

INTRODUCTION: THE SUMMIT OF THE FUTURE, AN OPPORTUNITY FOR GLOBAL GOVERNANCE



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The United Nations, the global governance instrument established by the international community following the devastation of the Second World War, needs a major overhaul if it is to respond to the new governance crises and challenges in the 21st century. The Summit of the Future, convened by Secretary-General António Guterres on September 22nd and 23rd, 2024, is intended to act as a catalyst to reinvigorate an organisation at a low ebb. The last two decades have stretched the UN legal and institutional framework's capacity to adapt to a new geopolitical reality, as some of the principles underpinning it until now and which form the pillars of the liberal order are coming under increasing challenge.

Negotiations are conditioned by factors such as China's consolidation as an assertive power with worldwide reach, or the emergence of a Global South that questions the geopolitical order of a globalisation fashioned to suit Western powers and which perpetuates inequality and dependency. The lack of representation in the organisation's main bodies, most notably in the Security Council but also in the economic and financial organs, is a source of grievance for states and regions that feel sidelined. And it is not just countries: other actors that wield increasing influence in the international arena, such as cities

and civil society organisations, are also demanding more participation and inclusion, and more transparency in decision-making and accountability.

Other demands stem from the need to provide multilateral institutions with the financial, human and technical resources to get the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) back on track in the wake of the multiple, overlapping crises of recent decades. There are also concerns about the need to arm the multilateral system with a greater capacity to anticipate and react to such crises and to manage the effects of looming climate change. Added to that is the uncertainty arising from rapid technological change and the breakthrough of artificial intelligence.

THE AIM OF THE PACT FOR THE FUTURE IS NOT TO CREATE A NEW AGENDA BUT TO HELP FULFIL EXISTING ONES AND FOSTER STRUCTURAL CHANGES SO THAT THE UNITED NATIONS CAN ADAPT ITS MANDATE TO A NEW GEOPOLITICAL REALITY.

According to the [General Assembly mandate](#), the summit must adopt a “Pact for the Future” negotiated with the member states. Rather than draw up a new agenda, its goal is to help achieve and improve existing ones, like the 2030 Agenda or the [Paris Agreement on climate change](#). The summit must also foster the changes required for the United Nations to fulfil its mandate of preserving peace and human security. To these ends, the secretary-general structured the Pact for the Future

into five chapters: 1) sustainable development and financing; 2) peace and security; 3) science, technology and innovation; 4) youth and future generations, and 5) transforming global governance.

This *CIDOB Report* seeks to provide answers to three key questions: a) what are the reasons and arguments driving the reforms; b) what type of proposals and measures are under negotiation; and c) what is the position of the various actors involved and what interests are in play. The analyses in the report spell out the divergent views of the Global North and Global South. But that is not the only debate, as other fault lines are apparent that shape coalitions and groupings of variable geometry depending on the conditions and capabilities of the different actors. The idea is to clarify some of the main challenges and issues in play, and to look back and see where progress has been made and where the main obstacles to an effective reform for better governance lie.

The two opening chapters address the first item on the agenda: financial matters. Víctor Burguete looks at reforming the international financial architecture. He examines the proposals to provide the financial

institutions with greater legitimacy and transparency; and with the capacities to respond quickly and effectively to sovereign debt problems in a manner that is fair to the countries of the South, many of which are reporting record debt levels in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis. José Antonio Alonso, meanwhile, tackles the crucial issue of financing the development agenda. The Summit of the Future will lay the foundations and set the tone for the discussions at the International Conference on Financing for Development, to be held in 2025. He proposes devising a way to maximise funding sources that are currently underutilised, like special drawing rights or the multilateral development banks. He also flags the need to bring some order to the ineffective web of financial instruments working in disarray at present.

The following two chapters are devoted to the challenges of the peace agenda, which is currently under the onslaught of a proliferation and escalation of conflicts. Rafael Grasa explains the ongoing negotiations to tackle the reform of the Security Council against a backdrop of a crisis of legitimacy owing to the blocking tactics employed by the major powers with the right of veto. He warns that, besides reform of its composition and functioning, the very values and principles of the international order are at stake. Next, Jordi Armadans delves into peacebuilding instruments from a human rights perspective, warning that democratic backsliding and growing threats to people's security undermine sustaining peace. He also warns of the dangers of arms proliferation and of taking a militaristic view of collective security.

The next two chapters explore the challenges of the digital transition. Marta Galceran looks at the Global Digital Compact negotiations, which are taking place in parallel with the discussions over the Pact for the Future. The goal of the compact is to establish a worldwide consensus on the principles governing cyberspace to ensure a transparent, inclusive, secure and responsible digital transition. The negotiations have brought to light the existence of a geopolitical divide, but also controversy over the role of the states in a space where decentralised governance has prevailed until now. Carme Colomina, meanwhile, takes a deep dive into the issue of information integrity, starting from the premise that truthful information is a public good protected by international law. She alerts readers that disinformation and hate speech directed at certain collectives have a negative impact on every area of development; and that this warrants a framework of accountability and responsibility for the platforms and agencies involved.

The following chapter, by Anna Ayuso and Waldo Swart, analyses the secretary-general's initiative to include a declaration on coming generations as an annex to the Pact for the Future. The declaration seeks to address the need to promote a long-term view that considers the effects that present

decisions will have on future generations. To this end, the authors signal the obligation to foster participatory processes that include younger generations in negotiation procedures and to incorporate a principle of intergenerational justice that tackles the fight against current inequalities. Anticipation, transparency, participation and innovation are also front and centre in Cristina Gallach's chapter on institutional reform of the United Nations. She notes that to be able to act in a timely and effective manner requires strengthening capacities but also a change in the institutional culture and the incorporation of technical innovation tools.

The last chapter, by Ricardo Martinez, examines the role of cities in global governance as agents of change and innovation to achieve the SDG targets. Despite the difficulties cities encounter when it comes to taking part in intergovernmental negotiations, they have succeeded in including an urban dimension in the Pact for the Future. But it is far from commensurate with their importance in terms of population and economic, social and cultural output worldwide.

Most of the authors acknowledge it will not be possible to reach global agreements in every area mentioned. But the ambition and scope of the debates can lay the groundwork for a future governance that is more suited to the challenges and level of complexity and uncertainty of the international context.