

ON

POLICY

AFRICA ■

The United Nations emblem is centered in the upper half of the cover. It features a world map with latitude and longitude lines, surrounded by a laurel wreath, all set within a circular frame. The emblem is rendered in a light, metallic color against a dark, textured background.

The UN at a Crossroads:

Power, Gender and Global Fragmentation

ON POLICY AFRICA MAGAZINE 32ND EDITION - 2026



**“For Africa,
this is a
moment to
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and from
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Dr. Julienne Stéphanie Mesumbe

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Editorial Note

UN at a Crossroads in a Fragmented World

Highlights on Peace and Security



A New UN Leadership for a New Global Order: Advancing Africa's Representation in the Security Council Anthony Antem

The forthcoming selection of a new Secretary-General of the United Nations presents a critical opportunity to align global governance institutions with the realities of an evolving international order. As geopolitical power becomes increasingly diffuse and demands for more inclusive multilateralism intensify, Africa's longstanding quest for permanent representation on the United Nations Security Council has gained renewed urgency.



The 2026 Contest for UN Secretary-General: A Timely Case for Women's Leadership Enowbagem Agbortanyi

The 2026 selection of the next Secretary-General of the United Nations has reignited global discussions about leadership, representation, and the future direction of multilateral governance. Despite eight decades of existence, the UN has never been led by a woman, raising important questions about gender equity and inclusivity within the world's foremost international organization.

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Economic Affairs



The UN at a Crossroads: Why Africa’s Industrial Future Depends on Inclusive Global Leadership Dr Stephane Mbiankeu Nguea

Africa’s aspirations for industrial transformation are unfolding at a time when the international economic and political order is undergoing profound change. As the United Nations confronts growing questions about its effectiveness and representativeness, the quality of global leadership will play a decisive role in shaping opportunities for sustainable industrial development across the continent.



Who Governs the Future of Work? Africa’s Labour Markets in an Era of Global Fragmentation. Wirajing Muhamadu Awal Kindzeka

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“Can the United Nations adapt to today’s realities, or will it continue to reflect a world that no longer exists?”

Dr. Julienne Stéphanie Mesumbe

The UN at a Crossroads in a Fragmented World

By Dr. Julienne Stéphanie Mesumbe

The United Nations is at a critical moment in its history. Almost eighty years after its creation, the global context in which it operates has changed significantly. Power is no longer concentrated in a few countries. Geopolitical tensions are increasing. Trust in multilateral institutions is declining. At the same time, demands for greater inclusion, representation, and fairness are becoming stronger.

This issue of On Policy Magazine looks at this moment of transition. It asks a simple but important question: can the United Nations adapt to today's realities, or will it continue to reflect a world that no longer exists?

Across the contributions, a clear message emerges. The current global system is facing pressure from different directions. On one side, major powers are increasingly acting based on national interests,

often outside multilateral frameworks. On the other, developing regions, especially Africa, are calling for a stronger voice in global decision-making. These tensions are shaping what we now describe as global fragmentation.

One of the most visible areas where this tension appears is in the question of representation. Africa makes up more than a quarter of UN member states and continues to play a major role in peacekeeping and global diplomacy. Yet, it remains underrepresented in key institutions such as the Security Council. This issue therefore highlights the urgency of reforming global governance structures so that they better reflect current realities.

At the same time, the upcoming selection of a new UN Secretary-General presents an important opportunity. Leadership matters. It shapes priorities, builds consensus, and influences how institutions

respond to global challenges. This transition comes at a time when the UN is expected not only to manage crises but also to rebuild trust in multilateral cooperation.

Another important dimension discussed in this issue is gender. Despite its global mandate on equality, the UN has never had a female Secretary-General. This raises important questions about credibility and inclusiveness. Promoting gender-balanced leadership is not only a symbolic issue. It is also about strengthening decision-making and ensuring that global institutions reflect the diversity of the societies they serve.

Beyond peace and security, the issue also looks at the economic consequences of global fragmentation, especially for Africa. Declining development finance, changing labour markets, and shifting global partnerships are redefining how countries engage with the international system. For Africa, these changes come with both risks and opportunities. While the continent remains vulnerable to external shocks, it also has the potential to play a more active role in shaping the rules that govern global trade, labour, and development.

What becomes clear across all these discussions is that Africa can no longer remain a passive participant in global governance. Its demographic weight,

economic potential, and regional integration efforts give it a stronger position than before. However, turning this position into real influence requires coordination, strategic engagement, and a clear vision.



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The future of the United Nations will depend on its ability to respond to these realities. Institutions that fail to adapt risk losing relevance. Those that embrace reform, inclusion, and shared responsibility will remain central to global cooperation.

At On Policy Magazine, our aim is to contribute to this conversation by bringing together diverse perspectives that are grounded in policy and focused on action. This issue highlights the choices facing the international system and, more importantly, the role that Africa can play in shaping its future.

The UN is at a crossroads. The direction it takes will depend not only on global powers, but also on how actively other regions engage in shaping the system. For Africa, this is a moment to move from participation to influence, and from voice to action.

This issue is released ahead of ongoing global discussions on the selection of the next UN

Secretary-General.



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A New UN Leadership for a New Global Order: Advancing Africa's Representation in the Security Council

The forthcoming selection of a new Secretary-General of the United Nations presents a critical opportunity to align global governance institutions with the realities of an evolving international order. As geopolitical power becomes increasingly diffuse and demands for more inclusive multilateralism grow, Africa's longstanding quest for permanent representation on the United Nations Security Council has gained renewed urgency and relevance.

By Anthony Antem

Introduction: Africa's place In a Changing Global Order

Africa's case for permanent representation on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is reinforced by the continent's growing global significance. This debate is particularly relevant for Africa, home to over [1.4 billion people](#) and whose demographic growth,

economic potential, and diplomatic influence continue to expand. With 54 member states, Africa constitutes the largest regional bloc, accounting for roughly [28 percent](#) of UN member states and is projected to be home to nearly [2.5 billion people by 2050](#), making it one of the most important demographic and political forces in the international system. The continent also [contributes substantially](#) to UN peacekeeping efforts and continues to feature



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prominently on the Security Council's agenda, with African issues comprising an estimated 60–70 percent of Council deliberations in many years. Despite its growing global significance and the fact that many Security Council deliberations focus on [African issues](#), the continent remains the only inhabited continent without permanent representation on the Security Council. The upcoming leadership transition therefore presents a critical opportunity to address this longstanding imbalance. For the UN to remain credible and reflective of contemporary geopolitical realities, meaningful reform must include stronger African representation in the Security Council.

The Representation Gap: Why the Current Security Council No Longer Reflects Today's World

Established in 1945 in the aftermath of the Second World War, the UNSC, was designed to maintain international peace and security through a structure that granted permanent membership and veto powers to five major powers: China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. At the time of the Council's creation, much of Africa remained under colonial rule and had little influence in international affairs. Today, Africa comprises 54 sovereign states, represents nearly a third of UN

membership, and plays an increasingly important role in global diplomacy, peacekeeping, trade, and economic development. The rise of emerging powers such as India, Brazil, and South Africa, alongside the growing influence of regional organizations such as the African Union, has transformed the international system into a more multipolar order. This representation gap is particularly striking given that a significant proportion of Security Council deliberations, resolutions, sanctions regimes, and peacekeeping operations have focused on African conflicts and security challenges. As a result, decisions affecting the continent are often made without a permanent African voice at the highest level of global security governance. This imbalance raises important concerns about the legitimacy, accountability, and inclusiveness of the UNSC, while also limiting African ownership of decisions that directly shape peace and security outcomes across the continent.

Africa's Position on Security Council Reform

The foundation of Africa's demand for permanent representation on the Security Council is rooted in the [Ezulwini Consensus](#), adopted by the African Union in 2005. The Consensus represents Africa's unified position on UN reform and argues that the continent's historical exclusion from permanent decision-making structures is both unjust and incompatible with contemporary global realities. It calls for Africa to be allocated no fewer than two permanent seats with all the prerogatives and privileges of current permanent members, including the right of veto should the veto system remain in place, as well as five additional non-permanent seats. More than a reform proposal, it serves as a statement of Africa's commitment to a more equitable, representative, and democratic system of global governance. As discussions surrounding the next Secretary-General gather momentum, reaffirming and advancing the Ezulwini Consensus should remain central to Africa's diplomatic

engagement on Security Council reform.

