

DESPERATE HOPE

HOW OUR CIVILIZATION CAN SURVIVE AND THRIVE

Francis M. O'Donnell

The progress of our planetary civilization now depends critically on the preservation of those universal values espoused in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and detailed in the Millennium Declaration. The aspirations of all humanity articulated in those visionary documents depend for fulfilment on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and the primacy of investments and partnerships for that purpose.

They also depend on progressive development of the corpus of international law that regulates relations between states and over the global commons, and on the processes of global and national reform that bring our societies into compliance and harmony. This also requires some new methods

of prevention of flagrant violations, and the elimination of impunity for rogue behavior through enforcement of the rule of law.

The human dignity of all peoples, through the institutionalized solidarity painstakingly developed by decades of successful multilateralism, stands at risk. The time has come to redefine human progress and design a development approach that protects the biosphere and reduces institutional, economic, and societal stress. Open, deliberative, and consensus-seeking models of governance must engage differences in explorations of diversity that maximize synergies. Such models of governance embracing universal principles are a prerequisite for effective dialogue—not because they are global but because they are fundamental to human dignity

Francis M. O'Donnell is a retired senior diplomat, veteran of the United Nations system and former Resident Coordinator of the UN System in Serbia & Montenegro (Belgrade, 2000-2004) and Ukraine (Kyiv, 2004-2009). He is also a former ambassador of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta to Slovakia and a life member of the Dublin-based Institute of International and European Affairs. You may follow him on X @fmod1. This essay is an excerpt from his upcoming book entitled Desperate Hope: Reflections on Survival Pathways for Civilisation, which is scheduled for publication in 2024.



Source: Gulliver Image

“No country can legitimately veto any Security Council resolution on a dispute to which it is party”

and fulfillment across all cultures—and thereby enable integrity, ethics, transparency, accountability, and democracy.

Environmental stewardship, preserving biodiversity, and tackling climate change, all require dovetailed partnerships and collaboration between governments at all levels, with civil society and the corporate sector. Social media can be engineered and moderated primarily with this in mind. Social responsibility must take precedence over profit. Models of economic growth and development strategies need to take into account that our planetary resources are not limitless, and on the contrary

the scale of exhaustion, waste, pollution, and environmental contamination actually now require active redress if the human milieu is to be sustainable not just for human life but for ecosystems of biodiversity and for effective carbon sequestration.

The search for new norms in a world of globalized relativity needs to be mindful of the fundamental values that undergird our human dignity. A world where human rights and freedoms are paramount must be matched by codified responsibilities. To this end, civic education needs a radical transformation, to ensure a vibrant civil society.

The global reach of communication today enables the first truly global civil society, suffused with a planetary consciousness and conscience. But corruption is a disease which enables state capture, kleptocracy, repression, and autocracy. Governments must follow through on their obligations as states parties to the UN Convention Against Corruption. This will release the energies of civil society through active citizen engagement, amplified by social media, to direct political reform and hold leaders accountable.

There is a growing divergence in values between high-income and low-income countries, and between democracies and autocracies. A real challenge is to address the massive disempowerment of the hundreds of millions, perhaps even billions, of people across the world as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, and the loss of jobs that have come about, a half-billion in formal employment, and as much as 1.5 billion (loss of income) in terms of the informal sector. Policies that enhance social protection, empowerment, and solidarity alongside one another will help nurture greater social inclusion based on common human security. The debt trap continues

to afflict those countries that cannot hold their governments adequately accountable for fiscal rectitude, ethical integrity, and transparency. Debt forgiveness can leverage governance and tax reforms and basic universal income would be emancipating and transformative.

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A new worldwide fabric of resilience, upon which to build a new global human security architecture, would preserve civilization in the face of mounting existential threats, i.e. a global resilience network, parts of the architecture of which are actually already in place. With a greater focus on human, as distinct from, but in addition to, state security, this is what lies behind the proposal for a Global Resilience Council. Combined with the Resilience Agenda put together by the World Economic Forum, this could be part of a new global resilience architecture. It could make more effective use of military and civil defense assets for disaster relief and ensure that such infrastructure, assets, and personnel, are geared also towards human rights protection, natural and technological disaster prevention, mitigation and response, and emergency support to civilians.

Military base conversion should enable creation of global stability nodes to manage mass displacement, humanitarian corridors, safe havens, status determination, and unarmed civilian protection as part of a new global resilience architecture.

Growing market concentration in almost all sectors demands a new global approach, regulatory and enforceable. Better regulation of competition should prevent market concentration and state/regulatory capture, regardless of the national, international, or planetary nature of the domains exploited. There is an acute need to ensure accountability to the public interest, whilst limiting the abnormal accumulation of capital. This warrants a global legal convention on the international legal standing of multinational/global corporations, their rights and responsibilities, going beyond the voluntary UN Global Compact, and OECD principles of corporate governance. This does not imply obstructing, but enabling regulation: enabling free and fair competition, enabling small-scale, start-up entrepreneurship and

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innovation (SMEs), and enforcing anti-trust or anti-oligopoly legislation through robust enforcement agencies. A similar measure should tackle the growing impunity of trans-national Ultra-High Net Worth Individual billionaires and prevent the practice of speculative “disaster capitalism.” In this regard, stakeholder capitalism may offer new scope for advancing such measures.

