ECONOMIC & SOCIAL ISSUES

PROMOTING PEACE, PROJECTING STRENGTH:
The U.S. AND THE UN IN 2019

CONGRESSIONAL BRIEFING BOOK
PROVIDING HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

For many people, the UN is the world’s ‘911 service’—a first-responder that helps deliver food, shelter, clean water, medical assistance, and education to those caught in the middle of deadly conflicts or suffering in the aftermath of natural disasters. Given its high degree of international legitimacy, capacity, and reach, the UN is uniquely positioned to coordinate and lead these types of relief efforts. Over the course of the last year, UN humanitarian agencies like the World Food Programme (WFP), UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), UN Population Fund (UNFPA), and others have answered the call of millions of vulnerable and persecuted people all over the globe.

These efforts, though, have been mounted at a time when the UN humanitarian system as a whole is facing ever-increasing demands on its resources. More than 68.5 million people around the world have been driven from their homes by war, persecution, or human rights abuses—the highest level of forced displacement since the end of World War II. This is a trend that has been increasing for several years, and 2019 is expected to continue placing unprecedented strains on the UN’s already overworked network of frontline humanitarian agencies.

WORKING TO PREVENT FAMINE IN YEMEN

The war in Yemen has grown to massive proportions, creating the largest food security emergency in the world and forcing at least 75 percent of the population to rely on some form of basic humanitarian assistance to survive. This nearly five-year conflict has severely disrupted food supplies, causing widespread hunger, acute malnutrition, stunting, and sometimes death. As a result, the UN estimates that as many as 22 million Yemenis are food insecure and nearly 16 million wake up hungry, including 1.1 million pregnant women who are considered malnourished. In response, the UN has launched an extraordinary humanitarian relief operation. Despite numerous access constraints and security risks, WFP is working to reach as many as 12 million people every month with food and nutrition assistance; the UN’s Food

But there is a very important case made for development - that if you can...give children and young people a chance, that then you will have communities that are peaceful and prosperous, that you will have prosperity and peace across the entire world. Isn’t that also well worth investing in?

HENRIETTA H. FORE
Executive Director, UNICEF, and former Administrator, USAID
May 25, 2018
and Agriculture Organization is helping 5 million people protect their livelihoods by providing crop and vegetable seeds, fishing gear, poultry production kits, vaccinations and treatments for livestock, and cash support in exchange for local work being done to rehabilitate agricultural infrastructure; UNFPA has integrated nutrition services for pregnant women within its mobile medical teams and clinics providing reproductive health services and safe deliveries; and UNICEF has treated nearly 230,000 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition.

HELPING VENEZUELANs FIND REFUGE FROM A POLITICAL DISASTER

The UN now estimates that at least 3 million people have fled Venezuela amid extreme food and medicine shortages, hyperinflation, rampant crime, and political repression. The country’s economic collapse has pushed almost 90 percent of its population below the poverty line, setting off the biggest refugee exodus in the Western Hemisphere. As some 5,500 people flee Venezuela per day, the UN has been working in neighboring Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador, where an influx of migrants has overwhelmed local governments’ ability to respond. In these countries and beyond, the UN is providing emergency shelter, legal aid, cash assistance, and more. Planning beyond their immediate needs, UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration released a regional response plan in December 2018 that focuses on direct emergency assistance, protection, socio-economic and cultural integration, and strengthening capacities in receiving countries.

