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Chapter one

A centre for modern multilateralism



A modern workplace for modern multilateralism

To support modern multilateralism, UN Geneva must also modernize itself. One way in which we are doing this is through the [Strategic Heritage Plan](#), which involves the extensive renovation and modernization of 170,000 square metres of the Palais des Nations complex, and the construction of a new permanent office building: Building H.

Constructed mainly in the 1930s, the Palais des Nations has been well maintained over the years but has never been comprehensively renovated. In recent years, it became evident that much of the mechanical, electrical and plumbing infrastructure was coming to the end of its useful life, and that harmful construction material needed to be removed, infrastructure updated, and modern health and safety codes met.

Consequently, in 2015 the General Assembly approved the Strategic Heritage Plan project to urgently renovate the historic Palais des Nations, with a total project budget of SwF 836.5 million. The aims of the Strategic Heritage Plan are to modernize buildings and conference support systems, improve working conditions and safety, provide better accessibility for persons with disabilities and reduce energy costs, while at the same time protecting the heritage of the buildings. This once-in-a-generation renovation project is one of the largest currently under way in Europe.

Turn to page 124 to see how UN Geneva is protecting heritage treasures while renovating the Palais des Nations.

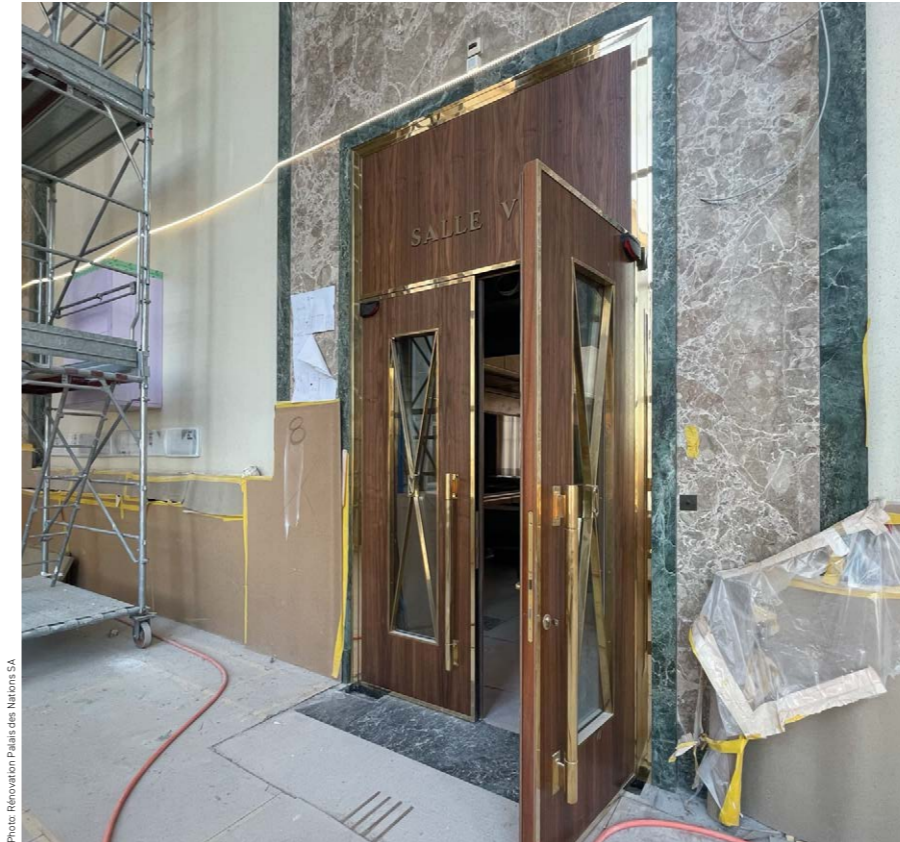


Photo: Renovation Palais des Nations SA

The doors of some meeting rooms in the Palais des Nations are being renovated to make them fire-resistant, and their heritage elements are being maintained.

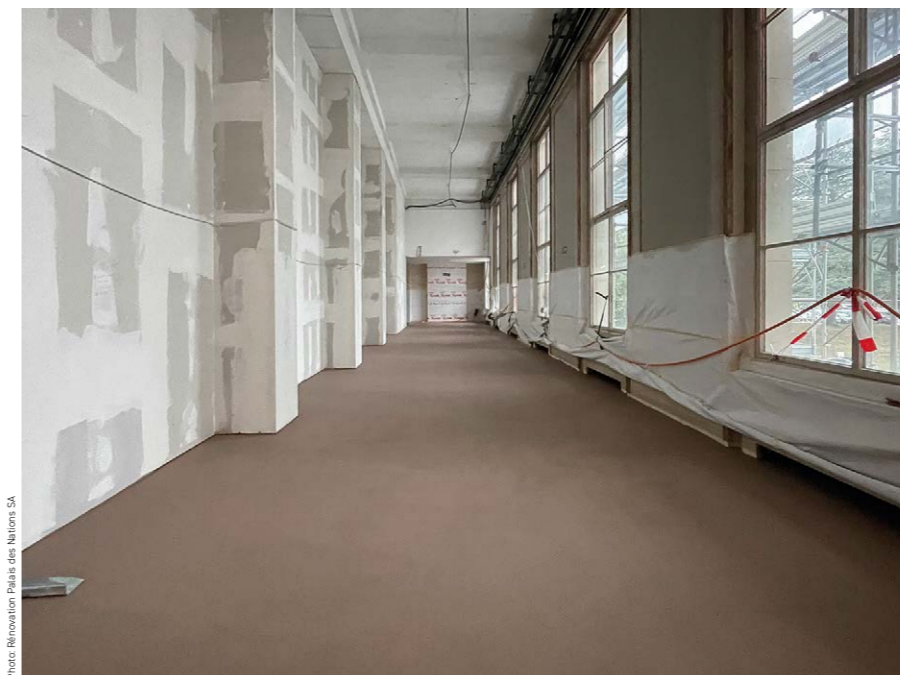


Photo: Renovation Palais des Nations SA

The side corridors of the Assembly Hall are being restored to their initial shape. The marble wall cladding, the amber-coloured window trimming and the original full-height windows are being kept as significant elements from the original design.

Inauguration of Building H: a 21st-century building for a 21st-century United Nations

After breaking ground in 2017, and then facing significant challenges relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular supply chain issues and the temporary closure of the worksite during a nationwide lockdown, this year, right on its 75th anniversary, UN Geneva inaugurated Building H, one of the major projects of the Strategic Heritage Plan. This was an important milestone for UN Geneva as it continues to work towards supporting a renewed and modern multilateral diplomacy.

The inauguration took place on 1 November in the presence of the Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, Ignazio Cassis; the President of the State Council of Geneva, Serge Dal Busco; the Mayor of the City of Geneva, Frédérique Perler; a State Councillor of Geneva, Nathalie Fontanet; the Director-General of UN Geneva, Tatiana Valovaya; and representatives of many Member States.

Building H offers the necessary facilities, infrastructure and technology to advance and improve UN Geneva's provision of high-quality and modern conferencing services to the international community. Made possible thanks to the generous and strong commitment of Member States, Building H is an important investment in the future of the United Nations family in Geneva and sets the standard for new ways of working.

With its modern and sustainable design, the new building can accommodate up to 1,500 staff from a range of different entities. Such proximity will encourage cross-divisional work and collaboration, bring significant operational efficiencies and reduce the overall cost of operations.

“When we laid the foundation stone for the building ... we wanted to provide a suitable setting for sustainable, forward-looking multilateral diplomacy. And we have succeeded. Now it's up to us to make sure that this house bubbles with life and ideas.”

Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, Ignazio Cassis, during the inauguration

Turn to page 56 to learn about the sustainability features of Building H.



Scan the QR code to watch the [inauguration ceremony](#).



Scan the QR code to take a [video tour](#) of the new Building H.

UN Geneva Director-General Tatiana Valovaya (centre) shows Secretary-General António Guterres (left) the Building H construction site in April.



