

**Written Testimony of Peter Yeo, President of the Better World Campaign**  
**U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs**  
**Subcommittee on Oversight and Intelligence**  
**“U.S. Accountability at the United Nations: Challenges and Opportunities for Reform”**  
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Chairman Mills, Ranking Member Moskowitz: thank you for the opportunity to testify on the issue of UN reform. I’m here today with a simple message: the UN gets it. It is serious about working with the Trump Administration and Congress to become more cost-effective, accountable, and fit for purpose.

Last year, UN Secretary-General António Guterres launched the UN80 Initiative, the most wide-ranging reform effort since the United Nations was founded. It seeks to advance reform through three broad lines of effort. First, by reducing costs and improving management through shared services, procurement reform, digital modernization, and staffing reductions. Second, by addressing the proliferation of UN mandates created by member states through systematic review, elimination of outdated tasks, streamlined reporting, and potential sunset provisions. Third, by reducing organizational fragmentation through mergers, shared platforms, integrated country teams, and realignment across the peace and security, development, humanitarian, and human rights pillars of the UN’s work.

This is a work in progress of course, but it is not idle chatter. Working in close consultation with President Trump’s team at the U.S. Mission in New York—led by U.S. Ambassador to the UN Mike Waltz and U.S. Ambassador to the UN for Management and Reform Jeff Bartos—the UN has already delivered significant, concrete wins for American taxpayers.

In September of last year, Secretary-General Guterres called for major belt-tightening: slashing spending, reducing staffing, and streamlining administrative processes. On December 30, 2025, the General Assembly delivered, adopting a regular budget of \$3.45 billion for 2026, down \$270 million from 2025. It represented the largest reduction in the UN regular budget ever, both in dollar and percentage terms, driven by several key cost-saving measures: (1) the elimination of 2,900 staff posts, representing a nearly 20% reduction in staffing at UN Headquarters in New York; (2) consolidation to a single global payroll system; (3) offshoring of administrative functions from New York and Geneva to lower-cost locations including Nairobi, Bonn, Amman, and Entebbe; (4) pooling of HR, procurement, and finance services at each duty station; and, (5) cuts to travel, publications, conferences, and training.

The budget adopted by the General Assembly included other critical provisions called for by the Trump Administration as well. For example, it endorsed a comprehensive review of the UN’s staff compensation package and initiated a process to modernize the UN’s Joint Staff Pension Fund with an eye towards reining in costs long-term. The budget also includes provisions added at the behest of the U.S. requiring the Office of Internal Oversight Services—the UN Secretariat’s equivalent of an Inspector-General—to prioritize investigations into cases that may lead to disciplinary action or significant financial recovery.

In announcing the start of the UN80 initiative last year, Secretary-General Guterres stated that, “These efforts are not ends in themselves. They are about better serving people whose very lives depend on us. They are about hardworking taxpayers around the world who underwrite everything we do.” That is exactly what the General Assembly delivered in December. And that is also exactly why the U.S. supported the final outcome. During the closing session of the General Assembly’s Fifth Committee—which handles

budgetary and reform issues—before the start of the new year, Ambassador Bartos commended the UN for “embracing common sense reform and for adopting a leaner and better prioritized 2026 regular budget.”

More recently, the UN has made progress on other aspects of UN80 as well. For example, on March 31, 2026, the General Assembly adopted a groundbreaking resolution that seeks to reform how mandates—the decisions taken by member states in the General Assembly, Security Council, and other UN bodies that guide the UN’s work—are created, implemented, and reviewed across the organization. This is critical because the large number of mandates in the UN system has created practical challenges: since 1946, more than 40,000 resolutions and other decisions have been adopted across UN bodies, and about 3,000 mandates are currently in force. This can at times lead to overlap, duplication, and inefficiency.

