

Building a world community



UN2020 update  
Toward a 75th anniversary of UN renewal and reform  
by Fergus Watt

*The text below is based on remarks by Fergus Watt, Coordinator, UN2020 Initiative at a side event April 24 2018 during the UNGA High-Level Meeting on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace.*

The idea of a United Nations 2020 Summit starts with a general sense of expectation around the UN's 75th anniversary milestone. But the attraction here is more than a simple anniversary. More importantly, it offers an opportunity to address the present crisis in multilateralism, through a General Assembly-led, multistakeholder process dedicated to strengthening the organization.

The need is clear. General Assembly President Lajčák, and many others, have drawn the attention of governments to the current crisis in multilateralism. Important large governments that ideally would lead at the United Nations are not doing so. They have withdrawn funding, withdrawn from important UN agencies as well as multilateral processes on climate change and migration, among others. Meanwhile important international prohibitions on intervention and use of weapons of mass destruction are being ignored. And the institutions that provide global protection of civic space, freedoms of association and expression, are under attack.

So the idea of a 2020 anniversary summit offers a political space where governments and other UN stakeholders can push back. Specifically, what we're calling for is a General Assembly mandated process of stocktaking, re-commitment to the principles and purposes of the Charter, and reforms that strengthen the organization.

We began this work a little over a year ago. The initiating organizations are the Stimson Center, CIVICUS, the Workable World Trust and the World Federalist Movement. The principal focus, at least at this stage, is on process, generating support for a General Assembly mandate for a 2020 summit process.

We have focused on the UN Ad Hoc Working Group of the General Assembly on Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) as a vehicle for mandating this process. A resolution is expected in September. We are grateful that a number of states

spoke recently in favour of preparations for 2020 at AHWG meetings; and even more grateful that the AHWG Co-Chairs (from Colombia and Croatia) included in the “zero draft” of this year’s resolution supportive language that “Calls for timely preparations for the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations.”

Should this text find its way through to the final version of the AHWG resolution (expected early September), a subsequent decision of the UN GA would set out the crucial “modalities” of a 2020 process – things like the scope of a preparatory process, opportunities for civil society participation, contributions from the UN secretariat, a format for the 2020 summit/meeting, etc. So there is a distance yet to travel before we can say that the envisioned 2020 process provides an opportunity commensurate with the current crisis in multilateralism and the needs of a 21st century UN. But we’re getting there.

Some additional details:

We suggest that any 2020 process needs to be complementary to and build upon the Secretary-General’s internal reforms on peacebuilding architecture, development and management. We anticipate that the scope of the 2020 process would be unlikely to entail changes to the UN Charter. Considering the paralysis at the Intergovernmental Negotiations on Security Council Reform, and the impact of incorporating those fraught political dynamics in another process, steering clear of Charter reform may well be a good thing. One can achieve a lot without opening up the UN Charter. And a 2020 summit could point to subsequent processes that address the need to review and reform the Charter.

We point out that the year 2020 will also be the occasion for a large number of important multilateral processes and “+5 reviews.” The overlay of a UN 2020 leaders summit could contribute to a dynamic whereby these separate processes, rather than proceeding along familiar lines in their own silos, may find synergies and mutually reinforcing elements between and among them, and that the prospect of a leaders summit on the political horizon could well generate greater ambition to deliver stronger outcomes.

Although we’re still in the early days for this process, and nothing has been decided yet, those of us plodding through the weeds of this campaign have a gut feel that this stands a reasonable chance of going somewhere. The present political drift away from multilateralism just isn’t what an interdependent world community needs. And we believe that a majority of small and medium governments, allied with civil society and other stakeholders, can get the pendulum swinging back in a more positive direction.

Further details are available at [un2020.org](http://un2020.org)