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CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL LAW  
National University of Singapore

# International Law at the United Nations: *In Brief*



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## Introduction

The Centre for International Law at the National University of Singapore is pleased to launch the first issue of its 2026 volume of newsletters highlighting updates at the United Nations, with a focus on international law. This edition explores key thematic areas such as peace and security, human rights and humanitarian law, sustainable development, international courts and tribunals, and the wider UN structure. The growing liquidity crisis at the UN continues to hamper a number of its efforts, as evidenced by several updates.

*This newsletter has been prepared by Rashmi Raman (Research Fellow), Hla Yadanar Win (Research Associate), and Trisha Unnikrishnan (Research Associate) of the NUS Centre for International Law.*

## Highlights

1. From January to March 2026, the UN's **peace and security** efforts continued amidst ongoing conflicts and tensions in the Middle East, Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Myanmar, as well as new crises in Venezuela and Iran. The Security Council adopted multiple resolutions extending peacekeeping and political missions, including those in Haiti, Yemen, Cyprus, and Afghanistan. It also addressed rising tensions and attacks across Iran and the Middle East and condemned the terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Nigeria. Meanwhile, the Council also welcomed Syria's ceasefire steps and integration efforts, and addressed Libya's political transition. The General Assembly also held an emergency session on Ukraine that called for a ceasefire and compliance with international law. The President of the General Assembly also urged all parties in ongoing conflicts to commit to mutual ceasefires in the observance of the Olympic Truce during the 2026 Winter Games.
2. On **human rights and humanitarian affairs**, the Human Rights Council held urgent debates on attacks on schools in Iran, as well as on attacks by Iran on other countries in the Middle East. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights published a number of thematic reports highlighting systemic violations and structural inequalities. These included reports on the occupied West Bank, conflict-related sexual violence in Sri Lanka, abuses against migrants in Libya, and the rights of minorities and persons with disabilities. Humanitarian agencies warned of worsening crises, exacerbated by inadequate funding, in Yemen and South Sudan. Discussions across UN bodies emphasised gender equality and the protection of vulnerable groups, including women and children in conflict settings. The General Assembly adopted a resolution recognising the racialised chattel enslavement of Africans and their trafficking as the gravest crime against humanity and a *jus cogens* violation.
3. There were notable developments before **international courts and tribunals**. The International Court of Justice held public hearings on the merits in the case concerning *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (The Gambia v. Myanmar)*. The ICJ delivered a judgment granting Guatemala permission to intervene in the proceedings in *Sovereignty over the Sapodilla Cayes/Cayos Zapotillos (Belize v. Honduras)*. In addition, Iceland accepted the compulsory jurisdiction of the Court.
4. The UN also continued its efforts in the areas of **sustainable development and global governance**. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights reports detailed ways to integrate human rights in sustainable development strategies to advance the 2030 Agenda. Broader governance efforts included the appointment of members to an international scientific panel on

artificial intelligence, the entry into force of the BBNJ Agreement, and substantial discussions on outer space regulation.

5. Within the **wider UN system**, institutional developments and multilateral processes continued despite challenges. The Secretary-General outlined priorities for the UN, centred on adherence to the UN Charter, promoting peace and justice, and fostering unity in a fragmented international environment. The Human Rights Council elected a new president, while preparations advanced for a diplomatic conference on the crimes against humanity treaty. The General Assembly adopts a resolution on the creation, implementation and review of its mandates, to strengthen the UN system. However, the UN also continued to face the consequences of its **liquidity crisis**, caused by delayed and incomplete contributions, as the Secretary-General warned that the organisation could run out of money by July 2026.

## Week of 1 January 2026

### **Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs**

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) publishes its “humanitarian update”, warning of the humanitarian crisis in Yemen exacerbated by funding cuts that disrupt essential services.

*Read more [here](#).*

### **Sustainable Development**

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) issues a thematic report on “Best practices, challenges and lessons learned concerning integrated approaches to the promotion and protection of human rights and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level”. It illuminates ways to enhance progress on the SDGs and eradicate extreme poverty, while providing recommendations to advance human rights and sustainable development by 2030 and beyond.