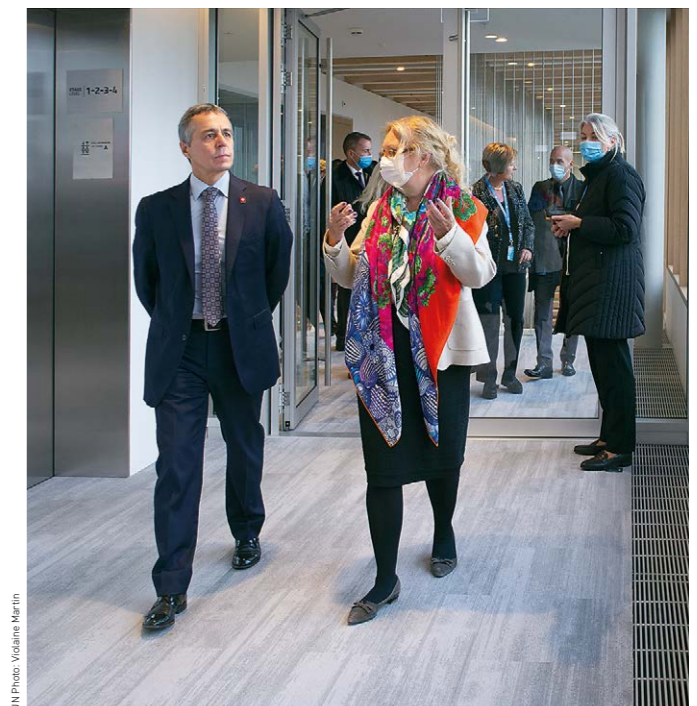
UN Photo: Yvelaine Martin

A ribbon is cut to officially open Building H. From left to right: the Mayor of the City of Geneva, Frédérique Perler; the Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, Ignazio Cassis; the Director-General of UN Geneva, Tatiana Valovaya; the President of the State Council of Geneva, Serge Dal Busco; and a State Councillor of Geneva, Nathalie Fontanet

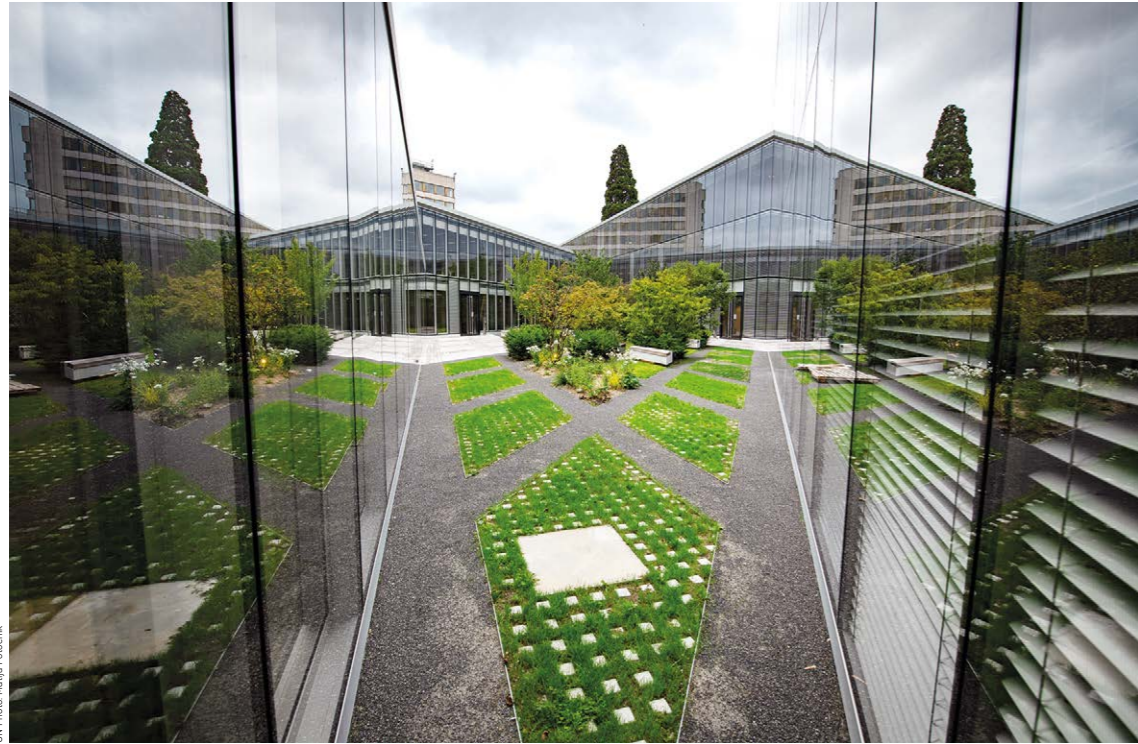
The Director-General of UN Geneva, Tatiana Valovaya, shows the Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, Ignazio Cassis, Building H, during its inauguration.



