A UN75 Dialogue Report

HOW CAN THE UN BE MADE FIT FOR PURPOSE IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN?

TOGETHER FIRST

A GLOBAL SYSTEM THAT WORKS FOR ALL

The UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) joins the UNiTE Campaign outside its HQ in Santiago, Chile, to promote the elimination of violence against women. © Carlos Vera/ECLAC.

About Together First

Together First is a growing network of people and organisations committed to building a global system that works for all. From activists to business leaders, parliamentarians to community workers, we support solutions for making global governance more open, inclusive, equitable and effective.

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

Launched in 2018, Together First is leading a global campaign throughout 2020 to:

Find workable ways to address global risks by consulting people from all walks of life

Compile the most promising ideas into this "to-do" list for world leaders

Mobilise our network to make these solutions a reality

About this report

Together First is committed to advancing the best ideas for improving global governance. We believe that by making the conversation on global governance accessible and inclusive, we will help create a more democratic, transparent and accountable system.

To this end, throughout the United Nations 75th anniversary year, Together First has been engaging, supporting and convening conversations. "UN75 dialogues" are conversations facilitated through a UN toolkit that addresses the question of how we build "the world we want; the UN we need". These conversations were launched in January 2020 by the UN Secretary-General António Guterres and form part of the UN's aim to have the largest ever global conversation. During the first 3 months of 2020, over 330 dialogues were held in 87 countries, in person and through virtual means. Individuals across borders, sectors and generations have been taking part and sharing their ideas on how the UN can help realise a better world.

As part of this public consultation, Together First co-sponsored a UN75 dialogue to discuss the future of multilateralism in the Americas. The discussion (20 March - 26 April 2020) took place online and was supported by a consortium of international organisations including Together First, and TF coalition members: The Stimson Center, The Global Challenges Foundation (GCF), Igarapé Institute and UN2020, as well as The Organisation of American States (OAS), The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) and Adelphi.

Following on from this consultation, the Stimson Center produced an outcome paper which sought to summarise the conversations that took place. Together First has commissioned consultant Adriana Erthal Abdenur to write this UN75 Americas report, which builds on that paper and elaborates on some of the ideas and proposals that emerged from the perspective of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Adriana Erthal Abdenur is a Brazilian policy expert and activist, having earned her PhD from Princeton University and bachelor's degree from Harvard University. She is the co-founder and Executive Director of Plataforma CIPÓ, a new Brazil-based entity dedicated to improving global governance, climate action, and peacebuilding. Dr Abdenur was previously a Professor at the New School and Columbia University and publishes widely on global governance, South-South cooperation, rising powers and international peace and security. She currently serves on the UN ECOSOC Committee on

Development Policy and is a member of the Expert Working Group on Climate-related Security Risks.

In this report, Dr Abdenur addresses how the UN can be made "fit for purpose" in the Latin America and Caribbean region. She offers four recurring and cross-cutting themes on how to: (1) increase participation, through including civil society and youth in UN processes (2) strengthen the UN's role in peacebuilding, especially through conflict prevention (3) boost climate and security governance, making it more relevant to the region and (4) improve the links between regional and global governance in the Latin America and Caribbean context.

Dr Abdenur's conclusions strongly support and reinforce several of Together First's "to-do" list reform proposals. The "to-do" list was launched in Together First's report Stepping Stones for a better future and comprises 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 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.