Obstacles to Reform

Despite growing support for Security Council reform, significant political and institutional obstacles continue to hinder progress. Foremost among these is the [resistance of some current permanent members](#), who may perceive changes to the Council's composition as a challenge to their influence and privileges within the existing system. Reform efforts are further complicated by the stringent requirements for amending the UN Charter, which necessitate broad approval from member states, including ratification by all permanent members of the Security Council. Within Africa, maintaining a unified position also presents challenges, particularly regarding which countries might ultimately occupy any newly created permanent seats. Such divisions could weaken the continent's collective bargaining power and dilute its advocacy efforts. Beyond these internal and procedural constraints, intensifying geopolitical rivalries among major powers have made consensus on institutional



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reform increasingly difficult, often relegating Security Council reform to the margins of international diplomatic priorities.

The Secretary-General Transition as a Strategic Opportunity

The [selection of a new United Nations Secretary-General](#) offers a strategic opportunity to reinvigorate discussions on institutional reform and the future of multilateralism. While the Secretary-General does not possess the authority to unilaterally alter the structure of the Security Council, the office plays a significant agenda-setting and consensus-building role, helping to shape global conversations on the effectiveness, legitimacy, and inclusiveness of international institutions. This leadership transition comes at a time when countries across the [Global South](#) are increasingly calling for reforms that better reflect contemporary geopolitical realities and address longstanding disparities in representation and influence. Against this backdrop, Africa has a unique opportunity to leverage the transition period to elevate Security Council reform on the international agenda, build coalitions



To capitalize on the momentum generated by the Secretary-General selection process, African states must adopt a proactive and coordinated diplomatic strategy that places Security Council reform at the forefront of international discussions.

with like-minded states, and advance the case for a more representative system of global governance. By linking its demand for permanent representation to broader calls for multilateral reform, Africa can position Security Council reform as a necessary step toward strengthening the credibility and effectiveness of the United Nations in an increasingly multipolar world.

Policy Pathways for Africa

What African Policymakers Should Do

To capitalize on the momentum generated by the Secretary-General selection process, African states must adopt a proactive and coordinated diplomatic strategy that places Security Council reform at the forefront of international discussions. This requires intensified engagement with UN member states, regional groups, and key decision-makers before, during, and after the leadership transition to ensure that Africa's reform agenda remains visible and politically salient. Equally important is the need to build broad coalitions with Global South partners and reform-minded states that share concerns about the inequities embedded in existing global

governance structures. By framing Security Council reform as part of a wider effort to democratize international decision-making, Africa can strengthen its appeal beyond the continent and attract wider support. Furthermore, linking the demand for permanent representation to broader debates on global governance reform, development finance, climate justice, and the restructuring of multilateral institutions can help position Africa's case as a global rather than regional issue. Such an approach would underscore that a more representative Security

Council is essential not only for Africa's interests but also for enhancing the legitimacy, effectiveness, and responsiveness of the international system as a whole.

What the Next UN Secretary-General Should Do

The next United Nations Secretary-General will have a critical role to play in advancing a more representative and inclusive multilateral system



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that reflects contemporary global realities. Although the office lacks the authority to directly reform the Security Council, the Secretary-General can use their convening power, moral authority, and agenda-setting influence to promote constructive dialogue on institutional reform and build momentum for greater inclusivity within the UN system. This includes facilitating broad-based consultations among member states on Security Council reform, encouraging consensus-building across regions, and ensuring that the concerns of underrepresented regions, particularly Africa, remain central to these discussions. Beyond reform debates, the Secretary-General can also support greater African participation in peace and security decision-making structures by strengthening partnerships with the African Union, enhancing the role of African institutions in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and promoting more systematic consultation with African stakeholders on issues affecting the continent. Such measures would contribute to a more legitimate, effective, and responsive multilateral order capable of addressing complex contemporary



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**Conclusion:
Representation as a Test
of UN Credibility**

As the United Nations prepares for a new chapter under its next Secretary-General, it faces mounting pressure to demonstrate that it can effectively respond to the complexities of a rapidly changing world. From geopolitical fragmentation and protracted conflicts to climate insecurity and growing demands for global equity, the challenges confronting the international system require institutions that are both effective and representative. The Secretary-General transition presents a timely opportunity to advance this conversation and build momentum for a more inclusive multilateral order. A Security Council that better reflects the voices and interests of all regions, including Africa, would not only strengthen the UN's legitimacy but also enhance its capacity to promote peace, security, and cooperation in the twenty-first century.

The 2026 Contest for UN Secretary-General: A Timely Case for Women's Leadership

The 2026 selection of the next Secretary-General of the United Nations has reignited global discussions about leadership, representation, and the future direction of multilateral governance. Despite eight decades of existence, the UN has never been led by a woman, raising important questions about gender equity and inclusivity within the world's foremost international organization.

By Enowbachem Agbortanyi

Introduction

With the current United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, wrapping up his mandate by December 2026, there is a need for an appropriate candidate to succeed him, one that will be consistent with the UN's values and

mission. Having existed for more than 80 years, the United Nations has yet to have a female Secretary-General, highlighting the existing disparity in values and practices. This article argues that the appointment of a female Secretary-General would not only serve as an important corrective step but also strengthen the organization in terms of legitimacy and accountability. In addition, women's

leadership qualities, which involve cooperation and long-term conflict resolution, make a perfect fit for the UN's mandate.

Context: A critical leadership transition

The present Secretary-General, António Guterres, is due to end his second term in December 2026, initiating a worldwide search for the next candidate. Principles of increased transparency and inclusiveness characterize the procedure, and it involves nomination by member states followed by endorsement by the Security Council and the General Assembly. This situation emerges against the background of deep global challenges, including geopolitical competition, reduced multilateralism, climate emergencies, the erosion of democracy, and funding issues within the UN system. Such a scenario necessitates transformative leadership.

For the first time, several outstandingly qualified women have emerged as top contenders. In particular, many declared candidates are women, demonstrating the conscious efforts of the international community to ensure gender equality. Moreover, it must be noted that during the almost 80 years of its existence, the United Nations has never been led by a woman. Despite the persistent recommendations of member



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states, there has never been a female Secretary-General.

This brief aims to echo the need for the global body to implement its message of gender equality even at the helm of the organisation, not just at the level of agencies. It provides several reasons why it is most timely for a woman to be the 10th SG of the UN, as well as considerations during selection and validation at the various stages.

Why a female Secretary-General?

- ◆ Correcting historical gender imbalance

Ever since its formation in 1945, the UN has had nine Secretary-Generals – **all men**, beginning from Trygve Lie of Norway to the incumbent Antonio Guterres from Portugal, notwithstanding multiple appeals for parity in leadership appointments. The gender gap in leadership in the UN has continued unabated, despite its norms of equality, as reflected in the Charter of the UN and other frameworks such as

CEDAW. UN data reveals that women occupy just **28%** of managerial leadership positions globally.

Appointing a female Secretary-General would therefore represent not merely symbolic progress but a substantive correction of institutional inequity. It would demonstrate that the UN is



CREDIT: REUTERS/MAYELA LOPEZ

willing to embody the values it promotes, thereby strengthening its credibility. Moreover, it would send a powerful signal to member states, particularly those where women remain excluded from political leadership, that gender parity is both achievable and necessary. The appointment of a female Secretary-General would move beyond symbolic progress to a substantive correction of institutional injustice. It would also signal that the organization is ready to align its values with its practices, strengthening its credibility. In addition, this move will serve as a clear message to other member countries, especially those where women still face many obstacles to participating in politics.

◆ Enhancing institutional legitimacy and trust

With [increasing distrust in the UN](#), the issue of leadership legitimacy has become highly significant. The UN is facing increasing criticism among the member countries as well as the global community due to its detachment from the current issues. The appointment of a female to the position of the Secretary-General may restore the prestige by making sure that its leadership reflects the expectations of society. The diversity in leadership may tend to increase organizational effectiveness and public support. According to a [2020 report by the World Economic Forum](#), gender diversity in organizations promotes innovation and responsiveness. The UN will position itself as

a forward-looking institution that is able to not just preach but adjust to changing global norms, including breaking the pattern of male dominance.

