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**HOW IS THE MULTILATERAL
SYSTEM FAILING TO DEAL WITH
THE CLIMATE CRISIS, AND WHY
THERE IS A NEED FOR A GLOBAL
RESILIENCE COUNCIL**

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Background

As part of the FOGGS [UN2100 Initiative](#), a proposal for the establishment of a “Global Resilience Council”, as a “UN Security Council” for non-military threats to human security, has been put forward by FOGGS since the summer of 2020. This proposal acquired renewed relevance in the context of the UN reform process initiated by UN member states through their Declaration on the 75th anniversary of the United Nations in September 2020 and the *Our Common Agenda* report issued in response by the UN Secretary-General in September 2021. By commissioning this discussion paper, FOGGS wanted to explore how the proposed Global Resilience Council would work in practice and how it might help address more effectively the global climate crisis. A “sister paper” to this one has also been commissioned, to discuss how the proposed Council would help address a global health crisis more effectively.

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Introduction and Problem statement

Climate change is one of, if not *the* most pressing challenge the world faces. Recent publications from the IPCC as part of its *Sixth Assessment Report*¹ and the 2021 UNEP *Emissions Gap* report detail the catastrophic warming trajectory planet Earth is on, and that even if current climate commitments are followed, the planet and its people are facing impending disaster. There is growing consensus among scientists, policy makers, and an increasing proportion of the public that this is an urgent, existential threat. However, many governments, the private sector and other stakeholders have been slow to implement effective climate action. Even with the IPCC repeated warnings, CO₂ emissions have not only continued but have increased, and with them the extreme weather events, the rise in sea levels and the global average temperature, and other catastrophic climate change impacts.

There is a framework for action to address climate change, through the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement reached under it. What is missing is an international intergovernmental body with a decision-making and enforcement mandate to take the lead in ensuring that appropriate action is taken by governments, the private sector, and other key constituencies.

The Foundation for Global Governance and Sustainability proposes the establishment of a Global Resilience Council (GRC), which would have the mandate and the capacity to better coordinate effective responses to the challenges faced by humanity than the current sectorally fragmented multilateral bodies built around the United Nations. As explained in [‘A “Security Council” to Deal with Non-Military Threats](#) (FOGGS, June 2021), the GRC would have powers analogous to those of the UN Security Council (UNSC), with one of its key features being enforcement measures to demand implementation of collective decisions taken. If properly set up and equipped, the GRC would enable the multilateral system to achieve a much higher level of climate action, both adaptation and mitigation.

Climate change as dealt with by the current multilateral system

As climate change increases in prominence through the clear manifestation of its catastrophic impacts worldwide, public pressure on leaders to take action mounts, at the national and the international level. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is the central multilateral body that brings countries together on the issue, convening the annual

¹ See contributions of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the IPCC (2021-2022), available online at <https://www.ipcc.ch>

Conference of the Parties (COP), which delivered the Kyoto Protocol (1997) and the Paris Agreement (2015). Through the UNFCCC process, countries negotiate on a range of issues including climate adaptation, mitigation, finance and capacity building. Moreover, through many programs and initiatives, the UNFCCC collaborates with both state and non-state actors. Other United Nations bodies, such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) also have a major stake in the international climate change arena, alongside many other multilateral or “mini-lateral” organizations like the G20 and the G7, NGOs and private sector companies. The result of this is a sprawling multilateral climate action “universe” that is nevertheless proving ineffective at dealing with the causes and the worst effects of the climate crisis.

The multilateral climate process has evolved over time within the framework of the UNFCCC, its Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement, which have many undeniable strengths. Especially the universal character of the Paris Agreement has revitalised the whole process. Nevertheless, important shortcomings remain:

Firstly, there is clearly a lack of accountability. As mandated in the Paris Agreement, countries have announced ambitious Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), which, *if met*, would go some way to mitigating the worst climate impacts. Despite NDCs being included in the Paris Agreement (Article 4, paragraph 2), it is unclear what, if any consequence there will be if an individual country does not comply with its own commitments, or if a successor government simply ignores them. Further, the climate crisis requires an all-of-government / all-of-society response, with actions by all levels of government and non-state actors. However, within the current structures of the multilateral system, there is neither a mandate nor an accountability mechanism to monitor the huge range of sectors that contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. This leads to a situation where, although the UNFCCC process can achieve positive target- and rule-setting outcomes within its specific mandates, it has no jurisdiction over the implementation of these outcomes by governments or other actors.

