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Chapter four

A centre for art, culture and history

UN Photo: Matja Potocnik



Cultural diplomacy at UN Geneva

In 2021, UN Geneva continued to foster cultural diplomacy by providing a platform for sharing art and culture in different forms. UN Geneva's [Cultural Activities Programme](#), in partnership with Member States and international organizations, curated 10 events and activities and offered them to delegates, staff and visitors. Art exhibitions, film screenings and concerts were held both virtually and in person, as UN Geneva continued to navigate the fast-evolving epidemiological situation and the associated restrictions.

Central to the Cultural Activities Programme are multilingualism and a shared understanding of United Nations values and principles. The events and activities this year showcased new perspectives on these themes, in six different languages. Some of the events are highlighted on these next pages.

Versus World Health Organization June



The [World Health Organization](#) staged an exhibition titled *Versus* at the Palais des Nations, on the theme of resilience. *Versus* featured a selection of artworks and performances from 20 art initiatives around the world. During the opening ceremony for the exhibition, panellists discussed the topic of resilience and art.



Scan the QR code to watch the [opening ceremony of Versus](#).

Baltic Appeal to the United Nations Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania September



In 2021, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania celebrated the 100th anniversary of their accession to the League of Nations and the 30th anniversary of their admission to the United Nations. To mark this occasion, their respective Permanent Missions in Geneva jointly organized a historical exhibition at the Palais des Nations. *Baltic Appeal to the United Nations* showcased unique archival documents compiled by the [UN Library and Archives Geneva](#) which traced the path of the Baltic States' membership of the United Nations.

"One Humanity" concert United Nations Alliance of Civilizations November



On 8 November, the [United Nations Alliance of Civilizations](#) opened its new office at UN Geneva. To celebrate, it partnered with the [ONUART Foundation](#) to organize a concert entitled "One Humanity", featuring renowned German tenor Jonas Kaufmann.

The World in Faces**Russian Federation****November*****Dostoevsky and Music*****Russian Federation****November**

The World in Faces, an exhibition by the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation, highlighted the world's diversity. The exhibition comprised portraits captured by photographer Alexander Khimushin of indigenous people from 90 different ethnic groups around the world, all wearing their traditional clothing. The opening ceremony included a live performance from Russian folk band Heiro.

On 26 November, at the Palais des Nations, the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation celebrated the 200th anniversary of the birth of the Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky. On this occasion, artists Anastasia Chertok and Dmitry Kondratkov performed some of Dostoevsky's favourite operas as well as songs based on his works.



International Bazaar returns to the Palais des Nations

Following a hiatus in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the protective measures and restrictions put in place at the Palais des Nations, UN Geneva and the [United Nations Women's Guild Geneva](#) joined forces in 2021 to hold – in compliance with safety protocols – the traditional International Bazaar.

Staff members, delegates and visitors enjoyed cuisine and crafts provided by the permanent missions to the UN in Geneva. These festivities in the halls of the Palais des Nations were a unique celebration of the different cultures and talents found in our global community.

Profits collected from the event will allow the United Nations Women's Guild Geneva to advance its work supporting women and children in need and the UN's commitment to equal rights and opportunities for all.



The Director-General of UN Geneva, Tatiana Valovaya, and the Permanent Representative of Switzerland, Jürg Lauber, visit a stall at the Bazaar.



UN Geneva Director-General Tatiana Valovaya delivers opening remarks at the Bazaar.

Ciné-ONU Geneva continues throughout the pandemic

Ciné-ONU Geneva organizes regular film screenings followed by debates on a wide range of issues that the United Nations works on. Early on in the pandemic, Ciné-ONU Geneva offered online screenings and discussions, and invited Ciné-ONU Brussels (the originator of the Ciné-ONU concept) and Ciné-ONU Vienna to join this initiative. Bringing the strengths of the three Ciné-ONU programmes together had the effect of expanding and diversifying our audiences, with some first-time viewers taking part from as far afield as Canada, China, India and Mexico.

In 2021, six virtual screenings were held, illustrating the rescue of Jews during the Second World War thanks to an Albanian code of honour, the Great Green Wall project to fight the effects of climate change and desertification in Africa, what it is like to be a woman working in the culinary industry, online abuse against women, climate change and the science of our planet, and how press freedom in defence of truth and democracy has been championed by journalist and 2021 Nobel Peace Prize recipient Maria Ressa.

When the epidemiological situation improved in Switzerland in mid-2021, Ciné-ONU Geneva made a return to one of the city's cinema houses, the Cinerama Empire, for two screenings that addressed sustainable agriculture, and how today's news production affects the way we see the world. To be continued!



