

Rising to the challenge

A NEW REPORT FROM TOGETHER FIRST

TOGETHER FIRST

A GLOBAL SYSTEM THAT WORKS FOR ALL



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UNA-UK activists organise at their member's summit in July 2018.
Credit: Jeremy Gilley/Peace One Day/UNA-UK

Join us

We call on our leaders to be better and our governments to do better. Time is running out, but with your help we will be one step closer to the global public movement we need to identify and secure meaningful solutions to the problems plaguing our world – from climate change to cyberwarfare to genocide.

We firmly believe that only a transformation in global governance can save us. But this cannot happen without a groundswell of support from the public, organisations, businesses and leaders at all levels. Over the next year Together First will strengthen its coalition of activists from all backgrounds and campaign for tangible progress as part of the UN's 75th anniversary activities.

Join Together First now and get involved.

www.together1st.org | [@TogetherFirst](https://twitter.com/TogetherFirst)

About Together First

Together First is a rapidly growing network of individuals, civil society organisations, practitioners, parliamentarians, business leaders and activists from all regions of the world committed to fair, open and inclusive solutions to improve global governance.

We are driven by the urgent need to address global catastrophic risks and to expand the boundaries of political possibility.

Throughout 2020 Together First is leading a global campaign to:



Identify workable ways to address global risks through broad-based global consultations and targeted advocacy activities.



Produce a 'to-do' list for the international community by prioritising the leading ideas.



Mobilise our diverse network to make these solutions a reality.

We are most grateful for the support of the Global Challenges Foundation. The United Nations Association – UK provides the secretariat for Together First.

Rising to the challenge

Together First is a global campaign to give civil society a seat at the table when the world's future is being discussed.

We believe that humanity faces challenges that threaten our very survival – such as climate change and other environmental risks, weapons of mass destruction and cyber warfare. If we are to address those challenges, we need to work together across borders, sectors and generations. But global coordination to mitigate major threats remains entirely inadequate and dominated by states. To be successful, a host of other actors need to be part of the dialogue and decision-making.

That is why Together First is focusing on building coalitions of NGOs, human rights activists and campaigners around the most promising ideas to improve global governance systems so humanity is better equipped to tackle the challenges we face, and to turn these ideas into reality. To date, 50 organisations have signed up to our campaign, covering all five of the UN's regional groups.

We are a network of realists. We understand that convincing decision-makers to pursue transformative reforms in the current environment will not be easy, but that the chances of success will be maximised by having clear and bold visions and demonstrating where existing support and resources for proposed ideas can be found along with realistic roadmaps for implementation.

This report highlights the important work being carried out by members of our coalition. In five essays, each of the featured individuals and organisations outline their proposals for strengthening, reforming or transforming our global system. At the end of the report, we list a selection of other projects coalition members are working on.

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Extinction Rebellion UK's Citizens' Assemblies Working Group explains the concept of citizen's assemblies, a scalable solution to climate governance which could replace or operate alongside existing mechanisms, and outlines how an approach to climate change based on deliberative democracy could identify and oversee implementation of the radical changes required with the speed, legitimacy and long-term vision the crisis requires.



Greta Thunberg joins climate action protest outside UNHQ in September 2019. Credit: UN Photo/Manuel Elias

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Beatrice Fihn of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) explains that the governance mechanism for a nuclear-free world already exists. It is called the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, already has significant political support, and can play a powerful role in stigmatizing, delegitimizing and eventually eliminating nuclear weapons.

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Maja Groff outlines the vision and aspiration that reform of our global system should embody, and makes the case that such a long-term vision needs to be converted into short term and achievable policy goals, of the kind the Together First process will champion.

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Lysa John and Mandeep Tiwana, CIVICUS' Secretary-General and Chief Programmes Officer, outline the pressures on civil society, how the UN could help support them, and how they in turn could support the UN. They highlight the need for better coordination between the UN and its key stakeholders, and a new post of Under-Secretary-General for Civil Society to spearhead that coordination.

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Mona Ali Khalil explores the extent of the authority of the UN General Assembly to act when a veto by one or more permanent members blocks the UN Security Council from fulfilling its responsibility to maintain international peace and security. With the repeated failures of the UN Security Council to fulfil its responsibility to protect civilians in the face of mass atrocity crimes – including genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity – fresh in our minds and hearts, she revisits the "Uniting for Peace" resolution as a way around the veto and a path to principled action to save civilian lives.

