



Redefining Multilateralism

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Abstract

There is a compelling need to redefine our conceptions and institutions of multilateralism. Multilateralism needs to be reshaped to take into account the proliferation in the number, variety and diversity of stakeholders acting globally, the volume of international interactions and transactions taking place, and the interdependence and complexity of the engagements between people, organizations, communities, sectors and countries. Multilateralism needs to evolve to take into account changes in the sources and nature of conflict, insecurity and power arising from internal weaknesses within states in the form of political instability, ethnic or religious strife, administrative incapacity, economic breakdown, natural calamity or environmental degradation. It needs to reflect the shift from territorial issues to a wide range of non-material, cross-border factors, extra-territorial issues including information flows, financial flows, trade, intellectual property rights, technological dissemination, global social movements, the COVID-19 Pandemic, and climate change. It needs to respond to the interdependencies that render ineffective piecemeal strategies and policies implemented by specialized, sectoral institutions. A new form of multilateralism or plurilateralism is required that effectively engages a substantially larger number and wider range of stakeholders. National governments are too mired in domestic politics and competitive nationalism to act on their own. Essential changes in the global system can only be achieved with the active, vocal involvement of global civil society. The requisite energy and momentum can only be unleashed by a transformative global social movement. Multilateral institutions must devise new and more effective ways to bridge the vast distance and surmount the innumerable barriers that separate “we the people” from decision-making in international affairs. Building stable, democratic, prosperous, resilient societies is the antidote to human insecurity. A major paradigm shift is urgently needed for a more inclusive, representative, participative, multi-stakeholder system of global governance equipped to understand and respond to the speed and complexity of the issues we face, and committed to realize the comprehensive agenda of human security goals unanimously adopted by the world community.

Today humanity is confronted with a complex nexus of interrelated security threats. The multilateral system for international cooperation and global governance is under siege at precisely the time we need it more than ever before. The ideas, institutions and policies on which the system is based is not fit for purpose to handle the complex, cross-border challenges arising from the globalization and financialization of the world economy, the growing power and independence of MNCs, rising levels of unemployment and inequality, the pressures of political and economic refugees, the depletion of natural resources, the existential climate threat and, most urgently, the plethora of urgent economic and social problems generated by the microscopic COVID-19 virus.

The global pandemic is the most immediate and visible of these challenges due to its sudden, devastating impact on human health, the global economy, jobs, incomes, food production and distribution, education, travel and other sectors. It has highlighted and severely aggravated fundamental flaws in prevailing economic policies. It has spurred rising levels of unemployment, economic inequality and insecurity around the world. These in turn are reinforcing the retreat from multilateralism and democracy and fueling polarization and tensions within nations. The impact of these threats is far more visible and tangible to billions of people than the threats to national security envisioned at the time the UN was established. They are also much more complex. And they all dwindle into relative insignificance in comparison with the fast-approaching, existential threat of global climate change.

1. Characteristics of the Global Crises

The multidimensional crises confronting humanity today share a number of defining characteristics. All of them are global in origin and magnitude. None of them can be effectively addressed by individual nation-states operating independently of one another. The solutions for each and every one of these problems require profound changes in the relationships between nation-states and in the structure and functioning of multilateral institutions. This is self-evident with regard to issues such as COVID-19 and Climate Change, but it is even true for issues such as unemployment that have been traditionally regarded as strictly national in origin and remedy. More than two-thirds of the factors impacting on unemployment within countries stem from the conduct of other nations and the global system.

These challenges come at a time when there is a loss of confidence in traditional institutions of governance, a decline in governability and a general crisis of leadership. People have lost confidence in their governments, and, by extension, the intergovernmental organizations to which they belong. National political parties, business, the media and even scientific institutions confront a mounting trust deficit. Democratic values and the rule of law are under attack. Nationalism, populism and isolationism pose a growing threat to the global order. The distance between global institutions and the people has widened, in spite of the increasing efforts of the United Nations system to play a more direct role in tackling global challenges.

