



Fulfilling the UN75 Declaration Expert Series

Experts Roundtable #1

Declaration commitments #1 “We will leave no one behind” and #12 We will be prepared

Hosted on 18 February 2021

Synthesis of Major Insights & Recommendations

On February 18, 2021, a consortium of civil society stakeholder organizations initiated the first in a six-part “Fulfilling the UN75 Declaration Expert Series,” where thought leaders from global civil society engaged UN Missions and Secretariat officials in a candid dialogue on progress, challenges, and further measures needed to meet two of the twelve commitments presented in the [UN75 Declaration](#). This inaugural discussion, co-sponsored by the Coalition for the UN We Need, CIVICUS, and the Stimson Center, and in collaboration with The Elders, addressed the UN75 Declaration commitments #1 on “We will leave no one behind” (focused on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development) and #12 on “We will be prepared” (focused on preventing health crises).

The series is intended to take stock of progress toward achieving the twelve UN75 Declaration commitments, introduce alternative institutional, policy, and normative measures for improving implementation, and consider steps for achieving such reforms, including a possible follow-on intergovernmental process as recommended in the [Eminent Persons Open Letter](#) signed by 49 former world leaders and UN officials. The expert series aims to contribute insights and concrete proposals for consideration in the Secretary-General's forthcoming (*Our Common Agenda*) report—expected to be released by September 2021, prior to UNGA High-Level Week.

The first roundtable’s lead-off speakers included: **H.E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf**, Former President of Liberia and Member of The Elders; **Cristina Petcu**, Research Associate, Stimson Center; **Mandeep Tiwana**, Chief Programmes Officer, CIVICUS; and (*moderator*) **Fergus Watt**, International Coordinator, Coalition for the UN We Need.

Key Lead-Off Speaker Quotes

“The pandemic has highlighted the deeply interconnected nature of our world, and the extent to which our own security is wholly dependent on the security of others. It has also laid bare the stark inequalities that exist both within and between countries. Nowhere can this inequality be more obviously seen than in the monopolisation of vaccines by the richest and most powerful countries, which risks preventing much of the Global South from having widespread access to vaccines until 2022 or 2023. This approach will not only lead to a deepening of global inequalities but will actively undermine all countries’ national efforts to bring this disease under control.” - H.E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

“The current health crisis demonstrates a continued and severe lack of preparedness in our global health system. And despite various disease outbreaks over the years, we still lack a global health system that, for example, ensures global access to essential medical equipment, such as personal protective equipment, sanitation items, medicines and vaccines.” - Cristina Petcu (in presenting two Stimson Center Overviews of UN75 Declarations commitments #1 and #12)

“To ‘be prepared’ for the next global challenge, international cooperation, coordination and solidarity through the UN are critical. Much more needs to be done to realize people-centred multilateralism in the spirit of the UN Charter. Our present approach to international cooperation remains predominantly state-centric. There are many reasons for this including the global democratic deficit and civic space challenges.” - Mandeep Tiwana

The following summary offers key international policy insights and recommendations for the fulfillment of the two UN75 Declaration commitments explored during the roundtable:

UN75 Declaration Commitment #1 - We will leave no one behind

Major Insights

- For the UN to work effectively in a multi-sectoral way, it must extend beyond traditional paradigms and attitudes, focusing on how its pillars (Human Rights, Peace and Security, and Development) can work coherently together rather than along separate paths. The 2030 Agenda negotiations demonstrated the potential for multi-sectoral coherence, despite the difficulty in forging consensus across many UN Member States.
- The [UN75 Declaration](#) represents a shared roadmap to ensure that multilateralism is working, but there remains a deficit in multilateral leadership among national political representatives. A more inclusive approach to multilateralism that brings together various stakeholders is needed in light of the critical debate on public goods vs private interests.
- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) seek to tackle structural inequalities within and between states, but COVID-19 only underscores the lack of needed change across the

board. Progress toward meeting the SDGs was off course before COVID-19, and in many cases, the pandemic has halted and even reversed progress on the 2030 Agenda.