ECLAC headquarters building. © ECLAC.
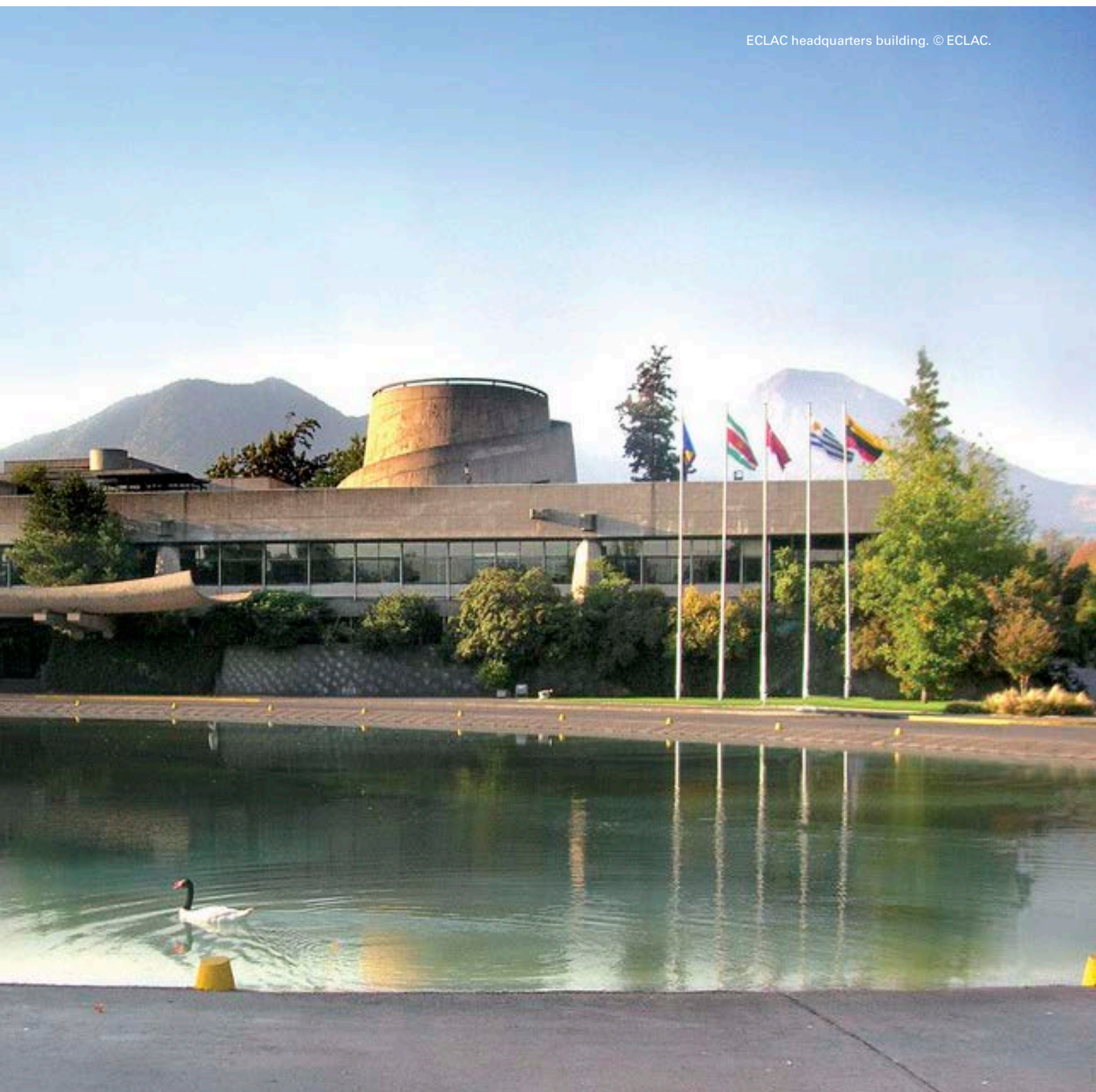
Miroslav Jenca, Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia and the Americas for the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations, visits Colombia to encourage progress of the peace process, while reaffirming the support of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia (UNVMC). Mr. Jenca looks out over Bogotá. © UN Photo/Hector Latorre.
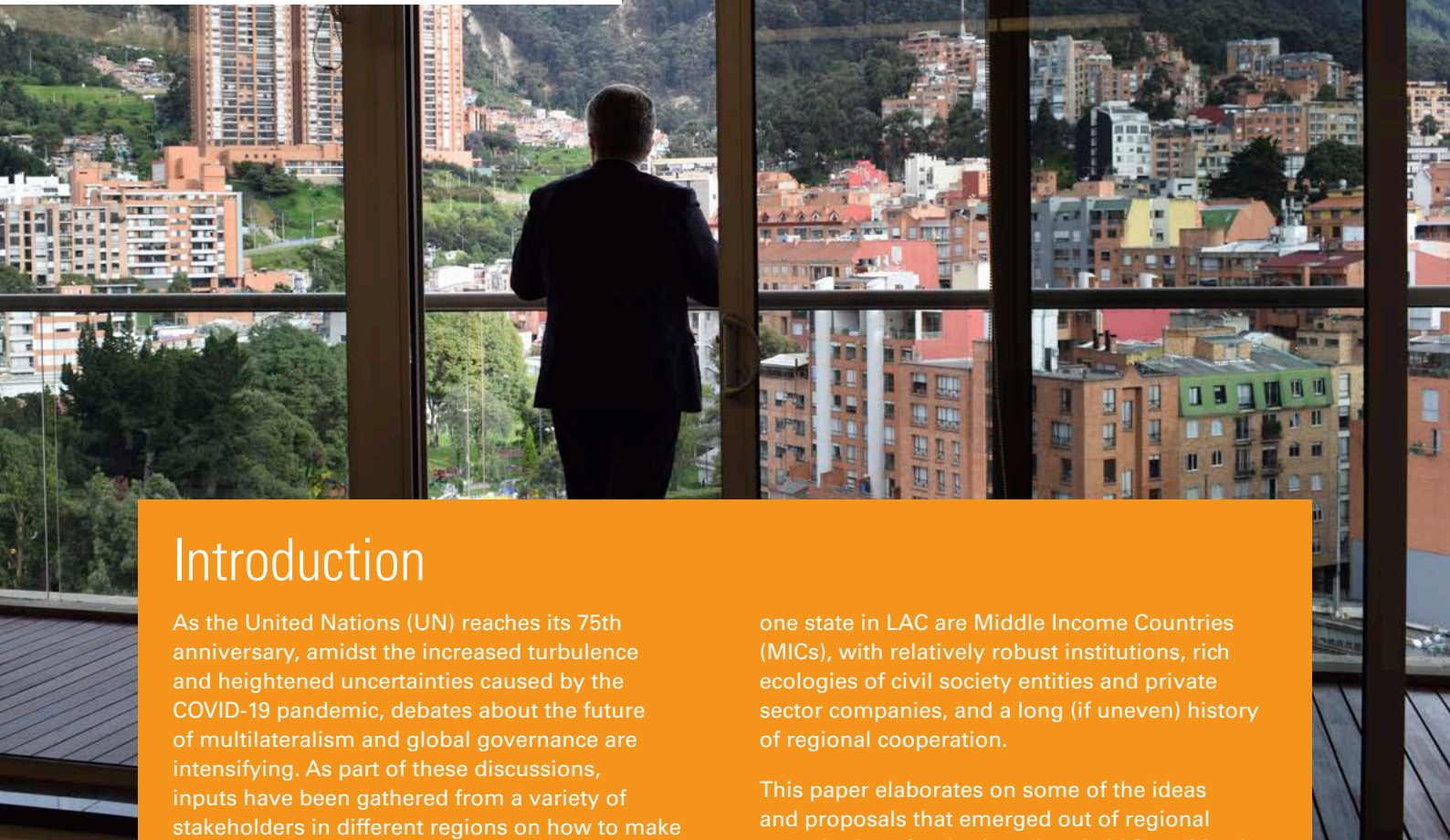
Introduction

