



CHAPTER ONE STRENGTHENING OUR ECOSYSTEM

The international community gathers at the Palais des Nations on the occasion of the high-level segment of the fifty-fifth session of the Human Rights Council at the Palais des Nations.
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A year of high-level diplomacy and global impact

In 2024, UN Geneva continued to affirm its role as a global centre for multilateralism, servicing and hosting a series of high-profile international conferences and meetings that shaped international policies and enhanced global cooperation. Among the meetings were those of key Geneva-based entities such as the Economic Commission for Europe, the Office for Disarmament Affairs, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. UN Geneva’s expertise in conference management, information coverage, security and diplomatic engagement ensured the seamless execution of General Assembly-mandated intergovernmental processes.

Promoting human rights around the world at the Human Rights Council

In February, the high-level segment of the fifty-fifth session of the Human Rights Council took place; Member States, civil society and human rights experts engaged in discussions on pressing human rights issues. Discussions focused on a range of issues, including humanitarian crises, emerging challenges in digital rights, and climate justice, highlighting the Council’s central role in addressing contemporary human rights concerns. In key resolutions, the Council focused attention on measures to enhance climate justice initiatives and protect digital privacy.



The Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, addresses participants at the high-level segment of the fifty-fifth session of the Human Rights Council at the Palais des Nations.
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Shaping global health policies at the World Health Assembly

In May, the World Health Organization convened its seventy-seventh World Health Assembly at the Palais des Nations, with the theme “All for health, health for all”. Participants discussed and agreed on amendments to the International Health Regulations, further shaping international health policies and strengthening global cooperation on urgent health challenges. Following the adoption of the resolutions, the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, welcomed the “common desire by Member States to protect their own people, and the world’s, from the shared risk of public health emergencies and future pandemics”.



The seventy-seventh World Health Assembly, held at the Palais des Nations, was focused on the theme “All for Health, Health for All”.
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Charting a new course in the light of the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

In June, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development celebrated its sixtieth anniversary with an event entitled “Charting a New Development Course in a Changing World”, held at the Palais des Nations. The discussions were focused on adapting multilateral trade policies to global shifts, and underscored the Conference’s ongoing contributions to global trade and development. Government representatives, United Nations officials and experts advocated for new trade frameworks to support developing economies and for a renewed multilateralism built on solidarity and equality.



Government officials and heads of international organizations pose for a photo as part of an event at the Palais des Nations to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.
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Accelerating climate action in Baku and Riyadh

Beyond the Palais des Nations, UN Geneva was instrumental in the preparations and servicing of the twenty-ninth United Nations Climate Change Conference (also referred to as COP 29) in Baku. Working closely with local stakeholders, UN Geneva contributed to the smooth execution of the conference, providing essential and successful support in conference services, including interpretation, documentation and in-room meeting support, as well as security services. Similar high-quality conference services were also provided during the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, held in Riyadh, reinforcing UN Geneva’s role as a cornerstone of global diplomacy.

Advancing the rights of workers at the International Labour Conference

The International Labour Organization hosted its annual International Labour Conference in June. The two-week event brought together government representatives, employers and workers to address the urgent need for global action to advance social justice, a call that was underlined by the Director-General of the International Labour Organization, Gilbert F. Houngbo, in his opening address. Key outcomes included progress on regulating biological hazards in the working environment, promoting decent work in the care economy and reaffirming fundamental labour rights in a rapidly changing world.



The Director-General of the International Labour Organization and Secretary-General of the International Labour Conference, Gilbert F. Houngbo, opens the 112th session of the Conference.
©ILO Photo: Violaine Martin



The organizers of the twenty-ninth United Nations Climate Change Conference, held in Baku, relied on UN Geneva’s provision of high-quality security and conference services to ensure a successful event.
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UN Geneva’s contributions to the Summit of the Future

The Summit of the Future, held in New York in September, shone a spotlight on global cooperation in a rapidly changing world, focusing on sustainable development, peace and security, science and technology, digital cooperation, youth engagement and governance reform.

International Geneva played an important role in the preparatory stages of the event. In a series of events and discussions that UN Geneva facilitated, diplomats, United Nations officials, members of civil society and experts engaged in open conversations. Among other events, the Executive Briefings regularly held at the Palais des Nations provided a trusted platform for inclusive dialogue.

