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# **Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization**

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*Note*

Symbols of United Nations documents are composed of letters combined with figures. Mention of such a symbol indicates a reference to a United Nations document.

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

1. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic dominated the past year, around the world and at the United Nations. We are a world in mourning for the millions of people whom we have lost. The pandemic is the greatest shared global challenge since the founding of our Organization; every country has faced pain, uncertainty and vulnerability. The global health, social, economic and human rights crises triggered by the pandemic have underscored the importance of multilateral cooperation and tested it to the limit.

2. The United Nations has been central to the pandemic response, from safeguarding people and jobs to assisting Governments in ensuring a sustainable and equitable recovery. We supported some 160 countries in tackling the health, humanitarian, social and economic impacts of COVID-19 and helped more than 260 million children to access remote learning. At the same time, we contributed to the creation and operationalization of the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator and its COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility. The only way to end the pandemic is to deliver vaccines to every country.

3. We have also been leading and actively contributing to the larger conversations around health security, global financial stability and the dawning recognition of the world's deep fragility. That fragility relates to rising poverty and hunger; prolonged conflicts and human rights crises; skyrocketing levels of inequality within and between societies; the ungoverned development of new technologies; the erosion of the nuclear disarmament regime; and the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and rising levels of air and water pollution. It has never been clearer that our fates are interconnected and that the inability to solve shared problems is creating unacceptable risks.

4. The path to stronger, more resilient societies lies in a transformative recovery process rooted in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement. Over the past year, we have worked closely with Governments around the world to launch the decade of action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals, by supporting recovery packages that address the climate crisis, invest in renewable energy and sustainability, reduce inequalities and exclusion and promote gender equality. We have supported broad efforts to provide robust social protection systems and strengthen health systems and universal health coverage. My call for peace in the home in April 2020 was followed by a system-wide focus on the importance of gender-sensitive response policies, including protection against gender-based violence.

5. Our discussions on financing for development forged a new way of doing business, in collaboration with international financial institutions, and created space for innovative ideas to help low- and middle-income countries to invest in their people and avoid defaulting on debt. A series of round-table discussions, focusing on women economists, articulated new strategies for a green, inclusive and sustainable recovery.

6. Our efforts to mobilize global climate action, from science-based reports to public advocacy and private negotiation, have contributed to creating a growing coalition for net zero emissions by mid-century and to increasing awareness in the investment community that fossil fuels are riskier and more expensive than renewable energy. The Climate Ambition Summit, held in December 2020, delivered plans and pledges from 75 countries and many businesses and cities on the steps that they

intended to take to cut global emissions by 45 per cent by 2030 compared with 2010 levels, in accordance with the Paris Agreement. We also mobilized the international community to address the funding gap for adaptation and resilience measures, highlighting the need to put these on an equal footing with efforts to curb emissions. As we look forward to the crucial events on climate and biodiversity in 2021, we will build on these results in an effort to create irreversible momentum for a green recovery and a just transition.

7. Divisions between major Powers and fragmentation within States contributed to a challenging environment for peace and security over the past year. However, across the globe, my special envoys and I seized a number of openings in conflict situations to advance the cause of peace. My appeal for a global ceasefire to respond to COVID-19 was endorsed by 180 Member States and by the Security Council and was the foundation for a second resolution calling for a ceasefire to allow COVID-19 vaccinations.

8. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, more than 40 United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions continued their vital work to protect civilians and advance peace. Many responded to the pandemic by delivering key equipment, addressing misinformation and advocating public health measures. We intensified our efforts to implement commitments on women and peace and security and increased the number of women heads and deputy heads of peace operations, peacekeepers and mediators as we marked the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the landmark Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#). We also assisted 19 electoral processes in 2020 and supported 60 countries in developing their capacity with regard to elections. Across the United Nations, we continued to promote the voices and rights of young people in decision-making on peace and security.

9. Human rights were already under threat before COVID-19 unleashed a shadow pandemic of abuses. The seven areas for action in my call to action for human rights provided a robust framework to push back and to mainstream a culture of human rights within the United Nations. Nearly 90 countries partnered with the United Nations to reform discriminatory laws, including laws that entrenched gender inequality, in 2020. The new guidance note on the protection and promotion of civic space, adopted in September 2020, commits the entire United Nations to taking concrete steps to safeguard and promote this critical underpinning for open and inclusive governance. We continued to implement the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, and preparations are under way for an interministerial conference on the issue later in 2021.

10. Throughout the pandemic, we put gender equality and women's rights at the centre of our efforts, giving visibility to the effectiveness of women's leadership and advocating response and recovery plans that target women's specific needs and invest in the care economy. Our family planning programmes helped to prevent over 14 million unintended pregnancies, nearly 40,000 maternal deaths and more than 4 million unsafe abortions in 2020, when access to health services was particularly constrained.

11. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the value of the recent reforms to our development, peace and security, and management structures, which enabled us to adjust our business operations and respond quickly to the needs of Member States. In the months following the start of the pandemic, United Nations country teams rolled out 121 socioeconomic response plans covering 139 countries and territories. More than \$3 billion was repurposed, and an additional \$2 billion was mobilized for immediate support.

12. The management reforms allowed us to adjust policies and procedures quickly to accommodate the new realities on the ground. At the same time, we were able to deploy dedicated capacities to focus on key areas of concern, including health and supply chain management. The new annual programme budget meant that we could incorporate lessons from the response to the pandemic into the budget for 2022 rather than 2024, as would previously have been the case.

13. Our response to the pandemic coincided with a record liquidity crisis, exacerbated by fluctuations in payment patterns. By exercising careful control over our fiscal expenditure, we succeeded in minimizing the damage to our programme delivery.

14. United Nations personnel are our most important asset, and we have made strenuous efforts over the past year to protect them from the impact of the pandemic. We facilitated the successful medical evacuation of more than 200 personnel and partners, and the response time for such emergency evacuations decreased by half throughout 2020 until March 2021. Our personnel made full use of remote arrangements and telecommuting to continue their vital work without disruption.

15. Our efforts to build inclusivity and diversity into every aspect of our work continued to bear fruit, with progress towards gender parity at every level. We continued to focus on improvements in peace operations, where the challenges are greatest. We launched a new geographical diversity strategy and saw increased action across the board on disability inclusion, following the launch of the first ever strategy to address this issue two years ago. We also launched an important internal discussion on racism and discrimination, and we are finalizing the first ever strategic action plan to address racism within the United Nations.

16. The past year saw the start of a process of deep reflection on the future of multilateralism. Based on the global listening exercise we undertook to mark our seventy-fifth anniversary, and a process of engagement with Member States, thought leaders and young thinkers and public consultations, we are now preparing a report with recommendations on advancing our common agenda for September 2021. The seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations will thus become the launching point for a reinvigorated, networked and inclusive multilateralism that is fit for the future.