Digital governance needs to be strengthened in line with universal values to ensure that digital capitalism serves the common good and is used as a force for inclusion rather than exclusion. Big Data can be harnessed to build a better world, affirming positive inclusive values, combating hatred and exclusion, and reducing the digital divide. Such data harvesting could be a formidable resource for the United Nations in upholding human rights, advancing the SDGs, and helping prevent conflict. Better managed social media can become an instrument of self-determination if identity and privacy can be protected. The permanent service and subordination of artificial intelligence

to human control and responsible authority is essential. The fields of globally scoped artificial intelligence and cyberspace also require global regulation, including protections for personal digital privacy.

Political and societal convergence can only prevail if capacities for peaceful negotiation, arbitration, and dispute resolution underpin efforts at consensus-building. The gap between theory and practice in conflict resolution must be closed, and capacity built for mediation and negotiation, including robust support for effective Track II diplomacy. The challenge is for globalized civil society to be more actively engaged in national and international problem-solving, deploying Track II citizen diplomacy and with eminent women leaders at the forefront of such efforts.

Only through the perception and reality of global and national institutions upholding universal values and legal norms, and prohibiting their violation, can we end impunity for crimes against humanity including war crimes and genocide. As called for in the 2000 UN Millennium Declaration, all countries should sign and ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and also ensure compliance

with the decisions of the International Court of Justice.

Major structural reforms of the United Nations system and of other international institutions must be accelerated, rendering them more inclusively multi-stakeholder entities. The UN must also be empowered to safeguard multilateralism and prevent the rogue behavior of autocracies that threaten these norms. It must also

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confront extreme concentrations of capital and corporate power that lack transparency, democratic accountability, and social responsibility. The ethical imperatives contained

in the InterAction Council's Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities should be mainstreamed by the UN General Assembly in the New Agenda for Peace, and in the "Summit of the Future: Multilateral Solutions for a Better Tomorrow" in 2024. Only by acting collectively, and that means individually contributing, can we limit the unhealthy concentration of power in the world, whether political, economic, corporate, or cultural. These and related phenomena demand a new approach to multilateralism that is inclusive of legitimate actors, with a new constellation of enforcement agencies and avoids the intrusion of surveillance technologies

that undermine personal dignity and empower obscure forms of tyranny.

Civil society organizations as well as corporate giants and digital media represent new forces which require UN structural change in global governance, hence a chamber of representatives of civil society and a chamber of representatives of the corporate sector. A similar approach would establish a UN parliamentary network to function as an advisory body to the UN General Assembly. Regional institutions with parliamentary structures including the Council of Europe, the European Union, the African Union, ECOWAS, and Mercosur should be considered as examples. The relatively recent Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative is a good example of a multi-stakeholder organization comprised of governments, corporations, and civil society representatives.

The profound democratic deficit fossilized in the composition and functioning of the UN Security Council must be radically altered and this organ and others rendered fit for

purpose in this twenty-first century. Global peace and disarmament are crucial for saving humanity, which requires reform of the veto-power and membership aspects of the Security Council. For starters, no country can

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legitimately veto any Security Council resolution on a dispute to which it is party, according to UN Charter article 27.3, depending on how that is interpreted. The world must stop interpreting that so narrowly as to enable rogue impunity through Security Council inertia. Hence, article 27.3 should be reinterpreted, without holding world peace hostage to a comprehensive UN reform. It is also time to revive the imperative of disarmament, eliminate nuclear weapons, turn

swords into ploughshares, and missiles into windmills. And sanctions regimes must be subject to regular review.

The UN must act quickly to introduce an Outer Space equivalent to the International Seabed Authority. The proliferation of satellites in their tens of thousands by Amazon, OneWeb, Telesat, Boeing, Viasat, in addition to the ESA, U.S. Space Command and

Russian and Chinese ambitions, warrant great urgency. Another aspect of the global commons relates to bio-ethical standards, and in particular the appropriation of ownership of naturally occurring genetic material, for example, of rare species with benefits for human health, or of genetically modified organisms.