There is a compelling need to redefine our conception and reinvent our institutions for multilateralism. The notion of multilateralism as a system by which member nation-states

manage interstate relations no longer captures the entirety of the global game. Conceptually, we need to reshape the principal objectives of multilateralism and expand participation to include a much wider range of stakeholders. Multilateral institutions were originally conceived primarily to foster national security, preserve peace and prevent the recurrence of world war. They are now compelled to address much broader, more complex and imminent security challenges. More effective global governance is essential for addressing all of them.

“We are on the verge of blundering into something far more devastating than the world has experienced before for a variety of reasons, not least among them, unusually deteriorated relations among the most heavily armed and powerful States, a climate catastrophe that is already at our doorstep, the dark side of the unprecedented quantum leaps in technological development, and the deficit of trust among peoples, countries, communities and societies. Add to that the ‘game-changing’ COVID-19 pandemic and what the world has before it is a stage set for planetary calamity. We should pull back from the precipice in time. Multilateralism, modern multilateralism, which marks its 100th anniversary this year, is the only way to do this.”¹

– David Chikvaidze

Chef de Cabinet of the Director-General of UNOG at Geneva

But let us not prematurely dismiss the potential contribution of nation-states. It is only five years ago that 193 countries of the world united in adopting the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The unanimous adoption of Agenda 2030 is an unprecedented historical commitment to operationalize and realize in practice the idealistic principles set forth in 1948 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. During the same month when the SDGs were adopted, another landmark of multilateralism was achieved with the adoption of the Paris climate accord to curb the release of greenhouse gases by 197 nations.

“Multilateralism is not dead. It just needs to be reinvigorated and reinvented based on a 21st century model.”

– Sandrine Dixson-Declève, Co-President, Club of Rome

A more effective multilateral system is absolutely and urgently needed. Criticism of the present system fails to take into account the extraordinary changes in global society which make the current institutional framework increasingly inadequate. Whatever its shortfalls, its achievements have been enormous and the need for a multilateral system today is greater than ever before.

Since the founding of the League of Nations and its rebirth as the United Nations, there has always been ambiguity, conflicting viewpoints and competing concepts regarding the

purpose and nature of the multilateral system. At its inception, many viewed it primarily as an instrument to maintain the balance of power between potentially conflicting states in a world where empires were still legitimate. They regarded multilateralism as a buffer against a fracturing of the world by a proliferation of small states striving for ethnic or national homogeneity. Legal experts emphasized its role as a mechanism for preserving peace and supporting international relations through international law, rules, regulations and systems for arbitration. Others promoted its virtues as an international system for establishing technical standards for coordinating global services such as the postal system, telecommunications, weather monitoring. And some envisioned it as the embryo for a future world government which could gradually emerge as humanity outgrew the narrow distinctions of nationality and embraced universal values and a shared common human identity.

The UN was founded by 55 nations in 1945—including many such as India which were still subject nations within the imperial system. None could anticipate at the time that within 15 years the entire global system of empires would virtually dissolve into thin air, emancipating one-third of humanity, and that the number of nation-states would eventually multiply more than three-fold. None could foresee that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which was established as a set of idealistic principles without legal status or means of enforcement would in subsequent decades acquire increasing power in international law and eventually serve as the foundation for the 17 Sustainable Goals adopted unanimously by 193 nations in 2015.

These circumstances illustrate the radical changes that have taken place in the world since the birth of the UN 75 years ago and underline the necessity for the continuous evolution of multilateral institutions to keep pace with the on-going evolution of the global community it was established to serve and protect. In the context of the dramatic changes that have taken place, a review and assessment of international institutions is required to identify needs and opportunities to realign their mandate, structures, strategies, policies and funding to enhance their capabilities to preserve peace and promote human security in its broadest sense.

