2021
in Review
At the beginning of 2021, many people expected that it would be a year in which the world would be able to overcome the pandemic. Nevertheless, 2021 has demonstrated that the pandemic’s impact has been far-reaching and has worsened existing disadvantages, poverty, and vulnerabilities.

2021 in Review presents a selection of news headlines and reports on the general direction that nations follow when relating to human rights, humanitarian area, and international relations as seen by the United Nations. Among the most pressing issues the world faced in 2021, addressed at the United Nations, were the ongoing effects of the pandemic, human rights violations, tougher restrictions that sparked protests in many countries, a decline in trust in government institutions and leaders, privacy infringements, the limitation of religious freedom, racism, discrimination, political unrest, the challenges of the world economy, food insecurity, and many others.

I would mention some initiatives taken at the UN for the first time. In June 2021, UN General Assembly conducted its first-ever Special Session Against Corruption, adopting a Political Declaration, in which UN Member States recognized the gravity of the issues and threats posed by corruption to the stability and security of societies. On 31 August 2021, the UN marks the first International Day for People of African Descent as a celebration of their enormous contributions to every field of human endeavor. Also, in October 2021, the Human Rights Council recognized that enjoying a clean and healthy environment is a fundamental human right. The United Nations has declared 2021 as the International Year of Peace and Trust to reaffirm its commitment to resolve conflicts peacefully.

In terms of statistics, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the number of displaced people has increased from 82.4 million at the end of 2020 to 84 million at the end of 2021, as a result of persecution, conflict, violence or human rights violations. The United Nations’ humanitarian agency OCHA estimated that 274 million people would need humanitarian assistance in 2022, an almost 20% increase from already record-high numbers in 2021. According to global statistics, just 39 percent of rural girls attend secondary school. Women’s rights are threatened, and many children, particularly girls, are losing their educational opportunities. Also, in a growing number of countries, the practice of shutting down internet and mobile phone access to silence dissent has become more common. “Surveillance tools can interfere with human rights, from the right to privacy and freedom of expression to rights of association and assembly, religious belief, non-discrimination, and public participation,” the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression said in an official statement. Conflicts continued in Syria and Yemen, and new tensions led to instability in Myanmar, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Sudan, and other countries.
We can observe some concerning trends in the statistics: an increase in forced displacement, people suffering from acute hunger, restriction of freedom, increased authoritarianism, conflict, and violence.

While there were many struggles and challenges, we should still consider some positive things that happened in 2021. Innovations in certain fields, such as medicine, have increased in a very short time and global economic output has been improving from the collapse caused by COVID-19. We have observed a spirit of generosity during this crisis and strong solidarity among peoples and nations. Having a positive attitude has proved valuable to many people who experience tough times. During this difficult year, many of us may have experienced anxiety, fear, sickness, grief, loss of freedom, uncertainty at work, and loneliness due to COVID-19. Even in the midst of uncertainty, there is hope. “The world is not without a ruler. The program of coming events is in the hands of the Lord. The Majesty of heaven has the destiny of nations as well as the concerns of His church in His own charge.” (E.G.W., 5T, 753). We must never forget that God is in control of history, and we should never lose sight of the wonderful promises He has made for our future.

“Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; He lifts His voice, the earth melts.
The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.”
Psalm 46:6-7 - NIV

Pastor Nelu Burcea, PhD, GC PARL Associate Director
Seventh-day Adventist Church’s Liaison to the United Nations


Widespread attacks in DR Congo may amount to crimes against humanity https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/02/1083582


Anti-Muslim hatred has reached ‘epidemic proportions’ says UN rights expert, urging action by States: https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1086452


US death penalty must be abolished, rights experts urge President Biden https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1087012

Independent UN expert says ‘tsunami of hate’ targeting minorities must be tackled: https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1087412


US death penalty must be abolished, rights experts urge President Biden https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1087012

Independent UN expert says ‘tsunami of hate’ targeting minorities must be tackled: https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1087412