As the United Nations (UN) reaches its 75th anniversary, amidst the increased turbulence and heightened uncertainties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, debates about the future of multilateralism and global governance are intensifying. As part of these discussions, inputs have been gathered from a variety of stakeholders in different regions on how to make the UN system more effective and responsive to both old issues and emerging challenges, including those related to socioeconomic inequalities, new technologies, geopolitical changes, and climate change. In Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), the central concerns can be summarized in the following question: How can the UN be made "fit for purpose" in this region?

LAC encompasses a vast array of countries and societies spread across two continents, as well as the islands of the Caribbean. The problems faced – and therefore, corresponding solutions – will therefore also vary widely. But some common challenges remain from past eras, including persistent socioeconomic inequality, low economic growth, and widespread environmental destruction, just as new ones are emerging – such as climate changes and privacy issues around new technologies – that require innovative thinking and collective responses. Likewise, there are common capacities across the region. All but

one state in LAC are Middle Income Countries (MICs), with relatively robust institutions, rich ecologies of civil society entities and private sector companies, and a long (if uneven) history of regional cooperation.

This paper elaborates on some of the ideas and proposals that emerged out of regional consultations for the Americas held from March to April 2020, organized by a consortium of civil society entities, with support from the United Nations. During those consultations, participants from a variety of sectors and a wide array of countries were asked to provide recommendations on how to address major gaps and weaknesses in the UN's engagement across the Americas. Although this paper does not cover the full gamut of issues debated, which encompassed a wide variety of themes for an ever broader region, it aims to offer insight into four recurring and cross-cutting themes raised during those discussions: how to increase meaningful participation, including by civil society and youth, in UN processes; how to strengthen the UN's role in peacebuilding, especially through conflict and violence prevention; how to boost climate and security governance, making it more relevant to LAC; and how to improve the links between regional and global governance.