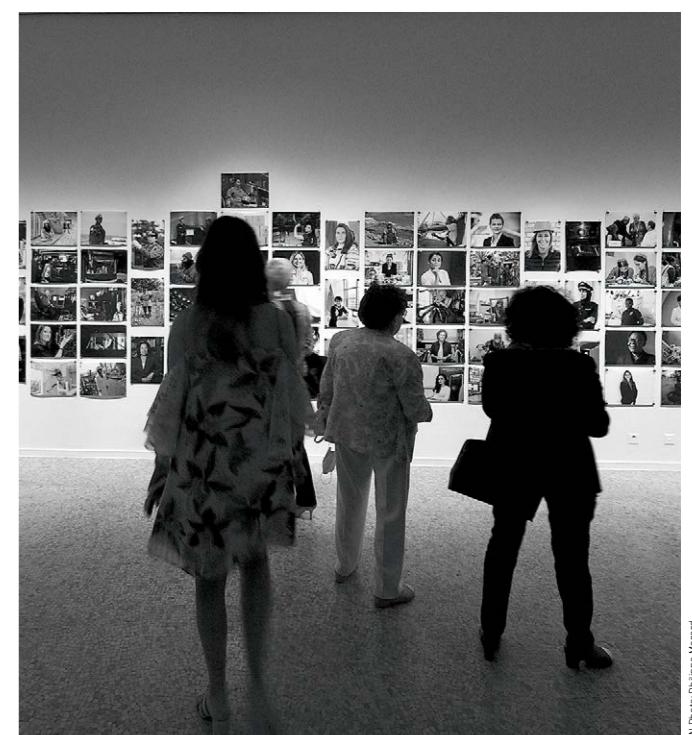
Art, women and history at Geneva's Musée Rath

UN Geneva held an exhibition this year to bring international and local Geneva together in celebration of multilateralism and the values of the [United Nations Charter](#). The exhibition, entitled *Divers Égales Unis*, was held at Geneva's Musée Rath from 1 September to 10 October. It was organized in partnership with the D10 Art Space gallery, the City of Geneva, the Geneva Red Cross and the Lian Foundation.

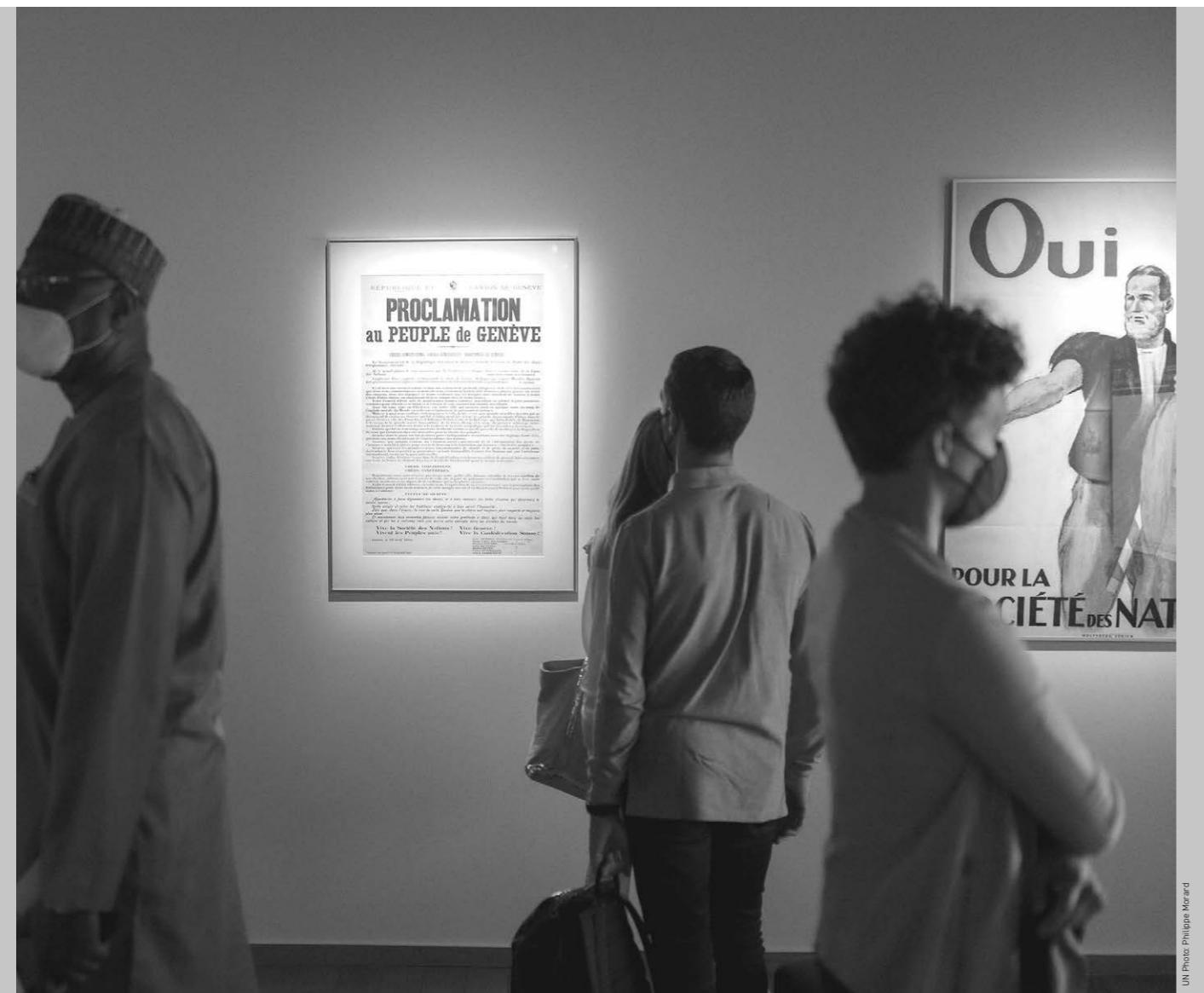
The exhibition was made up of a number of components:

- Eighty-two artworks from UN Geneva's art collection, alongside a curated display by the [UN Library and Archives Geneva](#) with videos explaining the evolution of multilateralism and the role played by the special spirit of Geneva
- *Palais des Nations: A Time for Reflection*, which featured photographs of the Palais des Nations taken by UN Geneva Director-General Tatiana Valovaya during the first COVID-19 lockdown in 2020
- *Not A Woman's Job?*, an initiative of UN Geneva's [Perception Change Project](#)
- A selection of archives from the [Geneva Red Cross](#) and from its first woman president, Alice Favre
- An artistic project by the [Geneva University of Art and Design](#)
- Photographic portraits by Ana D. Lombard of women personalities of Geneva

Not a Woman's Job?
portraits displayed in
the *Divers Égales Unis*
exhibition



UN Photo: Philippe Mora



UN Photo: Philippe Morard
Visitors at the *Divers Égales Unis* exhibition



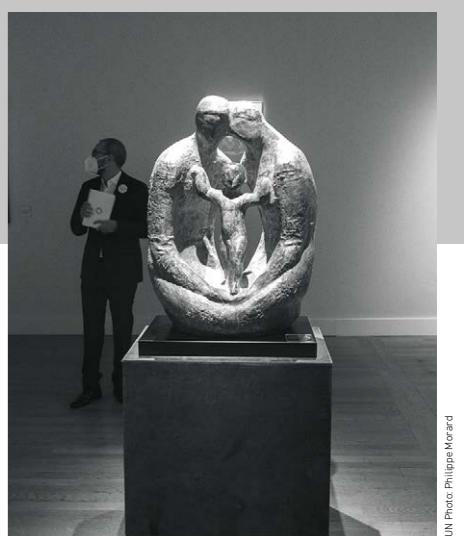
UN Photo: Philippe Morard
Artworks exhibited as part of *Divers Égales Unis*



UN Photo: Philippe Morard
Visitors at the *Divers Égales Unis* exhibition at Geneva's Musée Rath



UN Photo: Aysen Lina
A visitor to the exhibition surveys artworks from UN Geneva's art collection



UN Photo: Philippe Morard



UN Photo: Philippe Morard
A visitor to the exhibition views a painting from UN Geneva's art collection

Images of the Palais des Nations displayed across Geneva

In March 2020, the halls of the Palais des Nations fell temporarily quiet in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown and switch to telecommuting. It was during that time that UN Geneva Director-General Tatiana Valovaya took the opportunity to walk through the iconic buildings without the usual hustle and bustle. She soaked in the architecture and reflected on the contribution of the Palais to diplomacy over the years.

Seeing the Palais des Nations in this way, she decided to capture it through a series of black-and-white photographs. After sharing them with colleagues to show how different the Palais looked, Ms. Valovaya was then invited to exhibit them publicly.

An exhibition titled *Palais des Nations: A Time for Reflection*, organized by UN Geneva's Perception Change Project and the Centre de la photographie Genève, was held from 24 February to 17 March at 160 outdoor locations around Geneva. Seventeen black-and-white photographs taken by Ms. Valovaya were showcased to share with the public the beauty and history of the Palais.



