Chapter 1
UN at 75: honouring the past, looking to the future
UN75 virtual dialogues focus on multilateralism in the time of COVID-19

In the same year as the UN marked its 75th anniversary, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted how interconnected and interdependent the world is. The global challenges stemming from the crisis have been a stark reminder of the need to work together across borders, sectors and generations.

As part of the UN75 global conversations launched by the Secretary-General, António Guterres, UN Geneva organized a series of three virtual dialogues on multilateralism, which were watched by thousands of people across the world.

The first dialogue was held on 24 April to mark International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace. The discussion brought leaders of Geneva-based international organizations together with Swiss students to consider how the multilateral system was faring in the face of a global pandemic.

"This crisis will help to build a more effective and inclusive system of multilateralism, cooperation strong enough to address global challenges. COVID-19 will pass but the climate emergency, inequality and poverty will remain. That makes solidarity and international cooperation in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals even more important than ever."

UN Geneva Director-General Tatiana Valovaya

Scannable code to watch the first “Multilateralism in the time of COVID-19” dialogue.

On 25 June, UN Geneva hosted a second “Multilateralism in the time of COVID-19” dialogue, to mark the anniversary of the signing of the Charter of the United Nations. Students and young researchers from partner institutions, as well as leaders of key international agencies, discussed the effects of the pandemic on culture, sports and tourism.

“As recent weeks have shown us, shared challenges are best addressed through cooperation and international solidarity. These values lie at the heart of tourism. Now, as we start tourism responsibly and when it is safe to do so, we have an opportunity to grow our sector back stronger and better. Both sports tourism and cultural tourism can help build the foundations for this brighter future.”

Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization, Zurab Pololikashvili

Scannable code to watch the “Multilateralism in the time of COVID-19” special feature on culture, sports and tourism.

Behind the scenes during the first dialogue, on 24 April

The Director of the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, Alessandra Vellucci, moderates inputs from youth during the second dialogue, on 25 June.
The third and final dialogue was held on 22 October, as part of UN Geneva’s activities for United Nations Day. The theme was “Multilateralism of the future: how will global cooperation evolve in the 21st century?”. High-level speakers considered the evolution of multilateralism and the role of the UN in shaping the future of international cooperation in the face of emerging global challenges.

“I do think we need to build a much more inclusive multilateral system and to recommit ourselves to the core values of solidarity, cooperation and equality that underpin the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”

Chair of The Elders, former President of Ireland and former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson

Scan the QR code to watch “Multilateralism of the future: how will global cooperation evolve in the 21st century?”.

Youth play a key role in UN75 events

The UN75 theme of “Shaping our future together” meant that engagement with youth was central to the anniversary campaign, globally and in Geneva.

Futurecasters: Global Young Visionaries Summit
UN Geneva’s commemorations of the UN’s 75th anniversary were launched at the Palais des Nations with the opening of the Futurecasters: Global Young Visionaries Summit, the 2020 iteration of the Ferney Model United Nations, on 8 January. Organized by the International Telecommunication Union and the Lycée International de Ferney-Voltaire, the summit brought 750 students from 25 countries to Geneva for three days to discuss global issues from a youth perspective.

With “Technology for development” as the theme, students debated how technologies could be harnessed to drive progress towards the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Guest speakers at the opening included the Director-General of UN Geneva, Tatiana Valovaya; the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Preparations for the Commemoration of the United Nations’ 75th Anniversary, Fabrizio Hochschild Drummond; and the Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau of the International Telecommunication Union, Doreen Bogdan-Martin.

“We will use your voices to try and reinvigorate the international project so that we can secure the future you want and secure the future we all want for your children and subsequent generations.”

Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Preparations for the Commemoration of the United Nations’ 75th Anniversary, Fabrizio Hochschild Drummond

Youth play a key role in UN75 events
Youth dialogue with the Secretary-General of the United Nations

Young people in Geneva had an opportunity to offer their advice directly to Secretary-General António Guterres in February. As part of a series of global conversations held to mark the Organization’s 75th anniversary, the Secretary-General took part in a discussion with young people before an audience of more than 600 at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies. During the event, young people voiced their concerns and outlined their vision for a better future. The topics addressed included inequality, climate change, misinformation, and youth leadership.

