



**Purposes and
principles:
adapting the
United Nations to
a new era**

V. Purposes and principles: adapting the United Nations to a new era

108. In this report, I have outlined a vision for Our Common Agenda. To support this vision, the United Nations also needs to adapt. The Organization has evolved over time in response to changing needs, most recently through an ambitious reform agenda to improve its effectiveness, launched in 2017, which has begun to deliver results. The COVID-19 pandemic was an early test of these reforms, enabling the United Nations system to respond to the needs of people and Member States. Emerging from the pandemic, with the world facing important choices to support a breakthrough rather than a breakdown scenario, the United Nations must provide a platform actively to shape the future in ways that will make it worth living in, and for.

109. Some Member States have suggested that the United Nations is itself a global common; or at least, that it is vital to support the delivery of many global public goods, serving as a venue for collective action, norm development and international cooperation. While the United Nations alone cannot address the numerous challenges confronting us, especially in a complex and networked world, it is one of the key institutions available for solving the problems that matter most. The United Nations has a universal convening power that gives all 193 Member States an equal voice, increasingly joined by representatives from the private sector, civil society and academia, along with a unique role in safeguarding global values, ethics and norms and a global presence and technical expertise. As some spaces of decision-making become increasingly exclusive, there is a need to safeguard a space for all voices. Our Common Agenda must therefore include upgrading the United Nations, so that it is able to support global discussion, negotiation, progress, solutions and action to address our most urgent collective goals.

110. The previous chapters of this report set out a series of actions that the United Nations intends to work with Member States and others to pursue in support of the renewed social contract, stronger solidarity between generations and the delivery of global public goods. While summarizing them, I offer below additional reflections, commitments and recommendations for how the United Nations could continue to adapt and make a difference in people's lives. This recognizes that the Charter is based on enduring values and principles, but is also flexible and dynamic, allowing for adjustment to address new challenges.

A. For the Secretariat and the United Nations system

In support of the renewed social contract

111. Much of the operational and in-country work of the United Nations is geared towards supporting the social contract at national levels, as needed and requested by States. In some contexts, it is the United Nations itself that ensures delivery of vital public goods, such as humanitarian action, health, education, electricity and housing, along with security and support for the police. My proposals in chapter II for **institutions that listen better to people, participatory approaches and reducing complexity** thus equally apply to the United Nations where relevant. Building on [good models](#) from elsewhere in the system, the United Nations Secretariat will develop a policy that puts people at the centre of all its actions and takes into account the impact of intersecting personal characteristics, such as age, gender and diversity.

112. The United Nations development system reforms have positioned the Organization to offer more cohesive support to Governments. Building on

this, Member States could consider steps to bring the governance bodies and funding of development agencies closer in alignment to maximize impact, while leaving each agency its separate brand and operations. I will also encourage United Nations country teams to actively support States in renewing the social contract, particularly focusing on trust, addressing discrimination and exclusion, and measuring what matters. We will look to make every United Nations presence a centre of context-specific prevention expertise, including by better linking peace and security, human rights, climate and development work, and focusing on factors that can give rise to or exacerbate grievances. The consultations for the [seventy-fifth anniversary](#) (reaching 1.5 million people) and for Our Common Agenda (with some 500 submissions) have initiated a new era in listening, consultation and engagement with people, along with our [guidance](#) on civic space under my [Call to Action for Human Rights](#). I will encourage all parts of the United Nations system to make such consultations with people, including women and young people, regular and systematic going forward.

113. Other elements that the United Nations system will take forward as part of its own support to and reflection on the renewed social contract include reviewing our rule of law assistance, implementation of my Call to Action for Human Rights, including through a United Nations system-wide agenda for protection, and making human rights commitments a reference point in the design and delivery of United Nations programmes, development assistance and crisis prevention initiatives. I recommit to ensuring gender parity at all levels within the United Nations system by 2028. I will also support a review of the United Nations system's capacity – staffing, resources and architecture – to deliver on gender equality as a core priority across all entities.