CONFRONTING THE ROHINGYA CRISIS

In what the UN has termed a “textbook example of ethnic cleansing,” hundreds of thousands of Rohingya, a stateless Muslim minority group in Myanmar, were driven from their homes into neighboring Bangladesh by an organized campaign of violence and persecution beginning in August 2017. While the UN and international NGOs have only been granted limited access to Myanmar’s northern Rakhine state, the epicenter of the violence, they are playing a crucial role in meeting the needs of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. WFP has provided food aid—including rations and vouchers—to nearly 900,000 Rohingya, as well as nutritional support to over 200,000 malnourished children and pregnant and nursing women. UNFPA midwives have screened more than 500,000 women, provided dignity kits to more than 110,000 women, and delivered over 5,600 babies safely. UNHCR has developed new sites in Bangladesh to help house displaced Rohingya, including building latrines and wells, distributing shelter-building materials, and constructing major roads and access points to ease living constraints. In addition, UNHCR continues to airlift supplies to Rohingya camps in Bangladesh, including tens of thousands of tents, blankets, kitchen sets, and sleeping mats, to meet the growing needs of this severely victimized population.
ASSISTING SYRIAN CIVILIANS
Since fighting first broke out in 2011, Syria has been devastated by a vicious civil war: hundreds of thousands of people have been killed, over 5.5 million Syrians are living as refugees in neighboring countries, and 6.6 million are displaced within their own country. Here too, the UN is leading the international humanitarian response. In addition to distributing food rations to approximately 3 million displaced civilians inside Syria every month, WFP provides electronic vouchers that allow 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, and Iraq to purchase food in local markets. These vouchers have helped inject $2 billion into regional economies, creating hundreds of jobs in the food retail sector in countries whose resources are increasingly stretched thin by the refugee crisis. UNICEF’s work inside Syria has allowed millions of people to gain access to safe water, hygiene and sanitation services, education, and vaccines. UNFPA provides lifesaving reproductive health services for pregnant women: its maternal health clinic in Jordan’s Za’atari refugee camp—which currently hosts nearly 80,000 Syrians—safely delivers an average of 80 babies per week. Through buildings provided by the U.S., UN Women has created four “Oasis Centers” to promote women’s economic empowerment, train women and girls on digital literacy, and provide civic engagement opportunities and access to childcare. UN Women and WFP are also working together to use blockchain technology to provide safe and secure payments to women at WFP-contracted supermarkets, reducing costs and increasing coordination between humanitarian assistance providers.

EDUCATING A GENERATION OF PALESTINIAN CHILDREN
Established by the UN General Assembly in 1949 to assist Palestinians who were forced from their homes by the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) provides an array of critical services to Palestinian refugees in the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. Perhaps most importantly, UNRWA is a critical provider of education, reaching nearly 500,000 Palestinian children with a curriculum centered on tolerance, gender equality, human rights, and non-violence. In fact, more than 50 percent of the agency’s work is on education. To put that in perspective, if it were in the U.S., UNRWA would be the country’s third largest school system. UNRWA also provides health services to 3 million Palestinian refugees and food aid to more than 1 million people in Gaza.

The U.S. has long been a key funder of these activities; however, in 2018, the Trump Administration announced that it would stop funding the agency. This decision puts UNRWA’s schools, health clinics, and food assistance programs at severe risk. Crippling UNRWA financially or outright eliminating the agency would result in the destruction of long-standing civilian institutions which are deeply embedded across the Middle East, none of which can be easily restored, rebuilt, or absorbed by host governments. This move threatens to further destabilize the region and spark a humanitarian crisis that could further empower extremist groups like Hamas.
THE UN AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The fight for human rights and fundamental freedoms around the world has been a core part of the UN's mission since its inception. Seventy-three years later, the UN works to advance human rights through a number of tools, mechanisms, institutions, and partnerships, including the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR or “UN Human Rights Office”), UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), independent human rights experts (sometimes called “special procedures”), and bodies of individual experts that seek to support states to meet their commitments under international human rights treaties.

UN HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE

A separate entity from the UNHRC, the Human Rights Office was established in 1993 with U.S. backing. The Office operates 14 country offices and 12 regional offices, and it supports 13 human rights components in peace missions. This includes providing technical assistance, monitoring, and public reporting related to human rights issues. It has a Rapid Response Unit for swift deployment in human rights and humanitarian emergencies, which has recently supported fact-finding efforts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Nicaragua, North Korea, Syria, Bangladesh, Central African Republic, and Sri Lanka, among other countries.