## Chapter II

### The work of the Organization

#### A. Promotion of sustained economic growth and sustainable development

##### Context

17. One year after my call for a decade of action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals, our efforts face monumental challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic is having devastating impacts, in many cases reversing years of development progress and deepening pre-existing inequalities. The Goals are now more critical than ever. More than 3.4 million lives have been lost to COVID-19, hunger has increased, and nearly 120 million people have been pushed into poverty. A multilateral response and international solidarity have never been more important.

##### Key objectives

18. The Organization fosters international cooperation and partnerships on transformative global agendas, including the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, the New Urban Agenda, the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020, the Vienna Programme of Action and the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway. Serving in 162 countries and territories, resident coordinators lead United Nations country teams, mobilizing United Nations development system entities to deliver on the objectives of cooperation frameworks agreed upon with host Governments to advance the Sustainable Development Goals at the national and local levels.

##### Key outcomes

##### *Meeting the 2030 Agenda in the time of COVID-19*

19. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, I mobilized a comprehensive health, humanitarian and socioeconomic response, including a series of 23 policy briefs on the consequences of the crisis and recovering better. These efforts were complemented by concrete analysis, policy recommendations and proposals provided by the broader United Nations system.

20. Guided by the United Nations framework on the immediate response to COVID-19, the first of its kind, 121 socioeconomic response plans were prepared, covering 139 countries and territories to support an inclusive and green recovery. We also repurposed \$3 billion in funding and mobilized an additional \$2.18 billion to support recovery efforts, leveraging a new catalytic instrument, the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, and other resources.

21. On the health front, the ACT Accelerator, and its COVAX Facility, which is on track to deliver at least 2 billion COVID-19 vaccine doses in 2021, supported the rapid development of tests, treatments and vaccines.

22. In July 2020, world leaders participated in the high-level political forum on sustainable development, reaching over 125,000 participants and viewers as a result of its virtual format. A total of 47 countries participated in the voluntary national review process, of which 26 were first-time presenters, demonstrating their deep commitment to the 2030 Agenda despite the limitations posed by the pandemic.

23. The inaugural Sustainable Development Goals Moment in September 2020 marked the high point of efforts throughout the year to reinforce the position of the 2030 Agenda framework and beyond as a unifying and highly relevant framework for response and recovery efforts and to guarantee a sustainable, prosperous and inclusive future.

*Scaling up financing for development*

24. In May 2020, I partnered with Canada and Jamaica to launch the Initiative on Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond, promoting concrete financing solutions to the COVID-19 crisis to leaders and ministers of finance. To inform a recovery that is sustainable and inclusive, round tables included eminent women economists, resulting in an ambitious menu of short-, medium- and long-term policies tailored to the needs of various stakeholders. Significant progress was made on the Group of 20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative, which delivered more than \$5 billion in relief since it took effect. The 2021 forum of the Initiative on Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond further advanced action-oriented dialogue on the solutions for financing the COVID-19 recovery and achieving the 2030 Agenda; the outcome document of the 2021 forum was the most ambitious since its inception, raising the commitment level of the international community against the backdrop of the COVID-19 crisis.

25. To scale up financing for development, the annual Sustainable Development Goals business forum gathered over 10,000 participants who engaged on good practices and solutions for the implementation of the Goals. We also launched the SDG Investor Platform in partnership with the Global Investors for Sustainable Development Alliance, providing private sector investors with tools to drive new levels of capital towards the Goals.

*Leaving no one behind*

26. To enhance our support to small island developing States, whose unique vulnerabilities have been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, we proposed, as requested by the General Assembly, recommendations for the development and use of a multidimensional vulnerability index for small island developing States to guide programmatic support.

27. To support the 3.6 billion people who lack Internet access, the Commission for Social Development adopted policies to promote digital inclusion of disadvantaged groups, including women and girls, persons with disabilities, youth, indigenous peoples and older persons. We also supported over 300 million children and youth around the world in continuing their education online during the pandemic.

28. To combat food insecurity and unhealthy diets, in 2021 the Commission on Population and Development adopted by consensus a resolution on population, food security, nutrition and development that will inform upcoming international meetings and forums.

29. Implementation of Youth 2030: The United Nations Strategy on Youth is gaining momentum across the United Nations system with the finalization of the United Nations country team scorecard to benchmark progress. In 2020, the first reporting by 33 entities and 130 United Nations country teams indicated that our response to youth needs during the COVID-19 crisis had been rapid and robust.

30. In 2021, we launched the first *Global Report on Ageism*. The report is aimed at increasing the visibility of ageist attitudes, characterized by stereotypes or discrimination based on old age, and facilitates comprehensive policy responses that support every stage of life.

*Climate action*

31. Our climate action leadership comes at a critical moment as global temperatures continued to rise in 2020, contributing to wildfires, droughts, floods, coral bleaching, locust swarms and increased frequency of extreme weather events, crippling communities and impeding development. Unsustainable consumption and production are driving climate, biodiversity and pollution crises.

32. A global coalition of stakeholders committed to net zero emissions by 2050 expanded, with many Governments increasing interim targets to deliver on 45 per cent reduction in emissions by 2030. I continued to encourage countries to support the energy transition in developing countries and ensure that the goal of mobilizing \$100 billion in new annual pledges on climate finance is met or surpassed for the period 2021–2025.

33. Over the course of 2020, we provided significant support to Member States enhancing nationally determined contributions and delivering on climate and environment priorities, with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework to guide our action at the country level.

34. As the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity (2011–2020) concluded, the United Nations held its first summit on biodiversity in September 2020. Attended by 72 Heads of State and Government, the summit helped to ensure that climate and biodiversity emergencies remained at the fore of the global sustainable development agenda.

35. In April 2021, the first stocktaking report on the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 was produced. While progress is being made towards increasing global forest area, particularly in Asia, Europe and Oceania, the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic and escalating climate and biodiversity crises are threatening to offset those gains.

36. Early warning, early action programmes have been critical in reducing disaster mortality as extreme weather events doubled between 2000 and 2019. A partnership with the World Broadcasting Unions on the “Media saves lives” project trained over 500 journalists to communicate with citizens to reduce vulnerability in the event of a disaster.

*Gender equality*

37. COVID-19 has exacerbated gender inequalities in every society, pushing more women into unemployment, poverty, increased care burdens and spiralling violence against women and girls. From the start of the crisis, the United Nations system has responded by ensuring that gender equality is at the start of response and recovery planning. One of the first policy briefs that I released addressed the impact of the pandemic on women and girls. In addition, anticipating increases in violence against women and girls, I appealed for peace in the home, a call taken up by over 140 Member States.

38. To drive gender-sensitive responses to the pandemic, we increased the availability and breadth of gender data, capturing intersecting inequalities through *The World's Women 2020*. We also published a dashboard of gender indicators on the Women Count data hub and established the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker, which assesses the extent to which 3,100 national policy measures are gender-responsive. The Women Rise for All series highlighted the effectiveness of women's leadership and gender-balanced decision-making, reinforcing the Organization's commitment to the consistent advocacy of temporary special measures, including quotas, in the implementation of my call to action for human

rights. While commemorations of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action were delayed, the year was spent mobilizing to ensure that concrete results are secured from the global Generation Equality Forum.