Making 2020 count

Next year the United Nations, which sits at the core of our current global system, turns 75. Governments will mark this milestone with a leaders' summit in September 2020, at which a political declaration will be adopted. UN Member States have agreed that this declaration should be forward-looking, focused on: 'The future we want, the UN we need'.

The first part of that phrase references the Sustainable Development Goals, which were adopted in 2015 as an ambitious blueprint for the world. The second speaks to the recognition that we need an effective multilateral system to deliver the Goals, as well as address catastrophic risks. Alongside this, the United Nations will launch a series of dialogues – pitched as the biggest-ever global conversation – on achieving the future we want.

If taken seriously, the anniversary could serve as a starting point for helping multilateralism to adapt to the 21st century. The last major set of reforms to the United Nations, for example, were agreed at the 2005 World Summit which followed on from the Millennium Summit.

This is a crucial opportunity to take stock of our current global system – and demand action to improve it. Together First's objective is to ensure we make the most of this historic moment.

Over the next 18 months Together First will highlight the work of our coalition and champion viable ideas that the international community should consider adopting during the UN's 75th anniversary process.

Visit our website together1st.org to find out more about how to become part of the movement and submit your ideas to our call for solutions.

Citizens' assemblies: The people take back control

Extinction Rebellion UK's Citizens' Assemblies Working Group explains the concept of citizen's assemblies, a scalable solution to climate governance which could replace or operate alongside existing mechanisms, and outlines how an approach to climate change based on deliberative democracy could identify and oversee implementation of the radical changes required with the speed, legitimacy and long-term vision the crisis requires.

The current systems of democracy are failing us. The vast majority of people believe in the idea of democracy – that people have the right to make decisions about issues that affect their lives – but they are increasingly disillusioned with today's structures.

It isn't hard to see why. Politicians are under the thumb of large donors and corporate interests. Political parties often value their reputations over the needs of the people they represent. And governments across the globe have failed to address long-term systemic failures because they are always focused on the next election. We now face the catastrophic consequences of this: the climate and ecological emergency which threatens all life on earth.

But there are solutions that can deepen democracy and help us address the emergency. A citizens' assembly is one of these – and it's Extinction Rebellion's third demand.

In a nutshell, a citizens' assembly consists of a demographically representative, randomly chosen sample of people who deliberate on an issue. That's why it's called deliberative democracy. In its first meeting, the assembly is briefed on critical thinking. They hear from experts and those affected by the issue at hand – and they have the opportunity to ask in-depth questions. The learning process often takes place over several weekends. After considering submissions from the general public, they break off into smaller, facilitated discussion groups to weigh-up the options and decide on solutions.

The idea is not new. Random selection in governance goes back to Ancient Athens – and it is still widely used for legal juries. Recently, there has been a surge in interest in deliberative democracy across the globe.

Three years ago, Gdansk in Poland had a major flooding incident in which two people died. When it was concluded that such extreme events would only increase with climate change, the mayor agreed to organise a citizens' assembly to discuss the issue. About 60 residents were chosen to listen to expert testimony – and for transparency the final stage of the random selection process was carried out by a die-roll and live-streamed. If at least 80 per cent of the group agreed on a decision, it became law.

The next year when the city flooded again the municipality was able to respond swiftly partly due to the resolutions passed by the representative citizens' assembly. Its success means that a citizens' assembly can now be requested whenever at least 1,000 of Gdansk's 350,000 adults sign a petition. Others have so far been formed on pollution, civic engagement and equal rights.

The public deserves to determine a response to the crisis we face. Done well, politicians and decision makers will have a stake because it's about having a mandate with cross-party support. Maybe decent politicians will get behind this because they know that five-year electoral cycles don't allow for the kind of long-term thinking we desperately need.



