

# A GLOBAL HUMAN SECURITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL INTEGRITY ACTION COUNCIL (abbreviated as GAC)

TO PROVIDE EFFECTIVE RESPONSES TO  
GLOBAL NON-MILITARY SYSTEMIC THREATS<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

In the 1940s the UN founders saw the need to face up to the ravages of war. They created an institution with obligatory authority on military issues in order to prevent future armed conflicts and their consequences. They also gave this institution a weaker mandate regarding coordination on economic and social matters.

Since then, global structural crises in the climate, health, biodiversity, race, finance, social, gender and other fields have led to massive human, environmental and economic consequences, even as they garnered wider public recognition. The initial response to each of these “human security” crises was to create separate organizations or legally autonomous treaty bodies to galvanize international action, treating each crisis as an independent global challenge. The time has come to face up to the reality that each of these crises has many dimensions, which interconnect with the corresponding dimensions of other crises and generate crises that threaten the foundations of human governance and resilience, rendering the current autonomous and largely voluntary and fragmented efforts to address them hopelessly insufficient. The broad normative framework for the required transformation already exists and has been recently articulated through concepts such as the 2030

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<sup>1</sup> This proposal for the establishment of a Global Human Security and Environmental Integrity Council (GAC) builds on and revises an earlier proposal for a Global Resilience Council ([GRC](#)) put forward in 2020 by the Foundation for Global Governance and Sustainability (FOGGS). FOGGS is proceeding to this new iteration of its proposed Council in view of comments on the earlier proposal received from UN and country officials, think tanks, civil society organizations, as well as other non-state actors and individuals. In this revision, FOGGS seeks to incorporate a number of related initiatives, which call for the establishment of separate councils on environmental, economic or social issues, into one comprehensive and practicable proposal.

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Agenda for Sustainable Development/Sustainable Development Goals, “the Triple Crisis” of climate change, environmental pollution and biodiversity loss, Earth System Governance, Health for All, and Human Security.

The international community now needs to take the next step to create a body that has enforcement authority, similar to that of the Security Council,<sup>3</sup> over states and non-state actors to coordinate responses across multiple sectors and institutions. This proposal for a new high-level Council in the United Nations system grows out of lessons learnt over the past decades and an uncomfortable recognition that the current configuration of international organizations is not up to the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It offers innovative ideas to upgrade the structural opportunities for contributions of non-state actors to intergovernmental bodies, expands the policy coordination arrangements between and among UN system organizations, allows for the direct participation in international governance of regional integration organizations, and initiates an intergovernmental process to move towards a governance system in the non-military fields that has similar sanctioning capacities to those of the Security Council in military matters.

**In short, this Global Human Security and Environmental Integrity Action Council (GAC) needs to be added to the United Nations intergovernmental machinery.**

In some minds the Emergency Platform proposal advanced by the UN Secretary-General<sup>4</sup> and included by the Co-facilitators of the Summit of the Future outcome in their recently revised draft of the Pact for the Future,<sup>5</sup> is an appropriate multilateral response to major global crises. However the Emergency Platform and the Systemic Crisis Response Council are fundamentally different. First, the Emergency Platform is limited in scope to unusual potential future shocks,<sup>6</sup> not addressing the longstanding systemic and unresolved crises. Second, the proposed governance of the Emergency Platform is under the Office of the Secretary General, not under an

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<sup>3</sup> A GAC would be a complementary body to the Security Council in that it would address the non-military global structural crises, while the existing (and hopefully redesigned) Security Council and Peacebuilding Commission would discharge the United Nations’ central responsibilities in maintaining peace and avoiding armed conflicts.

<sup>4</sup> See *Our Common Agenda*, Report of the Secretary-General, United Nations, September 2021, para. 101 (available online at [https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common\\_Agenda\\_Report\\_English.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf)) and *Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 2: Strengthening the International Response to Complex Global Shocks – An Emergency Platform*, United Nations, March 2023 (available online at <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-emergency-platform-en.pdf>).