#### *Regional support*

39. Core to our development system reform was the harnessing of United Nations expertise and technical capabilities at the regional level to strengthen support to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. In follow-up to Economic and Social Council resolution [2020/23](#), regional collaborative platforms were established, bringing together regional commissions and regional offices of United Nations development system entities in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe and Central Asia, and Arab States to provide coordinated support to resident coordinators and United Nations country teams and strategic direction on common priorities at the regional and subregional levels. The platforms built issue-based coalitions, rolled out knowledge hubs, strengthened data systems and advanced efficiency efforts.

40. Regional collaborative platforms published their first annual regional United Nations development system results reports of system entities. Regional forums on sustainable development provided guidance on priority areas for implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

41. The regional commissions developed the COVID-19 Stimulus Tracker, an interactive platform containing over 6,600 policy responses from 194 countries, establishing a knowledge platform for good practices for COVID-19 recovery and implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

#### *United Nations development system*

42. Three years ago, Member States adopted the most far-reaching reforms of the development system in the history of the Organization to ensure that we were equipped to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda.

43. The response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its socioeconomic impact was the first litmus test for the system. The reinvigorated, independent and impartial resident coordinator system and the new generation of United Nations country teams rose to the challenge. Over 240 million people were supported with essential services, 36 million received critical water and sanitation supplies and 120 million benefited from social protection schemes.

44. In December 2020, the General Assembly adopted resolution [75/233](#) on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, sending a strong signal of ongoing support for the reforms as it shifted attention to results, identifying substantive areas for action by the United Nations development system until 2025.

45. In addition, to strengthen collaboration across the humanitarian, development and peace pillars, a new Sahel investment mechanism was conceived to scale up the joined-up United Nations response in the Sahel; a new Secretary-General's planning directive is being rolled out for Burkina Faso; and the Joint Steering Committee to Advance Humanitarian and Development Collaboration facilitated closer cooperation with country leadership, with a focus on the Sudan.

## **B. Maintenance of international peace and security**

### **Context**

46. Our capacity to respond to crises and incipient or potential conflict was tested as never before in the past year. The pandemic, for the most part, did not affect the underlying dynamics of armed conflict, but it undermined trust in institutions, exacerbated inequality and created new flashpoints for tension. Because COVID-19 restrictions hindered in-person diplomatic action, my special representatives and envoys leveraged technology to prevent conflict, de-escalate crises and advance peace processes, including in some conflicts that underwent dangerous escalation. The reform of our peace and security pillar resulted in more cohesive responses.

47. My call for a global ceasefire to stop violence, open space for diplomacy and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid was supported by 180 Member States, one non-member observer State, conflict parties, regional organizations, civil society and religious representatives. It was further reinforced by Security Council resolutions [2532 \(2020\)](#) and [2565 \(2021\)](#). I welcome the ceasefires that have taken place since I issued the call, including in Libya and the Sudan.

### **Key objectives**

48. The United Nations supports Member States through a wide range of activities in the area of international peace and security, grounded in the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the mandates of the General Assembly and the Security Council. Through its political, peacebuilding and peacekeeping engagements, the Organization assists in the prevention, mitigation, management and peaceful resolution of conflicts. The Organization also dedicates capacities to advancing women's participation in peace processes, tackling violence against children, sexual violence in conflict, and children and armed conflict, the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and the prevention of genocide.

### **Key outcomes**

#### *Prevention, management and resolution of conflicts*

49. We adjusted our working methods to advance conflict prevention and peacemaking despite the additional challenges posed by the pandemic. My special representatives and envoys engaged with conflict parties to move towards ceasefires and lasting political settlements. In the Sudan, we continued our support to the transition with the establishment of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan (UNITAMS). The Mission advocated the implementation of the Juba Agreement for Peace in the Sudan and worked to bring non-signatory armed groups into the peace process to achieve a comprehensive and inclusive peace. To that end, UNITAMS supported the peace talks between the transitional Government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North Abdelaziz al-Hilu faction. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the good offices process and the implementation of the United Nations Initiative for the Consolidation of Peace contributed to the holding of elections in an overall peaceful climate. In Libya, intra-Libyan dialogues facilitated by the United Nations Support Mission in Libya led to the signing of a ceasefire agreement on 23 October 2020, a political road map and the selection of an interim executive authority to lead the country towards elections scheduled for 24 December 2021. In South Sudan, we provided good offices and mediation to strengthen trust in the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan.

50. My special envoys and representatives also worked to help defuse tensions around electoral processes. In Malawi, my Special Representative to the African Union assisted in responding to the challenges posed by a drawn-out presidential electoral process, including by defusing tensions and promoting trust in, and respect for, national recourse institutions. My Special Representative for the Central African Republic used his good offices in helping to ensure that presidential and legislative elections remained on schedule despite a challenging environment.

51. Our close partnership with regional organizations remains central to our work. Cooperation between the Economic Community of West African States, the African Union and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, as well as other partners, contributed to preventing and defusing election-related tensions and violence in West Africa and the Sahel, notably surrounding the presidential elections in Côte d'Ivoire on 31 October 2020. In Myanmar, following the declaration of a state of emergency by the military on 1 February 2021, my Special Envoy on Myanmar and I led international calls to uphold the democratic aspirations of the people of Myanmar, while ensuring a coherent United Nations approach to maintaining assistance to the people of Myanmar and to strengthening United Nations partnership with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

52. The United Nations maintains more than 40 special political missions and 12 peacekeeping operations, comprising more than 90,000 civilian and uniformed personnel. Our peace operations are staying the course in complex situations and adapting to better assist national efforts to build and sustain peace. Planning for the United Nations transition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau and the Sudan was carried out in close collaboration with missions and United Nations country teams. In the Sudan, the United Nations reflected the country's democratic transition in adapting its own structure in the country, with the closing down of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur and the ramping up of UNITAMS to support the political transition and the peace process and contribute to peacebuilding in the country.

53. My Action for Peacekeeping initiative, endorsed by 154 Member States and four partner organizations, continued to mobilize collective support for peacekeeping operations, including strengthening the safety and security of peacekeepers, enhancing the performance and accountability of missions and ensuring that integrated strategies support the achievement of political objectives. On 29 March 2021, I introduced Action for Peacekeeping Plus to further strengthen Action for Peacekeeping commitments and results.

54. Our instruments for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts keep evolving with emerging risks, threats and trends. Our missions are using digital tools to monitor media and online content, including for disinformation and hate speech. In the Central African Republic during the recent presidential elections and in South Sudan, we worked with social media companies to counter hate speech and misinformation. In Mali, the Mission's weekly radio show, *Le vrai du faux*, fights misinformation. Digital tools also supported broader participation in dialogue processes in

#### **Highlight: climate security**

The climate security mechanism has expanded efforts to support United Nations field missions, country teams and other partners in regions highly affected by the linkages between climate change and peace and security. The mechanism has launched multi-stakeholder projects in the Americas, the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa aimed at strengthening integrated and gender-sensitive approaches to risk analysis and management. Across all engagements, the mechanism leverages partnerships to promote peacebuilding and climate action for sustainable solutions.

