UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk

Global Update to the 63rd session of the Human Rights Council

7 September 2026

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Distinguished participants,

We live in an age of extremes.

Raging wars, painful polarization, climate chaos, and head-spinning technological change make people feel disoriented and even powerless.

Strong forces are working to create and sustain that feeling.

Tech moguls, populists, and vested interests, amplified by social media echo chambers, tell us these trends are inevitable.

In fact, the opposite is true.

History is full of brave people who took action to resist oppression and demand their rights. People who called out injustice and inequality. People who refused to accept their fate, coming together to channel the universal values that underpin our humanity.

This truth is a force to be reckoned with, underpinning all we are doing.

The past years have been marked by a growing number of armed conflicts, and diminishing respect for international human rights and humanitarian law, and the United Nations Charter itself.

There are now more than 60 wars involving at least one State – the highest number since the end of the Second World War. The surge in conflict between States takes us into particularly dangerous territory.

I am alarmed by the resumption of attacks between the United States and Iran, affecting the entire Gulf region. Recent reports of civilian deaths and injuries, including at a wedding in Hormozgan province, are particularly concerning. The geopolitical and economic impacts of this entirely avoidable crisis are again reverberating around the world, and I appeal for an immediate return to negotiations.

Russia’s full-scale war in Ukraine, now in its fifth year, is on a menacing trajectory, with soaring civilian casualties and intensified attacks on energy infrastructure. While the overwhelming majority of civilians killed are Ukrainians, there are also reports of growing numbers of deaths and injuries in Russia.

I am horrified by reports that fully autonomous drones launched by the Russian Federation killed three Ukrainians last month. Ukraine has reportedly also field-tested such weapons. I join calls for the urgent prohibition of weapons that can take lives without human involvement.

There is only one way out of this madness: peace negotiations that respect the UN Charter.

In its fourth year, the war in Sudan is expanding. Parties to the conflict continue to launch attacks on markets, hospitals, fuel stations and other civilian infrastructure. I urge the Council to focus on the deteriorating situation in Kordofan, Blue Nile, and North and West Darfur, where civilians are at imminent risk. Again, there needs to be an immediate ceasefire, an end to foreign involvement, and a return to inclusive civilian rule.

In Gaza, Israel has killed more than 1,300 Palestinians in daily strikes, despite the ceasefire that was announced almost a year ago, according to figures from the Palestinian Ministry of Health. It continues to restrict the entry of humanitarian aid. I am appalled by Israeli proposals for the forced expulsion of all Palestinians from the Gaza Strip, and the constant stream of dehumanising rhetoric by some senior officials.

I am also troubled that armed groups affiliated with Hamas have executed and tortured several Palestinians suspected of collaboration.

In the West Bank, Israel's annexation is unfolding, unobstructed, despite the clear ruling of the International Court of Justice. What more will it take for States to take action to prevent the entrenchment of occupation across land earmarked for Palestinians under the two-state solution? They need to end the transfer to Israel of arms that risk being used to violate international law. Companies also need to end business practices that support illegal settlements.

We need far greater efforts by the international community towards sustainable peace, in which Palestine and Israel live side by side in equal dignity and rights, in line with UN resolutions and international law. Words of condemnation ring hollow in the face of deliberate violations and suffering.

In Lebanon, Israeli forces must end attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. My Office's assessment team is investigating violations committed by both Israel and Hezbollah since 2 March; this is crucial for truth-telling and accountability.

Beyond these conflicts, there are many places around the world where people are neither at war, nor at peace.

Negotiations are breaking down. Ceasefires are disregarded.

I am concerned about renewed hostilities in South Sudan and escalating tensions in Yemen. I urge the parties to exercise restraint and the international community to do all it can to avert a return to all-out war.

And I again urge the Houthis to release at once our 73 UN and NGO colleagues who have dedicated their lives to easing the suffering of the Yemeni people.

