

European Perspectives on Taking Forward the UN75 Declaration: From Reflection to Innovation & Action

Held on 4 March 2021

Synthesis Report of Major Insights & Recommendations from the Public Forum and Expert Roundtables

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Background

On 21 September 2020, the United Nations' 193 Member States adopted the Declaration on the Commemoration of the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the United Nations, which outlines a vision and twelve distinct commitments addressing the world's most pressing challenges, threats, and opportunities. The milestone UN75 Declaration further calls for "the Secretary-General to report back before the end of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly with recommendations to advance our common agenda and to respond to current and future challenges." Based on "a process of profound reflection" on the future of multilateralism and global governance, the Secretary-General's report *Our Common Agenda* (forthcoming this September) is expected to reflect diverse stakeholder perspectives, from civil society and business groups to Member States, youth representatives, and thought leaders.

As an independent, multi-stakeholder contribution to the consultations and substantive preparations for *Our Common Agenda*, the Robert Bosch Stiftung GmbH, Federal Foreign Office of Germany, Stimson Center, Academic Council on the UN System (ACUNS), Plataforma CIPÓ, and Leiden University convened, on 4 March 2021, a global public forum which gathered some 500 participants from all over the world, and three roundtables with select experts from Europe and beyond. The back-to-back events sought to offer diverse perspectives from Europe and other regions in response to the overarching question: "In marking 75 years of the United Nations, how can the results of last year's intense reflection now be turned into action and contribute to innovation and strengthening of the world body?" The program's two main goals were: *first*, to identify the international actors chiefly responsible for advancing the UN75 Declaration's vision and individual commitments, detailing, in particular, the unique capabilities, ideas, and networks within Europe needed to advance the UN75 Declaration against the backdrop of COVID-19; and *second*, to propose concrete ideas and inclusive strategies for the Secretary-General to consider for his forthcoming report's recommendations on strengthening global collective action to realize the UN75 Declaration's full potential and for holding international actors accountable to its implementation.

The event consisted of five sessions: a global public forum; three expert roundtables on the themes of 1) Sustainable Development and Climate Action, 2) Peace & Security and Humanitarian Action, and 3) Human Rights, the Rule of Law, and Democratic Governance; and a closing session to draw common threads from the roundtables and discuss key elements of a "strategy for change."

Global Public Forum: Highlights from the Panelists

This section highlights important reflections from the global public forum's eight panelists on Europe and the international community's role in taking forward the UN75 Declaration.

"Multi-stakeholder collaboration at all levels is an absolute necessity as we try to develop holistic solutions to global challenges. Let us use the UN75 data and make voices of relevant stakeholders heard." — *Sandra Breka, Member of the Board of Management of the Robert Bosch Stiftung*

"We need to find better ways of governance and governing, both at the international level... [and] at the national level. When we see the reality of today's world — that it is a networked one and involves civil society, young people, thought leaders, and private companies — how can we work better together, beyond the regular institutionalized forms that currently exist in the international system?" — *Volker Türk, Assistant Secretary-General for Strategic Coordination, UN Executive Office of the Secretary-General*

"The Common Agenda of the UN and the UN75 Declaration is the European Agenda, so Europeans will be key in this agenda's implementation. The EU itself is multilateral, and we know the benefits and the importance of international cooperation ... **Building a strong alliance for the implementation of the**

Common Agenda will be key, and Europeans can be very important here. — *Ambassador Anna Karin Eneström, Permanent Representative of Sweden to the UN and former UN75 Declaration Co-Facilitator*

“The pandemic is really a wake-up call for multilateralism. It shows that strong and effective cooperation is indispensable to secure peace, stability, prosperity and to address all the major challenges of our time, from the pandemic and migration and from arms control to climate change.” — *Ambassador Susanne Baumann, Federal Government Commissioner for Disarmament and Arms Control and Head of the Directorate-General for International Order, the UN and Arms Control, Federal Foreign Office of Germany*

“Multilateralism matters because we believe that **only through the United Nations and other institutions,** alongside other partners worldwide, **can the EU serve as a standard-bearer of modern multilateral action in support of democracy, human rights, and climate action.** — *Kristin de Peyron, Deputy Managing Director, Human Rights, Global and Multilateral Issues, European External Action Service*

