and social harmony. They deepen trust. They build hope.

It can be done. I have seen it done. I have seen a country bitterly divided and diminished grow more inclusive, more developed, and more just.\textsuperscript{12} In your lifetimes, and in the lifetimes of your parents, this has happened again and again in various parts of the world as policies grounded in human rights shape greater justice, equality, and dignity.\textsuperscript{13}

And it can be done again. Today I will be speaking on some of the very strong challenges that we increasingly face in today’s world. But as I do so, I’m also going to ask you to hold on to this thought; NO MATTER HOW COMPLEX AND HOW PAINFUL THESE CHALLENGES MAY SEEM, THEY CAN BE ADDRESSED.

So that’s enough about solutions for the moment. Let’s talk a little bit about the problems that we face.

I want to begin with climate change, which is a comprehensive and

\textsuperscript{11} See generally id. 16–19 (connecting the relationship between inequalities in access to social opportunities to greater social and political participation); cf. 25 Encyc. Britannica \textit{Political Systems} 984 (1991) (surveying different types of political systems including their function and development).

\textsuperscript{12} See generally Martin Nilsson, \textit{The Left and Democratic Consolidation – Deepening Democracy in Latin America}, in THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROJECT: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES 87–88 (Ashok Swain et al. eds., 2009) (noting the democratization that took place in Latin America from military dictatorships to electoral democracies in the 1980s and 1990s carried out social reforms leading to economic prosperity).

devastating threat to human rights and indeed, human life.\textsuperscript{14} I was only wearing one pin [on my jacket] this morning, but I was just at a meeting with the so-called V20: the 20 countries most vulnerable to climate change in the world.\textsuperscript{15} The Chair of the V20, who is from the Marshall Islands, convened a group of finance ministers and asked them to commit to actions and dialogue to tackle climate change.\textsuperscript{16} This pin, a traditional shell pin from the Marshall Islands,\textsuperscript{17} reminds us that if we do not act, the Marshall Islands will disappear underwater.\textsuperscript{18} To me, climate change is a very important issue.

Climate change is driving displacement by destroying people’s ability to earn a decent livelihood in the places they were born.\textsuperscript{19} From increased

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{14} See Glob. Comm’n on Adaptation [GCA], \textit{Adapt Now: A Global Call for Leadership on Climate Resilience}, at 3 (2019), https://cdn.gca.org/assets/2019-09/GlobalCommission_Report_FINAL.pdf (accepting that climate change is inevitable and that people must adapt to climate change because it will have devastating impacts on people, the environment, and the economy).
  \item \textsuperscript{15} See also \textit{About}, V20, https://www.v-20.org/about/ (last visited Sept. 15, 2019) (outlining twenty vulnerable countries joining V20 to create an initiative to mobilize efforts that will “strengthen economic and financial responses to climate change [. . . ] includ[ing] to: Promote the mobilization of public and private climate finance; Share and exchange best practices on economic and financial aspects of climate action; Develop new and improved approaches to climate finance; and, Engage in joint advocacy and other collective actions”).
  \item \textsuperscript{17} See V20 Group of Finance Ministers (@V20Group), \textit{TWITTER} (Apr. 11, 2019, 10:39 AM), https://twitter.com/V20Group/status/111639534360147200 (showing a picture of the pin and highlighting Bachelet’s call for “urgent climate action in support of V20 economies”); \textit{see generally JUDY MILFORD}, \textit{HANDICRAFTS OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS} 1, 36 (Wilson Printing ed., 2006) (providing a pictorial overview of the nature and types of handicrafts and jewelry of the Marshall Islands).
  \item \textsuperscript{18} See, e.g., Coral Davenport, \textit{The Marshall Islands Are Disappearing}, N.Y. TIMES (Dec 1, 2015), https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/12/02/world/The-Marshall-Islands-Are-Disappearing.html (giving an individual personal account of the impact of growing tides on a family and village in the island nation).
poverty and food insecurity to the scarcity of water and accelerated environmental damage, climate change is a clear and present threat to human dignity and to the gains that have been made in building up inclusive and sustainable development. Climate change also heightens tensions and inequalities within societies, driving conflict — including violent conflict.

