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## UN2020: Landing pad or launch pad?

by Fergus Watt

The UN2020 initiative is a civil society-led consortium calling for a United Nations 75th anniversary that includes a meaningful process of stocktaking, renewal and reforms that strengthen the organization.

The campaign is led by WFM-IGP and a growing network of civil society partner organizations. On the basis of consultations in 2017 and 2018 with governments, secretariat officials and NGO colleagues, there is now a growing recognition not only of the current challenges facing multilateralism, but also the need for a dedicated, General Assembly process that builds upon present and ongoing Secretary-General-led reforms to generate international support for a more robust and coherent UN system, one that is better able to respond to the challenges of the 21st century.

The campaign was dealt a setback in August when a proposed General Assembly resolution (in the context of the Ad Hoc Working Group on GA Revitalization, AHWG) failed to generate consensus around language that “called for timely preparations for the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations.” Opposition came from Algeria, Indonesia and some other members of the Non-Aligned group of states.

The failure to obtain agreement on a mandated preparatory process for 2020 also led to a loss of time. Often it is the case with UN conferences that these preparatory processes, with discussions regionally, in national capitals as well as at the UN, and including involvement of civil society, provide the necessary political momentum for successful multilateral negotiations. The 2015 Sustainable Development Goals and the recent Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration are two recent examples.

Now, with less than two years before a proposed 2020 Summit, there are questions regarding the possibilities and scope of any 2020 outcome that would lead to reform and renewal of the UN system. This gives rise to the “landing pad vs launch pad” debate. Will 2020 be a landing pad for world leaders to adopt agreed measures for

renewing the UN system? Or will the Summit Outcome provide a launch pad for additional discussions in the years following on ways to improve and strengthen the system?

Popular support for a UN2020 Summit continues to grow. Some other noteworthy recent developments include:

- A resolution in August adopted by over 1,100 organizations at the 2018 UN NGO / DPI conference included a recommendation to Member States to “Advance people-centered multilateralism by developing proposals to revitalize the United Nations on the occasion of its 75th anniversary in 2020.”
- A resolution at the October 2018 meeting of the World Federation of United Nations Associations calls on “All United Nations Associations and WFUNA to join the call for a UN2020 summit to serve as a catalyst for fundamental renewal, reform and strengthening of the UN system . . .”
- “Together First,” led by UNA-UK, was launched November 11-13 at the Paris Peace Forum. Supported by the Swedish Global Challenges Foundation, Together First is a worldwide network of scholars and activists, generating substantive proposals for strengthening global governance and the United Nations.
- On December 10, Spanish Foreign Minister Josep Borrell, writing in El Pais, said that “ ... We support the Secretary-General’s efforts to make the UN a more useful tool in the fulfilment of its goals. In 2020 the UN turns 75 years old. That may be a good time to discuss at a summit some institutional changes needed to enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness, such as Security Council reform, to make it more representative and to limit the use of the vetoes of the great powers, or the establishment of a Parliamentary Assembly, thereby strengthening the role of civil society and the democratic dimension of the multilateral system.”
- The PyeongChang Global Peace Forum 2019 will be held in PyeongChang, South Korea from 9 to 11 February, 2019 under the theme “Agenda for Peace from PyeongChang to the World – PyeongChang Appeal for Peace (PCAP) 2030.” The PGPF 2019 aims to make use of the momentum created in the Korean Peninsula during the PyeongChang Olympics in 2018 for peace- building in Asia and to link peace to other global agendas. A follow-up global forum is planned for February 2020.

Importantly, over 70 civil society representatives participated in the “UN2020 Information, Organization, and Strategy Meeting: Responding to Multilateralism in Crisis” that took place in New York on October 15 2018. The meeting set the direction for the UN2020 campaign’s support to civil society mobilization in 2019 and 2020.

Following this summer’s failure of the AHWG resolution to deliver a mandate for a UN2020 process, there is a need now for a stand-alone General Assembly resolution. At a meeting with NGOs on December 5th, the President of the General Assembly, Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garcés said that her first priority is the revitalization of the UN, to make it fit for purpose, and that she has begun consultations with a number of Member States about the need to begin preparations for the 75th UN anniversary summit.

The UN2020 campaign looks forward to working with Ms. Espinosa, and the co-facilitators that are expected to be appointed soon for a resolution leading to the proposed UN Summit in 2020.

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