“Young people are the conversation. It is important that we include young people, immediately, not just as an afterthought or as superficial participants. They need to be involved from the earliest design and implementation stages of policy-making — from the very start to the very end of the policy cycle, because youth perspectives are critical.” — *Fatima Zaman, Advocate at the Kofi Annan Foundation*

“In order to successfully achieve effective and inclusive global governance and advance Our Common Agenda, **we must discuss ways of mainstreaming climate-sensitive policies across all twelve commitments of the UN75 Declaration.** How can we build trust in national, regional, and global governance institutions if climate justice is not achieved and the effects of climate change continue to disproportionately affect those who have historically been marginalized and excluded from governance structures and decision-making?” — *Maiara Folly, Co-founder, Plataforma CIPÓ*

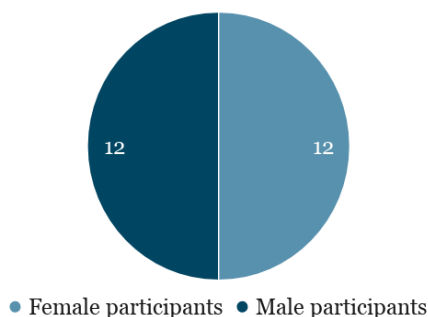
“We need to build the national interest-based case for multilateral cooperation to complement the moral and norm-based arguments. Not only do national interest-based arguments have the benefit of being true, but they also stand a greater chance in seeing traction among the wider UN membership — and that applies, in particular, to the ‘leaving no one behind’ principle.” — *Sebastian von Einsiedel, Senior Advisor on Internally Displaced Persons at the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs*

Summaries of the Three Expert Roundtables

Sustainable Development and Climate Action Roundtable

UN75 Declaration commitments #1 (“leave no one behind”) and #2 (“protect our planet”)

Sustainable Development and Climate Action Roundtable
Total number of participants: 24



Prompts for discussion: What practical, near and long-term global governance reform measures (policy, normative, legal, operational, and/or institutional) can help reduce perceived inequities and systemic/structural problems in the global economy (which suffered an estimated 4.4 percent contraction in global GDP in 2020 due to the pandemic)? And how can the UN and other international bodies best deliver on the Decade of Action for the SDGs *and* facilitate a recovery that doubles as effective climate action?

The discussion emphasized multilateralism and international cooperation as indispensable avenues for advancing the UN sustainable development and climate action agendas. While participants deemed essential the identification of concrete steps to foster collective action towards a timely implementation of both the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Paris Agreement, they highlighted several obstacles hampering the UN's ability to build back better and greener from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Firstly, several experts called attention to worsening tension between the need for increased international cooperation and states' concern to safeguard their sovereignty, driven by the growing systemic competition between the United States and China, and the re-emergence of deep North-South divisions. These issues have become more visible and acute in light of COVID-19 pandemic response and recovery, marked by “vaccine nationalism” on the part of developed countries.

Secondly, the roundtable discussion emphasized the UN system’s failure to meaningfully take into account the voices of young people, women, and civil society. An expert also noted that countries often the most affected by policies promoted by the UN, particularly those in Africa, are systematically left out of decision-making processes. As a result, the particular circumstances and needs of their citizens generally remain unaddressed or unprioritized.

A third obstacle was referred to as an “ethical paradox” of global funding: the failure of the international community — the wealthiest in human history — to raise sufficient funds to finance climate action and sustainable development. One stakeholder noted that, even with military expenditures worldwide reaching record levels in the past few years, military power and nuclear deterrence were unable to protect humanity from the most pressing challenge fueling global insecurity, namely the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, initiatives aimed at building social security networks remain underfunded.

Fourth, in the context of promoting climate justice, a participant underscored the difficulties inherent in ensuring the rights and meeting the needs of current populations, while taking into account the needs of future generations. This tension was further considered by an expert who called attention to the fact that policies aimed at tackling climate change focus disproportionately on current emissions. In short, even if industrialized countries were to achieve their net zero emissions targets, these efforts would be meaningless if expected emission increases in the developing world were not addressed simultaneously.