The resolution adopted by the General Assembly seeks to create a more structured lifecycle approach to UN mandates. All new mandates must be proposed with a concept note covering rationale, objectives, financial implications, and implementation timelines. All new and renewing mandates must also establish regular mandate review cycles where member states assess timelines and performance indicators. The resolution also calls on the Secretary-General to propose current mandates for consolidation or termination by the end of 2026. These proposals will then need to be weighed by member states, who will ultimately decide whether to modify, consolidate, or end any mandates.

The UN isn’t stopping there, however. There are active discussions happening in New York about advancing other aspects of UN80 as well. But none of this will happen on its own. The Secretary-General is relatively limited in terms of what he can achieve unilaterally. Many of the reforms currently being hashed out will ultimately require approval by the UN General Assembly to move forward and therefore need buy-in from member states. Assembling that kind of international consensus is no easy task, and will require sustained diplomatic leadership from the U.S. To ensure progress on our reform-related priorities, the U.S. will have to be at the table, making constructive proposals, bringing our allies on-side, engaging in some tactical horse-trading, and assembling a broad-based coalition of like-minded countries that share a common commitment to a renewed and revitalized United Nations.

### **The UN is Delivering; Now It’s Time to Uphold Our End of the Bargain**

Progress on reform also requires honoring our financial commitments to the UN. For any reforms to be sustainable—indeed, implementable in the first place—the UN needs to be on solid financial footing. But over the past year, the exact opposite has been the case, and that has largely been the result of decisions made here in Washington. During Calendar Year 2025, the U.S. made \$0 in payments on its regular budget assessments, causing the level of U.S. unpaid assessments to rocket to more than \$2 billion, representing 95% regular budget arrears owed by member states to the UN. The Administration also clawed back \$2 billion in FY25 appropriated funds for key State Department accounts that fund U.S. assessed and voluntary contributions to the UN through two rescissions packages.

The effect of these and other funding decisions was dramatic and detrimental. In October of last year, the UN was forced to institute a 25% reduction in personnel serving on its peacekeeping operations, working out to more than 13,000 uniformed personnel pulled out of conflict zones around the world. Earlier this year, the Secretary-General warned that the organization faces “financial collapse” if member states continue to fail to pay their assessed dues on-time and in-full.

The irony is that these financial challenges are happening at the same time that the U.S.-UN relationship has entered a critical phase. While seeking reforms and budget cuts at the UN, the Trump Administration

also recognizes that it simply can't achieve some of its core foreign policy objectives without the UN. For example, last year, President Trump hosted the Presidents of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda at the White House for the signing of the Washington Accords, a U.S.-led effort to end more than three decades of bloody conflict in eastern DRC.

Stabilizing Central Africa is critical for a number of reasons. First and foremost, for the safety and security of Congolese civilians, who have suffered for far too long under the yoke of a constellation of abusive armed groups, absent state authority, and abysmal humanitarian conditions. It is also important for a core bipartisan priority: countering China and securing greater access to critical minerals needed for advanced industries in the U.S. The DRC holds vast untapped quantities of critical minerals like cobalt, copper, and lithium, which Chinese state-owned enterprises have made significant inroads in exploiting in recent years. A DRC at peace and secure within its borders could help boost America's own economic security and competitiveness. Conversely, continuing violence and insecurity will undermine efforts to promote American investment and help steer the DRC away from China.

But as with any peace agreement, signing a piece of paper is only the first step. Implementation is key, and that requires an independent guarantor capable of stabilizing the situation on the ground and ensuring that all parties are living up to their commitments. That's where the UN comes in. Over the years, the UN peacekeeping mission in DRC (MONUSCO) has greatly reduced civilian killings and succeeded in keeping the country unified. Now, with thousands of troops on the ground, MONUSCO is the only actor that stands ready to ensure the success of President Trump's initiative by supporting implementation of a ceasefire between the two countries, facilitating humanitarian access, and engaging in other stabilization and civilian protection activities. The importance of partnering with MONUSCO has been recognized repeatedly by the Trump Administration itself: during a briefing on DRC at the UN Security Council last September, Ambassador Waltz stated: "The United States supports MONUSCO and the role it plays in advancing peace and stability in the DRC." In December, the U.S. voted in the Security Council to renew MONUSCO's mandate for an additional year.