◆ Leadership style and conflict resolution

A growing body of [evidence](#) indicates that women often bring distinct leadership approaches characterized by collaboration, inclusivity, and consensus-building. While leadership effectiveness is not inherently gender-specific, [studies](#) in political science and organizational behavior suggest that female leaders tend to prioritize dialogue and long-term stability—qualities essential in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. For example, the [Council on Foreign Relations](#) claims that women's participation in peace processes increases the probability of a peace agreement lasting at least two years by 20% and a peace agreement lasting fifteen years by 35%. Given the UN's key role in mediating conflict, such leadership qualities are most relevant. A female Secretary-General could therefore bring a renewed emphasis on preventive diplomacy and inclusive peacebuilding strategies.

◆ Advancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda, introduced by UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000, highlights the role of women in peace processes and security. Even though there have been some achievements, implementation has remained inconsistent because women are often underrepresented in peace processes and post-conflict reconstruction.

A female Secretary-General can play a key role in promoting the WPS agenda through its full integration into the activities of the United Nations. She can thus make sure that gender perspective is not regarded as a secondary issue but a fundamental one in the context of global security. Moreover, the

United Nations Security Council has recognized the significance of leadership in implementing the WPS agenda on multiple occasions.

Barriers to change

However, there are various reasons why the appointment of a woman as Secretary-General still remains a challenge. The influence of the Permanent five members of the Security Council with veto powers makes geopolitical factors more important than normative factors. The informal process of selecting a new leader can adversely affect the candidates without the support of the great powers.

Furthermore, the combination of regional rotation and gender can lead to a reduction in efforts towards change. Although a Latin American candidate enjoys considerable support, this does not necessarily mean that a female candidate will also have widespread acceptance. Opposition continues to exist among member states that emphasize merit over representation as a criterion, even though the two factors are not mutually exclusive.

Conclusion

The appointment of the next UN Secretary-General in 2026 will be a turning point in this global institution. Given the number of women contesting for this position, this process can serve as an important step towards the election of the first woman as the Secretary-General of the UN. This will not only help to correct the long-time imbalance that has existed from creation with 9 male Secretary-Generals, but it will also contribute to the improved legitimacy of the organization and its leadership potential. In the context of the growing complexity of global problems, inclusive and transformative leadership becomes particularly important, and appointing a female Secretary-General will better position the UN to address these global contemporary problems.

A photograph of Donald Trump speaking at a podium in a large assembly hall, likely the United Nations. He is wearing a dark blue suit and a red tie. The podium is wooden with a black top and has a microphone and a glass of water on it. In the background, a large audience of people is seated in a tiered arrangement, looking towards the speaker. The lighting is bright, and the overall atmosphere is formal.

**“American
First policy of
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Dr. Primus Tazanu

GOVERNANCE

What Future for the United Nations in the Face of Different Types of Nationalisms?

The resurgence of diverse forms of nationalism across the world is reshaping the political environment in which the United Nations operates, raising important questions about the future of multilateral cooperation. From populist and economic nationalism to ethnic and sovereignty-driven movements, these trends have increasingly challenged international institutions, collective decision-making, and the norms underpinning global governance.

By Dr. Primus Tazanu

Introduction

In the coming months, the United Nations (UN) will elect its 10th Secretary-General to lead the organization into its next phase. Established over eighty years ago, the UN now faces increasing challenges, including its perceived limitations in effectively responding to conflict involving major powers. Two world powers, Russia and the United States of America, both members of the UN Security Council, have recently launched wars against weaker nations, acts of aggression disapproved by the UN. These conflicts, often

framed in terms of national interest, have renewed debates on the limits of international law and the effectiveness of multilateral institutions. Recent conflicts, including developments involving Ukraine, Iran, and Venezuela, have raised important questions about the legality of state actions, the limits of international law, and the role of major powers in shaping the global order. This article examines these developments and reflects on what they reveal about the limitations of the UN, as well as the steps required to strengthen its credibility. It begins by questioning how nationalism is interpreted and applied in global politics.



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Nationalisms and the Helplessness UN

American expansionist campaigns, added to President Trump's arm-twisting approach to international relations, are highlighting what [Lord Palmerston, the 19th century British prime minister](#), observed more than one and a half centuries ago. Lord Palmerston stated neither friends nor enemies are permanent in international relations. Trump is reworking international alliances in favour of USA, even if it means offending allies or using force to meet American interests. He was unapologetic about his [desire to exploit Venezuelan oil](#). At the same time, he has encouraged American firms to take advantage of the new dispensation and invest in the

Venezuelan oil industry. Similarly, American war on Iran is still about natural resources and ideological differences dating back to almost half a century. In the case of Iran, aside from suspecting that the country could develop a nuclear weapon, Iranian nationalist policies since 1979 continue to infuriate USA, the reason Iran is under American sanctions that particularly target the oil industry.

America views Iranian and Venezuelan nationalism with suspicion, the reason they gave President Maduro an ultimatum to resign in November 2025. The war on Iran is meant to quell its nationalist sentiments. In fact the ultimatum and war sound more like the colonial demands by the Spanish

conquistadors in the Americas. Before conquering lands, the conquistadors would arrive the outskirts of the village in twilight and read out a [requerimiento](#), a ‘surrender or die’ document, declaring their intentions to enslave the natives, to plunder their land, and to steal their gold. Of course, in most cases, the natives did not surrender and the consequences were bloody.

Just like the conquistadors, Trump interprets native nationalism as outright rebellion, when in fact these people just want to be left alone, and to have control over their resources. Native nationalism looks inward, to protect themselves and their resources. Scholars have long observed that nationalism is often interpreted differently depending on geopolitical context, with some forms being accepted and others viewed as threats. Interestingly, the very white power structure respects and supports white nationalism. [American First policy](#) of Mr Trump is an expression of nationalism. Well, the point here is that, unlike non-white people’s nationalism that looks inward, white people’s nationalism, aside from looking inward, often acts outwardly to control and exploit lands that threaten the Westerner’s way of life.



International law does not endorse a country intervening in another, which is why advocates of the global liberal system and institutions find it disappointing when a powerful country attacks another militarily or when it abducts a sitting president of another country.

This observation is vital to understanding why the USA, Russia, and most Western countries often feel threatened when resource-rich countries of the Global South adopt nationalism as a strategy of socioeconomic justice. Irrespective of their stance, the UN expects other countries to respect the decisions of states that express nationalist sentiments.

International Aggression and the UN Position

International law does not endorse a country intervening in another, which is why advocates of the global liberal system and institutions find it disappointing when a powerful country attacks another militarily or when it abducts a sitting president of another country. [Article 2\(4\) of the UN Charter](#) prohibits states using force to interfere in the internal affairs of others. On the other hand, however, the USA has justified its foreign aggression by citing the UN’s Article 51, which talks about the right to self-defence. It wants to protect its forces in the Middle East. In the case of Maduro, President Trump believed he was simply enforcing an American law because a US court in 2020 indicted the Venezuelan leader for drug and gun charges.

However, the American position downplays international procedures needed to take Maduro to a US court or to launch military strikes on Iran. International law provides two options for countries to act when they find themselves in this scenario. First, countries can use military force against others only for self-defence. Secondly, they can do so only when authorized by the UN Security Council. The USA did not comply with any of these, raising questions about the applicability of international law. The UN cannot impose sanctions on USA because the global body does not have the power to do so. Additionally, the US has veto rights in the UN Security Council, meaning Americans cannot vote to sanction themselves.

Admittedly, the American actions expose the weakness of the UN, an organization that influential countries have, at times, disregarded. Unfortunately, the UN relies on morality and a belief in gentleman's agreement, which expects nations to exercise civility and understanding on the international arena, even amidst pain and hurt. On the contrary, powerful nations often go against these expectations when their national interest is at stake.

