



**Draft Speaking Notes
for the pre-recorded video message at the
High-Level Meeting of the UN General Assembly on the theme
“The Future We Want, the UN We Need:
Reaffirming our Collective Commitment to Multilateralism”
Monday, 21 September 2020**

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We stand at a critical moment in history. The great hopes raised by the UN Charter 75 years ago are clouded today by the evidence of pervasive growing inequalities, political polarization, inaction in the face of the existential challenges for humankind, and by the growth of a scepticism with regards to the value of multilateralism and international cooperation.

This is very concerning because now, more than ever before, there is an urgent need for global responses in order to address the consequences of a hugely disruptive global pandemic. A pandemic, we have to stress, that the international community has been unable to prevent and properly contain, despite several signals it refused to heed in the recent past, and the lessons that previous crises yielded.

The pandemic has brought to the surface the deeply rooted fragilities of the systems upon which our development is grounded. Basic infrastructures, service delivery systems (particularly in the health and education sectors), social protection platforms, job creation mechanisms, emergency preparedness: in all these policy areas the pandemic has shaken the very foundations of our societies. It has affected trust in public institutions and their effectiveness in responding to unprecedented global challenges.

Political systems are under stress too. The pandemic has exacerbated processes and conditions that already affected peace and conflict dynamics in the world. The fragility of institutional responses in many countries has increased vulnerability to the pandemic and its consequences. While the COVID-19 emergency is unfolding, the erosion of multilateralism is impacting on the implementation of global agendas that were adopted through consensus before the crisis. For all the regional and country differences that we can find in attitudes towards multilateralism, the truth is that the international system of norms and institutions created over the past decades is under tremendous stress and at the risk of becoming irrelevant. We cannot let that happen.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is not only humanity's best hope of protecting our planet and the inherent dignity of all human beings. Indeed, in many respects, it anticipated

some of the key elements that should guide national, regional and global responses to the pandemic today. A pillar of this approach is the implementation of the SDG16 plus on peace, justice and institutions. The crisis we are going through has taught us, in no uncertain terms, that trust in accountable institutions and processes is a fundamental public good.

Paradoxically, the most serious global, economic, social and political crisis since the end of the second world war, far from consolidating global support for multilateralism, has multiplied doubts about the capacity of international institutions to inspire, shape and support recovery strategies and plans. The Declaration on the 75th anniversary of the United Nations reflects such contradictions. While the Declaration recognizes many UN achievements in the fields of peace and security, human rights and sustainable development, its negotiations have brought to the fore critical fault lines that still divide the international community on such issues as UN's reform, climate action, women's rights, civil society engagement and the promotion of democracy and the rule of law.

We welcome the commitment expressed in the Declaration, and here I quote: *"We will continue to promote respect for democracy and human rights, to enhance democratic governance and the rule of law by strengthening transparent and accountable governance and independent judicial institutions"* (end of quote). We pledge our unwavering commitment to supporting those values and ideals such as the bedrock of the partnership between the UN and International IDEA, as stressed by our status as observers at the UN General Assembly. Our close links with the UN are part of a larger trend.

When the UN was established in 1945, its halls were populated by Member States. One of the big changes that characterized the last decades of UN history has been the opening up of that secluded space to other stakeholders: inter-governmental organizations, civil society, private sector, academic institutions, think tanks, and a wide range of partners have engaged in a constant conversation on global priorities, agendas and strategies. Their engagement has contributed to addressing new and emerging challenges, sharing experiences and practices, and strengthening partnerships on the ground for the implementation of global agendas.

This trend towards inclusion must continue. We are convinced that the UN will grow stronger out of the challenges posed by this pandemic. But it will do so only if it looks towards the future, and if it rekindles its will to change in the direction of more inclusion, more transparency and more democracy in the global arena. The way out of the crisis is not bouncing back to the pre-COVID-19 status quo. The challenge for the UN and for us all will be to exit the crisis by bouncing forward, by strengthening a more effective and more democratic multilateral space. At this critical juncture, when the UN turns 75, and International IDEA celebrates its own 25th anniversary, we can only hope that a renewed international commitment to multilateralism will allow us to build a better world over the next few decades, that will allow us to build a world in which no one will be left behind, in which every human being will have the opportunity to live in peaceful, just and inclusive societies, in which every person will fully enjoy the fundamental freedoms and rights that are the core of our common human heritage.

Happy 75th anniversary, United Nations, we proudly stand with you.

I thank you.