



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
1 April 2021

Original: English

---

## Seventy-fifth session

Agenda item 126

### Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly

#### **Letter dated 23 March 2021 from the Permanent Representative of Portugal to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly**

Further to my letter dated 24 February 2021, I have the honour to transmit herewith a letter from António Guterres (see annex), in which he presents his vision statement as a candidate for the position of Secretary-General of the United Nations for the 2022–2026 mandate.

*(Signed)* Francisco **Duarte Lopes**  
Permanent Representative



**Annex to the letter dated 23 March 2021 from the Permanent Representative of Portugal to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly**

**Letter dated 23 March 2021 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly**

I am writing to you in the framework of the process for the selection and appointment of the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

As stated in your joint letter with the President of the Security Council, dated 5 February 2021, this process is conducted in accordance with Article 97 of the Charter of the United Nations and is guided by the principles of transparency and inclusivity.

I would like to reaffirm my willingness to fully meet the membership's expectation that, in line with those principles, candidates should submit a written vision statement and participate in informal dialogues or meetings with Member States, as stated in the letter you addressed to me on 8 January 2021.

It is in this context that I hereby submit my vision statement as a candidate for the position of Secretary-General of the United Nations for the 2022–2026 mandate.

I should be grateful if this document could be brought to the attention of the members of the General Assembly.

A similar letter has been sent to the President of the Security Council.

*(Signed)* António **Guterres**  
Secretary-General

## Enclosure

### Vision statement

#### “Restoring trust and inspiring hope”

#### The next five years for the United Nations

by António Guterres

I am grateful for the opportunity to share with Member States my vision statement as a candidate for the position of Secretary-General of the United Nations from 2022 to 2026. It has been a profound privilege to serve as Secretary-General since 2017.

As five years ago, I wish to start with a reaffirmation of the Charter of the United Nations, which is indeed “an exceptional achievement in the annals of history”. The Charter perseveres even in the face of profound transformation. Its purposes, principles and provisions epitomize all that we stand for and guide all that we do.

For all that the world changed in the intervening years, the tenets of my 2016 vision statement are still largely relevant: understanding global megatrends, “connecting the dots”, the centrality of prevention, coordination and partnerships, reform and innovation – underpinned by the values of the Charter – remain key for the discharge of the mandate of a UN Secretary-General.

But what does this mean in 2021, as we look ahead to the years to come?

### A. Challenges and opportunities

It is a truism to say that we live in an interconnected and interdependent world. There is hardly any issue today that does not reverberate across borders, and indeed across generations, that does not require the world to come together to act, that does not demand equity and solidarity. Yet do we live accordingly? Do we take this interconnectedness into account in words or actions?

Not enough. And because of this, we are all at greater risk. And not only all of us, but succeeding generations as well, and indeed the very viability of life on earth.

Over the past four years, within the possibilities of the office that has been entrusted to me as the Secretary-General and in the face of complicated political realities, I have tried to give voice to drive action on our interconnectedness. To the risks and opportunities that it yields. To the imperative of working together to solve problems before they overwhelm us. To the amazing possibilities at hand if we do it in solidarity.

Over those four years, we have taken this journey together to lead the charge on climate action; launch the Decade of Action to achieve sustainable development; vigorously promote gender equality; engage in a surge in diplomacy for peace and a better integration of prevention and risk assessment into core UN decision-making; set in motion Action for Peacekeeping; take early action against the four famines;<sup>1</sup> reinforce prevention and response measures to sexual exploitation and abuse; initiate a Call to Action for Human Rights; ensure a coordinated UN response to prevent and counter terrorism; set out a Disarmament Agenda; adopt strategies to counter hate speech and safeguard religious sites; develop a youth strategy; ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities; and institute a system-wide data strategy. This was accompanied by wide-ranging internal reforms to the UN development system, the

<sup>1</sup> Yemen, northeast Nigeria, South Sudan and Somalia.

peace and security architecture, as well as management, to enhance transparency, accountability and effectiveness. And, over the past year, by an all-out effort on all aspects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, from safeguarding lives and livelihoods to ensuring a sustainable and equitable recovery.

It is hoped that these various initiatives will be part of a deeper and broader transformation much needed to rise to the challenges of a rapidly evolving world.

