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## CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE UN WE NEED

### **Response to the Elements Paper**

*20 April 2020*

Initiated in 2017, the UN2020 Campaign is focused on leveraging the UN's 75th anniversary to take stock and strengthen the United Nations system so that it may better cope with existing and emerging global challenges, in support of a people-centered multilateralism. We take this opportunity to thank the co-facilitators for their Elements Paper released on 9 April and provide a response to it that includes proposed language as well as key recommendations.

Civil society stands ready to collaborate and share our vision with the world and its governments as they prepare for the UN75 World Leaders Summit on 21 September this year. To this end, UN2020 has undertaken a global, multi-sectoral, cross-regional dialogue to develop a coherent civil society vision for a strengthened UN system. The outcome of this dialogue will be reflected in a "UN75 People's Declaration and Plan of Action" which will be released on 14 May 2020 at the online UN75 People's Forum for the UN We Need.

As the Declaration and Plan of Action drafting process is ongoing, this response provides an early indication of key principles and proposals likely to be featured in the final version. We request the UN75 co-facilitators and all Member States to consider these inputs in their negotiations of the 'zero draft' of their Political Declaration.

#### *Language for "Acknowledging Achievements and Looking Ahead"*

At a time when change is progressing at a pace and scale unparalleled in human history, we can and must lay the foundation for a better path for humanity. A world-encompassing health crisis has shaken the global order to its core and demonstrated our true interconnectedness and interdependence. No community is immune and we can no longer behave as if our current institutions are sufficient to secure our future. Like the United Nations arising from the ashes of World War II, our response to this challenge has the potential to transform global governance to reflect a new reality.

The window for bold, coordinated action to improve global governance is open. Crucially, we need steadfast, inclusive and sustained political leadership to address obstacles head-on and rebuild the bonds of trust and compassion between institutions and citizens around the world through democratic values. We must unite and harness our ideas, networks, and resources to better support all nations and peoples to overcome current challenges by transcending social and political boundaries.

At the heart of the solutions to today's challenges lies a sincere commitment to adopt a renewed posture of collaboration, innovation, and action. The paradigm of "us versus them" can no longer meet our needs and an understanding of "we the peoples" is clearly emerging as growing numbers recognize our global interdependence. We call for a strengthened international system based on the interwoven bonds that tie individuals, communities and institutions at all levels and grounded in agreed international human rights frameworks. To do so, governments must commit to transparency, inclusion, and collaboration, while all must be prepared to work constructively and in good faith for the common benefit of all.

### *Language for "Delivering on Commitments and Responding to Global Challenges"*

For this section, we highlight three essential action points which should be included in the political declaration. These action points are accompanied by an annex which includes a number of other recommendations that correspond to the eleven issues listed in the Elements Paper (plus one other issue).

**Ensure that UN75 is a catalyst for a follow-on global governance reform process by establishing an Independent Commission on Global Governance.** This Commission needs to undertake a detailed examination of global challenges and identify options to make the UN more fit for purpose and truly representative of "we the peoples." The goal of the Commission is to help usher in a new compact for renewed global governance and to rebuild confidence in global institutions. The outcome of this endeavor would be geared explicitly for adoption by the General Assembly and the implementation of its recommendations. Other recommendations in the annex include Independent Panels of Experts or other such bodies which would feed into this Independent Commission so as to ensure coherence across themes.

**Expand modalities for civic engagement.** At this time of crisis, it is all the more important that governments ensure the protection of human rights, fundamental freedoms, and civic space. Moreover, meeting new and compounding global challenges and opportunities demands inclusive and open mechanisms for meaningful civil society participation at all levels including the UN. Specific proposals include a dedicated civil society focal point at the Under-Secretary-General level; increased use of communications technology to enhance transparency and participation; and implementing a World Citizens' Initiative whereby a critical mass of individuals representative of world regions could petition the UN to respond to pressing issues.

**Fully fund the United Nations.** We call on Member States to fulfill their treaty obligations to pay their dues to the United Nations in full and on time. The shortfall of funding to achieve the ambitious agenda of the United Nations is but one dimension of the ongoing threat to multilateralism. The fiscal response to the current pandemic demonstrates that lack of resources is not to blame - there is enough money - it is that the United Nations has not been prioritized. Moreover, Member State contributions are assessed and allocated using an arcane and opaque set of rules that have failed to generate adequate funding for the UN's work. A wide-ranging review and reform of the means for providing essential funding of the United Nations system should be mandated. More specific recommendations can be found under item (xi) in the annex.

