



By: **Gordon Brown**

# Trump's withdrawal from international organizations leaves victims behind



On January 27, US President Donald Trump's second withdrawal from the [Paris climate agreement](#) will finally take effect.

This follows his announcement on January 7 that the United States would leave an additional [66 international organizations](#), including 31 United Nations entities and 35 non-UN bodies, now deemed unacceptable to the administration.

Never has a national leader so comprehensively severed ties with the international community in a single month.

Nor has a leader blatantly declared, "I don't need international law," as Trump did in an interview with [the New York Times](#) a few weeks ago.

He went on to assert that he alone would be the arbiter of when such constraints apply to the US, and that his power would be limited only by his "own morality."

Greenland has rightly become a focus of concern over US threats to seize it. But this overlooks the fact that lives are already being lost because of America's brutality.

Over the past year, the Trump administration has slashed funding for global humanitarian assistance and health programs, which, according to the Center for Global Development, will likely result in roughly [one million additional deaths](#) per year.

A study by the Barcelona Institute for Global Health and other organizations found that US and European aid cuts could together cause up to [22.6 million additional deaths](#) – including 5.4 million children under the age of five – in developing countries by 2030.

Given that recent developments imply further deep cuts in international support, these figures will surely need to be revised upward.

## An alternative to the UN's peacemaking efforts

Of course, we were already aware that the administration would target global institutions like UNESCO, the World Health Organization, the UN Refugee Agency, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA).

But now we know that America will become the first country to abandon the very framework for reaching agreements on climate change, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which it will leave one year from now.

**No one should doubt that the remit of Trump's new Board of Peace will have major implications**

At the same time, no one should doubt that the remit of Trump's new [Board of Peace](#) will have major implications.

This attempt to provide an alternative to the UN's peacemaking and peacekeeping efforts, which have persistently been underfunded, represents a momentous shift in longstanding US policy.

The attack on agencies committed to the international rule of law from which America has long benefited – including the International Law Commission, the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, and the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law – augurs badly for the legality of future US actions.

It also seems far removed from the official explanation that the goal is to cut waste and counter the "woke" agenda.

## Protection of girls' and women's rights

Leaving the agencies that support women's equality and the protection of girls' and

women's rights can hardly be justified by labeling them "ideological programs" at odds with US sovereignty, as the official statement does.

One has to ask how an agency like UN Women can be considered "unnecessary" and "wasteful" when it has helped more than 80 countries deliver **gender-responsive budgets**, and when its sister agency, UNFPA, supports maternal health.

And the decision to withdraw from entities within the UN system that are focused on supporting girls and women who are victims of civil wars, climate change, and other crises veers into vindictiveness.

These include **Education Cannot Wait** (which I used to chair), a fund that provides access to education to millions of refugee and displaced children; the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (OSRSG-SVC); and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children (SRSG-VAC).

If these organizations are not adequately funded, some of the world's most vulnerable women and girls will be at a heightened risk of violence and maternal mortality.

"It is no longer acceptable to be sending these institutions the blood, sweat, and treasure of the American people, with little to nothing to show for it," explained US Secretary of State **Marco Rubio**.

But to claim that American citizens are the ones suffering at the hands of agencies focused on alleviating girls' and women's suffering in low-income countries is wholly disingenuous. It suggests that the Declaration of Independence's recognition of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" as inalienable rights still applies only to men.

**The number of girls out of school – already at 122 million worldwide – will rise, triggering cascading effects**

These agencies – OSRSG-SVC and UN Women – fund shelters, offer legal aid, and give psychosocial support to vulnerable women. They work to end child marriage and forced genital mutilation.

In many of the world's conflict zones, displaced women will now lose access to safe spaces, at a time when reports show that conflict-related **sexual violence increased** by 25% from 2023 to 2024.

Viewing child protection as crucial to achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, SRSG-VAC works alongside the WHO to improve health outcomes for women and children.

Similarly, UNFPA and the WHO fund initiatives that aim to reduce the **transmission of HIV**, a leading cause of death among women and girls of reproductive age.

This assault on rights extends beyond protecting women's safety and health. The education of girls will take one of the biggest and most severe hits.

The number of **girls out of school** – already at 122 million worldwide – will rise, triggering cascading effects.

For example, Education Cannot Wait collaborates with UNICEF to ensure schooling for girls in fragile states not only to provide them with more opportunities to thrive, but also to prevent early forced marriage.

## A spectacular moral failure

The Trump administration wrongly assumes that Americans and foreign nationals support the dismantling of international organizations.

But the vast majority of people want countries to work together to address shared problems. In a recent **public-opinion survey** conducted across 34 countries, covering every region, more than 90% of respondents said that international cooperation was essential for global health, human-rights protection, and

conflict prevention.



*Abandoning girls and women, particularly in crisis contexts, is not financial prudence. It is a spectacular moral failure - Gordon Brown*

Only 5-6% of the respondents, and no more than 7% in any one region, believe – as the Trump administration seems to – that such collaboration is “generally a waste of time and resources.”

Moreover, contrary to reports of growing skepticism about multilateralism, respondents often reported more trust in international organizations than in their own governments.

Trust in the WHO stands at 60% globally (rising to 85% in Sub-Saharan Africa), while trust in the UN is at 58%.

The results would almost surely be similar if respondents were asked about the value of international organizations promoting girls’ and women’s opportunities, which are the foundation of a better world.

Abandoning girls and women, particularly in crisis contexts, is not financial prudence; the economic costs will be borne for years, if not decades and generations. It is a spectacular moral failure, and it shames us all.

Gordon Brown, a former prime minister of the United Kingdom, is World Health Organization Ambassador for Global Health Financing.