There is no doubt that the challenges we face today have become infinitely more complex: a pandemic that has brought the world to its knees; climate change on the cusp of the point of no return; biodiversity regressing dramatically; pollution levels reaching fatal highs, including in oceans; geostrategic divides and dysfunctional power relations; complex wars with no end in sight, frequently associated with the spread of terrorism; destabilizing, skyrocketing inequalities, notably for women and girls and the poor; the struggle for gender equality facing major pushbacks; inequities increasing, especially for lower- and middle-income countries, and within societies everywhere; the shadowy side of an increasingly unhinged digital world; an eroding nuclear disarmament regime; unprecedented humanitarian and human rights crises; the prospect of famine rising exponentially; record numbers of refugees and the forcibly displaced. The global South, women and minority groups in particular have been disproportionately affected by these developments.

The complexity, human toll and dramatic pace of these challenges and our faltering response to them expose a deep fragility in our world. Governance at all levels has become more difficult, resulting in a widespread unease, a heightened sense of unfairness and a rise in populism and inward-looking nationalist agendas that peddle simplistic fixes, pseudo-solutions and conspiracy theories. We have seen a growing disconnect between people and the institutions that were supposed to serve them, manifested, for instance, in an increase in social movements and protests against governance structures. No part of the world has been spared this uptick in popular discontent.

We also cannot ignore the fact that, while it has transformed our world for the better in many ways, the technology revolution has a shadowy side that has contributed in no small measure to the disquiet on display. We are in one of the most important transformational moments in recent history – the fourth industrial revolution. Large technology companies have emerged as geopolitical actors. Serious concern exists about the destructive potential of the misuse of artificial intelligence. Massive demographic shifts are under way, as is rapid urbanization. These developments have changed how we live, how we work, how we eat, how we think and how we interact with each other.

In the midst of all this, international cooperation has been put to the test as seldom before. The purpose of multilateralism has been questioned and even undermined by some in positions of power. Solutions to shared problems have proved more elusive in the context of fragmented geopolitical power dynamics and emerging powerful non-State actors. There has been deep questioning of how we share our societies and this fragile planet, of the fundamental ties and trust that connect us, how we engage with those who disagree, feel hard done by or excluded, how we take account of future generations at different levels of governance.

These trends have produced a deep paradox: international cooperation is more necessary than ever but frequently more difficult to achieve. It has been embraced more often in the breach than in reality. Or cosmetically but without the deep will and resolve needed collectively to make a meaningful difference.

People have had enough of this half-heartedness, of this short-sightedness. People are demanding more. Perhaps, for the first time in our lifetime, the pandemic

has had the effect of making all people around the world feel vulnerable at the same time, creating a strong sense of interconnectedness. They are demanding leadership that rises to this challenge. We are seeing an overwhelming public appetite around the world for more, and more effective international cooperation. Women and young people in particular have made that case. Some of the most negative trends of the recent past are starting to be reversed. There is a genuine sense of hope in the air.

Increasingly, the realization is setting in that the aforementioned paradox – if left to fester – could actually end life as we know it. The climate emergency and COVID-19 have exposed the ways in which our fates are connected and the costs of our inability to solve shared problems. COVID-19 alone has upended our lives, wiping out decades of painstakingly achieved progress towards poverty and hunger eradication, children’s access to education, gender equality, immunization, to name a few. It also laid bare many of the aforementioned risks and fragilities.

Let us not have any illusions. It would be easy to assume that “business as usual” would simply mean continuing as we are. That is not what will happen. A business-as-usual approach will produce negative downward cycles of climate chaos, biodiversity loss, mistrust, social upheaval, poverty, conflict, massive migration and disaster. It will almost certainly ensure that we and the generations that follow will face a dystopian future in which rights and values are further eroded while the likelihood mounts of catastrophic risks.

Alternatively, let us imagine that we get more serious about our shared vulnerability and the need for collective action. Let us imagine that leaders and people alike recognize the need to come together at local, national and global levels, to chart a course towards a better – and not a dystopian – future. Out of immense suffering, we have a once-in-a-lifetime window of opportunity. But I also think it is a window that could rapidly close. We have therefore reached an important inflection point in history – a genuine moment of truth.

