UN accountable

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Note: All text below is written from the perspective of Member States to facilitate integration into a zero draft for intergovernmental consultations towards the Pact of the Future.

Chapeau

We, the Member States, believe more transparent structures of accountability and a strengthened perception of independent collective oversight will help the United Nations System be more effective and to act more coherently with its principles, without compromising the UN's distinctive deliberative characteristics and the discretion indispensable to diplomacy;

We recognize the need for external, independent, credible measures of accountability to increase trust in the UN System and its convening power at the heart of effective multilateralism, including for greater clarity on and responsibility for funding, allocation of resources, effectiveness, efficiency and internal rule of law;

We recall that the UN System is composed of a large number of UN entities and bodies with different governing bodies, varying delegated authority, collective budgets and different mandates that interlink with those of others, and that this complexity is further magnified by the fact that this intricate web of structures, mandates and funds is not static, but rather evolves and grows through each meeting, decision or UN report;

We recognize our governing role as Member States to increase the capacity of the United Nations System as a whole to fulfill and deliver an accurate and accessible account to stakeholders of its mandated work to maintain international peace and security, facilitate international cooperation in economic, social, cultural, environmental or humanitarian affairs; and encourage respect for human rights;

We call for a balanced, independent, overview that does not focus on specific incidents, but rather the structural realities these reflect, and the clear opportunities for structural improvement, not just in one entity, but across the system. Accountability gaps are most readily apparent in programme implementation, beneficiary treatment and staff dynamics, but are insufficiently used to identify structural opportunities for improvement;

We stress the need for a comprehensive approach to accountability that can reflect our different views and expectations as Member States, while maintaining a System-wide scope, which is currently absent and entirely necessary given the growing complexity of international cooperation needs as well as the large number and variety of UN System bodies;

We highlight the importance of stakeholder engagement, including the unique added value of social entrepreneurship and its role to bring forth innovative solutions that are cost-efficient, high-impact and scalable.

Chapter I. Sustainable development and financing for development

We recognize the need to confirm the value of social enterprise and to establish mechanisms to support social enterprise, including providing financing and allowing for their support of accountability mechanisms.

Chapter II. International peace and security

We recognize the importance of constructive independent accountability mechanisms in strengthening the credibility and trustworthiness of the UN's vital work in international peace and security.

Chapter III. Science, technology and innovation and digital cooperation

We recall, as Member States, that the [UN Joint Inspection Unit's revised report "Review of accountability frameworks in the United Nations System"](#) (July 2023) calls for a unified accountability framework, noting that "overall recognition of the links that exist among United Nations system organizations could also be improved" and its Recommendation 4, "The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should prepare, by the end of 2024, through consultations held in the appropriate inter-agency mechanisms, a common United Nations system reference accountability framework maturity model, taking into consideration the updated JIU reference accountability framework";

We note that UNaccountable's [Accountability Maturity Assessment Model](#) is a timely innovative addition and adds value with its comprehensive method of analyzing accountability in a new structural way, by using a matrix of indicators and components that can be used for all System entities, and looks at the impact of all three stakeholder groups in each of these – Member States, UN agencies and non-state stakeholders - not only on their own, but in their interactions with each other. As such, the Accountability Maturity Assessment Model provides an opportunity for digital cooperation and technology to support a more effective and efficient UN.

Chapter IV. Youth and future generations

Recalling the relevance to youth and future generations of the calls for "a system of accountability that will hold all actors responsible for their commitments to future generations", included in the Secretary-General's [High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism Report](#), where "transformative shift one" makes calls to "improve legitimacy and effectiveness through inclusion and accountability";

We confirm that [relational accountability](#) between Member States, UN entities and non-state stakeholders should be at the core of any effective UN accountability model. Relational accountability is the UN's distinctive feature and means stakeholders working with each other and amongst themselves effectively to create consensus decisions, thereby meeting the UN's purpose of being [a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of (...) common ends"](#). Relational accountability is consequently about the actions that create the premise or structure for stakeholders' interactions, or that rely on the established process of stakeholders' interactions. These interactions may be among members of the same stakeholder

group (e.g., Member State negotiations or inter-agency platforms) or in between organized groups of stakeholders (e.g., between Member States, Observers and the Administration at a Governing Bodies meeting). Some key aspects of relational accountability are transparency, capacity to reach consensus, relevance of mandates, preference for non-earmarked funding, and non-State actors' inclusion and participation.