The preparatory process was launched at a briefing in Geneva in November 2023, with the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Policy, Guy Ryder, offering insights into the Summit’s objectives. In January 2024, the Director of the Summit of the Future/Our Common Agenda team, Michèle Griffin, presented the zero draft text of the Pact for the Future, which incorporated diverse stakeholder inputs. The zero draft outlined key areas for international cooperation and reflected perspectives from International Geneva actors, particularly in areas such as human rights, digital cooperation and sustainable development. In February, the President of the General Assembly at its seventy-eighth session, Dennis Francis, briefed the diplomatic community on the broader intergovernmental agenda.

A pivotal preparatory session in March reflected the multistakeholder approach to drafting the Pact. Mr. Ryder and the co-facilitators of the Summit – the Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations, Antje Leendertse, and the Permanent Representative of Namibia to the United Nations, Neville M. Gertze – engaged with Geneva-based diplomats, representatives of United Nations entities and civil society actors.

The instrumental role played by International Geneva in addressing contemporary challenges was also underscored during high-level talks on emerging technologies. Notable events included a meeting of the Secretary-General’s High-Level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence in March and an Executive Briefing with the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Digital and Emerging Technologies, Under-Secretary-General Amandeep Gill, in August. Discussions at these meetings contributed to further shaping the Global Digital Compact, a key component of the Pact for the Future.

Regional perspectives were integrated through a number of events, including a high-level meeting organized by the Nizami Ganjavi International Center that brought together former Heads of State and Government, among others, to reflect on the future implementation of the Pact for the Future, and a Ecumene Discussion Club round table, which facilitated the inclusion of diverse voices in the global dialogue.

Throughout the year, UN Geneva also actively promoted the Summit, producing informative videos to highlight the Summit’s objectives and the critical role of multilateral cooperation. After the Summit, a follow-up Executive Briefing was held with Mr. Ryder, who emphasized the urgency of implementing commitments and outlined the next steps for diplomatic and civil society engagement.



The President of the General Assembly at its seventy-eighth session, Dennis Francis, discusses the agenda of the Summit of the Future with representatives of the Geneva-based diplomatic community during a briefing hosted at the Palais des Nations.
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Supporting peace efforts and humanitarian action

In 2024, the world faced persistent humanitarian crises, which stretched global resources to their limits. Yet the United Nations persevered and continued to provide life-saving aid under increasingly difficult conditions. In Geneva, the United Nations family and its partners reaffirmed their unwavering commitment to humanitarian action, peace efforts and solidarity through key events that underscored the urgent need for collective responses rooted in empathy and sacrifice.

World Humanitarian Day: a call to #ActForHumanity

On 19 August, UN Geneva and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs commemorated World Humanitarian Day with a solemn ceremony at the Palais des Nations. The event built upon a communication campaign entitled #ActForHumanity and amplified the call for an end to impunity for attacks on civilians and humanitarian workers. The observance holds special significance, as 2024 was the deadliest year on record for aid workers. In addition, the event took place against the backdrop of ongoing hostilities in Gaza, where, as at the date it was held, over 280 humanitarian personnel had lost their lives. The Chief of Staff of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, Ben Majekodunmi, shared poignant stories from Agency staff working in Gaza who had survived attacks.



UN Geneva staff pose for a photo in solidarity with the humanitarian community, as part of the #ActForHumanity campaign launched on World Humanitarian Day.
©UN Photo

Solidarity with the Palestinian people

On 29 November, UN Geneva hosted a special meeting to mark the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, chaired by the Director-General of the UN Office at Geneva, Tatiana Valovaya. The Director-General read out a message from the Secretary-General, António Guterres, who stressed that the United Nations would continue to stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people and their inalienable rights to live in peace, security and dignity.



The Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States, Hichem Bayoudh, reads out a statement during a special meeting marking the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.
©UN Photo: Ania Freindorf

Celebrating 75 years of the 1949 Geneva Conventions

August marked the 75th anniversary of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, a significant milestone for international humanitarian law. On that occasion, UN Geneva welcomed members of the Security Council, at the invitation of the Government of Switzerland, for a visit of the Palais des Nations, including of the newly renovated historic rooms. Following the tour, Security Council members engaged in a panel discussion, organized by the Swiss authorities, entitled “75 years of Geneva Conventions: a renewed commitment to upholding international humanitarian law”. The event offered an opportunity to reaffirm the enduring importance of those foundational treaties in protecting civilians during armed conflicts and highlighted the global community’s responsibility to uphold the principles therein. The day concluded with a ceremony at the Place des Nations, at the foot of the Broken Chair monument.



The Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, Ignazio Cassis, delivers remarks during a ceremony held next to the Broken Chair at the Place des Nations to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the 1949 Geneva Conventions.
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A platform for peace

Throughout the year, UN Geneva serviced a number of multi-stakeholder meetings and events dedicated to the promotion of peace efforts. This included the traditional Geneva Peace Talks, held on the International Day of Peace in September, which fostered an inclusive dialogue on the future of peace with more than 450 participants at the Palais des Nations and additional participants online.

Another annual flagship peacebuilding event was Geneva Peace Week, which took place in October. The event, focused on the central question “What is peace?”, generated discussions on how peace could be redefined, sustained and realized in today’s rapidly changing world. This year’s edition drew over 6,700 people – the highest number of participants since the event’s inception in 2014.

As part of a broader call for peace, International Geneva, with UN Geneva at its core, once again played a central role in preventive diplomacy and regional mediation efforts. UN Geneva hosted a new round of the Geneva International Discussions in November. UN Geneva also provided services to the United Nations-led peace talks on the situation in the Sudan in July. The peace talks were focused on concrete measures for improvements to ensure the safe and unfettered distribution of humanitarian assistance, and options to strengthen the protection of civilians across the Sudan, in accordance with Security Council resolution 2736 (2024).



Led by the Director-General of the UN Office at Geneva, Tatiana Valovaya, members of the Security Council visit the historic buildings of the Palais des Nations that have been under renovation.
©UN Photo: Elma Okic

Secretary-General calls for action at the 2024 session of the Conference on Disarmament

In late February, the Conference on Disarmament held the high-level segment of its 2024 session. In a landmark address, the Secretary-General of the United Nations called on the member States of the Conference to break the long-standing deadlock and fulfil the Conference's negotiating mandate. It was the first time in nearly a decade that a Secretary-General had directly addressed the world's only multilateral disarmament negotiating body.

In his remarks, the Secretary-General highlighted the grave risks posed by rising geopolitical tensions, stalled arms control efforts and rapid advancements in military technology. He warned that the international disarmament landscape was deteriorating and stressed that inaction was not an option. The Secretary-General emphasized the need for renewed multilateral engagement to prevent a new arms race. He reiterated the Conference's pivotal role in addressing pressing disarmament challenges, from nuclear risks to emerging threats in outer space.

The Secretary-General's message was clear: the Conference must return to substantive work. His call was answered when, later in the session, member States established five subsidiary bodies to advance work on the agenda items, focusing on issues such as nuclear disarmament, outer space security and conventional arms control. Those bodies then engaged in preliminary discussions and reached consensus on their reports, including with regard to recommendations for the subsidiary bodies to resume their work in 2025. This represented a significant effort to introduce continuity, maintain momentum and restore meaningful progress to the work of the Conference.

By responding to the Secretary-General's call with concrete action, the Conference on Disarmament took an important step towards revitalizing its role in the United Nations disarmament machinery. The next challenge will be to fully resume the negotiating mandate of the Conference and to make progress on measures to enhance global peace and security.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations addresses representatives of member States of the Conference on Disarmament on 26 February.
©UN Photo: Pierre Albouy

“The great tragedy is that in the middle of these crises, the failure of this Conference to reach its objectives as intended has contributed to a growing sense of cynicism about multilateral solutions. ... Humanity needs the Conference on Disarmament to work successfully.”

Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, at the high-level segment of the 2024 session of the Conference on Disarmament.



Strengthening civil society partnerships for the future

In 2024, UN Geneva continued to advocate for the Secretary-General's vision for an inclusive, networked and effective multilateralism, including by supporting the activities of members of civil society, who are key partners in advancing the work and priorities of the United Nations.