Based on the foregoing, a central question of today remains prevention in all its aspects, ranging from conflict, climate change, pandemics to poverty and inequality. Indeed, our success in finding solutions to the interlinked problems we face hinges on our ability to anticipate, prevent and prepare for major risks to come. This puts a revitalized, comprehensive and overarching prevention agenda front and centre in all we do from now on. We need more innovation, more inclusion and more foresight, investing in the global public goods that sustain us all. It requires a reset multilateralism for the new era, based on principles of equity and solidarity. It is my firm conviction that this new awareness of our shared vulnerability, and the need to work and act together, will help us seize the opportunity to correct course and shape a better future.

Simply put, the choices we make now will determine our trajectory for decades to come.

## **B. Role of the United Nations going forward**

Sovereign States have at their disposal an intergovernmental Organization – the United Nations – whose very purpose is to bring them together to “achieve international cooperation in solving international problems”. Its presence is global, and its activities span the breadth of human need, supporting peace where it is fragile, providing humanitarian relief even in the most remote locations on earth, engaging with governments and societies on sustainable development and human rights, as well as crafting forward-looking, solution-oriented agendas for transboundary issues. In this context, the governance of critical global public goods, not just public health but

also peace and the natural environment, needs to be reinforced and reimagined. Participation can be as wide and inclusive as necessary.

States also have the blueprints for a better world. The Charter itself, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Sustainable Development Goals represent the comprehensive global plan for peace and security, mutual trust, equality and equity. In addition, seventy-five years of resolutions and agreements represent a crucial heritage, an *acquis* painstakingly developed over decades. We can and must build on them, strengthen and redouble our efforts to implement them with full determination. Indeed, if we had lived up to the promises we have already made, we would not be looking over the precipice.

But the world has also changed beyond recognition over seventy-five years, creating new needs and gaps. And so, while the fundamental values and principles of the UN endure, in some areas we will need new agreements, for instance, for regulating cyberspace, artificial intelligence and other frontier issues.

And in a world on a precipice, we must combine the best of our past achievements with the most creative and adaptable look to the future. It is vital for the world to come together and develop a new social contract, including with future generations, and a new global deal. It has been said that we may have reached a new “San Francisco” moment that must be seized before it is too late. Just as our founders came together determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, we must come together with equal resolve and vision to save succeeding generations from the scourges of war, climate change, pandemics, hunger, poverty and injustice.

To that end, it would be my intention, over the next five years, to work with Member States so that the UN can be the pivot to turn things around. We can already discern the beginnings, but its breakthrough requires careful, conscious nurturing. It requires humility, civility, openness, inclusiveness, cohesion, professionalism, innovation, restoring trust and inspiring hope. It requires us to meet people where they are and to keep them front and centre of our thoughts and actions. Anchored in the purposes and principles of the Charter, it also requires a spirit and culture of genuine partnership with all actors around the world: Member States but also regional organizations, international financial institutions, civil society, the private sector, science, academia and the media. This deep belief in partnership has been an important guiding principle throughout my tenure and will remain so, if I am given a second mandate.

### **C. Imperatives for the next five years**

From my vantage point, the following imperatives become apparent for the next five years:

#### **In the short-term, mounting a massive and enduring response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences**

COVID-19 has been the wake-up call and the dress rehearsal for potentially worse crises to come – it is critical to heed its lessons and to use our emergence from this crisis as an opportunity. One of the single most important tests will be how best we are able to overcome COVID-19 and how best to equip the world to prevent and be better prepared for future pandemics and similar existential threats. Developing and middle-income countries have been particularly hard hit, requiring massive support ranging from debt relief, adequate liquidity, including the allocation of special drawing rights, to increased resources for multilateral financial institutions.

The UN mounted a [full-fledged response to COVID-19 and its effects](#), from the health and humanitarian responses to a broad policy agenda, as well as support for addressing socioeconomic impacts and recovering better. Building on all the initiatives and crisis management we have undertaken so far in this area, it will be important to use the convening power of the UN to support leadership for a unified global push that is based on principles of equity and solidarity in order to:

- (a) Get past COVID-19 as a health threat, in particular ensuring that vaccines are available to everyone, everywhere, as soon as possible;
- (b) Sustain a joined-up approach to the pandemic's wider collateral impacts on economies and societies, notably in the most affected developing and middle-income countries, through inclusive and sustainable recovery and reversing the significant setback towards ending poverty; and
- (c) Come together in an all-out effort to prevent, prepare for, mitigate and respond to any future pandemics in the most comprehensive way possible beyond the immediate health response.