UN INDEPENDENT EXPERTS

There are over 50 UN special procedures with mandates to promote universal human rights around the world through country visits, expert-level reporting, and supporting the work of local advocates on the ground. Considered independent from the UN, special procedure mandate holders do not receive a salary and are expected to serve in their personal, expert capacity. Existing special procedure mandates include the special rapporteurs on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; freedom of religion and belief; freedom of expression; combatting human trafficking; and protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home—so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

March 27, 1958
UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

The UNHRC is the only global intergovernmental body created with the exclusive purpose of upholding universal human rights. It is composed of 47 Member States, elected for three-year terms by the General Assembly and based on equitable geographical distribution. A political body rather than a court, the Council meets several times throughout the year, passing resolutions on individual human rights situations, ordering inquiries into allegations of human rights violations, and appointing independent experts on a range of subjects to investigate particular countries or thematic human rights issues.

When the UNHRC was established in 2006, the United States declined to run for a seat, and the result was that the Council struggled to fulfill its mandate. The Council’s work was unduly focused on Israel and characterized by antagonistic relationships among regional blocs of states. In 2009, however, the U.S. changed course, successfully running for a seat with the goal of changing the body’s dynamics; it was overwhelmingly re-elected by UN Member States in 2012 and 2016.

The U.S. began its third term on the Council in January 2017, but never appointed a U.S. representative to the body. In June 2018, the Trump Administration announced it was leaving the UNHRC, citing anti-Israel bias and the body’s membership.

Despite the U.S. departure from the Council, the record is clear that U.S. membership produced tangible, positive outcomes on a number of core American foreign policy objectives. For example:

- The Council, with U.S. support, established a Commission of Inquiry (COI) to investigate human rights violations in North Korea. In 2014, the Commission released a 400-page report implicating the North Korean regime on a wide range of crimes against humanity. As a result, OHCHR established a field office in Seoul, South Korea to track rights violations in North Korea;

- With U.S. support, a broad cross-regional coalition of Council members voted to launch an investigation into human rights abuses in Yemen in September 2017. In August 2018, a “Group of Experts” reported back to the Council with findings that war crimes may have occurred. The report documented at least 16,706 civilian casualties from the conflict between March 2015 and June 2018 but acknowledged “the real figure is likely to be significantly higher.” The Group also transmitted a confidential list of potential perpetrators of international crimes to OHCHR. In December 2018, the UN Security Council passed its first resolution on the Yemen conflict in three years;

- The Council established a COI on the human rights situation in Syria, which has helped gather evidence against specific individuals for their involvement in crimes against humanity – a “perpetrators list” shared with international judicial bodies;

- The U.S. worked with other Council members to establish a UN special rapporteur to scrutinize the human rights situation in Iran. The rapporteur’s March 2017 report noted concern over “targeting and harsh treatment of Christians from Muslims” and others observing what Iranian authorities call “deviant faiths.” This included arbitrary arrests, harassment and detention, and risk of prosecution under apostasy laws;

- With U.S. leadership, the Council passed three historic resolutions in 2011, 2014, and 2016. The most recent resolution established an independent expert focused on combating violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The new independent expert allowed for unprecedented global-level reporting on international human rights challenges facing LGBTI individuals, including extrajudicial killings, brutalization, and criminalization of consensual same-sex relationships; and
Council membership aided U.S. efforts to normalize Israel’s treatment at the UN. According to the American Jewish Committee’s Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights, there was a 30 percent decrease in country-specific resolutions on Israel during U.S. membership on the Council versus the period when the U.S. was off it. The number of special sessions on Israel also dropped significantly—six during the three years before the U.S. joined the Council versus one in the last four years. In March 2018, the State Department reported that the Council saw “the largest shift in votes towards more abstentions and no votes on Israel related resolutions since the creation of the [Council].”
IMPACT OF THE U.S. WITHDRAWAL FROM THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

The U.S. decision to withdraw from the UNHRC in June 2018 was criticized by major U.S. allies and national NGOs:

- Key U.S. allies—including Australia, Belgium, Sweden, Switzerland, the U.K., and the European Union—have expressed public regret over the decision. “The U.S. has always been at the forefront of the protection of human rights around the world... [the U.S.] decision risks undermining the role of the U.S. as a champion and supporter of democracy on the world stage,” an EU spokesperson said in a statement at the time;

- In June 2018, 12 national human rights groups also expressed disappointment in the withdrawal in a joint letter to the State Department arguing that, “Forfeiting the U.S. seat on the UN Human Rights Council only serves to empower actors on the Council, like Russia and China, that do not share American values on the preeminence of universal human rights”; and

- A January 2017 Council on Foreign Relations report found that U.S. catalytic leadership on the Council has played a critical role in diluting anti-Israel bias, growing the organ’s appetite for timely country-specific action, advancing fundamental freedoms reflective of U.S. values, and helping to lay the groundwork for accountability in cases of war crimes.

As a result of the U.S. withdrawal:

- The U.S. is forced to outsource its flagship human rights efforts at the Council to other countries with less of a global diplomatic footprint. This includes initiatives on ensuring, promoting and protecting human rights on the Internet as well as addressing the human rights situations in Iran, South Sudan, and Syria;

- The U.S. was not present to inform negotiations or offer evidentiary input when the Council passed its first-ever resolution on the human rights conditions in Venezuela in September 2018;

- The U.S. was not present to go on the record supporting and defining the mandate of a new Council accountability mechanism on Myanmar. Established by the UNHRC in September 2018, the mechanism will seek to “collect, consolidate, preserve and analyze evidence of the most serious international crimes and violations of international law.”;

- The U.S. does not wield the same level of influence and credibility to pursue overdue reform of the UNHRC’s membership standards and agenda as it would wield as a Council member. A U.S.-led effort to initiate reform of the UNHRC through the UN General Assembly has also stalled; and

- While U.S. votes and diplomacy as a Council member acted to block consensus actions against Israel, the same cannot be guaranteed with the U.S. sitting on the sidelines.

At the same time, the State Department has stonewalled UN independent experts mandated by the Council that are seeking approval to visit the U.S. This represents a dramatic departure from standing U.S. policy—including previous cases where U.S. officials may have disagreed with the reasoning for a proposed U.S. visit by UN experts but still kept open lines of communication. “This suggests the U.S. has abandoned even the most rudimentary forms of human rights accountability, and a whittling away of access to justice for those in the U.S. whose human rights may have been violated,” one current UN special rapporteur told *The Guardian.*
REDUCING THE RISKS OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND BUILDING A CLEAN-ENERGY FUTURE

BRIEF HISTORY

Over the last 200 years, modern energy, agriculture, and industrial practices have greatly increased the level of heat-trapping greenhouse gases in the atmosphere (especially carbon dioxide and methane), and there is broad scientific agreement that the world is warming as a result, with damaging and unpredictable impacts on weather. The world is already experiencing the impacts of unchecked climate change, including increasingly frequent hurricanes and damaging wildfires.

In 1992, the international community agreed to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. This treaty committed signatories to avoiding dangerous human interference with the climate system and to reducing emissions commensurate with their levels of development. President George H.W. Bush signed the treaty, and the Senate unanimously ratified it.

After years of negotiations on implementation of the treaty—including the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 and the Copenhagen Accord in 2009—a breakthrough was achieved with the Paris Agreement in 2015. The agreement, adopted by 195 countries, commits the world to keep global average temperatures from rising more than 2°C (3.6°F) above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit temperature increases to 1.5°C (2.7°F). This goal is supported by voluntary national commitments to reduce emissions.

However, on June 1, 2017, the Trump Administration announced its intention to withdraw the U.S. from the Paris Agreement. This represents a historic forfeiture of global leadership and threatens to undermine efforts to stave off the worst effects of climate change. Nevertheless, Americans from across the country and in all sectors, from state and city governments to businesses, investors, civil society organizations, and...
citizens, have stood up to support the agreement. Perhaps most notably, a bipartisan group of 17 U.S. governors created the U.S. Climate Alliance and committed their states to work together to reduce greenhouse gas emissions consistent with the goals of the agreement. Together, these states represent more than $9 trillion of U.S. GDP and 40 percent of the U.S. population. Additional states are expected to join the Alliance in 2019.