Finally, an expert pointed to the spread of science denialism tendencies — what was referred to as a “crisis of expertise” — in several parts of the world. This phenomenon, characterized by distrust of scientific knowledge and by widespread disinformation, was classified as particularly harmful to global efforts against climate change, which rely on scientific assessment and consensus. The participant also noted that, while scientific discourses play a key role in persuading the international and scientific communities and policy makers at a global level, they do not suffice in influencing local and domestic politics. Scientific models often fail to address the specific characteristics of local ecosystems and the expected effects of climate change on local communities, thus deepening the gap between science and people and exacerbating the crisis of expertise.

Still, the roundtable acknowledged that progress has been made in recent years. The agreement on the 17 universal Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reached in 2015 by all UN 193 Member States, was hailed as an important achievement that, as one stakeholder noted, represents the best way forward to ensure the protection of the most vulnerable groups worldwide.

In the specific area of climate action, a participant noted that significant steps have been taken to make climate change adaptation a key international priority, pointing to the broad range of proposals that emerged from the first Global Climate Adaptation Summit, hosted in January 2021 by The Netherlands. The initiatives, agreed to by over 80 ministers and heads of governments, include the launch of new multi-stakeholder alliances and funding mechanisms to address climate adaptation, including an adaptation finance mainstreaming program for middle- and lower-income countries to manage climate risks; a new global ecosystem-based adaptation fund; and a new umbrella fund to enhance adaptation for smallholder agriculture.

Recommendations

- UN and related multilateral reform proposals **must take into account intense systemic competition**. Thus, universal implementation of the SDGs should be prioritized not only to focus governmental and international community attention on those who are furthest behind in different

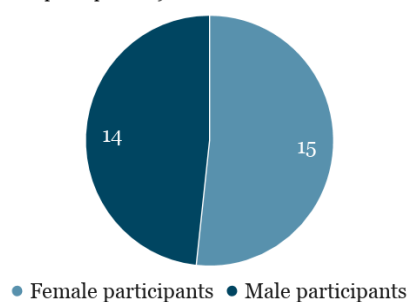
parts of the world, but also as a way of **reducing the North-South gap** widened by vaccine nationalism (in this regard, ensuring vaccine availability for all should be a top policy priority).

- UN organizational reforms must promote **inclusive and democratic mechanisms that allow civil society, vulnerable groups, women, and youth** to participate meaningfully in the world body’s decision-making process. One step in this direction would be to ensure that policy and reform proposals developed in forums such as the Youth Climate Conference and the ECOSOC Youth Forum are taken into account and implemented by the overall UN System. Structural reforms are also needed to **increase the voice of developing countries’ citizens**, so that their particular needs and expertise are taken into account in decision-making processes aimed at promoting their development and safety.
- In their own best interests, **donor governments must increase their official development assistance budgets**, with the short-term goal of helping developing countries build back better and greener from COVID-19, while safeguarding longer-term investments in durable social safety nets. Member States should also support the UN Secretary General’s efforts to engage with donors and multinational development banks to ensure that, by 2024, at least 50 percent of the total share of climate finance is spent on building resilience and adapting to the effects of climate change. To meet the clear global, national, and human security challenges posed by climate change and pandemic preparedness, UN Member States should seriously reconsider costly national security paradigms that focus primarily on military means, including nuclear deterrence and other requirements for ever-expanding national defense budgets.
- The United Nations, and its Member States’ SDG implementation measures (for example, Voluntary National Reviews presented at the annual High-Level Political Forum, on Sustainable Development) must **place greater emphasis on tackling the underlying causes of inequalities and climate change emergencies**, rather than focusing mostly on their consequences. In addition, to preserve our planet for the sustainable use of future generations, carbon emissions reduction strategies must address *potential* emissions sources and not just current emission sources and trends.
- In order to minimize the effects of science denialism tendencies or the crisis of expertise, the UN must **promote locally-led, decentralized forums that allow for the participation of citizens**, especially those who do not belong to a civil society organization. These participatory mechanisms would enhance engagement and mobilization of non-organized citizens, as well as help to translate their demands into a **science-led politics that is more inclusive and adequate to their needs**, thus helping to narrow the gap between science and people.