Latin America and the Caribbean at the United Nations (and vice-versa)

Since its founding, in 1945, the UN system has both diversified and intensified its presence and role in LAC. The region's historical receptiveness to the system is in part a result of the deep engagement of Latin American and Caribbean states in the establishment of the United Nations, as well as key reform efforts, including the creation of agencies such as UNCTAD; the establishment of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (and later, its replacement with the Human Rights Council), and the Peacebuilding Commission - not to mention ongoing discussions about reform of the UN Security Council. For many states in LAC, both large and small, the UN has played a central part in foreign policy decision-making, especially in multilateral strategies, since historically the organization has been regarded as the most legitimate space for pooling resources, coordinating positions, and holding global debates about norms and principles – therefore helping to shape expectations around the behavior of states and other actors in international relations.

In addition to LAC states' engagement with the UN secretariat through their missions in New York, Geneva, Vienna and other headquarter sites, the relationship takes place through the UN's varied presence in LAC. This presence is manifested in three primary ways.[1] First, direct representation: most of the more than thirty funds, programmes, and specialized agencies that make up the UN system maintain a formal presence and carry out a wide variety of initiatives in LAC. These efforts cut across all UN pillars – peace and security, human rights, and development – under the country-level leadership of a Resident Coordinator.

Second, the UN system comprises regional structures and organizations in LAC. Many of the funds, programmes, and specialized agencies have regional offices in the region. These include UNESCO's regional office in Montevideo; UNICEF's and UN Women's regional offices in Panama City, Panama; and the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC), in Santiago. Through the UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG), these offices work to support countries to achieve the 2030 Agenda and to tackle transnational

challenges, as well as to boost cooperation within the region, including within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.[2] In addition, several regional organizations, among them the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), are part of the UN system, and the different components cooperate on both cross-cutting agendas as well as specific themes.[3]

And third, in response to specific demands, the United Nations deploys special missions, envoys, and advisors to particular countries or subregions as particular demands arise. Current peace operations include recent missions in Haiti (MINUSJUTH and MINUSTAH) and the political mission in Colombia. The Special Envoy for the Ocean to Central America makes frequent visits to the region; Peace and Development Advisors (PDAs) have been deployed to countries as varied as El Salvador, Honduras, Venezuela, and Ecuador, among others.

The variety of channels through which the UN works with partners in LAC has produced a number of successes, such as support for major peace agreements (including the deal signed in 2016 by the FARC guerrilla and the Colombian government); the dissemination of best practices in social policies in areas as varied as education, health, and law enforcement; the provision of essential humanitarian support in the context of the Venezuelan refugee crisis; and the development of the Inter-American System of Human Rights.

In parts of LAC, the UN has responded to the consolidation of states' MIC status by engaging with governments and other stakeholders as a high-level dialogue partner, promoting knowledge sharing and fomenting technical cooperation. However, current engagement channels between the UN system and LAC actors are uneven, which makes the UN highly vulnerable to attacks from the region's nationalist populist leaders, bent on undermining the Organisation's credibility.

At the same time, public concerns with major global and regional challenges have changed. The most recent update on the UN75 Survey and Dialogues, led by the Office of the Under-Secretary-