SCIENTIFIC CONSENSUS

The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was created in 1988 to establish a strong scientific basis for climate change policy. The IPCC, which depends on the uncompensated engagement of hundreds of climate experts from leading academic and research institutions worldwide, has released five Assessment Reports. Each expressing increasing certainty about the human contribution to climate change and warning of the likely consequences if the world does not respond.

In October 2018, the IPCC released its Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C, a landmark report with contributions from more than 90 scientists from 40 countries. The report found that if the world could keep global warming to only 1.5°C, we can expect to see 50 percent fewer people exposed to extreme heat, a 33 percent lower risk of heavy precipitation, and 50 percent fewer people suffering from water scarcity, among other positive impacts. To do so, however, the world must cut greenhouse gas emissions in half over the next 12 years—an enormous challenge requiring “rapid and far-reaching transitions” that would be “unprecedented in terms of scale, but not necessarily in terms of speed.”

Another major climate report was released in November 2018 by the U.S. Global Change Research Program, a consortium of 13 federal agencies including the Department of Defense, NASA, the Department of Agriculture, and the Environmental Protection Agency. The 1,600-page report is the second volume in the fourth National Climate Assessment, which details the current and future impacts of climate change on the U.S. under various warming scenarios. The cost of unchecked climate change will be dire, the report warns, with hundreds of billions of dollars and thousands of lives at risk in the U.S. alone.

UN CLIMATE NEGOTIATIONS

The Paris Agreement brought all nations together for the first time under a common framework to combat climate change. The agreement received broad support—led by China, India, and, before the Trump Administration’s decision to pull out, the U.S.—and entered into force on November 4, 2016.

The Paris Agreement is based on country action plans, which are to be strengthened over time in five-year increments starting in 2020. The agreement also reaffirms a commitment to mobilize $100 billion each year from public and private sources to help developing countries deal with the impacts of climate change. For the first time, non-governmental actors (businesses, cities, states, and NGOs) are invited to engage with the UN process and make commitments on climate.

In September 2018, California Governor Jerry Brown seized on the opportunity presented by the Paris Agreement to host the Global Climate Action Summit in San Francisco, which brought together global leaders across the private sector, academia, civil society, government, and beyond. The Summit resulted in dozens of commitments to increase climate action across five areas: healthy energy systems, inclusive economic growth, sustainable communities, land and ocean stewardship, and transformative climate investments.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres will convene heads of state for a high-level climate summit in September 2019, which will support and encourage governments to raise the ambition of their national commitments to the Paris Agreement and develop long-term climate action strategies by 2020.
GLOBAL HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING

Over the last 70 years, the health and welfare of people around the world has been at the core of the United Nations. Key UN agencies such as the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), UN Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), UN Development Programme (UNDP), and World Health Organization (WHO) have long partnered with NGOs, faith-based organizations, and governments, and as a result people around the world are living longer, more prosperous lives. As the largest overall donor to the UN, the U.S. is a critical partner in UN activities, working to ensure the vision of the UN comes to fruition in an efficient and effective manner. This partnership reinforces the goals and ideals of U.S. foreign policy.

KEY AREAS WHERE THE U.S. AND UN ARE WORKING TOGETHER:

CHILDREN’S HEALTH

The U.S. has long been a key contributor to UNICEF, which in 2017 alone procured 2.5 billion doses of vaccines for over 100 countries, reaching 45 percent of the world’s children. Childhood vaccination is one of the most successful medical interventions in the last 50 years, responsible for saving the lives of 2.5 million children each year.

Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance brings together developing and developed countries, plus WHO, UNICEF and the World Bank to increase access to new and underused vaccines in developing countries. The U.S. is Gavi’s fourth largest donor and from 2000 through Fiscal Year 2018, it has contributed more than $2 billion. As one of the Vaccine Alliance’s original six donor countries, the U.S. has been playing a vital role in ending preventable child deaths through reducing child mortality and targeting funding for high-impact, low-cost vaccines.
POLIO
The world has never been closer to eradicating polio. The U.S. is the largest government donor to global polio eradication efforts and has been vital to the work of UN agencies in reducing polio by 99.9 percent, from 350,000 wild poliovirus cases a year in 1988 to just 22 in 2017. If we fail to eradicate polio, within a decade we could see a resurgence of as many as 200,000 new cases each year, at the cost of billions of dollars to national governments.

GLOBAL PANDEMICS
In today’s globalized world, diseases can circle the globe in as little as 36 hours. The best way to prevent the spread of infectious disease is to stop it at its source, before it becomes costly and difficult to contain. The UN system is well positioned with the international credibility, convening power, and organizational mechanisms to facilitate and coordinate health work on a global scale in a way that amplifies the work of U.S. agencies like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Together, multilateral and bilateral cooperation strengthens global capacity to better detect, prevent, or respond to fast-moving pandemics and infectious diseases:

- In the past, cuts to WHO led to major reductions in their outbreak and emergence response units, elimination of critical staff, and severe scale-backs in disease surveillance. This played a central role in the slowed response to the West Africa Ebola crisis in 2014, which cost the U.S. nearly $2.4 billion;

- The new WHO Health Emergencies Program, requested by Member States and approved at the 2017 World Health Assembly, is only partially funded. If WHO is not able to secure full funding, including from the U.S.—one of its largest donors—the world is at risk of another major outbreak or worse: a global pandemic. Global collaboration, including the sharing of pathogens and timely reporting of outbreaks, is only possible through a trusted multilateral platform facilitated by the UN and is critical to preventing health emergencies. A large-scale disease outbreak could cost the global economy up to $6 trillion; and

- In 2014, more than 30 countries including the U.S. launched an initiative to work together to achieve the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA). In November 2018, 49 countries renewed this partnership for the next iteration of GHSA through 2024. This initiative commits to strengthen and support the implementation of the WHO’s International Health Regulations by improving countries’ health systems to better detect emerging infectious diseases before they spread. The success of this initiative does not rest on one country’s effort but is based on strategic partnerships among all participating countries, a fact noted by U.S. government representatives at the November renewal conference.

HIV/AIDS
The U.S. is one of the largest contributors to the UN Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). UNAIDS has been an essential partner of the U.S. government since the 2003 launch of the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and plays a critical role in global efforts to end the AIDS epidemic. UNAIDS helps articulate the vision and mobilize the political will and resources that support U.S. goals and priorities: saving lives, achieving epidemic control, and increasing global burden sharing. UNAIDS’ ambitious targets for expanded prevention and treatment set the vision for the response to AIDS while PEPFAR’s annual global reports track progress, drive accountability, and identify opportunities to reach as many in need as quickly and efficiently as possible.
WOMEN’S HEALTH

The U.S. has historically been a leader in international reproductive health and family planning (IRH/FP) efforts and is the largest donor to IRH/FP in the world. Prior to 2017, the U.S. was also the second largest donor to UNFPA, funds that helped provide more than 38 million people around the world access to sexual and reproductive health services and gender-based violence counseling. While U.S. bilateral assistance has remained level over the past eight years, the expanded Global Gag Rule and a negative Kemp-Kasten determination made by the Trump Administration against UNFPA has undermined U.S. leadership.

