

2021
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At the beginning of 2021, many people expected that it would be a year in which the world would be able to overcome the pandemic. Nevertheless, 2021 has demonstrated that the pandemic's impact has been far-reaching and has worsened existing disadvantages, poverty, and vulnerabilities.

2021 in Review presents a selection of news headlines and reports on the general direction that nations follow when relating to human rights, humanitarian area, and international relations as seen by the United Nations. Among the most pressing issues the world faced in 2021, addressed at the United Nations, were the ongoing effects of the pandemic, human rights violations, tougher restrictions that sparked protests in many countries, a decline in trust in government institutions and leaders, privacy infringements, the limitation of religious freedom, racism, discrimination, political unrest, the challenges of the world economy, food insecurity, and many others.

I would mention some initiatives taken at the UN for the first time. In June 2021, UN General Assembly conducted its first-ever Special Session Against Corruption, adopting a Political Declaration, in which UN Member States recognized the gravity of the issues and threats posed by corruption to the stability and security of societies. On 31 August 2021, the UN marks the first International Day for People of African Descent as a celebration of their enormous contributions to every field of human endeavor. Also, in October 2021, the Human Rights Council recognized that enjoying a clean and healthy environment is a fundamental human right. The United Nations has declared 2021 as the International Year of Peace and Trust to reaffirm its commitment to resolve conflicts peacefully.

In terms of statistics, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the number of displaced people has increased from 82.4 million at the end of 2020 to 84 million at the end of 2021, as a result of persecution, conflict, violence or human rights violations. The United Nations' humanitarian agency OCHA estimated that 274 million people would need humanitarian assistance in 2022, an almost 20% increase from already record-high numbers in 2021. According to global statistics, just 39 percent of rural girls attend secondary school. Women's rights are threatened, and many children, particularly girls, are losing their educational opportunities. Also, in a growing number of countries, the practice of shutting down internet and mobile phone access to silence dissent has become more common. "Surveillance tools can interfere with human rights, from the right to privacy and freedom of expression to rights of association and assembly, religious belief, non-discrimination, and public participation," the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression said in an official statement. Conflicts continued in Syria and Yemen, and new tensions led to instability in Myanmar, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Sudan, and other countries.

We can observe some concerning trends in the statistics: an increase in forced displacement, people suffering from acute hunger, restriction of freedom, increased authoritarianism, conflict, and violence.

While there were many struggles and challenges, we should still consider some positive things that happened in 2021. Innovations in certain fields, such as medicine, have increased in a very short time and global economic output has been improving from the collapse caused by COVID-19. We have observed a spirit of generosity during this crisis and strong solidarity among peoples and nations. Having a positive attitude has proved valuable to many people who experience tough times. During this difficult year, many of us may have experienced anxiety, fear, sickness, grief, loss of freedom, uncertainty at work, and loneliness due to COVID-19. Even in the midst of uncertainty, there is hope. "The world is not without a ruler. The program of coming events is in the hands of the Lord. The Majesty of heaven has the destiny of nations as well as the concerns of His church in His own charge." (E.G.W., 5T, 753). We must never forget that God is in control of history, and we should never lose sight of the wonderful promises He has made for our future.


*"Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; He lifts His voice, the earth melts.
The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress."
Psalm 46:6-7 - NIV*

Pastor Nelu Burcea, PhD, GC PARL Associate Director
Seventh-day Adventist Church's Liaison to the United Nations

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