

Fulfilling the UN75 Declaration Expert Series

Experts Roundtable 2

UN75 Declaration commitments

#2 We will protect our planet and #10 We will boost partnerships

Hosted on 18 March 2021

Synthesis of Major Insights & Recommendations

On March 18, 2021, a consortium of independent civil society organizations took part in the second roundtable of the “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 discussion, sponsored by the Coalition for the UN We Need (C4UN), Global Challenges Foundation/Climate Governance Commission, Group of Women Leaders for Change and Inclusion, Plataforma CIPÓ, the Council on Energy, Environment and Water, and the Stimson Center, addressed the UN75 Declaration commitments #2 on “We will protect our planet” and #10 on “We will boost partnerships.”

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 UN General Assembly (UNGA) High-Level Week.¹

The roundtable’s lead-off speakers included: **María Fernanda Espinosa**, Group of Women Leaders for Change and Inclusion, former President of the UN General Assembly, and former Foreign and Defense Minister of Ecuador; **Maja Groff**, Convener, Climate Governance Commission (*moderator*); **Jimena Leiva Roesch**, Senior Fellow and Head of Peace and

¹ The opinions, assessments, valuations, positions and, where applicable, judgements expressed are within the responsibility of the authors or the individual persons making the corresponding statements in this publication, which aims to capture and distill, while employing the Chatham House Rule, the ideas conveyed by the 18 March 2021 expert roundtable participants. They do not necessarily and not in every case correspond to the positions and opinions of the event co-sponsors and all participants.

Sustainable Development, International Peace Institute; **Arunabha Ghosh**, CEO, Council on Energy, Environment And Water; and **Maiara Folly**, Co-founder, Plataforma CIPÓ.

Key Lead-Off Speaker Quotes

*“Three major, intersecting issues are the climate, biodiversity extinction, and inequality crises. Alongside the COVID-19 pandemic, these global crises over the past year have become even bigger and more profound.”- **María Fernanda Espinosa***

*“The UNSG has called for a “quantum leap” on net-zero emissions commitments in 2021, underlining how dire the reality of our planetary situation is. We also, of course, need crucial new levels of strategic finance, taking advantage of this Covid recovery moment; and, we need new, unprecedented, dynamic partnerships if we are to make this necessary global transition, to really protect our planet.” - **Maja Groff***

*“In setting the scene, it’s really important to understand how this [current] moment is different from 2015, when we signed the Paris Agreement... It’s no longer in the negotiators’ hands to get to a net zero emissions world - it requires a bigger set of actors. ... We need less launching and more action and coordination.”- **Jimena Leiva Roesch***

*“If we have to build back better and use the pandemic moment for systemic change, I believe that will happen when the needs of the elites and the climate-vulnerable converge.”- **Arunabha Ghosh***

*“Environmental crimes open the door to other crimes, such as gender-based violence and the killing of environmental defenders and indigenous peoples.” - **Maiara Folly***

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 #2 - We will protect the planet

Major Points Voiced by Participants

- An estimated mere 18% of multimillion COVID relief packages worldwide can be considered “green investments,” which rounds out to only about \$368 billion going into green infrastructure and solutions.
- There is inadequate coherence, lack of leadership, and insufficient sources of sustained financing within the climate governance architecture, all of which need to be addressed urgently.

- Unexpected geopolitical shifts and events after the Paris Agreement was adopted, namely the rise of populism and the COVID-19 pandemic, have slowed the fight for effective climate action.
- Environmentally-friendly hydrogen could serve as an important substitute for fossil fuel in energy-heavy industries. Several countries already maintain hydrogen heavy industries, but there is no multilateral platform that brings them together. The lack of international cooperation in this space could widen the gap between those who maintain green hydrogen technology and those who need it.
- The commitment to “protect our planet” speaks to the need to protect biodiversity and natural resources. We cannot achieve these goals if we do not agree on a global mechanism to tackle illegal deforestation, which also represents 10 percent of global gas emissions. Deforestation destroys the most biodiverse areas, such as the Amazon rainforest, which is losing forested areas as large as Lebanon each year. Illegal deforestation is not only problematic for the forests and their ecosystems, it also opens the door to other crimes, such as corruption, financial crimes, gender-based violence, and the killing of indigenous peoples and environmental defenders.
- There is significant attention placed on the climate crisis, but not enough on pollution or biodiversity. We need a better understanding of how environmental crises are interconnected. They should be addressed by multisectoral and comprehensive responses based the overarching concept of human security, which puts people at the center and respects human well-being and dignity. This concept can also be applied in the field of ecological governance.
- Legal instruments for climate action are necessary but difficult to achieve. Given the urgent need for action, we need to work on multiple, parallel tracks when pursuing legally binding instruments.
- There is a concern that parties to the Paris Agreement are submitting updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) that are not sufficiently ambitious. In some instances, countries (for example, Brazil) reduced the ambition of their NDC pledges.
- The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) alone is not sufficient to tackle the climate challenge; for example, there should be global sectoral agreements that include both governments and the private sector.