The younger ones might not know this, but when I was younger, I saw the *Mad Max* movies, which were about a war for energy resources. Well, I do not know if that’s going to happen in the future, but water will clearly be a driver of conflict in many places in the world. We have seen how in some Central American countries, drought means a massive flow of migrants looking for new opportunities and a better life. My office
will continue to deal with the more traditional human rights issues, but I also want to work on the frontier issues such as climate change and its impact on the most vulnerable.

This brings me to another challenge: war. The devastation of today’s conflicts, and their huge economic and humanitarian cost, create broad and enduring harm to the next generations. There is no victory or winner in a conflict that destroys lives, land, infrastructure, economies, and hope.

We are seeing fewer wars between States, but more and more enduring, intra-State conflicts with the involvement of foreign countries.


28. Cf. id. (“Empirical research indicates that periods of genocidal violence, when
We need greater efforts to rationalize and control the proliferation of arms and the conduct and risk of conflict. In February, the U.N. Secretary General told the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, “I will be blunt. Key components of the international arms control architecture are collapsing . . . new weapons technologies are intensifying risks in ways we do not yet understand and cannot even imagine.”

However, countries are eroding existing agreements. It has been seventy years since the Geneva Conventions laid out the minimal basic decencies to be respected by all parties in conflict to preserve the lives and dignity of civilians, hors de combat soldiers, and prisoners of war. But the actors of today’s conflicts increasingly fail to respect even these minimal commitments.

Sieges are employed to deliberately starve civilians while other obstacles to humanitarian assistance deprive them of basic services and they do take place, are always ‘embedded’ within protracted armed conflicts in an apparent attempt to impose a ‘final solution.’


care. 34 Medical locations are bombed, repeatedly, in what seem deliberate patterns. 35 Attacks on women, including the use of rape as a weapon of war, seem to be employed in some cases as policy to try to break down family and community bonds and demoralize the adversary. 36 Unfortunately, in places where there used to be war, gender-based violence remains a huge threat, such as for many women in some countries of Africa. 37 Children are tortured and killed in front of their parents to create widespread fear; they are abducted and used as soldiers or as sexual slaves; and they are deprived of education. 38


36. See, e.g., U.N. Secretary-General, Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, ¶¶ 5, 13, 17, U.N. Doc. S/2019/280 (Mar. 29, 2019) (highlighting the verified countries involved in conflict-related sexual violence and the general tactics and purposes of the groups); Claudia Card, Rape as a Weapon of War, 11 HYPATIA 5, 10–11 (1996) (“Of many forms of martial terrorism, rape in a patriarchal culture has a special potential to drive a wedge between family members and to carry the expression of the perpetrator’s dominance into future generations.”).


Although measures to identify these violations and hold those accountable are being taken— including by my Office— these measures are not unanimously supported by the world’s states. Governments need to do a much better job supporting accountability for violations of international humanitarian law.

Conflicts impoverish nations and drive displacement. According to U.N.H.C.R., 44,400 (forty-four thousand four hundred) people are forced to flee their homes every day because of conflict or persecution. Most are internally displaced; others will try, desperately, to find safety across international borders. Other displaced people are fleeing deprivation; they have simply lost hope that they will benefit from the basic requirements of human dignity in their homeland.


42. See, e.g., UNHCR, Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018, at 35, 38 (June 20, 2019) [hereinafter Forced Displacement in 2018], https://www.unhcr.org/5d08d7ee7.pdf (finding that 41.3 million people were displaced due to a convergence of the factors arising from escalating violence that contributed to poverty).


44. Forced Displacement in 2018, supra note 42, at 2 (stating that of the 70.8 million forcibly displaced persons worldwide that 41.3 million are internally displaced).