2. Transformations of the Global Community

Reshaping multilateralism needs to take into account fundamental changes in the world system. First, the international system has become much more inclusive than ever before. For the first time in the history of mankind, it encompasses nearly the whole of humanity, while at the time the UN was founded 750 million people—almost a third of the world's population at the time—lived in territories that were non-self-governing. Regions that were once considered on the periphery are now becoming center stage. The number, variety and diversity of stakeholders acting globally, the volume of international interactions and transactions taking place, the interdependence and complexity of the engagements have expanded beyond imagination. Membership in Facebook now approaches three billion users, making it the largest community in the world and challenging the notion of the nation-state as the most representative model of democracy. Though national, religious and ethnic identities persist, there is an increasing emergence of a common global identity, a global sense of community, a shared global commons, and a shared global culture—not a culture of uniformity, but of increasing richness and diversity.

A second fundamental change is a deep mutation in the nature of conflict. Wars used to be a matter of competition between powers. Today, weakness is replacing power as the source of conflict and war. Conflict situations today reflect manifestations of state weakness in the form of political instability, ethnic or religious strife, administrative incapacity, economic breakdown, natural calamity or environmental degradation. The greatest threats confronting humanity now primarily result from the flight of political refugees, economic refugees fleeing shortages of jobs or food, environmental refugees fleeing drinking water shortages, floods or rising sea levels. These diverse causes of insecurity are turning the international environment upside down. They represent more imminent, tangible and dangerous threats to global peace than superpower rivalry.

A third change is mobility. The international system used to be based on the idea of territory, fixed physical boundaries and physical property. Today the territorial notion of politics has been altered by a wide range of non-material, extra-territorial, increasingly fluid and rapidly changing cross-border factors, including information flows, financial flows, trade, intellectual property rights, technological dissemination, the spread of social movements, such as Fridays for Future and Black Lives Matter, the onset and course of the Pandemic, and the looming consequences of global climate change.²

A fourth change associated with the other three is the growing complexity and interdependence between all the dimensions of multilateral relations. The major crises confronting humanity today are multi-sectoral with respect to both their causes and the requisite solutions. Conventional disciplinary boundaries between economy, politics, technology, society and ecology are illusory theoretical constructs. Piecemeal strategies and policies implemented by specialized, sectoral institutions at the national and global level are inadequate to address them. So too, all of these challenges transcend prevailing theory and models in the social sciences and defy solution by conventional thinking and strategies. Specialized, siloed organizations are ill-equipped to address complex, multidimensional issues.

The world today is also increasingly integrated. As society has expanded horizontally to encompass the whole world, its various dimensions, sectors and activities have become increasingly interrelated and interdependent with one another. The multilateral system has to be reshaped to address a far wider range of issues as inseparable dimensions of a complex and increasingly integrated global system. It also has to be empowered with the mandate, authority, resources and commitment of member states required to meet the global challenges to Human Security. It has to overcome the perceptual and conceptual barriers erected by disciplinary silos to decipher the complex interactions and interdependencies between different fields of social existence and to transcend the piecemeal, specialized action of narrow sectoral institutions, policies and programs.

Examples of this increasing integration are ubiquitous. The media today is not merely a source of sectoral information on politics, business, advertising and entertainment. It is integrated with every human activity at every level from global news and national politics to social movements and the personal relations between individuals. The enormous impact of

fake news on political processes, elections, and public confidence in governments, politics and science is illustrative. The impact of financialization and unregulated global financial transactions on the instability and fragility of economies around the world was evident by the events that followed the 2008 financial crisis.

Production, trade, marketing, finance, and distribution are evolving chains but into integrated global supply and distribution systems for everything from the dissemination of political news, commercial advertising, education, e-governance and religion to the production and delivery of every variety of products, services and entertainment. Systems for transportation, communication and finance are morphing from bilateral interactions into seamless global systems. Technological developments play a central role in the speed and extent of integration, but technology itself is becoming more integrated and interdependent, as illustrated by recent developments of computerized electric cars and the integration of artificial intelligence in virtually all aspects of life.