Global Climate Strike demonstrators outside the Ministry of Defence in London in September 2019.
Credit: Enyseh Teimory/UNA-UK

Citizen's assemblies empower people at a local level, but the idea is scalable, and it will need to scale to match the globe-spanning, border crossing, magnitude of the problem. Citizen's assemblies and other deliberative methods could provide for an effective mechanism for global governance. As for the system we have, in particular the global conferences and intergovernmental processes linked to the Paris climate treaty, they would be considerably strengthened and legitimised if citizen's assemblies became a fundamental ingredient to their working methods.

This is the future – more politics, more say, more power. Strength from the people – the definition of democracy – seems like a good idea again.

Extinction Rebellion is an international movement that uses non-violent civil disobedience in an attempt to halt mass extinction and minimise the risk of social collapse. This essay was authored by the Citizens' Assemblies Working Group at Extinction Rebellion UK. Parts of this text have been adapted from an article originally published in the *New Statesman* on 27 August 2019.

A world without nuclear weapons

Beatrice Fihn of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) explains that the governance mechanism for a nuclear-free world already exists. It is called the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, already has significant political support, and can play a powerful role in stigmatizing, delegitimizing and eventually eliminating nuclear weapons.

Over the past few years, warning bells have again sounded as the nuclear-armed states have entered a new nuclear arms race. In the last two years alone, nuclear arsenals in China, North Korea, and Pakistan have grown and Russia and the United States have increased significantly their expenditure on nuclear weapons technology. The US and Russia have both recently withdrawn from the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), and days after its formal expiration, the US resumed testing such missiles. Russia and the US may also be expanding their non-strategic nuclear weapons capabilities.

After the commitment of what collectively amounts to several trillion dollars to the development and production of nuclear weapons, the world is once

again witnessing the birth of a nuclear arms race. High-tech developments in the military such as cyber operations and artificial intelligence further increase the risks and unpredictability of existing nuclear arsenals.

It was against this backdrop that a humanitarian disarmament movement grew, based on the need to take discussions about nuclear weapons away from narrow concepts of national security and towards the effects of these weapons on human beings – on health, on societies and on the environment on which we all depend for our lives and livelihoods. Following six years of collaboration on this humanitarian initiative between states, international organisations and with ICAN as a committed and determined civil society partner, states decided to convene a United Nations diplomatic conference in 2016 “to negotiate a legally-binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination”.

On 7 July 2017, 122 states adopted the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). This marked the first time a global treaty has outlawed the possession and use of nuclear weapons, and reflects frustration that despite legally-binding agreements to prohibit biological and chemical weapons, no similar disarmament treaty existed on the third, and most devastating, weapon of mass destruction. The Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) placed some limits on their further spread, but has not succeeded in eliminating them; the parallel and compatible process of prohibition can provide fresh energy for the implementation of the duty the NPT places on nuclear states to disarm.

Once the TPNW enters into force (expected in 2020), the first 50 states parties will be pushing hard to persuade states covered by a nuclear “umbrella” and the nuclear-armed states to renounce nuclear deterrence and come on board. No one—whether state or non-state—is under any illusions about the challenges that lie ahead in achieving this breakthrough, but equally no one is blind to the urgency of the need, with the world standing on the verge of a new nuclear arms race.

The TPNW is a groundbreaking new way of addressing increasing concerns of nuclear weapons use. It is a comprehensive disarmament treaty, prohibiting all development, possession, transfer, and use, and requiring the verified destruction of any stockpiles. In that way, it resembles the conventions that prohibited biological and chemical weapons.

However, this treaty was initiated and negotiated by non-nuclear weapon states despite stark opposition of the few nuclear-armed states. Through an active civil society campaign and close cooperation with governments and international organisations, the international community used the United Nations General Assembly to launch these negotiations, circumventing the usual veto of the permanent members of the Security Council.

This treaty is a powerful tool that the majority of states in the world can utilize to shift power dynamics and create new norms that changes behaviour. While the nuclear-weapon states stayed away from the negotiations, this treaty has managed to significantly increase pressure on the nuclear-armed states and perhaps more importantly, the nuclear allied countries.

With this treaty, nuclear weapons will be increasingly seen as illegitimate, losing their political status. Arms companies will find it more difficult to work on illegal weapons since such work will increasingly carry a significant reputational risk. Banks, pension funds and other financial institutions will start divesting from companies producing nuclear weapons and make it a financial burden to be involved in such activities.