*Read more [here](#).*

## Week of 5 January 2026

### **Peace and Security**

The Security Council holds an emergency meeting to discuss the United States’ military actions in Venezuela. Several States condemn the acts by the United States, while the Secretary-General underscores the importance of respect for the principles of the UN Charter.

*Read more [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).*

### **Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs**

The OHCHR publishes a thematic report on “Israel’s discriminatory administration of the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem,” highlighting the systematic violations of Palestinians’ human rights in the illegally occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which have intensified since 7 October 2023.

*Read more [here](#).*

The OHCHR issues a report on “Disability-inclusive infrastructure, including transport and housing”, highlighting the connection of disability-inclusive infrastructure and care and support systems in furthering human rights.

*Read more [here](#).*

## **Wider UN Affairs**

The Human Rights Council elects Ambassador Sidharto Reza Suryodipuro from Indonesia as its President.

*Read more [here](#).*

The Secretary-General regrets the United States's decision to withdraw from a number of UN entities, among other international institutions and conventions, but stresses that the multilateral system of the UN will continue to function.

*Read more [here](#) and [here](#).*

## **Sustainable Development**

The UN publishes the “World Economic Situation and Prospect 2026” Report, finding steady growth in the global economy in 2025, despite disruptions such as the US “liberation day” tariffs. This growth, however, is slow, particularly when compared to pre-pandemic levels.

*Read more [here](#).*

## **Week of 12 January 2026**

### **Peace and Security**

The Security Council extends the monthly reporting of the Secretary-General to the Council on Houthi attacks on merchant and commercial vessels in the Red Sea until 15 July 2026.

*Read more [here](#).*

The Security Council holds a meeting on the maintenance of peace and security in Ukraine, after Russia's missile and drone attacks on Ukraine's civilians and civilian infrastructure, including energy infrastructures. Many call for de-escalation and an end to the attacks, while the Secretary-General states that such attacks violate international humanitarian law.

*Read more [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).*

### **Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs**

The OHCHR publishes a thematic report on “Accountability for Conflict-related Sexual Violence in Sri Lanka”, highlighting the widespread and systemic sexual violence in conflicts, the failure of the State to ensure accountability, and the impact of impunity on survivors.

*Read more [here](#).*

The OHCHR publishes its report titled “Rights of persons belonging to national, or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities”. It highlights steps taken at the UN in 2025 to further this, and concludes that elucidates measures that States must take in this regard.

*Read more [here](#).*

The UN and its partners appeal for \$2.3 billion to support humanitarian efforts for 4.1 million vulnerable people in Ukraine, as attacks continue across the country.

*Read more [here](#) and [here](#).*

### **Wider UN Affairs**

The Secretary-General highlights the priorities for 2026, focused on complete adherence to the UN Charter, peace-building initiatives (peace between nations, peace and justice, and peace and nature) and building unity in an age of division.

*Read more [here](#).*

### **Ocean**

The Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement) enters into force.

*Read more [here](#).*

## **Week of 19 January 2026**

### **Peace and Security**

The Security Council condemns terrorist attacks in the Shahr-e-Naw neighbourhood of Kabul, Afghanistan, and reiterates that terrorism is one of the most serious threats to peace and security in Afghanistan.

*Read more [here](#).*

### **Wider UN Affairs**

The United Nations Economic and Social Council commemorates its 80th anniversary under the banner “ECOSOC80: A Turning Point for Multilateralism”.

*Read more [here](#) and [here](#).*

The first session of the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on Prevention and Punishment of Crimes Against Humanity meets. The Committee decides the participation of stakeholders, including relevant non-governmental organisations, civil society organisations, academic institutions, and the private sector.

*Read more [here](#).*

## Week of 26 January 2026

### **Peace and Security**

The President of the General Assembly appeals to all member States to commit to the Olympic Truce for the Milano-Cortina 2026 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games by promoting peace and harmony at all levels. All warring parties of the current conflicts are called on to agree to true mutual ceasefires during the Truce, in line with its ancient tradition practice.