In support of solidarity between generations

114. In chapter III, I proposed some institutional modifications at the United Nations to strengthen our solidarity with both younger and succeeding

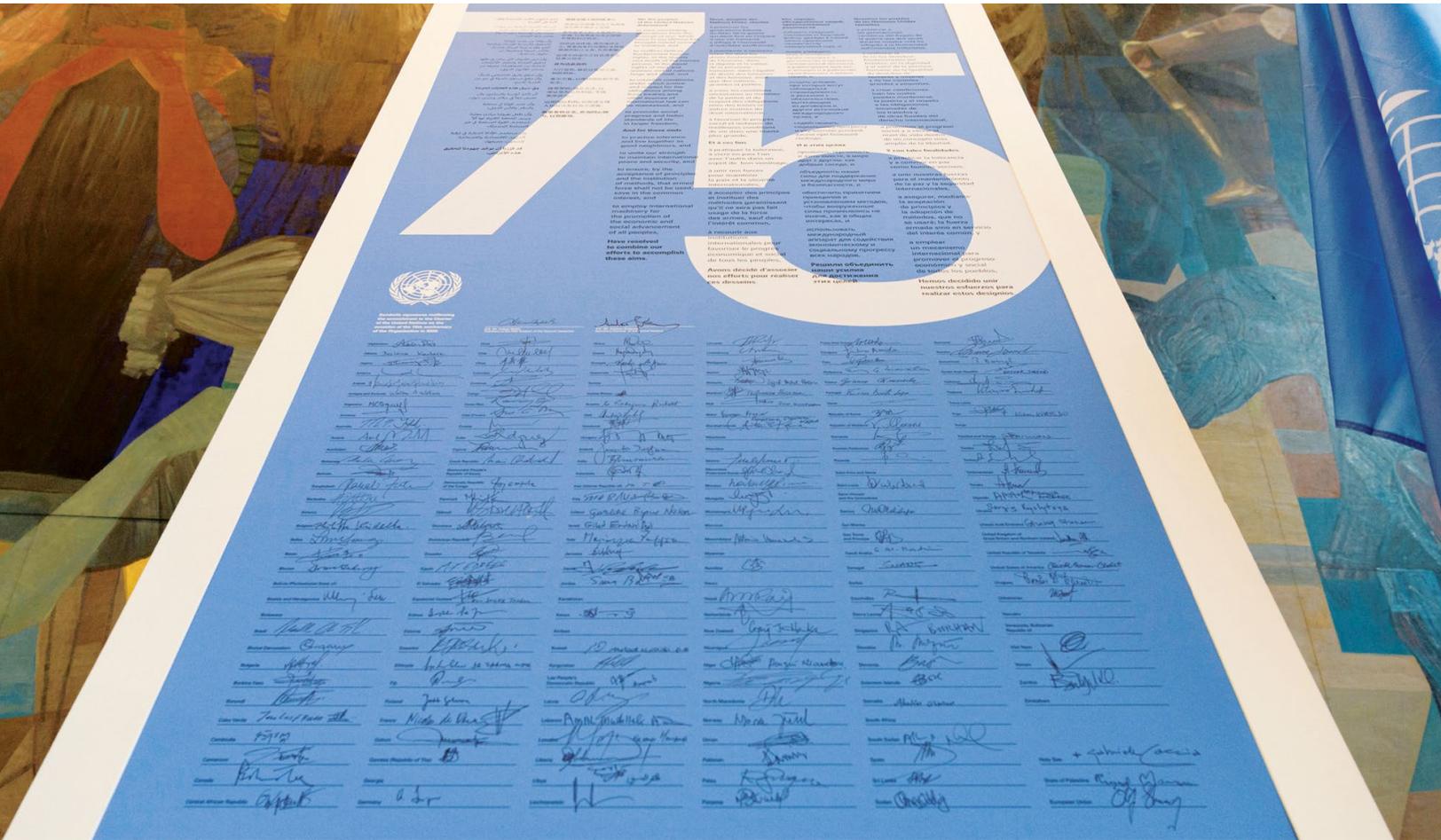
generations. Notably, I propose to ensure that the voices of youth are more systematically integrated across the United Nations system by exploring with Member States the upgrading of the current position of Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth to an office in the Secretariat. I will also continue to listen to and support networks of young United Nations staff members, including on the need to improve our recruitment and retention of young people from diverse backgrounds, as well as to put in place a more modern and flexible environment that supports junior staff members, including young women, in advancing their careers.