Libya, where the United Nations Support Mission in Libya engaged with large groups of women, youth and local representatives and the broader Libyan public via digital platforms to gather views. In response to the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech and my recently launched Data Strategy, we developed a web-based tool to facilitate social media reporting and are developing other digital tools to help missions to address disinformation and hate speech. More broadly, through the United Nations Innovation Network, we are exploring, pioneering and leveraging cross-cutting methodologies, including new technologies, behavioural insights and immersive visualization, to advance the implementation of our mandates.

55. In 2020, I released my first report on youth and peace and security (S/2020/167) since the Security Council adopted resolution 2250 (2015), in which it recognized the essential role of young people in preventing and resolving conflict and in sustaining peace.

#### *Protection of civilians*

56. Peacekeeping operations and special political missions continued to play an important role in protecting civilians, in support of the primary responsibility of host States, including through political engagement to prevent and resolve conflict, support to the promotion and protection of human rights and the strengthening of the rule of law and the facilitation of humanitarian assistance. To mitigate the operational constraints imposed by the pandemic, operations adapted community engagement, patrolling and capacity-building. For example, in South Sudan, a key milestone was achieved when protection of civilians sites were redesignated as sites for internally displaced persons, secured by national authorities. In the Sudan, UNITAMS is supporting the implementation of a national strategy to protect civilians. In the Central African Republic, amid electoral tensions, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic stabilized several regions, mitigating harm to civilians and enabling popular participation.

#### *Women and peace and security*

57. In February 2021, women represented 48 per cent of heads and deputy heads of mission, leading efforts to find political solutions to crises. We have also made progress in increasing the number of uniformed women deployed, exceeding all but one of the targets set out in the uniformed gender parity strategy 2018–2028 in 2021. The number of deployed women in uniform has increased fivefold in the past three decades, and we are working towards full gender parity based on our uniformed gender parity strategy. To that end, we continue to take measures to improve the work environment and mitigate barriers to women's meaningful contribution to peacekeeping.

58. Twenty years after the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), however, women's direct participation in track 1 peace processes remains one of the least implemented goals of the women and peace and security agenda. In 2021, I called upon Member States to implement temporary special measures, including quotas, to increase women's equal participation in peace and other decision-making processes.

59. In 2020, the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund saw significant growth in its support to women who prevent conflict, respond to crises and accelerate the achievement of peace in their communities. The Fund supported 293 local organizations in conflict-affected and humanitarian settings, reaching 6.4 million people in 22 countries. It also provided financing to 62 civil society organizations responding to COVID-19 in 18 countries.

60. In 2020, the Peacebuilding Fund maintained its focus on gender-responsive peacebuilding. Some 40 per cent of its investments supported gender equality and the empowerment of women, exceeding its annual target of 30 per cent and, for the sixth year in a row, the 15 per cent target set in my Seven-Point Action Plan on Gender-Responsive Peacebuilding. Guided by its gender strategy, the Peacebuilding Commission delivered tangible support to numerous women peacebuilders. The Commission also increased the number of women briefers from 6 in 2019 to 25 in 2020.

#### *Peacebuilding support*

61. On 21 December 2020, the General Assembly and the Security Council concluded the third review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture, unanimously adopting twin resolutions [75/201](#) and [2558 \(2020\)](#).

62. The Peacebuilding Commission engaged in 15 separate country- and region-specific contexts in 2020, including multi-partner support for peacebuilding in Burkina Faso, engagement with women former combatants and survivors in Colombia and mobilization of support for the National Development Plan and National Reconciliation Framework of Somalia.

63. The Peacebuilding Fund provided nearly \$174 million in investments across 39 countries in 2020, 97 per cent of which contributed to targets of the Sustainable Development Goals. As the Organization's instrument of first resort to support integrated programming for conflict prevention and peacebuilding, 83 per cent of the investments from the Fund went to joint programmes. Key priorities included supporting system-wide responses to facilitate transitions in eight countries, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan; women and youth inclusion in 20 countries; and cross-border and regional approaches involving 20 countries, including in Central America and the Sahel region.

64. We also strengthened our partnership with the World Bank, collaborating in 47 country contexts in the priority areas of prevention, food security, forced displacement and COVID-19 response.

#### *Electoral assistance*

65. The year 2020 was a challenging one for elections. Member States faced difficult decisions on postponing or proceeding with elections that involved complex legal, political, human rights and public health considerations.

66. We provided electoral assistance in 54 States and territories, including 9 under a Security Council mandate. We directly assisted 22 elections and referendums in 2020, including in Bolivia (Plurinational State of), the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Mali, the Niger, the Republic of Moldova and Vanuatu, as well as in New Caledonia (France). We conducted 13 needs assessments, both virtually and in person, and 12 advisory missions.

67. We supported the African Union in developing a framework for electoral assistance and the League of Arab States in strengthening its electoral database and institutional memory.

68. Promoting women's participation is a guiding principle in our electoral support. All electoral needs assessments incorporated gender considerations. The United Nations supported the efforts of 45 Member States to increase women's equal participation in electoral processes, including in advocating and adopting temporary special measures. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, for example, we supported women's political participation and measures to combat gender-based violence in politics, and national efforts led, for the first time, to gender parity on candidate lists.

Our global roster campaign to diversify our pool of electoral experts led to a 25 per cent increase in the number of women experts.

#### *Rule of law and security institutions*

69. Strengthening the rule of law and security sector governance remains a core pillar of stability and durable peace. We continued to support the capacity of countries and areas in which the United Nations has field missions, including Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Libya, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan, the Sudan and Yemen, as well as Kosovo,<sup>1</sup> by reinforcing accountability for crimes fuelling conflict, extending prison security, enhancing the capacity and accountability of defence and security forces in line with international human rights and humanitarian law, disarming and demobilizing ex-combatants and reintegrating them into civilian life, and mitigating explosive threats, on the basis of Security Council mandates.

70. We assisted, provided tools to and advised Member States on how to better address potential drivers of conflict related to the rule of law and security sector governance, as well as how to mitigate COVID-19-related risks to national rule of law and security sectors.

71. We assisted 16 peace operations undertaking human rights-compliant planning and operations through policy guidance and training to enhance their support to national authorities. We provided explosive ordnance risk education to over 1.7 million people and explosive threat mitigation and response training to over 24,000 first responders and peacekeepers. In response to COVID-19, our health and safety-related guidance enabled the continuation of community violence reduction programmes, including in the Central African Republic, which saw 4,000 beneficiaries in 2020.

#### *Security Council affairs*

72. Amid the pandemic, we provided support to 79 public meetings and 46 informal consultations of the Security Council, as well as 143 videoconference briefings and 126 videoconference consultations. We also helped to facilitate adoption by the Council of 57 resolutions and 13 statements by the President of the Council, many of them in accordance with new remote working methods. The Secretariat continues to support the Council's subsidiary bodies, including sanctions committees and working groups.