In recognising that the majority of states in the world are setting clear norms for what kind of behaviour is acceptable – even if the most powerful will not participate – the TPNW is a powerful example of what democratisation of global governance could look like.

At a time when nationalism and authoritarian leadership are back and such leaders are undermining multilateralism and cooperation, the solution does not lie in adjusting our expectations to the lowest common denominator. Instead, as the TPNW shows, this is the moment when the progressive majority moves ahead and creates new norms and shapes behaviour to lead the world forward.

The TPNW is an example of progressive multilateralism and every government that joins it will contribute to stigmatizing, delegitimizing and eventually eliminating nuclear weapons.

Beatrice Fihn is the Executive Director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), 2017 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate. She accepted the Nobel Peace Prize, delivering the Nobel Laureate lecture on ICAN's behalf. She facilitated civil society mobilisation throughout development of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Key ingredients for people-centred multilateralism



Maja Groff* outlines the vision and aspiration that reform of our global system should embody, and makes the case that such a long-term vision needs to be converted into short term and achievable policy goals, of the kind the Together First process will champion.

There is an unprecedented urgency and a clear ethical obligation to address a range of pressing issues currently confronting humanity, where the cost of inaction or delayed action is devastatingly high. Such issues include, but are not limited to: the current climate crisis, and the over-stepping of other key environmental planetary boundaries (with the need to address fundamental human survival and inter-generational equity); the continuing proliferation of nuclear and other weapons; the general instability as we transition to a “multipolar” world with shifting international power dynamics; the social and economic

volatility caused by economic inequality and instability of the international financial system; and emerging risks arising as a result of current technological innovation.

Tackling these issues will require a transformation in global governance, and a reorientation to “people-centred multilateralism”. This should be predicated on the universality of human rights (and responsibilities to each other) and the equality of and dignity inherent to each person, in order to create an equitable and a strongly participatory order that systematically engages global civil society. There must be respect for international cultural, ethnic, and regional diversity as well as for equitable representation in global governance institutions, while still affirming core international values. Established principles of subsidiarity and complementarity in supra-national governance should also be further employed.

Achieving this will require leadership from above and below. It will also require quality education, media and information to increase understanding of the crucial national benefits that come from effective multilateral cooperation and to cultivate of a global civic ethic which includes notions of solidarity, empathy, and responsibility.

The capacity of the UN system must be significantly enhanced, founded on principles of legitimacy, fairness and transparency. This includes international institutional mechanisms for the prevention of conflicts, tackling their root causes and building from existing obligations for the peaceful resolution of international disputes and for general disarmament.

In parallel, international legal institutions are due to be systematically strengthened, including with respect to implementation, monitoring, and enforcement powers.

In relation to international environmental crises, we need a paradigm shift towards an understanding of a shared planetary territory to be effectively managed. The interdependence of human and ecological systems must be better understood, as well as the imperative to not only protect the environmental commons but to collectively repair damage from human impact. Local consumption habits must be changed on a global scale to close waste loops and improve recycling, reusability, and sustainability of human-made and natural resources.

There must be a reorientation to fair, inclusive and sustainable economies at all levels – shared prosperity must be realized, and systemic economic and financial risks avoided. We must address issues such as extreme wealth and income inequality, and seriously consider the general need for productive employment and living wages with social protection floors. “Competition” in international taxation and illicit financial flows must be tackled. Economic and social well-being are an integral part of human dignity and must be fore-fronted and realised. At the same time, we must move beyond forms of excessive individualism and materialism towards an ethic of shared prosperity, within planetary boundaries.

To ensure efficacy of enhanced international governance, enhanced and reliable funding for the UN and other global governance institutions must be ensured. At the same time, new degrees of effective management and service delivery within the UN and its specialized agencies and programs should be realized, and continuing reform processes sustained. Transparent and meritocratic appointments to senior positions within the UN system are a vital first step in ensuring that this takes place. There should also be better inclusion of and coordination with regional organisations.

All this will require a new generation of ethical leadership and transparency, legitimacy and effective anti-corruption measures at all layers of government, with all actors subject to rule by law.