But there appears, at times, to be a mismatch between policy priorities and the resources required to carry them out. As I noted previously, in large part because of U.S. delays in payment of its assessed contributions and rescissions, the UN was forced to make deep reductions to uniformed personnel levels last year. This includes MONUSCO, which currently has just over 8,100 military personnel deployed in eastern Congo, down from a level of nearly 10,500 at the beginning of 2025.

Needless to say, this presents a challenge to MONUSCO and its ability to achieve what the Trump Administration expects of it. In February, MONUSCO sent a team to monitor a local ceasefire between Congolese government forces and Rwandan-backed M23 rebels around Uvira in South Kivu province in eastern Congo, demonstrating its readiness and ability to advance U.S.-led peace efforts on the ground. However, in order to fully execute its ceasefire monitoring and verification role across North and South Kivu provinces, where M23 and Rwandan forces are active, Secretary-General Guterres has reported that MONUSCO would need to deploy an additional 1,500-2,500 troops, essentially reconstituting the force levels that it lost late last year due to the budget cuts. This can't happen as long as the U.S. fails to make good on its financial commitments to UN peacekeeping.

The same is true for Haiti, where armed gangs currently control 90% of the capital, displacing more than 1.4 million people from their homes and turning the country into a regional hub for drug trafficking and other forms of organized crime. Violence, political dysfunction, and deteriorating humanitarian conditions in Haiti

have direct implications for U.S. national security and regional stability, fueling migration to the U.S. and providing a vacuum for our geopolitical rivals to potentially expand their influence in the Western Hemisphere.

The Trump Administration has made stabilizing Haiti a core part of its policy towards Latin America, and here again, it has turned to the UN for assistance and partnership. On September 30, 2025, in a major diplomatic win for the U.S., the UN Security Council adopted a U.S.-drafted resolution authorizing the establishment of a 5,500-strong Gang Suppression Force (GSF) for Haiti, with a robust mandate to directly take on the gangs. The GSF replaces an earlier Kenyan-led police mission (MSS) that failed to make headway due to a severe lack of personnel, essential equipment like armored vehicles, and funding. Attracting sufficient levels of personnel and equipment was made particularly challenging because the U.S. failed to deliver funds it had initially promised to the MSS, the financing for which was based on voluntary contributions. The experience of the MSS demonstrated the need for a more robust force with more reliable access to funding and equipment.

Crucially, the resolution addressed this issue by establishing a UN Support Office for Haiti—funded by assessed dues on member states through the annual UN peacekeeping budget—to provide equipment, supplies, and logistical support to the GSF, creating a consistent and reliable pipeline of critical force enablers that the MSS lacked. But U.S. cuts to peacekeeping last year raised serious questions about the reliability and sustainability of America's commitment. China seized on this incongruity during the Security Council debate on the U.S.-drafted resolution, accusing the U.S. of failing to “fully honor its funding commitments” and citing this as a reason to doubt the viability of the GSF.

To date, more than a dozen countries have pledged troops to the GSF, with the full force expected to be on the ground by September. However, for the GSF to be able to sustain sufficient levels of uniformed personnel, troop-contributing countries need assurances that their people are not going to be hung out to dry without proper support in an extremely dangerous operating environment where they will have to confront heavily-armed gangs. To ensure the viability and sustainability of this force, it is absolutely essential that countries know U.S. funding and support will be forthcoming.

President Trump understands this. Earlier this year, Democratic and Republican appropriators came together to draft an appropriations minibuss—including funding for State Department programs—that provides near full funding for our assessed contributions to the UN in Fiscal Year 2026. President Trump signed the bill into law, and recently stated that “We’re going to make sure the United Nations is viable” and “help them, moneywise.”