45. Id. at 2 (estimating 25.9 million refugees and 3.5 million asylum-seekers).

46. Norwegian Refugee Council [NRC], Global Report on Internal Displacement 2019,
These migrants are women, men, and children exactly like you and me.47 Who knows; if we were in their situations, we would perhaps make the same decisions and embark on similar journeys. They are our equals, but increasingly, instead of measures to assist and protect them, they are greeted by barriers, pushed back into danger, humiliated, threatened, detained, and exposed to unnecessary risk. 48

A great deal more could be said about these three challenges, all of them connected – climate change fuelling migration and conflict49 – but there are a number of other very significant challenges to human rights that are also increasing in scope and intensity today: food insecurity.50

47. See Forced Displacement in 2018, supra note 42, at 60 (“According to the available data, overall males and females were almost equally represented in the population of concern to UNHCR with 25.4 million men and boys and 25.7 million women and girls.”).


After many years in which undernourishment and food insecurity has declined, the painful, and almost entirely preventable, number of people counted as “undernourished” rose from 777 million in 2015 to 815 million in 2016, mainly due to conflicts, as well as drought and other climate-linked disasters. 815 million is 11% of humanity; in other words, one out of every nine women, men, and children around the world is still going without sufficient food.

Economic inequalities are also growing. More wealth is being produced than ever before in human history; globally, labour productivity grew by over 2% in 2017. But this wealth is not being equitably shared. As the I.L.O. (International Labour Organization) has pointed out, the labour share of global domestic production (G.D.P) has been falling for twenty–five years, and this trend has continued.

I’m sure everyone in this room has heard of Oxfam’s analysis that asserted that 82% of all the wealth generated in 2016 went to the richest 1% of the global population, while the poorest half of humanity saw no change in their income, leaving them even further behind.

http://www.fao.org/3/ca5162en/ca5162en.pdf (citing studies that offer evidence that the number of undernourished people worldwide has slowly increased since 2015).

51. Id.
52. Cf. id. at 6–7 (citing 785.4 million undernourished people in 2015 and projecting 821.6 million undernourished people by 2018 and attributing long-term impact on food security to drought).
53. Id. at 3, 6.
55. Andrew Gilmour, OHCHR, Keynote Remarks by ASG Andrew Gilmour, OHCHR at the HLPF Plenary Session, Leaving No One Behind: Are We Succeeding? (July 13, 2018), https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=2338 2&LangID=E (“The economic growth model is producing more wealth than ever before, but this wealth is not being equitably shared.”).
Last week a major new U.N.-led report – which involved more than sixty international organizations – found that most of the world’s people now live in countries with increasing income inequalities. The 2019 Financing for Sustainable Development Report said low wage growth, rising inequalities, and insufficient actions by the Sustainable Development Goals threaten to undermine the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – a breakthrough effort which promises tremendous benefit for all humanity.

In a wide number of countries, laws and policies that restrict and, in many cases, criminalize civic activity are increasingly being adopted. These measures include restrictions on freedom of expression and participation in peaceful demonstrations; restrictions on free and independent media sources; restrictions on the ability to register human rights N.G.O.s and to receive foreign funding; and vaguely worded anti-terrorism legislation, which can be misused to target almost any form of criticism.

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60. See Saskia Brechenmacher, How State Restrictions Are Reshaping Civic Space Around the World, CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT INT’L PEACE (May 22, 2017), https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/05/22/how-state-restrictions-are-reshaping-civic-space-around-world-pub-70049 (noting that governments are using national security and national sovereignty as red herrings for “erecting new barriers to the operations and funding of NGOs, harassing and demonizing civic activists, and criminalizing dissent through expansive anti-terrorism laws”).

The killing of at least one human rights defender every day, including journalists and trade unionists, has become a new and shocking fact since 2015. Often, these human rights defenders are environmental activists who resist corporate or development projects. Frequently, they receive little or no protection from the State, and their deaths may never be effectively investigated.

