Global People’s Forum for the Future of the United Nations Summary Report
December 8th 2021

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On 8 December 2021, the Coalition for the UN We Need (C4UN) & Together First hosted its Global People’s Forum for the Future of the United Nations on the theme “Turning Words Into Action.” The 2021 People’s Forum was organized in two parts: scene-setting to ensure understanding of where we are at this moment, followed by six thematic break-out strategy sessions to help advance a coherent process. The meeting aimed to identify elements of an advocacy strategy that will prioritize and sequence those OCA proposals and initiatives to advance, while identifying other key proposals and campaign initiatives that are not reflected in the OCA report.

Welcome remarks: Maria Fernanda Espinosa, Group of Women Leaders: Voices for Change and Inclusion & President of the UN General Assembly (73rd Session), C4UN Co-Chair (see page 5)

- H.E. Espinosa set the context for the forum by underscoring critical thinking as civil society’s most valuable asset. She further outlined that in order to make the UN75 Declaration count, we must strategize together so that the OCA report triggers a constructive, inclusive and sustained process of implementation. The GPF provides the opportunity to draw a map to guide our work in the coming months and years, to come up with a “to do” list and corresponding strategy.

Keynote Address: Abdulla Shahid, President of the 76th session of the General Assembly (see page 6)

- H.E. Shahid reaffirmed that with the help of civil society, we can achieve the goals of the OCA report, restore hope to this world, implement our common agenda, and secure a better tomorrow. He pointed out his office’s PGA Youth Fellowship Programme for HOPE as a step towards inclusive voices for progress.

Opening Panel – Where We Are (see page 7)

- The OCA report speaks to the global moment of breakdown or breakthrough, and seeks to build on, and accelerate the SDGs, not distract from them. Crucially, the report is intended to be the beginning of a conversation, not the end.
- Panelists highlighted that the report also suggests a Summit of the Future in 2023, which is currently envisioned to take place alongside the September UNGA. In the next two years a considerable amount of additional substantive work will need to be done on the many proposals in the report through different tracks and different sets of actors to enable member states and other stakeholders to negotiate a summit outcome.
- Panelists further debated the need to critically analyze the agenda set out by the OCA report, and sequence our priorities, amongst which vaccine equity and restructuring institutions to provide the global south with a ‘level playing field’ prominently featured.
BREAK OUT SESSIONS KEY TAKEAWAY PRIORITIES:

Youth/Future Generations (see page 14)
- This discussion focused on the mandate of the new UN Youth office in increasing access and impact of youth voices across the UN. Crucially, partnerships must be formed with local institutions and agents to translate the narratives and goals of the OCA through existing communication channels in ways that engage the majority youth.
- Additional emphasis was placed on the role of the Envoy for Future Generations in sharing the burden of accountability for the future intergenerationally.

Civil Society Engagement (see page 15)
- It was noted that while the OCA presents several key entry points for civil society, the OCA report is weak overall in terms of delivering proposals for ensuring more effective civil society participation in global decision-making.
- Discussants called for clear, concrete mechanisms, as previously proposed by civil society, to be implemented to anchor civil society participation in the follow-up to the OCA report, beyond 1-2 minute speeches at events.

Climate/Environment (see page 16)
- Discussions revealed that the climate crisis is not the problem but is the symptom of a deeper problem of the destructive relationships between humanity, nature, politics and economics; this calls for a fundamental shift in global mindset - the OCA attempts this shift, reinforcing (and not duplicating) efforts in UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement.
- Discussants grappled with the need for a legal paradigm shift in the relationship between environmental agency and rule of law, including legal recognition of the global commons.

New Agenda for Peace (see page 17)
- The OCA calls for a new “Agenda for Peace” focusing on six core areas, and frames peace as a ‘global public good’. The session recalled the original 1992 Agenda for Peace report, suggesting that the OCA’s relatively open-ended call for a new agenda is an opportunity for civil society to influence outcomes on a wider scale.
- Discussions of system-wide reforms including strengthening R2P and other legal and institutional frameworks, concluded that such concrete and granular mechanisms would play a part in this more elusive ‘Agenda for Peace’.
**Economic/Social Inequalities** *(see page 19)*

- Participants discussed the consequences of economic inequality through the lens of their national and local experience working with immigrants and discriminated populations forced to work menial jobs in the informal economy.
- Democratizing economies will play a key role in strengthening trust between people and governments.