Chapter V. Transforming global governance

We recognize, as Member States, the need to create organizational bureaucratic incentives and disincentives tailored to the goals we seek in the UN, to promote efficiency and reduce inefficiencies and redundant structures;

We note that gaps in accountability are often a result of insufficient transparency, unexplicit, conflicting or unprioritised expectations and norms, obsolete or unseen structural or procedural incentives with perverse effects, absence of structures for periodic review and corrective measures, and other similar structural governance gaps. Identifying these structural weaknesses gives stakeholders the means to rectify them;

We also note that working on [relational accountability](#) across stakeholder roles will create the incentives for a more effective UN system and serve as a more stable foundation for all stakeholder groups to work together on effective reforms, should they wish, to combine management and relational accountability and focus stakeholders on structural trade-offs, inter-dependencies and organizational incentives;

We further acknowledge that the capacity of UN System stakeholders to transparently self-assess favorably across the following maturity level dimensions can result in more effective multilateralism. We also note that combining relational and management accountability aspects allows us to take a structural approach to interdependencies and tradeoffs across maturity level dimensions and the UN System:

1) *Administrative transparency. Multilateral cooperation is stronger when UN entities have disclosure policies that specify exactly which internal and external policies are for information, discussion or approval, and by whom; when Member States make their positions stated across the different UN entities' Governing Bodies publicly available; when UN entities clarify which non-state actors are relevant to their mandates and their role, if any, in participating to the Organization's work; and when budgets of the Organizations and record of its Governing Bodies are publicly available.*

2) *Quality of governance. Multilateral cooperation is more effective when UN entities make general proposals for the orientation of their programmes, and provide timely information ahead of formal consultations with Member States; when Member States effectively engage and reach consensus on UN strategic, long-term goals; when their decisions are timely and consistent; when mandate implementation rates are high.*

3) *Administrative burden. Multilateral cooperation is more efficient when the agenda of the Governing Bodies meetings is pertinent and focused on collaboration needs that are timely and of most interest to the stakeholders; when the number of procedures, steps and signatories as well as the time required to begin project implementation is reasonable; and when UN entities enjoy relative standardization and uniformity in their contractual regime for donors, implementing partners and service providers.*

4) *Procedural regularity. Multilateral cooperation is more efficient when UN entities delegate decision-making authority to staff working most directly on the topic; when there is no conflict of interest; when*

there is integrity, quality assurance in procurement and contract management, with a limited range of contract variations.

5) *Implementation and agility. Multilateral cooperation is effective when mandates are implemented fully; when the strategic priorities of UN's entities are consistent over time, and UN's comparative advantage maximized in capacity building as well as in relationship with implementing partners; when UN entities review and update internal policies when needed; when the UN entities sustain and reward their innovation appetite, with a high density of innovative projects; when the UN entities anticipate, plan and begin work to address risks before they materialize; when the UN entities enjoy the necessary access to key government decision-makers for programming core to the mandate; when the UN entities can have staff work in the locations and with the people whom the programmes should benefit; and when the UN entities treat beneficiaries in a way consistent with the rights the UN is meant to protect and uphold.*

6) *Financial sustainability and sound management. Multilateral cooperation is legitimate and sustainable when consensus is reached on funds required to support mandates of the UN; when UN entities achieve consistency of budget presentation methodology across the System, in a way that facilitates internal and external audit; when UN entities are accountable to Member States for voluntary contributions, gifts and donations; with the increase in share of pooled funds; when UN entities measure absolute value of cost-efficiencies and actively seek initiatives to this effect through programmatic, procedural developments or external partnerships.*

7) *Well-functioning workforce. Multilateral cooperation is legitimate and inclusive when the executive head and staff are selected through competitive, open and transparent processes; when the workforce is representative of the membership and gender across grades, functions and geographies; when outstanding performance is recognized, rewarded and reinforced; when staff are treated with fairness and dignity in accordance with the rights the UN promotes; when anonymized lists of staff offense and measures taken are published; when promotion criteria are uniformly applied through a process that is clear and transparent.*

8) *Effectiveness of Internal Control and Risk Management. Multilateral cooperation is more accountable with strong standards of internal controls, when strong risk management assessment and mitigation measures are in place, when fraud prevention, detection and response is effective and whistleblowers are systematically supported and protected.*

9) *Judicial independence and effectiveness. Multilateral cooperation is more accountable when international civil servants have access to an administration of internal justice that is structurally independent and perceived as such, benefitting from external controls, with access to alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, following due process, free from improper influences, accessible without financial hardship, and time efficient in providing redress and resolution.*

10) *Oversight independence and effectiveness. Multilateral cooperation is accountable when oversight is structurally independent and perceived as such, when the responsiveness on suspected misconduct is clear, with strong compliance in implementation of recommendations from oversight bodies or reasoned explanation for the lack thereof.*

11) *Investigations and audit effectiveness. Multilateral cooperation is accountable when strong independent audit and investigative functions are supported and encouraged.*

12) External oversight. Multilateral cooperation is accountable when it is independently and comprehensively assessed and when stakeholders are open to evaluation and review.