

Stepping stones for a better future

10 ideas for world leaders who are serious about building back better

The UN Secretary-General has called on leaders to build back better from the Covid-19 pandemic. As governments lay the foundations for recovery, it is vital that they look beyond the immediate horizon to the future.

The decisions we take now will cast long shadows. The climate emergency has not disappeared. It will not wait for us. Neither can we ignore the trends that have sharpened as a result of the pandemic, from entrenched inequalities to rising geopolitical tensions and new technologies. And we cannot afford to let our international system wither on the vine. We must take bold measures to ensure it becomes more open, inclusive, fair and effective.

In this report, Together First presents 10 such measures. Our movement was founded in 2018 to create a “to-do” list for the international community, comprising concrete, feasible steps to mitigate global catastrophic risks and put us on a pathway to the broader global governance revolution we need.

The 10 proposals listed here are drawn from a larger pool featured on our [ideas hub](#). They have been selected following extensive consultations with policy-makers, practitioners and experts, as those most likely to be at a tipping point, when a concerted campaign could lead to implementation in the foreseeable future.

All our ideas are anchored in a simple theory of change:

First, **citizen engagement**. It has been pointed out that the United Nations Charter starts with the words “we the peoples” but then the peoples are scarcely heard from again. If we are to restore trust and confidence in our institutions, we must find ways to strengthen participation - in particular of young people and civil society.

Second, **leadership and accountability**. No amount of reform can make up for good leadership. It is vital that we take steps to ensure leaders are appointed on merit. Similarly, we must take steps to promote greater transparency and accountability, otherwise greater openness will only lead to further disillusionment.

Third, **peace and security**. This goes to the heart of our international system, founded on the promise to protect future generations from the scourge of war. It is in this area where failures are most tragic and visible. We must find creative ways forward, even as traditional reform processes appear to be stalled.

And finally, **stronger mechanisms to tackle existential risks**. We champion two arms control treaties that are important aims in themselves, as well as potential models for managing other risks.

Taking the 10 steps outlined in this report would transform the way our global system relates to the public and manages risk. It would make international institutions stronger and more accountable.

But to face the mid-21st century our international institutions need more than a tune up. The present intergovernmental negotiations on a “UN75 Political Declaration” must represent that start, rather than conclusion, of a global conversation on how we better address global challenges.

This is a summary version of the full report “Stepping Stones for a Better Future” available online [here](#). If you want to discuss these ideas with us, or join our campaign to turn them into reality, then please do get in touch via our [website](#).

The list:

1. **A high-level champion for civil society.** The United Nations needs a high-level focal point to empower, support and convene civil society. It would powerfully contribute to strengthening citizen engagement and empowering citizens and civil society to help deliver the world we want and the UN we need.
2. **A UN youth council.** As Secretary-General Guterres said “Young people are an enormous asset to our societies. We must cherish them, invest in them and empower them.” Our international system needs to better develop its mechanisms for engaging with youth through a youth advisory body.
3. **Merit based appointments.** Our international institutions need to be led by independent, principled, bold individuals that reflect the people they serve in gender, age, nationality and race.
4. **Accountability for state violations of planetary boundaries.** By enhancing the monitoring and evaluation elements of our global system, and then using this information as the basis for accountability campaigns, accountability and standard setting can be enhanced.
5. **A Security Council that acts or gets out of the way.** There is a pressing need to ensure that the Security Council does its job more efficiently and effectively. If it cannot, then it is important that those duties be discharged elsewhere in the international system.
6. **A stronger Peacebuilding Commission.** The Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) needs a more prominent role. The necessity of a shift from crisis-oriented approach to longer-term engagement is broadly accepted within the UN but this is not reflected in the UN Peace and Security architecture.
7. **People-centred peacekeeping.** Peace operations are predominantly state-centric. A significant portion of their efforts are focused on supporting the host government and state institutions, or threats to them. Placing people at the centre of peace operations will make them more accountable and locally grounded.
8. **An integrated approach to climate and security.** Climate change can magnify, accelerate and diversify insecurity: from violence and organized crime in the Amazon to violent extremism in the Sahel. Incorporating climate and security into the work of the UN and partner organizations is an essential yet severely overlooked dimension of climate action.
9. **A ban on killer robots.** From mustard gas to cluster munitions our international system has a long history of prohibiting forms of warfare that society deems too barbaric and dangerous. As the 1995 Protocol on Blinding Laser Weapons shows, it is not necessary to wait until new dangerous technologies are in use before banning them.
10. **A ban on nuclear weapons.** Weapons of Mass Destruction pose an existential threat to life on earth. They serve no useful purpose and can never be used without committing an atrocity. Biological and Chemical weapons have thankfully been banned. The corresponding ban for nuclear weapons needs to be brought in to force so that nuclear armed states pay a corresponding diplomatic penalty.