FOGGS | Foundation for Global Governance and Sustainability

World Peace: Reclaiming the United Nations and its ideals



Author
Francis M. O'Donnell

June 2025

FOGGS PAPERS

Foundation for Global Governance and Sustainability (FOGGS)

Rue Abbé Cuypers 3
1040 Brussels, Belgium

info@foggs.org
www.foggs.org

Cover Page Image: *Non-Violence sculpture (The Knotted Gun), a bronze sculpture by Swedish artist Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd at UNHQ in New York*

June 2025

About the Author

Amb. Francis M. O'Donnell is a member of the Peace Reflection Group (PRG) of former UN system staff; a Life Member of the Institute of International and European Affairs (Dublin); a director/trustee of the School of Civic Education (of the Association of Schools of Political Science of Council of Europe); and frequent participant in policy networks comprising primarily current/former Heads of State/Government. He was Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Sovereign Order of Malta to Slovakia from 2009 to 2013. He previously served as a United Nations official for 32 years, latterly as Resident Coordinator of the United Nations system in Ukraine, from 2004 until 2009, and previously in similar capacity in Yugoslavia/Serbia-Montenegro, 2000-2004. The initiative to create an Irish-Arab Society was proposed by him in November 1968, and taken up by a group of Irish and Arab friends. It played a key advisory and facilitative role promoting Irish-Arab trade and cultural links. With its support Irish diplomatic relations were established with 12 states in the Middle East and North Africa between 1974 and 1976. He currently serves as the elected President of the Genealogical Society of Ireland, and of the historic clan O'Donnell of Tyrconnell, which he represents in the Clans of Ireland, where also serves as the board member representing the interests of the ancient Gaelic Chiefs and Chieftains of Ireland.

Disclaimer

This publication is issued by FOGGS with permission from the author, who retains the copyright for the substantive textual content. The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of FOGGS, its Board members or partners, or those of other members of the PRG network.

Reproduction of the paper or any part of it is permitted for non-commercial purposes with the following reference: *O'Donnell, Francis M., "World Peace: Reclaiming the United Nations and its ideals", FOGGS Papers, June 2025*

Foundation for Global Governance and Sustainability (FOGGS)

ISSN: 2983-7227 **ISBN:** 978-2-9603389-5-9

WORLD PEACE: RECLAIMING THE UNITED NATIONS AND ITS IDEALS

- *Francis M. O'Donnell*

Foundation for Global Governance and Sustainability (FOGGS)

A loud call for the return to the UN Charter's values

A small group of friends who have been active early members of a peace-making reflection group for the past three years, mostly with decades of experience in multilateralism in the United Nations system or other international service, with some family members, came together on 7-10 May 2025 in the medieval village of Seillans in France. The following is a personal reflection from one of the participants. The discussions were lively, often humorous, and occasionally poetic.

An agreed outcome document describes the challenges. Following wider discussions online with the Peace Reflection Group[1], a Call is issued, to mark the UN Charter's 80th anniversary, and to reclaim its purpose against an assault on its principles, the rule of law, and its global institutions. It is also 50 years since the Helsinki Final Act was supposed to bring lasting peace and security to Europe – instead a devastating war is destroying the largest country entirely in Europe, its bleeding heart at the geographic centre: Ukraine. This is also the 25th anniversary of a historic UN Security Council resolution 1325 advancing the role of women in conflict zones and highlighting their crucial role in peacebuilding, peacekeeping, and post-conflict reconstruction.

The appeal which is published this week, states: "*We call for moral clarity. A return to the UN Charter's values - peace, human rights, rule of law, and faith in human dignity. A renewed commitment to truth over lies, integrity over corruption, solidarity over silence. When this international order collapses - and without urgent action, it will - rebuilding it will take generations. We call for strengthening international law, preventing conflict, and transforming global financial systems to create opportunity for everyone, everywhere, rather than perpetuate inequality. Young people deserve our action, not our apologies*". Former UN officials, as well as heads of state/governments, ministers and parliamentarians, are encouraged to sign or endorse the appeal in the coming weeks up to the 80th anniversary of the UN Charter on 26 June 2025, while an option for the general public has also been launched including via AVAAZ[2].

Restoring the rule of law requires tight observance of treaties, norms, and standards

Globalising responsibly requires tackling corruption and engaging all stakeholders

In Seillans, a distinction was made between normative globalisation and corporate globalisation. Normative globalisation is rooted in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the extraordinary growth in the body of international law, and related institutions, which today governs relations between states and is inadequately recognised as a foundation for our sustainability. Corporate globalisation, rooted in trade and investment, has been the corresponding bedrock of growing prosperity – however, like many governments, it has become infected by the virus of corruption, undermining good governance, social peace, human and state security, and ultimately transforming into an obstacle to sustainability.

