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Chapeau

The future is the result of past history and the decisions of today. The past cannot be changed, but what we decide today will change the future. We live in a moment in history where peace is under threat, poverty and inequalities are increasing, biodiversity is being eroded, and human activities are changing the climate to a point that endangers civilization as we know it.

We need a new social contract and a transition to sustainable energies in each and every country, but this is not enough. No national government can handle alone the current confluence of crises. The global governance institutions created at the end of World War II, without participation of a majority of the current members of the United Nations, without women's rights in many of those that participated and with no awareness of planetary boundaries anywhere, are inadequate to manage the current challenges.

The UN was instrumental in promoting decolonization and echoed the demands of the newly independent countries for changes in the international order to also end economic dependency and make the Right to Development a reality.

Yet, since the end of the Cold War the normative and supportive role of the UN in key areas like industrial development, environmental protection and even health, education and gender policies have been encroached on by the WTO and the Bretton Woods institutions.

International cooperation is indispensable to face the current "polycrisis". To make it possible, it is imperative to end the selective application of rules, as well as their establishment by a small group of countries and to kick off a process of reform in global institutions to make them more democratic, accountable and able to deliver the objectives of Agenda 2030.

Chapter I. Sustainable development and financing for development

The 2023 SDG summit evidenced that the goals agreed in 2015 will not be met, and indicators in some key areas like poverty and hunger, inequalities and CO₂ emissions are getting worse. Neither business as usual nor accelerating in the wrong path will help when a change of direction is required. A new course is needed, based on the Right to Development and the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities, with developed countries, directly

responsible for creating many of the problems, meeting their promises, changing the unsustainable consumption patterns of their rich minorities, and transitioning away from carbon-based economies with fair burden-sharing.

Further, taking into account the COVID-19 experience, the principles of the [Buenos Aires Commitment](#) endorsed by the LAC region could open the path towards a *care society* that recognizes care as a right to provide and receive care and to exercise self-care. The sexual division of labour, where women do most of the care work, frequently unpaid or badly paid, should be transformed into a fair social organization of care, in the intersection of the agreed SDGs on gender, health, education and poverty eradication.

New measures of progress are needed, not based on GDP but in human welfare and rights, vulnerability, biodiversity protection and responsible consumption within planetary boundaries, including in the dashboard a measure of externalities created by overstepping those natural limits.

More ODA is needed, and its indicators should show actual efforts, meet the promised targets and be reported by an independent agency to avoid the creative accounting of the OECD, who can't be a player and referee at the same time.

But ODA is not enough. Financing such a transition requires

- contributions to the loss and damages fund commensurate with the problems created by historic emissions,
- low cost funding and technological support for the shift to non-carbon energy,
- debt cancellation and renegotiation, in the framework of a deep reform of the IFIs,
- an international convention on taxes, in the framework of the UN, to avoid illicit financial outflows from capital-starved countries

Chapter II. International peace and security

In his farewell speech as US president in 1961, General Eisenhower warned the world about “the acquisition of unwarranted influence” by what he called the military-industrial complex, that could “endanger our liberties or democratic processes” because of the “disastrous rise of misplaced power”.

World military expenditures went down to under 200 dollars per capita in the last years of the 20th century, but then started to rise again, reached a record of 2.2 trillion dollars in 2022, according to SIPRI and is still growing. The world spends on its armies ten times more than the total official development assistance. The military-industrial complex has massively incorporated information and communication technologies and “war industry” now not only benefits armies and defense contractors but also communications platforms that profit from hate messages and fuel conflicts.

The five permanent members of the Security Council who have a direct special responsibility in maintaining peace, according to the UN Charter, are all major arms exporters and have vested interests in different areas of conflict in the world. This makes their veto privilege a direct obstacle to peace in many situations. This problem can be made worse, instead of being solved, by giving veto power to more countries. Aware that the UN Charter makes it difficult to eliminate veto, the Summit of the Future may decide to curtail it, for example by requesting the UN General Assembly not only to vote on those issues where a majority decision was vetoed, but also to automatically ask the International Court of Justice for an advisory opinion on the legal issues involved in the vetoed resolution.

Chapter III. Science, technology and innovation and digital cooperation

The World Summit on the Information Society (Geneva 2003 and Tunis 2005) adopted the consensus that Internet governance encompasses both technical and public policy issues (paras 59 and 60, Tunis Agenda for the Information Society), and should involve “governments, private sector, civil society and international organizations, in their respective roles”, with states having “rights and responsibilities” for addressing such issues in the global arena. Any new mechanism on digital cooperation should be explicitly bound by the WSIS Consensus.

Digital issues inevitably appear in global discussions on issues as varied as digital trade, biodiversity, health, food, and oceans. Checks and balances necessary to prevent scope-creep in the participation of non-governmental stakeholders and the predictable capture of the discourse by dominant countries and their big tech corporations. Forty per cent of the world population (some 3 billion people) have no access to the Internet, and 96% of them live in developing countries. To appropriately reflect their concerns, those countries and groups should be adequately represented in the deliberations on digital cooperation.