UN Photo: Jean-Marc Ferré

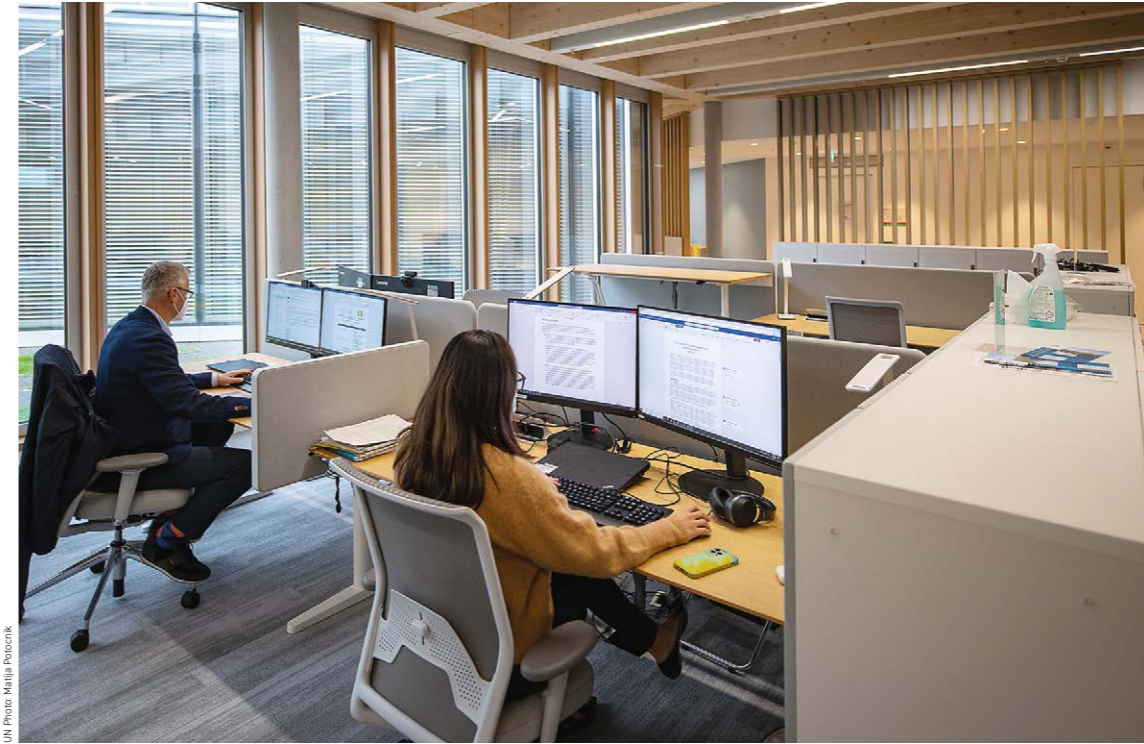


UN Photo: Yvelaine Martin



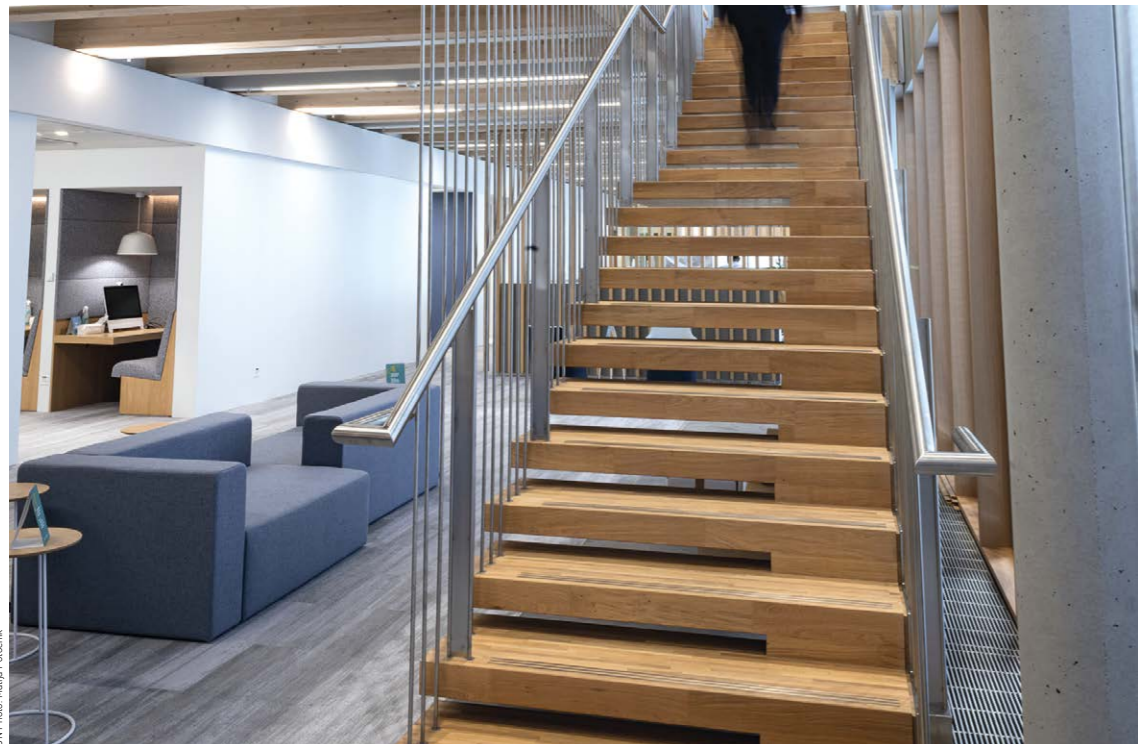
UN Photo: Marija Potocnik

An inner courtyard in Building H



UN Photo: Marija Potocnik

Staff working in the new Building H



UN Photo: Marija Potocnik

A feature staircase in Building H



UN Photo: Marija Potocnik

Building H includes a range of spaces where staff can work or meet.

Improving accessibility for persons with disabilities

Accessibility for persons with disabilities has been fully integrated into the Strategic Heritage Plan, including into the design of Building H, consistent with the [United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy](#).

Early in the planning and development of the Strategic Heritage Plan project, an accessibility masterplan that took into consideration all different types of disabilities was established. Recommendations from accessibility audits have been and continue to be implemented throughout the various design stages for both the new and the existing buildings. As a result, Building H has automatic doors, wide corridors, adjustable desks and fully accessible toilet facilities. Guiding strips feature throughout the building, and buttons are located at an appropriate height in the lifts. Many of these accessibility features are also being put in place as part of the renovation of the historic buildings of the Palais des Nations, and have been included in the design and construction of Tempus, the temporary conference facility.



UN Photo: Marija Polocnik

A network of guiding strips on the floors helps to make Building H more accessible to persons with disabilities.

Security and safety in Building H

Moving hundreds of staff into a new building is not only a major logistical undertaking, it also requires important information about health and safety to be shared. As well as UN Geneva's expertly trained security personnel, its volunteer emergency wardens and the staff who work in the newly inaugurated Building H needed to be made aware of security procedures and evacuation routes.

UN Geneva's Security and Safety Service gave a series of safety briefings to staff, which included guided walk-throughs. Staff were shown or informed about the emergency procedures, signage, escape routes, locations of extinguishers, and audio alerts, as well as systems deployed during an emergency such as sprinklers and fire shutters. Dedicated online training was provided for emergency wardens.

In addition, the Security and Safety Service conducted a full emergency evacuation of the building. The successful exercise had all occupants evacuated and accounted for in just under 20 minutes. The evacuation protocols operated according to plan, thanks to the positive input by Security and Safety Service personnel and 11 emergency wardens, and the cooperation of all staff members present. Everything learned during the exercise was noted and subsequently addressed.



UN Photo: Chris De Saette

UN Geneva Security and Safety Service staff attend a briefing in the new Building H.

Visitors' Service guided tours of the new Building H

Ahead of their move into Building H, staff were invited to take a guided tour of the new building, as part of a collaboration between the Strategic Heritage Plan team and the UN Geneva Visitors' Service.

The tours took staff through the building and the outside spaces, concentrating on the design features and the new types of workspace offered, which include collaboration spaces and formal and informal meeting rooms, as well as on facilities such as the pantries and the Grab and Go self-service café.

Between May and July, 51 tours were run for staff. UN Geneva's guides also led nine protocol tours, including the tours given for the building's inauguration on 1 November, for a total of 343 people. The tour guides proved invaluable in sharing their knowledge with the building's new occupants, and were also able to enhance their own knowledge of the building and the Strategic Heritage Plan project.



UN Photo: Monica Del Moral

Staff take part in a guided tour of Building H.

Large-scale moves and new workplaces

Between January and June, staff at the Palais des Nations were on the move. As buildings closed sequentially to enable the renovation works that are part of the Strategic Heritage Plan, staff were relocated to swing spaces and permanent spaces throughout the campus. Most significant was the move of more than 1,200 staff into the newly constructed Building H.

These large-scale moves presented challenges on a number of fronts, most notably due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on construction and renovation timelines and on pre-move preparations. Moreover, staff faced an adjustment from mostly enclosed offices to open spaces and a flexible working environment in Building H.

How were these challenges addressed? With the help of the Strategic Heritage Plan team and of the newly created transition team, whose mandate included assistance and support for staff and coordination among UN Geneva services, to ensure that the moves and transition to new workplaces went smoothly.

Furthermore, the creation of a network of transition coordinators – focal points from each entity – proved invaluable. This group of approximately 100 staff members were crucial in making sure that important communications were passed on to their colleagues. They were also instrumental in providing feedback to the Strategic Heritage Plan team and the transition team to head off potential issues and to allow creative and innovative solutions to be found. The transition coordinator network will remain essential throughout the next phases of implementation of the Strategic Heritage Plan, which involve the move of staff from Building E and, in late 2024, from the two locations of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to Building H within the Palais des Nations complex.



UN Photo: Marija Potocznik

Staff during the move to Building H

Fifth Committee of the General Assembly makes a virtual visit to UN Geneva

Accountability and oversight are an important part of ensuring the effectiveness of the United Nations and multilateralism. Every other year, the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly – which considers administrative and budgetary questions – is invited to visit UN Geneva. This visit is principally to provide the Committee with additional first-hand information on the Strategic Heritage Plan project, particularly through tours of the renovation and construction projects.

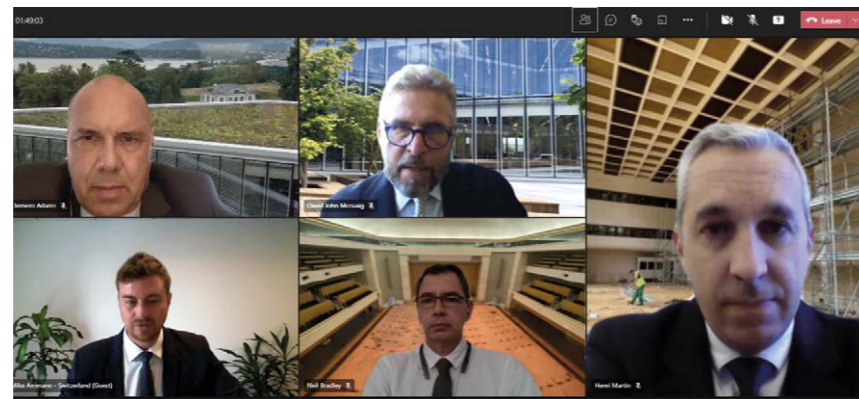
Given the challenges around COVID-19 restrictions and international travel in 2021, the members of the Fifth Committee were unable to visit the Palais des Nations in person this year. UN Geneva had to find a creative alternative to a physical walk-through of our buildings: a “virtual visit” was designed.

While remote participation in meetings is a well-established practice now at UN Geneva, the virtual visit was a first. But how

could an online experience be created that would offer the same benefits and information as walking through a building?

To meet this challenge, the Strategic Heritage Plan team and the Division of Conference Management developed a virtual tour of the Palais des Nations renovation works. This nearly 30-minute video, which was narrated live by experts, provided the Committee with detailed information on activity and progress. It even went further than a normal visit, for example providing footage of asbestos removal, which for safety reasons it would not have been possible to see in person.

Also as part of the virtual visit, the Director-General of UN Geneva, Tatiana Valovaya, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Geir O. Pedersen, and the Acting Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Isabelle Durant, held a panel discussion on innovation in Geneva.



