



# Intercontinental Think Tank UPDATE

In this September Zonta Says NOW Intercontinental Think Tank Update:

- [The United Nations Turns 80](#)
- [Climate Week New York](#)
- [Snapshot, Dashboard and Unfinished Business](#)
- [The Toxic Truths about Plastic](#)
- [November Think Tank](#)

## The United Nations Turns 80



This year marks the 80th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. At UNGA80, (the 80th meeting of the UN General Assembly) world leaders tackled the pressing issues shaping our future. Across debates, leaders agreed that without reform, resources, and climate justice, the UN risks drifting into irrelevance.

The Secretary-General urged leaders to choose 'cooperation over chaos' and called for stronger climate action including allocating \$1.3 trillion annually for developing countries. Small island and developing states warned that rising seas, hotter temperatures, and environmental degradation are existential threats. They called for developed nations to honor financial pledges, assist vulnerable countries, and address debt burdens that exacerbate inequality. Under the Paris Agreement, every five years countries must [register](#) their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) to show how they will reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and many countries announced their NDCs at UNGA80.

Education was championed as a critical tool for peace and poverty reduction, with Grenada noting that universal literacy could lift 171 million people out of

poverty. There were calls for gender-responsive policies and investment in girls' education to strengthen climate action, peace, and development.

Peace and security dominated discussions, including the conflicts in Gaza, Ukraine, and Myanmar. [President Musar](#) from Slovenia gave an inspiring speech about ending genocide in Gaza and pursuing gender equity. Nuclear disarmament was underscored as essential for lasting safety and emerging technologies, including AI, were flagged for their potential in conflict prevention and humanitarian work.

Reform of the United Nations was discussed with leaders stressing the need for a more representative Security Council, including permanent or rotational seats for Africa and small island developing states, fairer representation, and greater inclusion of women in leadership. Through the [UN80 initiative](#), the UN is identifying changes to make the UN more effective, responsive, and cost-effective. This includes the possibility of [merging](#) UNFPA and UN Women and creating one centre of excellence on Women, Peace and Security.

[Annalena Baerbock](#), President of the 80th session and only the fifth woman ever in that role, led the Assembly. She noted that *there has never been a woman chosen* to be Secretary-General. The President of Chile nominated [Michelle Bachelet](#) as a candidate to be the next UN Secretary-General - a move that was supported by many other countries. He pointed out that having a woman at the helm of the UN would send a clear signal that nowhere is closed off to women and restore the UN's credibility and sense of purpose to become a place of hope for the world.

[Good News](#): On 20 September, the High Seas Treaty was ratified by over 60 countries so will take effect in January 2026! The Treaty establishes legally binding rules to conserve and sustainably use the two-thirds of the world's ocean area that lies beyond national boundaries.

[Learn more about UNGA80](#)

[Back to top](#)

## Climate Week in New York



[Climate Week New York](#) is the world's largest climate gathering outside COP. With over 1,000 events held across the city, it is where people come together to share their progress across clean energy, climate finance, technology, green jobs and climate justice. It is uplifting, inspirational and profound.

*We Don't Have Time* hosted the [Climate Hub](#) where you can view videos of many interviews and panel discussions. For example, Bill McKibben, founder of 350.org and Third Act [talked](#) about the explosive rise of solar and wind energy, how battery prices are plummeting and how Kenya is exporting green energy. Professor Michael Gerrard [see [video](#) from 2:52:49] from Columbia Law School described how the courts can save the climate, and Katharine Hayhoe [see [video](#) from 3:05:57] discussed how to amplify our voices when talking about climate by connecting the head, heart, and hands.

The debate on the motion, *the [21st century leader is disobedient](#)* challenged us to think differently about leadership and was great fun. Would this format be something to do in our clubs?

There were many discussions around the Road to COP30 in November. UN Climate Change Executive Secretary [Simon Stiell](#) talked about the rise of the new economy where bold climate action means better jobs, higher living standards, cleaner air, healthier lives, secure food, and affordable energy and transport. He also launched *Inside COP*, an official COP30 Brasil podcast hosted by the team from Outrage and Optimism that takes us on a journey to the new economy. Check it out!

'Inside COP' Podcast

[Back to top](#)

## Snapshot, Dashboard, and Unfinished Business



The impacts of climate change magnify any existing inequality including gender inequality. In September, four key actions occurred to help close gender gaps.