**Roadmap to 2023 Summit of the Future & 2025 World Social Summit** *(see page 21)*

- In discussions on the run up to the Summit of the Future and the World Social Summit, five key takeaways arose: (1) Civil society has a responsibility to include itself, (2) Coordinated action through substance and process through an organized civil society would be most effective, (3) Mainstream messages of key global issues in media, (4) Build upon mechanisms that already exist, and (5) Being creative in our thinking and ambitions.
For over two years, important global consultations in support of the 75th anniversary of the United Nations have taken place, leading to the adoption of the UN75 Political Declaration, and most recently, the release of the Secretary General’s Our Common Agenda report now under consideration by the General Assembly. While the principles underpinning nearly all of these recommendations - solidarity, trust, coherence, human rights, justice, gender equality, inclusion, and sustainable development to name a few - are shared, the path forward remains elusive. Barriers to more effective international cooperation - political and social, institutional and conceptual - remain and must be addressed and overcome. This requires advocacy and action, a shared vision and diverse strategies to achieve that vision. Different actors in different contexts and different regions will play different parts in ushering in more effective global governance arrangements - a true expression of common but differentiated responsibilities.

On 8 December 2021, the Coalition for the UN We Need (C4UN) & Together First hosted its Global People’s Forum for the Future of the United Nations on the theme “Turning Words Into Action.” Over 140 civil society advocates from around the world came together to strategize on how to further evaluate, critique and advance the many progressive proposals from the Secretary-General’s Our Common Agenda report. The 2021 People’s Forum was organized in two parts: scene setting to ensure understanding of where we are at this moment, followed by six thematic break-out strategy sessions to help advance a coherent process. Combining survey results(i) with reflections from the Forum, the meeting aimed to identify elements of an advocacy strategy that will prioritize and sequence those OCA proposals and initiatives to advance, while identifying other key proposals and campaign initiatives that are not reflected in the OCA report.

i) See addendum below.
Welcome remarks: Maria Fernanda Espinosa, Group of Women Leaders: Voices for Change and Inclusion & President of the UN General Assembly (73rd Session), C4UN Co-Chair

We are living in the midst of a profound, interconnected set of nested crises from the climate emergency to the global health catastrophe, as well as an extinction crisis, all of it intensified by a major crisis of inequalities. We cannot remain indifferent.

There is one goal that unites us: the commitment to make the United Nations the organization that is capable of realizing people's aspirations for a better, greener, more humane, peaceful and just world. We gather today to build a new multilateral system that is able to respond to the great challenges of our times, through a United Nations that acts efficiently and swiftly, and is able to serve the most vulnerable.

Critical thinking is our most valuable asset as a coalition. We are aware that the main responsibility lies in the will and engagement of member states through an open and inclusive intergovernmental process. We also know that we as civil society have a key role to play. The best way to overcome the deficits of trust, legitimacy and implementation in multilateral decisions at the UN is precisely through co-responsibility and social ownership. That is why civil society’s engagement is so vital.

This is our opportunity to make the UN75 Declaration count, to strategize together so that the OCA report triggers a constructive, inclusive and sustained process of implementation. We are here today to collectively draw up a map to guide our work in the coming months and years, to come up with a “to do” list and a strategy.

The procedural resolution adopted by the General Assembly calls upon the President of the General Assembly to initiate under his overall guidance a process of follow up to enable all member states to begin inclusive intergovernmental consideration of the various OCA proposals, options, and potential means of implementation to take them forward in collaboration with all relevant partners through broad and inclusive consultations.
Keynote Address: Abdulla Shahid, President of the 76th session of the General Assembly

We appreciate that the Coalition is keenly interested in the Secretary-General's report: "Our Common Agenda". As its name suggests, this is a document for all of humanity that gives us a comprehensive blueprint to recover better and build the world that comes afterwards. It envisions a world that is equal, gender-balanced, and climate-conscious; a world with a more efficient and inclusive multilateral system; a world that our youth can look forward to inheriting and can actively engage in shaping.

As noted at the recent UN Town Hall held with CSO representatives, civil society is integral to delivering on those promises. We are all aware of how the pandemic has compounded existing human rights challenges. We must continue to use the General Assembly as a platform to raise awareness, to advance human rights, and to generate solutions to address human rights abuses.

Together we must make every effort to eliminate violence and discrimination against women; to give women an equal voice in shaping our world; to ensure that their contributions are recognized and celebrated; and to ensue that a gender perspective is incorporated into the work of the General Assembly. Much of the same can be said for young people. We have a moral obligation to leave the planet in a decent condition for those who would inherit it. We must be inclusive and empower young people to make a difference.