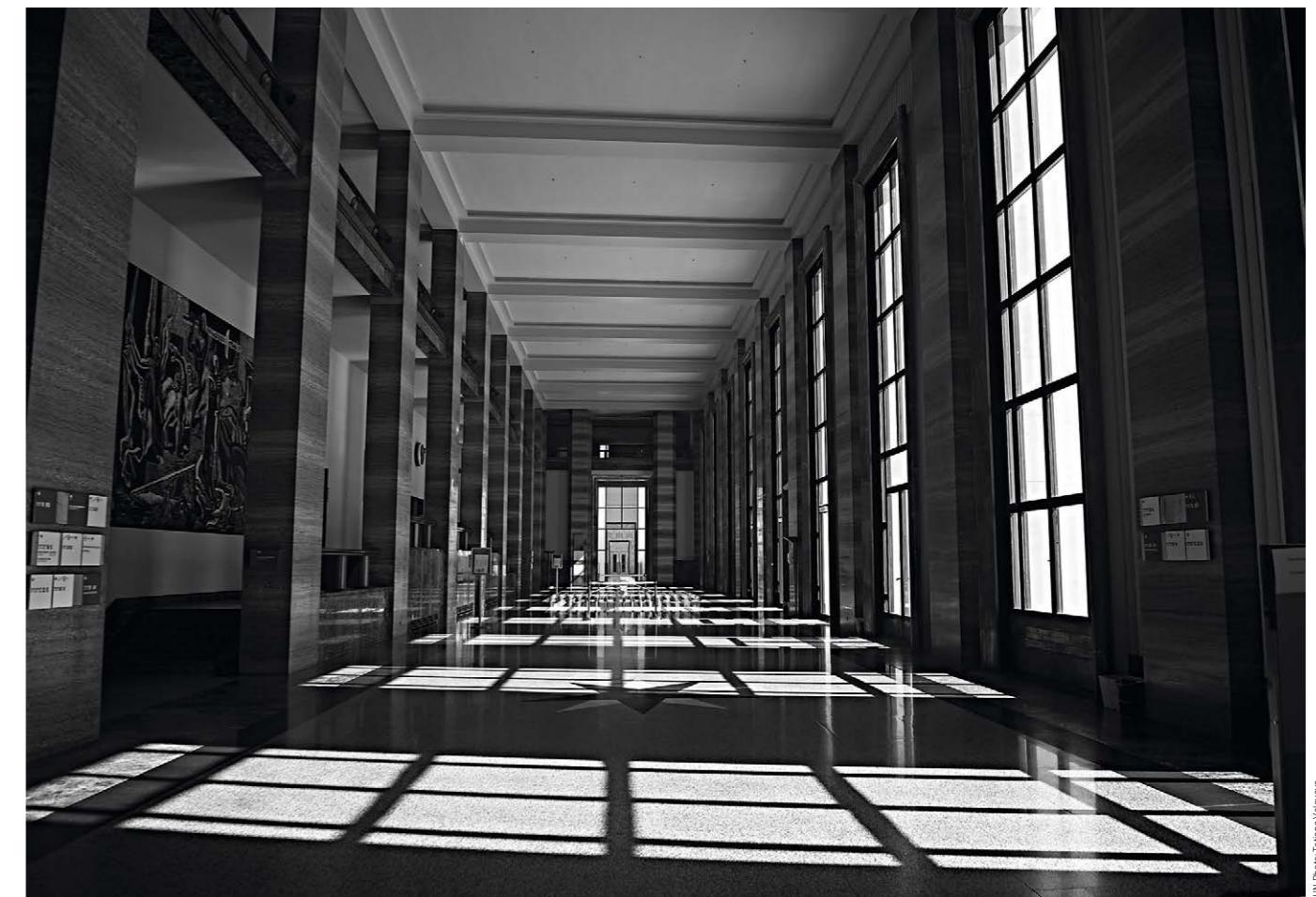
The artwork *Ecce Homo II* in the Palais des Nations is seen in a new light during the first COVID-19 lockdown, in March 2020.

“During the confinement, the Palais was empty but I never had the impression that it was abandoned. On the contrary, I think that its walls convey an encouraging message because so many events took place there, so many challenges were overcome. When you become aware of this, then you can tell yourself that we will also find solutions to our current issues.”

UN Geneva Director-General Tatiana Valovaya



Scan the QR code to read an [interview](#) in French that Ms. Valovaya gave at the time of the exhibition.



