

UN2100 Initiative

Proposals for a modern, effective, ethical and people-centred United Nations

Discussion paper

January 27, 2019

OBJECTIVE: To put forward innovative and practical ideas towards a modern, more effective, ethical and people-centred United Nations, as the central node of global governance arrangements and indispensable tool for tackling shared challenges.

Disclaimer:

This publication presents an initial, non-exhaustive set of UN and global governance reform proposals, developed under the auspices of the UN2100 Initiative of the Foundation for Global Governance and Sustainability (FOGGS). It was authored by Dr Georgios Kostakos, Executive Director of FOGGS, as a discussion paper to be shared with FOGGS partners, policy-makers and experts, as well as the broader public around the world, through consultations aimed at formulating a collective “Call to Renew the UN”.

The ideas presented in this publication were formulated by its author following discussions with FOGGS Executive Board, Advisory Board and Secretariat members – to all of whom sincere thanks are due – but should not be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of those other individuals.

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Background

The United Nations' 75th anniversary in 2020 is expected to feature a world summit in New York, complete with world leaders' declarations of commitment to continuing to work together for the common good. Such anniversaries in the past, including the Millennium Summit in 2000, the 2005 World Summit and the UN Sustainable Development Summit in 2015 reasserted the validity of the post-World War II global governance architecture with the United Nations at its centre, and claimed to reform and revitalise the world body for subsequent decades. Among the new elements thus introduced to global governance and the United Nations (UN) system were the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and later the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and the Peacebuilding Commission. Separate specialised conferences made advancements on issues such as climate change, through the agreement reached in Paris in 2015.

Nonetheless, a significant discrepancy between pronouncements and actions, or intentions and achievements, can be attested on a daily basis, in the way that the UN and the global governance system work. Despite pulling millions out of poverty, fighting disease, promoting human dignity and maintaining relative peace in large parts of the world for decades, the post-World War II multilateral cooperation framework is currently experiencing a significant pushback. The way that globalisation is pursued by key governments and big financial and commercial interests, especially after the end of the Cold War, has increased inequalities, heightened insecurities and alienated large population segments. The great challenges of poverty and inequality, human rights and migration, climate change and resource depletion, regional conflict and weapons proliferation remain menacing. In the hands and mouths of opportunistic and amoral leaders all this becomes a call for returning to some kind of idealised national societies of plenty, insulated from the problems of the others. The net result is unhinged populism, increased intolerance and isolationism in many parts of the world, challenging the foundations of the multilateral system.

In this context, the UN's 75th anniversary more than an occasion for celebration is an opportunity to rethink what has gone right and what has gone wrong in global governance, reassert the principles of multilateral cooperation and (re)build a fit-for-purpose global organisation for the next quarter century. This is a task that is not reserved exclusively or even primarily to the country leaders and delegates meeting at UN Headquarters in New York. There is dire need for active engagement, contribution of creative energy and ideas, and commitment to act by think tanks and advocacy groups, private enterprises and individuals the world over.

Overall objective of this initiative

We believe that it is high time to revisit the conceptual and moral foundations of the post-World War II multilateral system and ensure its capacity to address the global governance and sustainability challenges of the 21st century. The outcome of the UN's 2020 summit needs to mark a clear new course based on the shared values and interests of humanity.

Through the UN2100 initiative FOGGS builds on the expertise of its Advisory Board members, Executive Board, Secretariat staff and associated institutions and experts with the overall goal to contribute to a much-needed rethinking of the global governance system, with a view to increasing the latter's legitimacy and its capacity to meet the challenges facing humanity and our planetary home in the coming quarter century.

The specific objective to be pursued in the framework of the initiative is to put forward innovative and practical ideas towards a modern, more effective, ethical and people-centred United Nations, as the central node of global governance arrangements and indispensable tool for tackling shared challenges.

In pursuit of our objective

The UN2100 Initiative consists in putting together a set of ideas for global governance and UN reform in response to key global challenges of our times. The findings will be combined and broader

conclusions will be drawn following consultations with partner institutions and experts, as well as the broader public, for eventual incorporation into a “Call to Renew the UN” that will be submitted to opinion- and decision-makers at various levels.