Recommendations from individual participants: Policy, institutional, legal, normative, and operational reforms

- The UN Secretary-General’s proposed “New Social Contract” should encompass a **New Global Pact for the Environment**. It should include nature, society, the economy, and politics in order to save our planet and our species. However, at present time, there is no UN process to establish such a Pact. Current work on the **Global Pact for the Environment should be supported and prioritized**, in order to fulfill the crucial aim of enshrining key, binding ecological governance principles and bringing coherence among the hundreds of existing environmental agreements, which also currently lack effective monitoring and implementation standards.
- Create a **common green finance risk mitigation mechanism** across countries to analyze risks (political, currencies, policies, etc.) that business managers do not control. This can lower and flatten the risk curve and allow for projects in emerging markets to attract more capital for climate mitigation or adaptation.

- Leverage a **sustainable energy trade agreement** that ensures better, more robust, rules-bound manufacturing, and localized supply chains that cut across countries, rather than creating tariff barriers between a subset of just a few countries that, for example, currently control the manufacturing of solar panels.
- Establish a **green hydrogen alliance** that does not focus only on research and development or control of intellectual property rights. Rather, this initiative should employ emerging markets as the testbeds for deploying environmentally friendly hydrogen technologies at scale, in order to bring down capital costs, for instance, that drive the divergence between hydrogen versus coal-driven steel plants. This would further help to converge the interests of the “new green elite” with those who are most vulnerable to climate change.
- A new **technology facility/initiative involving the private sector to enable poorer countries to take advantage of innovative green-tech and to roll out renewables** is urgently needed and could draw from models that were employed, e.g. for vaccine rollout and other global problems.
- The negotiation of **legally-binding instruments focused on forest protection**, involving not only countries with large forest areas but also those importing and financing forest products is needed urgently. However, this initiative should learn from and avoid the top-down approaches of past convention efforts.
- Create a **Global Resilience Council** to bring global climate governance together with wider sustainable development efforts, outside of the UNFCCC framework. Similar to the Security Council, a new “Resilience Council” mechanism could be useful for discussing non-military threats and promoting conversations on issues critical to advancing progress across the UN agenda.
- We need to **invest in additional anticipatory, evidence-based foresight capacities** for global environmental governance that ensure vital analysis and that can effectively project global trends in order to guide international decision-making.

UN75 Declaration Commitment #12 - We will boost partnerships

Major Points Voiced by Participants

- The governance of partnerships in the UN is fragmented. There are bits and pieces of support for partnerships to function in the UN system, but more support is needed for new partnership ideas to be followed-through and for new partnership initiatives to progress.
- Among the major challenges that partnerships within the UN system face are a lack of predictability, transparency, accountability, and mechanisms to help guide effective partnerships. More thought is required on the concept of “networked multilateralism,” as well as the place of UN Member States in the “partnership-building” space.
- UNICEF, UNFPA, and UNDP, for instance, deal with thousands of partners. Therefore, it is important to know who these UN agencies are working with, who is able to deliver and share across their platforms, and who identifies what the risk assessment and the deliverables are. This will allow each UN agency to build on lessons learned from other partnerships.

- There is a gap in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that requires the engagement of the private sector, academia, and civil society. Partnerships need to foster better integration of private sector and public sector financing for achieving the SDGs.
- Data is important for assessing the progress of partnerships, and further investments are needed to build capacities for tracking global trends and evaluating policy initiatives on pioneering new partnerships.
- It might be argued that the world has moved beyond the need to create new treaties for the time being. Now the focus could/should be on implementing high-impact partnerships, integrating all sectors across the UN system, and committing to fulfilling the SDGs; key occasions like Stockholm +50 could be taken advantage of in this respect.
- There is an observable increase in multi-stakeholder coalitions, but they sometimes compete rather than coordinate with each other. Reimagined collaborative approaches are needed to address the traditional and continual challenges, structures, and issues that inhibit human and environmental development.
- Financing new projects and dynamic partnerships is crucial if we are to bring about normative and operational change, especially in transitioning towards a sustainable future.