UN Photo: Tatiana Valovaya

The iconic Salle des pas perdus captured by UN Geneva Director-General Tatiana Valovaya during the first COVID-19 lockdown

L'Oiseau bleu at UN Geneva

As the historic Palais des Nations undergoes renovation, a temporary facility – Tempus – has been built in the grounds of the Palais to host multilateral conferences. In 2021, two large-scale canvasses were added to the exterior of the building to represent Sustainable Development Goal 17 on partnerships for the Goals, and specifically, the importance of strengthening partnerships between Governments, civil society and the private sector.

L'Oiseau bleu, conceived by Collectif 1m83 Art and UN Geneva's Perception Change Project, is composed of five images created by Japanese photographer Yoshinori Mizutani. The installations depict bright yellow birds, symbolizing a bright flight towards a better future. The artwork was inaugurated on 30 June and will be in place until 2024.

In October, the Perception Change Project, Collectif 1m83 Art and UN Geneva's visitor guides arranged for more than 350 students between the ages of 6 and 10 to be taken on a guided tour of the Palais des Nations, the *L'Oiseau bleu* canvasses being a primary focus of their visit. Through a sensory-driven experience, the children learned about the meaning of the artwork and its symbolism for the United Nations. The children rounded off their tour with an origami workshop, creating bird figures to be displayed in the Palais.

"Let us be inspired by these exceptional works of art and reflect on the role we must play in our own worlds to achieve sustainable development for a better future."

UN Geneva Director-General Tatiana Valovaya



One of the *L'Oiseau bleu* canvasses on the Tempus building



A close-up of one of the *L'Oiseau bleu* canvasses



One of the *L'Oiseau bleu* canvasses on the side of the Tempus building



Students tour the Palais des Nations and visit the *L'Oiseau bleu* canvasses adorning the Tempus building.

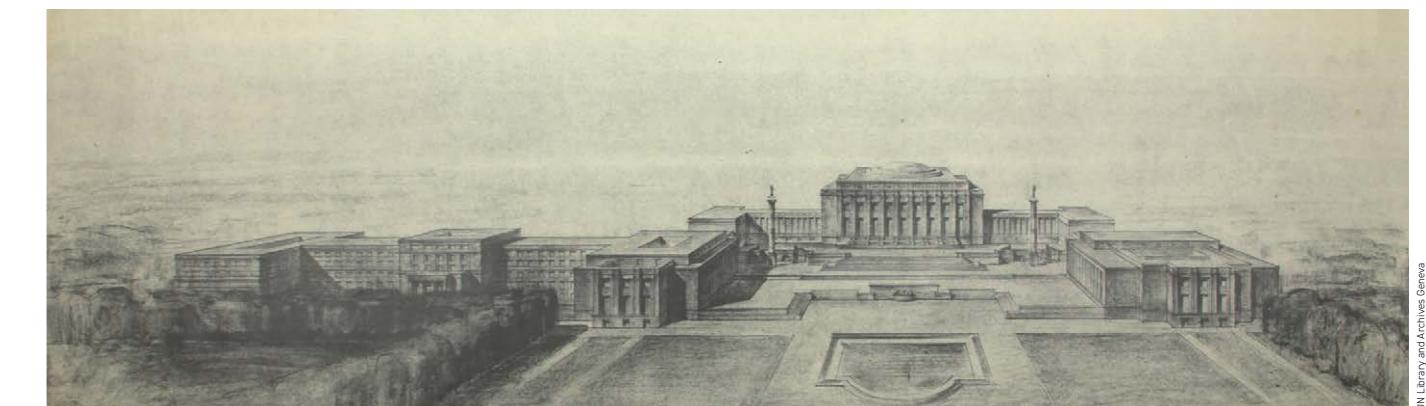
UN Photo Niccolò Ventura



Students create origami birds during their visit to the Palais des Nations and the *L'Oiseau bleu* canvasses.

UN Photo Niccolò Ventura

HiSTORIES: the history of the Palais des Nations



UN Library and Archives Geneva

The Palais des Nations is part of the daily working life of UN Geneva staff members, diplomats, civil society representatives, journalists, and many more. But when was it built? What are the architectural features? Where does the interior decoration come from?

An episode of the *HiSTORIES* series, released in July, shone a light on the heritage of the Palais des Nations and its special connection with multilateralism. It retraced the construction of the iconic building, from the launch of the international architectural competition in 1926 to the building's completion in 1938.

The *HiSTORIES* series explores key issues, events and personalities of our past based on documents from the League of Nations archives, which are managed and preserved by the [UN Library and Archives Geneva](#). Other *HiSTORIES* topics in 2021 included the life of the peace activist and first female recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, [Bertha von Suttner](#), and how to use UN Geneva's new online archives platform to research multilateralism.



Scan the QR code to watch the *HiSTORIES* episode on the Palais des Nations.