Timeline

October 2018 – September 2020

Structure of the set of proposals

The proposals put forward in the main part of this paper that follows are not exactly those expected from a standard paper on UN reform. We chose to leave intractable problems like UN Security Council reform aside and focus on some more “basic”, ambitious but achievable reforms. In fact, the fundamental issues and core functions that we tackle here touch upon the very essence of multilateralism and its purpose that evolves over time much more than politically super-charged debate items.

There is indeed an urgent need to rethink UN mandates and structures on the basis of a comprehensive human narrative and some core functions regarding which the UN has real value to add. The following core functions have been identified as stages for addressing major and interconnected global challenges:¹

- Core Function 1: Early warning and prevention
- Core Function 2: Awareness-raising
- Core Function 3: Leadership and Vision
- Core Function 4: Decision-making
- Core Function 5: Implementation

¹ See Tapio Kanninen & Georgios Kostakos, [“Global Governance of Climate Change: A Comprehensive Assessment Through a Functional Approach”](#), *Mother Pelican*, Vol. 8, No. 8 (August 2012) and Tapio Kanninen & Georgios Kostakos, [“Can the United Nations Address the Interconnected Global Challenges of Today and Tomorrow?”](#), *Journal of International Organizations Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2011), pp. 68-82.

Core Function 1: Early warning and prevention

Earth Watch Centre

It is time for the UN to establish an **Earth Watch Centre**, which will keep track in real time of the state of key indicators of human (including social and economic) and planetary well-being. By analysing the indicators in a holistic way, taking into account multiple systemic interactions, the Centre will point to potential threats as they appear, giving advance warning to intergovernmental bodies, the press and the broader public so that there can be timely action.

The watch could cover, among other issues:

- Environmental and climate parameters / State of the global commons
- Armed conflicts between and within states
- State of human rights and good governance
- Poverty, hunger and disease / Humanitarian emergencies
- Employment and wealth distribution
- Human mobility
- Global cyber commons management
- Scientific and technological advances

In fact, such capacity already exists but is dispersed throughout the UN system and among national governments. By connecting outfits such as the Global Earth Observation System of Systems ([GEOSS](#)), the World Health Organisation's Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network ([GOARN](#)), crisis alert mechanisms of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), etc. with each other and with specialised scientific centres and other observatories, the UN could put together the complete picture of the state of humanity and of our planet at any given moment, thus allowing for informed opinion-forming, decision-making and corrective action, if necessary.

The Centre could operate as a physical facility connected to all of its contributing entities, with seconded specialised staff. This would be supplemented with a small **Integration, Coherence and Follow-up Unit** dedicated to the Centre, which would apply *systems thinking*, thus giving the diverse data their place in the bigger picture of global governance and sustainability and identifying emerging threats and longer trends. The Centre should operate under the authority of the UN Secretary-General and should be attached to UN system coordination mechanisms for comprehensive data gathering and effective follow-up.

Warnings would be issued for any of the previously mentioned issues, individually or in combinations, on the basis of a clear set of criteria derived from existing global norms, such as the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement for climate, etc. (see Core Function 2 below).

To "watch the watchers", especially when it comes to sensitive issues of global politics, human rights and the state of multilateralism, a **UN Watch / Global Governance Observatory** should also be established in line with transparent principles and processes. This is a "special global governance function" that could be assigned to the "Third UN",² as opposed to the First UN (member states) and

² See Thomas G. Weiss, Tatiana Carayannis and Richard Jolly, "The 'Third' United Nations", *Global Governance*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (January–March 2009), pp. 123-142.

Second UN (secretariats), keeping both of the latter honest. A variation of that would have this function assigned to the “UN 2.6”, involving a unit placed within the UN Secretariat but consisting of independent experts, who would report autonomously, outside of the UN hierarchy.

Core Function 2: Awareness-raising

State of the Planet Report

Beyond the warnings issued in real time in case of an actual emergency, a quarterly **State of the Planet Report** summarising the key parameters followed by the Earth Watch Centre should be conveyed by the UN Secretary-General to the main deliberative organs of the United Nations system, including the International Financial Institutions (IFIs). The report should highlight any major issues of concern and should recommend any necessary action. Except for any very sensitive political information and advice, which might jeopardise the resolution of or even exacerbate a situation if released prematurely, the report and/or a summary of the main points in non-technical terms should also be given to the media and should be made available to the public on-line. The public should also be able to access the raw Earth Watch Centre data in real time, with small if any exclusions.