Young people still trust the multilateral system to resolve the issues they care about – from protecting the planet, to upholding the rights of all, to equal economic opportunity. We owe it to them to vindicate that trust. We owe it to them to address the climate emergency, to ensure vaccine equity, and to give them a say in shaping the planet they will one day become responsible for. Because youth participation is one of our key priorities, we have initiated the PGA Youth Fellowship Programme for HOPE.

With the help of civil society, we can achieve all these goals. We can restore hope to this world; we can implement our common agenda; we can secure a better tomorrow.
Nudhara Yusuf, GGIN Facilitator, Stimson Center (Moderator)
The Secretary-General and his executive team delivered the Our Common Agenda report with 90 recommendations across four pillars at this juncture of global breakdown or breakthrough. This panel discussion looks to analyze what is happening now and anticipate the road ahead.

Michèle Griffin, Senior Policy Advisor, Executive Office of the Secretary-General
The OCA report aims to speak to the moment we are in during this critical juncture of existential threat as Covid continues its rampage around the world. The report clearly articulates what the Secretary-General feels we must do differently if we are going to emerge from Covid into a more equal world and inclusive multilateralism that takes into account future generations.

Member States are still considering what the follow up will look like and we are ready to support them in taking it forward. Following a number of GA plenary sessions between September and November, member states adopted a resolution welcoming the substantive report. The resolution had 166 co-sponsors which was a signal that member states welcomed Secretary-General’s thought leadership and his efforts to bring them together to address some of our major global challenges.

Conversations such as this one with civil society are a crucial part of the equation. This is a report for everyone and it will take everyone to bring its ideas to fruition. It builds on and seeks to accelerate the SDGs, not to distract from them.

There are also new ideas in the report not so deeply embedded in the SDGs or elsewhere that will need further consideration. For instance, the Secretary-General has signaled his intention to appoint a High Level Advisory Board on Global Public Goods on how to develop, manage and protect our critical global commons. As endorsed in an editorial just published in “Nature”, he also plans to establish a Scientific Advisory Board in recognition of the incredibly important role that data and science play in supporting global decision-making.
There are a host of ideas that take into account the needs and rights of future generations in all of our decision-making. While encouraging member states to consider establishing national mechanisms for the future like others have done, the Secretary-General proposes to appoint a Special Envoy for Future Generations to speak for future generations in global decision-making.

The report also suggests a Summit of the Future in 2023. In the next two years a considerable amount of additional substantive work will need to be done on the many proposals in the report through different tracks and different sets of actors to enable member states and other stakeholders to negotiate a summit outcome. While this is for member states to decide, our general idea is that this summit wouldn't necessarily be a stand-alone summit but rather take place in the context of the UNGA in September 2023.

All of these ideas are for discussion, they are not a fait accompli. The report is designed to be the beginning of the conversation not the end. We are in the process of listening to member states as they digest the report, and listening to civil society to hear your reactions about charting a way forward. The Secretary-General has now given his ideas to the world and he is very much looking forward to seeing how the world reacts.

**Q&A**

The OCA report is not a UN reform report about changing institutions, it is about changing behavior and mind sets. It’s about solidarity and trust. It’s about how a huge range of actors coming together to solve global problems.

On the question about future generations, she noted that the UN Charter opens with a promise to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. The report makes very clear that were we writing that sentence today, we would surely be making a much broader promise to succeeding generations to save them from a whole range of scourges, of which climate change and pandemics are but two, some of which we cannot probably foresee. There are more than ten billion people yet to be born in this century and the vast majority of those will be born in Africa and Asia. It is to those succeeding generations that we really dedicate this report.
H.E. Mr. Agustín Santos Maraver, Ambassador, Permanent Mission of Spain

The General Assembly adopted a resolution last October in support of the OCA report against the backdrop of multiple crises including the pandemic, a world recession, climate change, rearmament linked to new political tensions, and the crisis of multilateralism which has not been able to produce answers or guide us. On 11 March 2020, the Secretary-General made a speech presenting the challenges of the pandemic. It took four months for the Security Council to pass a resolution in support of the Secretary-General's emergency plan. It took another two months for the General Assembly to adopt a resolution. By that time we had 2 million deaths because of the pandemic and 16 countries had defaulted on their debt.

There will be winners and losers in this crisis. We have regions of the world with 80% vaccinated and other regions with only 7% vaccinated. The question of inequality comes in as a central point. We were so happy that the rate of poverty had been decreasing for the past 20 years, yet in just one year we have had 130 million people fall into extreme poverty. As the report states: we are going to have a breakthrough or a breakdown.

