

## **Ideas and Global Platforms for Preventing Violent Conflict and Sustaining Peace on the Road to 2020**

*Side Event during the UNGA High-Level Meeting on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace  
Tuesday, 24 April 2018, 1:15 pm – 2:30 pm (UN Conference Room #12)*

*Fergus Watt, International Coordinator, UN2020 Initiative*

### ***Shaping the Agenda for a 2020 Summit on United Nations Renewal, Innovation and Reform: A Call to Action***

Thank you Amb Iteboje for this introduction, and to the governments of Canada and Nigeria for co-sponsoring, and particularly to the Stimson Center for the organization of this side event.

The Secretary-General's report on Sustaining Peace -- as well as the UN-World Bank Pathways for Peace report -- place preventive action and post-conflict peacebuilding on a par with peacemaking and peacekeeping.

And that's all well and good. We know that spending and operational efforts on prevention are fractionally as expensive as what the world spends on crisis response and reconstruction. A shift away from managing and responding to crises and toward preventing conflict sustainably, inclusively, and collectively can save lives and save money.

The problem of course is that governments don't make the investment in peace. Ours is a world where global military expenditures have reached, according to SIPRI's 2016 estimates, something approaching 1.7 trillion dollars, dwarfing the UN's spending on peace operations, which in turn far exceeds the organization's spending on conflict prevention and post-conflict peacebuilding.

We all know this. And I don't want to be overly pessimistic. Because progress is possible. But when it comes to institutional evolution for sustaining peace we need to be in this for the long haul.

The idea of a United Nations 2020 Summit starts with a general sense of expectation around the UN's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary milestone. But the attraction here is more than a simple anniversary.

More importantly, it offers an opportunity to address the present crisis in multilateralism, through a **General Assembly-led, multistakeholder** process dedicated to strengthening the organization.

The need is clear. General Assembly President Lacjak, and many others, have drawn the attention of governments to the current crisis in multilateralism. Important large governments that ideally would lead at the United Nations, are not doing so. They have withdrawn funding, withdrawn from important UN agencies as well as multilateral processes on climate change and migration, among others. Meanwhile important international prohibitions on intervention and use of weapons of mass destruction are being ignored. And the institutions that provide global protection of civic space, freedoms of association and expression are under attack.

So the idea of a 2020 anniversary summit offers a political space where governments and other UN stakeholders can push back. Specifically, what we're calling for is a General Assembly mandated process of stocktaking, re-commitment to the principles and purposes of the Charter, and reforms that strengthen the organization.

We began this work a little over a year ago. The initiating organizations are the Stimson Center, CIVICUS, the Workable World Trust and the World Federalist Movement. The principal focus, at least at this stage, is on process, generating support for a mandate for a 2020 summit process. Some details:

- We have focused on the UN Ad Hoc Working Group of the General Assembly on Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly as a vehicle for mandating this process. A resolution is expected in September.
- We suggest that the 2020 process would need to be complementary to and build upon the Secretary-General's internal reforms on peacebuilding architecture, development and management. (Although, considering that some of those reforms have encountered stormy waters among governments, it is conceivable that 2020 may offer the SG another opportunity to see some of these reforms through.)
- We anticipate that the scope of the 2020 process would be unlikely to entail changes to the UN Charter. Considering the paralysis at the Intergovernmental Negotiations on Security Council Reform, and the impact of incorporating those fraught political dynamics in another process, steering clear of Charter reform may well be a good thing. One can achieve a lot without opening up the UN Charter.

- We point out that the year 2020 will also be the occasion for a number of important multilateral processes and “+5 reviews.” These include:
  - o the 5-year anniversaries of the Paris Climate Agreement, and the adoption of Agenda 2030 for the Sustainable Development Goals,
  - o the review conference of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Agreement,
  - o the mandated reforms for the Human Rights treaty bodies, (and now active consideration of other ways to review and strengthen the Human Rights Council machinery
  - o the 20-year anniversary of Resolution 1325, with the opportunity that presents to reinforce and broaden the Women, Peace and Security agenda,
  - o the 25-year anniversary of the Beijing Women’s conference,
  - o the 15-year anniversary of the Biodiversity Convention, as well as
  - o the Peacebuilding Commission and other norms and processes that came about in the UN’s last major dedicated reform effort in 2005.