#### *Violence against children, children and armed groups, sexual violence in conflict and victims' rights*

73. The COVID-19 pandemic increased the existing vulnerabilities of conflict-affected children, and escalation of conflict and disregard for international humanitarian and human rights law had a severe impact on children. Children are killed and maimed by warring factions and are victimized by recruitment as soldiers on the front lines or used by parties to conflict in supporting roles. In 2020, there were nearly 24,000 verified violations against children by government forces and non-State armed groups, including those designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations.

74. Cross-border spillover of conflict and intercommunal violence are a concern, particularly in the Sahel and the Lake Chad basin.

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<sup>1</sup> References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution [1244 \(1999\)](#).

75. Grave violations affect boys and girls differently. Whereas 89 per cent of children recruited and used were boys, 97 per cent of sexual violence was perpetrated against girls. Sexual violence remains vastly underreported, owing to stigmatization, cultural norms, absence of services and safety concerns. In 2019–2020, the United Nations verified over 2,500 cases. In March 2020, the United Nations signed a framework of cooperation with the Government of the Sudan to address impunity related to conflict-related sexual violence. The United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict network closed its multi-project trust fund, which supported 52 projects in 16 conflict-affected countries, and launched a successor fund to support the implementation of Security Council resolution [2467 \(2019\)](#).

76. Ending violations against children and providing them with long-term and sustainable reintegration programmes is essential to sustaining peace and development. The Organization has increasingly focused on ending and preventing violations through engagement with peace processes and has also deepened its cooperation with regional organizations to protect children.

**Highlight: outer space**

The year 2020 saw a record number of objects and satellites launched into space. This rapid development creates opportunities for a better future but also poses challenges to safety, security and sustainability in outer space. To that end, we launched a campaign with the European Space Agency to raise awareness of space debris. We also partnered with the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to expand awareness of the landmark Guidelines for the Long-Term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities, adopted in 2019, and began extensive stakeholder engagement with the support of the United Arab Emirates Space Agency on the topic of space sustainability.

## C. Development in Africa

### Context

77. Following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, our support to Africa's response and recovery was swift and integrated, focusing on health and humanitarian interventions as well as socioeconomic support to protect vulnerable populations. In line with the principles underpinning our partnership with the African Union, we also supported and complemented the regional response through operational, policy and advocacy actions.

### Key objectives

78. The United Nations promotes sustainable development and peace in Africa by contributing to accelerating the integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 of the African Union. We do so by addressing the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development and the interlinkages among peace, security, human rights and development. We also help to foster intraregional integration and international cooperation on the continent.

### Key outcomes

79. In our support to Africa's pandemic response, we provided early policy guidance, including my policy brief on the impact of COVID-19 on Africa. Our country teams conducted country-level and thematic COVID-19 socioeconomic assessments, informing 47 socioeconomic response plans to ensure a green and inclusive recovery. To prevent misinformation during the pandemic, we worked with the African Union on outreach campaigns to fight myths and raise awareness about the virus and its spread. These efforts amplified the United Nations Verified campaign and were offered for free to 275 media institutions and platforms.

80. We launched the Africa knowledge management hub on COVID-19 and the Africa dashboard as a digital one-stop shop for information and data. We also supported the Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa 2020–2030 of the African Union and consolidated advancements in the framework of the Digital Centre for Excellence for digital identity, trade and economy.

81. We supported 38 countries and three regional economic communities in developing national strategies to harness the benefits of the African Continental Free Trade Area, which covers a market of \$2.3 trillion and 1.3 billion people. Along with regional partners, including the African Union, our support to the launch of the Africa Medical Supplies Platform helped African countries to purchase certified medical equipment, including 670 million COVID-19 vaccine doses. We also supported the mobilization of funds for the Great Green Wall, with over \$14 billion pledged in support of the initiative.

82. In support of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and its support plan, we established a new Sahel investment support mechanism and appointed a Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel to mobilize resources and strengthen collective engagement across the region.

83. In November 2020, the Deputy Secretary-General undertook a mission to West Africa, visiting five countries to amplify the call for international solidarity where it was needed the most and to assert, at the highest levels, an agenda of hope and a better future in Africa.

84. In May 2021, we expanded our annual Africa Dialogue Series to one month of activities organized in partnership with the African Union on the theme "Cultural

identity and ownership: reshaping mindsets”. The 2021 Dialogue was aimed at leveraging the continent’s identity, history and achievements, thereby promoting a new narrative that leads to building forward and better and to achieving Africa’s transformative agenda.

## D. Promotion and protection of human rights

### Context

85. Human rights are at the centre of the work of the United Nations, including its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As the pandemic exposed systemic inequalities, my call to action for human rights rallied the United Nations to ensure that human rights are integrated into recovery efforts, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups.

### Key objectives

86. Our work to advance the protection and promotion of human rights spans the three pillars of United Nations engagement, including in the following thematic areas: support for international human rights mechanisms; mainstreaming human rights within development and peace and security efforts; and advancing the core principles of non-discrimination, participation and accountability.

### Key outcomes

#### *Support for international human rights mechanisms*

87. In 2021, we used innovative modalities to continue to provide support to treaty-based and intergovernmental bodies and found new ways of engaging civil society and victims with special procedures using digital technology. We also launched the new Universal Human Rights Index, which contains over 180,000 recommendations of United Nations human rights mechanisms.

#### *Human rights within development efforts*

88. Substantial efforts have been made, including under my call to action, to advance the integration of human rights into development interventions at the country level. New guidance allows United Nations field presences to better align their work with recommendations of universal periodic reviews, and similar efforts are under way to strengthen engagement with the treaty bodies.

89. To combat increasing inequality, we launched the Surge Initiative, promoting economic, social and cultural rights and the Sustainable Development Goals. Through the Initiative, and in line with my call for a renewed social contract, we engaged with United Nations resident coordinators and country teams in more than 59 countries to ensure that human rights were at the centre of national-level COVID-19 socioeconomic response plans.

#### *Peace and security*

90. In 2020, the Security Council held its first open debate on human rights in United Nations peace operations, and we released a study showing that human rights components are significant enablers for the implementation of the mandates of peace operations. We also created three emergency response teams to strengthen human rights risk analysis, in line with my call to action for human rights.

91. My annual report on conflict-related sexual violence ([S/2021/312](#)) listed 52 parties credibly suspected of sexual violence in situations on the agenda of the Security Council. I also encouraged all State and non-State parties to adopt and implement specific commitments to eliminate conflict-related sexual violence.

*Non-discrimination*

92. In 2021, racial discrimination has been a key focus in our work to address inequality and counter discrimination, which have often led to intergenerational injustices. In June 2020, the Human Rights Council adopted resolution 43/1 on systemic racism in law enforcement against Africans and people of African descent, and we issued a guidance note on racial discrimination in the context of COVID-19. We also reactivated the United Nations network on racial discrimination and protection of minorities, issuing guidance for country teams on combating racial discrimination and protecting minorities, and created a checklist for country teams to work towards eliminating laws that are discriminatory against women and girls.

93. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences collected 270 submissions on increased violence against women in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, reflected in her report to the General Assembly on the impact of COVID-19 and domestic violence (see [A/75/144](#)). The Special Rapporteur encouraged Member States to maintain services and adopt specific protection measures during the pandemic and to contribute to commitments to eliminate violence against women and girls advocated in my call to action for human rights.

94. In May 2020, a meeting of religious leaders resulted in the Global Pledge for Action by Religious Actors and Faith-Based Organizations to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic in Collaboration with the United Nations, which focuses on countering hate speech, among other priority areas.

*Participation*

95. In September 2020, the United Nations produced a guidance note on the promotion and protection of civic space, to support the effective implementation of all three pillars of the United Nations. As a result, United Nations personnel are exploring strategies to promote more inclusive civil society participation and to preserve and expand online civic space.

*Accountability*

96. We continued to support States and other stakeholders in the design and implementation of context-specific, victim-centred and human rights-based accountability and transitional justice processes. In 2020, we published a study with recommendations on the impact of drug policies on prison overcrowding in South-East Asia. We also worked with Kenyan authorities and grass-roots groups to fund litigation, resulting in compensation for residents of an informal settlement affected by environmental degradation and lead poisoning.

**Highlight: accountability for sexual violence**

Important progress was made in the fight against impunity for sexual violence as the United Nations provided support to a trial in the Democratic Republic of the Congo that resulted in life sentences for two former armed group commanders convicted of war crimes. In Yemen, the United Nations documented patterns of intimidation and sexual violence against politically active women, resulting in Security Council sanctions against those responsible.

## **E. Effective coordination of humanitarian assistance**

### **Context**

97. The past year has been one marked by enormous challenges, with humanitarian needs reaching record levels. Armed conflicts, the climate crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic transformed the humanitarian landscape, compounded risks and exacerbated inequalities. Disasters were increasingly frequent and devastating. Disturbing trends unfolded, including the shadow pandemic of gender-based violence, increasing forced displacement and mounting food insecurity. In response, the United Nations continued to coordinate and support the provision of humanitarian assistance, reaching more than 264 million people.

### **Key objectives**

98. The United Nations works to ensure coordinated, coherent, effective and timely humanitarian responses to save lives and alleviate human suffering in disasters, conflicts and other humanitarian emergencies. We advocate humanitarian principles, promote respect for international humanitarian law and mobilize resources to prepare for and respond to humanitarian crises with partners. Facilitating early action and rapid responses, including through anticipatory approaches, remains crucial to effective coordination. In addition, the United Nations advocates disaster risk reduction through prevention and early warning systems to prevent disasters from happening and mitigating their negative impacts when they do.

### **Key outcomes**

99. In 2020, the United Nations worked with partners to mobilize a record \$19.1 billion to assist 264 million people in 64 countries. The United Nations coordinated humanitarian responses to both acute and protracted crises and disasters across the globe, including the destructive port explosion in Lebanon and the desert locust outbreak in the Greater Horn of Africa.

100. In response to the specific impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19 was launched to address the ensuing humanitarian needs in 63 countries. With the generous support of donors, \$3.7 billion was mobilized, providing life-saving assistance and support, as well as personal protective equipment kits and essential health, protection and education services. Complementing the United Nations-led health and socioeconomic responses to the pandemic, the Plan exemplified the strength of coordination, coherence and agility across the United Nations system and its partners.

101. Beyond the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, humanitarian pooled funds were indispensable in responding to the unprecedented needs, and \$1.8 billion was allocated to partners in 2020, including a record \$848 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund and \$909 million from country-based pooled funds. Of that amount, allocations of \$492 million were targeted to mitigate the pandemic's impact on more than 20 million people in 49 countries. Pooled funds also supported early action to address the spread of the Ebola virus in the Great Lakes region and to reduce the severity of the desert locust outbreak in the Greater Horn of Africa, where 13 million people had their livelihoods and food security protected. In addition, high-level pledging events mobilized resources for responses in the Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen and the central Sahel, among others.

102. In 2020, humanitarian partners advanced anticipatory action initiatives in over 60 countries, and \$140 million was committed by the Central Emergency Response Fund for additional pilot projects. For the first time, the Fund disbursed funding based

on predictive analytics frameworks for responses ahead of disasters. In Bangladesh, pre-agreed funding released before peak flooding helped to provide cash assistance and hygiene and dignity kits to vulnerable people and protect their livelihoods. In Somalia, pre-agreed financing and actions made the funding allocation process three times faster than previously, supporting 1.3 million people ahead of rising food insecurity and the compounding effects of locusts, floods and COVID-19.

103. To address the imminent and grave risk of multiple famines, including in South Sudan, Yemen and north-east Nigeria, I established a high-level task force on preventing famine, facilitating rapid system-wide efforts to avert famine and counter acute food insecurity. The initiative is aimed at mobilizing resources, advocating improved access to at-risk and affected people and enhancing data and real-time information-sharing.

104. The United Nations also scaled up disaster risk reduction and risk analysis in the humanitarian programme cycle. For example, in Pakistan risk analysis and mitigation were integrated into response planning, and the Africa Road Map for Improving the Availability, Access and Use of Disaster Risk Information for Early Warning and Early Action, including in the Context of Transboundary Risk Management, enhanced transboundary early warning systems. Through the reform of the United Nations development system, disaster risk reduction has also been mainstreamed and integrated into 24 new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks signed in 2020.

105. At present, 143 Member and observer States report in the Sendai Framework monitor. By December 2020, 101 countries had national disaster risk reduction strategies in place, enabling the effective reduction of disaster risk. For example, no lives were lost in the volcanic eruption in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in April 2021, owing to actions taken by the Government in line with its national disaster risk reduction strategy. The United Nations response, which included rapid allocation of funding and a joint environment mission team, is an example of the complementarity of humanitarian response and recovery efforts.

## F. Promotion of justice and international law

### Context

106. Since its inception, the United Nations has been at the centre of international law-making, providing unique contributions to the development, codification and implementation of international law.

### Key objectives

107. The United Nations promotes justice and international law through various actions and mandates, such as those related to oceans and the law of the sea, international trade, international treaties and agreements, peace operations, international tribunals and sanctions. In addition, the International Court of Justice, the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, settles legal disputes submitted by States and provides advisory opinions on legal questions.

### Key outcomes

108. Our work on the establishment of the legal framework for the United Nations resident coordinator system globally has contributed to the implementation of the broader reform of the development system in support of the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2021, we have also dealt with legal issues arising in relation to the United Nations and its operation as a result of the pandemic and supported business continuity.

109. In 2021, the International Court of Justice continued to consider many high-profile cases, such as the case concerning the *Arbitral Award of 3 October 1899 (Guyana v. Venezuela)*, in which it rendered its judgment in December 2020. The Court also commemorated the seventy-fifth anniversary of its inaugural session, which took place on 18 April 1946.