Peace & Security and Humanitarian Action Roundtable

UN 75 Declaration commitments #3 (“promote peace and prevent conflicts”), #8 (“upgrade the United Nations”), and #12 (“be prepared”)

Peace & Security and Humanitarian Action Roundtable
Total number of participants: 29



Prompts for discussion: Under Secretary-General António Guterres, the UN has taken steps to restructure its peace and security pillar to, for instance, prioritize prevention and sustain peace, enhance the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations, and improve coordination and coherence with the system’s wider human rights and development pillars. How effective have these efforts been, and what other ideas for institutional revitalization would enhance the “Secretary-General’s toolbox” to better prevent and manage conflicts?

This roundtable’s experts noted that humanitarian action needs to be brought closer to the core of peace and security efforts. Food scarcity, humanitarian crises, and threats engendered by climate change are existential issues, which pose a threat to overall

international security. Moreover, as growing humanitarian crises and inequality are driving demand for UN and Security Council involvement, we lean too often, errantly, on political and military intervention as our panacea. The participants suggested that instead, we should focus on the underlying root causes of conflicts. One is unmet basic social need (lack of education, employment, or funding for projects lead people to look for alternatives to meet their basic need). Another is the under-representation of certain ethnic groups in politics and decision-making processes. A third cause is the fragility of governance at the national and regional levels.

With intrastate conflicts now at the center of UN peace and security efforts, participants noted that the era of conventional warfare between states has largely come to an end. However, the internationalization of intrastate conflict seems evermore commonplace. A central element of the UN Charter is non-use of force for political gains, yet we regularly see large and medium-sized powers worsening conflicts, and thus casualties, through their involvement. Even as new stakeholders gain influence in the UN, it remains, at its core, an institution of states with their own interests. This raises several moral questions regarding sovereignty. What rights do states, or the United Nations collectively have to intervene in a conflict between a government and a rebellious uprising? How should they choose which side to support? And should the UN recognize non-state actors for negotiations, if so, under what circumstances?

Despite its failures to end conflict, nations continue to seek help from the UN because it has developed respected expertise through its participation in, for instance, peacekeeping, election observation, and ceasefire monitoring over the years. Participants also emphasized that the UN must act more nimbly in times of crisis. The UN must reconsider atrocity crimes and their mitigation separately from prevention, and it should closely monitor instances of civil rights abuses, which are often bellwethers for such tragedies. Lastly, the UN needs more leeway to utilize the tools at its disposal without being micromanaged Member States.

An overarching issue which casts a shadow upon peace and security efforts is the global political system's transition to multi-polarity. Power is fragmenting at the state and international levels, and fervent competition is growing in parallel with globalization and interconnectedness. A western-led democratic order lies juxtaposed to another that rejects its values and norms. This handicaps peace and security efforts, as reflected in Security Council vetoes, and persists through politicking across other UN organs. If the issue is indeed a normative one, then new institutions will not be a remedy, and the creation and use of new principles, such as the Responsibility to Protect, will become increasingly difficult moving forward. Furthermore, political tensions between great powers can bleed down to the ground-level. Large powers are often at the forefront of peacekeeping recruitment, and this can result in peacekeeping forces that are not intrinsically interested or fully invested in the success of the mission.

Peace and security are further imperiled by large power interests in conventional and non-conventional weapons. Nuclear-armed states widely opposed the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, and they occupy all the permanent, veto-wielding seats in the Security Council. There needs to be increased normative pressure against nuclear powers, and more accountability for their military industrial complexes, which supply the great majority of the world's weapons. The UN75 Declaration speaks of non-proliferation and disarmament, but the UN must be bolder with its words, clearly voicing the need for the complete prohibition of nuclear weapons.

Among the many different perspectives participants agreed upon, one item in particular stood out: the need to better engage youth, women, and civil society across the UN system. More precisely, we need to develop platforms for youth to co-design and co-create peacebuilding, from planning to execution, monitoring, and evaluation.