<sup>5</sup> See *Pact for the Future: Rev 1*, 14 May 2023 (available online at <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sotf-pact-for-the-future-rev.1.pdf>), Action 49. We will strengthen the international response to complex global shocks.

<sup>6</sup> The aforementioned Policy Brief 2 on the Emergency Platform identifies on page 5 “some of the global shocks that we may encounter in the future . . . : a) Large-scale climatic or environmental events that cause major socioeconomic disruptions and/or environmental degradation; b) Future pandemics with cascading secondary impacts; c) High-impact events involving a biological agent (deliberate or accidental); d) Events leading to disruptions to global flows of goods, people or finance; e) Large-scale destructive and/or disruptive activity in cyberspace or disruptions to global digital connectivity; f) A major event in outer space that causes severe disruptions to one or several critical systems on Earth; g) Unforeseen risks (‘black swan’ events).” The policy brief concludes that “there are several potential future shocks in which the multilateral response architecture is underdeveloped or non-existent.”

intergovernmental body, as the Secretary-General selects the states and non-state advisors. Third, the membership configuration for the Emergency Platform blurs the roles of states, the private sector and civil society, while the SCRC proposal keeps the distinct responsibilities clear and adds new ways non-state actors can engage with states and with each other.<sup>7</sup> Fourth, as major crises and shocks are multi-dimensional in nature, any new structure needs to address inter-organizational silos, which an advisory body to the Office of the Secretary-General does not do. Moreover, as proposed, the Emergency Platform is a temporary body with only the ability to call for voluntary actions,<sup>8</sup> which severely hampers its potential effectiveness. In spite of these significant shortcomings, some proponents of the Emergency Platform, including some governments, continue to present the Emergency Platform as a quick and financially free solutions to today's catastrophic and existential structural crises. Other distinguishing features are presented in the Annex to this paper.

### **Why focus on systemic crises of human security and environmental integrity**

Systemic crises impact on the core planetary, social and economic systems on which human civilization, environmental integrity and even individual human existence rely. Responding to systemic crises then is different from efforts to enhance international cooperation, promulgate new global rules for specific sectors, correspond to humanitarian emergencies, things that would continue to be pursued in the context of the respective specialized UN bodies. The four defining characteristics of systemic crises can be summarized as follows:

- i) The **causes of a systemic crisis** are multidimensional, long standing, embedded in the prevailing structure of globalization and generally beyond the terms of reference of any specialized agency, convention, or commission in the field;
- ii) The **consequences of a systemic crisis** are also multidimensional and reverberate via globalization to impact negatively communities, organizations, economies and nature well outside the relevant specialized agency, convention, or commission's ability to mitigate;
- iii) **Solutions to a systemic crisis**, even of specific manifestations in the form of a catastrophic event or crisis, require interventions that encompass a sensitive engagement with multiple other systemic crises; and
- iv) Some quite **powerful global actors cause, protect or are content to maintain a systemic crisis**. Such actors, be they states or international businesses, energetically organize to get immediate or long-term benefits from a systemic crisis.

### **Mandate of a Global Human Security and Environmental Integrity Action Council**

The Global Human Security and Environmental Integrity Action Council would have a range of enforcement powers and serve as a new intergovernmental umbrella body with the ability to call for actions across the international community. It would bring the collective strength of the diverse and interrelated multilateral

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<sup>7</sup> See section entitled "New Dynamic for the Engagement of State and Non-State Actors" below for further details.

<sup>8</sup> See section entitled "Enforcement measures and other operating procedures" below for further details.

organizations, governments, markets, and communities to focus on resolving the major systemic crises of our times.