110. Highlights from other United Nations or United Nations-assisted tribunals during the reporting period include the following: on 18 August 2020, the Trial Chamber of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon convicted Salim Jamil Ayyash in relation to the attack in Beirut on 14 February 2005 that killed the former Prime Minister of Lebanon, Rafik Hariri, and 21 others and injured 226 more. The three others accused, Hassan Habib Merhi, Hussein Hassan Oneissi and Assad Hassan Sabra, were found not guilty. The Trial Chamber subsequently sentenced Mr. Ayyash to five concurrent sentences of life imprisonment.

111. In November 2020, Félicien Kabuga made his initial appearance before the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, where he stands charged with seven counts of genocide and crimes against humanity allegedly committed in Rwanda in 1994.

112. On 8 June 2021, the Appeals Chamber of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals rendered its judgement in the *Mladić* case on the appeals filed by Ratko Mladić and the Prosecutor against the judgment rendered by a Trial Chamber of the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia on 22 November 2017. The Appeals Chamber dismissed the appeals in their entirety and affirmed Mr. Mladić's conviction for genocide, crimes against humanity and violations of the laws or customs of war. It also affirmed the sentence of life imprisonment imposed on him by the Trial Chamber.

## **G. Disarmament**

### **Context**

113. In 2021, the United Nations continued its core work of reinforcing the norm against the use of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction and pursuing their elimination, and of advancing the regulation and limitation of conventional weapons. The United Nations also tackled the challenges arising from new technologies and in cyberspace. As military expenditures rose to \$1.98 trillion in 2020, the highest level since the end of the cold war, disarmament remains central to the work of the United Nations.

### **Key objectives**

114. The United Nations supports multilateral negotiations and efforts aimed at achieving general and complete disarmament, focusing on the elimination of nuclear weapons, upholding the prohibition of other weapons of mass destruction, regulating conventional weapons, responding to the challenges of emerging weapons technologies and promoting regional disarmament efforts and public awareness.

### **Key outcomes**

115. While several key milestone meetings were postponed in 2020 owing to the pandemic, the United Nations continued to support Member States in the area of disarmament. For example, we provided policy, procedural and technical advice to the President-designate of the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in expanded virtual consultations. We assisted Member States in addressing existing and potential threats relating to State use of information and communications technologies, and we supported new thinking on norms, rules and principles to reduce military threats to outer space systems. We also updated voluntary guidance on ammunition stockpile management and supported expert discussions on lethal autonomous weapons systems.

116. In 2021, the operational readiness of my Mechanism for Investigation of Alleged Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons was reinforced through updated rosters of experts and analytical laboratories. We also improved coordination with other parts of the United Nations system to enhance preparedness for a deliberate biological event and fostered a gender-balanced network of young biological scientists from the global South through the Youth for Biosecurity initiative.

117. At the regional level, we supported the implementation of the Road Map for Implementing the Caribbean Priority Actions on the Illicit Proliferation of Firearms and Ammunition across the Caribbean in a Sustainable Manner by 2030, which was developed with the aim of preventing and combating illicit trafficking of firearms and ammunition. Working with national authorities in Africa and Latin America, we built their capacity for integration of small arms control and gender-based violence prevention. In support of the Silencing the Guns initiative of the African Union, we worked collaboratively with 10 countries to raise awareness of the negative effects of the illicit proliferation of small arms at the urban and community levels.

118. Under the United Nations SaferGuard quick-response mechanism, we fielded an assistance mission to Equatorial Guinea following explosions at a military camp. The mission assisted the Government in assessing the cause of the explosion and provided technical advice on ammunition management to reduce future risks.

**Highlight: Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons**

On 22 January 2021, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons entered into force, following the fiftieth ratification. The Treaty is the first multilateral nuclear disarmament treaty in over two decades and represents the concerns of many States over the growing dangers posed by nuclear weapons. The United Nations is working to ensure a successful first Meeting of States Parties that will contribute to the Treaty's goals.

## H. Drug control, crime prevention and combating terrorism

### Context

119. The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified our exposure to crime and violence. With confinements came intensified risk of domestic violence and online sexual exploitation. Emergency and economic responses to the pandemic raised corruption risks, and organized criminal groups falsified medical products to raise profits. Prisoners were among the most vulnerable to the pandemic, and ensuring access to justice for all has been a significant challenge.

120. Terrorists have exploited the political and socioeconomic fallout of the pandemic in conflict-affected or fragile regions. The global threat posed by Da'esh, Al-Qaida and their affiliates was compounded by growing concerns over neo-Nazi and other racially or ethnically motivated groups resorting to terrorist violence.

### Key objectives

121. The United Nations supports Member States in tackling issues related to drugs, crime and terrorism by advancing compliance with standards and norms on crime prevention and criminal justice and implementing principles and standards in international instruments such as the United Nations Convention against Corruption and the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

### Key outcomes

#### *Crime prevention and countering transnational organized crime*

122. The United Nations contributed to COVID-19 preparedness in detention centres in more than 50 Member States, which resulted in improved prison conditions and basic services for detainees. We provided personal protective equipment and sanitary items to prison authorities and supported the availability of quality health-care services for prisoners.

123. In South-East Asia and South America, we analysed fraud and corruption risks related to economic rescue measures for COVID-19 and contributed to whistleblower protection in Kenya and Mexico. As a result, Member States were able to ensure that investigations, prosecutions and international cooperation continued despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

124. With online presence increasing during the pandemic, we expanded support to Member States on cybercrime and online abuse. For example, we provided training to teachers and authorities on cybercrime prevention, detection, identification and management, with an emphasis on online child sexual abuse and exploitation.

#### *Countering the world drug problem*

125. In 2021, we continued the International Collaborative Exercises programme, providing forensic laboratories with updated information on the identification and testing of drugs. As a result, forensic and testing quality was strengthened in 299 laboratories in 87 countries.

126. We also supported alternative development across various regions, switching from illicit to licit crops. In Colombia, more than 8,600 farming families and 90 rural organizations increased their productivity and income by developing competitive and quality-standardized products.

127. We reached more than 600,000 families across 45 countries in our work on drug use prevention. The programmes also reached vulnerable populations such as

refugees and internally displaced persons, including 100,000 internally displaced families in Kachin State in Myanmar.

#### *Terrorism prevention*

128. To promote multilateral cooperation for counter-terrorism, we launched the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Platform, connecting 43 entities and 131 Member States. We also organized the Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week in July 2020 and the second Counter-Terrorism Week in New York in June 2021.

129. In our support to Member States, we assisted 40 countries with regard to the use of passenger data to counter the travel of terrorists and serious criminals and began deploying the goTravel software. We initiated a global programme to counter the financing of terrorism, training more than 400 officials from 20 countries and contributing to new software for financial intelligence units. We supported over 100 Member States in addressing the risk of bioterrorism, as well as linkages between terrorism and illicit arms trafficking and organized crime.

130. Our new Global Framework provides a whole-of-United Nations approach to supporting Member States in the protection, repatriation, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of foreign nationals returning from the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq, who may have alleged or actual links or family ties to designated terrorist groups.

