



Submission: Key recommendations for the Summit of the Future

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CIVICUS is a global alliance of civil society organisations and activists dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society throughout the world. Our vision is of a worldwide community of informed, inspired and committed citizens engaged in confronting the challenges facing humanity. Our mission is to strengthen citizen action and civil society throughout the world. CIVICUS seeks to engage the Summit of the Future as a key opportunity to shape global governance outcomes to enable the creation of peaceful, just, equal and sustainable societies.

The United Nations (UN) was conceived as a ground-breaking achievement in global cooperation and people-centred multilateralism. Born out of the ashes of the Second World War, its Charter outlines four lofty aspirations in the name of 'We the Peoples'. These are to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war; reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, dignity and equality; establish conditions for justice under international law; and promote social progress and better standards of living.

Yet, in the face of multiple intersecting crises, including violent conflict, egregious human rights and humanitarian law violations, eye-watering inequality and runaway climate change, the UN's impact appears to be hamstrung by great power rivalries and state-centric ways of working. We believe enhancing civil society participation at the UN can catalyse pre-emptive diplomacy and efforts to address the root causes of festering global challenges.

At the end of 2023, hostilities are raging in Israel-Palestine, Ukraine, Sudan and the Sahel region even as millions of people continue to reel from the negative consequences of protracted conflicts and oppression in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Syria, Yemen and elsewhere. With their emphasis on social cohesion and leaving 'no one behind' civil society organisations can help strengthen peacebuilding and democratisation efforts as experiences from ending apartheid in South Africa and the civil war in Liberia attest. Notably, civil society groups bring gender perspectives and the needs of excluded populations into decision making. However, to enable this they need to be included in decision making.

Worryingly, global civic space conditions which enable the participation of civil society in decision making are hugely challenging. According to the [CIVICUS Monitor](#) – a participatory research platform that annually measures global civic – over 85% of the world's population live in countries with serious space restrictions where active citizens and civil society organisations find it incredibly hard to organise, speak out or seek transformation of social, economic and political structures.

These trends are also playing out at the UN where the latest [report](#) on intimidation and reprisals against individuals and groups for cooperating with UN bodies and mechanisms lists as many as 40 states as being responsible for these acts. Moreover, many of the UN's state-centred procedures and

exclusive decision-making spaces dominated by government representatives sit at odds with the people-centred aspirations of the UN Charter.

Civil society brings an incredible amount of energy to the UN to advance ambitious commitments. Without full civil society participation, global governance institutions are sure to keep falling short of their potential. It's no surprise that the Sustainable Development Goals which form part of Agenda 2030 – arguably the greatest human endeavour to create peaceful, just, equal and sustainable societies – are seriously off track.

According to the UN Secretary General's 2023 [progress report](#) just 15% of the goals are on track while 30% have regressed or not seen any progress since 2015 when the goals were put in place. Indeed, it's no secret that civil society organisations contribute to innovations in public policy, deliver essential services to the most excluded, and importantly help ensure transparency, accountability and participation. But they are increasingly under attack for uncovering corruption and serious human rights abuses.

Tellingly, the [SDG Summit](#) fell short of substantive commitments towards the UN Secretary General's [SDG Stimulus Plan](#) urging an annual injection of USD 500 billion to accelerate progress. It is our firm belief that many of the challenges the UN is grappling with can be addressed through better and more robust participation of civil society. But for this to happen, the UN has to embrace civil society engagement as a priority. We urge that participation modalities in the run up to the Summit of the Future be as open and inclusive as possible.

In particular, we would like to highlight recommendations from the [Unmute Civil Society Initiative](#) and the [We the Peoples Campaign](#) outlined below.

Unmute Civil Society recommendations on meaningful participation at the UN

Unmute Civil Society recommendations are supported by 52 states and over 300 civil society organisations from around the world. They seek to enhance current participation modalities at the United Nations to make them more inclusive along-with focus on institutional improvements. Below is a summary.

First, the UN should maximise opportunities to take advantage of information communications tools (ICT) to broaden participation of a wide range of people and civil society organisations from across the world. Hybrid meeting formats that harness digital tools can enable a broad range of stakeholders to access key policy and decision-making spaces at the UN.

Second, efforts must be made to narrow digital divides that exist across the global North and South. Moreover, investments in digital infrastructures and digital democracy initiatives should be mindful of disparities that exist across gender, rural-urban, economic and minority status, class and other intersections of discrimination.

Third, meaningful participation should be prioritised by amending procedures and practices at the UN to allow for ample time and opportunity for civil society representatives to provide inputs on outcomes documents, attend key meetings and participate as equal stakeholders in crucial negotiations.

Fourth, the value of civil society participation should be celebrated through the adoption of a Civil Society Action Day as occasion to affirm the UN's commitment to enabling civil society participation and drive meaningful debate on improvements.

Fifth, the UN should urgently appoint a People's or Civil Society Envoy to drive best practices on civil society participation across the UN, address asymmetries on how UN forums, agencies and offices engage civil society, ensure participation of a diverse range of civil society stakeholders in the UN's work and to proactively drive the UN's outreach to citizens and civil society groups across the world.

More information on the Unmute Civil Society recommendations can be found here:

<https://action4sd.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/UNmute-Recommendations-for-meaningful-civil-society-participation-at-the-UN.pdf> ;

<https://action4sd.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/UNmute-Annex-1-endorsements-6-20.pdf>

<https://www.ipsnews.net/2023/07/will-un-turn-ideas-to-unmute-civil-society-into-action/>

We the Peoples call for inclusive global governance

The We the Peoples call is supported by over 200 civil society organisations and over 100 parliamentarians from around the world. The call is predicated on the principle that the biggest challenges facing humanity such as pandemics, climate crisis, bio-diversity loss, violent conflict, forced displacement, discrimination and inequality are global and cross-cutting in nature. They can be resolved only through better citizen participation. The call for inclusive global governance includes three key ideas outlined below.

One, the creation of a World's Citizen Initiative to enable people to put forward proposals on key issues of global concern for discussion and further action at the highest political level. Any proposal that reaches a certain threshold of popular support could be placed on the agenda of the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council. A detailed paper on the subject can be downloaded here: https://www.worldcitizensinitiative.org/files/unwci_study.pdf

Two, the creation of a UN Parliamentary Assembly which enables the inclusion of people's elected representatives in decision making at the UN. The assembly will act as a representative body and watchdog connecting people with the UN and while representing a wide diversity of viewpoints. A detailed paper on the subject can be downloaded here:

https://www.democracywithoutborders.org/files/DWB_UNPA_Policy_Review.pdf

Three, a UN civil society envoy to enable greater participation, spur inclusive convenings and drive the UN's outreach to the public and civil society organisations. The envoy would champion a broader strategy to open up the UN to people's and civil society voices. A detailed paper on the subject can be downloaded here:

<https://together1st.org/storage/Cde7cqLsDdv3WWRWhIAJCyN23UI6ikZyg3NEaYVL.pdf>

More information on the We the Peoples call for inclusive global governance can be found here:

<https://www.wethepeoples.org/>

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