Recommendations

- **Prevention should entail humanitarian security** and have a people-focused approach. A way to operationalize this could be by making funding available directly to local peacebuilders, not international NGOs. These *actual* peacebuilders (especially youth) can apply their local expertise to solve and prevent conflicts.

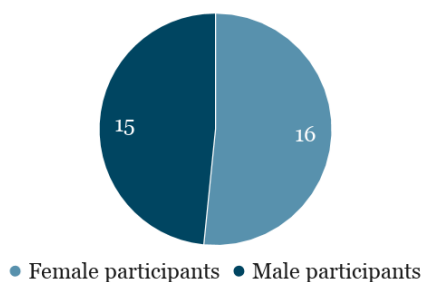
- In responding to the question “how do we work across different normative frameworks to prevent conflict,” it was recommended that a **new Conflict Analysis Responsibility Center be established within the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs**. This could help practitioners understand the different frameworks available to prevent conflict and address, in this way, current conceptual confusion.
- **Formulate procedures on how the UN will address, approach, and negotiate with non-state actors.** As intrastate and non-state actor conflicts continue to rise and gain international attention, the UN needs to have standards for engagement in place.
- **Boost partnerships with and enhance coordination between the UN and regional organizations.** This would relieve part of the UN’s burden in the field and also help coordinate better the mandate of different actors on the ground. Further, both the UN and regional organizations should serve as conduits to connect local organizations to one another.
- There needs to be greater equity in North/South relations with regards to peacekeeping and the prevention of violent extremism. The **Global South should be a co-designer and co-creator of peacebuilding programming** rather than having Western approaches imposed on them.
- The UN should continue to work on **developing and recalibrating the tools that it has already established**, rather than always looking to create something new. For example, the **UN System-Wide Community Engagement Guidelines on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace** that were launched recently provide a great resource for cooperation between local peacebuilders. They should be promoted and disseminated across the UN system and with its partners.

Human Rights, the Rule of Law, and Democratic Governance Roundtable

UN 75 Declaration commitments #5 (“place women and girls”) at the centre, #11 (“improve digital cooperation”), and #12 (“listen to and work with youth”)

Human Rights, the Rule of Law, and Democratic Governance Roundtable

Total number of participants: 31



Prompts for Discussion: The UN75 Declaration highlights the importance of human rights, the rule of law, and democratic governance, including in light of the rights of traditionally marginalized groups and increasing inequality. Women, youth, and marginalized populations have borne the brunt of the socio-economic impact of the pandemic. Twenty-five years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and its Platform for Action for gender equality, and five years since the adoption of the Security Council Resolution on Youth, Peace and

Security, what UN system reform and strengthening measures can help accelerate the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of youth? Moreover, how does the UN human rights pillar need to be broadened and strengthened to cater for the digital world? How can the UN better help countries realize these commitments on the ground (from peacebuilding and nation-building to “equality building”)?

Existing global mechanisms require revitalization to address factors that continue to inhibit greater respect for human rights worldwide, and the UN cannot credibly promote human rights without promoting inclusion. There needs to be innovative ways to promote political inclusion and implement other changes to ensure that discussions lead to more concrete results and not just talking points. How can we close the performance gap that perpetuates human rights violations?

In particular, women and girls continue to be left behind in the areas of human rights and political inclusion. Without ensuring protection of their rights, including reproductive rights, violations will continue to occur. Initiatives defending women’s health and family health are a necessity not a luxury,

but how can these rights be protected? During the pandemic, an increase in violence against women and girls has put progress toward meeting SDG #5 at risk. How can the international community re-engage on this SDG, amongst other goals, to create durable change?

The digital divide has greatly impacted the education and progress of youth. COVID-19 has been the global stress test for the global education system, and it has spotlighted the gaps in accessibility. There is an increasing need for technological devices and internet access in education, but not everyone has them at their disposal. Additionally, access to education must not be restrained on the basis of gender. Access to education and digital technologies must be extended to girls as much as boys, or else girls will continue to fall behind. Girls have a right to education, and we must protect that right. Equal opportunity for digital access must be implemented on local and national scales to equip younger generations with the knowledge and tools necessary to face important decisions. In this digital age, when conversations can span countries and regions, how can these technologies best be utilized to empower youth? Digital spaces can be neutral or safe spaces to discuss and expand on human rights and empowerment, but where are we in terms of digital accessibility for this debate?