The Future Power of the UN

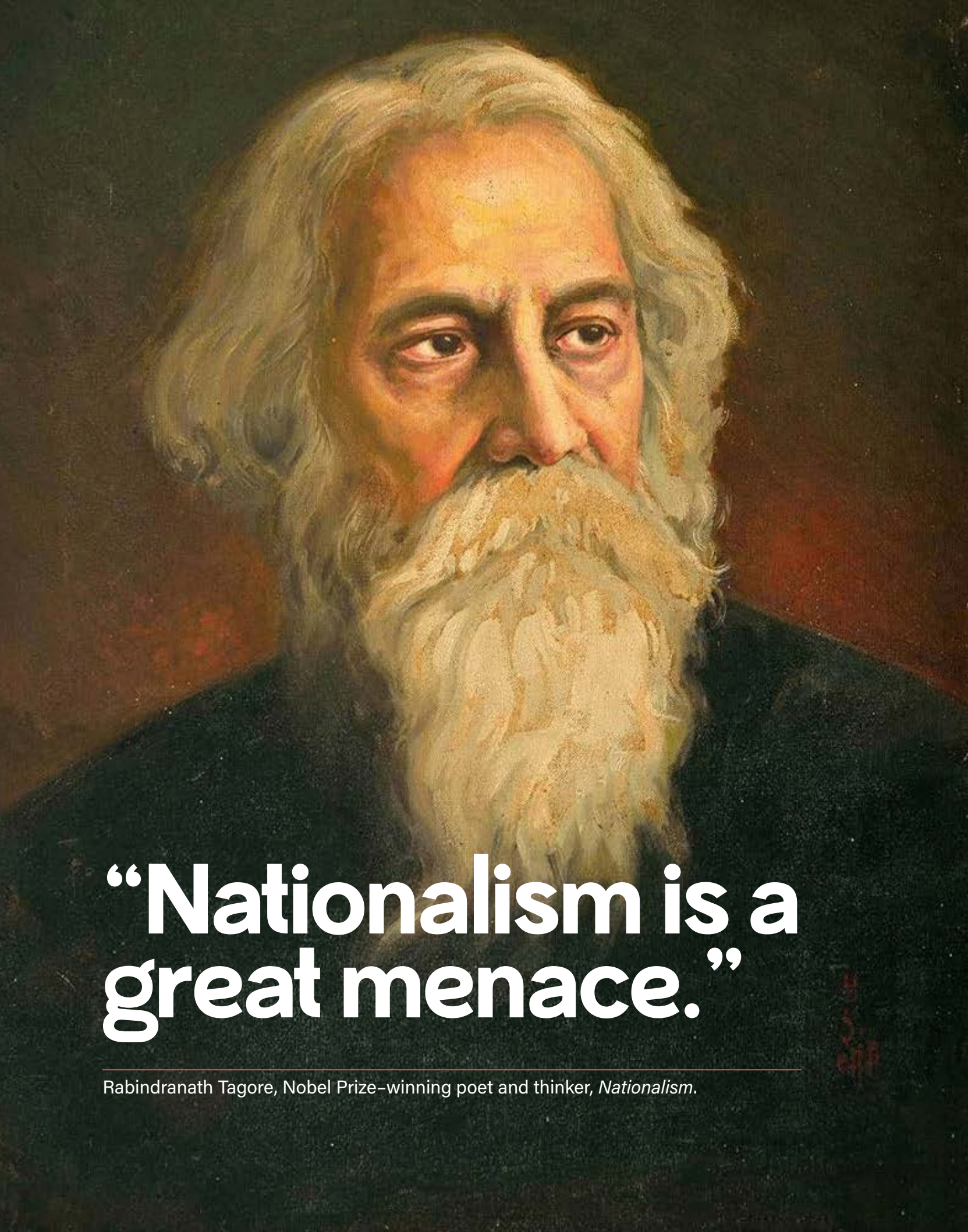
Countries with veto rights in the UN Security Council have either ignored or used the organization to justify their foreign aggression in the name of

national interests. For sure, it would be impossible for the UN to stop powerful countries such as USA and Russia from taking unilateral decisions to attack weaker ones. There are however, some areas that the UN can pay attention to, if it wants to stay relevant as a global body. Some of these are:

- Reforming the Security Council in significant ways. The organization could increase the number of countries with veto powers in the Security Council, while simultaneously making all seats at the Council non-permanent. Increasing the seats could take into consideration the representational balance such as three countries from each continent.
- Reducing the executive powers of Security Council, while devolving more powers to the General Assembly. Presently, the UN General Assembly has fewer powers than the Security Council even as the former has more members.
- Lastly, the UN could encourage its members to develop regional military alliances similar to NATO. The rationale behind this is that aggressive nations would be cautious when they plan to attack a country that is a member of a military alliance.



International law provides two options for countries to act when they find themselves in this scenario.



**“Nationalism is a
great menace.”**

Rabindranath Tagore, Nobel Prize-winning poet and thinker, *Nationalism*.

The UN at a Crossroads: Why Africa's Industrial Future Depends on Inclusive Global Leadership

Africa's aspirations for industrial transformation are unfolding at a time when the international economic and political order is undergoing profound change. As the United Nations confronts growing questions about its effectiveness and representativeness, the quality of global leadership will play a decisive role in shaping opportunities for sustainable industrial development across the continent.

By Dr. Stephane Mbiankeu Nguea

Introduction

The selection of the next [UN Secretary-General in 2026](#) comes at the time when the world is increasingly fragmented. From Ukraine to the South China Sea, trade wars to military conflicts: power acts alone; the weak

absorb the shock. For African nations, the stakes could not be higher. The international system is imperfect, but it is still the main organisation where small and medium-sized economies can bargain trade arrangements, secure development finance, and keep the bigger powers answerable. The [World Trade Organisation's](#) dispute-resolution

process keeps stalling. The [World Bank](#), meanwhile, estimates developing countries will need an extra \$2.4 trillion every year by 2030 to meet climate and development goals, but those pledges have not been delivered. [Africa's share of global foreign direct investment](#) is still below 6%. Therefore, the election of the next Secretary-General transcends routine. It represents a unique institutional moment to redefine the contours of global cooperation, at a time when the price of fragmentation is rising by the day.

Global Fragmentation and Africa's Industrial Constraints

The links between global governance failures and Africa's industrial stagnation are direct and measurable. Three main mechanisms show up. First, the erosion of multilateral trade rules tends to hit emerging industrialisers especially hard. The [AfCFTA](#) aims to build a single market of 1.4 billion people, but everything hangs on predictable international trade rules for inputs, know-how, and export opportunities. When major powers impose unilateral tariffs, sanctions, and industrial incentives that run counter to WTO commitments, African exporters—who don't really have the fiscal room to respond—get squeezed out of the markets they were promised. Second, fragmentation in digital governance weakens Africa's ability to construct a competitive digital economy. As [UNCTAD's Digital Economy Report 2024](#) describes, the global digital economy is now managed through overlapping regulatory blocs: [the EU's GDPR](#), [China's cyber sovereignty approach](#), and the United States' more market driven posture. Without a coherent multilateral structure, Africa risks turning into a patchwork digital market, unable to reach the scale required for locally produced platforms and industries. Third, climate finance shortfalls undercut infrastructure investment. The [African Development Bank puts](#) Africa's infrastructure funding gap at about \$68 to \$108 billion each year. When rich countries fail to deliver the \$100 billion annual

climate finance pledged and reaffirmed at every COP, African governments face a brutal choice: invest in roads, ports, and power, or service their debt.

The Gender Dimension: Exclusion at the Top, Exclusion at the Base

The debate over the next Secretary-General is also a debate about gender. In the UN's 80-year history, no woman has ever held the post of Secretary-General. This gap is not symbolic, but is structural.



