



Speaking notes:

## **“Prospects for Ambitious Reform of the United Nations”**

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On September 22-23 this year, the United Nations will hold the Summit of the Future in New York, bringing together world leaders to agree a new international consensus on how to, as the UN Summit website describes it, “deliver a better present and safeguard the future.” One of the outcomes of the summit will be a Pact for the Future covering five key areas: sustainable development and financing for development; international peace and security; science, technology and innovation, and digital cooperation; youth and future generations; and transforming global governance.

Governments are negotiating this Pact in the lead-up to the summit based on a zero draft that co-facilitators Germany and Namibia initially presented to member states on January 29, 2024. Following consultations, the “Rev 1” of this Zero Draft was distributed at the UN just last week. The pact will also include two annexes, which are being negotiated separately: the Global Digital Compact, co-facilitated by Sweden and Zambia, and the Declaration on Future Generations, co-facilitated by the permanent representatives of Jamaica and the Netherlands.

How did we get here?

Dedicated efforts at major reform of the modalities and architecture of global governance don't come along frequently. The last such effort at the United Nations was the 2005 reform initiatives led by the late Kofi Annan.

The origins of this process are rooted in civil society campaigning. In 2015 an independent commission - the Albright-Gambari Commission, co-chaired by former U.S. Secretary of State the late Madeleine Albright and former Nigerian Foreign Minister and UN Under-Secretary-General Ibrahim Gambari and formally known as the Commission on Global Security, Justice & Governance brought out a report under the auspices of the Hague Institute for Global Justice and the Washington-based Stimson Center. Among their many recommendations was the idea of using the 75th anniversary of the UN in 2020 as a focal point for strengthening global governance. Some of us in the World Federalist Movement latched on to this as a campaigning idea and, beginning in January 2017, held a series of consultations among various civil society networks and with key missions in New York.

The call to strengthen global governance came at a time of declining international cooperation across many sectors. Some of the funding cuts at the UN brought about by our friend Donald Trump actually helped our work, contributing to a sense among small and medium-sized missions that a revitalization of the organization was needed. And so momentum grew for the idea that the UN's 75th anniversary in 2020 could be an occasion for not simply an anniversary commemoration, but also an opportunity to take stock of the multilateral system and seek ways to strengthen the United Nations. The Secretary-General's office was supportive and, beginning in 2018, a UN Secretariat-supported "global listening exercise" canvassed the views of stakeholders around the world.

The UN 75 Declaration, whose development was co-facilitated by Sweden and Qatar, was adopted by governments in September 2020. It identified

12 areas of action corresponding to the UN's main functions as an international organization. That Declaration also included an operative paragraph mandating the Secretary-General "to report back . . . with recommendations to advance our common agenda and to respond to current and future challenges." A year later, the Secretary-General's "Our Common Agenda" report included over 90 recommendations to strengthen global governance. The SG proposed a Summit in 2023. That was perceived by some delegations to diminish from the attention governments needed to pay to the 2023 SDG Summit, so the Summit of the Future was moved to 2024. In the meantime General Assembly discussions in 2022 and 2023 focused on the Summit of the Future modalities and then, more substantively, on what's referred to as the scope and elements of the proposed Pact for the Future.

These "scope and elements" discussions were supported by a report from a High-level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism, co-chaired by Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the former President of Liberia and Stefan Löfven, former Prime Minister of Sweden. And the Secretary-General's office produced 12 policy briefs on some of the key ideas in his OCA report. And of course there were scores of proposals and consultations organized by civil society.

And although, as I said a moment ago, the 2023 discussions were aimed at establishing the scope and key elements of the proposed Pact, in fact there was not consensus on anything more than a bare-bones outline of the scope, the 5 chapters I mentioned, of the Pact package. Consensus on the broader elements of the Pact was blocked by the same group of countries who had insisted that the Summit be moved from 2023 to 2024 so as not to interfere with the SDG Summit.

The discussions on reforming the UN are not isolated from some of the geopolitical tensions we read about daily. We hear often that the U.S. unipolar moment has passed and we are entering a so-called multipolar world order.

- A team in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General led by US and western officials developed the OCA report. The US seeks to consolidate a modest set of reforms for a United Nations they have dominated since 1945.
- Meanwhile a group of states, most but not all from the G77, prioritize issues like the need to do more to advance the SDGs and to reform the international financial architecture.
- These governments also insist on the “intergovernmental character” of the United Nations. They are no friends of most human rights instruments and also not at all keen on a summit preparatory process that features a large role for civil society. In the draft Pact for the Future which we’ll turn to in a moment the two most glaring weaknesses relate to human rights (including gender equality issues) and environmental governance. Both of these are treated as “cross-cutting issues,” rather than constituting a chapter of their own.

I’m oversimplifying here. On any given issue there are a range of differing state perspectives.

And on the question of civil society access Western governments are not blameless. It’s a divisive topic among the EU, as some governments would want a process that more closely resembles the development of the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals.