Over the past quarter-century, the World Wide Web has evolved into the first truly global social system linking billions of people and millions of organizations around the world and giving rise to new types of networks of interconnectivity. The COVID-19 Pandemic is only the most recent and dramatic expression of the growing complexity and fragility arising from growing connectivity when it is not guided by effective leadership and instruments of governance. The consequences of this growing complexity extend far beyond the original conception of security and the capacities of the present global system of governance to comprehend, lead or regulate.

These sources of change—inclusivity, mutation of the nature of conflict, mobility and complexity—reflect a profound transformation in the nature of international relations. As a result, the notion of interstate relations no longer adequately captures the nature of the global community or the challenges of global governance.³

3. Building Trust and Confidence in the UN System

The evolution of the global community has been supported by a growing awareness of the shared values and common destiny that bind together all human beings. In the measure that awareness has grown, relations and cooperation between people and nations have grown exponentially. Those born after 1995 have come into a world in which people everywhere are interconnected as never before and more conscious of their shared humanity than earlier generations divided by history, war, nationalism, ethnicity and religion. Their human relationships have been dramatically altered by instant global interconnectivity. The growing sense of “We the People” is the ultimate basis on which the UN system is founded and on which it will evolve in future.

Strengthening multilateralism is absolutely essential for humanity to effectively address the global challenges confronting the world today. Yet some UN member states and large portions of humanity either underestimate its importance or rely on unilateral and bilateral initiatives which undermine its power to serve humanity. The UN system was established to serve its member states and the world community rather than to exercise authority over

them. It depends for its mission on trust and confidence far more than on power. Anything that enhances public trust and confidence in the multilateral system enhances its capacity for effective service. Anything that diminishes public perception impairs its functioning as well as that of the tens of thousands of UN staff whose motivation is strongly influenced by public perceptions of the UN system.

In a June 2020 survey by GlobeScan, citizens of 27 representative member-states expressed nearly twice the level of trust in the UN system (26%) than they had in national government (15%). But both these figures were far below the ratings for medical professionals (82%), scientific and academic institutions (73%), and NGOs (41%). Even large national companies rated higher in trust (28%). These figures reflect a general decline in respect and trust for all types of social institutions in times of great uncertainty about the future. But they also highlight an opportunity that can be leveraged to strengthen the UN system and enhance its effectiveness by strategies which strive to build confidence and trust among the citizenship of member countries. While governments vie with one another across conference tables, a growing sense of solidarity among ordinary citizens may be the best way to reinforce the foundations of the system.

Innovative strategies can be adopted to enhance awareness, knowledge, understanding and support for multilateralism through relations with its vast and diverse network of stakeholders around the world to strengthen support for the UN at a time when it is more vitally needed than ever before.

- Enhancing the public impact of existing UN initiatives with parliaments, cities, business, academia, NGOs, educational institutions and other civil society organizations.
- Fostering a common global human identity and consciousness to enhance public confidence and support for international organizations and multilateral initiatives.
- Providing avenues for people around the world to directly project their views and priorities regarding national and global issues without the intermediation of partisan, nation-centric, political institutions.
- Mobilizing the combined resources of global civil society to create a direct voice for humanity.

4. Broadening the Stakeholder Base of Multilateralism

A new form of multilateralism or plurilateralism is needed that effectively engages a substantially larger number and wider range of stakeholders. The last three decades have brought about radical changes in the number and variety of institutions actively engaged at the global level that possess knowledge and capacities essential for addressing global issues. Non-state actors are playing an increasingly important role in analyzing problems, shaping political discourse and influencing public opinion in global society. Subnational structures, interparliamentary unions, megacities, multinational corporations, pressure groups, scientific institutions and civil society organizations are all stakeholders and players in global affairs.