*Read more [here](#).*

The Security Council extends the mandate of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hudayah Agreement in Yemen (UNMHA) for a final two months until 31 March 2026, and decides that the UNMHA will commence a liquidation process as of 1 April 2026.

*Read more [here](#).*

The Security Council extends the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) to 31 January 2027.

*Read more [here](#).*

The Security Council extends the mandate of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) until 31 January 2027. It also requests the Secretary-General to submit two reports on his Good Offices, particularly on progress towards reaching a consensus starting point for meaningful result-oriented negotiations leading to a settlement by 6 July 2026 and 4 January 2027 respectively.

*Read more [here](#).*

## **International Courts and Tribunals**

The International Court of Justice opens the public hearings on the merits in *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (The Gambia v. Myanmar: 11 States intervening)* on 12 January and concludes the hearing on 29 January 2026.

Read more [here](#).

## **Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs**

The United Nations commemorates International Holocaust Remembrance Day under the theme of “Holocaust Remembrance for Dignity and Human Rights.”

Read more [here](#).

## **Week of 2 February 2026**

### **Peace and Security**

The Security Council condemns the terrorist attacks across multiple locations in Balochistan Province, Pakistan, and urges all States to cooperate with the Pakistani Government to hold those responsible accountable.

Read more [here](#).

### **Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs**

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, during its 426th meeting, elects its bureau, adopts the programme of work for 2026, and accepts Chile’s request to join the Committee. The Secretary-General says “the occupation must end” and calls Member States to support the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Read more [here](#) and [here](#).

### **Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs | Health**

The WHO seeks humanitarian appeal for \$42 million to support and protect health care for 700,000 people in Ukraine as the country enters the war for the fifth year.

Read more [here](#).

### **Wider UN Affairs**

The Commission for Social Development holds its 64th session, looking at the themes “Advancing Social Development and Social Justice through Coordinated, Equitable and Inclusive Policies” and “Eradicating

Poverty and Ensuring Dignity through Resilient Care and Support Systems.” The session explores local innovations that reduce poverty and support livelihoods, while discussing unique avenues to financing social development.

*Read more [here](#).*

### **Outer Space**

The Scientific and Technical Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space begins its 63rd session. It discusses space debris, disaster management, sustainable development, global navigation satellite systems, space weather, near-earth objects, outer space activities, space and global health, use of nuclear power sources in outer space, and the role and methods of work of the Committee.

*Read more [here](#) and [here](#).*

## **Week of 9 February 2026**

### **Peace and Security**

The Security Council adopts a resolution under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, concerning the designation and sanctioning of those posing terrorism threats in Afghanistan, and the monitoring of such measures.

*Read more [here](#).*

The Security Council welcomes the commitments and actions of the Government of Syria to counter ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida. It also welcomes the comprehensive agreement between the Government of Syria and the Syrian Democratic Forces for a permanent ceasefire and integration arrangements of north-east Syria.

*Read more [here](#).*

Amidst escalating violence in Jonglei and Eastern Equatoria, the Security Council calls on all parties to cease hostilities immediately and engage in peaceful dialogue.

*Read more [here](#).*

The Security Council condemns the terrorist attacks at a mosque in Islamabad, Pakistan, and urges all States to cooperate with the Pakistani Government to hold those responsible accountable.

*Read more [here](#).*

## **Artificial Intelligence**

The General Assembly appoints 40 members from all of the UN's five regions to the Independent International Scientific Panel on Artificial Intelligence for a three-year term.

*Read more [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).*

## **Week of 16 February 2026**

### **Peace and Security**

The Security Council condemns the terrorist attack in Kwara State, Nigeria and urges all States to cooperate with the Government of Nigeria to hold those responsible accountable.

*Read more [here](#).*

### **Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs**

The OHCHR and the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) publish a joint report documenting patterns of widespread and systematic human rights violations against migrants, asylum-seekers, and refugees in Libya.

*Read more [here](#).*

The OHCHR publishes a thematic report on slavery, human trafficking, and other serious human rights abuses within cybercrime groups in Southeast Asia.