Martin Ostermeier was among six panellists who shared the stage with the Secretary-General. As the representative of Young UN – a network of over 2,000 changemakers working across the UN system, supported by UN Geneva – Martin urged additional efforts to make the Organization “more democratic and more participatory”. He stressed that, for participation to be meaningful, consultation had to be ongoing: “This dialogue is a great first start, but it shouldn’t happen every 75 years.”

“This is the beginning of a new dynamic of relationship between the UN and ‘We the Peoples’, and this relationship will hopefully be able to shape a new kind of multilateralism—a multilateralism that is inclusive, in which not only the governments, but also civil society, academia and local communities have a voice and have influence.”

Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres
Conversations in Swiss schools

As part of the 75th anniversary activities, UN Geneva’s Perception Change Project partnered with the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, the Permanent Mission of Switzerland, the Fondation pour Genève and the Eduki Foundation to engage with schoolchildren throughout Switzerland.

Speakers from International Geneva visited classrooms to explore the 75th anniversary of the UN with students and start conversations with them on the challenges and opportunities the UN faces, now and in the future. This outreach initiative was aimed at broadening students’ understanding of the UN system, while inviting them to express their thoughts and ideas.

In total, 21 presentations were given to over 350 schoolchildren in Switzerland, in five cantons. Seventeen of these took place in classrooms, while four were held by video link.

The Future We Want: from online contest to art exhibition

As part of the UN’s 75th anniversary celebrations, UN Geneva’s Perception Change Project ran an online art contest titled “The Future We Want”. The aim of the contest was to foster conversations about the kind of future we want for our world and how we can empower youth to work towards it.

Permanent missions to the United Nations in Geneva were invited to submit a work by an artist from their country. In all, there were 44 entries, from all five continents. The public were then invited to vote for their favourite artwork via a dedicated website. Close to 17,000 votes were cast, from around the globe.

The 10 artworks that received the most votes were reviewed by an international jury of nine children knowledgeable about art, which was convened with the support of the United Nations Information Service in Geneva and the World Food Programme. The young jury selected the three winners: Wall, by Sigita Maslauskaitė-Mazylienė, submitted by the Permanent Mission of Lithuania; Diversity Crowd, by Luigi Olivadoti, submitted by the Permanent Mission of Liechtenstein; and The Future That We Dream – A Harmonious World of Coexistence, by Zhao Peizhi, submitted by the Permanent Mission of China.
UN Geneva Director-General Tatiana Valovaya selected an additional winner from the remaining shortlisted entries: Maria Bertha, by Leca Araujo, submitted by the Permanent Mission of Brazil. This artwork pays tribute to Bertha Lutz, one of four women to sign the Charter of the United Nations in 1945 and a prominent advocate for the inclusion of women’s rights in the Charter. The artworks were exhibited first at the Palais des Nations and then at the D10 Art Space in central Geneva. The Perception Change Project will publish a book about the contest winners, and the winner of the Director-General’s Prize will be invited to exhibit her work at the Palais des Nations.

To show their pride in being part of the UN and the diversity that it represents, over 900 staff members from the UN community in Geneva, current and former, took part in UN Geneva’s photomosaic project to mark the UN’s 75th anniversary. Staff submitted head and shoulders portraits of themselves, which were all compiled into a large mosaic showing the Palais des Nations with the tagline “Together For You”. Released on United Nations Day, 24 October, the image was widely shared on social media and is now displayed in the Palais des Nations.
Host country celebrates UN75

Two children drawing their ideal world together: a tree, a sun, a house, people holding hands, and animals. They are the subject of a 6,000-square-metre ephemeral fresco by French artist Saype, installed in the summer in the grounds of the Palais des Nations. Titled World in Progress, the artwork highlights the role of future generations, a driving force behind the UN’s mandate and mission, and recalls the theme of the UN75 celebrations: the future we want.

Switzerland donated the fresco to mark the 75th anniversary of the signing of the Charter of the United Nations on 26 June. UN Geneva hosted an event at the Palais des Nations together with the Permanent Mission of Switzerland and the Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, Ignazio Cassis, who came from Bern to unveil the artwork.

“I like to deal with subjects through children. They hold the world of tomorrow in their hands. And when we talk about children, we also talk about us. What are we going to leave them as a world? What values do we want to leave them?” - Saype

Scan the QR code to watch a video of artist Saype creating World in Progress on the grounds of the Palais des Nations.
Switzerland also offered a virtual version of the annual concert by the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande to celebrate United Nations Day on 24 October. UN Geneva Director-General Tatiana Valovaya delivered opening remarks prior to the concert, which was screened for the public on UN Web TV and Radio Télévision Suisse.

