



While commemorating its own 75th anniversary, Pax Christi International issues this statement with other Catholic voices advocating for peace, justice, and human rights at the United Nations (UN). Like the UN, the Pax Christi movement and other Catholic organisations were born out of World War II's devastation and the desire to save subsequent generations from the scourge of war.

Statement on the 75th anniversary of the United Nations: A call for its strengthening in the (post) COVID-19 era

On this United Nations (UN) day, 24 October, 2020, Pax Christi International along with its members and partners commemorate the 75th anniversary of the UN system and wholeheartedly recognise the global organisation's contributions to peace, justice, and human rights around the world.

Accomplishments include the development of human rights, fostering sustainable development and climate action, governing global finance, adopting disarmament standards and taking initiatives to end hostilities (such as the UN Secretary General's recent appeal for a global COVID-19 ceasefire). Our members and partners around the globe have advocated at the UN for such actions and have actively participated in their implementation.

While celebrating its achievements and supporting its work, we are deeply worried about the challenges the UN is facing. These concerns are especially pressing in these times when multilateral responses to social, economic and environmental issues, including to the devastating COVID-19 health crisis, are urgently needed.

We are particularly concerned with the UN Security Council's recurring inability to act in critical situations¹, the unwillingness of some member states to step up action in response to the climate crisis, the inadequate responses to urgent needs of migrants and refugees, unaccomplished nuclear disarmament and the lack of engagement with the world's citizens.² Hopefully, this year's anniversary and the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis will create momentum for a long-awaited strengthening of the UN system, for which the support of all member states is urgently needed.

On 21 September 2020, in a General Assembly meeting to commemorate the UN's 75th anniversary, world leaders adopted a declaration honouring the multilateral framework and

¹ Examples include the Security Council inability to deal with the crisis regarding the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, the civil conflict in Syria and the disputed elections in Belarus. Moreover, it took the Council several months to back the UN Secretary General's March appeal for a global COVID-19 ceasefire.

² 74% of respondents to an UN global consultation to mark the 75th anniversary see the UN as "essential" in tackling global challenges when looking at the future. However, over half see the UN as remote from their lives and say they don't know much about it. See p. 99 of *The Future We Want: The United Nations We Need* report (September 2020): https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un75report_september_final_english.pdf.

pledged to better live up to the promise to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.³ To honor that promise we urge UN member states to reject nationalistic populism, and instead to work together for a more sustainable world.

In his recent speech to the General Assembly, Pope Francis said: “The pandemic has shown us that we cannot live without one another, or worse still, pitted against one another. The UN was established to bring nations together, to be a bridge between peoples. Let us make good use of this institution in order to transform the challenge that lies before us into an opportunity to build together, once more, the future we all desire.”⁴

This year also marks five years since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at its core. UN member states have committed to take steps to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure all people enjoy peace and prosperity. To achieve these goals by 2030, world leaders must rethink the global order, which is reaching its social, economic and ecological limits, as this year of disruption has clearly demonstrated.

We are concerned at the slowing of progress towards achieving the SDGs, especially as the pandemic is hitting vulnerable people the hardest.⁵ The global fight against the pandemic can constitute an opportunity for nations to refocus on the SDGs with a view to achieving a fairer, better, and safer world for all.

On the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the UN and in this year of unprecedented crisis for humanity, we ask UN member states to renew their commitment for an enhanced UN system in the (post) COVID-19 era and to take the following actions:

- Supporting the Secretary-General’s prioritisation of conflict prevention and sustaining peace, as part of the restructuring of the UN peace and security pillar, by contributing to the work in the field of addressing root causes, peacemaking, mediation, peacekeeping and post-conflict efforts.
- Exploring, choosing, and implementing nonviolent approaches to resolving disputes that endanger international peace and security, amongst others on the basis of Article 33 of the UN Charter. Considering nonviolent strategies as the first option in response to violent or potentially violent societal challenges, instead of resorting to military action that risks further aggravating a situation.
- Increasing budgets for the functioning of the UN and in particularly for the achievement of the SDGs by 2030 and for tackling the COVID-19 health crisis among vulnerable

³ UN meeting coverage and press releases, *World Leaders Adopt Declaration Promising Safer, More Resilient World for Future Generations, as General Assembly Marks United Nations Seventy-Fifth Anniversary* (1 September 2020), GA/12267, available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/ga12267.doc.htm>.

⁴ Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the UN, *Address of His Holiness, Pope Francis, To The United Nations General Assembly* (25 September 2020), 75th Session of the UN General Assembly, available at: <https://holyseemission.org/contents//statements/5f6df8f78dd6b.php>.

⁵ SDG Knowledge Hub, *UN Secretary-General Releases 2020 SDG Progress Report* (19 May 2020), available at: <https://sdg.iisd.org/news/un-secretary-general-releases-2020-sdg-progress-report/>.

populations. Shifting funds to SDG budgets and away from global military spending, which saw last year the largest annual increase in a decade reaching \$1917 billion.⁶

- Signing and subsequently ratifying the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, adopted in 2017 at the UN in New York, or if already done so, to encourage other countries to also sign and ratify the treaty. Fully implementing the treaty once it enters into force, which will be 90 days after the 50th ratification (to date: 47 ratifications)⁷, including its provisions on victim assistance and environmental remediation.

⁶ SIPRI, *Global military expenditure sees largest annual increase in a decade—says SIPRI—reaching \$1917 billion in 2019* (27 April 2020), available at: <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2020/global-military-expenditure-sees-largest-annual-increase-decade-says-sipri-reaching-1917-billion>.

⁷ See this ICAN website for the latest updates regarding the signatures and ratifications of the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons: https://www.icanw.org/signature_and_ratification_status.