Strategic Heritage Plan experts answer questions as part of the virtual visit.

Sustained COVID-19 response enables multilateral diplomacy to continue at UN Geneva

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to reverberate around the world in 2021. The situation called for a sustained response to ensure that multilateral diplomacy at UN Geneva could continue.

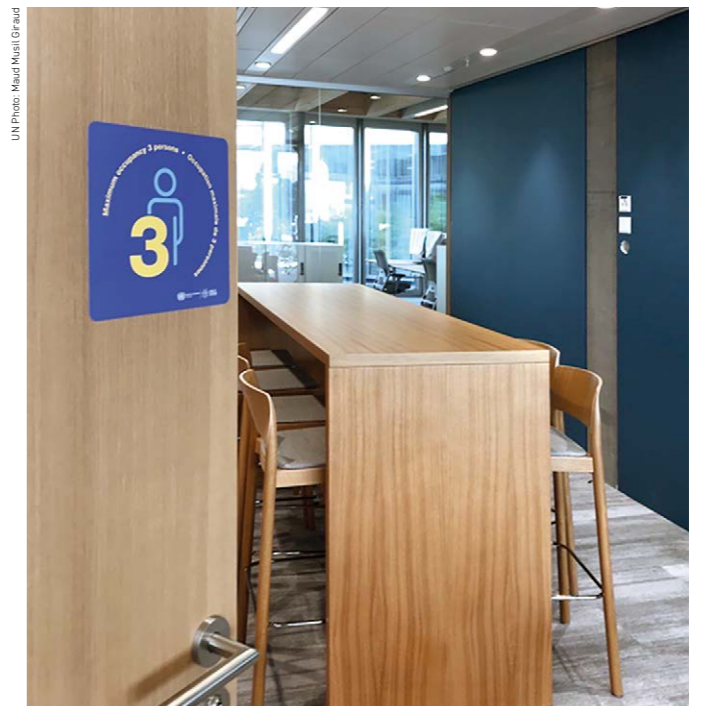
After a period of lockdown at the beginning of the year that necessitated telecommuting by UN Geneva staff and limited physical presence at meetings, Switzerland gradually began loosening some restrictions in March. It wasn't until July, however, that increased vaccination rates and an improved epidemiological situation allowed for a certain number of in-person meetings to resume and for more UN personnel to return to the office – with strict safety measures in place, such as physical distancing, mask-wearing and contact tracing procedures. Unfortunately, a deteriorating COVID situation at the end of 2021 once again required most UN Geneva staff to return to full-time telecommuting.

Throughout this turbulent time, UN Geneva worked to ensure the continuity of its core services and support for multilateralism while maintaining regular communication with its personnel, international organizations, Member States, non-governmental organizations, journalists, and other stakeholders. UN Geneva also offered resources to support the health and well-being of staff and managers, and enhanced the professional development opportunities available to them.

During the informal 5+1 talks on Cyprus in April, maintenance staff cleaned the armchairs, tables and microphones after each meeting.



UN Photo: Jean-Marc Ferret



UN Photo: Maud Nuzil Graud

Signage in the new Building H indicates meeting rooms' maximum occupancy, as part of the COVID-19 protective measures.

Inter-agency collaboration

UN Geneva has a leadership and convening role among UN entities in Geneva that has become all the more critical throughout the COVID-19 response.

One important mechanism for ensuring the safety and security of UN personnel in Switzerland is the Security Management Team. As Designated Official for Switzerland, UN Geneva Director-General Tatiana Valovaya chaired regular meetings of the Security Management Team throughout 2021, supported by her COVID-19 coordination team. The meetings brought together leaders and key officials of more than 40 UN system entities in Switzerland, and of non-UN organizations with observer status such as the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) and the European Broadcasting Union, as well as representatives of Switzerland and France.

UN Geneva also coordinated meetings of the security, human resources, medical and communications networks that cooperate across UN system and other organizations in Geneva. As the epidemiological situation continued to evolve throughout 2021, these meetings proved essential for the organizations to collectively discuss and adjust their COVID-19 response.

Technology and cooperation

Cooperation within International Geneva led to the refinement and sharing of a web-based tool to assess the risk of aerosol transmission of COVID-19. CERN developed the [COVID Airborne Risk Assessment](#) tool and generously provided UN Geneva with access to it for use at the Palais des Nations. The tool assesses indoor spaces based on a range of key indicators, such as the number of people in a room, the type of space it is, the type of ventilation and the wearing of masks, to provide a measurement of the risk of aerosol transmission. This information can be used to help inform health and safety measures.

All spaces at UN Geneva – especially the new Building H – performed highly in the assessments with protective measures in place. In its convening role, UN Geneva established an inter-agency technical working group to coordinate access to the COVID Airborne Risk Assessment tool. Since then, an international group of experts has been set up by the World Health Organization to standardize the approach to airborne risk assessment for respiratory pathogens using such tools as the COVID Airborne Risk Assessment.

COVID-19 vaccination

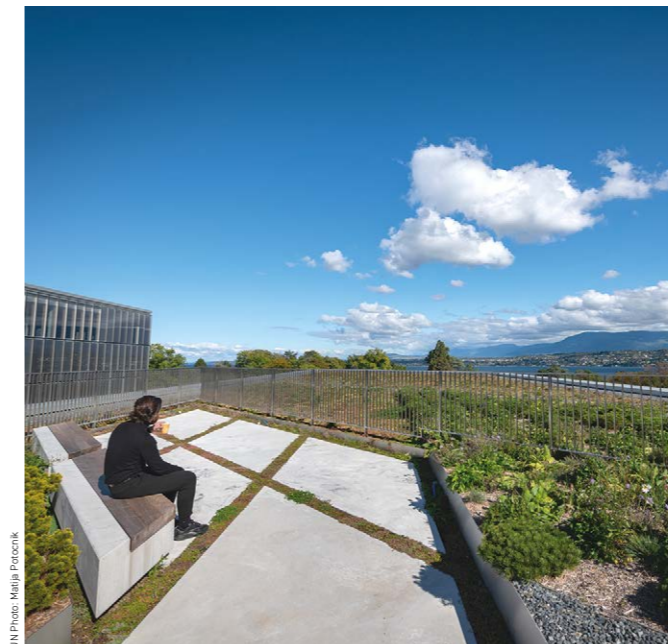
UN Geneva engaged with the authorities in Switzerland and France to ensure that UN personnel and their families would be included in the national vaccination roll-outs; both Governments provided free vaccines to their entire local populations, including our staff. As one of the key tools in the fight against the pandemic and to protect health, COVID-19 vaccination was actively promoted to all UN personnel. To ensure that UN Geneva had data for appropriate risk management, staff were also required to report their vaccination status through a confidential reporting platform.

Supporting staff mental health and well-being

An organization can only be as strong and effective as the people who work in it, and supporting the mental health and well-being of UN personnel is therefore always a priority at UN Geneva. The Staff Counsellor's Office plays a critical role in this effort and has been working to respond to an increased need for psychological support during the pandemic.

The Staff Counsellor's Office has focused especially on preventing mental health issues, through services such as individual psychosocial support, informational webinars, online mindfulness meditation sessions and team coaching. Many of the top concerns from personnel this year seemed to be exacerbated by the COVID-19 experience, and included anxiety, depression, family concerns and a need to prevent burnout.

The Staff Counsellor's Office cooperates closely with members of UN Geneva's working group on staff well-being and mental health, which includes the Human Resources Management Service, the Medical Service, the Staff Coordinating Council, the Office of the Ombudsman, and the focal points for gender and disability inclusion. This working group monitors the overall well-being of the colleagues that it serves, discussing any concerns and planning actions to improve the experience of staff.



UN Photo: Matija Potocnik

A UN Geneva staff member takes a break on a rooftop garden of Building H.

Conferencing adapts to the challenges of COVID-19

UN Geneva has continued to adjust its meeting protocols to align with protective measures in force in Switzerland, for example by requiring face masks throughout the Palais des Nations, introducing 1.5 metre physical distancing in conference rooms, and investing in additional resources and equipment to increase its remote interpretation and web broadcast capabilities.

In June, UN Geneva Director-General Tatiana Valovaya held a briefing with permanent missions in Geneva to update Member States on the status of conferencing and in-person meetings.

In 2021, all told, UN Geneva organized 5,298 meetings, providing 41% of them with interpretation services. Its translators also kept pace with a demanding workload, processing 70,543,915 words.