Rebuilding the idea of progress, building confidence again in our capacity to solve these existential crises is the key question of this debate. Multilateralism is a permanent diplomatic conference. We need the pressure from above like the OCA report and we need pressure from social movements. Without the fight for freedom of belief in the 17th century, and against slavery and colonization in later centuries, we wouldn't be here. We need a massive social movement that demands change to the idea of one single humanity and collective progress, so that we leave our children a better world.

The General Assembly debates are the perfect place to start. We have the Group of Friends that needs to take the agenda to start the discussion. We have the three summits on education, the future, and the social agenda in 2025. Finally, we need to rebuild confidence and to do that we need a world vaccination campaign within the next year, otherwise we won't have the trust of the people to debate about longer-term problems. We need a very serious discussion to find solutions on financing the defaults of many countries. In parallel we must continue the General Assembly debates about the OCA.
Beckie Malay, Convenor, Global Call to Action Against Poverty, the Philippines

It is very important to hear the poorest and excluded: farmers, fisher folk, rural women & youth, excluded castes and those discriminated by work & descent, everybody who has become invisible because of inequalities. We live in different spaces and time zones but we share a common home, the earth, which seems to be beeping out loud in an emergency call, but only a few of us can hear. We are at a time of overlapping crises of health, social divisions, climate change impacts, conflict and economic recession which have shown us how structural inequalities have barred us from achieving the SDGs and Agenda 2030.

We are in a situation where the poorest countries are not able to access vaccines while the pharmaceutical countries make a profit of $1,000 USD per second from its sales. The WTO patents of these vaccines and therapeutics have not been lifted to permit southern countries to manufacture them.

We need universal social protection measures that will not tie the poorest countries in deep debt to the IFIs and the MDBs. Debt relief measures must be given to the poor and indebted countries, including the moderately indebted ones, to enable the redistribution of wealth among nations. Technology and innovation must also be democratized because tech companies continue to enjoy enormous profits from digitalization. It is important for governments to be able to plan sustainably but the technological divide remains within countries and between countries.

The 2030 Agenda remains a viable guiding framework to direct actions to be undertaken by states and governments at the local, national, regional and international levels. With the devastating impact of COVID on the economy, governments must meet the challenge to redefine more sustainable plans and measures beyond the GDP for building resiliency against natural and human-induced risks such as climate and conflicts. We need to focus on production and food systems. Hence we need to hear the voices that include small producers.

We live at a time where human rights, the most basic fundamental pillar of the UN, are threatened by growing restrictions by authoritarian regimes. We have to challenge that. We need to work together towards strengthening the role of civil society at the UN. These are very important aspects of the OCA report that will help give civil society a central role to be able to contribute very substantially and meaningfully in the intergovernmental processes from national to the UN level.

The OCA report is a welcome starter for us. This is very important because a renewed social contract based on trust must still be negotiated. We are hopeful and optimistic but people must continue to push for human rights as a central basis for our unity and solidarity.
We are in “polycrisis” where crises are happening all at once as an integral part and consequence of the Anthropocene. We are confronting threats to human security such as Covid, climate change and problems related to increasing inequalities, while at the same time confronting threats to traditional peace and security such as increasing geopolitical tensions, nuclear & conventional arms proliferation, cyber threats and the militarization of outer space.

Both the causes and possible solutions to each threat are multidimensional and interconnected. The means at our disposal are frameworks such as the UN Charter, UDHR, 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement, and international institutions such as the UN, IFIs, regional organizations, G20/G7/BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organization and NATO.

It is within this context that the Secretary-General has introduced his OCA report. In the report we would agree with its emphasis on women, youth and future generations, as well as the need for a new social contract both nationally and globally. However there are elements that are more worrisome like a new multistakeholder approach that would emphasize partnerships over intergovernmental bodies that adopt binding treaties holding member states accountable through the UN where civil society engagement is guaranteed. The proposal to establish an ad hoc body like the Emergency Platform for dealing with emerging global crises leaves it up to the Secretary-General to select the participants each time with no provisions for decision-making and implementation by member states within the intergovernmental process. Alternatively, FOGGS has proposed a new standing body like a Global Resilience Council to deal with issues that don’t fall under the Security Council.

As active global citizens we should provide critical support for OCA proposals but no blanket endorsements. We need to consult with and mobilize people and our constituencies at all levels to formulate a civil society “golden package” that includes elements not covered in the OCA report. Finally, we should work with the Secretary-General, the General Assembly President, member states and groups of states, in a problem-solving, transparent and constructive spirit.
Javier Surasky, Governance for Development Coordinator, Cepei

We need to engage in the OCA report from multiple perspectives and levels in a coherent way exploring synergies between the OCA proposals, the 2030 Agenda implementation and the efforts to build forward better, that includes the UNDS reform process.