In Ethiopia, civilians are bearing the brunt of attacks in Amhara and Oromia, and of renewed tensions in Tigray. I urge all parties to end attacks against civilians and to respect international law, and I call on the government to deliver transitional justice and accountability.

We will provide detailed updates on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Myanmar, and other countries later during this session.

Mr. President,

War reflects the failure of our humanity.

The pursuit of peace embodies humanity at its best.

My Office will continue its vital work to prevent conflict, monitoring and documenting human rights violations, and supporting states through technical cooperation and capacity building.

We will denounce all attempts to disregard international human rights and humanitarian law.

And we will continue seeking ways to break cycles of violence.

I see seven entry points that I hope to pursue in the coming years:

First, we will step up our analysis and advocacy around the colossal business and economic interests that fuel wars. We will not shy away from exposing the shadow players and calling for accountability.

Second, we will support States to advance comprehensive transitional justice, looking at all perpetrators, and centred on victims. Without truth-telling, reconciliation and accountability, trauma and grievance turn towards vengeance and renewed violence.

Third, we will continue to support mediation, including through confidence-building measures grounded in human rights.

Fourth, we will work to increase women's participation and leadership in peace processes. Despite the historic role that women played as peacemakers in Ireland, Liberia, the Philippines and beyond, women are largely absent from negotiations on the DRC, Gaza, Sudan, and Ukraine.

Fifth, we will work with the grassroots organisations mobilizing for peace around the world, across communities and divides.

The vast majority of people everywhere want peace – and they need our support.

Sixth, we will leverage human rights as an early warning tool. We will strengthen our investigative and analytical capacities, to help identify tensions before they erupt in violence.

Finally, we will continue pushing for accountability – a prerequisite for sustainable peace.

I urge States to strengthen domestic accountability mechanisms and to give their full backing to the International Criminal Court. I also encourage States who have yet to do so to exercise available universal jurisdiction, so that those accused of atrocity crimes face justice even when domestic courts are unable or unwilling to act.

Mr. President,

The tragedy of conflict has touched almost all our lives.

The human cost echoes down the generations, and every war has a devastating impact on our health and our environment.

But today, we face other threats to our rights that are unfamiliar; even unprecedented.

The relationship between digital tools like AI, and our human nature, our human agency, will be a priority for the years ahead.

The need for AI governance is widely acknowledged – but where is the action? Delay only benefits the massive tech companies, their owners and enablers.

A handful of men has almost unlimited power over AI, which we are repeatedly told has unimaginable computing capacity. They talk about freedom, but on closer inspection, this turns out to be little more than the freedom to exploit our data.

There has been some recent progress at the international level, including the establishment of the Global Dialogue on AI and the Independent International Scientific Panel on AI.

And I welcome landmark steps on platform accountability by the European Commission, and AI governance by the Republic of Korea, among others.

However, I share the concerns of industry insiders that advanced AI could pose an existential risk to humanity.

AI that escapes its testing environment, or blackmails developers to prevent itself from being turned off, is AI that is too powerful.

I am calling here, today, for an all-out effort to put cast iron guarantees in place around the safety and security of AI, before it is too late.

I will be writing to AI companies in the coming days, to urge them to take the steps that are within their control, to reduce risks, now.

At a minimum, we need countries hosting AI and those involved in its supply chains to come together around agreed red lines.

We need independent verification, and much stronger collaboration on security within the industry.

We also need to consider the human rights impacts of AI on employment practices, on fundamental principles of democracy, and on our environment.

Little wonder people are rejecting AI and even refusing to use it. Governments and companies need to listen.

Human rights offer a way to navigate these difficult issues.

I will put a particular emphasis on looking for solutions, together with all those who are calling for technology that serves humanity rather than the other way round.

Monsieur le Président,

Lorsque j'entends dire que la technologie est source de progrès et de prospérité extraordinaires, je ne peux m'empêcher de demander : d'où viendra cette prospérité si nous ne changeons pas notre façon de traiter notre planète ? D'une terre brûlée et épuisée ?