Scan the QR code to watch the concert by the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande.

Lit up in blue for United Nations Day

On the evening of United Nations Day, 24 October, the Palais des Nations and Geneva’s iconic Jet d’eau were lit up in blue, joining a number of Europe’s other most iconic buildings and monuments, as part of the Turn Europe UN Blue initiative.
To celebrate a century of multilateralism, UN Geneva’s Library and Archives and Division of Conference Management, in partnership with the Republic and Canton of Geneva, the City of Geneva and the Fondation pour Genève, staged an exhibition entitled 100 Years of Multilateralism in Geneva. The exhibition featured 18 bilingual, double-sided panels that trace the evolution of multilateralism in the city, from the establishment of the League of Nations to the activities of the UN today. From 12 to 30 October 2020, the exhibition was on display in Geneva’s Place des Nations. In line with the measures taken to respond to COVID-19, and to provide easier access for the public, the Library and Archives also launched a virtual version of the exhibition.

Open-air exhibition chronicles a century of multilateralism in Geneva

Scan the QR code to visit the 100 Years of Multilateralism in Geneva virtual exhibition.

UN Library and Archives Geneva: transformations over the past 75 years

The Library and Archives opened in 1936, in the east wing of the Palais des Nations, as the Library of the League of Nations. Ten years later, in 1946, the Library and its historical archives were transferred to the United Nations. Since then, even though the building has remained relatively unchanged, the Library and Archives spaces have undergone several transformations to adapt to technological changes and the evolving needs of clients.
Library and Archives: Chronology of makeovers

**1960s**
The Library Study Room (Room B.135) was converted into a conference room. Later, in 1971, it was returned to the Library and became the Catalogue and Loans Desk Room.

**1970s**
The Periodicals Reading Room (Room B.127), located on the first floor of the Library, moved to the third floor. Room B.127 was redesigned and became the United Nations and Specialized Agencies Reading Room.

**1990s**
Adapting to the widespread adoption of information technology, the Library created two “cyberspaces” to provide access to its resources via the Internet. In 1997, the Library Foyer and the Welcome Desk (Room B.133) were completely redesigned to become the first Library cyberspace. A second cyberspace opened on the third floor of the Library (Room B.348) in 1998.
2000s

A third cyberspace, reserved for diplomats, opened in 2000, as a dedicated space in the United Nations and Specialized Agencies Reading Room (Room B.127), on the first floor.

2010s

The Catalogue and Loans Desk Room (Room B.135) was transformed in order to host the Library Talks. In 2012, it was repurposed to become the Library Events Room. Also in 2012, the Periodicals Reading Room moved to Room B.348 and the vacated space became the new United Nations Archives Reading Room.

2016

The main cyberspace was dismantled, and the Library Foyer and the Welcome Desk went back to a configuration similar to that used in the League of Nations era.

2018

The Library Events Room was refurbished to host the activities of the new Knowledge and Learning Commons.
Preserving art and heritage as part of the Strategic Heritage Plan

The Palais des Nations is an outstanding example of 20th century architecture and is also home to an important art collection. With paintings, sculptures, artworks on paper and fabric, ceramics, photographs, and more, the collection represents the diversity and richness of the world’s cultures. It comprises over 2,000 works dating from the era of the League of Nations to the present day.

Respectful of the architectural and artistic legacy of the past, UN Geneva’s Strategic Heritage Plan project has documented the art collection, as well as rooms of major historical and artistic value. Art and heritage specialists have defined conservation and restoration norms that must be respected during the renovation to prevent any risk of damage or degradation.

“The within the collection, artists have captured key UN values such as peace, human rights and environmental issues, and the project is proud that the protection of this heritage lies at the heart of the Strategic Heritage Plan.”
Strategic Heritage Plan Project Director David McCuaig

Commemorative events

Every year, UN Geneva marks a range of international days and anniversaries, with commemorative events. Although some necessary adaptations were made this year owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, UN Geneva continued to find ways to honour these important dates.
International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust

In January, UN Geneva paid tribute to those who perished in Nazi death camps, and marked the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Holocaust survivor Paul Sobol, 93, of Belgium, told of his personal experience of detention in Auschwitz-Birkenau and other camps.

