

Summary: “UN@75 & Agenda 2030: For Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement”

Friday, 28 June 2019, Baha’i International Community UN Office

Co-sponsors: NGO Committee on Sustainable Development-NY, UN2020 & Together First

Session Objectives:

- Explore the opportunities for civil society collaboration with the UN’s world-wide dialogues on UN@75
- Consider the potential of UN@75 as a platform to curate proposals to strengthen the UN system
- Leverage the synergies and complementarities among and between major UN anniversaries and agreements taking place in 2020 for “Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement.”

This session was recorded and is available on [UN2020’s website](#)

Following a welcome and opening remarks by Margo LaZaro, President and Chair of NGO Committee on Sustainable Development-NY Executive Board, she mentioned that the passion that our presenters and respondents have in support of this topic reflects the motto of NGOCS-D-NY: “Turn Your Passions into Actions for Change.” She turned the program over to the meeting’s co-sponsors and moderators Jeffery Huffines of CIVICUS and Natalie Samarasinghe of Together First. Natalie thanked both Margo and Jeffery for the opportunity to hold this meeting following the successful session one week earlier at the UN secretariat. She introduced the theme of the discussion and outlined the outcomes of the recently adopted GA resolution that mandated the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the UN. Jeffery introduced the session objectives. The two-hour dialogue featured three presentations followed by 5 NGO respondents. After the first round of remarks, the moderators opened the floor for an interactive discussion which included participants who joined the conversation remotely via Zoom.

Remarks by H.E. Dr. Michal Mlynár, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Permanent Mission of Slovakia to the UN.

At a time when there has been a move away from multilateralism, we must remain united by redoubling our commitment to multilateralism. The “3 Ps” are most important: people, participation and partnerships. We must involve as many stakeholders as possible, especially youth. Partnerships are crucial. Given the scale, scope and complexity of the SDGs, no one sector can do it alone, whether it be government, business, civil society or academia. Dialogue about sustainable development leading to action must be inclusive and collaborative. Broad involvement in decision-making through partnerships will unleash innovative ways of working. Through co-creation, we share risks and responsibilities.

As Co-Chair of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the General Assembly (AHWG), together with the Permanent Representative of Jordan, Ambassador Mlynár advised that Member States are negotiating a GA resolution that will include a provision that supports the recently adopted modalities resolution on the 75th anniversary of the UN in 2020. After 75 years of experience with the UN, we still have much to learn. In Slovakia, there is a saying that the wise learn from other people’s mistakes. We must embrace multilateral approaches, recognize the importance of innovation and technology, and support multistakeholder engagement, including from the private sector.

Remarks by Fabrizio Hochschild, Special Adviser of the Secretary-General for the Commemoration of the UN’s 75th Anniversary

We are living in a time of massive contradictions. The global challenges that we are facing are more acute than ever in terms of the planet and climate change where the Paris commitments are not being met. Regional conflicts are more protracted while civilian deaths in conflict are up. Superpower rivalry is increasing, leaving many UN processes paralyzed. We are not in a great place to meet the SDGs. While there have been many important advances in the past 50 years, life expectancy is now going down in some countries.

By definition these global challenges are a threat to our children and grandchildren. Will the positive trends of the last 50 years continue or is our continued progress in jeopardy? How do we revitalize the conviction that multilateralism is the key to working together through global problem solving?

The Secretary-General wants to initiate a global dialogue outside the New York bubble to interrogate the discrepancy between the future we want and what the world might look like in 25 years if the major trends of climate change, protracted conflict, demographics and disruptive technology are left unchecked in the absence of global cooperation. What sort of international institutions and partnerships do we need to meet the global challenges confronting humanity?

In the months ahead, the UN@75 will develop a toolkit with questions to guide the global debate, along with a feedback loop to inform Member States, UN agencies and the public about the outcomes generated by these dialogues.

Remarks by Maher Nasser, Director, Outreach Division, UN Department of Global Communications

The UN@75 dialogues need to be tied to the first three words of the UN Charter, “We the Peoples” as a two-way partnership. Many have complained that the UN is too political, that we did not know how to engage with the UN and the MDGs. But now the SDGs have given us a new platform to engage people and their concerns worldwide. Because of the SDGs more constituencies are coming to the UN to partner, including the private sector.