Scan the QR code to listen to a recording of the Director-General's [briefing for Member States](#).

This year, UN Geneva also launched a campaign to address the issue of poor sound quality in remote meetings, which can significantly hinder the ability of interpreters to understand and convey participants' messages. The campaign comprises a wealth of resources and best practices on how to achieve quality sound, such as videos and infographics.



Scan the QR code to find out how you can improve sound quality when you [participate in meetings remotely](#).



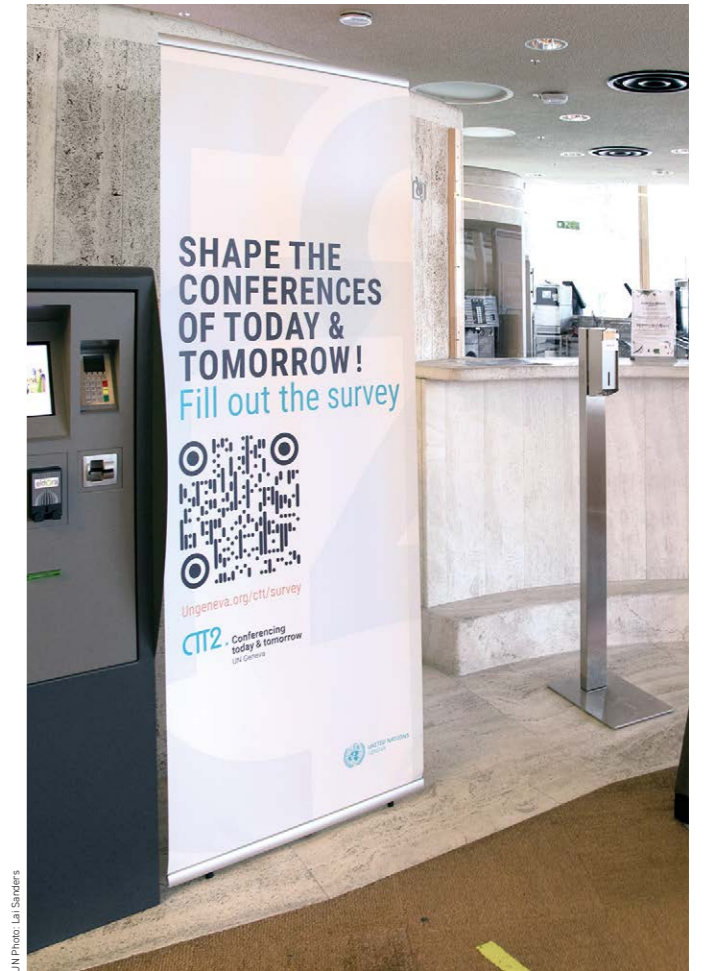
UN Photo: Vidiana Merris

Interpreters work behind the scenes in physically distanced booths at the High-level Ministerial Meeting on the Humanitarian Situation in Afghanistan, held on 13 September at UN Geneva.

Adapting our conferencing strategy to better serve stakeholders' needs

UN Geneva is committed to supporting conferences and improving the services it provides. The Conferencing Today and Tomorrow initiative was first launched by UN Geneva's [Division of Conference Management](#) in 2018 to analyse how major external trends – economic, technological, social and environmental – as well as internal trends within the UN, may lead to changes in clients' conferencing support needs. Using a four-track methodology, the Division made important findings in such areas as registration and security, interpretation, room layouts, and accessibility, among many others.

In 2021, Conferencing Today and Tomorrow entered [phase 2](#). The Division of Conference Management collected and analysed feedback from stakeholders to better understand how COVID-19 has changed their ways of participating in conferences, the major challenges and opportunities of hybrid and remote meetings, and how stakeholders envision future meeting experiences in the post-COVID recovery.



UN Photo: Lai Sanders

Banners installed around the Palais des Nations invite people to complete a survey about conferencing.

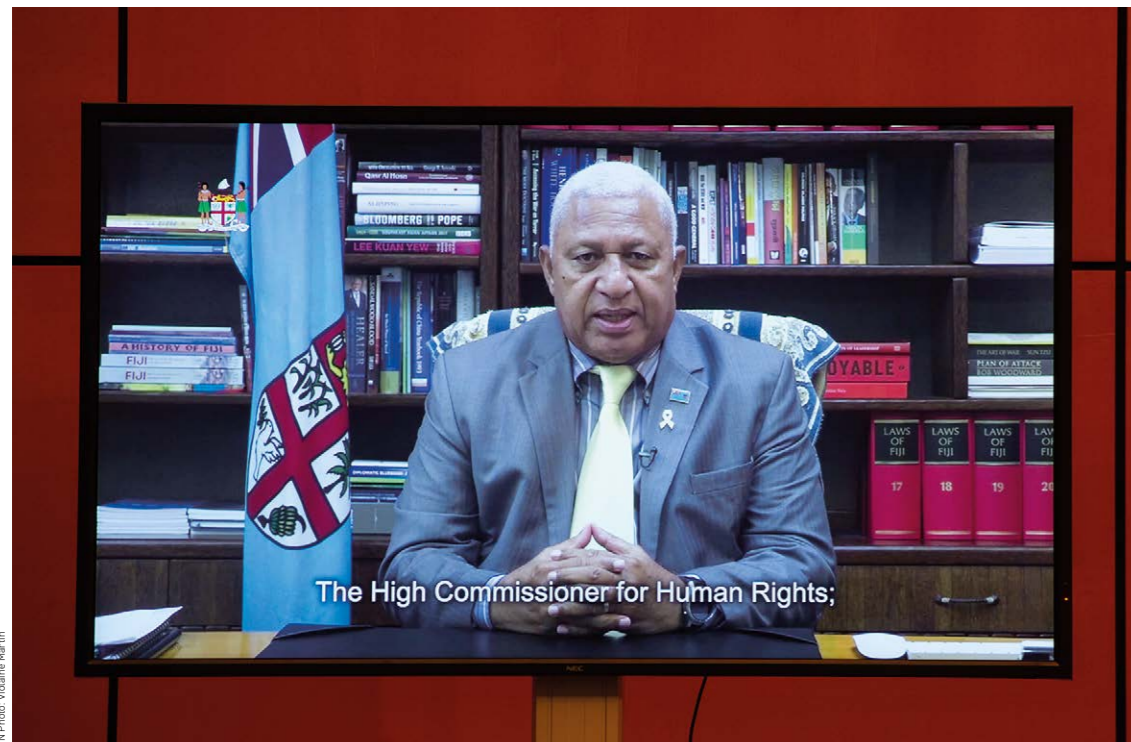
Virtually and in person: global leaders at UN Geneva

The participation and contribution of global leaders is an important part of international cooperation. As a centre for modern multilateralism, UN Geneva welcomes a range of eminent visitors from Member States, international organizations, civil society, academia and the private sector every year. In 2021 some were able to come to Geneva, while at times COVID-19 restrictions made it difficult to attend meetings in person; however, the infrastructure and support provided by UN Geneva ensured that they could still contribute virtually to multilateral diplomacy.



The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belgium, Sophie Wilmès, addresses the high-level segment of the 46th session of the Human Rights Council by video link, on 22 February.

UN Photo: Volaine Martin



The Prime Minister of Fiji, Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, addresses the high-level segment of the 46th session of the Human Rights Council by video link, on 22 February.

UN Photo: Volaine Martin



The President of Colombia, Iván Duque Márquez, addresses the high-level segment of the 46th session of the Human Rights Council by video link, on 22 February.

UN Photo: Volaine Martin



The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, Ann Linde, addresses the high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament by video link, on 22 February.



The Director-General of UN Geneva, Tatiana Valovaya (second from left), meets with the President of Estonia, Kersti Kaljulaid (third from right), on 8 June.



The Director-General of UN Geneva, Tatiana Valovaya, meets with the Secretary-General of the Higher Committee of Human Fraternity, Mohamed Mahmoud Abdelsalam, on 20 May.



UN Photo: Jean-Marc Ferré

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres (second from left), meets with the Greek Cypriot leader, Nicos Anastasiades (left), the Turkish Cypriot leader, Ersin Tatar (third from left), the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece, Nikos Dendias (third from right), the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu (second from right), and the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Dominic Raab (right), during the informal 5+1 meeting on Cyprus, on 28 April.



UN Photo: Marija Potocnik

The Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Amina Mohammed (centre), arrives at a meeting room at the Palais des Nations for a UN Geneva Executive Briefing held on 29 November.