131. We promoted resilience to violent extremism conducive to terrorism through sports and good practices to protect major sporting events from terrorist attacks. We launched a new International Hub on Behavioural Insights to Counter Terrorism to better inform and support United Nations and Member State efforts to prevent violent extremism and terrorism. We also continued to raise awareness of the plight of victims of terrorism and promoted their rights and role in terrorism prevention. For example, our Victims of Terrorism Support Programme highlighted the trauma and isolation that victims experienced during the pandemic, giving them a platform to advocate for their rights.

#### **Highlight: Justice Accelerators**

In 2020, the Justice Accelerators initiative was piloted in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, where secondary students competed by developing technology-based solutions for rule of law challenges in their communities. The winning teams developed artificial intelligence solutions to identify hate speech and violent extremist language in websites, as well as an online platform linking providers of affordable and pro bono legal aid with people in need of such services.

## Chapter III

### Effective functioning of the Organization

#### Key work streams

132. With more than 36,000 staff in 463 duty stations, the work of the United Nations Secretariat is underpinned by the effective management of finance, human resources, information and communications technology, supply chains, facilities, conference services and security and safety operations, as well as communicating the work of the Organization to global audiences.

#### Key outcomes

133. The COVID-19 pandemic was an early test of our reforms. Our reforms enabled us to adjust our business operations and respond quickly to the needs of Member States. Unlike responses to past emergencies, such as the Ebola crisis, the Organization did not need to create new structures to manage its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The new reform structures in development, peace and security and management facilitated a unified and agile response to the pandemic, saving time and money.

134. Virtual meeting platforms and remote simultaneous interpretation allowed delegates and staff to continue their work in more than 1,200 meetings. On site, physical barriers, air filtration systems and enhanced hygiene measures increased safety in our buildings. Through our “Reimagine the UN together” challenge, some 85 teams submitted innovative solutions to advance new and better ways of doing business.

135. To enable the continuation of our life-saving work around the world, we established a system-wide task force on medical evacuations, which mobilized 117 medical evacuations, established hubs in Accra and Nairobi and made arrangements with hospitals in several locations. By June 2021, our vaccine task force had delivered 222,500 vaccines to United Nations personnel and members of our partner organizations in 47 countries. We also continued to provide security to some 180,000 personnel and 400,000 of their dependants in more than 125 countries.

136. The new management structures at Headquarters have facilitated the United Nations response to COVID-19 by clarifying departmental responsibilities and enhancing their responsiveness. We were able to update and adjust policies to respond to operational requirements. An integrated supply chain system allowed the United Nations to quickly obtain critical goods and services at highly competitive prices. Personal protective equipment and medical equipment were successfully sourced and supplied to duty stations in need. The Organization’s supply chains, especially for strategic goods and services, have remained resilient even in these challenging circumstances, with no interruptions experienced despite different national travel and cargo restrictions.

137. The enhanced delegation of authority framework not only aligned responsibility with authority but also enabled managers to respond more quickly and flexibly to the situations that they were facing during the pandemic. A new governance mechanism, the Management Client Board, was established to ensure effective operations. For the first time, all types of entities in the Secretariat, particularly those outside headquarters duty stations, were represented in input into the development of administrative policy on a continuous basis.

138. Central investments in information and communications technology provided staff with modern tools to seamlessly continue their work. In various duty stations, staff members were able to continue to work remotely while connecting and collaborating with their colleagues globally.

139. Reforms also helped to strengthen accountability and transparency. A new evaluation capacity was formed, analytics capacities were significantly reinforced, and a Secretariat-wide risk register with corporate-level risk treatment and response plans was adopted and a risk management approach introduced.

140. The annual budget is now in its second year of implementation. It has improved the accuracy of our resource estimates and planning assumptions, thereby improving mandate delivery and accountability for results. We are now able to adjust our programme planning and incorporate lessons from the response to the COVID-19 pandemic into the budget for 2022. Under the biennial budget, such steps would have had to wait until the biennium 2024–2025.

141. Achieving an equitable workforce remains a key priority. In 2021, we maintained gender parity among Under-Secretaries-General and Assistant Secretaries-General, which was reached for the first time in 2020. We launched a strategy to advance equitable geographical representation and evaluated our recruitment processes to reduce bias and other barriers to inclusive hiring. We also launched the talent pool initiative to better leverage female talent within the United Nations common system.

142. To strengthen accountability, we created management dashboards to track our performance in areas such as gender parity and geographical representation and launched our first ever results portal for Member States. We also trained conduct and discipline focal points and expanded our Misconduct Tracking System.

143. In 2021, I signed the Secretariat's first statement of internal control, providing assurance to Member States that Secretariat-wide mandated activities are being implemented effectively and efficiently; financial reporting is reliable and compliant with International Public Sector Accounting Standards; and regulations, rules and procedures adhere to the regulatory framework.

144. The rights and dignity of victims remain at the centre of our work to eradicate sexual exploitation and abuse. In May 2020, the Victims' Rights Advocate concluded a pilot mapping of victims' services, capacities and approaches in 13 countries with United Nations presences. Since 2019, we have also quadrupled the number of United Nations entities submitting action plans to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse.

145. In March 2021, the High-level Committee on Management approved the *Investigators' Manual: Investigation of Sexual Harassment Complaints in the United Nations*, which lays out common general principles for fair, transparent and accountable investigation processes.

146. In September 2020, I established the Task Force on Addressing Racism and Promoting Dignity for All in the United Nations. The purpose of the Task Force is to identify the extent of personal, interpersonal, structural and institutional racism in the Organization and its impact on mandate delivery. The Task Force will devise a long-term strategic action plan on how to end racism and racial discrimination in the United Nations and propose measures to promote diversity and inclusion and develop policies and tools to create a safe environment in which racism can be reported and addressed promptly without fear of reprisal.

147. Cash shortfalls continued to affect our work in 2020. The year started with record arrears of \$711 million in our regular budget, and we faced a \$173 million gap in collections by the end of March. Facing a cash-flow deficit, we temporarily suspended hiring for regular budget operations and scaled down all expenses. Cash inflows remained unpredictable and the year-end arrears climbed to \$808 million. Stop-gap interventions cannot address these structural problems, and the problem will spill over into succeeding budget years.

148. In peacekeeping, outstanding contributions totalled \$1.7 billion by the end of the financial period, in June 2020. In 2019, the General Assembly authorized measures that provided important liquidity relief, including the settlement of payments to troop- and police-contributing countries. These measures have facilitated our ability to meet operational requirements and payments to those countries. However, sustained and predictable funding is needed to ensure the success of our peacekeeping operations. I appreciate the efforts of those Member States that have paid in full and on time and urge others to meet their financial obligations.

**Highlight: reducing our environmental footprint in field missions**

As part of our efforts to reduce the environmental footprint of our field operations, the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei installed 50 hybrid solar air conditioners, which consume 29 per cent less power and reduce fuel consumption by about 400 litres per year. The United Nations Disengagement Observer Force implemented three photovoltaic systems, reducing the mission's carbon footprint by about 250 tons of carbon dioxide each year.