The UN is much more than this building in New York, with 37,505 staff comprising the secretariat worldwide, over half of them in field operations. UN agencies such as UNICEF provide 45% of the world’s children with vaccinations. The people, partnerships and the planet are under tremendous stress. Almost half of all species living today will be extinct by the end of the century with the oceans becoming increasingly acidic.

Communications is our business, so the question is how do we translate the programs of the UN into language that people will understand? Facts and figures don’t change people’s hearts, but stories do. Therefore, the UN@75 toolkit needs an element of story-telling. We also must gather the outcomes of these dialogues to present to global decision-makers and the public.

The millennials and Generation Z have reenergized the climate action movement, they care intensely about their future. As the Secretary-General has often said, there is no planet B. We must step up to the challenge.

NGO Respondents

Jeffery Huffines introduced the NGO respondents asking how NGOs may best utilize UN75 to coordinate and synergize among and between the ongoing global agendas in 2020 like the SDGs and Paris Agreement, as well as the UN anniversaries such as Beijing+25 and Copenhagen+25. How may we use UN75 as a pivot to consider ways to further strengthen the UN system as a means to achieve the SDGs by 2030?

Daniel Perell of the Baha’i International Community and NGO Major Group asked, where is humanity going? What are we trying to achieve? Perhaps we are feeling a little bit lost. The UN represents the second great attempt at global governance. UN75 offers us an opportunity to ask the deeper questions. For example, perhaps our development model is built upon questionable assumptions. Are material means equivalent to development? Can you really have sustainably imposed development? Development must mean more than “to the victor go the spoils”. UN75 offers us the opportunity to ask how we may build an international system based upon the principles of sustainable development, peace and human rights.

Barbara Adams of the Global Policy Forum emphasized the importance of taking a holistic approach to multilateralism and Agenda 2030. We should not pick and choose among the SDGs that we like most to the neglect of others. It is unfortunate that the Member States have moved towards more of a voluntary system of global governance. The UN is based on norms and standards with a mandate to improve human rights. We should not support the multistakeholder approach now being used by Member States to the extent that it undermines human rights. Many people struggling to survive require access to public services and a functioning democratic system that does not rely upon a voluntary system of stakeholder engagement. We do not pay our taxes to Greenpeace, nor do we ask Unilever to deliver public goods.

Barbara was encouraged to hear that the UN@75 approach will be strategic, that we are not asking people to just celebrate the UN. Looking at recent history, the My World 2030 survey was a failure. People cannot be asked to rank the SDGs, or to pick and choose among them, because they are all connected. The 2030 Agenda isn’t just a development agenda to deliver ODA. The 2030 Agenda represents a post-colonial development agenda that provides a space for accountability to tackle inequalities and power imbalances.

Soon-Young Yoon of WEDO and International Alliance of Women emphasized the importance of making the connection between UN@75 and Beijing+25 being organized by UN Women. The year 2020 will be the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, the 20th anniversary of UNSC resolution on women, peace and security, and the 10th anniversary of the establishment of UN Women. The roadmap to Beijing+25 will include regional preparatory meetings in Fall 2019 to feed into CSW64 in March 2020, followed by Beijing+25 conferences in Mexico City in April 2020 and in Paris in July 2020 with satellite events in countries around the world.

The UN@75 overview is a very good start, but everyone is going to ask, what next? What kind of action can we take? For Beijing+25, it is the Beijing Platform for *Action*, not *Dialogue*. What is 2020 going to look like? On January 2021, what will we have to show for all of our effort? We need to make the connection to the global consensus agreements of the 1990s which many youths today don't know about.

Soon-Young shared three Beijing+25 projects. Civil society organizations will be asked to (1) develop parallel reports in the lead up to Beijing+25, (2) contribute to online books to gather memories and stories of what people did in Beijing in 1995 and after, and (3) participate in the Cities for CEDAW campaign. She suggested that there could be another book for UN@75 entitled Thank You United Nations. She also suggested that there should be a citizens' movement in support of better financing for the UN.

Eleanor Blomstrom of the International Women's Health Coalition characterized the alarming rise of nationalism, populism, capitalism, consumerism and militarism as the scary "isms" we must now confront. Only through a more robust multilateralism will the UN be able to stop these trends. She expressed appreciation for the effort that UN@75 is making to engage the voices of ordinary people, highlighting the importance of engaging social movements as well.