Elevating a specific crisis to the new Council could occur in a variety of ways:

- i) When a crisis exceeds the response capacity of any existing organization that specializes in that issue area, it could be taken to the new Council by the said organization or the UN General Assembly or ECOSOC, so that the Council could respond with a wider view and obligatory authority over the whole system of interrelated organizations, state and non-state actors;
- ii) When a government or a group of governments are faced with an unresolvable domestic crisis brought on by a global systemic crisis, they can appeal to the new Council to put their situation on its agenda with a view to providing support;
- iii) When an intergovernmentally adopted policy in an identified systemic crisis area is not adequately implemented by state or non-state actors, the Council could be assigned the task to sanction those blocking implementation;
- iv) When new challenges emerge or are about to give rise to a new crisis, the matter could be taken up by the GAC at the recommendation of the UN General Assembly, ECOSOC, the Security Council, the UN Secretary-General, the Executive Head of a specialized agency, or at the Council's own initiative;
- v) When a group of scientists and/or CSOs identify a potentially ungoverned or ill-governed systemic matter, which has led or can reasonably be expected to lead to a global systemic crisis, the GAC could be petitioned to establish a commission of inquiry or a fact-finding mission, which would eventually recommend whether the matter warrants consideration by the GAC.

In this manner, the Council would become the ultimate steward of the global commons, and the defender of ecological, economic and social boundaries on behalf of humanity, at least at the "appeals" level, once the responsibility for the management of a system in crisis has been passed on to it.

### **Establishing a Global Human Security and Environmental Integrity Action Council (GAC)**

The most secure, long-term route for the establishment of the SCRC would be through a self-standing treaty, as in the case of the International Criminal Court, or a UN Charter amendment. Given the urgency to address currently recognized systemic crises and the probability of a multi-year process for a treaty or Charter amendment to be completed, the new Council could be created through a two-stage process:

#### *a. A de facto act of creation*

The new Council could be established initially as a **subsidiary body of the UN General Assembly (UNGA)**, by a simple resolution of the Assembly itself, not requiring any further intergovernmental ratification. There is the recent precedent of the establishment of the Human Rights Council. The founding resolution could also include an invitation to the Conference of Parties of relevant conventions, UN system specialized bodies, the Bretton Woods Institutions, WTO, regional intergovernmental bodies, and other multilateral organizations to affiliate themselves via parallel intergovernmental resolutions with the GAC. It could gradually be declared or de facto

recognized as a subsidiary or associated body of the UN system of specialized agencies and other multilateral organizations. Alternatively, the GAC could be established as a subsidiary body of ECOSOC. In the case of ECOSOC, the GAC set of issues are clearly compatible with the Council's priorities on SDG implementation and UN system coordination.

One way or another, the new Council would be seen as a connecting bridge for a wide range of intergovernmental entities and could serve as a neutral platform for their representatives to meet and design coherent intergovernmental policy positions strengthened by political insights of their respective intergovernmental constituencies as well as more effective joint implementation programmes drawing on the specialist expertise within their organizations.

The new body itself would have the authority to create high-level task forces consisting of member states, multilateral agencies and/or other actors, to which the day-to-day response to a particular systemic crisis would be assigned. Unlike the UN Secretary-General's "Emergency Platform" proposal, such task forces would be accountable directly to the UN membership through the Council (see a comprehensive comparison between the GAC and the Emergency Platform proposals in the Annex to this paper). During the de facto establishment phase, the GAC could test out innovative procedures and practices, laying the ground work for the second phase.

*b. A de jure constitutional amendment*

The new Council could eventually be confirmed as an additional principal organ of the UN through a Charter amendment or a treaty similar to that of the International Criminal Court. The Charter amendment or treaty would also include all relevant provisions about the mandate, composition and functioning of the new organ and the status of its actions under international law. The statutes of UN system specialized agencies, relevant convention governing bodies (COPs), and other multilateral organizations might have to be amended to formally establish an operational bridge to the joint body.