With the accreditation of more than 5,600 representatives from 1,210 non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the facilitation of 53 meetings of NGOs at the Palais des Nations this year, the collaboration between UN Geneva and civil society continued to grow. UN Geneva's NGO Liaison Unit regularly distributed and maintained useful resources on its website and kept civil society up to date through a monthly newsletter. Civil society meetings facilitated by the Unit were focused on a broad range of topics, including global health, peace, gender, human rights and sustainable development, reflecting the diverse expertise and areas of work of the NGO community. Some of the meetings held were Model United Nations gatherings for young people, which help them to learn more about the principles of the United Nations and how it functions. In addition, NGOs spearheaded several of the commemorations of International Days held at UN Geneva, such as for the International Day of Living Together in Peace, the International Day of Older Persons and the International Day of Conscience.

The NGO Liaison Unit also took steps to bring the work taking place both at UN Geneva and at United Nations Headquarters in New York closer to civil society in Geneva. The Director-General of the UN Office at Geneva, Tatiana Valovaya, held her annual meeting with representatives of accredited NGOs, presenting UN Geneva's priorities for 2024, addressing concerns and reaffirming her commitment to supporting their activities. In addition, several New York-based senior United Nations officials held exchanges with NGOs at the Palais des Nations. Engagements included a town hall meeting with the President of the General Assembly at its seventy-eighth session, Dennis Francis, to exchange views with civil society organizations in Geneva on the theme “Peace, prosperity, progress and sustainability”, and briefings by the Under-Secretary-General for Policy, Guy Ryder, and the Director of the Outreach Division in the Department of Global Communications, Maher Nasser, on the Summit of the Future and the adoption of the Pact for the Future. These events were instrumental in sharing the perspectives and contributions of Geneva-based NGOs before and after the Summit, which took place in New York in September.



Representatives of accredited non-governmental organizations meet with the President of the General Assembly at its seventy-eighth session, Dennis Francis, during a town hall meeting at the Palais des Nations.
©UN Photo: Elma Okic

Promoting a sustainable digital future

One of the priorities of the United Nations is to advance an open, free, secure and human-centred digital future, one that is anchored in universal human rights and that enables the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2024, UN Geneva contributed to this by holding strategic events and discussions to explore the role of emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence.

In March, the UN Library and Archives Geneva welcomed the members of the High-level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence for their second in-person meeting. Convened in October 2023 by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, the Advisory Body conducted multi-stakeholder engagement throughout the first part of 2024 and produced its final report and recommendations in September, ahead of the Summit of the Future. At UN Geneva, the Advisory Body consulted with several locally based United Nations entities working on artificial intelligence in their fields, which include development, human

rights, health, intellectual property, technology standards, peace and security, and meteorology. The discussions fuelled the recommendations highlighted in the Advisory Body's final report.

In November, the UN Library and Archives Geneva, together with the International Labour Organization, hosted the annual meeting of the United Nations Library and Information Network for Knowledge Sharing (UN-LINKS). UN-LINKS is a platform dedicated to sharing know-how and best practices among United Nations librarians and engaging with local library communities on issues of common interest. This year's edition focused on the critical role of libraries in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals. Workshops and discussions were also held to explore the potential of artificial intelligence in enhancing knowledge-sharing and streamlining access to information.



The Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, addresses the members of the High-level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence during one of their meetings at the UN Library and Archives Geneva.
©UN Photo: UN Library and Archives Geneva

Furthermore, throughout the year, the UN Library and Archives Geneva convened encounters with academia and the private sector on the use of artificial intelligence-driven tools to enhance implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Discussions explored how artificial intelligence can leverage access to institutional memory and help shape policies for a more sustainable future.

With these initiatives, UN Geneva is contributing to an inclusive global framework for digital cooperation, a necessary step to overcome digital, data and innovation divides and to achieve the governance required for a sustainable digital future for all.

Scan the QR code to watch the 2024 edition of the UN-LINKS annual meeting.