The C4UN regional consultations gathered last June across five regions with two dedicated youth consultations in the Asia-Pacific & GRULAC regions to debate how to further the twelve commitments made in the UN75 Declaration. The outputs of the seven regional workshops were included in a unified report that included useful recommendations to feed the OCA process. The consultations flagged issues such as reforming global financial governance in the field of taxation, illicit financial flows, external debt and ODA, the harmful impacts of corruption on democratic governance and rule of law, democratic fragility, the rise of inequalities, the violence committed against human rights & environmental leaders, the depredation of financial systems, and the need to move towards a more inclusive globalization, amongst others. The results of the C4UN regional meetings clearly reflect the urgency of action. Now is the time to think in the long-term and to be better prepared for the challenges ahead. Now is the time for a more robust, more networked and inclusive multilateral system anchored within the UN.

The OCA report provides a set of concrete proposals organized under four pillars on how to move towards a UN able to keep abreast of the times and uphold the commitments that its member states have made. While we have been outstanding in identifying problems, we have been much less effective in proposing concrete real world solutions. To paraphrase Secretary-General Guterres, now is the time to fill that gap.

In 2022, the C4UN will organize a second round of regional consultations. The upcoming regional dialogues will likely be concurrent with the deliberation of governments in the General Assembly over the specific modalities for the consideration of the OCA report. We should ensure that the channels will be open at that time to send the ideas and recommendations of the regional consultations directly to the GA.

For future actions, the OCA report focuses on the 2023 Summit of the Future and the 2025 World Social Summit. However, there are other key meetings taking place in the coming months that should also be linked to the OCA process. For example, the Stockholm+50 summit will gather in 2022 to review environmental issues at the core of the international agenda. We should make sure to connect the dots.

To make the OCA promises a reality, civil society should engage in the UNDS reform process at the national and global levels. Without more efficient and effective sustainable development delivery it will be impossible to fulfill the 2030 Agenda or the OCA commitments.
Civil society should guarantee that every international meeting properly considers how its decisions could be transformed into action which impacts actions taken in other fields. Civil society should make visible the bridge between different international debates. In order to do this, we need to act based on data. The problems we are confronting have made the trial and error methodology outdated for designing policies for social change. We need to make informed and action-oriented decisions. We need to be proactive in finding and pushing for concrete solutions to actual problems.

The UN is not only a place where states and stakeholders meet to take decisions on issues of common concern. It is not a set of buildings around the world or an international organization. The UN is about a bold idea, a beautiful and necessary dream of a different world that is well worth striving for. The OCA opens a new window of opportunities to pursue that dream. No matter how difficult it would be, we should keep the light of the future shining. In dark times it is more necessary than ever. In our time the ideal represented by the UN is the lighthouse showing the way home.
Participants were invited to discuss the OCA recommendations and proposals in six thematic breakout groups that focused on key priorities, missing elements and next steps on how we can move forward.

**YOUTH/FUTURE GENERATIONS**

Facilitated by Rory Mondshein, Coalition for the UN We Need & Siddharth Satish, International Association for Political Science Students, USA & Canada. Rapporteur Nudhara Yusuf, Stimson Center.

The OCA focus on Youth and Future Generations represent two distinct groups of agents, both of which are core commitments of the agenda’s focus on the future. The Envoy for Future Generations plays the important role of intergenerationally sharing the burden of accountability to the generations to come, which previously fell on youth advocates.

Youth representatives should be included in the development and management of the proposed UN Youth Office and its consultative mechanisms. Further, the UN Youth Office’s mandate must include integrating the work of young people across the UN, and mainstreaming their inputs in general UN decision making processes. It is important that the full diversity of youth constituencies be represented at the UN and be active participants not only as speakers at UN programs but in decision-making processes. This involves increasing access and awareness of UN Youth opportunities.

We need to identify pathways and develop mechanisms to localize the messages and goals of the OCA report to increase access of these narratives to the majority of youth populations. These efforts must occur in consultation with civil society groups, non-governmental organizations, schools, institutions and communication channels that already actively engage young people.
CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT

Facilitated by Enyseh Teimory, UNA-UK/Together First & Andreas Bummel, Democracy Without Borders. Rapporteur Rianna Nayee, UNA-UK.