Business has been transformed by the establishment of global supply chains. The number of multinational corporations multiplied from 7,000 in 1970 to 82,000 in 2008 with 230,000 foreign affiliates by 2014.* The largest MNCs exceed in size the wealth and influence of many nation-states and have assumed the role of global social systems. The world's leading financial institutions have become linked as elements of an increasingly integrated global financial system. Academies, universities and research institutes have established international networks for collaborative action.

“At a time when many nation states are turning inward and reforming into blocs, leadership in thought is needed to redefine the concept and practice of multilateralism to include all legitimate stakeholders representing the human community.”

International civil society institutions have multiplied exponentially and are now forging networks to multiply their reach and effective power. The international movement to abolish land mines was initiated by six NGOs and was only later embraced by national governments. NGOs such as Fridays for Future have generated greater awareness of the climate threat than years of pronouncements by the IPCC. From an estimated 28,000 NGOs in the whole world at the beginning of the 21st century, today there are about 10 million, representing a 350-fold multiplication in two decades. Today there are approximately 41,000 active international organizations from 300 countries and territories. This includes intergovernmental (IGOs) and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), with about 1,200 new organizations being added each year.

In addition, lower level government institutions are also forming networks that extend beyond national boundaries. A global network of 7,000 of the world's largest cities has committed to meeting global climate targets. Megacities and provinces are now playing a critical role in planning and organizing the response to the pandemic. Subnational structures empowered by digital technology and capable of responding at faster speeds than states are entering into their own foreign trade agreements.

This rising importance of subnational entities is in accord with history. The most creative moments in the growth of civilization were not those dominated by massive empires. The growth of civilization has thrived on the freedom of small, innovative social units, such as the tiny kingdoms of ancient India, and the city-states of ancient Greece and Renaissance Italy. Silicon Valley, London, Bangalore, Singapore and Shanghai are their modern counterparts. An alliance of tiny island states played an active and very effective role in the climate treaty adopted in Paris.

This wide and expanding range of stakeholder institutions possesses an enormous range of knowledge, organizational capabilities and technological resources. They too represent

* <https://www.oecd.org/industry/ind/MNEs-in-the-global-economy-policy-note.pdf>

the aspirations and interests of “we the people”—in many cases more directly and effectively than the institutions of national government. But only a few of the very largest have an effective voice at the international level. Multilateralism needs to be redefined to give voice to, engage and harness the capabilities of a much broader range of stakeholders. At a time when many nation states are turning inward and re-forming into blocs, leadership in thought is needed to redefine the concept and practice of multilateralism to include all legitimate stakeholders representing the human community.

“The current system of multilateralism does not provide humanity as a whole with a direct voice in global affairs.”

5. Democratization of Power

The present multilateral system is severely limited in another respect. Although democracy was devised to empower citizens at the national level and give them a more direct voice in governance, in practice few of the actions of national governments, even in mature democracies, very accurately reflect the will of their own people. The size of populations, the intermediacy of political parties, the professionalization of politics as a career, the influence of lobbying and special interest groups, and the inordinate power of business and money in politics present nearly impenetrable barriers preventing the general population from effectively influencing decision-making on issues of fundamental importance to all humanity. This has been further complicated by the corporatization and politicization of the media as instruments of special interests.

“Power will have to bow eventually once a critical mass reaches a consensus about what needs to change. That rallying flag is the leadership we are looking for. Those who have ideas that are helpful and constructive, that support evolution rather than entropy and destruction, have to use every opportunity that the modern instruments of communication provide us to reach a larger and larger public audience and to build up a critical mass of people of goodwill.”

– Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga

President of Latvia (1999-2007); Co-Chair, NGIC

What is true of politics at the national level is far more true when it comes to representation of citizens on global issues. National politics is primarily concerned with domestic issues and global issues are debated primarily from the perspective of their impact on nation-states and special interest groups rather than from that of the global community. The current system of multilateralism does not provide humanity as a whole with a direct voice in global affairs. Indeed, very little information is available to access the views of humanity on issues of pressing concern to the whole world, such as the pandemic, climate change, the international financial system, the role of multilateral institutions, and management of the global commons.