Katherine Rewinkel El-Darwish, Librarian at the World Trade Organization and President of the Association of International Librarians and Information Specialists (left), Eliza McLeod, co-chair of the 2024–2025 United Nations Library and Information Network for Knowledge Sharing (centre), and Sigrun Habermann, Chief of the Library Services Section at the UN Library and Archives Geneva, deliver opening remarks to participants at the 2024 UN-LINKS annual meeting.
©UN Photo: Adeline Brucato



UN Geneva launches the Beyond Lab to drive sustainable innovation

This year, UN Geneva launched the Beyond Lab, formerly known as the SDG Lab. This marked a new phase in UN Geneva’s commitment to advancing social innovation for long-term sustainability.

The launch event on 30 April brought together partners, stakeholders and long-time supporters, including representatives from Member States, to unveil the new strategy, priorities and visual identity of the Beyond Lab. The Director-General of the UN Office at Geneva, Tatiana Valovaya, introduced the Beyond Lab as a creative and innovative space for exploring fresh perspectives on sustainable development. Key areas of work include intergenerational impact, regeneration, future generations and the role of human emotions.

In her opening remarks, the Director of the Beyond Lab, Özge Aydoğan, underlined that the transformation was more than a re-branding. It reflected more than a year of collaboration with key stakeholders, testing new ideas and concepts to challenge traditional approaches to sustainable development.

A central focus of the Beyond Lab’s new strategy is engaging with young people. Students from the École Internationale de Genève (Ecolint) gave an artistic performance at the launch event to highlight the commitment of the Beyond Lab to intergenerational action.

During the event there were also calls for stronger engagement from Member States and other stakeholders through initiatives such as the Beyond Lab’s What’s Next dialogue series and its Youth Moving Beyond GDP initiative. These efforts are aimed not only at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, but also at driving systemic change for long-term sustainability.



The Beyond Lab, formerly known as the SDG Lab, is a creative and innovative space for exploring perspectives on sustainable development. It was launched on 30 April at the Palais des Nations.
©UN Photo: Beyond Lab



A student from the École Internationale de Genève (Ecolint) delivers an artistic performance during the Beyond Lab launch event.
©UN Photo: Beyond Lab

Rethinking economic systems: from shifting mindsets to systemic change

Building on the success of the 2023 What’s Next series on rethinking economic systems, UN Geneva’s Beyond Lab convened new dialogues on the topic in 2024. These events foster the sharing of unique perspectives and discussions on transforming mindsets and systems to ensure the well-being of people and the planet.

The first dialogue in the 2024 series was held in June, in partnership with the Permanent Missions of Canada and Kenya, and was focused on values-based financing. Participants highlighted the need to redefine economic success and align investments with real community and environmental value, calling for a financial system that prioritizes human and planetary well-being and a triple bottom line approach that balances profit, social impact and environmental sustainability. Key recommendations included regulatory and education reforms to encourage long-term and equitable financial decisions. The discussion also contributed to shaping Member States’ preparations ahead of their participation in the Summit of the Future.

In December, during the Building Bridges week – a sustainable finance initiative supported by UN Geneva through the Beyond Lab – stakeholders from various sectors, including policymakers, economists, investment fund managers, changemakers and youth activists, gathered for a What’s Next event on economic transformation beyond gross domestic product. The discussion was focused on reimagining governance and financial systems to promote equity, environmental sustainability and resilience. Participants addressed systemic barriers such as debt and inequality, the undervaluation of ecosystems, and the importance of intergenerational collaboration. Event participants emphasized the need for a fundamental shift in how societies measure progress, advocating for policies that place human and planetary well-being at the centre of economic decision-making.



Youth climate activist Xiye Bastida, from Mexico, speaks at the December What’s Next event on economic transformation beyond gross domestic product.
©UN Photo: Beyond Lab

Bridging generations: UN Geneva’s local youth engagements

In 2024, UN Geneva doubled down on its commitment to involve youth in global diplomacy, ensuring their active participation in shaping the future through a number of initiatives.

Throughout the year, UN Geneva’s Perception Change Project welcomed more than 200 students from Swiss schools, offering them first-hand insights into international cooperation. Their young minds engaged with United Nations experts on critical issues such as human rights, disarmament and sustainability, bringing inspired future leaders closer to the work of global organizations.