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It weakens priorities and legitimacy. Moreover, women are still shut out of the rooms that set the rules for Africa: finance, trade, and climate. When women are absent from decision-making tables, the policy agendas that come out of those rooms end up systematically underweighting the sectors and concerns that matter most for truly inclusive development, for example, care infrastructure, informal-sector formalisation, education, and health. For Africa, the stakes are not symbolic. The consequences are real and economic. As a recent [study](#) found, capital-intensive industrialisation in Africa has often sidelined women from the most stable and well-remunerated jobs. Fixing it requires action, not talk: industrial policies tied to gender-inclusive hiring, STEM education for girls, and care infrastructure so women can work without constant

barriers. A multilateral system that cannot model gender equality will lack both the credibility and the analytical muscle required to push those policies forward. The [AU's Agenda 2063](#) explicitly frames gender equality as a driver of transformation. The UN's own SDG 5 and SDG 8 commit the world to gender equality and decent work for all. The election of a woman as Secretary-General, and more broadly the institutionalisation of gender parity in all UN leadership structures, would send a clear signal.

The Opportunity: Africa's Collective Leverage

Africa is not a passive spectator in this leadership transition. With 54 states and 1.4 billion people, it is the UN's largest voting bloc. That weight has long been diluted by divisions and outside influence.

However, the moment now demands unity, however hard it feels. A coordinated African position on the next Secretary-General should be built around three demands, not more- not less. First, the selection process should be genuinely transparent and merit based. It has to reject the informal rotation principle that has often barred candidates from particular regions, and sidelined all women. The “[1 for 7 Billion](#)” campaign has for a long time argued for this kind of change, and African civil society should really amplify these appeals instead of treating them like background noise. Second, candidates should come forward with clear, binding promises on multilateral trade and finance reform. This includes restoring the [WTO dispute settlement](#), delivering on climate finance pledges, and also negotiating a global digital governance framework that actually respects the interests of developing economies. Third, gender parity in UN leadership should be treated as a non-negotiable minimum standard, if the institution wants renewed credibility that holds up under scrutiny. The AU, which has already managed gender parity at the Commission level, should lead this insistence by example, not just by statements.

Policy Recommendations

For African policymakers and civil society organisations, the following actions are urgent:

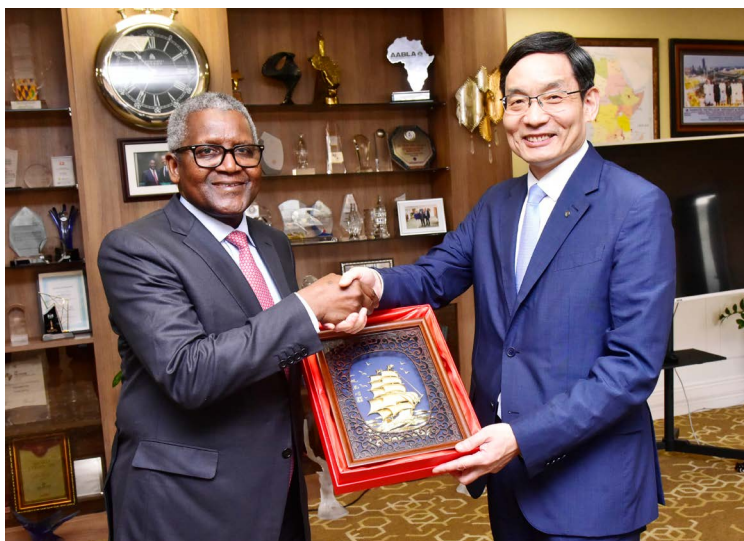
- The AU Commission should convene an extraordinary session to agree on selection criteria and, where possible, a shortlist of candidates, ensuring that the continent does not fragment its voting power.
- African member states should insist that candidates for Secretary-General publish specific, measurable pledges on trade reform, climate finance, digital governance, and gender parity in appointments.
- Organisations like [Nkafu](#) and its peers across the continent should track candidates’ statements,

publish scorecards, and engage media to ensure that the selection process remains under public scrutiny.

- African governments should explicitly connect their support for any candidate to that candidate’s willingness to champion the AfCFTA as a model of regional integration that multilateral institutions should actively support.

Conclusion

The United Nations is at a crossroads because the institution’s legitimacy, that is its ability to stand in for the interests of most of humanity, is now under doubt. Africa has the most to lose if the UN failed, but it also has the most to gain if the UN is fair and inclusive. The election of the new Secretary-General represents an important turning point. It could turn out to be one more of those closed-door arrangements, done by the powerful, and repeating the same exclusionary routines that helped bring the system here. Alternatively, it could be a watershed moment, a deliberate move toward global leadership that mirrors the world, as it really is diverse, multipolar, and in urgent need of institutions that work for everyone, not just some.



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Who Governs the Future of Work?

Africa's Labour Markets in an Era of Global Fragmentation

Africa's future prosperity will depend not only on the jobs the continent creates, but also on its ability to shape the global rules governing labour markets. As geopolitical fragmentation, demographic shifts, and changing patterns of globalization redefine jobs worldwide, Africa risks becoming a participant in the future of work without having a meaningful influence over how that future is governed.

By Dr. Wirajing Muhamadu Awal Kindzeka

The Representation Paradox of Africa's Labour Markets

The African continent is emerging as the world's largest source of labour force growth. By 2050, one in every four working-age individuals globally will be African.

At the same time, the continent continues to face some of the highest levels of youth unemployment, labour informality, vulnerable employment, and gender inequality in the world. From Africa's nearly 420 million youth aged 15-35, one-third are unemployed, another third is vulnerably employed, and only one in six is in wage employment. This

creates a fundamental paradox. Africa is becoming increasingly central to the future of global labour supply, yet it remains largely peripheral in shaping the institutions, standards, and policies governing labour markets. [Decisions regarding artificial intelligence, digital labour platforms, migration regimes, supply-chain standards, and emerging forms of work continue to be dominated by actors outside the continent.](#) This imbalance exposes Africa to three major vulnerabilities:

- Technological exclusion: Rules governing artificial intelligence and digital work are often designed without adequate consideration of African labour market realities.
- Unequal labour market transitions: [Women and young people remain concentrated in vulnerable and informal employment](#) while benefiting least from emerging opportunities.

- Third, limited representation in global labour governance: A reduction or limited Africa's ability to influence decisions, increasingly shape employment outcomes across the continent.

The result is a growing disconnect between Africa's demographic importance and its influence over the future of work.

Global Fragmentation and the New Geography of Work

The [global labour landscape is undergoing profound transformation.](#) Among the increasing challenges affecting the future of work in Africa are: geopolitical tensions, shifting supply chains and technological patterns, migration restrictions, and the rise of economic nationalism which are reshaping how economies produce, trade, and employ workers. While globalization once encouraged the integration of labour markets,



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today's environment is increasingly characterized by fragmentation and vulnerabilities. Production systems are being reorganized around strategic alliances, regional blocs, and national security considerations. Simultaneously, digital technologies are redefining where work takes place and who participates in global value creation. For Africa, these shifts create both risks and opportunities. On one hand, fragmentation may reduce access to global markets, foreign investment, and traditional employment pathways. On the other hand, it creates opportunities for African economies to position themselves within emerging regional value chains and new production networks. However, the benefits are not automatic as this depends on whether African countries can move beyond being suppliers of labour and become active participants in designing the governance frameworks that regulate labour mobility, digital employment, platform work, and technological transitions. This does not depend only on the availability of financial resources, but also with inclusive policy targets, sustainable infrastructures, proper resources mobilization and allocation, beneficial collaboration and resilient frameworks.

Gender and the Unequal Future of Work

As an important aspect, an inclusive global labour market, particularly the gender aspect, is one of the main issues debated on, when discussing about the future of work. Across Africa, women remain disproportionately represented in informal employment, low-productivity activities, unpaid care work, and vulnerable occupations. While digitalization and technological innovation have the potential to expand economic opportunities, they also risk reproducing existing inequalities if access to skills, technology, finance, and social protection remains uneven. Due to the continent's widened inequalities gap, women continue to face significant barriers to labour market participation, including limited access to digital infrastructure (Women are now 14% less likely than men to use mobile

internet), weaker asset ownership, and persistent social norms that restrict economic opportunities. Without deliberate intervention, the next generation of labour market transformation may widen rather than reduce gender inequalities. Ensuring that women participate fully in emerging labour markets, requires more than increasing employment rates. In addition, it requires integrating gender considerations into digital strategies, skills development programmes and social protection systems. The future of work must not simply be more technologically advanced; it must also be more inclusive and sustainable.