La technologie n'est pas une baguette magique. Son développement doit s'accompagner d'actions visant à relever les autres défis auxquels nous sommes confrontés.

Prenons la crise climatique. Le coût caché colossal des combustibles fossiles pour notre santé, nos économies et notre environnement dépasse de loin ce qui figure sur nos factures d'énergie. Le Fonds monétaire international estime ces coûts à quelque 6 700 milliards de dollars par an, soit près de 6 % du PIB mondial.

Les vagues de chaleur en Europe ont coûté la vie à environ 35 000 personnes cet été, mais le bilan réel est probablement beaucoup plus élevé.

Rien de tout cela n’est inévitable.

Il faut continuer à nous concentrer sur l'objectif de limiter le réchauffement climatique à 1,5 °C, comme le prévoit l'Accord de Paris, en veillant à ce que le dépassement actuel soit aussi faible et aussi bref que possible.

Il faut renforcer les investissements dans la résilience, l’adaptation et l’alerte précoce, dans un esprit d’équité et de solidarité. Il s’agit là d’impératifs en matière de droits humains, si nous voulons protéger les populations contre des catastrophes telles que les récents effondrements de glaciers au Népal et en Chine.

En Suisse, un système d'alerte précoce de pointe a permis d'évacuer l'ensemble du village de Blatten avant qu'il ne soit enseveli l'année dernière.

Malheureusement, les investissements et les innovations d'aujourd'hui semblent être motivés en grande partie par le profit, quel qu'en soit le coût.

Ces modèles économiques poussent notre planète – et ses habitants – au-delà du point de rupture.

Mr. President,

The immense concentration of wealth and power in one small corner of humanity is creating tensions that undermine both stability and sustainability.

Yet rather than urgently addressing these imbalances, some leaders are exploiting them.

Imposing crippling tariffs on countries already under severe stress from the climate crisis, debt burdens, and inequitable tax rules, weakens their political autonomy and their ability to fight poverty.

With less than four years left to deliver on the 2030 Agenda, only 36 percent of its targets are making progress, and 15 percent have gone into reverse.

Across the world, growing numbers of people cannot afford secure housing or a healthy diet.

When we celebrate economic growth, let’s be honest about where this growth goes. The International Labour Organization estimates that over the past two decades, it has benefited owners and investors more than workers. In several countries in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, economic growth is not matched by reductions in poverty.

These injustices are putting the social contract under increasing strain.

In many countries, including Albania, Argentina, India, Indonesia, and Tunisia, anger over inequality, unbearable living costs, lack of basic services, unemployment, and corruption has boiled over into the streets.

Conversely, economies grounded in human rights bring stability, opportunity, and trust. They foster transparent institutions, fair taxation, and effective public spending. At a time of dwindling foreign aid, they can be instrumental in mobilizing domestic resources.

Our work in Kenya illustrates this clearly. By supporting the authorities to include communities in economic decisions, we have helped address concerns that were fuelling public discontent.

We are working with governments in Cambodia, Iraq, Liberia, South Africa and beyond to fight corruption, protect the rights of workers, and build economies that work for everyone.

I will continue, in the coming years, to push for the human rights economy to become a universal model.

Human rights need to underpin all development efforts if they are to be truly sustainable. We will work to ensure they are at the heart of global policy, including the UN Tax Convention, the International Panel on Inequality, the Loss and Damage Fund – and the emerging vision for sustainable development beyond 2030.

Mr. President,

I will also focus on civic space, and on people's rights to peaceful protest, free expression, and information.

These rights build trust between people and their governments. They are a bridge between frustration and dialogue; between aspirations and change.

Yet, instead of engaging with the legitimate concerns of their people, many States are resorting to repression.

In Iran, the authorities are using the war as a pretext to pursue even more brutal oppression. Since March 2026, 59 people have been executed on national security-related charges – more than the number put to death on the same charges in the whole of 2025. Business closures linked to compulsory hijab requirements are also troubling.