While some roots of multilateralism are economic/utilitarian, the voluntary character of adhesion to its regional frameworks, such as the European Union, respects state sovereignty and brings it beyond the era of colonialism. However, the EU still bears some marks of colonialism in the treatment of various overseas

[1] The Peace Reflection Group: https://www.foggs.org/prg-about-us/

[2] The Call and windows for signature can be found here: https://www.foggs.org/prg/call-un-charter-at-80/ . As 2 June 2025, among 231 signatures so far figure 2 former Administrators/UNDP, a former President/IFAD, Secretary-General/UNCTAD, Director-General/IAEA, 9 former Under-Secretaries-General, 20 Asst. Sec-Gen/Asst. Dir-Gen. Sign AVAAZ petition here: https://secure.avaaz.org/community_petitions/en/world_countries_and_leaders_un_officials_global_ci_reclaim_the_purpose_of_the_un_charter_80_years_on/

territories of its members, going back to the Treaty of Rome[3]. Yet, it has been argued that it is, so far, the most successful voluntary constellation of states[4].

We are in a historic moment, and the current turbulence, uncertainty, and stress require us to imagine a better way forward, where the state has its place, but where sovereignty is relativised by norms, obligations, and relationships, and where civil society and other social and economic forces, including corporate, and independent media, need to be recognised for the roles and contributions they play within societies and across frontiers. In this regard, no one thrives alone, but within a community, be it a village, a country, or a union of states.

Investing in common ground means avoiding its arming for its devastation

In this, we are challenged to advance *welfare not warfare*, yet global arms expenditures now total US$2.7 trillion. 2024 was recorded by SIPRI as the steepest year-on-year rise since at least 1988 and marking the 10th consecutive year of increases, dominated by the China, Russia, USA - three of the Permanent Five UN veto-wielding powers in whom our global security is paradoxically entrusted in the UN Security Council - joined by Germany and India to account for 60%. Yet, are we called upon to show humanity to others, as in the ancient African sage expression "ubuntu".

And it is from Africa that most growth will come in the future, with its share of the world's population expected to increase from 10% to 28%, meaning over 1 in 4 people will be African, and mostly young. Whilst most overseas development assistance (ODA) has focussed with great success on Africa in the early decades following de-colonisation (building health, education, institutions and investment), today corruption, including grand corruption of some leaders, has become a toxic plague. Even so, most developing countries in Africa and beyond benefit from the internal mobilisation of resources more than ODA, while the bulk of resources for post-conflict recovery is domestically-generated. Many prefer fair trade to more aid. There seems no or little correlation between large ODA infusions and economic progress, therefore, the role of ODA, whether thematic or as fiscal support, must be challenged, and attuned to the declining resource base now emerging from altered US policies and the European push to defence and security[5].

Superpower exceptionalism and rivalry undermines multilateralism and sovereignty

It is time for the citizens of all nations to decry the periodic betrayal by the major superpowers, particularly the P5, in undermining multilateralism, and in failing the hopes and aspirations of all humanity. At the foundation of the United Nations, a special custodial responsibility was granted to these top five powers, namely the "veto" in the UN Security Council, in order to guarantee international peace and security and *"save succeeding generations from the scourge of war*". Almost immediately, the Cold War began, with proxy conflicts hampering the progress of many newly independent states emerging from the process of decolonisation. Some former colonies broke up: Cyprus, Palestine, India-Pakistan and later its offshoot, Bangladesh. Yet many former imperial powers, especially P5 members Great Britain and France, persisted with overseas territories, and the Treaty of Rome was partly shaped by discriminatory colonial policies (involving also former colonial powers Belgium, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain). The USSR persisted until

[3] Eklund, Hanna. *People, Inhabitants and Workers: Colonialism in the Treaty of Rome*, The European Journal of International Law, Vol. 34, no.4; published by Oxford University Press, 2023.

[4] As per US historian Timothy Snyder on 9 May, 2019 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7zs41CkIjRw)

[5] Some EU countries, while fully supporting new defence and security priorities, and substantially increasing national expenditure on the same, still maintain their ODA targets. In 2024, these members met or exceeded the 0.7% ODA/GNI target: Luxembourg (1.05%), Norway (1.02%), Sweden (0.99%), and Denmark (0.71%). Germany also achieved 0.8% in 2022. These countries have consistently prioritized aid, driven by strong multilateral policies and public support for solidarity. Ireland remains committed to the target by 2030, increasing ODA in absolute terms, but GNI growth increases the challenge (ODA at 0.55% in 2023).

the end of the Cold War, with its fragmentation fostering ethnic conflicts beyond and the often violent break-up or collapse of several states (Afghanistan, Czechoslovakia, Ethiopia/Eritrea, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, Yugoslavia[6], etc).