Maja Groff is an international lawyer based in The Hague, working on multilateral treaties, at international criminal tribunals and teaching at the Hague Academy of International Law. Together with Augusto Lopez Claros and Arthur Dahl, Ms Groff submitted one of the winning entries to the Global Challenges Foundation’s New Shape Prize 2018. *The views expressed here are individual and are not on behalf of any institution or organisation.

A seat at the table for civil society

Lysa John and Mandeep Tiwana, CIVICUS' Secretary-General and Chief Programmes Officer, outline the pressures on civil society, how the UN could help support them, and how they in turn could support the UN. They highlight the need for better coordination between the UN and its key stakeholders, and a new post of Under-Secretary-General for Civil Society to spearhead that coordination.

2019 may well be remembered as the year in which ordinary citizens finally lost patience with incremental changes and called for the bold and urgent actions we need to address the challenges we face. To date, we have witnessed citizen-led protests from Bolivia to Hong Kong, Sudan to the United Kingdom, as well as school strikes in over 100 countries as young people demand decisive action to combat climate change across.

Since fundamental change requires fundamental shifts in the way power and resources are traditionally organised, it is hardly surprising that the places where these efforts for change are located are outside the spaces dominated by established development actors. Take inequality: too many development experts see it as a technical problem rather than as a grave human rights violation best addressed through radical people-centred action. How else can one explain the reality of one in nine people or 821 million going to bed hungry every night in times of unprecedented wealth creation and technological advancement? Could it be that such situations persist because an overwhelming majority of the globe's populations are constrained by the political systems within which they live?

Evidence from the CIVICUS Monitor, a participatory platform that measures fundamental civic freedoms, shows that only 4% of the world's population live in countries where the freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly are adequately protected despite these rights being protected by the constitutions of most countries and under international law. Civil society worldwide is facing a slew of cascading restrictions on its ability to operate. Our State of Civil Society reports highlight that in recent years powerful interests on every continent are actively colluding to undermine obligations and commitments painstakingly secured by activists and public servants working together to lay the foundations for just, peaceful and sustainable societies.

Worse still, the brunt of repressive and often violent actions that seek to reverse progress is being borne by discriminated groups and communities. These include women, migrants, refugees, LGBTQI people, indigenous communities and minority ethnic and religious groups.

Across Europe, for instance, major population blocs are being mobilised against excluded groups. Ethnic and faith identities are being distorted in the name of narrowly defined national interests to sow division for political ends. Elsewhere, as in China and India, excluded groups are being suppressed as part of a conscious strategy to promote a narrow and artificially homogenous official version of national identity.

Groups that represent and defend the rights of such communities – including trade unions, journalists and rights activists – are being attacked and intimidated with gross impunity even in democracies such as the United States and Brazil.

Inclusive policy making that is responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable and seeks to leave no one behind is always damaged by these kinds of crackdowns. After all, civil society organisations not only help propel innovation in policy making, but in many instances also take responsibility for delivery of services on the ground in line with the needs of local communities. Notably, civil society activists and their organisations perform a watchdog role over public resources which often makes them a target for attacks. When civic space is constrained, sustainable development is compromised. Worryingly, human rights defenders uncovering corruption, advancing labour rights or challenging environmental degradation are particularly vulnerable as are those seeking to advance good governance, equality and rights of excluded populations such as indigenous peoples. The human rights organisation Frontline Defenders has documented targeted killings of 321 human rights defenders just last year.

So how do we defend civil society space and so improve global governance? A stronger partnership between civil society and the United Nations would go a long way. And such a partnership would need a champion. Just as human rights within and outside the UN system is championed by a High Commissioner for Human Rights, and youth is championed by the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, so too the relationship between the UN and



An LGBT pride parade in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. Space for civil society has been reduced in recent years. Credit: CC foto: upsilon

civil society needs a senior member of staff to lead and shape it.

In 2004 a Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations–Civil Society Relations headed by Fernando Henrique Cardoso recommended that the UN establish “an Under-Secretary-General in charge of a new Office of Constituency Engagement and Partnerships” – in other words a senior member of staff to act as a focal point for civil society at the UN. This proposal built upon similar calls in Erskine Childers and Brian Urquhart’s 1994 study “Renewing the United Nations System” and has formed the basis of subsequent calls from CIVICUS, UNA-UK and others.