In Pakistan, the authorities have used excessive lethal force and arbitrary detention to quell protests.

The recent protests in India showed the best response is dialogue with youth leaders, not the excessive use of force.

In Nicaragua, the authorities have closed down opposition political parties. In the Russian Federation, the authorities have continued to suppress the opposition, and bar parties from participating in elections.

Restrictions on civic space and media freedom are deepening, from Azerbaijan, Georgia and the Russian Federation to Tunisia and Uganda.

I deplore the prohibition of demonstrations across Afghanistan by the *de facto* authorities.

Digital surveillance is becoming an increasingly powerful tool of repression in several countries, including Angola, Myanmar, and Serbia.

Ahead of elections in Bosnia, I urge political leaders to counter hate speech and discrimination, and to end the glorification of war criminals.

In Venezuela, all arbitrarily detained people need to be released, and my team granted immediate access to all places of detention.

I welcome Mexico’s adoption of a protocol to investigate crimes committed against human rights defenders.

Mr. President,

A tide of systemic discrimination is sweeping around the world.

Across regions, femicide is an alarming trend.

In recent weeks, for example, seven women were reportedly killed by current or former partners in Italy, and nine women were reportedly killed in Cameroon. Huge data gaps make this crime particularly difficult to track.

Legislation and prosecution are crucial, but we also need to address root causes: discrimination, inequality, and gender stereotypes.

Studies show higher rates of femicide and other violence against women are linked to broader social tensions and an increased likelihood of violent conflict.

In Libya, I hope the new political agreement will create the momentum to adopt the law on violence against women, which has been pending for years.

I again call on the *de facto* authorities in Afghanistan to rescind their appalling decrees and policies effectively criminalizing the presence of women and girls in public life. Their system of severe discrimination and oppression, now in its sixth year, is nothing short of gender-based apartheid.

LGBTIQ+ people are facing growing threats. In Burkina Faso, Niger and Senegal authorities have arrested people under discriminatory laws; and Kyrgyzstan, Portugal, the United Kingdom and the United States are adopting or considering restrictions on the equal rights of transgender people.

Racism is one of society's deepest ills.

Hard-won gains for people of African descent are deliberately being undermined in some countries, including cuts to anti-discrimination programmes and attempts to distort history.

Politicians, traditional and social media amplify isolated incidents to portray migrants, refugees, Muslims, marginalised racial and ethnic groups, and minorities as a collective threat.

In some countries, such depictions have led to attacks against entire communities.

I urge the United States to halt the return of people to places where they could suffer irreparable harm, including Haiti, and to ensure due process for all removals to third countries.

Four more people have died in US immigration custody since my last update to this Council, for a total of 23 deaths in 2026 alone. There needs to be accountability for these deaths.

I am concerned that plans to equip immigration agents with electric shock gloves will increase the violence associated with their operations.

In China, tightening restrictions on the rights of the Tibetan people, including their freedom of religion, are deeply troubling. I appeal for an urgent U-turn on these policies.

But in some places where human rights are under serious strain, people are demonstrating their agency and power by marching, documenting abuses, lobbying parliamentarians and building solidarity networks. In South Africa, civil society pressure contributed to gender-based violence and femicide being declared a national disaster in November 2025.

These are acts of humanity, and I commend them.

Mr. President,

Our action in the years ahead will be inspired by these movements, which leverage human rights to navigate between extremes.

At the local and national level, this means working closely with marginalized communities. We will stand in solidarity with them, elevate their voices, and support their efforts.

The Global Alliance for Human Rights will be our entry point to increase engagement not only with States, but with civil society and others.

We will also increase our outreach to excluded or marginalised groups, including Indigenous Peoples, people of African descent, LGBTIQ+ people, religious minorities, stateless and undocumented people, the unhoused, street children, migrants, and refugees.

Because standing up for each other is what human rights are for.