---

1 United Nations (2020) "Where we work: Americas": https://www.un.org/en/sections/where-we-work/americas/index.html.

2 UNSDG (2020) "A coordinated response to Coronavirus": https://unsdg.un.org/about/coordinated-response-coronavirus.

3 OAS (2000) "Report of the General Secretariat on Implementation of Resolution AG/RES. 1639 (XXXIX-O/99), "Cooperation between the Organization of American States and the United Nations System" 4 May: http://www.oas.org/assembly2001/assembly/eng/documents/3304.htm.
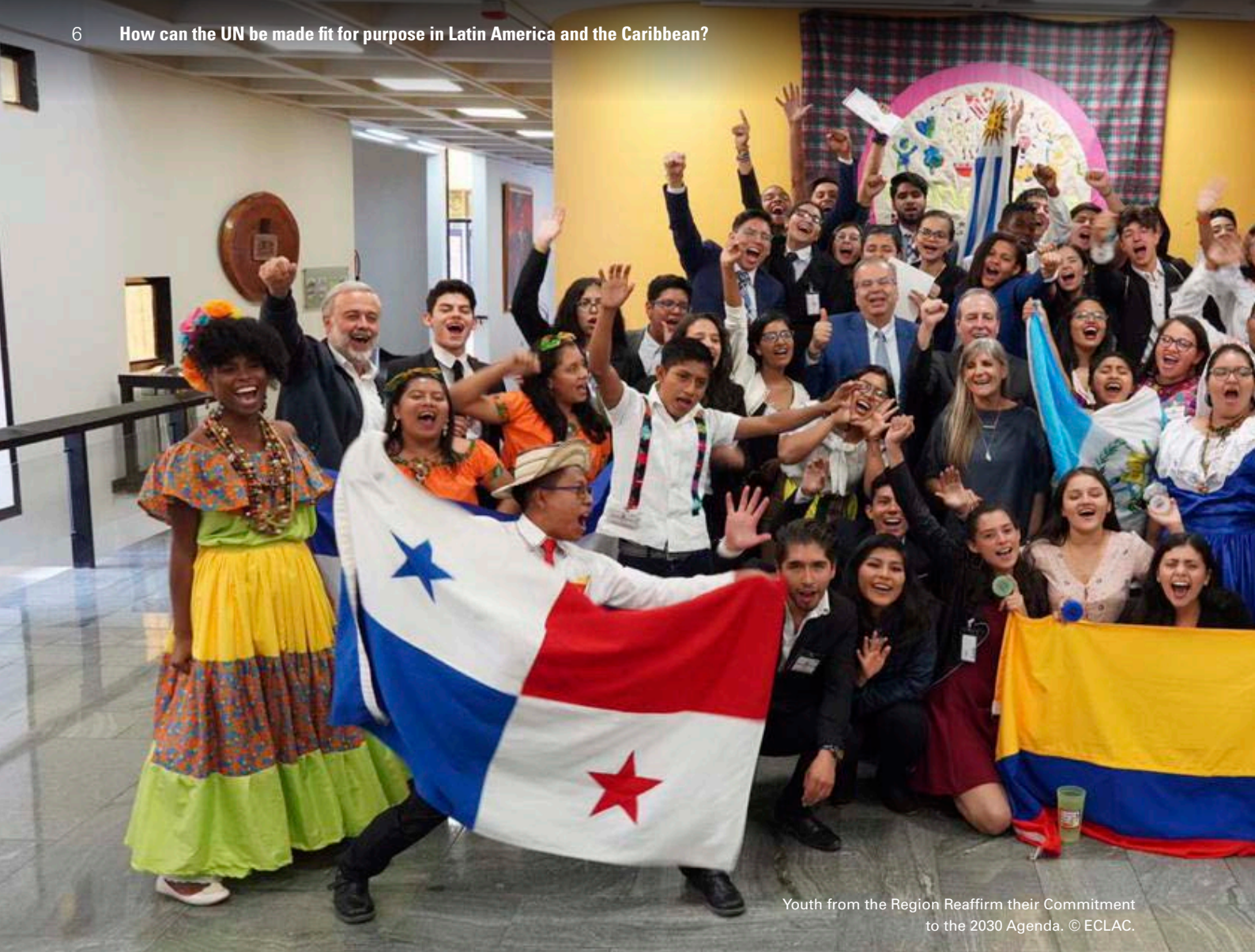
Youth from the Region Reaffirm their Commitment to the 2030 Agenda. © ECLAC.

General and Special Adviser on Preparations for the Commemoration of the UN's 75 Anniversary, show that the public's priorities for the "world we want to create" initiative are: environmental protection, protection of human rights, less conflict, equal access to basic services, and zero discrimination.[4] As of March 2020, the survey reached more than 13 million people in almost all UN Member States, and over 330 dialogues had been held in 87 countries. Despite the vast geographic breadth of this effort, the key findings so far are consistent with the inputs provided to the Americas Dialogue held online from March to June. Although that consultation only covered some of the ideas and concerns of LAC civil society, the recommendations that arose out of this exercise are deeply aligned with the findings from the UN75 survey.

Both the Americas Dialogue and the UN75 survey have taken place against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. As of early July 2020, LAC – which is home to 8 percent of the world's population – has seen nearly half of recent deaths caused by the virus. While some countries in the region, including Argentina, Cuba, Paraguay, and most of the Caribbean states, have managed to maintain transmission rates low (as of July 2020), the numbers of cases and deaths in major LAC economies, such as Brazil, Mexico and Peru, are skyrocketing; other states, including Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile, are seeing numbers rise quickly. In Venezuela, the administration of Nicolás Maduro has recognized only 57 deaths, but there are concerns that, more than in other countries, official figures do not accurately reflect the surge in transmission.[5]

The pandemic is laying bare the region's persistent social inequalities, with a disproportionate and devastating impact on black, indigenous, and low-

4 UN75 (2020) "Update on the Work of the UN75 Office: Resolved to Combine Our Efforts: Preliminary Assessment of the UN75 Survey and Dialogues" April: https://www.un.org/zh/inc/un75_update.pdf.