Pandemic recovery is our chance to engineer a reset, reignite the Decade of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals and chart a path to a more equitable future. It is clear that it needs to embrace renewable energy, as well as green and resilient infrastructure. Failure to address COVID-19 comprehensively will erode confidence in international cooperation urgently needed in other areas.

### **Leaving no stone unturned in the search for peace and security**

We face an increasingly fragmented peace and security context, impacted by geopolitical divides and the constantly evolving nature of conflicts. On the other hand, there are growing interlinkages between climate, scarce natural resources, socioeconomic vulnerabilities and conflict; threats from biorisks, disinformation, hate speech and cyberattacks. When I took office I pledged to engage in a surge in diplomacy for peace, and so I did. And yet it was often a Sisyphean task, given the complexity of the conflict landscape. Not least in light of my experience as High Commissioner for Refugees and living through many a humanitarian emergency, I also pledged to put more emphasis on prevention, putting in place a much more robust system of regional monthly risk reviews, senior decision-making and stronger support to Member States in managing and addressing crisis risks.

And yet the challenges continue to outpace our solutions. This lends great urgency to review the available mechanisms and tools to make sure they are fit to respond to these challenges. In this regard, it will be important for me to continue working closely with Member States to enhance the UN system's ability to address different conflict drivers from a prevention-oriented perspective, as well as seek to invest more in preventing crises.

When COVID-19 took hold, I issued a call for a global ceasefire, noting that the real enemy was the virus itself. Building on it and a number of openings in ongoing conflict situations, I would continue to do my utmost – through the good offices function of the Secretary-General, as an honest broker, bridge builder and messenger of peace – to work with the Security Council, as the body entrusted by the Charter with primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, and Member States to mobilize greater support for political solutions to some long-standing conflicts. I would reinvigorate and broaden a multidimensional prevention and preparedness agenda through concerted efforts. In this effort, it is critical to be guided by a comprehensive understanding of peace and security, stressing the urgency of complying with international law, at the heart of which is the Charter.

This will also require developing a new vision for peace operations in the future, enhancing Action for Peacekeeping, Sustaining Peace and the protection of civilians, and looking again at the peace continuum holistically in light of today's challenges. And we need to ask hard questions about those operations where there is no peace to keep in the absence of political solutions and review those where the resources and equipment are simply not adequate to fulfil the mandates. I am ready to see further with the Security Council, in the exercise of its peace enforcement function, as to how regional partners, notably the African Union, can be mandated and properly funded, including in counter-terrorism operations.

Based on the [Agenda for Disarmament](#), I would like to update with Member States the vision on disarmament around its three main areas: to save humanity; to save lives; and in relation to future generations, taking into account recent developments. I would like to explore in particular a dialogue to generate broader support for non-proliferation, a world gradually free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction, the effective control of conventional weapons and the regulation of new weapons technology. In light of the Decade of Action and the lessons learned from the pandemic, it would be important to study further possibilities to reduce military spending and redirect resources to social infrastructure, sustainable development, build trust and collective peace.

Moreover, I would continue actively to promote meaningful women and youth participation in peace processes, notably putting women at the centre of our conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacebuilding and mediation efforts – and increasing the numbers of our women peacekeepers.

Another challenge remains terrorism, which is waged on an entirely different scale, notably through its geographic span. Nothing justifies it. Progress has been made but we see terrorism rising in places that lack effective security arrangements and capacity to address social and other root causes. Continued cooperation is therefore needed to prevent and counter terrorism, including new forms thereof, while upholding the core values of the UN, notably human rights and fundamental freedoms. This requires a redoubling of collective efforts to counter terrorism's root causes. It also means addressing the cross-border nature of terrorism, which is increasingly linked to crime.

### **Making peace with nature and climate action**

As set out in my [“State of the Planet” speech](#), humanity is waging war on nature. Biodiversity is collapsing, ecosystems are disappearing, and air and water pollution are killing 9 million people annually. And with people and livestock encroaching on and disrupting ecosystems, the risk of more and more dangerous zoonotic diseases is real. Moreover, the past decade was the hottest in human history, with all the serious consequences this entails.

It is evident that the world is in the midst of a triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature loss and pollution. This triple crisis is the number one existential threat to humanity, countries and communities around the world. The climate emergency in particular is the defining issue of our time. People around the world, in particular young people, have woken up to this reality, demanding urgent action and a fundamental reorientation of all aspects of life and our relationship with the environment. Some of my most memorable moments during my tenure were my visit to small island developing States in the Pacific, witnessing first-hand the impact climate change has had on them already, as well as listening intently to young people about their fears and hopes during the youth summit which I convened in September 2019 ahead of the climate summit.