- UN Women released [The Gender Snapshot 2025](#) showing that none of the Sustainable Development Goals have been achieved. If existing trends continue, by 2030 around 351 million women and girls will still be



living in extreme poverty and by closing the gender digital divide we could lift 30 million women and girls out of poverty. Sadly, it showed that 676 million women and girls lived within 50 kilometres of a deadly conflict event in 2024, the highest recorded number since the 1990s.

- UN Women also launched a report called [Unfinished Business: Private Sector and Gender Equality](#) that aims to transform corporate commitments into equality for all women and girls. The report finds that women make up only 39 per cent of the global workforce, remain concentrated in lower-paying roles, face persistent wage gaps of 20 per cent, and experience higher rates of workplace sexual harassment. More importantly, the report shows how governments and businesses can work together to close the gap between commitment and actual outcomes.
- The UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) [adopted](#) a resolution to “revitalize” the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) — the world’s main body dedicated to gender equality. On paper, the resolution sounds promising: it reaffirms the [Beijing Declaration](#), calls for shorter and sharper outcome documents, encourages more space for civil society, and suggests rotating CSW’s big five-year review meetings so they don’t always happen in New York.
- UN Women launched the [Beijing+30 Priority Actions Dashboard](#) with 106 governments stepping forward with 191 commitments to accelerate progress for all women and girls by 2030. The Dashboard has an interactive map, charts and a directory. It focuses on six priorities: digital revolution, freedom from poverty, zero violence, equal decision-making, peace and security, and climate justice. All are underpinned by two core foundations – financing and gender data – with adolescent girls and young women at the heart of the Agenda. Check out the dashboard today!

[Beijing+30 Priority Actions Dashboard](#)

[Back to top](#)

## The Toxic Truths About Plastic



zonta.org/zontasaysnow



### Toxic Truths: Plastic, Pollution & Health

Intercontinental Think Tank  
Sunday 14 September, 6 pm UTC

1

The September Think Tank was hosted by Zontians from the USA. It focused on the toxic truths about plastic, pollution, and health. Guest speakers were:

- Dr Megan Wolff, Executive Director of P-SNAP, a network of physicians and scientists and Health Policy Director at Beyond Plastics from 2021-2024; and
- Teena Halbig, Co-founder of Floyds Fork Environmental Association, medical technologist, clinical laboratory scientist and microbiologist.

Megan and Teena shared the alarming impacts of microplastics and nanoplastics on our health and the environment. Did you know that microplastics have been found in our lungs, blood, breast milk, veins, semen, hearts, kidneys and brains? There are over 350,000 novel chemicals registered for global production but only about 3,500 have been studied and we only understand the large scale environmental impacts of 65.

Did you know that it takes up to 500 years for a plastic toothbrush to decompose? Plastic toothbrushes make up around 1 per cent of all plastic waste in the oceans - and every toothbrush ever made still exists in some form! Teena shared many hints on how to protect yourself from plastics in your daily life.

Errick Elavia (District 25) provided an overview of the plastic pollution crisis in Asia. He explained that Asia accounts for 81 per cent of global ocean plastic pollution worldwide and 3 billion people depend on oceans for their livelihoods.

Joan Kabayambi (District 18) gave an update on what is happening with the Global Plastics Treaty. Joan is Zonta International's representative at the UN Environment Program. She explained that in August, talks on the treaty were adjourned without consensus.

If you missed the Think Tank, the presentations, slides, and links to videos are now online. Check the link below.

**September Think Tank videos and slides**

[Back to top](#)

## **November Think Tank**



The next Intercontinental Think Tank will be held on Sunday 9 November at 10 am UTC. It will be hosted by Zontians from Europe and Africa and will focus on

the theme *Earth for All: Could gender-equal climate justice stop wars and conflicts?*

In September, the UN [reported](#) that global military spending reached an unprecedented US\$2.7 trillion in 2024. According to the UN, the world could eliminate extreme poverty for just under US\$300 billion.

On launching the report [The Security We Need: Rebalancing Military Spending for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future](#), Antonio Guterres, the UN Secretary-General stated that *a more secure world begins by investing at least as much in fighting poverty as we do in fighting wars.*

This is a very timely theme given that 25 November is the start of the 16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence.

Given the intensifying wars and rising geopolitical tensions worldwide, this will be a Think Tank not-to-be-missed.

**Register for the November  
Intercontinental Think Tank**

[Back to top](#)

**Zonta Says NOW  
to Gender-Equal Climate Action**  
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