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<td>7 April 21</td>
<td>Hate speech and violence still rising against Roma despite recognition gains, says rights expert: <a href="https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/04/1089232">https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/04/1089232</a></td>
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<td>13 April 21</td>
<td>Burundi refugees in Tanzania living in fear: UN rights experts</td>
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<td>21 April 21</td>
<td>New Iraqi law ‘major step’ in assisting ISIL’s female victims but more must be done: <a href="https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/04/1090322">https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/04/1090322</a></td>
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<td>25 April 21</td>
<td>Rohingyas traumatised again, after devastating camp fire</td>
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<td>6 May 21</td>
<td>Latin America rights groups face growing threats, attacks</td>
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<td>19 May 21</td>
<td>Ceasefire needed now, to stave off disaster in Gaza says UNICEF chief, as UNRWA launches emergency appeal <a href="https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/05/1092212">https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/05/1092212</a></td>
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<td>26 May 21</td>
<td>UN rights chief urges Libya, EU, to protect migrants crossing the central Mediterranean: <a href="https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/05/1092752">https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/05/1092752</a></td>
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<td>4 June 21</td>
<td>‘Digital rights’ key to inclusive post-pandemic recovery: UN experts</td>
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<td>10 June 21</td>
<td>Child labour figure rises to 160 million, as COVID puts many more at risk <a href="https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/06/1093682">https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/06/1093682</a></td>
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<td>14 June 21</td>
<td>Violence against elderly has risen during COVID, UN expert warns</td>
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Forced displacement at record level, despite COVID shutdowns: UNHCR

Central African Republic entrenched in ‘unprecedented humanitarian crisis’


UN rights office highlights policing reforms to address systemic racism

Despite advances, terrorist threats continue to persist and diversify


Internet shutdowns now ‘entrenched’ in certain regions, rights council hears

Social protection ‘lifeline’ during COVID, depends on where you live


New UN report reveals impact of COVID on human trafficking

Six months after coup, Myanmar’s political, rights and aid crisis is worsening

Iraq: Put torture prevention laws into practice, urges Bachelet


Spyware: Rights experts push for surveillance technology moratorium

Afghanistan women’s rights are ‘red line’, UN rights chief tells States
Human Rights abuses intensifying in eastern DR Congo - UNHCR

Multiple reports of alleged human rights violations in Tigray

Urgent action needed over artificial intelligence risks to human rights

Torture, killings, lawlessness, still blight Burundi’s rights record

Bachelet calls for major re-think over impact of sanctions on human rights

20 years after Durban Declaration, racism reverberates in ‘echo chambers of hate’

Human rights ‘catastrophe’ in Myanmar: UN calls for urgent action

South Sudan plagued by violence and corruption, Human Rights Council hears

UNICEF: Haiti children vulnerable to ‘violence, poverty and displacement’

Syria: 10 years of war has left at least 350,000 dead

COVID-19 caused ‘shocking’ inequalities: human rights chief Bachelet

Libya: War crimes likely committed since 2016, UN probe finds

Rising poverty a ‘moral indictment of our times’: Guterres
10 November 2021
HUMAN RIGHTS

One in 10 children worldwide live with disabilities

27 November 2021
HUMAN RIGHTS

Digital Child’s Play: protecting children from the impacts of AI

10 November 2021
HUMAN RIGHTS

Iran death penalty threat for abortion unlawful: UN rights experts

16 November 2021
HUMAN RIGHTS

Anxiety in Afghanistan as Taliban struggles for legitimacy

17 November 2021
HUMAN RIGHTS

Iran: Execution of juvenile offender ‘deeply alarming and shocking’

24 November 2021
HUMAN RIGHTS

193 countries adopt first-ever global agreement on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence

25 November 2021
HUMAN RIGHTS

Uphold safety, human rights on Belarus-Poland border, UN agencies urge

27 November 2021
HUMAN RIGHTS

Women and girls at high risk of being pushed into modern slavery

1 December 2021
WOMEN

COP26: Convert climate ‘promises to action’, urge UN rights experts

8 December 2021
HUMAN RIGHTS

Unilateral sanctions particularly harmful to women, children, other vulnerable groups

9 December 2021
HUMAN RIGHTS

‘Genocide remains a very real threat’, Guterres warns

9 December 2021
HUMAN RIGHTS

Clashes displace thousands in Darfur, where 6.2 million will need assistance next year

15 December 2021
HUMAN RIGHTS

Fundamental freedoms squeezed in Ukraine, Human Rights Council hears

17 December 2021
HUMAN RIGHTS

Ethiopia crisis: Human Rights Council sets up international rights probe

25 December 2021
HUMAN RIGHTS

Lebanon crises increase suffering of migrant domestic workers
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<td>UNHRC</td>
<td>Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism</td>
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Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression: **Disinformation and freedom of opinion and expression** (13 April 2021)

https://undocs.org/A/HRC/47/25

Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association: **Ending Internet shutdowns: a path forward** (15 June 2021)

https://undocs.org/A/HRC/47/24/Add.2

**UNHRC Report - Possible impacts, opportunities and challenges of new and emerging digital technologies with regard to the promotion and protection of human rights**

https://undocs.org/A/HRC/47/52

**UNHRC Report - Moving towards racial equality: study of the Advisory Committee on appropriate ways and means of assessing the situation**

https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies


https://www.unicef.org/media/108161/file

**UNDESA World Social Report 2020**

https://www.un.org/development/desa/