

THE FUTURE IS MULTILATERAL

Irina Bokova

THESE are turbulent times. Humanity is facing unprecedented forces of change that are sweeping across the globe. This raises tough questions for international organizations that were created in different times to face different challenges. We hear analysts speak of a ‘G-zero world,’ without global leadership. International institutions are compared to dinosaurs, bypassed by events, sclerotic, and unable to adapt. This is the age of ‘soft institutions,’ we hear, a time for more light-footed creatures.

Global turbulence requires international organizations to make the case ever more clearly for their effectiveness in supporting states and in strengthening the foundations of peace and sustainable development. The world has never been so complex and challenging, and this is precisely why multilateralism has never been so important. I am convinced that the future of multilateralism, despite

facing many uncertainties, is bright, because there is no other choice.

A WORLD OF CHANGE

It is a truism worth repeating: the world has changed dramatically since 1945. Change is accelerating, affecting all parts of the globe and opening up new opportunities, along with a long list of challenges.

We live today in a more “dense” international order. The family of states has grown dramatically since 1945, changing interactions and constellations of power. New actors have risen to prominence, including civil society, whose role has never been so great, as well as non-state actors like organized criminal groups, that are challenging the rules of international order.

Starting with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international law has developed beyond expectation, including

Irina Bokova is Director-General of UNESCO. You may follow her on Twitter @IrinaBokova.



Irina Bokova

Photo: UNESCO

in the sphere of international humanitarian law. The cause of human rights and fundamental freedoms has spread, expressed in rising aspirations within societies across the world.

The rise of new actors in world politics, interacting with states and international organizations, has shaped new rules for the provision of global public goods.

Humanity is more connected than ever before. The information and communication technology revolution is creating fabulous opportunities for exchange, and facilitating new forms of dialogue and cooperation across all

borders. Humanity is also more urban than ever, with more than half of the world’s population today living in cities. This will reach two thirds by 2030, with 95 percent of this growth occurring in developing countries. Cities are vital platforms for designing responses to climate change. The increasing complexity of modern societies also makes them key actors for managing diversity.

This horizon also features some dark challenges. Volatile energy and food prices, pressures of climate change, and loss of biodiversity is affecting people across the globe. Financial and economic crises have sent shockwaves across continents,

affecting the world's poorest communities the most. This has led to job losses, and increased poverty and hunger. This has led to parents pulling their children—especially girls—out of school, as well as to budget cuts in education, science, and research. Poverty endures across the world, just as inequalities are deepening.

Challenges are increasingly complex and global. With Ebola, we saw a disease hold an entire region hostage. Conflicts remain enduring, eluding resolution, tearing societies apart—this includes the devastation of six years of fighting in Syria, impacting across the region. In Syria and Iraq, a devastating humanitarian crisis has been exacerbated by the cultural cleansing of ISIS. Human rights are being violated on a massive scale, with minorities being attacked, women enslaved, and journalists beheaded—just as cultural heritage and cultural diversity are being destroyed. Across the world, we see the rise of violent extremism and terrorism, seeking to weaken and divide societies that are increasingly diverse.

Humanity is increasingly on the move, often at gunpoint. In 2015, worldwide displacement was at the highest level ever recorded. The number of people forcibly displaced had risen to a staggering 60 million, compared to 37 million just a decade ago. The family of states has continued to

grow, but so has the list of fragile countries, where weak institutions, conflict, and poverty combine to form a volatile cocktail. Most of the world's poor—some 1.5 billion people, of whom 40 percent are young—live in fragile countries and conflict situations.

With greater contact has come heightened fear—from vulnerable communities who sense that they stand to lose from globalization, that they are its 'object' rather than its 'subject.' Languages, traditions, identities—in a word, *cultures*—face increasing pressures of erosion.

Governance today has become more complex, more global, and more multi-leveled, with rising interdependence blurring the lines between the 'domestic' and the 'foreign.' The space available for national policy is changing at a time when the very notion of power is changing. Every day we see the limits of 'hard power' and the sheer difficulty of applying 'soft power.' As Moisés Naím put it: "power is easier to get, harder to use—and easier to lose." This is true at every level.

We must look straight at the challenges we face. The world is not safe when extreme poverty remains deeply prevalent. The future is not secure when so many people lack access to education and health. Societies are not sustainable

Cities are vital platforms for designing responses to climate change.

Poverty endures across the world, just as inequalities are deepening.

when women still do not enjoy equal rights and young people are desperate.

MORE MULTILATERALISM

The rising complexity of challenges calls for more multilateralism, not less—more diplomacy and more United Nations, accompanied by constant modernization and adaptation to new needs.