Scan the QR code to access all the *HiSTORIES* episodes.

Drawing of the project for the Palais des Nations

Heritage protection as part of the Strategic Heritage Plan: renovation of Room 11

The protection and promotion of heritage is a key objective of the Strategic Heritage Plan. One example of these efforts is the interior design of Room 11.

Room 11 was the work of an architect from the Netherlands, Julius Luthmann, who also designed the office of the Director-General at UN Geneva, formerly the office of the Secretary-General of the League of Nations. The room was a donation from the Netherlands and decoration work was carried out by H.P. Mutters and Son of The Hague.

Under the Strategic Heritage Plan, the major renovation works to Room 11 will include making it fully accessible to persons with disabilities. This will involve relocation of the interpreters' booths from one side to the other in order to give lift access to the upper

floor for persons with reduced mobility, automatic doors at the entrance and the podium, and three desks adapted for wheelchair users. New audiovisual and conferencing systems will be installed and will include new webcasting cameras and a new technical room.

Room 11 is filled with leather panels. Before work on the restoration of the room began, the state of the leather panels, and their mounting system on the walls, were carefully studied. Most of the panels were in very good condition, except those located near the windows, where heat variations and light had caused some degradation. Those panels will be repaired, while the others will be reused as they are. At the end of the renovation works, the leather panels will be reinstalled.



An initial concept drawing of Room 11



Room 11 in 1935

UN Photo UN Library and Archives Geneva



Before the renovation



Before the renovation works began

Photo Andrea Hoffmann



Before the renovation works began



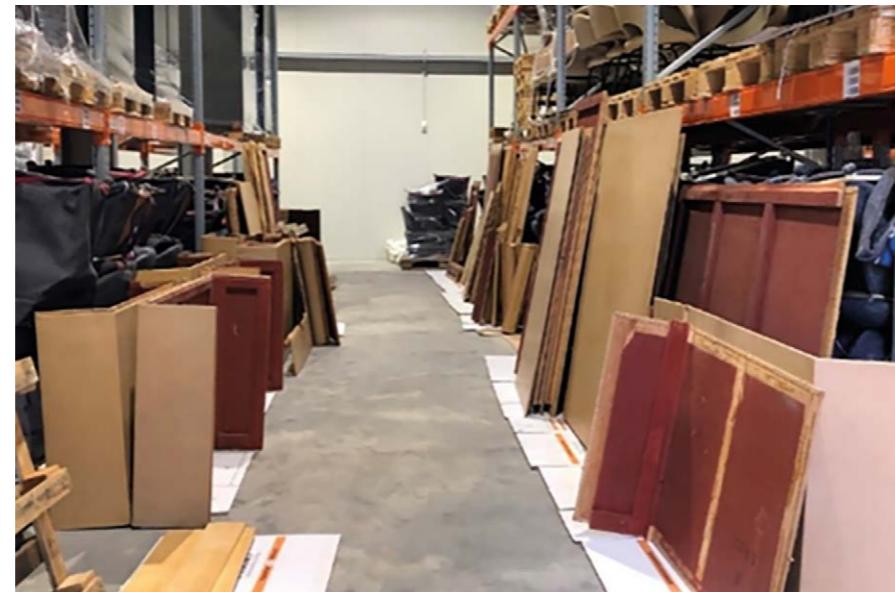
An example of damage to the leather panels due to exposure to light and heat, as a result of their proximity to a window



Before the renovation works began, three panels were removed to study their construction and mounting; each panel is numbered on the back.



Following removal of the leather panels, white protective sheets were placed on the wooden panelling below.