*Read more [here](#).*

The Independent International Fact-finding Mission for the Sudan releases a report, noting that violence by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in and around El-Fasher bears the hallmarks of genocide.

*Read more [here](#).*

### **Wider UN Affairs**

The Special Committee on Decolonisation opens its 2026 session, which annually reviews the non-self-governing territories list. The Secretary-General addresses three priorities to address their destiny: inclusive dialogue among non-self-governing territories; the central role of youth; and the urgent need for climate action.

*Read more [here](#).*

The Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organisation holds a debate on the role of the UN in maintaining international peace and security and supporting the peaceful settlement of disputes.

*Read more [here](#).*

## Week of 23 February 2026

### **Peace and Security**

The Security Council expresses concern over the continued violence in the Kordofan and Darfur States in Sudan. It condemns the drone attacks on civilians and humanitarian personnel, as well as the assault and destabilisation of the Rapid Support Forces in the Kordofan regions. It demands all parties to comply with obligations under international law, international humanitarian law and commitments undertaken in the Jeddah Declaration.

*Read more [here](#).*

The General Assembly adopts a resolution calling for a ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine at the eleventh emergency special session on “Support for lasting peace in Ukraine”.

*Read more [here](#) and [here](#).*

The Security Council holds a meeting for the maintenance of peace and security of Ukraine as the war enters its fifth year. The Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, during the meeting, notes that 2025 was the deadliest for Ukrainian civilians since 2022 and that the ongoing war risks the safety of Ukraine's nuclear site operations.

*Read more [here](#) and [here](#).*

### **Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs**

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) warns that a \$29 million funding gap for humanitarian responses is putting the lives of over 1.9 million displaced people at risk in South Sudan.

*Read more [here](#).*

The delegates from 120 countries meet in Geneva to mark 20 years of the UN Human Rights Council.

*Read more [here](#).*

## **Wider UN Affairs**

The Secretary-General presents its report on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, Regular Migration to the General Assembly and highlights two proposals to support its implementation: establishing clear pathways of regular migrations, and cooperating to support education, skills-building and employment opportunities in countries of origin.

*Read more [here](#) and [here](#).*

The provisional agenda for the seventy-seventh session of the International Law Commission is adopted. The session will be convened for eleven weeks between 27 April and 30 July, after the seventy-sixth session (2025) was shortened for budgetary reasons.

*Read more [here](#) and [here](#).*

## **UN Liquidity Crisis**

The Secretary General warns that the UN could run out of cash by the end of July 2026, stressing that it faces severe cash-flow challenges due to delayed and incomplete contributions. A record \$1.57 billion in contributions were left unpaid at the end of 2025.

*Read more [here](#).*

## **Global Health**

The World Health Organisation (WHO) releases a statement regretting the decision of the United States to withdraw from the WHO, noting that it makes both the United States and the world less safe.

*Read more [here](#).*

## **Week of 2 March 2026**

### **Peace and Security**

The Security Council urges all Libyan stakeholders to engage with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Libya to develop the country's political road map, to ensure that it is a Libyan-led and Libyan-owned process.

*Read more [here](#).*

The Security Council holds an emergency meeting following the airstrikes in Iran by the United States and Israel. The Secretary-General, along with many UN agencies and Member States, condemn the actions and call for negotiations and respect for the UN Charter and international law.

*Read more [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).*

### **Peace and Security | Education**

The Security Council holds a meeting on “Children, technology, and education in conflict”. It highlights the importance of digital learning for children in conflict settings with the support of technology, while calling for the creation of appropriate digital safeguards. The meeting marks the first time a Council meeting was chaired by a First Lady of the United States of America.

*Read more [here](#) and [here](#).*

### **International Courts and Tribunals**

Iceland recognises the compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice.

*Read more [here](#).*

### **Human rights | Women**

The OHCHR commemorates 15 years since the establishment of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, publishing a report that highlights the evolution of the group’s, its achievement, and ongoing challenges.