In addition to the official observance, several other activities related to the Holocaust commemoration were organized by UN Geneva and various permanent missions to the UN in Geneva, at the Palais des Nations and in the city of Geneva, including film screenings and an exhibition.

World Humanitarian Day

On World Humanitarian Day, 19 August, a ceremony at the Palais des Nations honoured colleagues who lost their lives in humanitarian service, and the thousands of aid workers who continue to provide much-needed support to people suffering in conflicts or natural disasters across the world. Organized in collaboration with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the ceremony was, exceptionally, held in a hybrid format, with a limited physical presence and the audience participating virtually.

International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People was marked with a hybrid special meeting at UN Geneva on 8 December. Speakers discussed the humanitarian and socioeconomic situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and highlighted the importance of meeting the needs of the population, abiding by international law and restoring faith in a political horizon.

Anniversary of Haiti earthquake

UN staff members, diplomats and members of the Haitian community gathered at the Palais des Nations to mark the 10th anniversary of the earthquake that shook Haiti on 12 January 2010. Louis Germain, a UN staff member who survived that day, shared his experience, and a minute’s silence was observed at 4.53 p.m., which was the exact time that the quake struck in 2010.
UN Geneva also used social media to commemorate and raise awareness of international days such as:

**International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda**

The International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda was marked on 7 April. The day serves as a reminder of the tragic events and the importance of promoting respect and peace.

**International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers**

International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers was observed on 29 April. It is a day to honor the dedicated service of peacekeepers and their efforts in maintaining peace and security worldwide.

**International Day of United Nations Geneva**

UN Geneva also used social media to commemorate and raise awareness of international days such as:

**Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons turns 40**

The Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects, more commonly known as the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, is a key instrument of international humanitarian law that seeks to ban or restrict the use of weapons that cause unnecessary suffering to combatants or that indiscriminately affect civilians.

Since its adoption in 1980, the Convention has gained the support of 125 High Contracting Parties, and, through an amendment in 2001, it became one of the few disarmament instruments to apply to non-international armed conflicts.

The dynamic and flexible nature of the Convention allows for the progressive development and codification of rules relating to the means and methods of warfare. The addition in 1995 of the Protocol on Blinding Laser Weapons (Protocol IV) marked the first pre-emptive ban on a weapon before its use on the battlefield. In 2003, the Convention was augmented by the Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War (Protocol V), which addresses the post-conflict impact of such weapons. In addition, a Group of Governmental Experts was set up in 2016 to discuss emerging technologies in the area of lethal autonomous weapons systems.

Looking forward, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs will continue to mark the anniversary of the Convention into 2021, and the Sixth Review Conference, in December 2021, will provide an opportunity for the Convention to remain a strong, agile instrument.

Scan the QR code to read the message of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for the 40th anniversary of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.

Scan the QR code to watch the message of the United Nations High Representative for Disarmament Affairs for the 40th anniversary of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.
Biological Weapons Convention turns 45

When the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction, usually referred to as the Biological Weapons Convention, entered into force on 26 March 1975, it constituted an important landmark as the first multilateral disarmament treaty to ban an entire category of weapons of mass destruction.

Forty-five years later, it is supported by 183 States parties and has managed to establish a strong global norm that the use of disease as a weapon against humans, animals and plants is intolerable.

The implementation of the Convention at the national level has increased the capacities of States to prevent and respond to the possible use of biological weapons.

The Ninth Review Conference, scheduled for 2021 in Geneva, will provide an opportunity to take stock of progress made in the implementation of the Convention and consider new developments, including in the areas of science and technology. It will also consider how the Convention can respond to future challenges so that it remains an important pillar of the international health security architecture.
Transfer of the assets of the League of Nations

For a short time after the adoption of the Charter of the United Nations, the League of Nations and the United Nations worked side by side. During the first General Assembly of the United Nations, in 1946, Member States representatives discussed the dissolution and liquidation of the League, in particular the transfer of its functions, property and assets based in Geneva. Following the adoption of the Common Plan by the General Assemblies of both organizations, the assets of the League of Nations were transferred to the United Nations, closing the last chapter of the League.
Geneva Conference

From 26 April to 20 July 1954, the Palais des Nations hosted the Geneva Conference to discuss peace settlements in both the Korean Peninsula and Indochina. The conference helped produce the Geneva Accords, which were aimed at unifying Viet Nam.

