

From: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/10/un-reform-secretary-general-antonio-guterres>

UN must reform to defend enlightenment values, secretary-general says

By Patrick Wintour

International institutions such as the United Nations must reform and adapt, in order to defend enlightenment values, the UN secretary general, António Guterres, has said.

Giving his first speech in London since his appointment in January, Guterres said: “Europe’s greatest gift to the world was the values of enlightenment. Now they are being called into question and under threat. We are seeing the human rights agenda losing ground to the national sovereignty agendas. We see more and more irrational behaviours, including an aggressive nationalism.”

Challenging the rise of isolationism and protectionism, Guterres, a former Portuguese prime minister, said the challenge facing the world today required a multilateral response.

“We now have a multi-polar world that will not solve its own problems. A multi-polar world needs more multilateral governance, not less,” he said, adding that a multi-polar world without multilateral institutions had led directly to the first world war.

Guterres is seen as a potential reformer for an institution that is struggling to stay relevant in face of criticisms from Donald Trump, and the impasse between Russia and the US on the security council.

He argued that the UN remained as relevant as ever, but said its unwieldy bureaucracy and structure needed to be reshaped for a more interconnected world.

He pointed to three separate pillars of the UN – peace and security, human rights and sustainable development – and questioned whether these issues could any longer be addressed separately, saying: “There is no peace and security without human rights.”

Calling for the three approaches to be combined into a single program, he said: “This approach must be at the centre of our strategy of reform.”

He called for improved coordination and cooperation between the UN’s development and humanitarian agencies.

He said with 80% of the UN’s costs addressing peacekeeping, reform was also needed. Changes in the nature of conflicts, and a decline in nation-state wars, meant “in reality there is often very little peace to keep”, requiring ever more complex operations.

Guterres also said it was absurd that every appointment of technical officers at the UN offices in Geneva required the agreement of all member states.

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He also disclosed that at the UN headquarters, there were more than 50 people working on various aspects of radio broadcast but only three people working in social media.

He also acknowledged that differing views on the UN security council meant that peaceful solutions to wars could only be negotiated when the regional players already agreed on an approach to the crisis.

For example, the current paralysis over Syria “will end only when all parties in the conflict understand and believe they cannot win the war”.

He said he did not think the country had reached such a state yet, adding: “We need to convince those that are party to the conflict that these wars cannot be won.”

He concluded that a rejection of globalisation lay at the heart of a resurgent nationalism.

“We need to fight xenophobia, antisemitism and hatred of Muslim communities. It is not enough to fight nationalism, but we must also address root causes. Many people feel left behind by globalisation.

“There is a lot of anger in the world. People see a lot of wealth and inequality has got worse. The only solution is to invest in social cohesion. We need to make each group feel like its identity is respected. We need a world where difference is respected. It is a mistake to think harmony just happens spontaneously.”