*Read more [here](#).*

## **Week of 8 March 2026**

### **Peace and Security**

The Security Council adopts a resolution stating that the Islamic Republic of Iran breached international law and posed serious threats to international peace and security through its strikes in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan. It demands the immediate cessation of all attacks by Iran.

*Read more [here](#).*

The Security Council debates Iran's nuclear programme and the legitimacy of “snapback” UN sanctions on the country.

*Read more [here](#) and [here](#).*

### **Human rights and Humanitarian Affairs**

OCHA publishes its “humanitarian update”, highlighting the humanitarian crisis, exacerbated by ongoing conflicts, violations of international humanitarian law, disasters, and economic decline, which leave 16.2 million people in need of assistance.

*Read more [here](#).*

### **Wider UN Affairs**

The General Assembly adopts a resolution on “Scope, modalities, format and organization of the high-level meeting on improving global road safety”.

*Read more [here](#).*

## **Week of 16 March 2026**

### **Peace and Security**

The Security Council extends the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) until 17 June 2026.

*Read more [here](#).*

The Security Council convenes a meeting on non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

*Read more [here](#) and [here](#).*

### **International Courts and Tribunals**

The International Court of Justice grants Guatemala permission to intervene as a non-party in the proceedings of *Sovereignty over the Sapodilla Cayes/Cayos Zapotillos (Belize v. Honduras)*.

*Read more [here](#) and [here](#).*

### **Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs**

The United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People holds a meeting on “Discriminatory Laws and Policies against Palestinian Women and Girls under Israeli Occupation: Justice Demands Accountability”.

*Read more [here](#)*

The Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), in his letter to the General Assembly, warns that the Agency “may soon no longer be viable” without immediate political and financial support from Member States.

*Read more [here](#).*

The UN Committee on Enforced Disappearance decides that there are sufficient grounds to indicate that enforced disappearance is being practised in Mexico and continues to be committed as crimes against humanity.

*Read more [here](#) and [here](#).*

### **The Wider UN Affairs**

The Commission on the Status of Women adopts a text on “Women, the Girl Child and HIV/AIDS”, calling upon governments, international partners, and civil society to address high HIV rates among young women and girls.

*Read more [here](#).*

## **Week of 23 March 2026**

### **Peace and Security**

The Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Protection and Operations in the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) updates the Security Council on the conflict situation in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. She highlights the particularly alarming situation in the Ituri Province, as clashes continue between the Congo River Alliance/23 March Movement (AFC/M23), armed groups (supported by the Rwandan Defence Force), and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC).

*Read more [here](#) and [here](#).*

The Secretary-General appoints a personal envoy to lead the UN efforts addressing the Middle East conflict and its consequences. He also emphasises ensuring respect for navigational rights and freedoms in the Strait of Hormuz.

*Read more [here](#) and [here](#).*

## **Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs**

The Human Rights Council holds an urgent debate on “the recent military aggression launched by Iran against Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates on 28 February 2026, targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure, which has resulted in the loss of innocent lives”.

*Read more [here](#).*

The Human Rights Council holds an urgent debate on the aerial attack on Shajareh Tayyebh Girl’s School in Minab, Iran, stressing the importance of upholding international law by protecting children and educational institutions.

*Read more [here](#).*

The General Assembly adopts a resolution titled “Declaration of the Trafficking of Enslaved Africans and Racialized Chattel Enslavement of Africans as the Gravest Crime against Humanity,” noting that it violates *jus cogens* norms.

*Read more [here](#).*

## **Week of 30 March 2026**

### **Peace and Security**

The Security Council convenes a meeting on the conflict in Lebanon between the Israel Defense Forces and Hezbollah, which resulted in the deaths of the three Indonesian peacekeepers under the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Indonesia demands a UN investigation on the matter.

*Read more [here](#) and [here](#).*

### **Wider UN Affairs**

The General Assembly adopts a resolution on “Mandate creation, implementation and review for an efficient and effective United Nations”, reiterating that balance must be maintained across the UN’s three pillars of peace and security, human rights, and development.

*Read more [here](#).*