Looking ahead, apart from the primacy of the United Nations, and the incremental participation of current national leaders-in-office in the World Economic Forum since 1974, there are now several networks of former heads of state/government and other world leaders active in advocacy for global cooperation to deal with humanity's various challenges. Most notably, and in order of their creation, these include the Inter-Action Council (1983), the Council of Women World Leaders (1996), the Club de Madrid (2001), the Global Leadership Foundation (2004), the Elders (2007), and the Nizami Ganjavi International Center (2012). With overlapping members and sometimes shared agendas, these represent a considerable vector of strategic influence for change, the more so when they combine with broad-based civil society movements, especially those representing the younger generations, and engage with the current powers-that-be. Working together, they could focus on the following:

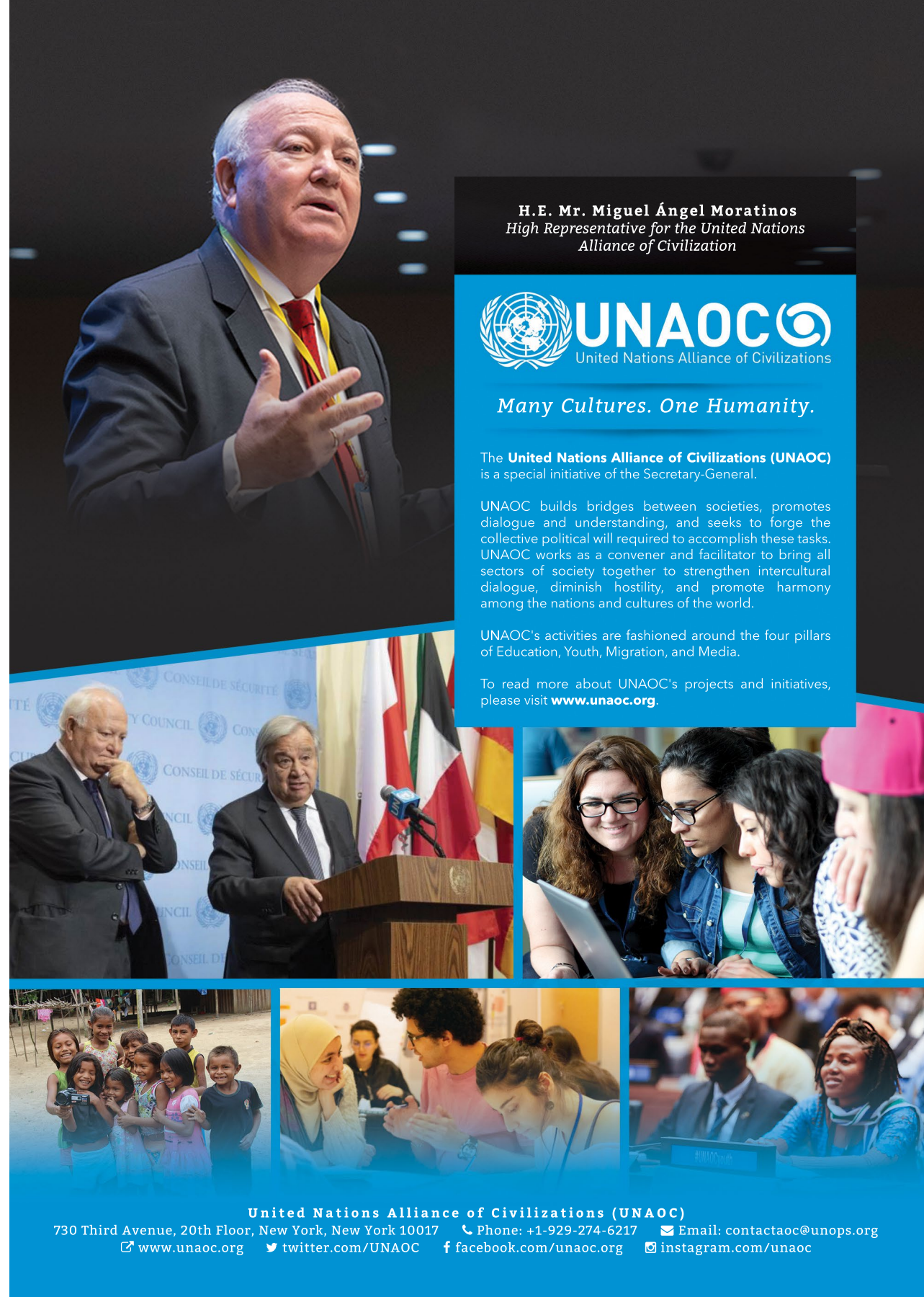
Low-hanging fruits:

1. Implement and enforce the UN Convention against Corruption.
2. Adhere to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative.
3. Through a global treaty, enforce standards on global corporations.
4. Enforce treaties on the Law of the Sea and Outer Space.
5. Build capacities for mediation, negotiation, and conflict resolution.
6. Ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

UN Reforms:

1. The UN General Assembly to adopt Universal Declaration on Human Responsibilities.
2. Reform the UN Security Council.
3. Establish a Global Resilience Council and network.
4. Establish civil society and parliamentary chambers.

To these ends, world leaders should also be enjoined to extoll the vision of a world based on human dignity and universal values and upholding the highest standards of leadership integrity and competence. In this regard, mandates and action to promote equal female participation in all levels of leadership will be most important, worldwide. ●



H.E. Mr. Miguel Ángel Moratinos
High Representative for the United Nations
Alliance of Civilizations



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