Secondly, there is a clear gap between the ambitious statements and commitments from world leaders that ‘we must act now’ and resources allocated to doing that effectively. A very clear example is the promised financial support to developing countries, where climate impacts are the gravest, most notably the commitment for a minimum of \$100bn of climate finance annually by 2020 that has not been fulfilled as of yet.

Thirdly, the multilateral climate sector lacks effective coordination among key actors. Despite UNFCCC being at the centre and engaging an extraordinary number of state and non-state actors at its COPs, despite initiatives by the UN Secretary-General engaging world leaders at the highest level, despite collaborations among various UN entities and many other partnerships among various actors, effective coordination still remains to be seen at large scale in practice. One example of this is the lack of science – policy coordination. To tackle the climate crisis and stay within the 1.5-degree goal, science, notably as objectively expressed by UNFCCC, should be the driving factor in all negotiations. Even though the IPCC findings and recommendations

feature in some negotiation sessions, they are often drowned out by political posturing. Coordination among multilevel governance actors and the private sector is also proving very difficult to achieve. We know, though, that if emissions are to be reduced and the worst impacts of the climate crisis are to be averted, it is vital that there is close coordination *and* cooperation between national politicians, multilateral organisations, NGOs, and the private sector.

To summarize, it is evident that there are mandate gaps in the multilateral UNFCCC driven climate process, which inhibit its ability to adequately respond to the multitude of crises faced. The three priority areas that need to be addressed urgently are:

1. An effective accountability mechanism for state and non-state actors, both for adherence to national and multilateral climate policies, but also to self-made commitments that align to the 1.5-degree target of the Paris Agreement.
2. Effective mechanisms and incentives for guaranteeing the allocation of public and private resources to where they are most needed, including for adaptation, mitigation and insurance / “loss and damage” purposes in developing countries.
3. The ability to overcome fragmentation and ensure effective coordination among governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-state actors on issues that fall under the ‘climate crisis’ umbrella. This includes better coordination among UN entities, but also between the UN bodies and national governments, as well as stronger engagement with, coordination with, and guidance to non-state actors.

How can these obvious gaps be addressed?

The GRC, an outline of its potential form and functions

What is currently missing from the multilateral system is a body capable of bringing together specialized multilateral agencies, the international financial institutions (IFIs), government ministries and non-state actors to address mega-crises in a cross organizational manner and provide them with clear direction on how to do so. The system lacks a body where the political response to a non-military crisis can move up from the level of individual specialized agencies to the global community as a whole. In the absence of such a body, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is occasionally requested to respond even to non-military threats, but is restricted to those aspects of a global threat that have or might have an armed consequence. However, it does not have the authority, expertise, or political will to do so. Therefore, the Foundation for Global Governance and Sustainability (FOGGS) proposes the establishment of a new body: the Global Resilience Council (GRC).

Among the key characteristics envisaged for the GRC, most notable are:

- (1) it would have the authority to determine the existence of an actual or imminent major threat to human security;
- (2) it would be sufficiently agile and quick acting to deal with threats ranging from abruptly occurring events to chronic systemic challenges;
- (3) it would dispose of effective means to engage multiple constituencies now recognized as powerful actors in global governance, while maintaining the centrality of a state-based and accountable multilateral system;
- (4) it would have the authority to take binding decisions;
- (5) it would have an effective sanctioning mechanism.

The core membership of the proposed GRC could include state level representation and other governmental actors, and advisory positions for non-state actors and observer constituencies, such as scientists or regional experts. The membership will be based on the substantive need and will be drawn with the intention of formulating the most effective response, and will allow for the accountability mechanisms to be implemented and close collaboration between state and non-state actors and key constituencies to be facilitated.