115. Separately, I propose the appointment of a Special Envoy for Future Generations who would, for the first time, represent the interests of succeeding generations across the United Nations system and with Member States. The envoy would also steer initial steps by the United Nations to bolster our capacity to understand, plan and act for the long term, exemplified by the proposed Futures Lab. I hope this will allow the United Nations to become a reliable guardian for our future, acting on behalf of both current and succeeding generations as anticipated in the Charter. The Futures Lab would also significantly strengthen the capacity of the United Nations in futures analysis and foresight.

In support of delivering global public goods through more networked, inclusive and effective multilateralism

116. In chapter IV, I outlined a vision for improved multilateral governance focused on protecting our global commons and delivering critical global public goods, as well as being prepared to respond to major risks. To support this, the United Nations system must adapt to play a leading role in a more networked and inclusive world, improving our collaboration and strategic engagement with other actors and forums at the global and regional levels, while also maximizing our comparative advantage in service of the people who need us most.

117. The value added of the United Nations in a **networked world** includes a number of elements which could be strengthened. First, one of the



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primary roles of the United Nations is as a **source of reliable data and evidence**, providing public and verified information to help the world understand risks and opportunities. To strengthen this role, I will seek to re-establish the Secretary-General's Scientific Advisory Board and explore better linking of knowledge centres across the United Nations system, including in its specialized agencies, to reinforce impact. I will also encourage the United Nations to become more strategic in knowledge production, delivering fewer, but more coherent and action-oriented reports each year. This will in part be achieved through the United Nations digital transformation strategy, which is directly aimed at effective knowledge production and dissemination across the system.

118. Another important role for the United Nations in a networked world is as a **convener**: serving as a place to build consensus around priorities and strategies, where actors from all sectors can make commitments and be accountable, and as a platform for collective action and delivery. Our universal nature means that in some instances we are not the most nimble, and that formalities and protocol must be observed. However, we also offer a space to bring together decision-makers with the accountability and authoritativeness associated with intergovernmental processes to support networked approaches. We must do this better, and more often. The United Nations will improve its work at different levels (country, regional and global) and across different thematic pillars (including peace and security, development, climate, human rights and humanitarian response).

We will also strengthen cooperation within the United Nations system and between the system and regional organizations, international financial institutions and others. To enhance cooperation between the United Nations and regional bodies, I will convene an annual meeting with all heads of regional organizations. I will also promote continuous active dialogue between the United Nations system, international financial institutions and regional development banks, as a complement to the Biennial Summit proposed in chapter IV.

119. The United Nations system, including the Secretariat, will also take further steps to become more **inclusive**. For certain constituencies, such as parliamentarians, the private sector, and cities and subnational authorities, which are crucial and innovative drivers of global change today, we have been asked to consider standing mechanisms for engagement and consultation, consistent with the sovereignty of Member States and provisions of the Charter on membership of the United Nations. Within the Secretariat, I will strengthen our collaboration with subnational authorities through the creation of an **Advisory Group on Local and Regional Governments**. I will also explore options to enhance parliamentary inputs at the United Nations, working with our existing partners.

120. The increasing role and influence of **the private sector**, and its centrality to achieving so many of the actions outlined in this report, will also be taken into account within the United Nations system. The [business and human rights](#) agenda is important in this regard. I also call for a broader range of businesses, from multinational corporations to small and medium-sized corporations, to participate in the Sustainable Development Goals and climate action, including through business models that align with efforts to rethink measures of progress and prosperity. The [new strategy issued by the Global Compact Office](#), promoting its 10 principles and the expansion of its network and private sector investments, is a unique vehicle to raise ambition and achieve stronger private sector engagement, accountability and partnerships.

121. Civil society organizations were present in San Francisco at the founding of the United Nations and have been an integral part of the United Nations ecosystem from the outset. As part of our consultations, civil society has called for better engagement with the United Nations system. I believe that it is essential for the United Nations to listen to, coordinate with and engage with civil society. I have heard the calls for a single, high-level entry point for civil society and will further explore options in that regard. However, I also believe that what is most needed at this time is to go beyond a consultation and advocacy role, and rather for all parts of the United Nations system directly to include civil society in their work across all the pillars of our activities. This is about a shift in mentality as well as in practice. As such, all United Nations entities will be asked to **establish a dedicated focal point for civil society**, if they have not already done so. These focal points will be expected proactively to create the space necessary for civil society actors to contribute at the country and global levels, and within United Nations meetings, networks, processes and arrangements. We will regularly map and monitor our relationships with civil society across the system to ensure that the better engagement we all seek is being achieved and sustained.