Security Council Meets on Threats to International Peace and Security, 30 May 2025; Credit: UN Photo/Manuel Elías

Russia embarked on destabilising its neighbours, such as Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, now directly invaded[7]. China aggressively asserted its claims in the Himalayas, the South China Sea, and over Taiwan. And India and Pakistan remain at loggerheads over Kashmir. Venezuela versus Guyana, and Guatemala versus Belize, have at least referred their border disputes to the International Court of Justice. Other disputes persist, e.g. Argentina-Falklands/UK, Chile-Bolivia, Colombia-Nicaragua, Brazil-Uruguay, etc. So much for the UN Charter – but perhaps the absence of major armed conflict in Latin America is a measure of the maturity of their post-colonial relations, and a respect for the rule of law, through recourse to the ICJ which should be seen as a credit to the UN system and multilateralism. But new threats are also made today by the USA to Greenland and Panama, following its armed interventions with its allies in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and elsewhere, such as Central America, Korea and Vietnam in bygone decades.

Peaceful settlement of disputes warrants more investment in mediation and conflict prevention, but trust also requires transparency if zero-sum is to yield to win-win solutions

Political stagnation afflicts the whole world: the UN Security Council has also become gridlocked due to the veto power of any of its P5 powers, with major conflicts raging in Africa as well as in the Middle East and

[6] Hear Susan Woodward on the factors that played into Yugoslavia's collapse; including American withdrawal of its respect for Yugoslavia being a neutral bulwark against Soviet expansion, hence a NATO ally, until the end of the Cold War, as well as IMF austerity, and the dysfunctionality of its federal requirement for consensus (a weakness that the EU suffers from unless QMV takes over for timely strategic decision-making). Prof. Woodward played an important role in the *Strategic Roundtable on Governance Transition* in Belgrade, featuring the most of the signatories of the Belgrade Agreement whereby the remnant Federal Republic of Yugoslavia became the new State Union of Serbia and Montenegro (hosted by UNDP, 19-20 July 2002): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p2hyevgXLDA

[7] Kremlin presidential advisor, Anton Kobyakov lately claimed the USSR still exists, and that the Belavezha Accords are invalid, such that its war on Ukraine is an internal matter. (21 May 2025, TASS) https://tass.com/politics/1961499

Europe. Little attention is paid to UN Charter article 27.3 which should disqualify any P5 party from using its veto on a matter in which it is directly a party to a dispute. The recent Liechtenstein veto initiative obliges a veto-user to report to the General Assembly[8]. Yet, the UN Charter states in its Article 33 "*the parties to any dispute, the continuance of which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security, shall, first of all, seek a solution by negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement …*".

Accordingly, a number of countries led by a Chinese initiative, have developed a *Convention on the Establishment of the International Organization for Mediation,* signed by about 30 countries on 28 May 2025. The launch has been characterised by a lack of disclosure of participation and content. Yet, designed to complement the UN's International Court of Justice, and the Permanent Court of Arbitration, by avoiding referral for judgments or arbitration decisions, it aims to be the first international organisation dedicated to mediation as a pathway to resolving international disputes. By becoming a permanent intergovernmental organization dedicated to mediation, IOMed aims to promote "win-win" cooperation over adversarial "win-lose" outcomes associated with litigation or arbitration. The initiative is touted as a "Global Public Good" for promoting peace, security, and international rule of law, with a focus on fostering mediation as a non-adversarial alternative to litigation, let alone armed conflict. Hence this initiative may strengthen the fabric for peace, regionally and globally, and could become the substantive backbone supporting the missions of UN Special Envoys, as the Sant'Egidio community did with Vatican support in 1992, ending Mozambique's civil war. However, the initial signatories are primarily authoritarian states, or flawed democracies, and if this institution is to succeed, it will require more transparency and participation of democratic countries to balance China's initially dominating role.