Model United Nations exercises further provided valuable platforms for young students to learn more about the work and functioning of the United Nations. Several of these simulations were held at the Palais in 2024, including one organized by the international high school in Ferney-Voltaire in January and another organized by Moscow State University in March. On United Nations Day, 24 October, the Geneva International Model United Nations held an event at the Palais des Nations to discuss the global refugee crisis and climate migration.

Furthermore, through partnerships with academic institutions such as the Geneva Centre for Security Policy and the Universities of Geneva and Saint Gallen, UN Geneva welcomed several groups of young professionals to the Palais des Nations. They met and engaged with United Nations experts working in diverse fields – humanitarian affairs, trade and development, and human rights. Round-table discussions and meetings with United Nations senior officials offered students direct exposure to global diplomacy and valuable insights into career opportunities.

UN Geneva also took the opportunity to involve younger generations in the various international day commemorations that it organizes. For example, during the World Bee Day celebrations in May, young environmentalists were invited to discuss the importance of safeguarding pollinators and promoting sustainable ecosystems. The event demonstrated how many young people are willing and able to rise to the challenge of addressing climate change with innovative solutions – whether through creating urban beekeeping initiatives, advocating for pollinator-friendly policies or raising awareness on digital platforms.



Students from a local Swiss school listen to a discussion in the Human Rights Council.
©UN Photo



Young people plant bee-friendly flowers in the Ariana Park as part of the World Bee Day celebrations held at the Palais des Nations.
©UN Photo: FAO Geneva

Advancing international law for future generations

In a world increasingly facing distrust in global cooperation and leaning towards unilateral policies, the role of the United Nations in promoting and advancing international law is more crucial than ever. International law underpins the work of the Organization in tackling today’s challenges and upholding the multilateral system established by the Charter of the United Nations.

A key focus for UN Geneva is educating future generations on the importance of respecting international law and of the trust that such respect fosters in the rule of law. Since 1965, the International Law Seminar has been a cornerstone of this mission, welcoming young jurists from around the globe to deepen their expertise. Organized in connection with the annual session of the International Law Commission, the seminar offers participants an opportunity to gain unique perspectives on the work of the Commission and the United Nations, including on the progressive development of international law and its codification.

In 2024, 27 young jurists participated in the fifty-eighth International Law Seminar, held from 1 to 19 July at the Palais des Nations. The programme featured, among other things, plenary meetings, specialized lectures and a visit to the University of Geneva. Topics included the progressive development of international law and the determination of the rule of law. Two working groups were set up: one on the immunity of State officials from foreign criminal jurisdiction, and one on piracy and armed robbery at sea.

Highlights included a roundtable discussion on the legal implications of sea-level rise and a workshop on the advisory opinion of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea on climate change and international law. Participants also attended a conference on the theme “Water, peace, and international law”, organized jointly with Geneva Water Hub, at which they explored the role of international law in transboundary water management and peacebuilding. In addition, the seminar fostered cultural and professional exchange through visits to the World Trade Organization and the Geneva Town Hall.

Young jurists participating in the fifty-eighth International Law Seminar pose for a group photo.
©UN Photo: Lai Sanders



Empowering youth in disarmament discussions

In the Pact for the Future, adopted by the General Assembly in September, Heads of State and Government recognized that “the full, effective, safe and meaningful participation of youth is critical to maintain and promote international peace and security”. In a world filled with geopolitical tensions and uncertainty, the Geneva branch of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) had already been taking steps in that direction, making a difference by championing members of the younger generations and amplifying their voices.

In March, UNODA launched its call for applications for the second edition of the Youth for Biosecurity Fellowship programme. Over three months (June to August), 20 young scientists from the global South participated in an intensive programme, delving into the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction (Biological Weapons Convention) through online courses and expert-led webinars. Their journey culminated in a 10-day field visit to Geneva, where they attended briefings by experts from leading biosecurity and biosafety institutions.

In line with the United Nations Youth Strategy, participants presented their research and shared perspectives at two side events during the fourth session of the working group on the strengthening of the Biological Weapons Convention, held from 19 to 23 August. The first event featured interactive presentations by the young scientists, who also showcased posters they had created on new biosafety and biosecurity initiatives. The second event was a dynamic panel discussion with emerging leaders in biosecurity, exploring the crucial role of youth in strengthening global biosecurity.

