

58th Session of the UN HRC and Human Rights Challenges in Today's World

Introduction

The 58th session of the UN Human Rights Council in 2025 was held at a time when the world is facing widespread challenges, including economic crises, sanctions, increasing human rights violations, and threats against women's rights. This session provided an opportunity for global leaders to discuss the impact of international crises on human rights. From unfair debt burdens that trap developing countries in cycles of poverty to unilateral sanctions that cripple economies and the rising trend of capital punishment, these issues were at the center of the discussions. This report summarizes the key speeches delivered by high-ranking officials, including António Guterres, Jürg Lauber, Filimon Yang, Volker Türk, Ignacio Cassis, and Seyed Abbas Araghchi, and reviews the main points raised.

Speech by António Guterres, UN Secretary-General

António Guterres emphasized that human rights are under serious threat worldwide. He warned that dictatorships and authoritarian regimes are expanding, with nearly one-third of the global economy controlled by non-democratic governments. Guterres also pointed to gender discrimination and the impacts of climate change as major human rights challenges and called for urgent global action to address these threats. He stressed the importance of upholding the rule of law and international justice and urged nations to take serious action against human rights violations, particularly in war zones such as Gaza and Ukraine.

Speech by Jürg Lauber, President of the UN Human Rights Council

Jürg Lauber stressed that the Human Rights Council must focus on the victims of human rights violations. He stated that the increasing number of human rights violations worldwide poses a threat to the progress made in past decades. Lauber emphasized the necessity of global solidarity and urged governments to consider human rights as a non-negotiable principle in both domestic and international policymaking.

Speech by Philémon Yang, President of the UN General Assembly

Philémon Yang highlighted the interconnection between human rights, peace, and sustainable development, warning that the global decline in commitment to human rights threatens international peace and security. He noted that the world is witnessing a reduction in support for human rights principles, with ongoing conflicts in regions such as Gaza, Sudan, and Haiti serving as prime examples of these challenges. Yang stressed that human suffering and the destruction of

civilian infrastructure must not be ignored and called on UN member states to take serious action to protect human rights.

Speech by Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Volker Türk expressed deep concern over the state of human rights worldwide. He warned that wars, particularly in Ukraine and Gaza, have led to widespread human rights violations. Türk also highlighted the threats posed by digital technologies and misinformation, calling for international regulatory frameworks to combat these challenges. He further urged independent investigations into war crimes in Gaza and other crisis areas.

Additionally, Türk addressed the issue of capital punishment, reporting a 31% increase in executions in 2023. He particularly noted the use of the death penalty in countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, China, Somalia, and the United States, with over 40% of executions related to drug-related offenses—cases that do not meet the criteria for the most serious crimes under human rights standards. He emphasized that the death penalty, besides violating fundamental rights, carries the risk of wrongful executions. He called for greater international efforts to restrict and ultimately abolish this form of punishment.

The High Commissioner also stressed the importance of the Beijing Declaration and the threats facing women's rights and gender equality. He warned that violence against women continues to be widespread in homes, streets, and even online spaces, with women's rights under serious threat worldwide. He acknowledged the increase in women's participation in politics and the economy but stated that no country has yet achieved full gender equality, calling for more measures to support women's rights and eliminate structural discrimination.

Speech by Ignazio Cassis, Swiss Minister of Foreign Affairs

Ignazio Cassis emphasized the need to support democratic institutions and prevent the expansion of dictatorships worldwide. He warned that human rights violations should not be treated as a selective issue by governments. Cassis also highlighted the necessity of establishing sustainable systems to protect citizens' fundamental rights, particularly in areas such as free elections, labor rights, and environmental sustainability.

Examination of the International Debt Crisis and Its Impact on Human Rights

Brands Kehris, UN Assistant Secretary-General, spoke at a side event of the Human Rights Council on the global debt crisis, emphasizing that the current debt system is unjust and exacerbates inequality and poverty. He noted that low-income countries, particularly small island nations, are forced to allocate a significant portion of their resources to debt repayment while urgently needing investment in healthcare and education. For instance, the Bahamas lost more than

a quarter of its GDP after Hurricane Dorian but still had to meet heavy debt obligations. He called for structural reforms in international debt systems and the adoption of solutions such as the Bridgetown Initiative and the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda to support vulnerable countries.

Sanctions, Business, and Human Rights

Alena Douhan, UN Special Rapporteur on Unilateral Coercive Measures, announced the final version of the guiding principles on sanctions, business, and human rights. These principles examine the effects of international and unilateral sanctions on economic and social conditions and demonstrate how sanctions lead to financial isolation, rising unemployment, and worsening economic hardships in affected communities. She stressed that sanctions must comply with international legal principles and that governments must ensure that businesses and economic institutions under their jurisdiction do not violate human rights.

Speech by Seyed Abbas Araghchi, Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs

Seyed Abbas Araghchi highlighted the impact of unilateral sanctions on the Iranian people, condemning them as inhumane measures that violate economic and social rights. He also emphasized that the Islamic Republic of Iran is a staunch supporter of Palestinian rights and strongly condemned Israel's actions in Gaza. Araghchi stressed that human rights should not be used as a tool for political pressure and called for international cooperation to promote human rights globally.

Conclusion

The 58th session of the UN Human Rights Council reaffirmed that human rights worldwide are facing multiple challenges. From the debt crisis and the devastating effects of sanctions to the rise in executions and the spread of authoritarianism, the discussions at this session underscored the urgent need for structural reforms and decisive international action. Global leaders emphasized that only through international cooperation, adherence to human rights principles, and the strengthening of justice mechanisms can these crises be mitigated. The international community now faces the critical question of whether it can implement sound policies and take practical steps to support a fairer and more humane future.