UN Photo: Sophie Torelli Chiron

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres (right), the Director-General of UN Geneva, Tatiana Valovaya (left), and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Martin Griffiths (second

from left), meet with the Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, Ignazio Cassis (second from right), ahead of the High-level Ministerial Meeting on the Humanitarian Situation in Afghanistan, on 13 September.



UN Photo: Volaine Martin

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, opens the High-level Ministerial Meeting on the Humanitarian Situation in Afghanistan, on 13 September.



UN Photo: Volaine Martin

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Germany, Heiko Maas, attends the High-level Ministerial Meeting on the Humanitarian Situation in Afghanistan, on 13 September.



UN Photo: Volaine Martin

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia, Marise Payne, addresses the High-level Ministerial Meeting on the Humanitarian Situation in Afghanistan by video link, on 13 September.



UN Photo: Volaine Martin

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh, A.K. Abdul Momen, addresses the High-level Ministerial Meeting on the Humanitarian Situation in Afghanistan by video link, on 13 September.



UN Photo: Jean-Marc Ferré

The Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy, Benedetto Della Vedova (left), the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet (second from left), and the President of the Human Rights Council, Nazhat Shameem Khan (right), during the 48th session of the Council, on 14 September

New access point at the Palais des Nations accreditation pavilion

Every year, UN Geneva welcomes thousands of diplomats, journalists, civil society representatives, visitors and many others through its gates to take part in multilateralism or witness it in action. In 2021, UN Geneva completed the construction of a new access point at the Palais des Nations accreditation pavilion at Pregny Gate, despite the supply chain challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The new access point was designed to increase the efficiency of security procedures for visitors and conference participants, to provide accessibility for persons with mobility impairments and to ensure the security and safety of staff operating the post. Security "layers" are fundamental to the design of the area, preventing possible security breaches and providing the capability to lock down if needed. The opening hours of the access point are flexible and based on operational needs.



Mock-up of the registration area at the new access point



UN Photo: Yoann Martin

The Director-General of UN Geneva, Tatiana Valovaya, welcomes the President of Viet Nam, Nguyen Xuan Phuc, to the Palais des Nations on 28 November.

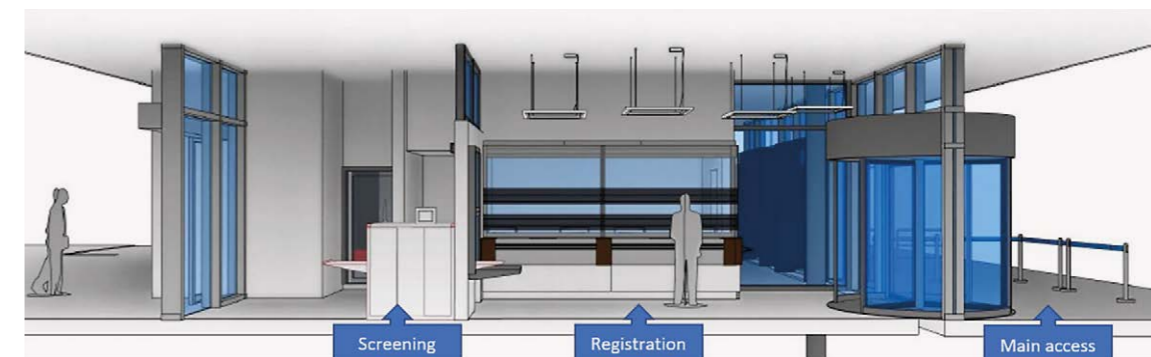


Diagram of the new access point

Safety, inclusion and progress at COP 26

The 2021 [United Nations Climate Change Conference](#), also known as COP 26, represented the UN's most ambitious effort to bring together cross-sector stakeholders for international dialogue since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The conference took place in Glasgow, in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, from 31 October to 13 November. Despite the immense challenges posed by travel restrictions, COP 26 broke records as the largest Conference of the Parties to date, with over 58,000 registrations, more than 38,000 badges issued on site, and 3,000 virtual badges generated.

UN Geneva took a leading role in equipping the conference with multilingual services, providing 50 out of the total of 62 interpreters and translators dispatched by the UN to Glasgow. While interpreters worked on site to render spoken English into the other five official UN languages, translators worked remotely from Geneva to translate all the official documentation for the conference.

Strict physical distancing protocols, daily testing requirements for all staff and participants, an increase in event livestreaming capabilities and the digitalization of document distribution processes ensured a safe, inclusive and meaningful COP 26 – resulting in the signing of the [Glasgow Climate Pact](#).



UN Photo: Jonathan Morgan

An interpreter works in a physically distanced booth at COP 26.

Sixth Review Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons

Adopted in 1980, the [Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons](#) continues to evolve and progress through the addition of new protocols and by broadening its scope of application. This flexibility has allowed the Convention to continuously contribute to the development and codification of new rules and norms of international humanitarian law.

In 2021, the sixth Review Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention was held at UN Geneva, from 13 to 17 December, under the Presidency of France. It provided an opportunity for the international community to continue exploring how to respond to emerging challenges in addressing and furthering international rules relating to the development and use of conventional weapons.

Against this backdrop, the Review Conference decided that the Group of Governmental Experts related to emerging technologies in the area of lethal autonomous weapons systems should continue its important work to strengthen the Convention.

The Review Conference also acknowledged that the substantive work on improvised explosive devices carried out in the framework of the Convention had contributed to raising awareness of the worldwide threat posed by such weapons. It further recognized the importance of a balanced involvement of women and men in the meetings under the Convention and its Protocols.

The next Review Conference is scheduled to take place in 2026.



UN Photo: Sophie Guillermé-Galet

The sixth Review Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, at the Palais des Nations

What is the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons?

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](#), known generally as the [Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons](#), seeks to ban or restrict the use of specific types of weapons that are considered to cause excessive injury or unnecessary suffering to combatants or to affect civilians indiscriminately.



Scan the QR code to find out more about the Convention.

Working towards the universalization of the Biological Weapons Convention

The Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction, more widely known as the [Biological Weapons Convention](#), was the first multilateral disarmament treaty banning an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. It has reached almost universal adherence, with only 14 States, mostly in Africa and the Pacific region, still outside its scope. To encourage the remaining States to join, the Geneva Branch of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs convened a [virtual regional workshop for African States](#) in March – a cooperative endeavour between its Biological Weapons Convention Implementation Support Unit and the Permanent Mission of Kenya to the United Nations Office at Geneva.

Combining expert presentations and testimonies from key officials, the workshop was tailored to build understanding about the Convention's provisions, and spotlighted ways in which the treaty would have a concrete impact in the African context. Senior officials of the three Biological Weapons Convention depositary Governments – the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America – encouraged the participating States to join the Convention via [video messages](#). The workshop was organized in the framework of [Council of the European Union Decision 2019/97](#), in support of the Convention.



Scan the QR code to learn more about [biological weapons](#).



Talkmore Maruta, Senior Biosafety and Biosecurity Officer at the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, discusses the role of the Centres in supporting the universalization of the Convention in Africa, during the virtual workshop.

The participation and role of women in international security: perspectives from the Conference on Disarmament

“Today, women's leadership is a cause. Tomorrow, it must be the norm. We can no longer exclude one half of humanity from international peace and security.”

Secretary-General António Guterres at the Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security on 21 October

On 26 August, the Presidency of Chile held a plenary meeting of the Geneva-based [Conference on Disarmament](#) dedicated to the participation and role of women in international security. At the meeting, States noted that the discourse on women and security must move past victim-centric narratives and instead acknowledge the contribution of women in conflict prevention and resolution and in peacebuilding, as well as the critical role that women play in sustaining peace.

The Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Izumi Nakamitsu, emphasized that ensuring the full and effective participation of women is not only the right thing to do, but the smart thing to do – and a critical step for effective and sustainable disarmament.

Though strides have been made in integrating gender perspectives into disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control processes, States expressed a desire for a more systematic approach to integrating gender perspectives. They also called for more opportunities to further discuss how to meaningfully enable the full and effective participation of women, and to continue the consideration of the gendered impact of weapons beyond the Conference on Disarmament.



The Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Izumi Nakamitsu, delivers remarks by video message to the plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament, chaired by Chile and with the presence of the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Tatiana Valovaya. The meeting was dedicated to the participation and role of women in international security.