Like the UNSC, the GRC was conceived to build accountability, decisive action and sanctioning elements into the multilateral political sphere. Just as the UNSC recognizes that some actors may not abide by a call for a ceasefire and should be coerced to do so, the GRC would have the capacity to raise the cost of continuing adverse activities by those non-responsive to calls for voluntary actions to address non-military threats to human security. The GRC would have an escalating repertory of tools for pre-emption/prevention, public engagement, fact finding, cross-organizational action, criminal liability referral, and imposition of economic and other sanctions. The GRC would utilise these tools to go much further than the UNSC in ensuring effective cooperation and coordination among all relevant state and non-state actors, allowing for positive crisis response and relief efforts, rather than being mainly reactionary to emerging crises. Of course, if collective action by the international community to address mega crises like the climate crisis is to have any meaning, there must be some form of obligatory intervention when necessary.

The GRC could be supported in its work by a companion body consisting of the intergovernmental heads of UN system entities and other intergovernmental organizations – an “Intergovernmental Leadership Council”. The goal of such a body would be to begin to create the dynamics for effective all-of-multilateralism responses to non-military mega crises brought before the GRC by one of these organizations or otherwise. It would be a parallel GRC support pillar to an expanded CEB, that is the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, which

brings together the executive heads of UN system entities under the chairmanship of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Moreover, support to the GRC would be provided by a set of diverse constituencies of non-state actors in the form of advisory assemblies, including of scientists and scientific associations, labour/trade union and professional associations, business leaders, parliamentarians, local authorities, indigenous peoples, civil society organisations, youth activists and young professionals.

The GRC proposal has been put forward primarily as a concept that responds to an obvious practical necessity. As the concept develops and its ownership spreads among state and non-state actors, the specifics of the GRC make-up will emerge through discussions and negotiations, including details on the GRC membership and associated decision-making practices.

How would a GRC contribute to a more effective response to the global climate crisis

The establishment of a Global Resilience Council would greatly increase our ability to tackle the climate crisis. It would directly fill the existing mandate gaps and would complement the current UNFCCC-led system strengthening implementation.

A key feature of the GRC in the context of the climate process is that its decisions would be binding and there would be strong accountability mechanisms. As of now world leaders often make strong commitments on emissions reductions and financial support for developing countries, without any formal consequence if they do not follow through. Should a country not follow commitments it made or decisions taken by the GRC in implementation of the UNFCCC framework, there would be a multi-level sanctioning process, similar in nature to the UNSC, using financial tools and diplomatic pressures as necessary. Ideally, if governments did implement their commitments, these tools would not have to be used often. Their existence, though, would serve as the proverbial sword of Damocles, hanging ominously over the heads of public and private actors, dissuading them from not complying.

Like the composition and its decision-making process, the exact sanctioning mechanisms of the GRC are yet to be determined. However, we have seen the damage of non-binding decisions in the existing multilateral process, which must be redressed in any new arrangement.

The GRC, assisted by the ILC, as mentioned in the previous section, would improve coordination among intergovernmental organizations, thus bringing their combined strength to bear on climate action priorities. Bringing in the IFIs too, the GRC would improve the allocation of financial resources, in terms of development assistance, trade arrangements, Special Drawing Right (SDR) issuance, etc.

Many of the groups and constituencies most impacted by climate change are not represented adequately in existing decision-making processes, both at an international and national level, and are often not even consulted. Resolving this imbalance will be prioritized via the institutionalised involvement in the GRC consultation process of advisory assemblies of various

constituencies of non-state actors, enabling them to bring their particular viewpoints and resources in the search for solutions. Once a GRC decision would have been made the advisory assemblies would undertake to assist with implementation mobilizing the tangible and intangible resources of their respective members.

Finally, all work of the GRC, both in relation to climate and other areas, will adhere to a strict set of standards. These will prioritize that human rights, gender equality, local and indigenous peoples' rights, and the needs of future generations are at the centre of decision-making processes and outcomes.

Conclusions

Negative climate impacts are fast outpacing the actions to mitigate and adapt to human-caused climate change. The existing multilateral process is not as effective as it needs to be in reducing global emissions that are at the heart of this crisis. Establishing a Global Resilience Council would help bridge existing mandate gaps and bring the total capacities of the multilateral system to bear in addressing climate change, while holding state and non-state actors to account for the contributions expected of them. Mandate gaps similar to those characterizing the climate process can be observed in several sectors, including the health sector. The potential contribution of the GRC to infectious disease control is the focus of another FOGGS Discussion Paper about to be published. More information on the Global Resilience Council proposal can be found [here](#).