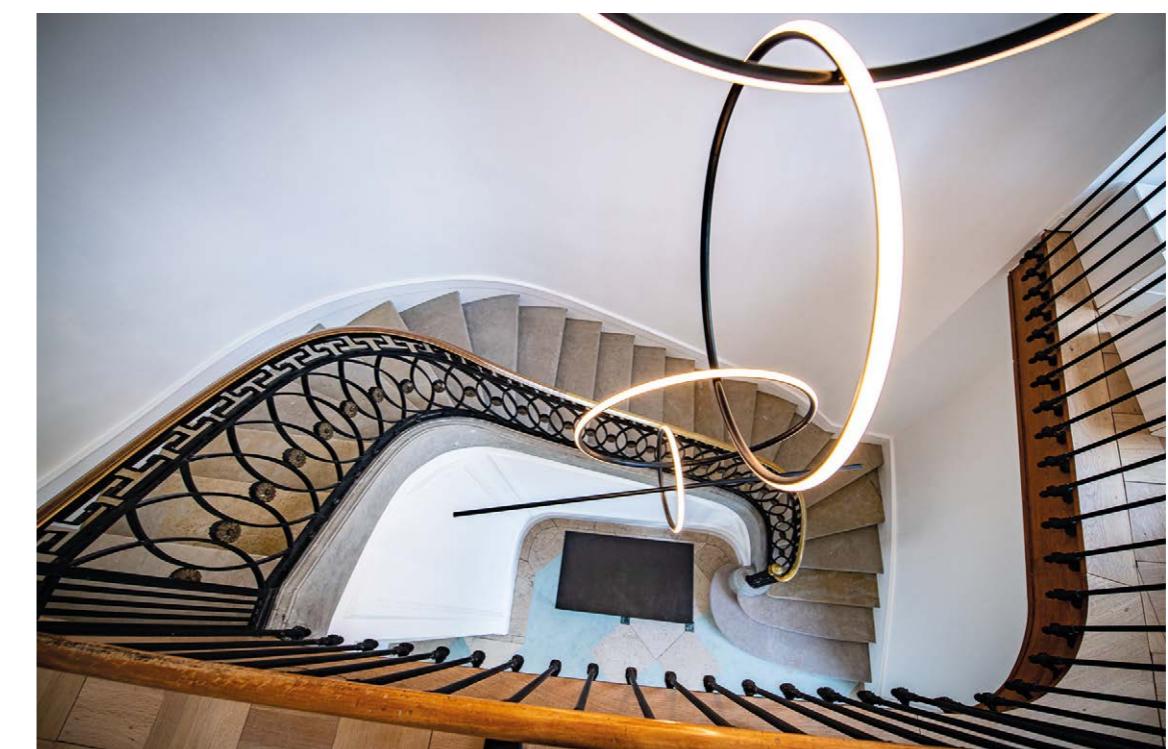
The panels are stored carefully during the renovation works.

Restoring the historic Villa la Pelouse

Nestled on the north-eastern side of the Palais des Nations campus is a once run-down old villa with a rich history – la Pelouse. In its glory days, queens, kings and nobles as well as UN Secretaries-General and Directors-General sipped their tea, talked, danced and lived there.

With the building in disrepair, UN Geneva launched a renovation project in 2020 to bring the former splendour of this treasure back to life, and in the process made many discoveries. Analysis of the original materials revealed that Villa la Pelouse had been a prestigious 19th century mansion, with black-and-white marble floors in the entranceway, historic parquet in most of the rooms, and walls embellished with decorative detail and mint-green woodwork.

In renovating the villa, UN Geneva sought to accentuate the elements of historical value, patiently restoring and protecting what had been hidden or battered over time. Non-original elements were given a contemporary touch to avoid any inconsistencies between different historical periods. The overall design of the restored villa is simple and monolithic, giving prominence to what “was there”; never overpowering the past, but accompanying it into the present day. Through this project, completed in 2021, Villa la Pelouse can continue to accumulate a rich history and serve many generations to come.



A renovated staircase in Villa La Pelouse

UN Photo Majda Potocnik



An antique stove
inside the renovated
Villa La Pelouse

UN Photo: Milija Potocnik



A meeting room
inside Villa La
Pelouse

UN Photo: Milija Potocnik

Preserving institutional memory during renovations

The move out of older offices to newly constructed spaces at the Palais des Nations as part of the [Strategic Heritage Plan](#) has afforded UN Geneva a valuable opportunity to access, appraise and preserve records that had long been housed in offices and storerooms.

Thanks to widespread, hands-on records management initiatives before and during the moving process, UN Geneva's archives grew by 700 linear metres in 2021 – more than twice as much as in previous annual transfers. The transfer of records and archives to the [UN Library and Archives Geneva](#) will not only ensure their preservation and accessibility, but also enrich the institutional memory of the organization.

For the UN Library and Archives Geneva, this meant mapping its paper collections, in preparation for a temporary closure and renovation of its storage areas. The collections consist of a unique blend of League of Nations archives, official United Nations records, academic books, publications by United Nations entities, and donations from governments, scholars and staff members. They reflect the interests and the work of the Organization throughout its existence, and provide a historical perspective on political, economic, social and human rights issues, enabling staff, diplomats and others to make informed decisions now and in the future.



A UN Geneva staff
member retrieves
records from one of the
Library and Archives
repositories.