Furthermore, the participation and representation necessary for inclusion in political spaces is threatened by the lack of national commitment to human rights, democratic governance, and the democratic legitimacy of the UN and other actors. Authoritarian and autocratic governments tend to disregard human rights on a national scale, putting human rights defenders in dangerous situations. The shortcomings of democratic governance on a national scale undermine political representation on a global scale. Human rights defenders have been threatened by their governments for calling out the human rights violations committed in their countries at the UN Human Rights Council. Similarly, authoritarian governments abuse the law to work in their favor during elections or protests to maintain restrictions on civil freedoms.

There needs to be increased protection and defense for those human rights defenders who put their lives in danger to ensure people's rights and representation in political spaces, including in multilateral fora. There is a lack of commitment by international institutions to put people at the forefront of policy debates and decision-making. The UN Charter makes no mention, outside its preamble, of "We the Peoples," despite Member States' continuous narrative about placing the individual at the center of UN's efforts and the importance of peoples' participation. How are human rights defenders to be given the support they need, especially in dealing with Member States that are not democratic by most international standards? How are we going to achieve progressive institutional change where we have important power players that are not enthusiastic about democracy?

Recommendations

- To promote gender equality and the protection of human rights on a global scale, **women must be involved in the decision-making processes**, especially in creating durable solutions that are applicable to them. Placing women at the center of decision-making and ensuring their place in other national spaces will ensure their place in international arenas — there cannot be one without the other.
- **Language plays an important role in inclusion** as it can ensure the presence and participation of traditionally marginalized actors, such as women and girls and indigenous groups, in political spaces. Explicitly referring to them and highlighting how the rule of law protects them, for instance, will allow for greater and more meaningful discussion and engagement.
- The UN must reaffirm its commitment to **placing people at the forefront of decision-making** with specific proposals to enhance their participation. For instance, a **UN Parliamentary Assembly** could give a voice at the UN to elected legislators from Member States, promoting democratic legitimacy and helping to further safeguard human rights through UN policies and programming. Moreover, **international judicial institutions need to receive outspoken support** from governments and other actors to underpin their legitimate exercise of public authority.
- **Changes in global and regional financial institutions' (as well as the private sector's) focus** are just as imperative as changes in legal and normative frameworks if existing gaps in digital access,

education, and gender equality are to receive the requisite, urgent attention needed from the international financial architecture. Excessive expenditures in traditional public sector priority areas, such as national defense and infrastructure, leave fewer public funds for other areas, such as women's rights and the protection of the most vulnerable.

- Different groups should be integrated into the discussion of human rights and rule of law. **Youth, civil society representatives, and other diverse actors add missing dimensions to the expertise needed** across these sectors. Likewise, parliamentarians, judges, and public administrators amongst others should be included in such discussions.
- There are important lessons to learn from the engagement of less democratic countries in human rights related negotiations. For example, the participation of countries with questionable democratic credentials in the negotiation on the draft treaty on business and human rights, undertaken under the auspices of the UN Human Rights Council, demonstrates how **multilateral approaches can create the conditions for countries to begin to understand the utility of a new human rights legal instrument**, even while lacking a strong underlying commitment to human rights principles.

Concluding Reflections & Synthesis Session

During the concluding session, summaries from the above three expert roundtables were shared and responded to by several eminent European discussants and general participants from governments, the UN Secretariat, and global civil society. Similar to the three thematically focused roundtables, the broad-ranging discussion also gave attention to the **UN75 Declaration's cross-cutting commitments of boosting partnerships, building trust, ensuring sustainable financing, and abiding by international law and ensuring justice**. In addition, participants teased out **common threads among the three roundtables**, and considered a range of efforts needed on the part of governments, the European Union, the UN system, and other international partners to take the UN75 Declaration forward.