It is abundantly clear that we need an urgent, all-out effort to turn things around. This must be the top priority for everyone, everywhere, necessitating climate action, the protection of biodiversity, forests, oceans, maritime environments and, importantly, cutting global greenhouse gas emissions in order to reach net zero by mid-century. In order to reach the latter goal, massive investment is also necessary in adaptation and resilience, as well as to make climate financing work for all, including through the full implementation of the commitments made in Paris.

Building on this year's important events and the growing global coalition for carbon neutrality, I see the role of the Secretary-General to ring the alarm bell, propose solutions and sustain urgent action on the macroplanetary level for years to come. In this context, if we seize it, emerging from the pandemic is an opportunity to implement the right combination of policies that can lead to green and blue recovery, with a just transition, notably in the sectors of energy, aviation, transport, tourism, the maritime sector, agriculture, industry and infrastructure development. I would continue to champion this cause with all my vigour.

### **Turbocharging the Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and advocating for a more equitable world**

Let us face the facts. In no realm is the gap greater between our promises and the grim realities of people's daily lives, than in our quest for sustainable development leaving no one behind. The global political and economic system is not delivering adequately on critical global public goods, including sustainable development, which is at the core of the social contract. Yet the Sustainable Development Agenda is the negotiated blueprint for our partnership with governments and societies to build peaceful, prosperous and inclusive societies on a healthy planet. The Decade of Action is aimed at transforming institutions and structures, broadening inclusion and driving sustainability. With less than a decade left to go, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are off-track. Yet we know that those countries and companies that have already embedded the SDGs have been much more resilient to external shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Given the glaring inequalities apparent in the wake of the pandemic, I am as committed as ever to the vision set out in my [Nelson Mandela lecture](#) on inequality. I would redouble efforts to advocate for equity between and among States, as well as promote social cohesion, equality and non-discrimination on all fronts within societies: gender, racial equality, sexual orientation, minority protection, eradicating poverty and destitution, support for refugees, the internally displaced, migrants and stateless people. This is directly linked to the implementation of the SDGs and the crucial aspiration of truly leaving no one behind. My efforts would be firmly guided by an overarching age, gender and diversity sensitive lens.

The vision and promise of the UN is that food, health care, water and sanitation, education, decent work and social security are not commodities for sale to those who can afford them, but basic human rights to which we are all entitled. We know that education and digital technology can be the two greatest enablers and equalizers. Equally, we must break the vicious cycle of corruption, which is both a cause and effect of inequality.

It is clear that the implementation of the SDGs requires massive investment and a new approach to financing. I talked about the urgent need for a quantum leap in financial support, notably as I hope the world embarks on an inclusive and sustainable recovery. The Financing for Development discussions taking place within the UN in the COVID-19 context have shown a new way of doing business in the UN in collaboration with the international financial institutions – an area I would seek to advance. I wish to see the fight against inequality as central to a new globalization

that is fairer, more inclusive, sustainable and human-centric, with a particular emphasis on the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States.

Moreover, I would like to pursue further a much more integrated working together within the UN system that straddles across peace and security, sustainable development and humanitarian action, firmly underpinned by human rights. The various actors in these areas need to work much more seamlessly together right from the outset of a crisis and even before, to prevent it in the first place – through effective coordination that is results-oriented and not driven by process. We have made important progress in this area, not least through my reform efforts, but more needs to be done. This is unfinished business that I would value an opportunity to work on in the years ahead.

### **Ensuring the centrality of human rights**

When I took office, human rights were under threat around the world. If anything, this threat looms even larger today. My [Call to Action for Human Rights](#) was issued just before the world went into lockdown in the face of the pandemic, but its seven domains for action were further validated by the COVID-19 crisis. It is only the beginning of truly mainstreaming a human rights culture and prism within the UN, engaging with all Member States and civil society at large, including in the context of the Human Rights Council and through the universal periodic review, inspiring young people and making a concerted effort to reverse the pushbacks we have seen over the past couple of years, with attention to the full breadth of rights – economic, social, cultural, civil and political – their universality and indivisibility, ensuring accountability and addressing the plight of victims.