The shutting down of the civil society space has repercussions across a very wide spectrum of government policies and human rights. Participation by the people in decision-making is a vital force to drive accountability and keep every kind of policy grounded in the real needs of society. When governments shut down all critical voices, they are no
longer listening to the contributions of all the people—and from housing policies, to education policies, to health, development, defence, every sector of State activity—they are likely to forget that good governance is governance that serves the people.\textsuperscript{68} In other words, measures that curtail the rights and voices of civil society also undermine our hope of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Another area where we all have a responsibility to remain alert is women’s rights. Advances made in previous decades have stalled in some places and in some cases are going backwards.\textsuperscript{69} It is troubling to see the recent roll-backs on many fundamental questions in some countries.\textsuperscript{70} They are underpinned by what seems to be a renewed obsession with controlling and limiting women’s decisions over their bodies and lives\textsuperscript{71} and by views that a woman’s role should be essentially restricted to reproduction and the family.\textsuperscript{72} Overall, women are still much poorer than
decision-making is more transparent and “government officials [are] more accountable” when citizens participate).


\textsuperscript{71} See, e.g., Diya Uberoi & Maria de Bruyn, Human Rights Versus Legal Control Over Women’s Reproductive Self-Determination, 15 HEALTH & HUM. RTS. 161, 162–63 (June 2013) (noting efforts in the United States to regulate women’s reproductive rights).

\textsuperscript{72} See United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of
men. They have less property, fewer opportunities, less access to basic services, and a lot less freedom to raise their voices and make their own choices.

Many of us are also very deeply concerned by the global rise in hatred directed at members of racial, ethnic, and religious groups as well as against foreigners and other minorities. In many countries, what used to be extremist ideas have now entered the political mainstream in tandem with a nativist, exclusionary, and intolerant worldview that also attacks efforts to maintain multilateral agreements and measures to ensure greater social justice. This world-view exacerbates global instability by shirking, instead of sharing, global burdens.

Perhaps you have noted how connected these challenges seem to be: climate change; unbearable civilian suffering in conflict; involuntary

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74. Id.; see also U.N. Women’s Rights Progress Report, supra note 72, at 122–25 (providing quantitative and anecdotal assertions about the gender gap within the framework of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals).


76. See Hate Speech ‘on Notice’ as U.N. Chief Launches New Plan to ‘Identify, Prevent and Confront’ Growing Scourge, U.N. NEWS (June 18, 2019) [hereinafter Hate Speech on Notice], https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/06/1040731 (“In both liberal democracies and authoritarian regimes, some political leaders are bringing the hate-fueled ideas and language of these groups into the mainstream, normalizing them, coarsening the public discourse and weakening the social fabric [ . . . ].”).

77. See U.N. Secretary-General, Secretary-General’s Statement on Intolerance and Hate-Based Violence (Apr. 29, 2019) [hereinafter Statement on Intolerance], https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2019-04-29/secretary-generals-statement-intolerance-and-hate-based-violence (outlining the two initiatives from the Secretary-General’s office to combat hate speech and protect religious sanctuaries).

78. See Hate Speech on Notice, supra note 76 (“Hate speech not only attacks human rights norms and principles, it also undermines social cohesion, erodes shared values[,] and lays the foundation for violence – setting back the cause of peace, stability, sustainable development and the fulfillment of human rights for all.”).
displacement; inequalities and extreme poverty; threats to the civic space; the oppression of women; a global rise in hatred being directed at members of minorities and migrants; and a sweeping world-view that undermines the search for agreement on joint action. 79 All these negative trends, profoundly corrosive to our hope for a decent future, seem to accelerate and accentuate each other.

But the solutions are also connected.

Some countries – not always the richest, in income or resources – are choosing to adopt principled policies that are also more effective. 80 Because they are grounded in the full range of human rights – taking steps to advance civil, cultural, economic, political, and social rights together – they create a mutually reinforcing dynamic, in which justice and greater civic freedom build sound development policies 81 , and measures for social protection feed into greater social harmony and trust.