In the design of both short and long term institutional arrangements, the right to development of people in the digital society and economy is of paramount importance. But a consensus for better access and connectivity for all cannot translate into extractive and adverse inclusion of the majority nations and peoples. A bargain for digital justice has to be an empowering deal that realigns global digital power to democratize the socio-economic order, and legitimize pluralistic visions of digital development. A reform of international financial institutions, innovations in public financing and a role for South-South cooperation are much needed for building the public digital infrastructural capabilities in developing countries.

A global digital compact should be grounded in the right to development, and institutional support must be provided to the Global South by the multilateral system – equipping developing countries to acquire policy and institutional support for the effective and efficient taxation of the digital economy; and the provisioning of low interest funds for digital infrastructure development in developing countries by international financial institutions.

Development sovereignty in the digital paradigm needs a new narrative of “data flows with equity and rights”. This vision would ensure that the protection of citizen rights in cross-border data flows is not limited to the narrow agenda of privacy and personal data security. Instead, the collective right of peoples to a) determine how their aggregate data resources are utilized and b) enjoy their rightful claims in the benefits of data-enabled knowledge needs to be recognized. The strong push for the creation of global data commons and multistakeholder partnerships for data innovation in sectors such as climate, health and more, is but a decoy for neocolonial control.

The advent of generative AI has put the spotlight back on longstanding concerns – re-colonisation of indigenous communities through propertization and enclosure of their knowledge commons and loss of creative work for the majority of the globe. An “open, free and secure” digital future means the right to flourishing of people and the planet -- public agora built on pluralism and inclusion, economies that thrive on peering and reciprocity, and societies of unlimited creativity and self-actualisation.

Chapter IV. Youth and future generations

There are 2 billion children between 0 and 14 years of age in the world (World Bank data). One fourth of them live in Sub Saharan Africa and another fourth in South Asia. For an absolute majority of the current youth and the next generation poverty, hunger and inequalities will be personal experiences they have suffered themselves by 2030 the target date of the SDGs. Only ten percent of the people under 14 live in countries ranked as “high income” by the World Bank. And in more than half of the OECD countries, the proportion of children living in poverty is higher than that of the population as a whole.

Thus, social protection, which is a Human Right for all, must be in place for future generations as those born today will not be able to lead a dignified life without it. Social protection must be designed for the long term, as it must cover childhood and youth, working life and old age, and it should be adequately protected from austerity programs.

Twenty per cent of the children of the world live in countries classified as “highly indebted poor countries”. Furthermore, the debt that the incoming generations will be asked to pay is not just financial. Every delay in combatting climate change adds to the burden that the current generations are imposing on those to come, in clear violation of the basic notions of sustainability.

In fact, debt sustainability shall not be defined by the ability to meet the creditors’ demands on time, but by the capacity to do so without infringing on a state’s human rights obligations, social protection in particular.

While protecting babies and children is a basic human instinct, children are being killed by the thousands in armed conflicts. These crimes against humanity cannot persist with impunity if we expect the future generations to adhere to the values of the multilateral system.

Meeting the goals set up by Agenda 2030 is a necessary first step to service our debt towards future generations. They need to be taken involved and consulted, and in doing so the United Nations should take into account the youth demographics.

Chapter V. Transforming global governance

As the unipolar order emerging after the end of the Cold War seems to be coming to an end, the United Nations are needed as much as ever to give structure and sense to an international system based on a fair and agreed normative and not on rules that shift at the whim of the powerful.

This requires the strengthening of jurisdictional bodies, such as the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court, as well as a new international and UN-based sets of norms on big corporations, including their responsibilities vis-a-vis Human Rights and fair taxation, linked to the actual origin of their value creation.

The UN’s indispensable normative and advisory functions are severely underfunded. Funding patterns have shifted away from core to earmarked funding, and UN entities have in recent times even turned toward private donations to fund normative work. Those funding patterns negatively affect the UN’s impartiality. In particular, UN development work seems to have lost the ambition to provide high-level policy advice on climate, sustainable transformations, trade issues, investment projects and other national/global priorities.

Multilateral development banks and global funds cannot be an unbiased source for relevant expertise, due to their one-dollar-one-vote governance. Normative and advisory work should be UN key functions, from which the UN's more downstream operational activities should follow. A robust core funding base – assessed or voluntary – is needed for the UN to provide and strengthen its normative and advisory functions, and to do so in the most impartial way possible.

The future of multilateralism cannot ignore the pre-eminence of digital policies for our shared global coexistence. Networked multilateralism with less hierarchical decision-making and many different actors is desirable in the design of a more equal world. But without a clear separation of roles, responsibilities, and powers of state and non-state actors in such distributed decision-making, such a move is likely to reinforce the corporate domination of digital policy debates in global digital cooperation arrangements.