

UN SLAMS WORLD'S 'APATHY' IN LAUNCHING AID APPEAL FOR 2026

UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations (UN) on Monday hit out at global "apathy" over widespread suffering as it launched its 2026 appeal for humanitarian assistance, which is limited in scope as aid operations confront major funding cuts.

"This is a time of brutality, impunity and indifference," UN humanitarian chief Tom Fletcher told reporters, condemning "the ferocity and the intensity of the killing, the complete disregard for international law, horrific levels of sexual violence" he had seen on the ground in 2025.

"This is a time when the rules are in retreat, when the scaffolding of co-existence is under sustained attack, when our survival antennae have been numbed by distraction and corroded by apathy," he said.

He said it was also a time "when politicians boast of cutting aid", as he unveiled a streamlined plan to raise at least \$23b to help 87 million people in the world's most dangerous places such as Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, Haiti and Myanmar.

The UN would like to ultimately raise \$33b to help 135 million people in 2026, but is painfully aware that its overall goal may be difficult to reach, given US President Donald Trump's slashing of foreign aid.

Fletcher said the "highly prioritised appeal" was "based on excruciating life-and-death choices", adding that he hoped Washington would see the choices made and the reforms undertaken to improve aid efficiency and choose to "renew that commitment" to help.

The world body estimates that 240 million people in conflict zones, suffering from epidemics, or victims of natural disasters and climate change are in need of emergency aid.

'LOWEST IN A DECADE'

In 2025, the UN's appeal for more than \$45b was only funded to the \$12b mark, the lowest level in a decade, the world body said.

That only allowed it to help 98 million people, 25 million fewer than the year before.

According to UN data, the US remains the top humanitarian aid donor in the world, but that amount fell dramatically in



AFP PHOTO

Fletcher speaking on the famine in Gaza during a press conference in Geneva, on August 22

BETWEEN THE LINES

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2025 to \$2.7b, down from \$11b in 2024. At the top of the list of priorities for 2026 are Gaza and the West Bank.

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Another country with urgent need is Sudan, where deadly conflict has displaced millions. The UN is hoping to collect \$2.9b to help 20 million people.

In Tawila, where residents of Sudan's western city of El-Fasher fled ethnically targeted violence, Fletcher said he met a young mother who saw her husband and child murdered.

She fled with the malnourished baby of her

slain neighbours along what he called "the most dangerous road in the world" to Tawila.

Men "attacked her, raped her, broke her leg and yet something kept her going through the horror and the brutality", he said.

"Does anyone, wherever you come from, whatever you believe, however you vote, not think that we should be there for her?"

The UN will ask member states to open their government coffers over the next 87 days, one day for each million people who need assistance.

And if the UN comes up short, Fletcher predicts it will widen the campaign, appealing to civil society, the corporate world and everyday people who he says are drowning in disinformation suggesting their tax dollars are all going abroad.

"We are asking for only just over 1% of what the world is spending on arms and defence right now," Fletcher said.