There are, of course, important exceptions at both levels. Mass demonstrations by women across America protesting the nomination of an ultra-conservative member to the Supreme Court and hundreds of thousands of citizens in Minsk—the majority women—calling for resignation of Belarus' President, and the massive protest that recently led to the resignation of Kyrgyzstan's President are illustrative. Their impact is multiplied by the growing influence and reach of social media protests such as Black Lives Matter and the MeToo movement which has circled the globe. These spontaneous informal social movements are indeed exercising growing influence at the national and global level. But they have yet to acquire the organizational capabilities or institutional access necessary to systematically participate in the multilateral system.

“The challenge before us is to transform the long, slow process of social evolution into a conscious process of rapid social transformation.”

Opinion polls play an important role in reflecting public opinion at the national level, but the high cost and organizational challenges of global surveys severely limit their usage and reliability. Rapid advances in electronic communications now provide opportunities to create a more direct voice for humanity on issues of concern to the whole planet. Communications, a cornerstone of international relations, have been radically altered by electronic and social media, smartphones and Internet. The number of people using the Internet has surged with more than one billion people coming online each day for the first time since January 2018. The new media make it possible to reach out to wider sections of humanity. For the first time it is technologically and economically feasible to poll a billion people in the world rather than relying on the minuscule samples participating in the few global surveys that are presently being done. Conducting secure global referendums on important issues requires only one further step.

“We, for the first time, possess the instruments, the basis on which humanity can come together to resolve its problems. This is the first time that humanity has had such an opportunity.”

– Douglas Roche

Founder and Chairman Emeritus of the Middle Powers Initiative

Changes in the global system of this magnitude cannot be accomplished by top-down efforts of a few visionary leaders. They can only be achieved with the active and vocal involvement of global civil society which sparks and unleashes a global social movement, like the movement that abolished colonialism around the world in the decade following WWII, the American Civil Rights and Anti-Apartheid movements, the International Campaign to

Ban Landmines in the 1990s, the Pan African Green Belt Movement, #MeToo and the global youth movements which have recently joined hands to fight climate change. It can only be done by awakening the aspiration of the global public, educating global public opinion and forging new types of global networks to provide a common voice for humanity.

“There is a need for distributed leadership. We have to reverse the extreme over-investment and mis-investment in competitive security. We have to give more power to people at different levels of the international organizations. We can do a lot within the existing system, even given the reduction of some budgetary contributions.”

**– Tibor Tóth, Ambassador, Exec. Secretary Emeritus,
Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization**

The adoption of the 17 SDGs by 193 countries was itself the result of an unprecedented effort to democratize decision-making processes by public consultations and engagement with civil society and other stakeholders around the world. These global goals have legitimacy beyond politics because of the unprecedented participatory process and the crowdsourcing of ideas from so many different groups, based on information communication technologies. An estimated 30 percent of the goals and targets included in Agenda 2030 originated from crowdsourcing ideas contributed by stakeholders around the world. As a result, various sectors of society are taking ownership of the SDGs and aligning their activities with them, especially in developing countries where they see the value of this overarching framework to leap forward.

Efforts are already underway to expand the scope for non-state stakeholders to contribute to the implementation of the SDGs. The UN Global Impact, International Chamber of Commerce, SDG Business Forum engage business. Local2030, a multi-agency initiative, works across the UN system, brings together the UN system, local authorities and national governments to develop and implement solutions that advance the SDGs at the local level. UN Youth Strategy works to scale up global, regional and national actions to meet young people’s needs, realize their rights and tap their possibilities as agents of change.* Such efforts, which are now largely confined to Agenda 2030 implementation, need to be taken much further to provide an audible voice for shaping global agendas and to support co-creation of effective solutions for all major issues by member-states, UN officials, the private sector, local authorities and other partners.