These are welcome developments. Over the past year, the UN has worked with the U.S. to advance far-reaching cost-saving measures and is engaging seriously with the Administration on deeper structural reforms. The UN has also demonstrated repeatedly that it is the linchpin for advancing critical American foreign policy objectives in a host of contexts, from Central Africa, to the Middle East, to right here in the Western Hemisphere. But the UN can't continue to make progress on those critical objectives if it goes belly-up financially. Now is the time for the Administration to uphold its end of the bargain and use the resources Congress has provided to ensure that the UN continues to serve as a reliable partner for the U.S. moving forward.

### **Strong and Constructive U.S. Engagement Advances Reform**

The idea that UN reform is more likely to succeed when the U.S. is at the table and meeting its financial commitments is not a new one. Indeed, years of experience have demonstrated that for our reform agenda to really stick, the U.S. needs to be seen as a credible and reliable partner: one who is concerned with actually changing the UN for the better, not tearing it down. In this way, past reform pushes offer lessons for the present.

When we have adequately funded our assessments for UN peacekeeping operations, for example, we have been able to push for effective cost-saving measures and other reforms. For example, from 2010-2015, when the U.S. was mostly current on its peacekeeping dues, the UN implemented the Global Field Support Strategy, an effort to increase the efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and speed of administrative and logistics support to UN field missions. This effort, which was strongly supported by the U.S., led to an 18% reduction in the cost per peacekeeper and a decrease in the number of support and security personnel serving on missions of 3,000.

Since then, the cost of peacekeeping has continued to decline, from \$8.3 billion in the 2015-2016 peacekeeping budget to \$5.38 billion approved by the General Assembly last June for the 2025-2026 period, a reduction of nearly 35% over the last decade. During that same period, American diplomats in New York were able to negotiate a steady decrease in the U.S. assessment rate for peacekeeping, from 28.4% in 2015 to the 26.1% level currently in place, which was adopted by the General Assembly in December 2024. The combination of budget savings and the reduction of the U.S. assessment rate mean that the U.S. was already assessed nearly \$1 billion less for UN peacekeeping last year compared to a decade ago. Those savings were locked in well before the two rescissions packages proposed by the Administration—which slashed FY25 appropriated funds for UN peacekeeping by almost half—took effect in the summer and fall.

Beyond cost savings, the U.S. notched other important reform wins when it was largely current on its assessed payments to the UN as well. For example, in recent years, the UN has put in place a host of policies to combat sexual exploitation and abuse involving personnel in UN field missions, particularly peacekeeping operations. These U.S.-backed initiatives have include shortening the timeline of investigations, increasing public reporting and transparency about suspects and the status of investigations, and providing legal aid, medical care, psychosocial support, and other critical forms of assistance to victims. In 2016—again, at a time when we were in good financial standing at the UN—the Security Council passed Resolution 2272, expanding the authority of the Secretary-General to repatriate entire military or police units that engage in widespread or systematic violations. The Secretary-General subsequently used these authorities to send home troops from several countries serving as part of the UN peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic. The UN also expanded its vetting database for civilian personnel in UN peacekeeping missions and implemented a policy requiring troop-contributing countries to deploy national investigation officers with sufficient experience and expertise to investigate allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse. While any instance of abuse is horrifying and totally unacceptable, these and other reforms over the years have delivered much-needed improvements in how the UN handles such cases.

The UN has also made significant progress on aid localization—a key bipartisan priority in Congress—over the last decade, giving local governments and civil society partners more ownership and responsibility over humanitarian aid and development initiatives. From 2016 to 2021—in the wake of the World Humanitarian Summit, when the international community agreed that at least 25% of humanitarian aid should be delivered through local organizations by 2021—funding from the UN Office for the Coordination of

Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) allocated to local NGOs rose from 23% to 34%. By 2024, OCHA allocated nearly 45% of all funding to local partners, almost double the World Humanitarian Summit benchmark. Here again, the U.S. was actively engaged in supporting these reforms, which took place over a period of time when the U.S. had significant financial skin in the game: between 2016 and 2024, the U.S. averaged more than \$6.3 billion in annual contributions to three of the largest UN humanitarian agencies—the World Food Programme (WFP), the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), and the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF)—collectively.