The students also engaged with UNODA staff, gaining valuable insights into disarmament and the various multilateral agreements discussed annually. These exchanges not only enabled the sharing of valuable knowledge, but also fostered the development of a passion for disarmament advocacy.



Participants in the second edition of the Youth for Biosecurity Fellowship programme during their visit to UN Geneva in August.
©UN Photo: Remi Bacouillard

Youth challenge how we measure progress

As the world grows increasingly aware of the limitations of gross domestic product (GDP) as a measurement of progress, young people are advocating for a broader definition of what truly matters. In February, UN Geneva’s Beyond Lab, in collaboration with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and Rethinking Economics International, launched a global essay competition entitled “What Counts in the Future? A Youth Perspective on Measuring What We Value”.

The competition organizers invited young people to share their perspectives on new frameworks for measuring progress, with a focus on well-being and sustainability. More than 600 essays were submitted, showcasing diverse views on redefining economic indicators to better capture societal and environmental priorities.

Five winners were invited to the Palais des Nations to participate in a high-level dialogue with the Director-General of the UN Office at Geneva, Tatiana Valovaya, held in April, and to present their ideas to Member States, policymakers and experts.

These insights laid the foundation for the Beyond Lab’s Youth Moving Beyond GDP initiative. The initiative gained further momentum through other dialogues, including an official side event held during the Summit of the Future Action Days in New York in September.

Youth Moving Beyond GDP encourages meaningful youth engagement in shaping economic policies. Its aim is to complement traditional policymaking processes by fostering intergenerational dialogue and integrating youth-led solutions. The focus of the initiative is to ensure that current and future economic systems reflect human well-being and planetary health, in addition to the traditional financial metrics.

Aligning with global efforts to rethink economic progress, this initiative supports action 53 of the Pact for the Future, in which Member States have committed to developing frameworks that go beyond GDP. As the movement grows, one message is clear: the next generation is not waiting to shape the future – they are already leading the way.

Scan the QR code to read a selection of 10 outstanding essays from the competition.



Winners of the global essay competition present their ideas during a high-level dialogue entitled “What Counts in the Future? A Youth Perspective on Measuring What We Value”.
©UN Photo: Philippe Morard

Youth-led efforts to redefine progress

Young people can be a positive force for development, especially when provided with the knowledge, opportunities and space needed to thrive. With this in mind, UN Geneva's Beyond Lab offers youth a space for their voices to be heard during high-level events, such as the Summit of the Future, held in New York in September. Throughout the Summit, the Lab supported young activists who, as they took to the stage and engaged with delegates and experts, emphasized the need to broaden the definition of economic progress and called for society to move beyond gross domestic product (GDP).

During a side event at the Summit of the Future Action Days – an additional opportunity for United Nations actors to engage with all actors – the Beyond Lab assisted young changemakers as they presented their ideas for new perspectives on progress. At the opening of the Action Days, María Alejandra Pérez Rodríguez, a participant in the essay competition entitled “What Counts in the Future? A Youth Perspective on Measuring What We Value”, organized jointly by the Beyond Lab, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and Rethinking Economics International, highlighted the critical need to invest in care work as a cornerstone of economic and social protection systems.

At a virtual side event, other young essay competition contributors shared their insights on measuring societal progress beyond GDP. Engaging directly with renowned activists, including Kumi Naidoo from South Africa, and Member State representatives from Spain and Zambia, they explored strategies to meaningfully integrate youth voices into policymaking.

The Beyond Lab further demonstrated its commitment to inter-generational equity and inclusive progress through its participation in a high-level panel at the Summit of the Future Action Days. The panel, entitled “Working with Countries to Move Beyond GDP and Promote Inclusive and Sustainable Development”, was a collaborative event organized by the International Institute for Sustainable Development and the International Development Research Centre. During the discussion, Davide Fanciulli, the Lab's lead on intergenerational impact, emphasized the importance of prioritizing values such as sustainability and equity alongside new socioeconomic narratives that focus on collective and community well-being over individual success.



Panellists discuss how to move beyond gross domestic product during a high-level panel discussion at an official side event of the Summit of the Future Action Days.
©Photo: International Institute for Sustainable Development/Earth Negotiations Bulletin, Diego Noguera