**Composition and Decision-making**

At its core, the GAC would be an intergovernmental body with limited membership, allowing representation of all regions and shared-interest groups of UN Member States through periodic rotation of members. Regional integration organizations with a minimum of Member States could become members of the Council on a permanent basis if their respective Member States agreed to be represented by their regional authorities. The specifics would be negotiated as part of the Council's founding act. In order to avoid the paralysis displayed all too often by the Security Council and the paralysis created by the practice of universal agreement on all economic, social, environmental matters, there would be, like the General Assembly, the opportunity for routine voting and no veto prerogative for any country or regional organization. This would extend the current principle of one-country-one-vote to one-region-one-vote. Rather, operational day-to-day decisions of the GAC would be made by a simple majority of those members present and voting, while enforcement decisions with obligatory power on the entire UN membership and non-state actors would require a 2/3 super-majority.

## **New Dynamic for the Engagement of State and Non-State Actors**

Solving systemic crises requires the well-orchestrated engagement of all systemic nodes, which means international, regional, national and local authorities, as well as non-state actors at all of these levels. To bring an all-of-government all-of-multilateralism and all-of-society support to the implementation of its decisions, the GAC would act as a common platform for all UN system specialized agencies and through them to all national ministries on global crisis response. Moreover, the GAC would engage systematically a collection of diverse constituencies, each with its own sensitivity to global crises, its own professional and knowledge background, and its own political alliances at local, regional, and international levels. To bring such a variety of actors, with their corresponding tangible and intangible resources to bear on an effective solution to systemic crises, the GAC would encourage the establishment of a number of Advisory Assemblies.<sup>9</sup>

Each Advisory Assembly would be expected to define the respective constituency's assessment of the causes and consequences of each specific crisis, and advise the GAC and all other constituencies on the best solutions to the crisis from the said constituency's perspective. In a precedent-setting fashion for non-state contributions to global governance, each Advisory Assembly would be expected to:

- (a) Evaluate the views of the other Advisory Assemblies and dialogue with them on causes, impacts and solutions in order to provide governments at the SCRC with a coherent package of proposed actions and
- (b) Undertake to lead within the constituency it represents around the world in implementing the eventual GAC decisions. This interactive structure breaks with the traditional pattern of intergovernmental bodies just receiving' input or group statements from non-state organizations from separate constituencies, while it maintains the state- centric character at the centre of decision-making. The condition for commit to implement the decisions of the intergovernmental SCRC opens the door for a SCRC hosting a non-state constituencies to coordinate their implementation actions.

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<sup>9</sup> The initial assemblies could include (a) a science / knowledge-based assembly (e.g. IPPC-like science bodies, as well as scientific associations, universities and think tanks), to be customized depending on the issue at hand each time; (b) a religious leaders and moral philosophers assembly to show a new appreciation of ethics as a driving force in crisis response; (c) an assembly for business leaders who have a working commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals and human rights; (d ) an assembly for labour / trade union and professional associations; (e) an assembly for indigenous peoples modeled on the existing UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues; (f) an assembly of civil society organizations, networks and social movements; (g) an open-door assembly for under-represented and affected communities (i.e. migrants and people with disabilities); (h) a parliamentary assembly consisting of representatives of national and regional parliaments; and (j) an assembly of local, sub-national authorities.

## **Enforcement measures and other operating procedures**

Unfortunately, over the past decades, the use of voluntary commitments, even in the face of increasingly high-risk global governance issues, has become the norm in international relations. So much so that obligatory authority and enforcement measures almost need to be re-discovered as a tool in global decision-making. Global volunteerism to implement major economic, social, gender, race, and environmental actions depends for its effectiveness on shared 'political will' and the willingness to use that shared will, when it exists, to discipline countries and other actors whose actions cause or aggravate the underlying threat or problem.

Were the GAC to be established as a subsidiary body of the UN General Assembly or ECOSOC, its capacity to enforce its obligatory decisions would initially depend, like that of the International Criminal Court, on calling upon other bodies to take obligatory measures in their respective areas of competence. Those other bodies would include the UN Security Council for issues that could be seen as also threatening traditional peace and security, the World Trade Organization on trade matters, international and/or domestic courts, central banks and other bodies. With time and deft handling, such a call for action by authorities currently capable of imposing sanctions would garner strength and build up the legitimacy of the GAC. In the event of a UN Charter amendment or treaty that would constitutionally establish the Council, then it would be given its own enforcement powers.