In 2023 we will commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and 30 years of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action on human rights. That may be a suitable moment to take stock, rejuvenate and update our thinking, perhaps via a follow-up world conference on human rights. We can reflect on the transformational and inspiring role human rights have played in our lives, linking it to peace, development and humanitarian action underpinned by strong rule of law principles. This would include specific actions to support the Decade of Action for Sustainable Development, notably eradicating poverty and promoting universal access to education and health care; the protection of civic space, building on the right to participate and the freedom of expression, association and assembly; explore the interlinkage between climate, biodiversity and human rights; address the human rights aspects in the digital and artificial intelligence realm; advance respect for international humanitarian law, seeking to end impunity, ensuring better humanitarian access and the protection of humanitarian actors. This process could also include updated action on racial justice and equality, building public trust of the historically marginalized who continue to suffer, with the UN as key to ending racism, xenophobia, discrimination and hate speech (building very much on my strategies to [combat hate speech](#) and [safeguard religious sites](#)).

Another theme, set out further below, would be accelerating gender equality and combating violence against women, notably through legal reform and mobilizing social transformation, building on the outcome of the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Generation Equality. And I would seek to promote a system-wide Agenda for Protection, as indicated in my Call to Action for Human Rights.

### **Taking gender equality to the next level**

Gender inequality and discrimination against women and girls are perhaps the most overwhelming injustice across the globe; an abuse that is crying out for

attention. Everywhere, women are worse off than men, simply because they are women. As set out in my speech on “Women and Power”, gender equality is the prerequisite for a better world. The pandemic has worsened already deep inequalities facing women and girls, erasing years of progress towards gender equality. It has also sparked a parallel epidemic of violence against women worldwide, with skyrocketing domestic abuse, trafficking, sexual exploitation and child marriage. It is clear that the world needs a new push to advance women’s leadership and equal participation. A better future depends on addressing this power imbalance.

We have consistently been at the forefront of driving a gender equality agenda globally, including in response to the pandemic and its disproportionate impact on women and girls. Within the UN, I am proud to have achieved gender parity among the senior leadership, including the resident coordinators, and we have a roadmap in place to achieve parity at all levels, as well as more equitable geographical representation in the years ahead. A lot remains to be done, however.

Action needed will variously include: advocating for the realization of women’s equal rights fully, including by promoting the repealing of discriminatory laws and enacting positive measures; advocating to ensure equal representation everywhere through special measures; supporting the advancement of women’s economic inclusion through equal pay, targeted credit, job protection and significant investments in the care economy and social protection; ensuring their sexual and reproductive health; promoting the adoption of emergency response plans to address violence against women and girls, and follow through with funding, policies and political will; giving space to the intergenerational transition that is under way; shifting mindsets, raising public awareness and addressing systemic bias consistently.

The world has an opportunity to overturn generations of entrenched and systemic discrimination. It is time to build an equal future. The UN must continue to be a steadfast partner in pursuing this essential work, which will benefit all the world’s people. I intend to deepen my personal commitment to highlighting and supporting gender equality in all areas of our work.

### **Focusing on people**

This should not need to be said. But as long as we live in a world of inequality, the Secretary-General does need to say it: our trademark must always be bettering the lives of people and communities. Our Charter begins with “we the peoples” and reaffirms faith in the dignity and worth of the human person. This is what needs to motivate any governance system, and importantly our peace, development, humanitarian and human rights work. Nowhere else is this more apparent than in the humanitarian work of the UN, of which we should all be very proud. Humanitarian needs have grown exponentially, with conflict and the pandemic being the main drivers. We will need to meet these needs and constantly ensure the safeguarding of the humanitarian space.

Focusing on people is also about listening to and engaging people in all that we do. To that end, we initiated a global listening exercise to mark the UN’s 75th anniversary – representing the UN’s most ambitious grass-roots effort to date to understand expectations of international cooperation by people at large around the world.

This focus on people remains an important yardstick. It is also at the heart of the social contract, including between generations and in relation to future ones. Through meaningful participation and regularized engagement, people of all walks of life are able to give voice to their plight and their needs, secure their rights, get the necessary support and find a path towards a life of greater stability. Ongoing dialogue

fosters trust between people and institutions, not least to elicit a concrete sense of what is troubling them and to clarify what needs to be done in response.