Eleanor advised that just as Beijing+25 is seeking to identify the gaps and challenges in the achievement of the Beijing Platform for Action, UN75 is an opportunity to do the same with regard to UN system. She placed the HLPF review to take place during the next session of the GA within the broader context of ongoing UN reform, hoping that it will give a jolt to strengthening UN governance as an important means of implementing the 2030 Agenda. NGOs need to coordinate their messaging and advocacy during the GA negotiations of both the HLPF review and the UN75 political declaration beginning this autumn.

Eleanor Openshaw of the International Service for Human Rights noted that human rights are at the center of the UN project. Vital as it is, the partnership between political bodies and civil society is highly contested. The UN@75 conversation needs to be clear about how civil society participation at the UN can be managed so people will feel that they may participate effectively and securely without fear of reprisals. With the Human Rights Council review (2021-2026) and treaty body strengthening on the agenda in 2020, UN@75 is an important opportunity to draw the strands of UN reform efforts together, to restate key principles, and ensure that rights-holders be at the center of every conversation.

Discussion

Participants spoke about the importance of translating UN programs, plans of action and reform processes into language that millennials and ordinary people can understand. Otherwise, the UN is in danger of losing its relevance. Ambassador Mlynár made the distinction between a values-based vs. rules-based international order, observing that while most Member States can agree on a set of universal values, the same cannot be said for the rules to be used to govern the international community. Rather than feeling lost, perhaps we are all feeling overwhelmed.

There were questions about civil society participation in the 75th anniversary commemorative events. Others highlighted the need to further define the impacts and outcomes for UN@75 as a launching pad for future initiatives if the full participation of civil society is to be realized. Rather than directing the proposed global dialogues towards a predetermined outcome, UN@75 is an opportunity to create the political space to ask the difficult questions about the global governance framework.

There was also a discussion about how the proposed UN@75 global dialogues should be conducted, in particular the methodology proposed by Missions Publiques to guide a structured dialogue with a representative cross-section of citizens from around the world to generate proposed solutions to the global challenges confronting political decision-makers.

Remote Participation

Several questions and comments from remote participants require further consideration:

- Which of the UN Members are supporting this process? Will they work with the UN Secretariat to support these global dialogues?
- Are there limits on this process as to how much rethinking of the U.N. can be proposed? Can we rethink the need for a new vision of the U.N. that is built on the sustainability of the planet rather than the current vision of preventing wars and encouraging peace among nations?
- When do we expect the toolkit(s) to be prepared?
- How is the UN going to make sure that in 2020 all the countries have young people represented, since they are the drivers of sustainable development?

- While the UN sets aspirational goals e.g. UDHR, MDGs, SDGs; all these must be tied to an action that a regular citizen can relate to and incorporate in their daily life. A single action can be linked to a single SDG. The “17 SDG’s 17 simple actions: a global movement”.
- We should use the climate threat as the organizing principle for UN75 – obtain a credible, science-based description of how severe climate change will blow apart current security systems including the UN and design UN reform and revitalization plans accordingly.
- The Academic Council of the United Nations System has dedicated its 2020 Annual Meeting in London to: “The UN@75: The Future of Partnership and Multilateralism”. The call for papers is being drafted. Focus will be on trust and trust building. Further to Mr. Hochschild’s reference to “hope and vision”, it would also be important to include “trust”.
- 2020 has been declared the International Year of the Nurse by WHO.
- Storytelling is key: *Let There Be Light International* has developed an animated story to demonstrate the impacts of energy on vulnerable off-grid families across the health, safety, and educational silos. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GswnSWZuhcs>
- The Global Commons Alliance is laying the groundwork for the Common Home of Humanity initiative for a law-based global environmental governance.

Margo LaZaro closed the meeting by thanking the presenters and the respondents for sharing their reflections along with Jeffery and Natalie for successfully moderating the session. She also thanked everyone both in the room and via Zoom for their interactive participation. She said the NGOCS-D-NY looks forward to further engagement with everyone to support this process and the discussions continuing while suggesting that future meetings have a more inclusive group of civil society representation to share in the inter-active dialogue, including global youth participants for inter-generational exchanges along with a balance of other stakeholders to share their perspectives. She acknowledged with thanks Jocelyn Jayasooria of UN2020 and Funmi with NGOCS-D-NY for their support throughout the meeting.