- To address the myriad challenges highlighted by COVID-19 and the commitment to “build back better”, governments must feature the 2030 Agenda prominently and holistically in their recovery responses. Moreover, COVID-19 recovery must focus on green and sustainable measures.
- The post-COVID-19 world provides an opportunity to address unheeded structural problems, including inequality, even if the needs are great and action may be costly.
- COVID-19 has also shown that progressive taxation that addresses inequalities in wealth is fundamental for diminishing inequality and leaving no one behind. Civil society groups (including Indigenous Peoples and Trade Unions) should push the United Nations and its Member States to abandon austerity; fortunately, most states are stepping up and at least trying to provide some kind of stimulus to citizens.
- By actively engaging global civil society, the United Nations will also be encouraged to place human rights and global public goods at the center of its decision-making and programming. Given the private sector’s inherent limitations, the United Nations would be wise to not over-rely on it or to afford it undue influence.
- Leaving no one behind also means leaving no one offline. Digitalization needs to be stressed by governments at local and national levels. Now is the time to digitize all peoples.
- A fundamental question to help guide effective and equitable policy action is: “How do we *involve everybody* in re-setting our strategy?” Progress will be constrained in rolling out the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, Paris Climate Agreement, and the Sustainable Development Goals if local and international civil society organizations are not involved directly, including organizations for women, girls, and scholars. Civil society, including academia, can, for instance, help to advance the 2030 Agenda simply by bolstering the case for science. However, civic space around the world remains highly constrained. CIVICUS Monitor statistics reveal that 87% of the world’s population live in countries with adverse civic space conditions despite the freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly being an inalienable part of international and constitutional law. The absence of civic space robs the ability of the vast majority of people to shape the decisions that impact their lives and undermines progress on Agenda 2030 commitments.

Major Recommendations: Policy, institutional, legal, normative, and operational reforms

- The UN’s Human Rights pillar is important to “leaving no one behind”, and in this regard, the Secretary-General’s Call to Action should be kept front and center.
- Effective SDGs implementation and sustainable recovery from COVID-19 require greater targeting and inclusion of marginalized groups in decision-making.
- Civil society (and not simply Member States) must also play an integral part in UN decision-making on assessing SDGs progress and addressing gaps in implementation.
- In May 2000, a Millennium People’s Forum was convened and proved to be extremely useful as diverse civil society representatives and other stakeholders debated UN policy issues and made concrete recommendations to the General Assembly. Such a major civil

society and other stakeholders forum should be formalized and could occur every 2-3 years in the GA Hall and involve both the President of the General Assembly and Secretary-General.

- As co-facilitators of the review of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), Austria and Senegal are currently engaging UN Member States on how to make the HLPF more effective. Canada and Jamaica's related work on improving financing for development (including matters such as debt management) are also critical to strengthening SDGs implementation.
- Leaving no one behind means: 1) accelerating access to equitable and affordable vaccines; 2) ensuring human rights (to combat growing infringement on civic freedoms and the spread of misinformation); and 3) strengthening the HLPF's mandate.
- Changing the policy priorities of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, Paris Climate Agreement, and the SDGs in silos will not help advance the goals each framework is committed to implementing. Rather, policy linkages between the three frameworks should be strengthened, public financing improved (e.g., a philanthropic institution, the Gates Foundation, should not serve as the WHO's largest funder, although its support is appreciated), and the governance systems for implementing these frameworks should be innovated.
- The precursor to the HLPF, the Commission on Sustainable Development, did two things that were unique at the time: (1) reported on progress in implementing the 1992 Rio Earth Summit conventions and Agenda 21, and (2) tracked related public expenditure. The HLPF should fulfill similar functions, with the support of relevant stakeholders from civil society and other stakeholders, including the business community. An inclusive, multi-stakeholder approach is critical because diverse state and non-state actors are needed to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals on the ground; HLPF discussions, therefore, need to help facilitate and connect local and sub-national level actions with national, regional, and global-level policy discussions.
- To better deliver on Agenda 2030 the private sector needs to discharge its social responsibilities in upholding key commitments by, for example, supporting measures to address inequality, sustainable consumption and production, and respecting rule of law. To better deliver on the 2030 Agenda, the private sector needs more accountable platforms to report on issues and advances in support of the SDGs.