### *Language for "Building Consensus and mobilizing for change"*

Where section one articulates the 'vision' of the future and section two the main areas of concern, section three turns to the means of implementation. In this light, the following enabling conditions are central to

lasting progress and a just international order. **(1)** We should reaffirm that governance is a public service aimed at protecting human rights, promoting gender equality, and empowering all - especially those left furthest behind. **(2)** The current crisis demonstrates the necessity of an ethos of global citizenship and solidarity which ensures that the advancement of one population does not come at the expense of another, and contributes to the advancement of all. **(3)** Much of the needed language has already been articulated, and we must redouble our efforts at the implementation of United Nations agreements, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement, which represent a means to achieve societal transformation. This will require systemic changes to fulfill those agreements. **(4)** Sustained, transparent and accountable financing of the UN system is necessary in order for it to achieve what is expected. **(5)** Finally, people must be at the center of the work of the United Nations and its Member States. That means promoting inclusive, open, and fair decision making at all levels of governance informed by rigorous, disaggregated quantitative and qualitative data.

The global threats now confronting us are unprecedented, and the consequences of inaction are dire. This moment represents a rare window for humanity to imagine and create more effective institutional arrangements through a strengthened, people-centered, and values-driven global governance. Heads of state and leaders of government, must act now in solidarity with present and future generations to reassess the institutional assumptions and arrangements which have led us to this moment of profound social, economic, and environmental vulnerability. The need is clear: *The time has come to launch a rigorous, nonpartisan, transparent, and inclusive process to assess global governance gaps and to develop a coherent strategy to fill them.* Our diverse populations, nations, and cultures have the skills and resources to address the challenges before us. Governments should reaffirm the values and principles enshrined in the UN Charter and commit to implement long standing agreements on human rights, peace and sustainable development. These promises must be incorporated into the habits, assumptions, attitudes, metrics and institutions so central to realizing our collective potential. May future generations look back on 2020 as the year a threatened humanity determined, with one voice, to shed harmful legacies and move towards a collective paradigm of dignity and hope.

## Annex

In response to the eleven issue areas outlined in the Elements Paper, we have taken the liberty of sharing a few thoughts and proposals on each. Moreover, we have found another area - namely “**Rule of law, democracy & democratic deficit**” - to be worthy of further elaboration.

**i) Recovery from COVID-19/preparedness/building resilient systems and societies.** Our institutions are demonstrably ill-equipped to secure our future in an environment characterized by increased fragility, growing pressure on resources, and multiplying global risks. We must strengthen governing systems and the resilience of our societies, restoring real value in the legitimacy of institutions and public sector delivery based on the needs of communities and people. The direct impacts of the pandemic must be adequately addressed through global guidelines and norms, advanced research and development, monitoring and early warning systems, and the management of impacts across borders in order to strengthen the resilience of global supply chains and prevent the deepening of global inequality in the face of a crisis. We must ensure the universal provision of healthcare and other necessary services regardless of country or circumstance, and consistent with human rights, gender equality and inclusion.

**ii) Peace and security/ongoing conflicts/preventive diplomacy/non-proliferation and disarmament.** It is critical to address the growing threats to peace and increasing violence through accelerated collective action at all levels. At a country level, urgent support should be provided to advance a human-rights based preventive approach and the responsibility to protect agenda; prioritize early warning and early action across the international system; strengthen national capacities to identify vulnerabilities rapidly and adopt evidence-based solutions and policies at scale; and elevate the role of civil society and regional organizations in creating and sustaining peace alongside U.N. peace operations and across U.N.’s resident country teams. The UN Peacebuilding Commission should be upgraded into a Council with enhanced powers and responsibilities, and mandated to lead on policy development, coordination, resource mobilization, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding efforts not addressed directly by the Security Council. Equally vital is achieving the elimination of all nuclear as well as lethal autonomous weapons and weapons of mass destruction, and the abolition of state-sponsored war by the 100th anniversary of the UN in 2045. Working relations between the UN Security Council and International Criminal Court should also be improved.

**iii) Development/Decade of Action/FfD.** Our pandemic recovery efforts must include investments to propel us toward a more equal, inclusive, just and resilient world in the face of known and likely global threats. Sustained political leadership and transformative action at local, national and global levels, are needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change by 2030. This begins with strengthening the mandate of the High-level Political Forum to increase accountability and prioritize the perspectives of those furthest behind. Further, the United Nations must take the lead in enhancing coordination with international financial institutions and align the policies and approaches of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization, and the G20 with Agenda 2030.

**iv) Promoting full respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms:** Countering the growing democratic deficit requires rebuilding bonds of trust based on agreed international human rights frameworks. In order for civil society’s constructive voice to be heard, the fundamental freedoms of assembly, association, and expression must be guaranteed, especially in light of the shrinking of civic spaces in countries around the

world and at the UN itself. The drastically underfunded budget of the human rights system must be increased in order for it to become more effective. Leaders of government must be clear: discrimination against anyone based on any identity is unacceptable. The accountability of the Universal Periodic Review should be strengthened to lead to more robust change on the ground. The Secretary-General's recent Call to Action for Human Rights should be more than mere aspiration.