Conversely, we’ve also seen plenty of instances when cutting funding or otherwise walking away from UN entities can be counterproductive, undermining America’s priorities and strengthening the hand of our competitors, most notably China. For example, from 2017-2021, the U.S. took a number of high profile steps to disengage from parts of the UN system, pulling out of the Paris Agreement, withholding funding from various UN bodies, delaying or slow-walking funding to others, withdrawing from the UN Human Rights Council and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and attempting to leave the World Health Organization (WHO). This period of American retrenchment coincided with rising Chinese influence at the UN, with China becoming the second largest financial contributor to the UN’s regular and peacekeeping budgets, and one of the top troop-contributors to UN peacekeeping operations.

As one might expect, China sought to play these circumstances for maximum benefit, using its increased financial contributions as leverage to get Chinese nationals elected to various high-ranking positions within the UN system. During that time, candidates backed by China were elected to lead 4 of the UN’s 15 specialized agencies—the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Food and Agriculture Organization, and UN Industrial Development Organization—while a U.S. national held the top post in just one, the World Bank. Compounding the problem, a key office within the State Department’s Bureau of International Organization Affairs responsible for promoting jobs for Americans within the UN system had been hollowed out, limiting the U.S.’s capacity to push back at the time.

Post-2021, when the U.S. reversed many of these policies and chose to reengage with parts of the UN system that it had previously shunned, the U.S. had an easier time of getting its preferred candidates elected to key UN positions. In 2022, for example, Doreen Bogdan-Martin, an American and former official at the U.S. Commerce Department, was elected Secretary-General of ITU, defeating a candidate backed by Russia and China in an overwhelming 139-25 vote. This ensured that an advocate of a free and open Internet would lead the organization responsible for setting international telecommunications standards, a critical win for U.S. economic interests and values. A U.S.-backed candidate from Colombia was also chosen to helm ICAO, succeeding the previous Secretary-General from China.

Past U.S. policies of disengagement have had other unintended consequences as well. When the U.S. defunded UNESCO in 2011 and then withdrew entirely in 2018, China replaced it as the organization’s largest funder, contributing more than 15% of its assessed budget. This gave Beijing leverage to use UNESCO as a platform to advance its own interests, including efforts to push UNESCO to support vocational and job training programs in countries partnering with China on the Belt and Road Initiative. Unfortunately, due to its absence from UNESCO, the U.S. was limited in its ability to push back against these efforts.

Recognizing that this left the U.S. at a disadvantage, in 2023, the U.S. rejoined UNESCO. This policy shift was made possible by Congress, which included language in the FY23 omnibus giving the Executive

Branch temporary authority to waive the funding prohibitions that caused us to defund the agency in the first place in 2011. Last year, however, the U.S. reversed course yet again, announcing in July that it would vacate its seat by the end of 2026. Once again, we are leaving China in the driver's seat and undercutting our own ability to set the rules of the road at UNESCO. It's hard to imagine that giving up our seat at the table will lead to better outcomes this time around.

### **Walking Away Means We Pay More and Get Less in Return**

More than just undercutting reform or ceding the floor to our adversaries, however, defunding or disengaging from the UN—or, relatedly, simply trying to circumvent key UN programs and activities by creating parallel structures—is strategically and financially counterproductive. Many UN functions are simply not replaceable in terms of global impact, political legitimacy, and cost-effectiveness. And recently, we've seen a clear instance of how attempting to go around the UN just that means that U.S. foreign assistance is less effective and sets American taxpayers up to spend even more money than they would otherwise.