Promoting the inclusion of youth perspectives in multilateral disarmament processes: International Youth Day in the Conference on Disarmament

In his [Agenda for Disarmament](#), United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres underscores the tremendous force that young people have to bring about change. Youth have historically played a key role in successful disarmament campaigns, such as relating to landmines, cluster munitions and nuclear weapons. They are also often the first to embrace new and innovative ways to interact, organize and mobilize, and advance bold solutions for the future.

In recognition of the valuable contribution of young people to sustainable peace and security, the Presidency of Canada of the [Conference on Disarmament](#) convened a formal plenary meeting dedicated to youth and disarmament, on [International Youth Day](#), 12 August. At the plenary, the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Izumi Nakamitsu, the Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth, Jayathma Wickramanayake, four United Nations Youth Champions for Disarmament and youth representatives from Conference on Disarmament member States called upon States to meaningfully engage in empowering young and diverse voices in disarmament discussions.

The United Nations Youth Champions for Disarmament, who are aged between 18 and 24 and come from countries across the globe, have received training in the general principles of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control, as part of a year-long programme convened by the [United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs](#) and its [#Youth4Disarmament](#) outreach initiative, with financial support from Germany.

In front of the Geneva disarmament community, they stressed that the young generation, "either as victims of war or as beneficiaries of peace", is ready and eager to contribute to debates, and highlighted their unique ability in using the transformative force of social media, leveraging grass-roots movements and ensuring linkages to the [Sustainable Development Goals](#).



United Nations Youth Champions for Disarmament address the Conference at its plenary meeting on youth and disarmament.

Youth for Biosecurity Initiative

The Geneva Branch of the [United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs](#) hosted the second [Biosecurity Diplomacy Workshop for Young Scientists from the Global South](#), virtually, from January to March. The event, better known as the Youth for Biosecurity Initiative, is part of the implementation of [Council of the European Union Decision 2019/97](#) in support of the [Biological Weapons Convention](#). It brought together [29 young scientists](#) from 17 countries in the Global South.

The main objectives of this interactive training were to provide the young scientists with an insight into multilateral diplomacy related to the Biological Weapons Convention. The training also provided them with an opportunity to reflect on their role as scientists in ensuring that biological agents are only used for peaceful purposes. The [#Youth4biosec](#) cohort remained engaged throughout the year, including during the [official meetings under the Biological Weapons Convention](#). With a view to the ninth

Review Conference of the Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention, scheduled for August 2022, the Youth for Biosecurity Initiative has developed partnerships with civil society organizations to ensure that young scientists have a seat at the table of global biosecurity diplomacy.



Scan the QR code to hear more about [the young scientists' experiences](#).



Participants in an online discussion during the second Biosecurity Diplomacy Workshop for Young Scientists from the Global South

CyberMediation Network: embracing the potential of digital technologies for mediation

Peaceful resolution of armed conflicts through mediation and good offices remains a human-centred endeavour, where in-person interaction is an essential ingredient for success. At the same time, digital technologies are transforming not just our life and our work, but also the dynamics of politics and conflict, and peace diplomacy is not immune to technological innovation.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, several mediation and dialogue processes have made intense use of digital technologies to overcome obstacles to travelling and in-person meetings. The benefits and efficiencies generated by the use of digital technologies in mediation have become apparent. At the same time, mediators have had to deal with a new set of risks that these technologies pose to peace processes. As the world gradually moves to a "new normal", technological innovations should be fully integrated into peace processes and mediation techniques, and new hybrid models of mediation, combining traditional and technology-based formats, are expected to emerge.

Against this backdrop, the CyberMediation Network has explored the area of digital peacemaking to find innovative solutions for facilitating online meetings, and for building trust between parties

to conflicts, both online and offline. The [Mediation Support Unit](#) of the UN's [Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs](#) and UN Geneva have facilitated the work of the CyberMediation Network since its inception in 2019.

During 2021, the CyberMediation Network developed several partnerships and joint projects on topics such as digital risk management, inclusion, social media in peace mediation, and digital process design and facilitation. Some examples:

In May, the Mediation Support Unit teamed up with [Build Up](#), the [Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue](#) and [Tandemic](#) to develop a self-paced course titled [Digital Process Design and Facilitation for](#)

[Mediation](#), which collates emerging good practices that can help peace negotiators design and deliver mediation activities, using online platforms and tools.

In June, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and [swisspeace](#) published a policy brief on [social media in peace mediation](#), which explored the use of social media in peace processes and provided practical recommendations to mediators on the potential benefits and risks of using social media.

In December, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, CMI – [Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation](#) and the [CyberPeace Institute](#) opened the [E-learning Platform on Cyber Hygiene and Digital Risk Management for Mediators](#). This interactive platform aims to help mediators and practitioners to build their awareness of digital risks and their capacity to manage them.

International Law Commission reconvenes

The seventy-second session of the [International Law Commission](#), postponed in 2020 owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, took place at UN Geneva in 2021 over a period of 11 weeks, from 26 April to 4 June and from 5 July to 6 August. It was held in hybrid format, allowing the Commission's 34 members, drawn from all five regional groups of the United Nations, to participate either in person or online.

Despite the challenging circumstances under which the session was held, the Commission was able to make progress in its work, which included completing two major texts, on protection of the atmosphere and the provisional application of treaties.

What is the International Law Commission?

The International Law Commission was established by the General Assembly in 1947 to undertake the Assembly's mandate under article 13 (1) (a) of the Charter of the United Nations to "initiate studies and make recommendations for the purpose of ... encouraging the progressive development of international law and its codification". The Commission's members are elected by the General Assembly to serve in their individual capacity for a term of five years.



The International Law Commission elected its first female Chair of the Drafting Committee, Patrícia Galvão Teles, at its seventy-second session.



The International Law Commission held its seventy-second session in hybrid format.



In 2021, the International Law Commission considered the second report of the Special Rapporteur on General Principles of Law, Marcelo Vázquez-Bermúdez (left).

The return of Executive Briefings

After a hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, UN Geneva's Executive Briefings series resumed in 2021. Six Executive Briefings were held – three in person and three in a hybrid format – with an average participation of 45 delegations per briefing.

The Executive Briefings, introduced in 2012, are a forum for senior officials of the UN and its partners to engage with the international community in Geneva on a range of key issues. In 2021, speakers briefed the international community on topics such as sustainable development, the repositioning of the UN development system, pandemic response and recovery in the context of urban development, and the rule of law.

Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed (left) briefs more than 70 delegations. The Executive Briefing of 29 November was held in a hybrid format.



UN Photo: Matija Potocnik

Multilateral cooperation through intercultural and interreligious dialogue

Despite persistent challenges posed by the ongoing pandemic, UN Geneva continued this year to actively promote multilateral dialogue between representatives of various faiths and cultures. As the General Assembly marked International Year of Peace and Trust in 2021, enhanced engagement with faith-based groups and other religious actors provided a timely opportunity to promote principles shared across the world's major religions, including peace, solidarity and tolerance.

Several virtual and hybrid events were organized in 2021 for Geneva-based diplomatic and religious communities to observe sacred days and religious holidays such as Vesak and Nowruz. During such events, UN Geneva Director-General Tatiana Valovaya used her remarks to encourage mutual understanding and interreligious dialogue, which both constitute important dimensions of a culture of peace.

In April, the Director-General took part in the High-level Event on Fraternity, Multilateralism and Peace organized by the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See. The participants recognized the valuable role that religion plays in both preventing and resolving conflicts. They also reaffirmed the need to encourage interreligious dialogue, which could pave the way for improved understanding of our shared values, and enhance peace, social stability and respect for diversity.

Furthermore, with the support of UN Geneva, the Geneva office of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations officially opened its doors on 8 November at the Palais des Nations in the presence of the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Spain and the Permanent Representative of Turkey, among others. The Alliance of Civilizations is a global platform for intercultural and interreligious dialogue and cooperation. Its Geneva office will further the collaboration between the UN entities, faith actors and many other international and non-governmental organizations based in Geneva.

The Geneva office of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations is opened by (from left to right) the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Spain, José Manuel Albares Bueno; the Director-General of UN Geneva, Tatiana Valovaya; the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, Miguel Ángel Moratinos; and the Permanent Representative of Turkey, Sadik Arslan.



UN Photo: Alliance of Civilizations



UN Geneva Director-General Tatiana Valovaya (bottom right) among the participants in the High-level Event on Fraternity, Multilateralism and Peace

A high-level call for peace, diversity and our common humanity

Over 30 world leaders and senior UN personalities exchanged ideas and perspectives at a conference titled "[Peace, Diversity and Our Common Humanity](#)". The event, held at UN Geneva on 4 and 5 October, was aimed at encouraging multilateral cooperation in times of complex global challenges.