Global plans without global commitment

Yet, every time in the past 25 years that the world has come together with a blueprint for the future of humanity, it is shortly thrown off by a direct superpower assault. America's "war against terror" in 2001, after the 9/11 attacks, diverted resources from implementation of the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals. It took fifteen more years after 2000 for the world to come together again in 2015 with Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. Only late last year, a new *Pact for the Future* was adopted. Now, the denunciation of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals by the US delegate to the UN General Assembly on 4 March 2025[9], undermines the global consensus that tried back in 2015 to rebuild that pillar of multilateralism that was previously sundered by the American response to 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Equally abrupt, arbitrary and harmful is the abandonment of the DAC/OECD target for ODA of 0.7% of members' GNI by several donor countries, mostly European; it must be resoundingly denounced as it jeopardises the relative achievements to date, and endangers the health and well-being of hundreds of millions of vulnerable people across the developing countries, especially in Africa. There are strong arguments therefore that revised ODA targets, attuned catalytically to new challenges as distinct from past practice, must

[8] On 26 April 2022, the UN General Assembly adopted the veto initiative launched by Liechtenstein, without a vote. This sets down that the GA will automatically meet within 10 days if veto is used in the Security Council by one of its five permanent members. https://press.un.org/en/2022/ga12417.doc.htm

[9] US delegate, Edward Heartney, Counselor for Economic and Social Affairs (ECOSOC) at the U.S. Mission to the UN, stated "*The United States rejects and denounces the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals, and it will no longer reaffirm them as a matter of course"*. He claimed the agenda advances "*a program of soft global governance that is inconsistent with U.S. sovereignty and adverse to the rights and interests of Americans*." Argentina's Milei administration, calling DEI and the SDGs a "globalist overreach".

be maintained, both to honour COP-29 obligations, but also to restore SDG achievement and effectively implement the globally-agreed *Pact for the Future*.

With political will, and international solidarity, this can be done, while nonetheless reforming its delivery, and re-focussing it on the separation of powers, the rule of law, judicial and media independence, and civil society and women's empowerment, all the while pursuing the fight against grand and petty corruption and accelerating national implementation of the UN *Convention Against Corruption*. The 2024 *Corruption Perceptions Index* (CPI) indicates that corruption is now endemic worldwide and dirty money is a dangerous problem everywhere[10]. Although improvements are happening in many countries, the provision of technical assistance in the fight against corruption, a key residual role for ODA, is crucial to ensure the full and effective incorporation required UNCAC commitments into domestic legal systems and the daily life of citizens worldwide. If these measures are pursued, with or without ODA support, the countries concerned will most likely prosper. They are *sine qua non* conditions for sustainable human development.

That ODA and its intermediaries, including bilateral USAID-funded NGOs, and UN agencies, had become so dependent on US funds - often way beyond America's share of the assessed core UN budget percentage - has surprised many, and its cutbacks now shocked by their abruptness. Yet as much as it has been portrayed as a grievance for US taxpayers, it is also an awakening for more equitable burden-sharing, and indeed a need to re-focus and reform its delivery.

Against this background, the UN80 drive to trim bureaucracy by 20% or more and rationalise institutions and mandates must be correlated with the *Pact for the Future*, and the globally agreed Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. Other member states must be encouraged to step forward and increase their level of commitment to peace and security, and to the achievement of the SDGs, which lags too far behind already. In this regard, more attention also needs to be paid to mediation for conflict prevention/resolution, and to the role the UN system can play in catalysing institutional capacity-building in the cases where ODA and local resources are insufficient or absent.

The cutbacks and scarcity of resources as well as the general over-militarisation of "traditional peacekeeping" was not part of the UN's original design, while the impact of militarisation on the SDGs also bears study[11]. This warrants the need for a shift to greater reliance on civilian peace work, including unarmed civilian protection (UCP), pioneered by Non-Violent PeaceForce, which came to the fore in Mindanao/Philippines, Sri Lanka, the OPT, and Sudan, and has been recognised in the UNSC and UNGA[12]. Equally, UNV's role could be expanded, along the lines exemplified in the book "*Volunteers against Conflict*"[13].

---

[10] See Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (2024): https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2024

[11] UNODA call for papers, January 2025: https://disarmament.unoda.org/fr/update/call-for-papers-the-impact-of-the-global-increase-in-military-expenditure-on-the-achievement-of-the-sustainable-development-goals/

[12] UNSC resolution 2327 (2016) and res. 2514 (2020) supported UCP for enhancing civilian safety in South Sudan, emphasizing its deterrence capabilities and acknowledging UCP's role in complementing protective environments, particularly in deterring sexual and gender-based violence in South Sudan. The UN General Assembly resolution 69/139 (2015) notes UCP's contribution to a *culture of peace*, highlighting civil society initiatives with NP's involvement. The 2015 High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) report asserts unarmed strategies, including NP's work, should lead UN civilian protection efforts. In Sudan, resolution 2524 (2020) establishing UNITAMS includes UCP for peacebuilding and civilian protection. NP's advocacy is reflected in resolution 2594 (2021), emphasizing UCP in peacekeeping transitions. These resolutions and reports underscore NP's impact in conflict zones like South Sudan, Sudan, and beyond, validating UCP's effectiveness in fostering dialogue and protecting civilians nonviolently, as recognized by UN bodies.