Over the last 50 years, UNFPA has taken a human rights-based approach to ensure that we live in a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe, and every young person's potential is fulfilled. In 2017, even with the loss of funding from the U.S., UNFPA provided more than 842.5 million contraceptives, which helped avert 13.5 million unintended pregnancies, 4.1 million abortions, and 32,000 maternal deaths. UNFPA also worked to ensure that reproductive health is integrated into the response to humanitarian emergencies. For example, the organization provided maternal care—including equipment and medicines for safe deliveries, emergency obstetric care, and support to address post-partum complications that arise in mothers and newborns—to the people of Mosul, Iraq; and “dignity kits”, which include hygiene products and other important supplies for women, to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

While the world has made important progress on women’s health over the years, significant challenges remain. In addition, there are currently 214 million women who lack access to modern contraception. If we were to reach this unmet need worldwide, we would see 67 million fewer unintended pregnancies, 36 million fewer induced abortions, and 76,000 fewer maternal deaths each year. Cuts to UNFPA and the reinstatement of the Global Gag Rule (along with its expansion) will hamper progress on addressing these and other critical IRH/FP issues.
In 2000, the global community committed to ending malaria for good, catalyzed by the UN Millennium Development Goals, when the disease was still considered neglected. Since then, the rate of malaria-related deaths has plummeted by 62 percent worldwide, and by 64 percent in children under five. This progress was made possible by U.S. leadership through the President’s Malaria Initiative (PMI), as well as U.S. contributions and partnership with WHO, UNICEF, the Roll Back Malaria Partnership and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Hard-fought efforts to alleviate the burden of malaria through cost-effective interventions have saved more than 7 million lives and decreased the number of malaria endemic countries from 106 in 2000 to 87 in 2017. To build on this progress, in 2015 the U.S. and the other 192 UN Member States reaffirmed their commitment to eliminate malaria through the Sustainable Development Goals (see page 28), which aim to reduce malaria cases and deaths by 90 percent and eliminate malaria from 35 countries by 2030.
THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

In 2014, all 193 UN Member States came together to build a successor to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), eight ambitious targets set in 2000 that were designed to halve extreme poverty and improve health, well-being, and equality worldwide. The outcome of the process was 17 Sustainable Development Goals (also known as the SDGs or Global Goals) that were adopted unanimously by the UN General Assembly in September 2015. The Global Goals seek to advance a number of key governance-related priorities and finish the job in areas where the MDGs made significant progress: ending preventable diseases like HIV/AIDS and malaria and maternal deaths; improving access to education, food, and sanitation; and promoting gender equality.
MEASURING IMPACT

The SDGs continue the evolution of how we measure the impact of development, not just in the targets and indicators of the goals, but how we collect and utilize data. We know that over the past two decades, the world—with strong support from the U.S. and a range of UN agencies—has made important strides on a number of the objectives sought by the MDGs and Global Goals. The UN’s 2018 Annual Report on progress towards implementing the Global Goals found that:

- The proportion of families living on less than $1.90 per person per day was more than halved between 2000 and 2017, dropping from 26.9 percent to 9.2 percent. Moreover, the total number of people worldwide living in extreme poverty fell from 1.85 billion in 1990 to 767 million in 2013;
- Mortality rates for mothers and children under the age of five have declined by more than 37 percent and 47 percent, respectively, since 2000;
- The global incidence rates of HIV, Tuberculosis, and Hepatitis B in children have declined;
- The proportion of people in the world’s least developed countries with access to electricity more than doubled between 2000 and 2016;
- A girl’s risk of marrying in childhood has dropped by nearly 40 percent in southern Asia since 2000;
- The global participation rate in early childhood and primary education reached 70 percent in 2016, up from 63 percent in 2010; and
- 116 countries have adopted freedom of information laws or policies, with 25 having done so in just the last five years.
Despite these signs of progress, however, significant challenges to realizing the Global Goals remain, and on certain indicators, the UN has recorded stagnation or even backsliding. Data can help us understand where we are falling behind and the UN, with both the private and public sectors, are innovating to reach the most vulnerable communities. Initiatives like the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data have launched a program with United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Food and Agricultural Organization to conduct regular surveys of farming households in 50 low and lower-middle income countries by 2030—and then make the data, combined with other information sources, widely available. This initiative seeks to use the power of data to boost the productivity of 500 million smallholder farmers and respond in real time while using existing government databases.
HURDLES TO ENDING EXTREME POVERTY AND THE WAY FORWARD