Different aspects of the current world landscape were examined, in four cross-cutting panel discussions. Distinguished panellists, including many former Heads of State and Government, provided their unique experiences and valuable inputs on pressing issues such as peace and security, equality, the climate emergency and sustainable development.

"Peace, diversity and our common humanity remain the guiding concepts of United Nations work and continue to be the core values of the United Nations Office at Geneva," said Director-General Tatiana Valovaya at the opening session.

Recognizing the critical role that civil society plays in issues right across the United Nations agenda, UN Geneva collaborates with a vast and diverse network of more than 750 non-governmental organizations. This high-profile event, co-organized by UN Geneva and the Nizami Ganjavi International Center, is one of many examples of the strong partnership between the United Nations and civil society.



Scan the QR code to revisit the high-level "[Peace, Diversity and Our Common Humanity](#)" conference.

Librarians and archivists at your service online, on-site and on demand

In 2021, the [UN Library and Archives Geneva](#) produced new and customized services and products to support both the research and the practice of multilateralism. The Library's Virtual Service Desk sent 7,400 answers to requests and thousands of scanned pages to users around the globe. Archivists enabled access for 300 researchers to millions of pages of digitized League of Nations content.

Activity returned to the reading rooms: users came back to leaf through newspapers and magazines, carry out research using physical and online resources, or browse the new special displays of books and digital materials on topics such as human rights, diplomacy or artificial intelligence. Library and [Museum](#) visits also resumed in October.

For the [International Law Commission's](#) 72nd session, which was conducted in a hybrid format, the Library provided a customized package of services. It included reserved spaces in the Library for Commission members to carry out their research, easy digital access for those taking part online, a dedicated research assistance service via live chat, and a tailored online research guide and bibliographies covering all topics on the agenda of the session.



Photo: Nizami Ganjavi International Center

Some of the speakers at the "Peace, Diversity and Our Common Humanity" event organized by UN Geneva and the Nizami Ganjavi International Center



UN Photo: Carla Bellota

The newspapers and magazines corner of the UN Library and Archives Geneva

UN75: The Future We Want, the United Nations We Need – final report launched at UN Geneva

In January 2020, the United Nations launched a global consultation to mark its 75th anniversary. Through surveys and dialogues held around the world, the UN asked people about their hopes and fears for the future. It was the largest stocktake to date of people’s perceptions about international cooperation and what they think should be prioritized. Over 1.5 million people from all countries and all walks of life took part in this “largest global conversation ever”.

The Future We Want, the United Nations We Need – the final report presenting the results of this global exercise – was launched at UN Geneva on 8 January 2021. The Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Preparations for the Commemoration of the United Nations’ 75th Anniversary, Fabrizio Hochschild Drummond, announced the key findings to the press corps at UN Geneva at a press briefing and gave interviews for our English-language and French-language podcasts. The launch also included an outreach campaign across UN social media accounts.



People from around the world had their say as part of the UN75 global consultation.



People who responded to the UN75 global consultation shared their hopes and dreams for the future of international cooperation.

Reaffirming the values of the Charter of the United Nations

This year, the Director-General, Tatiana Valovaya, celebrated the anniversary of the signing of the Charter of the United Nations by inviting all Permanent Representatives of Member States to symbolically renew their collective commitment to the Charter and to multilateralism. Between the International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace on 24 April and United Nations Day on 24 October, Permanent Representatives visited the UN Library and Archives Geneva to sign a large poster featuring the text of the Charter.

Permanent Representatives also received a copy of the photo book *100*, published by UN Geneva, which illustrates the role of Geneva in supporting multilateralism and diplomacy for peace. The book marks 100 years of multilateralism in Geneva by spotlighting 100 events, objects, documents and personalities that have contributed to the development of multilateralism in the city, from the creation of the League of Nations to the United Nations today.



Scan the QR code to watch a video about this initiative.



UN Geneva Director-General Tatiana Valovaya in front of the United Nations Charter poster that features the signatures of a range of Permanent Representatives



The Permanent Representative of Namibia, Julia Imene-Chanduru, signs the United Nations Charter poster.

Projecting multilateral diplomacy to the world

UNTV Geneva provides live broadcast content to news agencies as well as via the [European Broadcasting Union](#). It also distributes edited content with storylines through a variety of portals, including the UN Geneva multimedia newsroom and [UNifeed](#), a central platform for storing and sharing UN audiovisual material from around the world. UNTV Geneva produced almost 500 TV news stories in 2021; in February, through UNifeed alone, 187 broadcasters made use of 48 UNTV Geneva stories 1,621 times – an all-time record for a single month.

Throughout the pandemic, UNTV services also ensured business continuity for hundreds of hybrid press conferences featuring the Geneva-based UN agencies, funds and programmes.

The role of [UN Web TV](#) in enabling people to participate in and to monitor meetings at UN Geneva became more and more important during the pandemic. For example, through live webcast services, Libyan citizens were able to follow the [Libyan Political Dialogue Forum](#), at which their interim Prime Minister and President were selected. In 2021, UN Web TV in Geneva livestreamed close to 900 events. For the 46th session of the Human Rights Council, in February and March, more than 330,000 people from every country in the world tuned in to follow the proceedings via UN Web TV.

In 2021, UN Geneva’s Information Service produced a total of 1,200 news stories in French and English across the mediums of text, radio and television, as well as more than 2,000 official photos.

Scan the QR code to access the Information Service’s [interview](#) with Zarifa Ghafari, an Afghan activist attending events at the UN in Geneva, which had more than 7,200 plays and some 150 downloads on [UN News](#).



UN Geneva produces coverage at the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum.



Live webcasting by UNTV of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum



UN Geneva Director-General Tatiana Valovaya is interviewed in the UNTV studio for United Nations Day.

Multi-what? A short guide to multilateralism and its impact on our daily lives

What is multilateralism? What impact does it have on our lives? Initiated by UN Geneva's Perception Change Project and produced in collaboration with the UN Library and Archives Geneva, the *Multi-what?* booklet – and its accompanying social media campaign – aims to answer commonly asked questions about multilateralism and broaden the public's understanding of this complex and sometimes misunderstood concept.

Multi-what? explores the origins and evolution of multilateralism, and shows how multilateral cooperation around the world shapes and enhances our daily lives. It also highlights the role of Geneva as a hub for multilateral cooperation.

The publication is available both in printed form and online, in English and French.

Scan the QR code to access the *Multi-what?* website.



English version



French version



UN Photo: Niccolò Ventura

The *Multi-what?* publication, in English and French

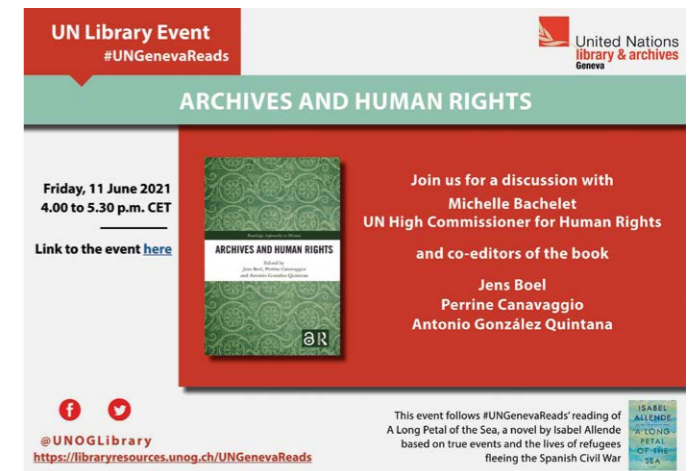
Archives and human rights

What is the relationship between archives and human rights? What if archives were not only a tool for looking backwards but also a powerful means to build a better future? How can archives and archivists contribute to stronger multilateralism? These were the key themes at an interactive event held virtually in June by UN Geneva for International Archives Week.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, and the editors of the book *Human Rights and Archives*, spoke at the event. They emphasized the importance of archives in shedding light on human rights violations and in supporting truth and reconciliation processes. They also discussed the relevance of archivists, who play an important role in determining authenticity, preserving institutional memory and facilitating access to information, especially in the face of fake news. Finally, the discussion explored the changes and opportunities provided by new technologies.



Scan the QR code to watch the event.



The flyer for the "Archives and Human Rights" event