I want to tell at least some good stories. 82

Ethiopia is a recent example where we see encouraging progress. 83 Another, better known but older, is the intervention by the U.N. which helped to end 300 years of apartheid and a bitter long-running conflict in South Africa now replaced with democratic institutions. 84 We also have some good stories in the Maldives, where there is a democratic government that is asking for support so that they can improve the institutions, change the constitution, and be more democratic. 85 They

79. Kaysie Brown, Global Issues are Connected and that Matters, U.N. FOUND.: GLOBAL HEALTH (Apr. 23, 2018), https://unfoundation.org/blog/post/global-issues-connected-matters/ (providing quantitative data to show that development challenges should not be addressed through disparate international efforts but through the interconnectedness of the international community).

80. See id. (providing the example of the African Capacity Insurance Company Ltd. which is the first African natural disaster insurance pool).

81. G.A. Res. 70/1, supra note 7, ¶¶ 10–11, 13.

82. Id.


85. See Joanna Slater, Maldives Opposition Declares Victory Over Autocratic Ruler in Presidential Election, WASH. POST (Sept. 23, 2018)
also want human rights advisers to help them identify human rights
grounded policies. My office has experience many such interventions
in Guinea, Nepal, Togo, and elsewhere.

This is not about waving a magic wand and having everything
suddenly come out perfectly; This is about progress. We can prevent
conflicts – and in fact, we do.

We will never see a TV reporter declaim into her microphone that she
is, “coming to you live from a country where war has not taken place”.
The news doesn’t work that way. But the world often does.

It may not seem so amid the turbulence and atrocities of world events.
But in by far the majority of countries, disputes are de-escalated before
they reach boiling points, or, after conflict has broken out, they are
mediated and brought under control. Enduring reconciliation is

https://beta.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/maldives-opposition-declares-
victory-over-autocratic-ruler-in-presidential-election/2018/09/23/1cffea2c-bf37-
11e8-9f4f-a1b7af255aa5_story.html (referencing the democratic election of Ibrahim
Mohamed Solih).

86. See United Nations Dev. Assistance Framework [UNDAF], Final Evaluation
Republic of Maldives, at 12–13 (July 11, 2019) [hereinafter UNDAF Maldives Report],
http://www.un.org.mv/publications/final-evaluation-report-of-the-united-nations-
development-assistance-framework-undaf-2016-2020/ (outlining the goals of the
Yageen Manifesto and the collaboration between the United Nations and the Republic
of Maldives).

87. See Needah Jehu-Hoyah, Togolese refugees start going home from Ghana with UNHCR help,
refugees-start-home-ghana-unhcr-help.html (providing data on the return of Togolese refugees to Ghana with the help
of the U.N. refugee agency); see United Nations Dev. Assistance Framework [UNDAF],
2017),
https://www.undp.org/content/dam/nepal/docs/legalframework/UNDAF%202018-
2022.pdf (outlining the Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Growth goals for the
Government of Nepal to work toward poverty eradication and policy development with
the support of the U.N.).

Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict, at 11 (2018) [hereinafter Pathways for Peace],
https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28337 (“Despite the escalation
of some ethnic conflicts and prompted by the atrocities that took place in Rwanda and
the former Yugoslavia, a surge in peacekeeping and prevention, among other factors,
reduced violent conflict to unprecedented levels by the mid 2000s.”) (internal citation
omitted).

89. See id. at 36–37.
This work is not just relevant – it is massively cost-effective. Because when human rights go wrong – when violations and abuses generate explosive crises and conflicts – the cost in bloodshed, wrecked economies, and humanitarian aid can be titanic.