[13] As mentioned in Seillans, a copy of this book was shared with the late UN SG Boutros Boutros Ghali during his visit to Turkey in May 1996, and he remarked that UNV is "the best kept secret in the UN" and should be widely better known. https://archive.unu.edu/unupress/backlist/ab-volunteers.html

Communicating what goes well: long way to go

Moreover, the UN can do better in promoting success stories and showcasing its acquis; not everything is perfect, but one small step for man…In fact, UN advocacy can make more use of its peacekeeping successes, e.g. UNTAC (Cambodia), UNTAET (Timor Leste), UNMIK (Kosovo). Moreover, little-known, the broader UN system benefits most people in their daily lives, including workers (ILO), air travellers and air courier services (ICAO and security of civil aviation), farmers & consumers/food safety standards (FAO), merchants/traders (UNCTAD) and shippers (WMO), children and students'/education (UNICEF, UNESCO), and indeed communicators and mobile phone users (ITU). This needs to be better shared through popular digital social media, such as Reddit, Threads, Instagram, Tik-Tok, and Youtube.



The PRG participants at the Seillans retreat

With a heavy conscience for dignity and peace

In Seillans, we considered at length the challenges of advancing inclusion across humanity and recognised the fundamental importance of greater equality for women, particularly deploring their subordinate repression in some countries and their increasing exclusion from political participation in many countries. Empowerment and emancipation are essential factors in the advancing of social and economic progress and constitute a foundation for greater compassion in society and in international relations[14].

Bearing beyond our professional careers in the UN, with a heavy conscience for continuing our vocation, we agreed on a concluding commitment:

> *As former international civil servants, we are rewired and not retired, serving the principles of the UN Charter through indirect support for the work of the United Nations, as responsible world citizens.*
>
> *We stand up to intimidating demands on the UN and defend its value, while accepting the need for reform that must be evidence-based and delivery-oriented.*
>
> *At the same time, we value the importance and fight for the dignity and self-fulfillment of each and every person, who should be master of their destiny.*
>
> *We act on the basis of compassion, seek dialogue with those who have grievances, rank peace and the human life above power and profit, and pursue conditions that enable the well-being and empowerment of all.*

While we focus on mobilising all countries, governments, and peoples to reclaim the values, principles and purpose of the UN Charter at its 80th year, marked on 26 June 2025, we cannot just sit back as that date passes. The UN system will continue to face the challenges that the *Pact for the Future* has identified. The real opportunity to galvanise the broadest global support for the UN Charter and its fullest implementation will require in due course, the calling of the General Conference for its revision in accordance with Article 109 of the Charter – but the world is not at all ready for this now. It requires huge and extensive diplomatic effort, once major geo-political scars begin to heal. The Charter was last revised in 1971, but time should not be wasted to engage significant diplomatic alignment around the basic elements to be revised, especially on the composition and functioning of the Security Council, for which many decades of negotiations have so far seemed wasted.

Only when the world heals its current deep wounds, and agrees on the revision of the UN Charter, can multilateralism and global governance be fully enabled for the next evolutionary stage of our planetary civilisation. But in the meantime, we must adhere to it as it is, if the Rule of Law is to prevail, and if we are to survive this profoundly de-stabilising moment of existential polycrisis.

If we get through this, then we can finally hope to achieve real world peace.

*****

[14] As born out in the World Values Survey (https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp)

The UN's achievements over the decades were never foregone conclusions. They were the result of painstaking effort by people from all nations, working together. We cannot simply turn our backs on that hard-won legacy. No state – large or small – stands to gain from the collapse of the multilateral system. This is not the moment to abandon it, but to renew and strengthen it[15].

- Ban Ki-Moon,
UN Secretary-General (2007-2016)
3 June 2025

[15] https://theelders.org/news/un-saved- my-family-now-we-must-find-courage- save-it

FOGGS | Foundation for Global Governance and Sustainability

Formatting and processing:
Manan Shah | FOGGS
Rue Abbé Cuypers 3
Brussels 1040, Belgium
www.foggs.org | info@foggs.org

ISSN: 2983-7227



ISBN: 978-2-9603389-5-9