The turning points of 2015 show the thirst for multilateralism that exists across the world. In September, all countries agreed on the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the 17 new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This builds on the Millennium Development Goals, embodying a new global transformative agenda for people, prosperity, and peace, as well as for the planet, to guide all efforts for the next 15 years. The year 2015 also closed with the historic COP21 Paris Climate Agreement. This is a key moment for protecting the planet, while ensuring a life of dignity for all.

The 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement must be seen as a single agenda to manage the turbulence of global change. Together, they provide all-encompassing responses to increasingly complex challenges.

These major multilateral agreements were reached for several reasons. Firstly,

they were led forward in a process owned by all states—driven from the ground-up and not imposed from above. Secondly, they were guided by an expansive concept of inclusion, reflecting the rise of key new actors in global politics. These agreements embody new forms of global partnership, combining states with civil society, the private sector, academia, and the scientific community. Inclusion was essential to

reach the agreements—it will be vital for their implementation, with action required across a spectrum extending beyond the power of governments alone. Lastly, these agreements came together because they worked with the grain of an emerging global community, playing in concert with new global public opinion.

Ownership, inclusion, openness—I see these as guiding principles of the new multilateralism.

The 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement highlighted the enduring and unparalleled ability of the United Nations to pull the world together around new goals and to set new norms of action. Clearly, some 70 years after its drafting, the UN Charter continues to embody the aspirations of women and men across the world for greater solidarity. The world is buffeted by strong forces of fragmentation—the UN still best expresses the vision of humanity as a single community, sharing values, a past, and a future.

THE NEW AGENDA

As the beating heart of international order and rules-based multilateralism, the UN is the only universal platform where new ideas can be transformed into norms, and where global action can be both credible and legitimate. Responding to complex challenges demands effective and smart action. But not only that: it also requires action that is values-driven, taking human rights and dignity as a starting point and thus working for the benefit of all. This is the UN's signature strength.

This requires constant adaptation to a changing environment. We need new thinking, new approaches to partnership, and a new openness with civil society and the private sector. The United Nations needs new business models of working together across the system, along with a new focus on reform, in order to build more coherent approaches, fit for the purpose of responding to rising demand for just and effective solutions.

This calls for a renewed engagement by all, with the core goal "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war." Taking this forward requires a new focus on prevention and mediation. We need a stronger culture of prevention, early warning, as well as monitoring capabilities across the system. This means bolstered monitoring of human rights—

the Human Rights Up Front Initiative launched by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is essential here—and a renewed attention to the Responsibility to Protect to rethink its modalities.

Diplomacy, mediation, and dialogue are essential at a time when globalization is pushing identities to the frontline, when 'living together' is a condition of stability and peace in ever-more diverse societies. This means a new focus on building resilience and risk reduction, on learning lessons and gathering knowledge from previous mediation efforts, and on building new skills. We must look again at the humanitarian system and the link to development—that is the vital importance of the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit.

The world cannot afford to play 'catch-up.' We see this clearly in responding to the challenge of violent extremism. Everything must be done to halt the financing, stop foreign terrorists, and push back violence. But *countering* violent extremism is not enough—we must *prevent* it. Violent extremists are not born; they are made and fueled. This is a process we must disarm, starting on the benches of schools, through new forms of education, media literacy, and new opportunities for youth engagement.

Ownership, inclusion, openness—I see these as guiding principles of the new multilateralism.

a condition of stability and peace in ever-more diverse societies. This means a new focus on building resilience and risk reduction, on learning lessons and gathering knowledge from previous

The UN is the only universal platform where new ideas can be transformed into norms, and where global action can be both credible and legitimate.

This was my message to the Leaders' Summit on Countering ISIL and Violent Extremism in September 2015, which I attended at the invitation of U.S. President Barack Obama in my capacity of UNESCO Director-General. UNESCO's contribution to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's new Plan of Action to Prevent Extremism is guided by the same principles. In November 2015, UNESCO held the first High-level Conference on Education to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism. In spring 2016, UNESCO launched a new Teacher's Guide on Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization. I see this as a new global battle

for hearts and minds—especially young hearts and minds—and this is where the United Nations can, and must, act.

At the same time, we need a new approach to peacebuilding. Peace support operations must be integrated into political and mediation strategies—they must be well-resourced, with targeted mandates and clear exit planning. The need for legitimate and effective peace support operations has never been so urgent, as highlighted in the 2000 Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, chaired by Lakhdar Brahimi, and the 2015 Report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, chaired by José Ramos-Horta.