Awareness-raising through the quarterly and ad hoc UN reports would be crucial for sharing reliable information on key global issues, which often become the target of misinformation, “fake news” and conspiracy theories. Increased openness and explanations under the objective leadership of the UN Secretary-General, supported by recognised experts in the specific issue each time, would increase the possibility of eliciting sufficient consensus for action.

Moreover, an annual **State of Global Governance Report** issued by the UN Watch / Global Governance Observatory would also help shed more light on the global governance system and would “name and shame” those not respecting the rules of peaceful coexistence and multilateral cooperation, or causing or contributing to the exacerbation of a threat, or those not taking effective action to address a threat, and would mobilise the media and national and global public opinions to put pressure for a change of course.

Core Function 3: Leadership and Vision

A global narrative of hope

The UN Secretary-General and his/her staff are well placed to articulate, develop and reinforce a compelling vision of a new, positive future for people, countries and the global community by means of a **global narrative of hope**. Based on honest analysis of the current situation, drawing on holistic and sustainable economic philosophies distinct from the presently dominant politico-economic model, and suggesting a realistic way forward on cutting edge issues like transformative technologies, such a narrative could interpret for the current times, reassert and reinvigorate the core messages of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, thus (re)setting the normative framework of multilateralism. All these messages would be integrated into the new narrative and would be connected with the fight against the major global challenges of today, while the common good would be clearly defined in terms of sustainable development based on equity and justice.

The work of FOGGS on a new *Grand Narrative for globalisation*³ that is people-centred, just and beneficial for each and every person on the planet, and for the planet itself, can be helpful in this endeavour. The eventual global narrative should find its way to schools and other educational establishments around the world, and should be complemented with symbolically powerful initiatives. Such initiatives could include the designation of a **global holiday** that goes further than just a UN day for a good cause and is really felt and celebrated by the people all around the world. It could be, for

³ See <https://www.foggs.org/the-grand-narrative/>

example, a reinforced version of the existing International Day of Peace, 21 September, or a Global Thanksgiving and Unity Day, which could be celebrated on 24 October, day the UN Charter came into force in 1945 and since observed as UN Day.

A “shock to the system” would be to explore the elaboration of a **Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities**, as complementary to the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to encourage sustainable use of natural resources and to enhance social equity, shared prosperity and well-being.⁴

Core Function 4: Decision-making

Bring in the experts

The United Nations deliberative bodies, like the Security Council and the General Assembly, produce a lot of so-called “resolutions” but more often than not fail to bring about resolution of the actual problems they are supposed to address. Moreover, decisions negotiated in New York or regional UN headquarters are the product of horse trading among diplomats rather than people who have in-depth knowledge of the subject-matter. Significantly fewer proclamations and more substantive, well thought-through, implementable and adequately resourced decisions would be a good start for the UN’s regaining the attention and respect of the global public.

A revamped deliberative process at the UN should have decisions on major global challenges taken with the participation of expert representatives from all competent line ministries and from the offices of the effective head of government for each country, to ensure both relevance / knowledge of the subject and its placement in the bigger picture of overall government policy-making and implementation. This should be the case both when issues get discussed at the central UN bodies mentioned above, as well as at specialised bodies, like the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). If the latter continues to engage primarily negotiators from foreign and environment ministries, without also bringing in the finance and industry / development ministries at least, it will fail to deliver on the most important, practical aspects of the Paris Agreement.

Moreover, the decision-making process should include the active and substantive (i.e. beyond a token speech or two) participation of the Secretary-General and/or his/her expert colleagues from the Secretariat, as well as independent experts from civil society organisations, think tanks and even private entities concerned. The latter should be selected through a transparent process that would include the various “consultative assemblies” suggested towards the end of this paper.

Core Function 5: Implementation

The UN’s convening, advocating, supporting and watchdog role

The decisions of UN bodies rely for their implementation primarily on two types of actors. On the one hand there is the UN Secretariat and the broader UN system organisations, who are called upon to take action, (re)direct their efforts and resources, produce briefings and reports on progress. On the other hand, it is the UN member states themselves and their administrations, which are supposed to be bound by the decisions of their collective bodies and actually have significantly more resources to put into implementation than the UN, if they wish to do so.