All our field offices spend a significant portion of their time on training for government officials, for members of security and police forces, and for civil society groups. Our monitoring of specific situations leads us to recommend targeted policy changes. We also work in the long term to strengthen the laws and institutions that should protect rights, including courts, parliaments, regional councils, schools, and community groups. And we seek to empower human rights defenders and civil society activists of all kinds – including activists for minority rights – so that they can confront prejudice effectively and with confidence.

Every situation has different characteristics, but the core drive is to translate human rights into practical measures: how to question people without using torture; how to manage peaceful protests without violence; how to ensure that minorities can raise their voices and participate fully in the life of a nation; how to ensure that women – and other discriminated groups – can claim their rights from judicial systems that continue to be operated, in majority, by men.

This practical work may not be what springs to mind when we first speak of human rights. One’s first thought is of lofty ideals – but those ideals are upheld by a huge range of very practical actions.

Why am I telling you this? Because this is not just our job.

Upholding human rights is your job too. This planet belongs to all of

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90. Id. at xix.
91. See id. at xix–xx.
93. Id. at 12–52 (highlighting specific country and regional examples where the U.N.).
94. Id.
95. Id. at 6–11.
96. See Human Rights Management Plan, supra note 13, at 28–29 (outlining a plan to combat inequality and countering discrimination at the heart of human rights abuses).
us, and this work is simply too important to be left to a handful of U.N. staffers.

To achieve sustainable development, and address climate change effectively, countries need to respect human rights.97

To end inequalities and poverty, they need to embrace the voices of civil society and respect the rights and choices of every member of society.98

To improve governance, fight terrorism effectively, and shape stable, secure societies, we need justice.99

We need a perspective that looks not just at today but at tomorrow. We need you - your generation, which may well be among the most important generations in human history in terms of the survival of humanity in a benign ecosystem.

The fact is that human rights violations – from the horrific to the chronic and almost invisible – are not random, they are not accidents, and they are rarely sudden.100

They are almost always the consequence of long-term political, economic, social, and cultural inequalities that create obstacles to the fair sharing of opportunities and resources and limit freedom and participation.101

100. See id. at 6–8 (reporting that “countries with weak institutional capacity were more likely to suffer violent social unrest during food shocks” and that states with “high levels of corruption and human rights abuses increase their risks of violence breaking out in the future”).
101. Id. at 6 (noting that “internal causes of conflict arise from political, security, and economic dynamics”).
And we can, all of us, contribute to shaping better policies and better outcomes. We can come together to protect the important gains of the past and advance towards more justice, greater dignity, respect for human equality, and better solutions for the world.

Remember this; a stable country is one where the people trust the government and each other. Without the rule of law, due process, and respect for human rights, there can be no long-term security of any meaningful kind. By the same token, economic growth that generates sharp inequalities generates chronic frustration, and thus potential violence.

States must be willing to protect the human rights of their people, and people must be able to hold the State responsible; this is our legal obligation, a moral necessity, and also the only way to achieve the safety your generation will need to accomplish everything you dream of achieving.

I am not willing to give in to defeatism and watch passively as the structures which maintain peace and security and sound development crumble.

We have the opportunity. This generation of world leaders has the capacity to ensure far greater well-being for their people. Tools such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development can be transformational; fundamental principles can underpin needed


103. See Pathways for Peace, supra note 88, at 109–11 (quoting, “at least since Aristotle, theorists have believed that political discontent and its consequences – protests, instability, violence, revolution – depend on the absolute level of economic well-being, but also on the distribution of wealth” (internal citation omitted)).

104. See id. at 161 (emphasizing effective, accountable, transparent, and inclusive institutions with goals to reduce violence against children, promote the rule of law, and provide equal access to justice for all); Conflict, Security, and Development, supra note 99, at 10 (“A reasonable interpretation of these results is that greater repression and abuse by a government creates both grievances and signals that those government (sic) are not dependable negotiating partners; suggesting that less coercive and more accountable approaches significantly decrease the risk of conflict.”).

reforms.\textsuperscript{106}

Thank you for your attention; now is my turn to listen to your voices.