UN75 Declaration Commitment #12 - We will be prepared

Major Insights

- Today's greatest moral test of multilateral cooperation is ensuring equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines worldwide. Disagreements are widespread as to how to best curb excessive "vaccine nationalism" and improve equitable access to life-saving vaccines.
- Vaccines should be viewed as a global public good, and the upcoming World Health Assembly in Geneva should prioritize expanding access globally to COVID-19 vaccines, including through the ACT Accelerator initiative. The pandemic cannot be defeated without resilient health systems worldwide.

- During the present COVID-19 crisis, more traditional financing for development models has proven slow and insufficient to meet development needs around the world.
- To more efficiently link global public goods and development assistance financing models, better coordination across major socio-economic sectors is required globally. Moreover, to better fight future health pandemics, their prevention must be addressed simultaneously and in a multi-sectoral fashion at both national and global levels.
- The current pandemic reveals the need for more data (easily accessible at national/local levels) and closer collaboration among those engaged in vaccine production.
- More effort is also needed to mobilize and share global vaccine manufacturing and distribution capabilities worldwide. Some plurilateral agreements exist that, in effect, contribute to fragmented Research & Development and unequal access to vaccines in many parts of the globe.
- Debates continue about responsibility for the protection of intellectual property across borders but given what is at stake with respect to pandemic preparedness and broader health security measures, intellectual property and, for example, Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) need to be reconceptualized in order to bring about more equitable production and distribution of vaccines around the world.
- Scientists' warning of new zoonotic diseases has not been incorporated into a global preparedness system that can then support regional and national institutions and operate as a kind of first line of defense against the spread of future deadly diseases.
- Local and international civil society organizations represent (though not exclusively) the voices of the people, and when they are encouraged to support multi-stakeholder partnerships with governments and the UN Secretariat, progressive coalitions for change can be forged in response to a particular global problem-set, such as health insecurity.
- Promoting effective health security goes hand-in-hand with building trust, and trust must be continuously nurtured to prepare for future health crises, especially if it is to help to combat widespread misinformation that can exacerbate health insecurity.

Major Recommendations: Policy, institutional, legal, normative, and operational reforms

- Investing in health-security preparedness should remain a policy priority and entail steps to improve TRIPS agreement implementation through the World Trade Organization.
- A strong and supportive international financial architecture is needed to help developing countries invest in health-security and to treat pandemic preparedness as a global public good for the benefit of all countries and peoples.
- Not everything can be left to the United Nations, which depends on health security interventions by the G20, WTO, and regional and sub-regional bodies. The global vaccination plan led by a combination of the G20, WHO, GAVI, CEPI, and the private sector is essential in R&D, distributing, and administering vaccines. Pharmaceuticals need to be mobilized, and the private sector has to play its part with full transparency to ensure proper and equitable vaccine distribution. The WHO-GAVI-CEPI and other partners COVAX facility needs to be funded fully and given other capabilities and the authorities to fulfill its central mission of building the manufacturing capabilities and purchasing

vaccines, ahead of time so that some 2 billion doses of proven safe vaccines can be fairly distributed by the end of 2021.

- The pandemic's economic repercussions have been felt most severely in developing countries. In order to prevent the present global public health crisis from precipitating a sustained global economic crisis, post-vaccine economic recovery must be managed carefully, coordinated across countries and regions, and include a mix of economic tools, including strategic investments and debt forgiveness.
- Many developing countries facing knock-on socioeconomic effects from the COVID-19 pandemic became even more dependent on (relatively scarce and slow) international development assistance. More reliable public financing (especially for financing at scale) is needed urgently. Moreover, to respond more quickly to health and broader socioeconomic emergencies, a faster release of funds is necessary.
- In terms of one possible new and major source of development financing, the IMF argues that a carbon tax could generate much-needed public revenue equivalent to 2 percent of a country's GDP. However, at the same time, one cannot ignore that some countries are spending upwards of 5 percent of GDP to subsidize energy. In short, much more could be done in both poor and rich countries alike within existing national resources.

Participant List

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