Civil society has been an indispensable partner to the United Nations, not only in terms of norm setting and adherence to values but also in supporting the delivery of programmes with legitimacy. And the UN in turn has the capacity to be a bulwark against

restrictions on space for civil society. But this deeper partnership will require better resourcing, a greater degree of senior leadership involvement, and above all more sustained coordination than the UN – the organisation of “we the peoples” – has yet shown. This is why it is so vital that such a post be established.

Lysa John is Secretary-General of the CIVICUS World Alliance for Citizen Participation. She has worked on issues of governance accountability and social justice since 1998. Most recently Global Campaign Director for Save the Children, she previously served as Head of Outreach for the UN High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Agenda. Mandeep Tiwana is CIVICUS' Chief Programmes Officer. Elements of this article are adapted from the pieces “Time to Act” by Lysa John in Sustainable Development Goals 19/6/19, and “Human Rights, Participation and the 2030 Agenda” by Mandeep Tiwana on the Oxford Human Rights Hub 13/2/19.

A way around the veto; a path to action

The “Uniting for Peace” resolution was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1950 during the Korean Crisis. The first emergency special session was convened in 1956 in response to the deadlock in the UN Security Council over the Suez Crisis. Between 1956 and 1997, ten such emergency special sessions were convened by the UN General Assembly. Since 1997, however, no new emergency special sessions have been convened.

With the rise in the use of vetoes in the past decade, the UN Security Council has failed to take effective action to stop the ongoing violence in Israel/Palestine, Myanmar, Syria, Ukraine, Venezuela and Yemen. The UN General Assembly and its Human Rights Council have sought to address the mass atrocity crimes by establishing International Impartial and Independent Investigation Mechanisms for Syria and for Myanmar respectively. With the UN General Assembly seeking to take a more active role in peace and security perhaps “Uniting for Peace” is a mechanism whose time has come again.

Mona Ali Khalil explores the extent of the authority of the UN General Assembly to act when a veto by one or more permanent members blocks the UN Security Council from fulfilling its responsibility to maintain international peace and security. With the repeated failures of the UN Security Council to fulfil its responsibility to protect civilians in the face of mass atrocity crimes – including genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity – fresh in our minds and hearts, she revisits the “Uniting for Peace” resolution as a way around the veto and a path to principled action to save civilian lives.

When a veto is exercised by one or more of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, the Security Council is prevented from fulfilling its primary responsibility to take prompt and effective action to maintain international peace and security in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. No state should ever be allowed to prevent the Security Council from discharging its responsibility in the face of mass atrocity crimes. And yet, as we have seen repeatedly in recent years, the veto has blocked the international community from fulfilling its vow to “never again” allow genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity to continue unpunished and unabated.

Conversely, other States should not seek to uphold the UN Charter by violating it. As provided in Article

51 of the UN Charter, the use of force is lawful only in self-defense or as authorized by the Security Council. In the absence of a credible claim of self-defense, the unauthorized use of force would not only violate Article 51 of the UN Charter but would also undermine the relevance and credibility of the United Nations itself. By contributing to a dangerous erosion of the world’s peace and security architecture, paralysis in the Security Council opens the door to further impunity and to ever-increasing threats and violations of international law.

As such, where a veto by one or more States prevents the Security Council to respond to mass atrocity crimes, it would be far better for Member States to refer the matter to the UN General Assembly pursuant to resolution 377(V), also known as the “Uniting for Peace” resolution, than to resort to unilateral action or “coalitions of the willing.”

In its “Uniting for Peace” resolution, the General Assembly “resolve[d] that if the Security Council, because of lack of unanimity of the permanent members, fails to exercise its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security... the General Assembly shall consider the matter immediately with a view to making appropriate recommendations to Members for collective measures, including in case of a breach of the or act of aggression the use of armed force when necessary, to maintain or restore international peace and security.”

By according the Security Council primary as opposed to exclusive responsibility, the drafters of the UN Charter entrusted a measure of residual authority to the General Assembly. As explicitly stated in the preamble to General Assembly resolution 377(V), the failure of the Security Council

to discharge its primary responsibility “does not relieve Member States of their obligations or the United Nations of its responsibility” nor does it “deprive the General Assembly of its rights or relieve it of its responsibilities under the Charter to maintain international peace and security”.