From Labour Supply to Labour Power

The central policy challenge for Africa is not simply creating jobs. It is transforming demographic potential into economic and institutional influence. For decades, discussions on Africa's labour markets have focused primarily on employment creation. While this remains important, the emerging global environment requires a broader perspective. The issue is not only about how many jobs Africa creates, but also who defines the rules governing those jobs. Achieving this transformation requires action on three significant fronts:

- Strengthening productive employment systems capable of generating formal, skilled, and resilient jobs.
- Investing in human capital, digital skills, and technological capabilities to prepare workers for changing labour market demands.
- Expanding Africa's voice within global labour governance institutions and international policy platforms where future-of-work rules are negotiated.

This transition represents a shift from labour abundance toward labour influence.

Policy Priorities for Inclusive Labour Market Governance

Positioning Africa within the future of work agenda requires a coherent policy strategy.

- First, invest in skills for technological transformation. Education systems must move beyond traditional models and equip workers with digital, technical, and adaptive skills relevant to emerging labour markets.
- Second, strengthen social protection systems. Labour market transitions will create winners and losers. Expanding social protection is essential to support workers affected by technological and economic change.
- Third, close gender gaps in labour market participation. Policies should address barriers facing women in education, technology access, entrepreneurship, and formal employment.
- Fourth, strengthen Africa's role in global labour governance and leverage regional integration. African countries should coordinate positions within international institutions to ensure that future labour regulations reflect the realities of developing economies. The region should also develop regional labour markets across borders, to create employment opportunities.

A Strategic Choice for Africa

The future of work is often discussed as a technological challenge. For Africa, it is equally a governance challenge. The continent stands at a crossroads: The region can remain largely a recipient of labour market rules designed elsewhere, or it can actively participate in shaping the institutions that will govern employment, technology, and economic

opportunity in the decades ahead. Africa's demographic rise provides a unique opportunity to exercise greater influence within the global economy. Yet demographic power alone does not guarantee economic power. Influence must be built through productive transformation, institutional capacity, regional coordination, and strategic engagement in global governance. The future of work will not be determined solely by technology or markets; it will also depend on who has a voice in shaping the rules.

Conclusion: Governing Work in a Fragmented World

As global fragmentation reshapes economic and political relations, the governance of labour markets is becoming an increasingly strategic issue. Africa's challenge is not only

to prepare workers for the jobs of tomorrow, but also to secure a meaningful role in defining how those jobs are created, regulated, and protected. The future of work is ultimately a question of power, representation, and inclusion. For Africa, success will depend not only on participating in global labour markets, but on helping govern them.



The future of work will not be determined solely by technology or markets; it will also depend on who has a voice in shaping the rules.

Financing Development Beyond Aid: What Future for CEMAC in a Divided World?

As traditional development assistance faces growing constraints amid geopolitical competition, fiscal pressures, and shifting donor priorities, countries of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa are increasingly compelled to explore alternative pathways for financing sustainable development.

By Dr. Salim Ahmed Vessah

The End of a Model : Between Declining Aid and Economic Fragility

In 2025, the member states of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC) raised nearly [\\$9.4 billion](#) on the regional debt market in Douala. This record level reflects a quiet yet profound shift: the region is now seeking to compensate for the gradual erosion of international aid through alternative financing sources. The global context is clear. Official development assistance declined by [6% in real terms in 2024, before falling by more than 23%](#) between 2024 and 2025.

Concurrently, flows to Sub-Saharan Africa dropped by more than a quarter in a single year. This sharp contraction is structurally reshaping the financing options available to African economies.

[For CEMAC, this profound transformation is occurring amid persistent vulnerability.](#) Regional growth, estimated at around 3% in 2024, remains too weak to generate a meaningful improvement in living standards, with per capita income virtually stagnant (+0.2%). Moreover, fiscal balances have deteriorated significantly, moving from a surplus

of 0.6% of GDP in 2023 to a deficit of approximately 1.5% in 2024. Public revenues are capped at 18.2% of GDP, compared with expenditures close to 19.7%.

In this context, the combined dependence on aid and extractive resources is becoming increasingly unsustainable. CEMAC is no longer facing a temporary constraint but rather the exhaustion of a development model. This shift is not unique to Central Africa. In West Africa, several economies have accelerated their use of domestic markets, while emerging countries such as Indonesia and Mexico are focusing on broadening their tax base and mobilizing national capital. CEMAC is therefore part of a broader global transformation in development financing models.

Financial Constraints: Debt, Weak Revenues and Limited Markets

Rising debt pressures significantly exacerbate this fragility. The regional debt-to-GDP ratio is approximately **53%**, with some countries exceeding critical thresholds. Debt servicing absorbs an increasing share of public budgets, limiting investment capacity in social and productive sectors. Access to



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financial markets is necessary yet constrained. The shallow Central African Stock Exchange (BVMAC) has a market capitalization of **around CFAF 1,710 billion (€2.6 billion)**, modest relative to the region's financing needs. However, the recent dynamism of the bond market, reflected in record issuances, shows room for progress. Recent sovereign issuances in Cameroon and Gabon, for example, have attracted growing demand, though often at high borrowing costs, reflecting persistent risk perceptions.

Provided that transparency, regulatory stability, and governance quality are improved, these markets could become a key pillar of regional financing. Yet, the central challenge remains the mobilization of domestic resources. With low tax revenue, CEMAC countries rely heavily on oil revenues. This dependence makes public finances vulnerable to external shocks and hinders stable budget planning. In an international environment characterized by rising interest rates and increased investor selectivity, this structural weakness is a major constraint.

Diversifying Financing in a Fragmented World

Tightened fiscal space



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prompts a key question : How can development be financed amid increasing uncertainty and reduced concessionality? Diversifying financing sources is critical. Traditional flows are being supplemented by new actors and instruments. Global diaspora remittances [exceeded \\$860 billion in 2023, with \\$669 billion](#) going to low- and middle-income countries. Sub-Saharan Africa received nearly \$49 billion. However, in CEMAC, these funds largely go to consumption, not productive investment. Instruments like diaspora bonds and dedicated investment funds could leverage this resource.

Simultaneously, [financing geopolitics are shifting](#). China, Gulf countries, and other emerging economies increasingly join traditional partners. This diversification offers opportunities but adds complexity. Faster financing may come with implicit trade-offs, like natural resource access or contractual dependencies. Innovative mechanisms, especially blended finance, are growing. Yet, the region lacks the capacity to structure bankable, credible projects aligning with international standards, which is necessary to access these instruments.

Finally, [climate finance presents a major opportunity](#).

The Congo Basin, the world's second-largest tropical rainforest, gives the region a strategic advantage in environmental negotiations. Carbon markets and ecosystem preservation financing could generate significant revenue, but robust institutional capacity is needed to mobilize this resource.

Rethinking Priorities: Integration, Governance and Transformation

Beyond financial instruments, the development model itself must be reconsidered. [The persistent weakness of intra-regional trade in CEMAC](#) limits economic attractiveness and resilience to external shocks. In a fragmented world, regional integration is no longer a secondary option but a strategic necessity. A more integrated regional market would attract greater investment, generate economies of scale, and strengthen collective bargaining power. However, significant challenges remain, including inadequate infrastructure, non-tariff barriers, and limited political coordination.

Moreover, governance is a central issue. As capital becomes increasingly demanding, [institutional credibility has become a key determinant of access to financing](#). Transparency, predictability, and policy effectiveness are no longer merely normative goals, they are conditions for accessing capital. Finally, structural transformation is essential. Without diversification, gradual industrialization, and substantial investment in human capital, no financing strategy will yield sustainable results.

Strategic Priorities for CEMAC

Against this backdrop, several strategic priorities clearly emerge:

- First, broadening the tax base is essential, notably through reducing exemptions, improving taxation of the informal sector, and gradually integrating the digital economy.



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- Second, developing a deeper and more liquid regional financial market is a key lever for reducing dependence on external financing.
- Third, strengthening the capacity to structure bankable projects, particularly through public-private partnerships is critical to attracting private capital.
- Fourth, mobilizing the diaspora through dedicated instruments, such as diaspora bonds or targeted investment funds, could provide a stable and strategic source of financing.
- Finally, accelerating regional integration remains essential to expand market size, improve competitiveness, and enhance investor attractiveness.