Multilateral institutions must devise new and more effective ways to bridge the vast distance and surmount the barriers that separate “we the people” from decision-making in international affairs. It is not sufficient to work with top-level representatives of countries, business and a few leading CSOs. They need to devise mechanisms to more actively and formally engage and collaborate with parliamentarians, local authorities, the private sector,

* <https://www.civiceus.org/index.php/re-imagining-democracy/overviews/3513-how-united-nations-reform-can-support-a-reimagined-democracy>

large CSO networks, youth and religious groups—people at all levels and in all fields of political, economic and social engagement.

6. Accelerating Social Evolution

It took centuries for the institutions associated with ‘balance of power’ multilateralism to evolve and it took the horrendous tragedy of two world wars to compel even a partial change in those institutions to accommodate the aspirations of a much broader section of humanity. Today we do not have the luxury of continuing to progress at such a slow, hesitant pace. *The challenge before us is to transform the long, slow process of social evolution into a conscious process of rapid social transformation.* Nothing less will be sufficient to address the pressing challenges confronting humanity today. Nothing less can prevent a further retreat and deterioration of the vital institutions of multilateralism evolved so patiently and painstakingly over 100 years and so essential to safeguard the future of humanity.

“There is simply no viable alternative to multilateralism. In today’s interconnected and interdependent world, governments and intergovernmental organizations alone cannot effectively address complex global challenges. These challenges require our collective response.”

– David Chikvaidze

Chef de Cabinet of the Director-General of UNOG at Geneva

The further evolution of global governance is inevitable. There simply is no other way in which society can address the complex range of challenges confronting humanity today. The evolution from tiny kingdoms to sovereign nation states took a millennium. The further evolution to the first prototype of international organizations took centuries. They developed gradually for a half century under the constraints imposed by the Cold War.

After 1990 it appeared to many that the need for multilateralism was no longer urgent or imperative. The resulting shift in focus from arms control to trade and globalization was accompanied by a slow retreat from multinationalism.

It is now evident that this was a grave error. The concept of security is being steered in the wrong direction. More than ever before the threats to peace and human security arise precisely in the undefined and unregulated no-man’s land between the boundaries of nation-states and the protections afforded by the institutions of global governance and rule of law.

The urgency and intensity of global challenges today compel us to advance development of the multilateral system based on the values enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the goals affirmed in Agenda 2030. The imminent risks and unavoidable costs of further delays far outstrip those of further aimless meandering into the future.

7. Shift from Competitive National Security to Human Security

We need a paradigm shift in thinking that views the full spectrum of global problems together and addresses them as the real threat to global security. We need to shift our thinking from the current competitive security paradigm to the more comprehensive inclusive focus on human rights, environment, employment, poverty, food security, education, health, and other dimensions of Peace and Human Security.

“COVID-19 has forced us to pay attention to what matters. And what matters in life is well-being of people and the planet.”

– Mamphele Ramphele, Co-President, Club of Rome

COVID-19 is a wakeup call to transform our systems. The total annual expenditure of 34 UN agencies engaged in the full gamut of governance, law, peacekeeping, health, education, refugee, and myriad other activities was less than US \$50 billion in 2016, equivalent to less than 4% or 9.6 days of global military budgets and about 0.057% or 5 hours of world GDP. We are still entrenched in the old model based on the flawed belief that our security depends primarily on a strong military. There is a perversity in the way we are allocating capital. No country can be safe without a stable and vibrant economy, sufficient jobs for all job seekers, and a strong social policy framework. The nations which have proven the most resilient in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic are those which have already shifted to a broader conception of security that also encompasses economy, ecology, health, education, social welfare and wellbeing.

“We need education. We also need more support for the UN. It is the only viable and affordable means to address both the urgent and existential challenges confronting the world today. We need to cut military spending and reinvest in the SDGs to support Human Security.”