While the OCA presents several key entry points for civil society, the OCA report is weak overall in terms of delivering proposals for ensuring more effective civil society participation in global decision-making. In addition to appointing more civil society focal points throughout the UN system, we need to continue to explore options for the appointment of a UN civil society envoy as mentioned in the report. Other proposals to promote that were not included in the report include the establishment of a World Citizens’ Initiative and a UN Parliamentary Assembly.

We need to think about how we engage diverse civil society voices at all levels. Civil society engagement needs to be far more meaningful than just being given two minutes to speak at official UN proceedings in New York or Geneva. Recommendations made to improve meaningful civil society participation at the UN by the UNmute Civil Society Coalition endorsed by over 60 member states should be implemented system-wide. Other mechanisms discussed for increasing civil society participation included the VNR process at the HLPF, and the engagement of national and regional constituencies through UN country offices and ECOSOC Regional Commissions.

Given the different rules of engagement of civil society & other stakeholders across intergovernmental organs, there is merit in the call for a general review to update resolution 1996/31, however there is a risk of going backwards. There is also the matter of budgetary implications to consider.
Facilitated by Maja Groff, Climate Governance Commission & Shirleen Chin, Green Transparency. Rapporteur, Mark Scheffer, Baha’i International Community.

Starting most broadly, there is a need for a shift of mindset. The solution is not just technical transitions, but consciously seeking to build new ways to address problems and finding new paradigms to look at them. The climate crisis is not the problem but is the symptom of a deeper problem of the destructive relationships between humanity, nature, politics and economics.

The idea that the climate crisis is to some degree a spiritual crisis was brought up. Corruption, self-interest and indifference to the suffering of others have very real world effects and need to be taken seriously. Participants also talked about the need for a legal paradigm shift linking the global environmental agency and rule of law package. On the legal recognition of the global commons, currently we look at the planet only in terms of national territories with only the leftovers recognized as global commons such as the high seas and Antarctica. We need tools to more formally manage the global commons.

Participants discussed the need to quantify climate impacts of given actions and policies, the interface between climate issues and other thematic issues like peace and security, the role of military spending and diverting funds that could be used more productively, and the carbon footprint of militaries. Also this idea of human security being conceptualized much more broadly and holistically in terms of well-being and flourishing.

The interface between OCA and other frameworks like UNFCCC, Glasgow and the Paris Agreement and how these different processes can reinforce and not duplicate one another, were discussed. Also discussed was the need to recognize in practice the linkages between all peoples of the world, as demonstrated so clearly through Covid, and adopting a systems perspective to get beyond silos. There is also the transformation of structures and systems by recognizing the critical role of gender equality in climate action, addressing the role of patriarchy in reproducing destructive power structures, and drawing on the contributions of women.

Finally, advocates discussed the need to speak with a common message from civil society to member states and better identify leverage points & paths for change in our advocacy at the UN.
Facilitated by Alyn Ware, Parliamentarians for Nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament. Rapporteur Fergus Watt, Coalition for the UN We Need

The Our Common Agenda (OCA) does not contain a lot of detailed proposals on peace issues. Peace is framed as a “global public good.” The OCA calls for a new Agenda for Peace focusing on six core areas: reducing strategic risks; strengthening international foresight; reshaping responses to all forms of violence; investing in prevention and peacebuilding; supporting regional organizations; and putting women & girls at the center of security policy. The OCA also calls for new efforts to secure peaceful use of outer space; a roadmap for the development and effective implementation of international law; a Strategic Foresight and Risk Report.

The original 1992 Agenda for Peace report released by Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall framed the key concepts of a peace continuum that are still relevant as guideposts for the UN’s actions in the peace field, namely “preventive diplomacy,” “peacemaking,” “peacekeeping” and post-conflict “peacebuilding.”

The OCA’s relatively open-ended call for a new “Agenda for Peace” is an opportunity for civil society to influence outcomes on a wider scale. Social science approaches that explore the underlying psychological causes of violence are often ignored. Reviving the UN “Culture of Peace” approach would be worthwhile. Also, broader security concepts, like “Common Security” and “Human Security” need to be strengthened in the new Agenda for Peace.

Another approach to strengthening UN efforts to promote peace is to focus on individual responsibility (i.e. the allowable conduct and legal responsibilities of the individual vs those of the state). These approaches include strengthening the International Criminal Court, the Responsibility to Protect, and linking the UN human rights machinery more closely with maintenance of peace and security. Many of the proposals from recent UN reports should also be re-visited, the SG’s 2018 Agenda for Disarmament, “Securing Our Common Future”, and the SG’s recent reports on “Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace.”