Examples of what the GAC could do in terms of enforcement, even without obligatory powers of its own, would include:

- a) Propose to governments, international financial institutions, and international judicial authorities that they make a decision and support actions to freeze the assets of the designated corporate entity or individual refusing to do their part to end a systemic crisis;
- b) Submit detailed public requests for supplemental information on their activities to governments, or other public or private actors in relevant sectors;
- c) Propose to international public and private financial institutions that certain international actors should not be considered safe investment vehicles as their actions are endangering global sustainability and resilience;
- d) Advise other multilateral governing bodies that a specific crisis or element of a specific crisis be put on the agenda of that governing body with a request to report back on the actions taken to the GAC within a specified time;
- e) Establish public lists of non-complying countries or companies, products or technologies to inform the decisions of citizens/consumers, investors and others; and
- f) Request the communication departments of relevant specialized organizations, as well as public and private media organizations, including social media, to develop and disseminate fact-based information material on the causes and potential solutions to a certain systemic crisis.

Were the GAC to be eventually established as a UN principal organ through a Charter revision or a new treaty complemented by amendments to underlying governing documents of specialized agencies or conventions ,

those legal texts could define its sanctioning authority, giving it the capacity to take action using a number of trade, financial, and other enforcement mechanisms.

## **Next Steps**

The way forward toward the acceptance of the SCRC proposal should be a three track approach

(a) **Build the narrative** that there is a need to close the systemic gaps in global governance and that it can be accomplished.

(b) **Engage with government delegates and officials in New York and capitals** to reflect the need for a GAC in the outcomes of the Summit of the Future and other upcoming intergovernmental conferences.

(c) **Create, under the UN General Assembly a preparatory commission** with representatives of UN member states, regional integration bodies, UN system and other intergovernmental bodies supported by a cross-organizational secretariat and provisional advisory assemblies of non-state actors to lay the basis for the establishment of GAC.

## **Closing remarks**

What we are looking for here would be a body central to multilateralism, through which the collective response to major systemic crises affecting human security and environmental integrity could generate an effective response, based on having examined the structural causes and diverse consequences of a specific systemic crisis. The new body should be able to address these multidimensional mega-crises in a dramatically new fashion, one that is based on a 'whole of government', 'whole of multilateralism', and 'whole of globalization' approach. The establishment of such a body with the ultimate responsibility of ensuring human resilience and planetary stability could precipitate the introduction of a set of much-needed innovations to make multilateralism fit for the UN75+25 period. Designing and bringing about such a body is indeed daunting, yet it needs to be done. The institutional arrangements proposed above provide a framework that would be further developed through negotiations among the world's governments with input from experts, civil society and other non-state actors.



**ANNEX**

Comparison of the features and functions of the proposed  
Emergency Platform and the Global  
Human Security and Environmental Integrity  
Action Council (GAC)

<b>Feature or Function</b>	<b>Emergency Platform</b>	<b>Systemic Crisis Response Council</b>
Scope	Future shocks	Long lasting systemic crises and future shocks
Duration	Temporary	Permanent
Implementation capacities	Voluntary	Voluntary and obligatory
Set-up Time	Anticipated delays in response to shocks, as a specific emergency platform has to be set up from scratch each time	Standing body ready to act
Membership	Selected by the UN Secretary-General	Governments represented directly or via regional organizations
Non-state actor involvement	Private sector and other non-state actor representatives on a par with states	Non-state actor constituencies advise the intergovernmental Council
Relation to the broader UN system	Centered around the Office of the UN Secretary-General in New York	Offers a formal institutional way for other intergovernmental bodies to affiliate with the SCRC
Conceptual framework, transparency and legitimacy	Based on the concept of multistakeholderism	Based on the concept of multilateralism
Learning and improvement	Ad hoc, case-specific mechanism	Institutional memory for continuity and improvement