Conclusion

CEMAC faces a demanding equation: increasing financing sources but facing increasingly complex access conditions. In a fragmented world, CEMAC struggles with both resource shortages and excessive uncertainty. The real shift will be strategic, not solely financial: transforming constraint into leverage, and moving from an aid-dependent model to a more autonomous, resilient, and sovereign economy. The question is no longer how to secure resources, but how to define a long-term trajectory.

Declining Development Finance: Africa's Strategic Options Under the Next UN Secretary-General

As global development finance becomes more uncertain and multilateral cooperation continues to evolve, there is a need for Africa to strengthen its financing resilience and strategic influence within the international system.

By Larissa Ntoubia

The global multilateral system is undergoing profound transformation amid geopolitical fragmentation, fiscal pressures, and declining confidence in international cooperation. Traditional development finance is becoming increasingly uncertain as major donor countries reduce aid budgets, re-prioritize domestic spending, and shift toward strategic or security linked financing. According to the [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development \(OECD\)](#), Official Development Assistance (ODA) has entered

a historic decline. In 2025, global ODA fell by 23.1%, the largest annual drop ever recorded. Sub-Saharan Africa, the world's most aid-dependent region, experienced **16-28% cuts** in bilateral aid, with Least Developed Countries receiving 25.8% less support than the previous year. These reductions have hit health, education, and humanitarian programs hardest, leaving African governments with shrinking fiscal space and widening financing gaps. At the same time, the anticipated transition to a new UN Secretary-General in 2027 presents



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a pivotal moment for redefining multilateralism and the future role of the United Nations in global development governance. For Africa, where many development programmes remain partly dependent on external financing, these shifts raise urgent questions about financing, representation, and strategic positioning within a changing international order.

As African countries face increasing vulnerability from declining development assistance and unpredictable donor priorities, existing institutions are struggling to respond effectively to overlapping crises. The uncertainty surrounding the policy direction of the next UN Secretary-General adds another layer of ambiguity regarding the future of development cooperation and the prioritization of African interests within the UN. Without engagement and alternative financing strategies, African countries risk diminished policy influence and increased exposure to global economic shocks. The brief examines how declining development finance and the 2027 UN leadership transition may shape

Africa's development prospects and influence within the multilateral system.

Declining development finance and the changing global aid landscape

Over the past years, development finance has served as a key pillar of international cooperation, supporting poverty reduction, infrastructure development, public health, and institutional capacity building across developing countries. However, the global aid architecture has evolved significantly as donor priorities have shifted from long-term development objectives toward crisis response, security concerns, and strategic geopolitical interests. ODA is increasingly being redirected toward humanitarian emergencies, refugee support, climate adaptation, and security-related initiatives. Simultaneously, many traditional donor countries face domestic fiscal pressures that constrain foreign assistance budgets. These developments have contributed to growing

uncertainty regarding the volume, predictability, and accessibility of development finance for African countries.

This is not without severe implications as declining and less predictable external financing threatens progress towards sustainable development goals. African countries face widening financing gaps at a time when investment needs are growing, making the search for alternative and sustainable financing sources increasingly urgent. In Kenya for instance external financing for health programs dropped by about 20%, forcing the government to increase domestic allocations to sustain HIV/AIDS and malaria programs.

The next UN Secretary-General and the future of multilateral cooperation

The present multilateral system is confronted with growing geopolitical rivalries, weakening consensus among major powers, and declining trust in international institutions. These challenges have raised questions about the effectiveness and legitimacy of the United Nations in addressing global crises and coordinating collective action. The appointment of a new UN Secretary-General in 2027 will occur at a critical moment for global governance. The next Secretary-General will shape priorities regarding development cooperation, financing for sustainable

development, climate action, peacebuilding, and institutional reform. Leadership choices may significantly influence the extent to which multilateral institutions remain effective platforms for addressing Africa's development challenges.

The 2027 leadership transition echo past climate governance shifts: when developed countries

pledged **\$100 billion/year** in climate finance at Copenhagen in 2009, African states secured recognition of their adaptation needs, but delivery took 14 years, with Africa receiving only about 26% of flows. Under Secretary-General António Guterres from 2017, the UN has pushed for fulfillment and **\$40 billion/year** in adaptation finance by 2025, yet delays eroded trust. This gap underscores the need for binding accountability mechanisms in the next leadership cycle. A renewed commitment to multilateralism could strengthen development partnerships and increase Africa's voice in global decision-making. Conversely, continued fragmentation could weaken collective responses to development challenges and reduce available resources. African governments therefore have a strong interest in actively engaging in debates on UN reform and future leadership priorities.

Africa's strategic options amid fragmentation

Reducing dependence on



The present multilateral system is confronted with growing geopolitical rivalries, weakening consensus among major powers, and declining trust in international institutions.

external assistance requires greater domestic resource mobilization, improved tax administration, strengthened public financial management, and the development of innovative financing instruments. Regional financial institutions can also play a greater role in mobilizing investment for infrastructure and sustainable development.

Expanding South–South and diversified partnerships is critical. African countries should pursue broader partnerships with emerging economies while maintaining balanced relations with traditional development partners. South–South cooperation offers opportunities for technology transfer, investment, trade expansion, and knowledge sharing that complement traditional aid flows. [China's Belt and Road Initiative](#) has invested heavily in African infrastructure projects since its launch in 2013, with investment reaching \$61.2 billion in 2025 alone that is a 283% year on year increase, making Africa the top BRI destination. In addition, India-Africa trade reached \$89.54 billion in 2022, and Ethiopia's Addis Ababa–Djibouti electrified railway transports 98% of Ethiopia's coffee exports and saved about \$43 million USD in logistics costs in 2022. These partnerships demonstrate tangible gains in cost savings, logistics efficiency, and regional trade expansion.

Furthermore, Africa's growing demographic and economic importance provides an opportunity to strengthen its influence within international institutions. Greater coordination among African states, particularly through the African Union and regional economic communities, can improve bargaining power and ensure that African priorities are adequately reflected in future multilateral reforms.

Policy Recommendations

- ✓ Reduce excessive dependence on traditional donor finance through domestic resource

mobilization and innovative financing mechanisms. African finance ministries can expand domestic tax bases. For example Rwanda's e-tax system increased compliance by 12% in 2021. Also, issuing green bonds can attract climate-focused investors.

- ✓ African RECs should engage proactively in discussions surrounding UN reform and the selection priorities of the next Secretary-General. Policy platform could influence the next Secretary-General's agenda, ensuring African priorities like debt relief and youth employment are central. Pushing for permanent representation in key UN financing committees, will ensure that Africa's demographic weight of over 1.4 billion people is reflected in governance.
- ✓ Expand South–South and diversified partnerships while safeguarding policy autonomy. Morocco's renewable energy partnerships with EU and Gulf states show how Africa can balance traditional and emerging partners.
- ✓ Build coordinated African diplomatic positions to influence the future architecture of multilateral governance. The AU's AfCFTA negotiation success demonstrates Africa's ability to negotiate as a bloc this model should be replicated in UN financing debates.

Conclusion

The transition to a new UN Secretary-General coincides with declining development finance and increasing uncertainty within the global multilateral system. These developments present both significant challenges and strategic opportunities for Africa. While traditional sources of development assistance may become less reliable, African countries can strengthen their resilience by diversifying financing sources, enhancing regional cooperation, and adopting a more proactive role in shaping global governance reforms.



“In eight decades of existence, the UN has never been led by a woman”



Closing Insight

Policy Takeaways Across the Issue

1. Representation Is No Longer a Symbolic Question, It Is a Governance Imperative

Across debates on Security Council reform, the selection of the next UN Secretary-General, labour governance, and development finance, a common message emerges: institutions that fail to reflect contemporary demographic, economic, and geopolitical realities risk losing legitimacy and effectiveness. Africa's demand for greater representation and calls for gender-inclusive leadership are therefore not simply matters of fairness but essential requirements for more responsive and credible global governance.