Greater UN “standing” capacities (permanent individually-recruited personnel) for UN peace operations should be explored. Current reliance on the standby system (personnel on loan from member states) of generating peace operations capacities leads to deployment delays, inconsistent standards and training, and occasionally abuses in the field. Standing forces would better support rapid deployment, often needed for prevention of conflict.
Strengthening the work of regional organizations to promote peace can also be part of a new Agenda for Peace. The session discussed efforts to reduce nuclear tensions in NE Asia. ECOWAS, the OSCE, the AU have all played effective roles promoting peace in a regional context.

Financing of UN peace work requires greater support and attention. Preventive approaches, UN mediation and conflict resolution, as well as UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding are all under-funded. The $2 trillion spent on global military expenditures was contrasted with the $6 billion the UN spends on peace operations.

The Institute for Economics and Peace estimates that the economic costs of violence are in the neighborhood of $15 trillion annually. COVID is changing views on economic progress. Society is increasingly prioritizing a range of “resiliency-building” policies. The OCA’s call for different metrics to measure social and economic progress should be encouraged.

Support is also growing for steps to reduce corruption, such as a progressive global tax and an anti-corruption court. The OCA invitation to consider elements of the post-2030 agenda is an opportunity to strengthen efforts to promote peace and end violence in the context of sustainable development programming.
The Secretary-General has called for a renewed social contract anchored in human rights as the necessary foundation for us to work together. On renewing the social contract, it was pointed out that a recent 15-year study of global protests in 101 countries conducted by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) in New York and the Initiative for Policy Dialogue (IPD) at Columbia University found that calls for real democracy was the most of any demand found by the researchers, followed by protests against inequality, corruption and lack of action against climate change. The activism of citizens and social movements in response to social and economic inequalities as a means to increasing trust is itself a barometer of the relative health of a democracy.

The OCA report highlights policies that seek to provide solutions to the root causes of inequality that include a strong commitment to human rights, decent work and universal social protection floors, health coverage and digital connectivity. The report also calls for economic models that account for the environment, debt relief, and strengthening the international trade system. Macroeconomic measures include rethinking GDP, using taxation to reduce extreme inequalities in wealth, and a Biennial Summit between the G20, ECOSOC, SG and IFIs.

Participants discussed the consequences of economic inequality through the lens of their national and local experience working with immigrants and discriminated populations forced to work menial jobs in the informal economy. Participants highlighted the importance of connecting the OCA discourse with those populations most affected by the inequalities that the OCA report seeks to address. From the perspective of Africa, the generational inequalities inherent in the global economic system as a consequence of 500 years of enslavement and colonial rule have not been adequately acknowledged as a basis to critique and reform the multilateral system. Structurally speaking, how can social movements effectively influence the multilateral system where might makes right?

The report does not address the history of injustice that has created an economic system that exploits planet and people where whole sectors of the population are left in situations of exclusion and poverty because it benefits the elite. The OCA purports to be practical but doesn’t take an accurate temperature of our times. Populations are more divided than ever in this century.
Without systemic reform and genuine engagement of citizens, the lack of trust between governments and their people will not be overcome. We need to democratize our economies, break up monopolies and strengthen unions. While inequalities afflict all countries, the impacts of Covid and climate change on those most vulnerable and least responsible calls for a universal set of principles that advocate for a more equal policy across the board. Data needs to be a part of the conversation, including more disaggregated data. Indigenous people need to be at the forefront of the climate issue.

We need strong leadership from the Secretary-General to help keep member states accountable. We need more investment that expands space and agency for people to affect the decision-making processes of the UN. While there are proposals to appoint a High-level advisory board and a repurposed Trusteeship Council, we need more effective mechanisms for the UN to listen to the people, especially at the grassroots level.
In terms of the agendas and processes leading up to the Summit of the Future and the World Social Summit, there were five broad takeaways to share. First, there were questions of inclusion. We as civil society have the responsibility to put ourselves out there. How do we reach out to each other, how do we partner in unique and distinctive ways, engaging in dialogue to overcome issues of mistrust? What opportunities can be created for civil society to be consulted and to meaningfully contribute to the agenda in those spaces?

Second, were questions related to organization and developing an agenda both in terms of the processes and actual summits themselves. There were points raised about how we can create a system where civil society can bring together all of these ideas and processes that we have to organize and galvanize around those and share them with others to develop a robust consensus.