If the doctrine of the “Responsibility to Protect” is to have any meaning – in particular, if the international community is to fulfil its stated responsibility to protect civilians from mass atrocities – then the systematic or large-scale commission of acts of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and/or crimes against humanity must be deemed a “breach of the peace” within the meaning of resolution 377(V). As such, the latter could and should, if the General Assembly so decides, provide a legal basis for collective measures, including the use of armed force as a last resort when and where deemed necessary.

Moreover, if the obligation to ensure respect for the Geneva Conventions under Common Article 1 of those conventions is to have any meaning, then UN Member States, as High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Conventions, must not let the veto or threat thereof become the only rule of international law enshrined and respected by the international community. The obligation to ensure respect for the sanctity of civilian life under customary international law – including to prevent or stop mass atrocity crimes whenever and wherever they are ongoing – should be as enforceable a legal principle and as binding a rule of law, if not more so.

The veto should not be the only element of the post-WWII legal architecture that is still respected nor should it be allowed to hold that entire architecture and the will of the international community hostage to the whim of a single State.



These 3,758 backpacks placed by UNICEF outside UNHQ represent each of the 3,758 children killed in conflict in 2018. Credit: UNICEF

Mona Ali Khalil is the Director of MAK LAW – an international strategic consulting service and an Affiliate of Harvard Law School Programme on International Law and Armed Conflict. She is a former Senior Legal Officer of the UN and the IAEA. She has a B.A. and M.A. from Harvard University and a Masters in Foreign Service and Juris Doctorate from Georgetown University. A prior version of this article first appeared in *Opinio Juris* on 22 November 2018.



From Left to Right: USS America transiting the Suez canal, 1981. Credit: W. M. Welch / US Navy; the late Kofi Annan pays respect to the late Dag Hammarskjöld in 2001. Credit: UN photo; the President of the 73rd General Assembly hands over the gavel to the President of the 74th in 2019. Credit: UN Photo; a mural on the side of a container used by Uruguayan UN peacekeepers to broadcast radio in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2018. Credit: Fred Carver/UNA-UK

Projects championed by coalition members

Below are just some of the projects that elements of our network are pursuing. The Together First online portal will provide a platform for all of these ideas and many more. Please visit our website to contribute your own proposals. Provided they are compatible with our values they too will be added to our online ideas portal. They will also be considered by our consultation process following which certain ideas will be selected to be refined and amplified by the Together First process and presented to world leaders in the form of a global “to do list” at the world summit to mark the 75th anniversary of the UN.

- On UN Peacekeeping:** UNA-UK has been running an ongoing campaign on combatting sexual exploitation and abuse by UN Peacekeepers: calling for a human rights and criminal justice approach to ensure accountability for perpetrators and justice for victims. Together First seeks to expand that work for more effective peacekeeping including reimagining the role of the peacekeeper in relation to the populations they are deployed to serve and to protect. Please visit www.mission-justice.org to find out more.
- On peacebuilding:** The Igrapé Institute and the Stimson Centre are just two of the organisations that are considering how the UN’s Peacebuilding Commission could play a greater role in providing for a safer world. One possibility is to transform the Peacebuilding Commission into a Peacebuilding Council – similar to the Human Rights Commission’s transformation

in 2005 – with new coordination authorities, new financial and knowledge resources, and a new focus on prevention, including through “peacebuilding audits.”