Recommendations from individual participants: Policy, institutional, legal, normative, and operational reforms

- The UN Secretary-General and his team should include in the upcoming *Our Common Agenda* report a proposal for **a new partnerships hub**, building on existing structures (e.g., United Nations Office for Partnerships, United Nations Global Compact, among others). It should go beyond launching partnerships and focus on identifying good practices and follow-through initiatives. The partnerships hub could also help to scale-up existing partnerships, and to ensure that they are better equipped to advance progress across the entire UN agenda.
- The momentum to create a “New Social Contract” is about, first and foremost, an **understanding of partners at the local level**. There is a great amount of data at the UN on partnerships that are working and succeeding, so this should be used to create commitments that go beyond basic intentions to partner. The UN has the ability to create partnerships, but the system is not well connected at the operational level where local partners are found. The UN has the most value when it has high functioning offices at the national level.
- The UN needs to **build partnerships in a bottom-up fashion** to strengthen local partnerships and become an incubator for demand-driven partnerships.
- The future UN will entail **more networked and inclusive multilateralism**, where different actors and constituencies play a greater role in delivering global public goods. Civil society partnerships are essential in the realization of these goals following the *Our Common Agenda* report.

Participant List

Mohammed Abdelraouf, Chair, Major Groups Facilitating Committee (MGFC) at UNEP representing Science and Tech. Major Group & Gulf Research Center
Adriana Erthal Abdenur, Executive Director, Plataforma CIPÓ
Marianne Beisheim, Senior Associate, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP Berlin)
Cassie Bernyk, Permanent Mission of the Republic of the Maldives to the UN
Caio Borges, Programme Coordinator, Climate and Society Institute
Linda Burenius, Head of Development, Global Challenges Foundation
Amanda Ellis, Director, Global Partnerships, Wrigley Global Futures Laboratory at Arizona State University
Pelle Enarsson, Senior Advisor, UN Foundation
Maria Fernanda Espinosa, 73rd President of the General Assembly
Bojan Francuz, Program Associate, NYU-CIC
Arunabha Ghosh, CEO, Council on Energy, Environment and Water
Harris Gleckman, Member of the Board, Foundation for Global Governance and Sustainability
Maja Groff, Climate Governance Commission, Global Challenges Foundation & Visiting Professor, Leiden University, Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs
Sigrid Gruener, Programme Director, Dag Hammarskjold Foundation
Rebecca Hallin, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of Sweden to the UN
Agnes Ali Harm, Deputy Permanent Representative of Fiji to the United Nations
Nick Rene Hartmann, Senior Partnerships Advisor, UNDP
Magnus Jiborn, Head of Research, Global Challenges Foundation
Takeshi Komoto, Second Secretary, Permanent Mission of Japan to the UN
Georgios Kostakos, Executive Director, Foundation for Global Governance and Sustainability
Giovanna Kuele, Project Coordinator, Igarape Institute
Marina Kumskova, UN Liaison, Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict
Jimena Leiva Roesch, Head of the Peace and Sustainable Development Program, International Peace Institute
Robert Lorentz, Counselor, Permanent Mission of Germany to the UN
Felipe Morgado, Programme Officer, UN DESA
Beatrice Mosello, Senior Advisor, Adelphi, Senior Fellow, UN University Centre for Policy Research
Junya Nakano, Minister, Permanent Mission of Japan to the UN
Vitorino Mello Oliveira, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of Portugal to the UN
Oyebisi Oluseyi, Executive Director, Nigeria Network of NGOs
Marcel Pieper, Senior Adviser and Post-UN75 Focal Point, Delegation of the European Union to the UN
Alana Poole, Political Affairs Officer, Executive Office of the Secretary-General
Richard Ponzio, Director, Global Security, Justice & Governance Program, The Stimson Center
Amb. Adela Raz, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations
Nirere Sadrach, Fridays for Future Uganda
Déborah Silva do Monte, Professor, Federal University of Grande Dourados
Carlos Frederico Silva da Costa Filho, Professor, Federal University of Tocantins
Helge-Elisabeth Zeitler, Climate/Environment Lead, Delegation of the European Union to the UN