⁴ See article on “Eradication of multidimensional poverty and the role of the UN” by Sudha Sreenivasa Reddy, Director, Eco Foundation for Sustainable Alternatives (EFSA), Bangalore and FOGGS Advisory Board member, available online on the FOGGS website: <https://www.foggs.org/1621/eradication-of-multidimensional-poverty-and-the-role-of-the-un/>

In this light, the UN cannot and probably should not have the main role in implementation, as that would require a major shift of resources and a degree of centralisation at global level that would be very difficult to sell politically, and in terms of practical results, while the “value for money” would probably be low or ineffective. Thus, the UN’s role in implementation should focus on:⁵

Convening and advocating at high level

The UN Secretary-General / Secretariat and the UN system agencies must use their convening and advocacy powers to push for greater ambition in implementing agreements reached. They should periodically engage heads of state and government in various forms, individually and collectively, to ensure their public commitment and continuation of the political will to take action, and should showcase good implementation examples while shaming the laggards.

Supporting implementation – know-how and capacity building

The UN, working with the scientific community and partners like civil society, community leaders, progressive business and the media, can help inform decision-makers and publics. The country presence of the UN system and inter-agency coordination can be used to build capacity and otherwise support the implementation of commitments by governments at regional, national and local level by sharing knowledge and good practices.

Supporting implementation – emergency response

On occasion, the UN may be the best, broadly accepted and recognised actor to send emergency assistance to areas hit by natural or human-made disasters, at least for an initial period that is crucial for survival. This is the case with the World Food Programme (WFP) for food-related emergencies. Alternatively, the UN may need to invite and coordinate the provision of assistance by a multitude of other actors, international, national and civil society or private, as is the case with OCHA. The extent to which the UN itself should maintain an operational capacity beyond coordination functions needs to be reviewed, to avoid excessive centralisation of resources or duplication with existing structures. The possibility of creating a **UN Humanitarian Agency for War and Other Disaster Zones**, bringing together agencies doing peacebuilding and humanitarian assistance, should be examined.

Supporting implementation – finance

Finance is essential for ambitious implementation, especially as regards the commitments of developing countries. The Secretary-General and the UN can mobilise public and private resources, and can help unleash capital flows to support implementation. The IFIs should of course be involved, in a spirit of true partnership and deferring to the moral and political authority of the central UN.

Holding states and other actors accountable – watchdog role

The UN has a central role in holding governments, businesses and local authorities to account for doing what they are supposed to do in implementation of global decisions and own commitments. Monitoring the status of implementation by individual actors and their overall impact on the challenge at hand are crucial parts of the UN’s watchdog role. In case one or more actors are found to fall short of what they should be doing, naming and shaming as well as other moral / reputational, administrative and ultimately legal sanctions should be imposed by the competent UN bodies; the UN should thus be *a watchdog with teeth*.

The above are valid for development-related work, notably in implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as for peace and security, and for human rights and humanitarian commitments too. Specifically for peace and security, the use of the *peacekeeping* tool will have to also be seen as a mechanism supportive of national and regional efforts, not as an independent instrument. The problems associated with the poor training of and insufficient equipment borne by

⁵ Largely borrowing from the article on “Climate change and climate action: What next for the UN after the Paris Agreement?” by Richard Kinley, f. UNFCCC Deputy Executive Director and FOGGS Advisory Board member, available online on the FOGGS website: <https://www.foggs.org/1559/climate-change-and-climate-action-what-next-for-the-un-after-the-paris-agreement/>

peacekeepers from several troop-contributing nations, and the multiple cases of sexual abuse, point to the need for an in-depth rethinking of UN operational capacity in this area. A smaller force of **UN trained and UN maintained police force** with the right equipment may have a more useful role to play for emergencies and preventive, short-term deployments in areas of rising tensions, ceasefires and arms control.

Enabling factors

To perform the various functions assigned to it, the UN needs to rely on a set of supportive / enabling factors. For a reformed UN these factors also need to be reformed, after close reconsideration:

Funding arrangements

The previously proposed reforms do not necessarily mean an increase in the resources that need to be made available to the UN. The existing budget can be used as is, at least to start with. Problem identification / early warning and prevention constitute the function that should have priority in resource allocation and for that the UN has to be able to rely on assessed contributions which are not earmarked for specific purposes favoured by countries/donors. **Additional resources could eventually be secured by allowing citizens around the world to contribute through tax-deductible donations and/or by transferring a small part of globally enforced taxes (e.g. on financial transactions) to the UN.** These mechanisms have the added value of being less directly controlled by national governments, which may want to use their contributions to extract favours or otherwise influence the UN. Of course, in case of introducing significant amounts of independent income for the world body there should be full transparency and checks to avoid overfunding, as well as to avoid a disconnect between the UN and its member states. The latter would maintain close budgetary control of the UN, including its non-state income, through the General Assembly's Fifth Committee, while not using the latter to micro-manage the Secretariat. .