So the discussions have been challenging, as they often are at the UN. However, at a conference I attended a couple of weeks ago in Nairobi, EOSG officials were quite optimistic that an ambitious outcome was possible.

That Nairobi conference by the way was the 2024 UN Civil Society Conference Aligned with the Summit of the Future. Our coalition was one of four main organizing networks. One might reasonably ask why a conference aligned with the Summit of the Future was held in Nairobi. But recall here what we discussed earlier regarding the contested space in the

process allowed for CSOs. Sending civil society to Nairobi may have seemed to some New York diplomats like a bright idea in the summer of 2023, but it backfired. The conference was well-organized. The three sets of co-facilitators and a number of high-level UN officials, including the Secretary-General, came and engaged the discussions with CSOs. The UN premises were stretched beyond capacity, with over 2,500 registered participants. What is encouraging here is the broad interest this demonstrates among CSOs on questions related to strengthening the UN and global governance.

But Nairobi's history now, and governments will soon (starting May 28) begin consultations on the latest Rev 1 of the Zero Draft of the Pact for the Future. In the time remaining, let's consider some of the key recommendations.

The current draft runs to 21 pages, with proposed commitments from world leaders framed around 52 "Actions." And each of these action items has subsidiary commitments. So there's a lot of content here. But don't worry, we're not going to talk about all of them. It's also the case that a great many of these action commitments are of a nature that they "reaffirm" or "re-commit" or pledge to enhance, or continue etc commitments they've made before. So I'll try and focus briefly on what seems new and most consequential in this draft Pact for the Future.

## **CHAPTER 1 - sustainable development and financing for development**

Action 2(a) Expedite implementation of the key elements of an **SDG Stimulus** at the UN and in other relevant forums and institutions.

Action 2(f) Strengthen the inclusiveness and effectiveness of tax cooperation amongst Member States and engage constructively in negotiations to **finalize a United Nations Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation.**

Action 4(b) Secure ambitious outcomes on financing all aspects of social development, including universal social protection, at the **Second World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development** in 2025, and request the Secretary-General to provide analysis and recommendations on these issues for the consideration of Member States.

Action 8(h) Request the Secretary-General to present options for Member States' consideration in advance of the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development for improved monitoring, assessment and verification of climate finance and sustainable development finance, while avoiding duplication of existing processes.

Action 10 (a&b) Consider how we will advance sustainable development beyond 2030 at the SDG Summit in 2027. . . . Request the **Secretary-General to submit a report to Member States in advance of the 2027 SDG Summit** on key considerations for determining an ambitious and effective post-2030 framework for sustainable development.

## **CHAPTER 2 —international peace and security**

Action 11 (d) Request the **Secretary-General to provide analysis on the impact of the global increase in military expenditure** on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by the end of the seventy-ninth session.

Action 18 (b&c&g) Request the **Secretary-General to provide strategic and action-oriented recommendations for the consideration of Member States on the future of all forms of United Nations' peace operations** and how the United Nations' toolbox can be adapted to meet evolving needs, to allow for more agile, tailored responses to existing, emerging and future challenges. . . . . Encourage the Secretary-General to

convene **an annual high-level meeting with relevant regional organizations** to discuss matters pertaining to peace operations, peacebuilding and conflicts. .... Ensure adequate, predictable and sustainable financing for African Union-led peace support operations mandated by the Security Council as recently agreed by the Security Council.

Action 22 (a) Revitalize the role of the United Nations in the field of disarmament, including by **recommending that the General Assembly hold a fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament (SSOD-IV)**.

### **CHAPTER 3 — science, technology and innovation, and digital cooperation**

..... **Introduces the Global Digital Compact** a set of human rights-based principles to lay the foundations for broader governance of cyberspace, including AI. As a “compact” it sets out principles and norms for state behaviour in the digital sphere.

On questions of governing emerging technologies, including Artificial Intelligence, governments commit to adhere to the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence. .... They further consider that international governance of emerging technologies, including AI, requires an agile, multi-disciplinary and networked multistakeholder approach, with a central role for the UN in supporting international AI governance.

### **CHAPTER 4 — youth and future generation**

Chapter 4 **introduces the Declaration on Future Generations**. It also mandates the Secretary-General **to appoint a Special Envoy for Future Generations**. The Special Envoy would represent and advocate for future

generations, raise awareness of intergenerational impacts of decisions and facilitate international cooperation.

Furthermore, the Declaration is likely to **establish an inclusive annual forum or high-level meeting on future generations** that will review this Declaration every [five years] .... creating a living compact between past, present, and future. Finally, the Declaration requests the Secretary-General to submit an annual report on the implementation of commitments and the embedding of long-term thinking in the interest of future generations.

## **CHAPTER 5 — transforming global governance**

Action 37 **Reform of the Security Council** .... Co-facilitators Note: It is clear from Member State and stakeholder inputs that reform of the Security Council remains a priority for the Summit of the Future, and we are committed to achieving an ambitious outcome in the Pact for the Future. We will present initial language on this issue in June 2024.