122. Within the Secretariat, the **United Nations Office for Partnerships** will support these relationships, ensuring that we have in place the necessary administrative, legal and digital instruments to allow our partners to access information and to participate in the work of the United Nations. We will in particular build on the possibilities for greater inclusion that we have seen during COVID-19, with digital solutions and hybrid meetings allowing more diverse actors to participate without limitations because of visas, funding and travel. Ensuring inclusive virtual meetings means taking into consideration and proactively seeking to address issues such as access to the Internet, language barriers, time zones and safety.

123. To make the United Nations **more effective**, we will develop new capabilities that promote agility, integration and cohesion across the system. This

will be part of a wider transformation towards a **United Nations “2.0”**, a new version that is able to offer relevant and system-wide solutions to the challenges of the twenty-first century. I will accelerate this transformation through a **“quintet of change”**, a set of cross-cutting agendas that underpin many of the initiatives proposed in this report. The quintet capabilities include data, analytics and communications; innovation and digital transformation; strategic foresight; behavioural science; and performance and results orientation. Driven by the [Secretary-General’s Data Strategy](#), better **data, analysis and communications** capabilities will enable us to turn information more easily into insight, transform our decision-making, optimize our services and make the Organization a better communicator. Further investing in **innovation and digital transformation** will reshape our way of working, helping us to reach more people in need and better serve them. Strengthening **strategic foresight**, through initiatives like the Futures Lab, will enable anticipatory action and the design of more forward-looking policies and programmes. The systematic application of [behavioural science](#) will increase our effectiveness in policy, programme and mandate delivery. It will also allow us to simplify bureaucratic processes. **Performance and results orientation** will ensure that the Organization is focused on impact, learning and continuous improvement.

124. Finally, for the Organization to be effective, it is crucial that Member States’ **financial obligations** be met in full and on time. The underlying reasons for the recent financial crisis of the United Nations are not fully resolved. I have made several proposals to Member States in this regard, ranging from increasing our existing liquidity reserves to creating a new reserve for our peacekeeping operations and addressing the structural impediments in the management of our budgets. As part of recent reforms, the United Nations has also made significant investments in improving transparency in its financial reporting and budgeting. However, efforts to focus more on results and improve mandate delivery have been undermined by the

unpredictability and timing of our cash inflows. If the vision that Member States articulated in the seventy-fifth anniversary declaration, and on which I have elaborated in this report on Our Common Agenda, is to become a reality we must solve the financial crisis and secure more sustainable funding for the Organization. The United Nations system can make better use of available resources, including by **repurposing existing funds** and adopting less rigid budgetary procedures. The United Nations system will also explore ways to better harmonize budgeting and funding requests, ensuring that the different executive boards of agencies, funds and programmes work together and communicate. We will focus on improving how we formulate and execute budgets to keep the Organization nimble and dynamic and able to respond to volatile situations and new emergencies. Ongoing efforts to ensure transparency for Member States in the budget process must not come at the expense of the ability of the United Nations to use resources efficiently and effectively; the focus should be on programme delivery and results rather than financing. We must allow managers to manage, and hold them accountable for the results. In addition to these steps, I invite Member States to consider examining the mechanisms for reviewing the budget, with support from the Secretariat as necessary. Together, we can identify ways to improve the budget process, **especially in how we formulate and communicate the results that we hope to and do accomplish**, looking holistically at what makes sense, what works well and what needs to be improved.

B. For Member States’ consideration

125. Any decisions regarding the principal intergovernmental organs and other bodies of the United Nations are for Member States. However, there are various needs that have been identified throughout this report, notably in conjunction with the interests of succeeding generations, and the governance of the global commons and the delivery

of global public goods through networked, inclusive and effective multilateralism. The activities of the **Trusteeship Council** have been suspended since 1994. Previous commissions and secretaries-general, along with some Member States, have proposed a repurposing of the Council to enhance the governance of the global commons. Building on these ideas, and as part of the follow-up to Our Common Agenda, I invite States to consider making the Council available as a multi-stakeholder body to tackle emerging challenges and, especially, to serve as a deliberative forum to act on behalf of succeeding generations. Among other tasks, it could issue advice and guidance with respect to long-term governance of the global commons, delivery of global public goods and managing global public risks.