While statistics are critical, they will never replace engaging at the human level. This is about empathy with people in their predicament; understanding how multifaceted we are; refusing to limit the view to one characteristic or identity. Each story reminds us of the volatility of life; how from one day to the next, violence and conflict, natural hazards or a pandemic can massively disrupt an existence and a previously expected life path. Each of the stories we listen to brings home to us the very essence of human existence, the rich texture of life, and how interrelated everything is. They motivate us to make a difference in the lives of others, and these voices need to be heard in everything we do in the UN, and I would rigorously pursue giving voice to the voiceless in our daily work.

### **Rising to the challenge of digital transformation**

Advances in technology and science have left no aspect of life untouched. The fourth industrial revolution has been deeply transformative, connecting and networking the world in hitherto unimaginable ways, generating innovation and being a driver of progress for sustainable development. But we are also faced with a colossal digital divide that reinforces social and economic divisions; surveillance, control and manipulation possibilities of an unprecedented nature; anarchic and criminal behaviour in cyberspace and ungoverned digital spaces, including the Internet, which have created new vectors of instability and thrown up huge ethical, social and regulatory questions. I welcome in this regard that Member States concluded by consensus the report of the Open-ended Working Group on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security.

We know that within a decade, national security will be more about data, critical infrastructure and cyber than about tanks, guns or soldiers. Traditional security concepts need to be updated, requiring a tailored crisis management approach. There are huge challenges of digital technology developments in the 21st century, which need to be tackled head-on. Among many examples, we have, for instance, seen how disinformation and other harmful practices have been deployed to serve political and commercial agendas, with a corrosive, divisive and polarizing impact on societies.

It is my intention to bring all stakeholders together, including through a strengthened Internet Governance Forum, to ensure robust implementation of the [digital roadmap](#), which I launched in June 2020 in follow-up to the [report of the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation](#).

The aim is – and has to be – an open, free and secure digital future, in full respect for data protection, privacy and other relevant human rights standards. The digital roadmap promotes such a vision of an inclusive, sustainable digital future by connecting the remaining 4 billion people to the Internet by 2030. Follow-up will also entail advancing efforts to enhance regulation in the use of artificial intelligence; advocating for more order and effective governance of the Internet, cyber and outer space; as well as, importantly, overcoming the digital divide. We cannot afford a two-speed world. And women need to have an equal role in designing digital technologies. As we have learned the hard way during the pandemic, the objective must be that everyone is connected. Digitalization and digital cooperation must be effectively leveraged to benefit and address global issues.

### **Advancing multilateralism and our common agenda**

If there has been a single lesson of the past four years, it is that we cannot solve our biggest problems if we do not come together. But coming together is not only about institutions or processes. It is in the first instance about our mindsets. It is very

human to want to retreat into like-minded groups, into comfortable ways of thinking, into old ways of doing business. But this tendency is harming us. Everything has been changing around us much more rapidly than ever before. And as we look ahead, the way we live and where, the type of cities or rural areas, how we educate ourselves throughout our lifetime, the type and forms of work we will engage in, all of that and much more will look very different from what we have been used to until now.

If we want a future in which we live in peace, at ease, with our basic needs met, collaborating, in greener cities, with socioeconomic models that value well-being and sustainability, as well as economic progress, where we enjoy open spaces for debate, as well as solidarity and trust within societies, between them and with future generations, we have to overcome our tendency to polarization and instead embrace international cooperation that is, in the first instance, about solving problems. That is underpinned by a deep sense of solidarity with each other, that understands the megatrends, connects the dots and is built on responsibility-sharing, making any transboundary issue and global common an international whole-of-society matter.

The latter is not about a global government or new bureaucracies but for Member States to come together to define what are the global commons that may require governance improvements. The starting point needs to be respect for and compliance with international law, its progressive development when gaps are identified, including, as necessary, through inclusive policies, the strengthening of institutions, as well as the appropriate engagement of all relevant stakeholders.

Multilateralism is hard yet rewarding work, as we all know through our commitment to diplomacy. It is the antidote to populist nationalism that wreaked havoc in the 20th century. We must not allow narrow interests and unilateral actions to re-emerge as a mainstay of international relations. It would be a disservice to the significant strides made since the Second World War. It would also be a fatal denial of the interconnectedness of life.

