

The **UN @ 80: A Living Legacy** was the General Assembly's high-level week kickoff event for staff, retirees and select non-governmental organizations held on Friday 19 September 2025 at 6:30 p.m. The General Assembly Hall's vertical gold central panel shone brightly, flanked by UN 80 logo side panels beautifully lit up in purple. One sad piece of opening music by Brenda Vongova's UNSCR Chamber Music Society quintet led to a piece more familiar, and then Pablo Casals' Hymn to the United Nations – rich chords with words by poet WH Auden (which, as we were informed by Master of Ceremonies Melissa Fleming, USG for Global Communications, was last played in 1971) that set the tone for the Secretary-General's introductory speech. We were then fortunate to hear four women speak: the President of the General Assembly, one Executive Director, and one Under-Secretary-General culminating with the Deputy Secretary-General.

Melissa Fleming emphasized looking ahead to the milestones. Most important are people, and living in peace, dignity and solidarity.

Secretary-General Mr. António Guterres' keynote speech was devoted to lives in service that had seen action. We must refuse to give up. Through music and stories we will be reminded we came together in living legacy. The Secretary-General made clear that global problems demand global solutions and that together we must work towards a better solution for all.

General Assembly President Ms. Annalena Baerbock mentioned a postcard from 1953 which had resurfaced from the UN 72 years ago, sent by a young man who knew the UN mattered to ordinary people. A million visitors come every year. UNHCR's and UNAIDS' work matters and seeds provided by FAO matter to the farmers in the Sahel. We defend the most vulnerable, unseen and forgotten. This 80th anniversary is a moment to celebrate the people and reflect on what the organization represents.

Ms. Baerbock welcomed change which must be built on the principles of the UN Charter. Noting that 168 million lives had been lost in Gaza, she said the UN could make the world stronger, better together so we could look back with pride.

Ms. Fleming concluded that the organization does matter. Ms. Silvia Zakhary and Mr. Sing J. Lee's 15-minute documentary "A Living Legacy" of milestones, initially in black and white, showed the UN's impact over the past 80 years, as the way to end war. This was followed by a 10 minute color video from the field showing that the world is interdependent - this is our planet – and the dangers of inequality such as the Rwanda genocide, Ukraine and Congo, as well as the 2024 Pact for the Future pledge. Across war and peace the UN was not perfect but persistent.

At this juncture, Ms. Fleming commented that tragedy, improvement and hope remind us of our collective responsibility for building what comes next. She stressed that young peoples' voices bring meaningful change at the local level. They risk their lives just to save other people. The UN represents 80 years of aspirations and actions, making it essential as a meeting ground. Multilateralism is the strongest tool to bring people together for the planet. She summarized specific achievements and that the UN remains the only place where many global leaders can sit together. It is open to everyone. No dream is too bold.

Nigerian singer star Tiwa Savage appeared in a swishy long white off-one shoulder dress and enchanted the audience with modern African music.

The Executive Director of UN Women, Ms. Sima Bahous, said the years had changed the world for the better and with revitalization the UN had been a key player in the crucial results of girls in schools, and the decrease in maternal mortality. Female poverty has stagnated at 10% since 2020, and 700 million women are currently living in conflict. UN Women will be celebrating its 30th anniversary this Monday (22 September 2025). 106 governments had made 170 commitments to advance women. She said women and girls look to us and exhorted the institution to grow stronger.

Ms. Catherine Pollard, USG for Management and Compliance, celebrated the staff, including those retired. She traced her long career through UNDP and the UN Volunteers to the Secretariat. Complex challenges she saw along the way were a serious understatement. Despite their increase exponentially, in the day it had always been so. In moments of uncertainty we must be open to trying to save humanity.

The UN is a political construct, she went on, but one with core values. There are always opportunities to ensure movement at the present moment and thrive for the next 50 years.

In her closing remarks, Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Amina Mohammed, referred to Dag Hammarskjöld. If we were climbing a mountain and building peace, we stand at base camp. These eight decades of service have lifted humanity. We know what we want but also the reality we face at 80 years' time to move better together. Then the whole GA Hall lit up with the cell phone lights she asked everyone to shine. Ms. Mohamed hoped we feel inspired. We have a rich history we can all be proud of. We can be part of the UN's living legacy.

To round out the program, the UN Chamber Society returned to the stage to play a short classical concert, amid applause and bows.

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Alice Harrison (Convenor), Geoff Baldwin, and Pat Duffy
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