**– Alyn Ware, Coordinator,
Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament (PNND)**

The most serious security problems today are not ones which wars create but the crises with the potential to create wars and massive migration along with the socio-political fallout generated by populism and fascism. Building stable, democratic, prosperous, resilient societies is the antidote to human insecurity.

A monumental, comprehensive transformation is required from a paradigm which fosters and perpetuates insecurity to one which promotes sustainable human security for all. It encompasses a shift from mutual suspicion to mutual trust; from distorted information to factual communication; from unregulated globalization to mutually beneficial exchange and interdependence; from vociferous, polarizing, fracturing politics to participative,

well-informed, inclusive democracies; from insufficient, paralyzed health systems to human-centered care and prevention; from unbridled exploitation of natural resources to ecological conservation and environmental renewal; from intolerance to mutual understanding; from injustice and misappropriation to equity and sharing.

“Human Security is a people-centered, comprehensive, holistic perspective, a unifying framework for addressing both the direct and root causes of insecurity. We all have a role to play in building a new social contract. And this new social contract has to be between society, the economy, politics and nature—a Global Green New Deal. So also, we have the responsibility to collectively craft a new culture of multilateralism, of cooperation and solidarity, a multilateral system that is inclusive, efficient, relevant, accountable and truly connected to people’s needs and lives.”

– María Espinosa, President, 73rd UN General Assembly

We know that the effort to change the system will confront enormous institutional inertia and resistance from those that enjoy inordinate power today. But that change is essential and the awakening of global public opinion to the need for it is essential. We can only strive to ensure it comes soon enough and without the need for the repetition of the costly errors that have marred our past.

A major paradigm shift is urgently needed for a more inclusive, representative, participative, multi-stakeholder system of global governance reflective of the aspirations and values of an increasingly informed and interconnected global community, equipped to understand and respond to the speed and complexity of the issues we face, and committed to realize the comprehensive agenda of human security goals set forth by the world community. This is the most appropriate leadership task of the UN system and its member nations on the 75th anniversary of its founding.

Such a paradigm shift to more inclusive and cooperative global cooperation is essential to meeting the world’s human security needs at the local, national and international level. Nobody is safe in a world of pandemics, weapons of mass destruction and climate change—unless and until we are all safe. The needed paradigm shift does not represent a derogation of national sovereignty in its true sense, but rather a strengthening of the only true basis for sovereignty itself in two respects. First, because, sovereignty implies power over ourselves and we cannot exercise power over things that are beyond our control. Enhancing global cooperation will enhance the power and freedom of all nations just as democracy enhances the power of all citizens.

Second, sovereignty begins with and is founded on the rights of the people and its institutions derive their legitimacy from the will of the people. Human security is not possible without economic, social and ecological stability and resilience. The paradigm shift to an inclusive, global human security perspective is essential to reshape and refocus the purpose

and function of our global institutions to address the full spectrum of humanity's security needs. A Green New Deal for some countries may temporarily reduce the immediate impact of the Pandemic and other threats on specific populations, but it cannot prevent their recurrence. A comprehensive and inclusive Global Green New Deal is the only viable strategy to address the vulnerabilities generated by the nexus of global challenges and create secure foundations for resilience in the future. Anything less is inadequate.

The UN-WAAS project on Global Leadership in the 21st Century is examining effective models and alternative strategies to complement and supplement existing initiatives for a breakthrough in collaborative multilateralism more truly responsive to the interests of humanity and more reflective of the will of "we the people". Leadership is needed to find more effective means for coordination of policy formulation across disciplinary boundaries and coordination of action between and among international organizations, nation states, urban communities, academia, business, and civil society organizations. Changes are needed to more formally engage and empower civil society organizations, subnational units and agencies, academic and scientific institutions, youth groups and other stakeholders within a restructured, democratized governance system designed and dedicated to the common good of all.

Security is a perception that depends on trust, which in turn depends on quality of leadership and transparency of governance... True transformative leadership is all about "uncorking" the future, rather than trying to rekindle the past.

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Notes

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