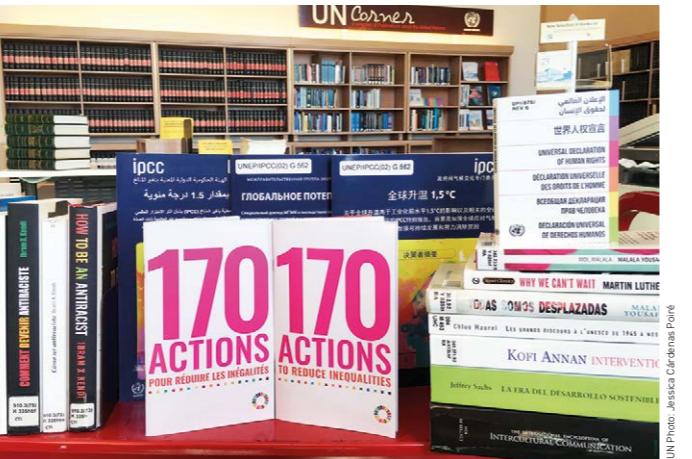
UN Photo: Aylin Lira

History in six official languages and more: UN Library and Archives Geneva

Did you know that the [UN Library and Archives Geneva](#) offers resources in 189 languages? The League of Nations Library – the predecessor to the current UN Library and Archives Geneva – aimed to develop a multilingual and multicultural collection ever since it was founded in 1919. The Library and Archives has built upon the heritage received from the League of Nations Library and now offers over 1.5 million physical volumes, 4 million UN documents and numerous digital resources in the six official languages of the UN as well as in many other languages. From essays on peace written in Latin in the 16th century, to first editions by renowned thinkers on economics and law, to UN reports on human rights, disarmament and climate change, to encyclopedias, dictionaries, academic journals and international newspapers, the extensive collection encompasses a rich history of international developments in multiple languages.



Scan the QR code to discover everything the [UN Library and Archives Geneva](#) has to offer.



Multilingual publications at the UN Library and Archives Geneva

UN Photo: Jessica Celdeira Pinto

Online access to the League of Nations archives

In November, UN Geneva launched a new online archives platform to provide truly global access to UN records and the archives of the [League of Nations](#). This includes content produced under the remarkable [Total Digital Access to the League of Nations Archives](#) project, through which we are digitizing all 15 million pages of the League's archives. The project will be completed in 2022.

The new platform provides state-of-the-art search functionality for users and is a cornerstone to providing archive access to the global community. It has received positive feedback, with researchers commenting on the benefits of providing access to the whole spectrum of the archives, which are critical to understanding the development of contemporary multilateralism.



Scan the QR code to access the new UN Archives Geneva platform.



Scan the QR code to watch a [HISTORIES](#) episode on using the new online platform.



Scan the QR code to learn more about the [Total Digital Access to the League of Nations Archives](#) project.

The new online platform

Search results on the new online platform

Twentieth anniversary of the United Nations receiving the Nobel Peace Prize

In 2001, the United Nations and its Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts in contributing to "a better organized and more peaceful world".

To mark the 20th anniversary of the award and to build greater awareness about the United Nations and Kofi Annan, UN Geneva produced a series of videos. A range of people were interviewed for the series, including young professionals currently working for the United Nations, staff who were working for the Organization in 2001, and colleagues of Mr. Annan. Combining anecdotes, recollections, and personal impressions, the interviews give an insight into Mr. Annan and his legacy, and shine a light on what the United Nations has accomplished in the past 20 years and what still needs to be achieved.



Scan the QR code to watch the series of interviews.



Reggae music: a way to remember slavery

On 23 September, the United Nations Information Service in Geneva held a panel discussion entitled "Reggae as an Instrument of the Collective Memory of Slavery". It followed a high-level meeting at the General Assembly on reparations, racial justice and equality for people of African descent – a meeting marking the twentieth anniversary of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Durban, South Africa.

The UN Geneva event focused on the close ties that reggae music has not only with Jamaica, but also with Africa and, more specifically, to slavery. Experts on the discussion panel approached the subject from the perspectives of both musicology and history. Sharing theoretical contributions, musical extracts and accounts of lived experiences, the panellists showed how reggae – included in 2018 on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity – contributes to shaping and transmitting the collective memory of people of African descent around the world.

The speakers included Ibrahima Guissé, a member of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; Mona Rishmawi, the Chief of the Rule of Law, Equality and Non-Discrimination Branch of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; Marc Ismail, a historian and teacher, and creator of the independent label Soul of Anbessa; Giulia Bonacci, a historian and researcher at the Institute of Research for Development, University of Côte d'Azur; Mathias Liengme, a musicologist; Carol Simpson, a lawyer and expert in intellectual property law; and Warren Wallace, a teacher and the president of the Jamaica Association in Switzerland.

The event was held at the Musée d'ethnographie de Genève and was webcast live on UN Web TV and Facebook.



Scan the QR code to watch a video recording of this event.