126. Beyond the Trusteeship Council, I took note of calls from **Member States for reforms of the three principal organs of the United Nations in the seventy-fifth anniversary declaration**, in particular their commitments to instil new life into the discussions on the reform of the Security Council and to continue the work to revitalize the General Assembly and to strengthen the Economic and Social Council. With regard to any decisions by Member States to adapt the intergovernmental organs to the needs and realities of today, I stand ready to provide the necessary support. Below are some of the ideas that have emerged from our consultations on the seventy-fifth anniversary and Our Common Agenda, grouped here for the consideration of Member States.

127. After decades of debate, the majority of Member States now acknowledge that the **Security Council** could be made more representative of the twenty-first century, such as through enlargement, including better representation for Africa, as well as more systematic arrangements for more voices at the table. In addition to the intergovernmental negotiations continuing with renewed urgency, suggestions have been made to strengthen the inclusiveness and legitimacy of the Council by systematically consulting with a broader range of actors, including regional

organizations; considering public commitments to exercise restraint in the use of the veto; and expanding the use of informal mechanisms, such as Arria-formula meetings, to advance sensitive issues. Reinforced action on prevention to ensure that the threats we face today do not fester and deteriorate would mean that the Council, charged with managing and resolving potential and actual threats to international peace and security, avoids seeing its agenda expand exponentially. The United Nations system needs to be able to address the cross-cutting issues of security, climate change, health, development, gender equality and human rights from a prevention perspective with greater effectiveness and accountability, for example through expanding the role of the **Peacebuilding Commission** to more settings. The proposed emergency platform for convening the key actors to respond to a complex global crisis could be another element of this.

128. Member States' efforts to revitalize the work of the **General Assembly** and streamline its resolutions, reporting requirements and committees have been welcomed. It has also been suggested that States could strengthen the high-level week of the Assembly, using it as an opportunity to take decisions and make commitments at the level of Heads of State and Government. Similarly, the **Economic and Social Council** was established in the Charter as the principal United Nations body coordinating the economic and social work of the Organization. While we are now in a different era, various proposals have been made to reinforce the role and profile of the Council, including by bringing the G20 and its processes into a closer relationship with the Council. In my view, the Biennial Summit put forward in chapter IV would be an important step forward in better coordination of global economic governance. In addition, the **high-level political forum** has emerged as the primary global gathering for sustainable development. It provides an inclusive platform for monitoring implementation of the 2030 Agenda, while promoting peer learning and expanding the global movement for the Sustainable Development

Goals. I invite all Governments, sectors, partners and alliances to engage at the high-level political forum each year to increase ambition, accelerate implementation efforts and build connections across issues that are essential for effective multilateralism.

129. The consultations as part of Our Common Agenda have called for fuller use of the **human rights treaty monitoring system**, including the universal periodic review, treaty bodies and special procedures, to solve pressing social, economic and political challenges. As indicated in my Call to Action for Human Rights, I am ready to work

with States to find ways to put the human rights mechanisms on a more sustainable financial footing, including through more flexibility for the United Nations to allocate funding, and to better link them with other processes to maximize their impact and assist States parties with compliance. More transparency has also been called for in terms of human rights commitments undertaken by prospective candidates for membership of the **Human Rights Council**, in line with the criteria adopted by Member States in General Assembly resolution 60/251 by which the Council was created.



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130. Finally, echoing calls made to the United Nations system, we have received suggestions on how to increase opportunities for engagement by **civil society and other stakeholders** across all the intergovernmental organs. These have included an annual civil society caucus in conjunction with the General Assembly's high-level week, as well as calls for an [updated resolution](#) defining how organs like the Economic and Social Council, the

General Assembly and the Security Council relate to civil society, local and regional governments and business actors, and for the President of the Economic and Social Council to convene a general review of arrangements for observer status or consultation in this regard. I encourage Member States to give serious consideration to these ideas, in keeping with our quest for a multilateralism that is more networked, inclusive and effective.