Humanitarian crises, both man-made and natural, have halted some of the momentum from the MDGs. For example, with regards to Goal 2—which calls for ending hunger, improving nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture—the same 2018 UN progress report found that following a prolonged decline, the number of undernourished people worldwide had actually increased from 777 million in 2015 to more than 815 million the following year. Armed conflicts in Yemen, South Sudan, Nigeria, and other countries, as well as droughts and natural disasters connected to climate change were major drivers in this increase. In addition, nearly 2.3 billion people continue to lack access to basic sanitation services, more than 90 percent of people in the world’s cities breathe polluted air, the youth unemployment rate is three times higher than for adults, and the gender pay gap remains pervasive, with men earning on average 12.5 percent more than women according to data from 45 countries.

Given the voluntary nature of the SDGs, perhaps gaps in implementation are to be expected. Indeed, neither the MDGs nor the Global Goals imposed any legally-binding obligations on Member States. Instead, they provide the international community with a detailed roadmap for achieving progress on a full range of measures related to the well-being of humanity and the planet. The fact that 193 Member States were even able to agree on such a common set of objectives—many of which carry more than a hint of U.S. influence—at all, is itself an achievement. Moving forward, it will be incumbent upon the U.S. to remain engaged and use its position of global leadership to help ensure that these lofty, but achievable, standards become more than mere words.
THE UN’S EFFORTS TO ADDRESS THE OPIOID CRISIS

The world is confronting a major opioid crisis and here in the U.S., more than 72,000 people died from overdoses in 2017, an increase of about 10% from the year before. This problem is transnational in nature, which is why the United Nations and its agencies, like the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the World Health Organization (WHO), in close coordination with the U.S., play a vital role in addressing it. Provided below are several examples of how the U.S. and UN are partnering on this issue.

In early 2017, at the request of the United States, UNODC voted to put international controls on two primary ingredients that are used to produce fentanyl—a drug 50 times more potent than heroin and responsible for at least half the people who died of opioid overdoses in 2016.

UNODC has created a system for monitoring illicit crop cultivation in Mexico, which is important because a significant amount of heroin in the U.S. originates in Mexico. The UNODC project uses satellite imagery and aerial photographs to depict where cultivation is taking place. The Mexican government is then able to view exact locations where illicit crops are grown, which helped the Mexican Army destroy 22 percent more poppy in 2017 than in the previous year.
In December 2017, WHO called for carfentanil—a drug the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency has noted is showing up in more U.S. communities and is so powerful that it is flagged as a potential chemical weapon—to be subject to the strictest drug control classifications. Additional control under these classifications imposes the strongest possible regulations by prohibiting production and supply of substances except under license for specific purposes, such as medical treatment and research. In the case of carfentanil, there would be no indication for human use.

At the September 2018 UN General Assembly, President Trump held an event, the “Global Call to Action on the World Drug Problem,” which asked Member States to sign onto a declaration. The document lays out a four-pronged plan focusing on reducing demand, cutting supply, strengthening international cooperation, and expanding levels of treatment regarding illicit drugs. In addition, the declaration reaffirms support for key UN conventions on narcotics, as well as the work of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and UNODC. As of this writing, 129 other countries had signed on.
IMPACT OF THE UNITED NATIONS IN 2019

Each year, the UN:

- Provides food aid to 91 million people in 83 countries
- Supplies vaccines to 45 percent of the world's children
- Assists over 68.5 million refugees and people fleeing war, famine, or persecution
- Works with 195 countries to combat climate change and make development sustainable
- Keeps the peace with 91,000 peacekeepers in 14 operations on 4 continents
- Fights extreme poverty, helping improve the lives of more than 1.1 billion people
- Supports maternal health, helping over 1 million women a month overcome pregnancy risks

And through all of the good that the UN does, it is a resoundingly good bargain for the U.S.:

0.2%

Funding for the UN amounts to 0.2 percent of the total FY ’18 federal budget

1,740,000,000

U.S. companies were awarded more than one billion dollars in contracts with the UN in 2017