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Syrian crisis reveals how the UN failed

September 21, 2016

The annual General Assembly of the United Nations is under way. It is a significant occasion on many levels. A recent ceasefire in Syria is in tatters. The humanitarian situation is dire and the UN appears to be out of moves to change anything. Ban Ki-moon, the outgoing UN secretary general, also addressed the assembly for the last time in the job. His comments speak volumes about the health of the international body and its ability to live up to its mandate.

"Present in this hall today are representatives of governments that have ignored, facilitated, funded, participated in or even planned and carried out atrocities inflicted by all sides of the Syria conflict against Syrian civilians," Mr Ban told the assembly before listing several other conflict areas in the Middle East where the UN has failed to achieve a lasting peace.

The UN's failure to engineer an end to the Syrian conflict is evidence of its inability to efficiently maintain peace and security in the international community. There is nothing especially unique about the Syrian civil war from an international perspective. There have been other crises that involved the disintegration of nation states, the targeting of civilians and migration problems.

The Syrian crisis is, however, the first such event of the 21st century and despite decades of globalisation that have led to a shrinking world for many, the UN has not been able to forge a

path out of the mire. There are many reasons for this but Mr Ban's final statement to the assembly highlights the major themes.

While world powers have paid lip service to the need for the UN, they have continued to operate in their own interests. Russia's intrusion into the Syrian conflict on behalf of Bashar Al Assad is a clear example of how rhetoric at the UN is often at odds with actions on the grounds and even undercut.

As we shortly welcome a new secretary general it is fitting to reconsider the role of the UN in resolving conflicts and living up to its founding principles. There are many successful projects such as sustainable development and the facilitation of international cooperation on health issues that the UN oversees. The world will be a better place if our collective resources are used for projects that help people instead of arguing over hollow rhetoric that is regularly undermined.