We will strengthen our work with governments on justice systems, including incarceration practices. Prisons are too often used as a dumping ground for people who don't fit in, and a substitute for addressing the root causes of social problems. They may also become hotbeds of radicalization and extremism.

I remain deeply concerned by the situation in China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, including in detention facilities.

I again urge the authorities to review national security and counter-terrorism legislation, strengthen the protection of minorities, and investigate allegations of human rights violations, including torture. I call on them to follow up on the recommendations made by my Office and UN human rights mechanisms. I also encourage full implementation of the national action plan for human rights, which is welcome.

We will strengthen our efforts around the world to end use of the death penalty, which overwhelmingly targets minorities, people living in poverty, and dissenting voices. We will continue to call out the sharp rise in executions in a small number of States.

We will build on our work with governments to address militarized approaches to security and law enforcement that are deeply counterproductive. I know many of you are uncomfortable with what is done in the name of protecting national security. These outdated practices can be an albatross around the neck of government.

How do you tame the beast?

That’s what human rights are for.

In Bangladesh, we have been calling for a strengthened and independent national institution that has oversight of security forces.

We will continue our work with governments around the world, including in Central Asia, to advance inclusive social and economic policies that deliver for everyone.

Señor Presidente,

A nivel mundial, trabajaremos sin descanso para reforzar el derecho internacional y el ecosistema de derechos humanos que nos beneficia a todos y todas.

Está claro que algunas potencias quieren destruir todos los esfuerzos de cooperación multilateral y sustituirlos por acuerdos transaccionales. Están socavando la cooperación mundial en materia de clima, salud, derechos reproductivos de las mujeres y otros ámbitos.

Si quieren saber adónde conduce esto, presten atención al brote de ébola en la República Democrática del Congo. El debilitamiento de los sistemas sanitarios mundiales y la reducción del financiamiento han agravado la situación, que sigue representando una amenaza transfronteriza.

A pesar de todo ello, la rendición de cuentas sigue existiendo a nivel mundial. Pregúntenselo a los bosnios;a los filipinos; a los chilenos. Se trata de un proyecto a largo plazo, y nuestra labor de documentar los abusos es esencial para ello.

Universality is a plank of accountability. Equal standards for all are essential. That is the basis of our tried and tested methodology to monitor and report on human rights violations and abuses – and our engagement with all countries.

Universality is fundamental to the Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures mandate holders. The upcoming Secretary-General's report on the Treaty Body system will show that this crucial work is endangered by chronic underfunding and a liquidity crisis, and I call for your support.

In the next four years, I intend to bring proposals for greater rationalization, innovation and creativity to the human rights ecosystem, through continuous improvement, building on our own reform efforts and other initiatives as part of the UN80 process.

Mr. President,

Power dynamics at the global and national level have changed; and we are changing in response.

The Global Alliance for Human Rights – the first of its kind – will be a place where everyone working for human rights makes common cause and stands up to the anti-rights onslaught.

Governments, civil society, philanthropies, the corporate sector, academia, young people, artists, cities and local government, and many others, will be able to co-create solutions to the human rights challenges that we face.

The Alliance will showcase how human rights connect people through facts, compassion, and the law.

In its initial phase, the Global Alliance will aim to put human rights education into every classroom; promote digital innovation and business practices with a human face; and help cities all over the world to deliver for their residents.

And this is just the beginning.

I urge you to join and play a full part.

What drives us is the belief that human rights will help the people of all our societies to realise their hopes and aspirations, in the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which affirmed that everyone, everywhere is born free and equal in dignity and rights.

This means holding up a mirror to those in power, challenging the *status quo,* and pushing the boundaries.

Robust debate, critical thinking, differences and disagreements are part of the age-old struggle for human rights. The only way to advance is through honest discussion, genuine engagement and working together.

We will always talk to everyone. And we will never give up on anyone.

Human rights are carriers of hope. They are a compass in turbulent times, and they offer concrete solutions to our challenges.

I look forward to continuing this important work with you.

Thank you.