Diseases do not respect international borders, making a coordinated global response critical to addressing public health issues. That is why the U.S. worked with the WHO to eradicate smallpox through global vaccination and disease surveillance programs; reduce cases of wild polio virus globally by 99% and prevent nearly 20 million cases of paralysis since 1988; and avert 2.3 billion cases of malaria and 14 million deaths since 2000. Collaboration with WHO has benefited the U.S. in other ways as well. For example, its prequalification system is a critical market-access engine for U.S. vaccine and medical manufacturers, streamlining regulatory pathways, speeding global uptake of American innovations, and enabling rapid, large-scale deployment of lifesaving treatments when crises hit.

The Trump Administration announced in late January that it was withdrawing from the WHO. But all of these functions are critical to the health, safety, and well-being of the American people, and some entity has to perform them. However, the potential replacements are less effective and more costly. In February, [\*The Washington Post\*](#) reported that, “the Trump Administration is proposing spending \$2 billion a year to replicate the global disease surveillance and outbreak functions the United States once helped build and accessed at a fraction of the cost...The effort to build a U.S.-run alternative would re-create systems such as laboratories, data-sharing networks and rapid-response systems the U.S. abandoned when it announced its withdrawal from the WHO...While President Donald Trump accused the WHO of demanding “unfairly onerous payments,” the alternative his administration is considering carries a price tag about three times what the U.S. contributed annually to the U.N. health agency.”

To underscore the point, the article went on to quote Tom Inglesby, Director of the Center for Health Security at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health: “Spending two to three times the cost to create what we already had access to makes absolutely no sense in terms of fiscal stewardship...We're not going to get the same quality or breadth of information we would have by being in the WHO, or have anywhere the influence we had.’ Rather than attempting to rebuild with ‘something not constructable,’ Inglesby said, the administration should specify what reforms it seeks and reengage with the agency.”

Reinventing the wheel to recreate critical systems that the U.S. used to be able to utilize for less than one-third of the cost is not consistent with the goal of combating waste, fraud, and abuse. American taxpayers would be much better served by maintaining our seat at the table in UN bodies and programs that protect vital U.S. national interests and seeking reform from the inside, rather than trying to supplant them with a much more expensive and less effective alternative.

## **The Path Forward**

The U.S.-UN relationship stands at an inflection point. The international community has a historic opportunity to reform and modernize an institution that, for more than eight decades, has played a critical role in helping to maintain global stability, deliver lifesaving aid to people in need around the world, promote fundamental human freedoms, and facilitate international economic connectivity. The UN has already taken significant steps over the last year to meet the moment, with more changes in the works. The question now is what the U.S. stance will be moving forward.

The U.S. played a central role in the UN's founding, coding many of our nation's highest aspirations and ideals into the organization's DNA. There is no substitute for American leadership here. That means maintaining our seat at the table and committing ourselves to the hard work of diplomacy. It also means honoring our financial obligations, which is key to building goodwill among likeminded member states, ensuring that reforms can be fully implemented, and preventing our adversaries from hijacking the process. Most importantly, it is also critical towards ensuring that programs and activities that advance our core national interests are adequately resourced and successful.

But that leadership can't come from the Executive Branch alone. Congress has a critical role to play too, which is why it is so important you convened today's hearing. The final FY26 appropriations bill underscored Congress's commitment to a two-pronged strategy on the UN: meeting our international obligations while pushing for continued progress on reform. Congress recognized in that bill that you can't change the UN by starving it of resources. Instead, you have to redouble your commitment to consistent and principled engagement. Now that the FY26 bill is law, it is absolutely critical that Congress exercise its constitutional prerogatives and ensure that the Executive Branch is implementing those funding and policy directives in line with Congressional intent. By doing so, you will ensure that the reforms being implemented today are long lasting, strengthen the UN as an institution, and ultimately advance American interests.