Scan the QR code to watch footage of the opening day of the Geneva Conference.

The “Big Four” in Geneva

In July 1955, amid cold war tensions, UN Geneva hosted a summit of the Heads of Government of the “four great Powers”: France, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

From left to right: Premier Nikita A. Bulganin of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, President Dwight D. Eisenhower of the United States of America, Premier Edgar Faure of France and Prime Minister Anthony Eden of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland pose for the media at the Palais des Nations.
Inauguration of UNCTAD and the G-77

From 23 March to 16 June 1964, the first session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) took place in Geneva. At the end of the session, the Group of 77, also known as the G-77, was established through the signing of the Joint Declaration of the Seventy-seven Developing Countries. Today, the G-77 is the largest grouping of developing countries in the UN.

First “Atoms for Peace” conference

In August 1955, UN Geneva hosted the first International Conference on the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy – also known as the “Atoms for Peace” conference – which was attended by about 25,000 participants. Some participants also took the opportunity presented by this conference to discuss the creation of an Atomic Energy Agency.

Scan the QR code to watch a video about the second Atoms for Peace conference, which was also held in Geneva, in 1958.
Visit of Pope Paul VI to Geneva

On 10 June 1969, on the occasion of his visit to the Geneva-based World Council of Churches, Pope Paul VI addressed the International Labour Conference on the 50th anniversary of the International Labour Organization, as well as the public in Ariana Park.

Extension of the Palais des Nations

Since the laying of the foundation stone on 7 September 1929, the historic buildings of the Palais des Nations have undergone several renovations and extensions. One of these projects was the construction of the E Building between 1968 and 1973 to better meet the growing demand for conference facilities. The new building was designed by a team of five architects, led by Eugène Beaudouin of France, and added office space and 11 conference rooms to the complex.
On 25 May 1990, the Security Council met in Geneva for the first time in its history to begin a debate on the situation in the occupied Arab territories.

In December 1988, the General Assembly moved its plenary meeting, aimed at discussing the question of Palestine, from New York to Geneva, in order to allow the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Yasser Arafat, to address Member States of the United Nations.
Inaugural session of the Human Rights Council

In 2006, the General Assembly established the Human Rights Council to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights throughout the world and address situations of human rights violations.

The Council met for its inaugural session at UN Geneva from 19 to 30 June 2006.

Nelson Mandela visits Geneva

Following his release after 27 years in prison in South Africa, Nelson Mandela visited several countries, including Switzerland.

On 8 June 1990, he addressed the 77th annual session of the International Labour Conference at the Palais des Nations and delivered a powerful message against the apartheid system.

Scan the QR code to watch footage of Mr. Mandela’s speech.
2013

Interim agreement on Iranian nuclear programme

On 24 November 2013, a historic agreement was reached in Geneva between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the P5+1 countries (China, France, Germany, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America) regarding the Iranian nuclear programme. This interim agreement paved the way for further negotiations which led to the successful conclusion in 2015 of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

2016

Olympic flame comes to UN Geneva

The Olympic flame, a symbol of peace and hope, came to UN Geneva during its worldwide journey ahead of the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Scan the QR code to watch the Olympic flame arrive at UN Geneva.
75 years of the UN: A snapshot of key moments at UN Geneva

Libya ceasefire agreement

A historic ceasefire agreement to end the conflict in Libya was officially signed at UN Geneva on 23 October 2020, paving the way for the resumption of political discussions and national elections in 2021.

Inaugural meeting of the Syrian Constitutional Committee

UN Geneva hosted the in-person opening session of the Syrian Constitutional Committee on 30 October 2019. This was the first phase in UN-brokered face-to-face talks between the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the opposition to draft a new constitution for the country after nearly nine years of conflict.

From left to right:
Ahmad Kuzbari, Co-Chair representing the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic; Geir O. Pedersen, Special Envoy for Syria; and Hadi al-Bahra, Co-Chair representing the opposition

A. Amhimmal Mohamed Alamami (left), head of the Libyan National Army delegation, shakes hands with A. Ali Abushahma (right), head of the Government of National Accord military delegation, in front of the Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Libya and Head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya, Stephanie Williams.