

## REFORMED MULTILATERALISM

# A new council for better global governance

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CONSIDERING the complex challenges that the global governance architecture is facing, new considerations are required to provide adequate and timely responses. The UN will host the Summit for the Future in September. The event presents a critical opportunity to chart a path for sustainable development and reformed multilateralism. Leading up to the Summit for the Future, stakeholder groups, including civil society and policy practitioner groups, have been asked to present new approaches to address the world's most pressing challenges.

In so doing, they would constructively contribute to the much-needed global governance reform process. In its preparation documents, the Summit of the Future recognises that "keeping with the vision of a more networked and inclusive multilateralism enshrined in Our Common Agenda, the Secretary-General has underscored the importance of engaging diverse stakeholders from across the full spectrum of society".

The UN's appeal to organisations to make representations and propose inclusive and critical approaches to addressing global concerns, offers an opportunity for civil society to develop and present views that will ensure more effective and representative multilateralism.

The annual meeting of the Academic Council of the UN System (Acuns) in Tokyo in June provided an apposite platform for the introduction and development of such thinking. Acuns is a significant organisation that seeks to bring together those studying and working on the practices and organisation of the UN system. With its gaze on the various global crises, with human security at its centre,

Acuns offers an opportunity for UN practitioners from across the world to share and debate their proposition.

The recent Acuns meeting allowed the Global South Perspectives Network (Network) to propose its thinking towards more effective and representative multilateralism. The network, of which the Inclusive Society Institute is a co-convenor, is a collective of academics, think tanks and civil society organisations that aims to constructively contribute to ensuring greater influence and an equitable partnership of the Global South states in matters relating to reformed and resilient multilateralism. Multilateralism that ensures adequate representation of the interests of the Global South. And for the broader contribution of the actors in the decision-making process relating to reforms and other actions affecting the multilateral system, anchored in the UN system.

Recognising that the world needs a stronger and more representative global governance system and that the UN in its current, outdated form has been unable to ensure such reform, the network used the opportunity to introduce its proposal of a Global Resilience Council (GRC). The GRC seeks to ensure rapid and effective UN responses to crises across the world. The thinking behind council recognises that the reforms required to the UN system cannot be accomplished by one centralised and specialised agency. Instead, it asks: How could the whole system be brought together so as to address prevailing human security issues? Such an approach recognises that singular mandates, or departments only addressing internal matters, do not address systemic problems.

The new council is proposed to be analogous to the UN Security Council (UNSC), but for non-military threats. It

is proposed to deal with systemic crises that have multiple dimensions. Such an approach should leverage learning from the past, to better address future events. For example, it should not get stuck in a situation akin to the Security Council, which empowers some powerful states with the veto power. This results in the UN not being able to address "big problems".

A GRC will be more representative than the UNSC. With 15 members, the Security Council is not representative of the world's 193 member states with different interests and concerns. The new body will supplement the Security Council. Whereas the Secretary-General has proposed something similar in his Our Common Agenda report, the suggestions have shortcomings as he suggests the creation of emergency platforms for each shock that emerges.

In such a situation, authorisation from member states would be required for each event. This would mean that the Secretary-General will decide which countries, civil society organisations and private sector players to invite to best address each crisis.

It is also proposed not to be permanent, but should be run on an ad hoc basis, to allow flexibility. Each structure will then end when that concomitant crisis ends. Such an approach is short-sighted and will prove to be ineffective. The crises of today, such as climate change, are not ad hoc crises. They are deeply ingrained in the way the world functions, affecting how people produce and consume. How the economy and politics work. It is not possible to get rid of these, systemic crises with an ad hoc structures.

A GRC will be an intergovernmental body; governments carry final responsibility for their citizens, and collectively for the whole of humanity. A mix of various (external) actors

cannot be expected to deal with existential questions facing countries, as evidenced by the Covax facility during the Covid-19 pandemic. The facility proved to work for only the wealthy countries that could pay the high costs. Those states were the first to receive their vaccines and often other, poorer states were denied their share until the richer states had more than enough. New structures, when set up, must be more representative. This will further ensure their legitimacy.

Unlike the voluntary Economic and Social Council, or the voluntary Paris Agreement, the GRC is proposed to have some obligatory powers. The suggestion is that in the start-up period, it could make direct proposals to governments, international finance institutions and judicial authorities. The organisations and institutions would act under their authority, leveraging or addressing issues themselves. As such, it would be able to hold actors accountable.

In conclusion, the concept of a GRC offers to be a body that will be central to reformed multilateralism. Through its collective response capabilities to major systemic crises, it would escalate concerns from the level of individual specialised agencies to the global community at large.

This would contribute to a concerted effort across various areas. It would function in the spirit of a "whole of government" approach, but on a planetary level. Such a body bodes well for the much-needed innovations that would bring about adequate and representative global governance reform.

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