



Media Note

New York

17 September 2023

UN General Assembly Insights: Monday 18 September

World leaders are in New York for the UN General Assembly's high-level week, and will participate in a host of summits and side-events on global issues. Over the course of the week, Crisis Group will highlight upcoming meetings with a focus on those that address peace, security and current conflicts. We will release a note each evening commenting on the next day's events. *These notes are for attribution, and quotations from Crisis Group staff are available for use by the media.*

1. The Big Event: Sustainable Development Goals Summit

The main event at the UN this Monday is the "SDG Summit". The President of the General Assembly is convening leaders to talk about how to get international development back on track after the economic shocks associated with COVID-19 and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Developing countries have urged that rebooting the SDGs be the top priority for the high-level week. Participants are likely to focus on revising the rules of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund to meet developing states' financing needs, although the U.S. has insisted that the details of these reforms be negotiated by the financial institutions' own boards.

As Crisis Group noted in [a briefing before the G7 summit in Japan](#) in May:

Worsening economic indicators on their own do not cause or exacerbate conflict, but the cost-of-living crisis, in particular, has created political pressures that in some places threaten unrest. After years of distress, many governments are unable to cushion their populations from shocks.

Crisis Group President and CEO Dr. Comfort Ero says:

Facing economic pressures at home, wealthier countries may be tempted to downgrade efforts to stabilise more fragile economies' finances. That would be short-sighted, both in terms of sustaining global solidarity and from a peace and security perspective.

2. In Focus: Threats to Afghan women and girls

Iceland and UN Women co-host a meeting on Afghanistan on Monday morning, focusing on the human rights of women and girls. Afghan women will speak about life under Taliban rule and the authorities' systematic violations of their rights. This is a priority topic at the UN this week. Luxembourg, the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect and the Open Society Foundation will convene a ministerial-level meeting on gender-based discrimination in Afghanistan on Tuesday.

The Taliban have sparked international outrage by imposing increasing restrictions on women and girls through 2023. The Security Council unanimously [condemned](#) a Taliban decision to bar women from working for UN agencies in April. Aid donors are also cutting back on humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, in part in response to the authorities' gender policies.

As Crisis Group noted in our [annual briefing on “Ten Challenges for the UN”](#) this month, many of these aid cuts are liable to affect the living conditions of women and girls especially badly:

“International donors and concerned states should place greater emphasis on restoring essential services and promoting economic development in Afghanistan. This may require a limited degree of collaboration with the Taliban, including through day-to-day dialogue with Kabul. Working to improve the basic living conditions of women and girls in the country, including through empowering the UN to engage on these issues, is the most effective way to help Afghans survive the slowdown of humanitarian aid.”

3. Also on the Agenda: The Middle East Peace Process

Also on Monday morning, the League of Arab States, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and European Union – coordinating with Egypt and Jordan – will convene an event on resolving the longstanding Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Ministers from more than fifty countries could attend, but the prospects for a breakthrough between the Israelis and Palestinians are currently exceedingly low.

Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Director Joost Hiltermann says:

“There is no chance of restarting peace talks without first putting pressure on the Palestinian leadership to allow for political renewal through elections, and on Israel to halt its rapidly advancing annexation of the occupied West Bank.”

One immediate challenge for the UN in the Middle East is a dangerous shortfall in funds for the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which offers food, services and employment to over 3 million Palestinian refugees. Jordan and Sweden are convening a meeting of key supporters of UNRWA on Thursday. As Crisis Group notes in [a new report on the agency](#):

“The only workable solution to the dire financial straits of an agency whose existence remains indispensable – for Palestinian refugees, the region and the world – is sustained and predictable multi-year funding, including from as of yet untapped donors [including China and wealthy Gulf Countries], in addition to an urgent short-term injection of funds in 2023.”

4. Crisis Group Will Also Watch...

Germany, Somalia and the Principles for Peace Foundation host a [high-level dialogue](#) on “New Partnerships for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding” at 4pm. And everyone in Turtle Bay will be gearing up for the start of leaders' speech to the General Assembly on Tuesday.

5. Crisis Group at UNGA78

Crisis Group will host a [‘Live Spaces’](#) event on Monday, 18 September at 11:30 AM (ET). Crisis Group President Dr. Comfort Ero and UN Director Richard Gowan will discuss what to watch for at this year's UN General Assembly.