



**UNITED NATIONS  
OFFICE OF LEGAL AFFAIRS**

**High-level Side Event on  
“Investing in Humanity through Multilateralism”**

**Opening remarks**

**by**

**Mr. Miguel de Serpa Soares**

Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and  
United Nations Legal Counsel,  
On behalf of the Secretary-General

**23 September 2019**

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of the Secretary-General, I would like to thank China, South Africa, Switzerland, and the International Committee of the Red Cross for their kind invitation to deliver the opening remarks at this important event.

The theme of this event is “Investing in Humanity through Multilateralism”. In this regard, I would like to first stress that multilateralism is the essence of the United Nations. This is clearly reflected in Article 1, paragraph 4, of the Charter which provides that one of the purposes of the United Nations is “to be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends.”



One of the common ends set out in Article 1 is “to achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of [a]...humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all”.

There is, therefore, no doubt that the United Nations must play a central role in upholding humanity through multilateralism.

The Secretary-General has, on a number of occasions, emphasized that global challenges should be addressed through multilateralism, including global challenges of a humanitarian character.

Most recently, the Secretary-General stressed, in his annual report on the work of the Organization submitted to the General Assembly, that “[t]here is no other way to address global challenges but to act collectively. But in today’s difficult context, it is not enough to proclaim the virtue of multilateralism; we must prove its added value.” This, of course, applies to our efforts to assist and protect persons affected by armed conflicts.

This year is particularly important to reflect upon humanity through multilateralism for another reason. It is the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. Most recently, at a debate in the Security Council to mark the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, I emphasized the crucial role which the Security Council and, more generally, the United Nations can play in respecting and ensuring respect for international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions.

Just to give you a few examples, the Security Council has established international criminal tribunals to prosecute war crimes, as well as the crime of genocide and





crimes against humanity; requested the Secretary-General to establish an investigative mechanism regarding atrocity crimes committed by Daesh in Iraq; authorized the establishment of commissions of inquiry to investigate alleged violations of international humanitarian law; and mandated peacekeeping operations to protect civilians, particularly in the context of ongoing armed conflicts.

The General Assembly has played a crucial role in facilitating the creation of multilateral treaties, including the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, the Rome Statue of the International Criminal Court, and more recently the Arms Trade Treaty and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

On this occasion, I, therefore, appeal to Member States to renew their commitment to the purposes of the United Nations enshrined in Article 1 of the Charter, and to reflect upon multilateralism, not as a choice but as an imperative for humanity.

Thank you.

New York, United Nations, Conference Room 11