The point here is that, it is possible – not a certainty, but a possibility – that the overlay of a UN 2020 leaders summit could lead to a dynamic whereby these separate processes, rather than proceeding along familiar lines in their own silos, may find synergies and mutually reinforcing elements between and among them, and that the prospect of a leaders summit on the political horizon could well generate greater ambition to deliver stronger outcomes.

Although we’re still in the early days for this process, and nothing has been decided yet, for those of us plodding through the weeds of this campaign, we have a gut feel that this stands a good chance of going somewhere. The present political drift away from multilateralism just isn’t what an interdependent world community needs. And we believe that a majority of small and medium governments, allied with civil society and other stakeholders, can get the pendulum swinging back in a more positive direction.

One of our current priorities is to begin to expand the conversation amongst civil society colleagues. There’s a program of meetings in the works, first UN-based, among colleagues in New York and Geneva, then reaching out, in national and regional contexts.

We have also issued a civil society Call to Action. Most of you will have found a copy at your seats at the start of this meeting. For those of you here today who are representing civil society organizations, please check it out. And if this is something you can support, please go to [UN2020.org](http://UN2020.org) or be in touch with one of us.

I’ll conclude there. Thanks for your interest and attention.

***While not presently advocating any specific measures, the UN2020 Initiative has identified some core principles and approaches for renewing the UN system. Among others, these include:***

**A Leading Role for the Secretary-General.** An effective preparatory process leading to the UN2020 summit must support and build on the reforms initiated by Secretary-General Guterres, including through his review of the Secretariat's peace and security architecture, his efforts to follow up on the UNGA's 2016 resolution on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities for Development, and associated management reforms.

**Prevention and Sustaining Peace.** In addition to management reforms, the Secretary-General has prioritised the need for conflict prevention and sustaining peace. Such an approach to peace and security — one that spans prevention, root causes, peacemaking, mediation, peacekeeping and post-conflict peacebuilding and reconstruction — will require substantial strengthening of heretofore under-utilized and under-funded parts of the UN system.

**One UN.** A more coherent and coordinated delivery of UN services at the country level has been a long-agreed goal. Member States would experience a more responsive and efficient system if the range of UN agencies, programmes and expertise were better aligned in support of country needs and demands. This could strengthen the impact of the UN system in delivery of critical areas of development, environment and humanitarian assistance, among others.

**A people-centered UN.** The United Nations needs to better incorporate the views of diverse stakeholders in its decision making processes, not only the positions of Member States' executive branches. Women must be given more equitable representation. Marginalized groups, especially indigenous peoples, must be given a greater voice. The space for civil society contributions – under threat today in countries worldwide – must be expanded and refined. New forums for parliamentarians and other citizen representatives should be established. Mechanisms for ensuring accountability for upholding human rights commitments must be strengthened.

**Regionalism.** There is need for better integration of regional organizations within the United Nations system. Regions can and should be links between that system and individual national governments.

**Adequate funding.** The funding of the United Nations, including its various funds, programmes and agencies, relies primarily on combinations of assessed and voluntary contributions from member states. The contributions are assessed and allocated using an arcane and opaque set of rules that have generated much controversy, while failing to generate adequate funding for the UN's work. To meet growing demands, a UN 2020 preparatory process must include a wide-ranging review and reform of the means and

methods for more securely providing essential funding of the United Nations system. Numerous viable proposals already exist.

**And the possibility of a continuing reform process.** Progressive reform results from a process of dialogue and negotiation. Some reform measures will be more easily agreed upon by the time of the 2020 Summit than others. The 2020 Summit should not only include outcomes that lead to agreed reforms and the introduction of new norms, but also establish an expectation and a process for the realization of further reforms in the years that follow.

OF NOTE: We do **not** anticipate that the composition of a reformed Security Council would fall within the scope of a 2020 reform process. Questions of equitable representation on and composition of the membership of the Security Council are under discussion through the General Assembly mandated Intergovernmental Negotiations framework.