2. Africa Must Move from Rule-Taker to Rule-Maker

Whether in peace and security, global trade, labour governance, digital regulation, climate finance, or development cooperation, the issue highlights the risks of Africa remaining on the receiving end of decisions made elsewhere. The continent's growing demographic, economic, and diplomatic weight provides an opportunity to shape global norms and institutions rather than merely adapt to them. Strategic influence must become as important as economic growth.

3. Regional Coordination Is Africa's Strongest Source of Global Leverage

Several contributors emphasize that Africa's influence depends less on the power of individual states and more on collective action through institutions such as the African Union, regional economic communities, and the AfCFTA. Whether advocating for Security Council reform, negotiating development finance, or influencing labour and trade governance, coordinated African positions will significantly strengthen the continent's bargaining power in an increasingly fragmented international system.

4. Financing Development Requires a Shift from Dependence to Resilience

The decline in traditional development assistance underscores the urgency of building more sustainable financing models. Strengthening domestic resource mobilization, deepening regional financial markets, leveraging diaspora capital, attracting climate finance, and expanding South-South partnerships are no longer optional policy choices. They are becoming central pillars of Africa's long-term economic sovereignty and development resilience.

5. The Future of Multilateralism Will Be Judged by Its Ability to Deliver Inclusion

The next UN Secretary-General will inherit a world marked by geopolitical rivalry, declining trust in institutions, economic fragmentation, and growing demands for equity. The credibility of

the multilateral system will increasingly depend on whether it can expand participation, address historical imbalances, promote gender equality, and create meaningful opportunities for developing regions to influence global decision-making. For Africa, the challenge is not simply to demand reform but to actively shape the emerging architecture of global governance.



CREDIT: PEXELS

“ The Future of Multilateralism Will Be Judged by Its Ability to Deliver *Inclusion* ”

Final Note

As this issue demonstrates, the United Nations finds itself at a pivotal moment in its history. Eight decades after its founding, the institution faces growing questions about its ability to respond effectively to an increasingly fragmented world marked by geopolitical rivalry, economic uncertainty, climate pressures, technological disruption, and demands for greater inclusion. The challenges confronting the multilateral system are not merely institutional; they are fundamentally questions of legitimacy, representation, and shared responsibility.

The contributions in this edition converge around a common theme: the future of global governance will depend on whether international institutions can adapt to contemporary realities. From Africa's call for a more representative Security Council and greater influence in global decision-making, to debates surrounding women's leadership, labour governance, industrial development, and

development finance, the argument is relevant. A multilateral system designed for the realities of 1945 cannot effectively govern the complexities of the twenty-first century without meaningful reform.

For Africa, these debates are particularly consequential. The continent is no longer a peripheral actor in global affairs. Its demographic growth, economic potential, strategic resources, and diplomatic weight position it as an increasingly important stakeholder in shaping the future international order. Yet influence is not guaranteed. It must be secured through strategic coordination, stronger institutions, proactive diplomacy, and a clear vision of Africa's role in a changing world.

As the United Nations prepares for a new leadership transition, the choices made in the coming years will have implications far beyond the selection of the next Secretary-General. They will help determine whether multilateralism can remain relevant, inclusive, and effective in addressing global challenges that no nation can solve alone.

At On Policy Africa, we hope this issue contributes to informed debate on these critical questions and encourages policymakers, scholars, civil society actors, and citizens alike to engage in shaping a more representative and responsive global order. The future of multilateralism remains unwritten, but its success will depend on the willingness of both institutions and member states to embrace reform, inclusion, and collective responsibility.



OPA 31st edition



In its 31st edition, On Policy Africa explored the theme “Digital Sovereignty and Africa’s Place in the AI Revolution,” highlighting how artificial intelligence, data governance, cloud infrastructure, and digital regulation are shaping Africa’s future. The edition brought together insights from economics, health, governance, peace, and security to show that Africa must move beyond being a passive consumer of technology and become an active architect of its digital destiny. A key message emerged across the issue: the continent’s ability to control its data, build local capacity, protect civic space, and harmonize regional policies will determine whether AI becomes a driver of inclusive development or a new form of digital dependency.

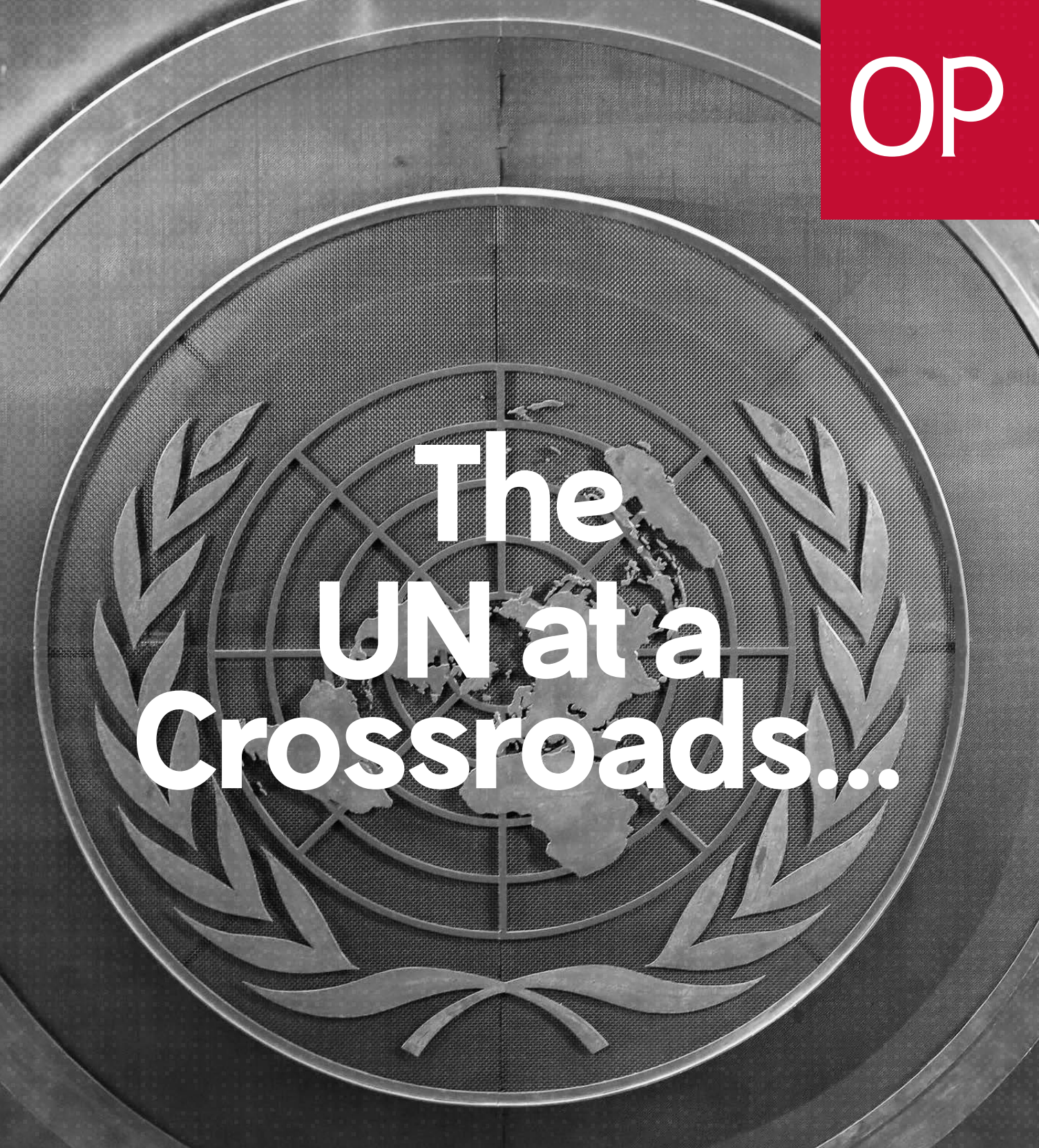
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The background of the page is a grayscale image of the United Nations emblem, which is a world map surrounded by a laurel wreath, all enclosed in a circular border. The emblem is centered on the page.

The UN at a Crossroads...

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