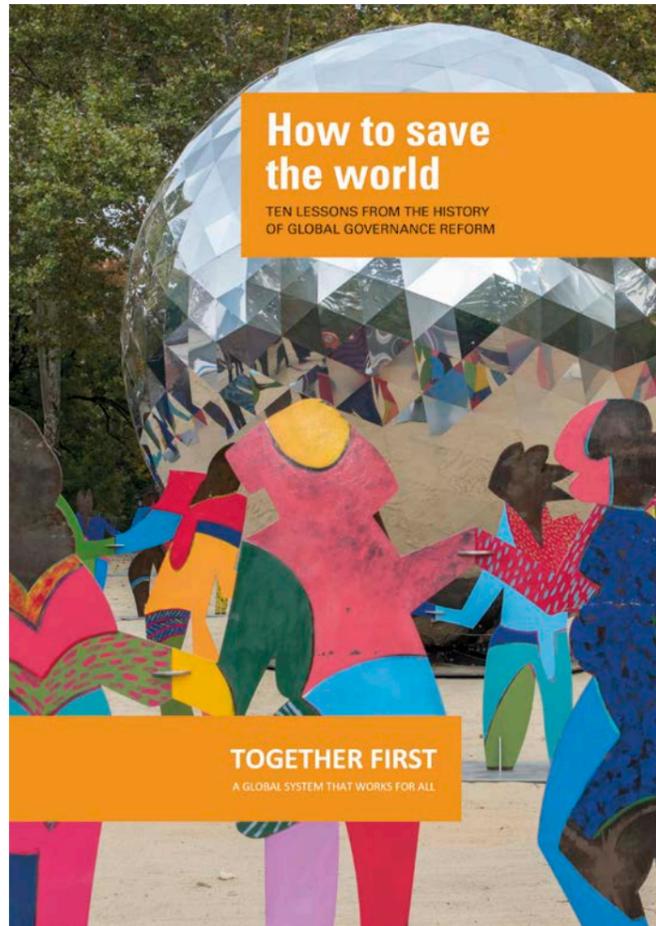
- On lethal autonomous weapons systems:** Also known as “Killer Robots”, these weapons represent a significant threat to civilian lives. Various members of our coalition are already working to ban any technology that removes the human agency in selecting and executing targets before it has the opportunity to cause lethal harm. In particular Together First members WILPF Cameroon, and Ethics & Technology, are working with African states and Russia respectively to join the call for the adoption of an international binding instrument against killer robots.
- On UN elections and appointments:** UNA-UK believes there should be no uncontested elections within the UN system. We are also keen to further

develop the work on transparent and meritocratic senior appointments that we started as part of the 1 for 7 Billion campaign.

- The Campaign for a UNPA** has been endorsed by over 1,600 members of parliament and hundreds of NGOs including many Together First members. They believe a UN Parliamentary Assembly (UNPA) represents a route to more effective, democratic and accountable global governance which is needed to cope with global challenges such as climate change. Visit en.unpacampaign.org to find out more.
- Democracy Without Borders, CIVICUS and Democracy International have a proposal for a **UN World Citizens’ Initiative (UNWCI)** which would allow members of the public to place items on the UN’s agenda via petitions. A campaign will be launched in late 2019. Visit www.worldcitizensinitiative.org to find out more.
- Stimson’s Just Security 2020 program will co-organize a multi-stakeholder Global Policy Dialogue on **Climate Governance: Innovating the Paris Agreement & Beyond** on the sidelines of the Global Green Growth Week in Seoul, South Korea. In November, this will be followed by the dialogue *A Better Framework for Global Economic*

Governance: Toward an action agenda for multilateral reforms.

- Recent scandals in Myanmar (on several occasions) Sri Lanka, and elsewhere have resulted in the recommendation that human rights and the prevention of atrocities need to be more firmly integrated into the work of UN country teams. And yet this is still not happening. Together First is working with experts to examine **how UN country teams can work better**.
- The considered opinion of many who have seen perennial cycles of UN reforms is that they add additional processes and mechanisms without ever taking them away, and that recommended structural changes are implemented without adopting the managerial and budgetary changes that are required to make them successful. In the interests of **doing less but doing it better**, Together First will seek out recommendations for things that the UN needs to stop doing.
- Together First is also collaborating with academics and other partners on: **governance of the internet, governance of migration, pandemics and antimicrobial resistance and the governance of biodiversity**. Watch this space for further work and research in these areas.



Visit our website to
read Together First's
previous report
"How to save the world"

Our report "How to save the World" accompanies our call for ideas and draws lessons from historical efforts of global reform.

Written by Sam Daws, a UN expert based at Oxford University, this report identifies 10 key barriers to implementing global solutions and the strategies for overcoming them.

www.together1st.org

COVER IMAGE Boats in the colours of the Sustainable Development Goals sail out past the statue of liberty to greet the arrival of environmental activist Greta Thunberg. Credit: UN Photo

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TOGETHER FIRST

A GLOBAL SYSTEM THAT WORKS FOR ALL