Action 38 (a&b) focuses on revitalizing the General Assembly. It **further enhances and make full use of the role and authority of the General Assembly** to address evolving global challenges, in full compliance with the Charter.. .... Enhance ways in which the General Assembly can contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security and strengthen its coordination with the Security Council, in particular by taking action on threats to international peace and security.

Action 38 (c&d) [GA] Ensure that the **selection and appointment process of the Secretary-General** is guided by the principles of merit, transparency, inclusiveness and regional rotation. .... Take into account during the next, and in subsequent, selection and appointment processes the regrettable fact that there has never been a woman Secretary-General. Action 39 (e) Request the Secretary-General to provide recommendations for the consideration of the Economic and Social Council on how to ensure that the **modalities, functions, working methods and**



**procedures of the Commission (on the Status of Women) are fit for the future.**

Action 40 (d) [PBC] Establish a more systematic and strategic partnership between the Commission and the international financial institutions to mobilize financing for sustaining peace and to help align national development, peacebuilding and prevention strategies.

Action 42 (b) [HR pillar] Request the **Secretary-General to provide proposals** for adequate, sustainable and predictable financing of the Office of the United Nations **High Commissioner for Human Rights** with the aim of steadily and significantly increasing the Office's regular budget resources over the next five years.

Action 43 - 47 deals with reform of the International Financial Architecture  
**Action 43. We will continue to reform the governance of the international financial architecture so that it reduces inequities and reflects today's world.**

We agree to:

(a) **Call on the board of the IMF** to take further steps to enhance the representation and voice of developing countries.

(b) **Call on the boards of the World Bank and other multilateral development banks** to enhance representation and voice of developing countries.

**Action 44. We will reform the international financial architecture to mobilize adequate volumes of capital to meet the Sustainable Development Goals, and direct financing to those most in need.**

(a) **Deliver a significant increase in resources for the International Development Association (IDA)** through its twenty-first replenishment, including contributions from both new and existing donors, and establish a clear pathway to larger IDA funding by 2030.

**Action 45. We will reform the international financial architecture to enable countries to borrow with confidence, promote access to**

**affordable credit, prevent unsustainable borrowing, and facilitate timely, coordinated and fair debt restructuring and debt relief.**

**Action 46. We will reform the international financial architecture so that it shields countries equitably during systemic shocks and makes the financial system more stable.**

**Action 47. We will reform the international financial architecture so that it can meet the challenge of climate change.**

**Action 48. We will develop a framework on measures of progress on sustainable development to complement gross domestic product.**

We request the Secretary General to:

a) Establish an independent high-level expert group to develop recommendations ..... and to present the outcome of its work during the eightieth session of the General Assembly, and subsequently establish an intergovernmental process to consider these recommendations.

**Action 50. We will strengthen the international governance arrangements for the environment to enhance cooperation and deliver on our ambition to protect our planet.**

61. We recognize the critical importance of tackling global environmental challenges and crises to the future well-being of people and planet. We agree to:

(a) **Explore options in the United Nations Environment Assembly** to strengthen the global governance of the environment with the aim of accelerating the implementation of existing commitments

**Action 51. We will strengthen our engagement and partnerships with relevant stakeholders to deliver on existing commitments and address new and emerging challenges.**

62. We recognize the importance of strengthening the United Nations' engagement with other actors. We agree to:

(a) Ensure that relevant stakeholders can meaningfully participate in United Nations' processes and that Member States have access to the views and expertise of partners on a systematic basis.

(b) Establish continuous and open channels of communication between **UN intergovernmental bodies and civil society**, allowing for ongoing dialogue, exchange of information, and collaboration beyond formal meetings, including through briefings, consultations, and interactive dialogues.

(c) Leverage the **private sector's** unique role and contribution to addressing global challenges and strengthen their accountability towards the implementation of the agreed frameworks of the United Nations.

(d) Strengthen the engagement of **local and regional authorities** in United Nations intergovernmental bodies and processes and request **the Secretary-General to provide recommendations on this matter by the end of the seventy-ninth session** for Member States' consideration.

(e) Deepen United Nations' engagement with **national parliaments** in United Nations intergovernmental bodies and processes.

(f) Enhance cooperation between the United Nations and **regional, sub-regional and other organizations**, which will be critical to maintaining international peace and security, promoting and protecting human rights, and achieving sustainable development.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Four main takeaways:

- In sum, a modest set of proposals which collectively modernize and strengthen the role of the organization — at this stage. But there is more to come.
- The trajectory of these negotiations is not typical; last minute deal-making is likely. (Security Council and IFA)

- Civil Society is now deeply engaged in the institutional questions of global governance reform, and this new dynamic is taking root globally, not just in the “New York bubble.”
- Historically these institutional adaptations have taken place after major World Wars. Therefore, any progress, however small, is a worthwhile result. And who knows, the next few months of highly charged discussions in New York may yet surprise us.

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