C4UN has discussed Multilateral Innovation Hubs, so what can we do to ensure that these are consulted upon in a non-adversarial way to generate consensus? There seems to be some broad consensus around ideas like a World Citizens’ Initiative, the UNPA, the Civil Society Envoy, so we can begin to think concretely on ways to move forward. Also recognizing some of the elements of building coherence while recognizing that there is a diversity of approach.

Third, about the importance of media in bringing to light some of these issues that we’re thinking about as we move toward these important processes. A fourth point was not forgetting to build upon those mechanisms that already exist. We have lessons from history in which civil society really played a remarkable transformative role. For example, what lessons can we learn from the campaign to ban landmines to move forward in this particular moment? What can we learn from those before us who have challenged the status quo that has led us to this point?

Finally, as we plan for the summits proposed to take place in 2023 and 2025 together with processes leading up to it, how can we be more creative in thinking of new ways and discussing things that many would say are impossible and not just what’s realistic, to challenge underlying assumptions. The many challenges and our interconnected realities are really challenging us to think that what was once viewed as an idealistic dream or a utopian reality is actually pragmatic.
Wrap-Up by Maria Fernanda Espinosa, C4UN Co-Chair
The quality, depth and creativity of the discussions and interactions went way beyond expectations. We are going to have a summary of these amazing ideas that came out of the conversations in the different groups. We can listen to ourselves which will fill us up with more energy, drive and commitment. We need to be creative, bold, audacious. Be one step ahead and not behind, we need to be proactive, we need to move beyond the status quo. We need to ask for the impossible. The response to this dystopian reality has to be to come up with new utopias and new paradigms. I am sure that the very rich material of today’s forum will serve the purpose of coming up with these shared narratives.

Perhaps the lesson from what I heard is the need to land, to shape our common strategy and the tactics that we are going to use. The only way is to work together. This is a collective effort and I heard loud and clear the need to democratize the voices from civil society, to listen to grassroots organizations, look at the community level, at local and national governments. These voices have to be brought to the international arena. The idea that civil society goes beyond NGOs, to build this international, transformative movement for multilateralism is also one of the lessons of today. We need action. We also heard that the OCA is a first step as a point of departure from which we can build to take the agenda of multilateralism 2.0 forward.

Addendum on C4UN Survey Results on Our Common Agenda
As a registration option to both the November 30 C4UN Roundtable and the December 8 Global People’s Forum, C4UN requested participants to fill out a survey based on the Secretary-General's "Our Common Agenda". Twenty participants filled out the survey, and while this number is insufficient to make any conclusive statements, it has provided useful information.

There were only two areas where it seems there is a clear focus for the C4UN and those are:
Participants indicated that we should be investing most of our energy in 'proposals for a United Nations more suited to the 21st century' (as opposed to the global new deal, succeeding generations and the like). We should focus our energy on the Summit for the Future.
While a number of responses seemed to indicate strong preferences for certain areas of focus, two proposals - high level advisory board and multistakeholder engagement - received concurrently the most "most energy" votes and the most "least energy" votes.

In the subjective responses C4UN survey-takers indicate a preference for a focus on matters related to the future (summit of the future, declaration on future generations, and the structural elements of a broken system) more so than anything else. In terms of areas where we should not be lending support, some respondents said we should support everything, while others were concerned about the politically fraught issues such as the trusteeship council, high level advisory panels, and a more central role for the private sector.

Five common C4UN proposals were listed in a manner that participants could indicate whether we should continue to advocate for them. While the variability was quite small (average rating ranged from 6.6 to 7.6), it appears that the civil society envoy and global resilience council retain the most support while the UNPA may be too politically challenging at this time.

Finally, and perhaps most usefully, there were a large number of 'missing' issues identified by those taking the survey. These are worthy of future consideration and include (non-exhaustively): finance of the UN, envoy for democracy, anti-corruption court, digital finance, international rule of law package, a more robust peace analysis, centering other key issues like feminist analysis, values, and sovereignty.

One can draw a number of conclusions from even this basic analysis which will be important for the future direction of C4UN. Firstly, there is still quite a bit to discuss. We haven't reached a shared understanding of the OCA (for example, there is likely nebulousness about "multistakeholder engagement") and, as a result, it is hard to build consensus. Some say the OCA is wonderful as it stands, others express hesitation in terms of its utility. Ultimately, this means we should:

Maintain our position as a 'big tent' coalition that allows a diversity of voices to co-exist at once. This is necessary for both our legitimacy among coalition members and to demonstrate the reality of our diversity.

We should be hosting more spaces for deeper discussion on the general approach of the OCA, the specific proposals contained therein, and on what other steps we might wish to see going forward.

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