**v) Humanitarian Action/humanitarian access/respect for international humanitarian law.** The overlapping effects of global risks demands proactive investment in prevention, mitigation and adaptive capacities to support humanitarian efforts and assist affected communities. These efforts include: strengthening early warning and response mechanisms between and within multilateral institutions through collective action, knowledge exchange, and learning to help countries and regions respond to security and development risks; investing in local communities and strengthening transitional justice mechanisms, as well as administrative and justice services; and ensuring the voices of different civil society groups are comprehensively integrated across decision-making and throughout research, policies and programming.

**vi) Gender equality and women's empowerment.** Women's voices in political decision-making, within their communities, at home or at work are essential to achieving peaceful and prosperous societies around the world. Women must be given a voice and a seat at decision-making tables so that policies and programs designed and implemented respond to the rights and needs of everyone. Support should also be provided to grassroots organizations that help bring women together, amplifying their voices and mobilizing their collective strength. Accelerated and concerted action is also needed to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, particularly during the pandemic. This includes: prioritizing increased and gender-responsive investment in evidence-based measures to prevent violence at all levels; expanding and reinforcing essential services, such as sexual and reproductive health and rights; as well as protecting health workers, service providers, and informal community networks that provide support to victims.

**vii) Ensuring an inclusive UN, including partnerships with stakeholders and youth.** Meeting new and compounding global challenges and opportunities demands inclusive and open mechanisms for meaningful civil society participation at all levels at the UN. Specific measures could include a dedicated civil society focal point at the Under-Secretary-General level; increased use of communications technology to enhance transparency and participation; and implementing a World Citizens' Initiative whereby a critical mass of individuals representative of world regions could petition the UN to respond to pressing issues. Furthermore, even in times of crisis we call upon governments to ensure the protection of human rights, fundamental freedoms, and civic space.

**viii) Climate change/oceans/sustainable consumption.** We call for full recognition of the international climate/environment emergency through a variety of measures, such as: a UN "whole-of-system" and "whole-of-society" response that is commensurate to the crisis (including effective action by the UN Security Council, UN Environment, and other principal organs, agencies and programmes); recognizing climate change governance as a fourth pillar of the United Nations; reinforcing scientific and technological assessment processes (including a commitment to the findings of the IPCC); increasing financing of development plans for sustainable development fully compliant with the lower 1.5°C target of the Paris Agreement and with other international environmental obligations; and strengthening the international governance regime, including the convening of a High-Level Panel of experts to make concrete recommendations that consolidate existing UN environmental bodies and treaties.

**ix) New technologies/digitalization/cyber.** Modern technology has the capacity to inform - or misinform - billions of people in an instant. An ad hoc commission should be established to address the role of the state in balancing the right to free speech against the harm done through the spread of misinformation. Targeted policies must be put in place to ensure that accurate, evidence-based information is prioritized on media platforms, and those maliciously spreading misinformation are held accountable. We also call for the increased use of communications technology to enhance participation and transparency and bridge the world's deepening digital divide by promoting universal, affordable, and secure internet access for all.

**x) Global mistrust/inequalities/disinformation, inc. hate speech.** Democratic backsliding has contributed to rising levels of corruption and the repression of fundamental freedoms, which have enabled the spread of misinformation and corruption and fueled global mistrust. Transparent, open and inclusive governance is required to stem this tide. And new post-COVID economic policies must be put in place to counter the deepening economic, educational, health and other inequalities being exacerbated by a profit maximizing, rather than people-centered, approach to development.

**xi) Reform issues/sustainable financing of the UN.** Today the need for deep systemic change is clear. The next chapter in global institutional arrangements, in order to achieve the transformation called for by Agenda 2030, requires a commitment by Member States to mandate and implement the results of an Independent Commission on Global Governance. This Commission may result in a number of proposed modifications to the current system, such as the establishment of a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly directly elected by the people, and reformed modalities for various Charter Bodies. Meeting new and growing demands requires sustainable financing of the UN, which is contingent on the fulfillment of Member States' treaty-obligations to pay dues and identifying new sources of funding. Increased funding could be facilitated through the High-level Panel on International Financial Accountability, Transparency and Integrity (FACTI Panel), which may be empowered to recommend additional revenue-generating mechanisms involving both public and private sector actors (as well as the accountability mechanisms necessary for them).

**Topic worthy of increased focus:**

**xii) Rule of law, democracy & democratic deficit.** Governments have the responsibility, derived from the will of their people, to spare no effort to promote democratic systems and strengthen the rule of law, as well as respect for all internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms - as committed to in the Millennium Declaration. A people-centered approach must be grounded in an understanding of the needs of communities as articulated by them, and a willingness to develop and appropriately scale up solutions and innovations. We should strive to have a unified approach to building high-trust democracies, and the UN must play a key role towards this objective. Supporting justice workers, such as the police and providers of grassroots justice services, is vital to rebuilding trust, hope, and social cohesion for the world that lies beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.