Identifying actors responsible for advancing the UN75 Declaration is imperative, both to facilitate concrete steps forward and to support the development of the Secretary-General's report, *Our Common Agenda*. The report of the Secretary-General will help to initiate a new phase of the dialogue begun by the UN75 Declaration, and it will help to further catalyze and focus the ongoing international conversation on the future of international cooperation. However, the report, and the conversations around it, cannot only be about the United Nations. They should both take into account the bigger picture: **international cooperation, the need to invest in it, and showing people how much it matters**.

Below is a synthesis of further key takeaways from the final session:

The biggest collective problem at present is the issue of trust: the trust people have in governments; the trust people have in each other — including that other people care about solving their problems — and the trust UN Member States have in each other. The role that states have in restoring trust is momentous, even (perhaps especially) where trust needs to be rebuilt among states themselves. African countries, for example, feel let down by a lack of visibility and influence in international forums and with respect to current vaccine rollouts. **Growing geopolitical tension between China and the West** threatens to undermine the collaboration needed between major countries on issues from climate change and post-COVID-19 recovery to human rights and freedom of information. The European Union has a natural role to play here, especially with regard to helping the United States and China focus on common interests in meeting the climate crisis and stopping the spread of future disease across borders.

Efforts now underway to fully recover from the COVID-19 crisis should be carried out in a durable, sustainable, and digitally inclusive way, showing, in the process, the value of global cooperation in

solving global — yet also very personal — problems. Both COVID-19 and the climate crisis have created new opportunities to change global governance for the better. People in advanced economies who did not care about international cooperation pre-pandemic increasingly realize that it matters to them, too. **Vaccine development and rollout is a good example of how public-private and international cooperation has produced timely, real-world results.** People also have seen that when governments and the private sector come together to solve problems, their lives can be directly impacted in meaningful and positive ways. Too often in the past, those lessons have been negative, as when governments have cut socially irresponsible, but lucrative, deals with industry for natural resource exploitation.

Prior to COVID-19, many warnings were issued about possible future pandemics, yet governmental preparedness faltered. Early warnings about the damaging potential of the present pandemic were in some cases ignored, downplayed, or even suppressed. In the current conversation on the future of international cooperation, **how much should we come to grips with our collective inability to halt the worldwide spread of the coronavirus,** and importantly, what should be done to strengthen early warning and promote early action when the next pandemic looms?

Funding, public and private, to build back from the present pandemic should be linked to commitments to promote **a greener recovery, using the recovery from one global disaster to both mitigate and promote resilience to another one, namely, climate change.** And all such activities should be subject to rigorous accountability measures, something that the UN and the broader multilateral system too often lack.

In order to strengthen and, over time, transform the UN system, **a major shift is needed away from short-term mandates and funding towards more strategic, longer-term commitments, backed by sustainable financing.** In particular, the UN and other international organizations need to be freed up to become learning organizations capable of better adapting to new trends, including the Secretary-General's envisaged technological revolution across the United Nations system. The UN Secretariat needs a stronger, independent identity in order to stand up for itself, and to demonstrate greater transparency, but it is difficult to transform an organization that is reflexively cautious, conservative, and substantively territorial in outlook.

The UN also should be opened up — and civil society needs to create a space for itself around the UN, if the world body does not do so. Bringing successful outside innovations into the UN system (as done with Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance) is essential for rebuilding that system. **Other multi-stakeholder coalitions should be created, outside of the formal United Nations, to garner political momentum for specific policy agendas, and then brought into the UN at an appropriate time to formalize the results.** Recent historical examples include the Ottawa Mine Ban treaty process and, more recently, the negotiations toward the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (better known as the Iran Nuclear Deal) and Paris Climate Agreement. Pioneering new multi-stakeholder partnerships could perhaps find a home within the United Nations' High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. That Forum might also serve as a venue for youth engagement initiatives to “connect the local to the global,” and to further encourage the creation of space at the national level for people to contribute to policy discussions that directly affect their lives.

Despite strong pushback by some countries that wish to return the United Nations to a time when it was viewed mainly as an intergovernmental organization, **there must be formal recognition by the UN and its Member States that many different types of actors need to be part of the solutions to today's pressing global problems,** starting with the full implementation of the UN75 Declaration commitments. This is a tall order — and it is not just up to states anymore.