Responding to the mandate given by the General Assembly in the UN75 Declaration, I will present a report in September 2021 on how to advance “our common agenda” to address present and future challenges. This report is meant to be a contribution for multilateralism to adapt to the threats, challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. This would mean a networked multilateralism that links global institutions across sectors and geographies, and an inclusive multilateralism that draws on the capacities of civil society, regions and cities, businesses, academic and scientific institutions. That is how we can ensure effective multilateralism. That is how we can combat irrationality and sustain the spirit of the enlightenment and the modern age.

### **Embarking on a United Nations 2.0**

Over its seventy-five years, the UN has been capable of enormous adaptation and innovation – far more than it is traditionally given credit for. The most famous example is peacekeeping. But there are so many more. I have always understood the Charter as able to deal with evolving circumstances, to envisage cross-pillar cooperation and to guarantee coherence in the work of the UN. The reform endeavours over the past four years have already been yielding results, best demonstrated by how the UN system came together to rise to the COVID-19 challenges. It is clear that institutions are not static but need to be nimble, dynamic and evolving to address ever more complex issues both at Headquarters and in our operations around the world. We, in the UN, are called upon to adapt in order to remain a universal platform for cooperation among sovereign States, based on the principles of equality, mutual respect, mutual benefit and international law, in accordance with the Charter.

It is also important to highlight that the work of the UN is only possible because of the strong dedication and commitment of UN staff, our biggest asset, bringing out the best and subscribing to the highest ethical standards in line with UN values.

A more integrated, cohesive and joined up UN that builds and participates in networks outside is the way of the future. Since everything is interconnected, we need system-wide solutions, not single-issue responses. Building on the consolidation of the reform efforts to date, we will continue to develop new methods of work to address today's and future challenges with a wide and ever evolving engagement with States, private, scientific and civil society actors. We will also build on our new communications strategy to ensure that what we know, produce and do is compellingly presented to a broad audience.

While continuous improvement and an unwavering commitment to transparency, accountability and oversight will remain the norm, it would be important to accelerate transformation through the below quintet of change in the years ahead.

- **Data, analysis and communications** – building on the overarching UN [data strategy](#) launched last year, turning the Organization into the state-of-the-art data analyst and communicator for the benefit of the world.
- **Innovation and digital transformation** – based on all available means, using our innovation infrastructure to permeate a wide range of our work to do our job better.
- **Strategic foresight** – engaging in strategic foresight, linking up with other entities around the world and feeding it into anticipatory action and preparedness.
- **Performance and results orientation** – focusing on delivery and measuring the success of our work, learning lessons from what has not worked and being driven by impact.
- **Work culture** – simplifying and reducing unnecessary bureaucratic processes and fostering a work culture of collaboration.

More specifically, as regards any decisions by Member States to adapt the intergovernmental organs to the needs and realities of today, I would stand ready to provide the necessary support.

### **Rekindling shared commitment to our enduring values**

The fundamental values of the UN are enduring and embedded in its Charter. They are not the preserve of any region. Indeed, they are found in every culture and religion across the world: peace, justice, human dignity, tolerance and solidarity. But somewhere along the way, the trust and sense of solidarity that must underpin collective action have been waning. It is up to us to rebuild. People need to trust once more that the values of the UN mean something for them, and that they are relevant to our lives in the 21st century. It will be important to translate them into current and future challenges, guiding the ethics of the future and enhancing a heightened sense of responsibility, responsibility-sharing and accountability, notably towards young people and future generations. We need to explore together, including with religious leaders and philosophers, what ethics for the future means, based on the core values on which the UN was founded.

---

## D. Conclusion

As we emerge from the pandemic, the UN is more relevant than ever. This was clear in the responses to our global listening exercise conducted for the 75th anniversary, but it was also clear in the ways people looked to States – the very States that make up the United Nations – and to international organizations to solve the biggest problem we have collectively faced since our founding. We must act as a catalyst and a platform for more inclusive, networked and effective forms of multilateralism. Our direction of travel is clear on peace and security, climate action, sustainable development, human rights and the humanitarian imperative. Our power to transform the current situation into a better world and future for all depends on everyone, everywhere, and can only be done successfully if we are resolute and resolved to combine our efforts towards our common agenda for the benefit of humanity and the planet. It is upon us – our choice – to make this a reality now before it is too late. It would be my deep honour if Member States were to entrust me again to contribute to fulfil this aspiration.

New York, 23 March 2021

---