Harnessing the power of science for the common good

The UN needs to explore the positive aspects of new technologies, making the best use of them in the performance of its own role(s), while also ensuring their spread for the benefit of its member states and their citizens. **This could include assuming a leadership role in recognising the existence of new global commons and utilities that should be subject to adequate regulation, possibly at global level due to their nature, such as Facebook, Twitter and Google.** Another ambitious and inspiring initiative could be **to encourage universal interest and participation in major projects like the exploration and colonisation of Mars, while ensuring that outer space is not used for military purposes.**

Bringing in non-state actors more systematically

For the successful performance of its various functions the UN needs to be able to call upon the expertise of non-state actors in a more systematic, less ad hoc way. Consultations with and advice from such non-state actors, as well as their use as a sounding board and transmission line towards the broader public, could be achieved through a number of **consultative assemblies** that the UN Secretary-General and/or the UN General Assembly President would periodically convene:

- Parliamentarians from national and regional parliaments;
- Scientists from international scientific associations, as well as celebrated individuals, e.g. Nobel Prize laureates;
- Religious leaders from around the world;
- Artists from around the world;
- Sportspeople from around the world.

Summary of key recommendations

| CORE FUNCTION 1: WARNING & PREVENTION | CORE FUNCTION 2: AWARENESS-RAISING | CORE FUNCTION 3: LEADERSHIP AND VISION |
|--|--|--|
| <p>An Earth Watch Centre, to keep track in real time of the state of key indicators of human (incl. social and economic) and planetary well-being, and point to potential threats as they appear. This would be supplemented with a small Integration, Coherence and Follow-up Unit, which would apply systems thinking and would identify emerging threats and longer trends.</p> <p>A UN Watch / World Order Observatory would watch the watchers and would be run by global civil society or as a fully autonomous unit of the UN Secretariat.</p> | <p>A quarterly State of the Planet Report summarising the key parameters followed by the Earth Watch Centre would be conveyed by the Secretary-General to the main UN deliberative organs with advice. Moreover, an annual State of Global Governance Report issued by the UN Watch / Global Governance Observatory would also help shed more light on the global governance system and would “name and shame” those not respecting the rules of peaceful coexistence and multilateral cooperation</p> | <p>A global narrative of hope, based on honest analysis of the current situation, drawing on holistic and sustainable economic philosophies distinct from the present dominant politico-economic model, and suggesting a realistic way forward that integrates the core messages of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and connects them with the fight against the major global challenges of today. Such initiatives could include the designation of a global holiday celebrated by the people all around the world; and the elaboration of a Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities, as complementary to the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.</p> |
| CORE FUNCTION 4: DECISION-MAKING | CORE FUNCTION 5: IMPLEMENTATION | ENABLING FACTORS |
| <p>A revamped deliberative process at the UN should have decisions on major global challenges taken with the participation of expert representatives from all competent line ministries and from the offices of the effective head of government for each country.</p> <p>Moreover, the decision-making process should include the active and substantive (i.e. beyond a token speech or two) participation of the Secretary-General and/or his/her expert colleagues from the Secretariat, as well as independent experts from civil society organisations, think tanks and even private entities concerned.</p> | <p>In terms of implementation, rather than trying to do it all, the UN should focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convening and advocating at high level; • Supporting implementation through <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - know-how / capacity building, - emergency response, - finance; • Holding states and other actors accountable / watchdog role, with teeth. | <p>Funding arrangements: Additional resources could be secured by allowing citizens around the world to contribute through tax-deductible donations and/or by transferring a small part of globally enforced taxes (e.g. on financial transactions) to the UN.</p> <p>Harnessing the power of science for the common good: E.g. by assuming a leadership role in recognising the existence of new global commons and utilities that should be subject to adequate regulation, possibly at global level due to their nature, such as Facebook, Twitter and Google.</p> <p>Bringing in non-state actors more systematically: through a number of consultative assemblies that the UN Secretary-General and/or the UN General Assembly President would periodically convene.</p> |

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