We cannot just keep the peace and deliver aid. We must prevent conflicts and halt their recurrence. We must prepare the ground for human development over the long term. This means integrating humanitarian, peacebuilding, and development efforts. I also see this as the objective of SDG 16—to build inclusive institutions, good governance, accountability and justice for all—as foundations for lasting peace.

Recent conflicts—in Mali, for instance—have also highlighted the need to integrate the protection of cultural heritage and the provision of education into peacebuilding. With

partners, UNESCO has worked to establish a common platform for education in emergencies, launched at the Humanitarian Summit, to provide justice to children and young people in conflicts. We cannot allow the loss of entire generations to despair, radicalization, and violence. We need an unbroken chain of action to accompany societies from crisis to stability, to build resilience and prevent fallback. This calls for action across the board, from legislation, to health, to education—this is where the United Nations matters.

Building peace cannot be divorced from advancing sustainable development. UN Secretary-General Ban

Ki-moon described the 2030 Agenda as a “paradigm shift.” I believe that taking it forward, together with the Paris Agreement, requires a paradigm shift in action and partnership. In the words of the 2030 Agenda’s Declaration, this is “an Agenda of the people, by the people and for the people.” The 17 SDGs have been crafted to empower women and men and to enable societies to lead themselves. Empowerment means ownership, and ownership means capacities. Capacities are the way to end poverty and bridge inequalities. The UN must make every effort to help countries build the capacities to help themselves.

We need an unbroken chain of action to accompany societies from crisis to stability, to build resilience and prevent fallback.

Taking forward the new global agenda means going beyond the North/South divide in order to meet objectives that are universal, drawing on the diversity of every society, its context and aspirations. Silo policies are doomed. The new agenda is transversal, and all of the SDGs are inter-related. Progress must be broad, with action integrated across the board—linking, for instance, public policies in health, education, water, social inclusion, and good governance in ways that are mutually reinforcing.

Human rights and dignity must be the starting point, compass setting, and the measure of all success.

This must go for men and women in every society—especially women. I see promoting gender equality as the enduring frontier in the struggle for human and civil rights across the world. This is also one of the greatest opportunities for sustainable development and lasting peace. Empowering women will power a better future for all.

This is how we can strengthen the resilience of societies today—by nurturing the capacities of every woman and man, by supporting the ability of all societies to

withstand the pressures of change and make the most of their opportunities. No society can stand alone in the face of climate change, disasters, or crises—resilience must be built on solidarity, and on recognition of the shared values and aspirations that underpin the need for cooperation.

The sources of resilience lie in the empowerment of every woman and man, every society, drawing on their heritage and cultures. This is the power of culture. It is a wellspring of identity and belonging that is essential in a world of bewildering change. It provides a foundation of meaning and knowledge, for people to understand the world and project themselves into the future with confidence.

Culture is a source of innovation and creativity, providing tools for women and men to craft new solutions to the challenges they face. It is also a bridge of dialogue, opening new opportunities for respect and mutual understanding between peoples, consolidating the basis for cooperation and joint action.

Every culture is different, and this diversity is a strength for all to share—at the same time, all cultures are part of the same humanity, united around shared values, human rights, and aspirations for dignity. Diversity is a force for the resilience and dynamism that all societies need today. The new multilateralism must recognize this and make the most of it, for the benefit of all.

The new multilateralism must be inspired by a new humanism.

NEW HUMANISM

Fundamentally, I believe the new multilateralism must be inspired by a new humanism. Globalization, urbanization, and cultural diversity are creating multicultural societies. This diversity is forcing us to rethink development, dialogue, tolerance, social cohesion, and even peace. The borders of peace are shifting within societies, in the perceptions that every person holds of their own culture and those of others. Making peace with others implies being

at peace with ourselves, with multiple affiliations, including with painful memories that demand our respect. I am convinced that diversity can be a wellspring for all if we learn to reconcile the diversity that makes us richer with the human rights that bring us together.

Threats are today globalized—we need the globalization of solidarity.

Globalization cannot just be about increased contacts and trade. It must be about sharing objectives and working

in common directions. It must be about a new relationship to others and to the world. It must be about strengthening humanity as a single community, including every woman and man, building on the fundamental values of dignity, equality, and respect that we all share.

This is the message of the UN Charter, and it has never been so true. We must renew our engagement with this essential humanism. Peace is not the absence of war; it is a relationship with oneself, others, and the planet that starts with human dignity, respect, and equality, underpinned by the profound conviction that we are one humanity on one planet, and we must stand together. We have no choice. ●