5 Phillips, Tom (2020) "'It's a tsunami': pandemic leaves vulnerable Latin America reeling" The Guardian, 5 July: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/05/its-a-tsunami-covid-19-plunges-latin-america-back-into-poverty-and-violence.

Recommendations

i. Civil society participation

Although the United Nations has focused primarily on nation-states, there are many ways in which civil society entities take part in UN debates and initiatives. Those channels include the consultative status offered to NGOs within the ECOSOC; ad-hoc processes organized by the secretariat; and the targeted initiatives through the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF), the Integrated Civil Society Organizations System (iCSO), and United Nations University (UNU). In addition, the United Nations has a successful record of multi-stakeholder models, which bring together state and non-state actors. These include innovative partnerships formed under the umbrella of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as national coalitions of NGOs, companies, and state agencies.[8] In some instances, civil society has taken the lead in driving new initiatives, as was the case of the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty, which was in great part driven by a group of six NGOs that launched the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL).[9] These examples reflect the important pool of knowledge, experience and innovation found in civil society around the world.

While inter-state regimes and policy coordination are indispensable to achieving goals as ambitious as the eradication of poverty, nuclear non-proliferation, and protection of human rights, making the system "fit for purpose" requires better incorporation of the demands, experiences, and concerns of civil society actors. This means building on existing channels. While these mechanisms have expanded the role of civil society within parts of the system, they remain largely ad-hoc. In some instances, such as the Human Rights Council, independent participation by civil society organizations is under threat due to the growing influence of authoritarian governments. There is a need for more effective and institutionalized channels that allow for reliable, meaningful participation by NGOs, think tanks, and other civil society entities.

The gap looks especially concerning from the perspective of LAC societies. From Colombia, where civil society entities – including women's

income communities, as well as special challenges faced by women and people with special needs. Economic projections for the region are dire; the Bretton Woods institutions have repeatedly downgraded growth forecasts for LAC – currently at -9.3% for 2020, which would represent the worst economic downturn for the region since reliable data began to be collected in 1901.[6] This fast-changing landscape no doubt increases concerns in the region with persistent challenges such as socioeconomic inequality and poverty, both of which are expected to increase considerably as a result of the pandemic.[7]

Given these concerns and the need for more international cooperation to tackle the challenges identified through the consultations, the next section of this paper highlights some of the key recommendations emerging from the Dialogue on how to make the UN's engagement with LAC more effective:

6 World Bank (2020) "Global Economic Prospects: Latin America and the Caribbean" June: http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/876791588788341170/Global-Economic-Prospects-June-2020-Regional-Overview-LAC.pdf.

7 Ibid.

8 UNESCAP (2018) "Partnering for Sustainable Development - Guidelines for Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships to Implement the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific": https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=400&nr=2545&menu=1515.

9 Cottrell, M. Patrick (2016) The Evolution and Legitimacy of International Security Institutions. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Having completed its mandate, MINUSTAH closed on 15 October 2017 and transitioned to the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH). A smaller mission without a military component, MINUJUSTH focused on supporting the reinforcement of the Haitian National Police, the Rule of Law institutions and the promotion of human rights. MINUJUSTH started with 350 civilians, seven police contingents and 295 individual UN Police. © MINUJUSTH/Leonora Baumann.

organizations – have worked to maintain the FARC peace deal alive, to Brazil, where NGOs are deeply engaged in the effort to preserve the Amazon rainforest even as the government attempts to criminalize civil society, LAC has developed a relatively robust and diverse ecology of non-state actors that often act on the "frontlines" of development, human rights, security, humanitarian, and climate action. They are especially active in addressing issues that affect populations facing specific vulnerabilities, such as women, children, LGBTI+, indigenous, black and migrant populations.

Given the region's changing political and economic context, meaningful participation by civil society in UN processes and initiatives has become more important than ever to LAC stakeholders. Over the past five years, much of the region has undergone a wave of rollbacks in the role of the state. Along with austerity measures centered on cutbacks to essential public services and infrastructure, in many places civil society has found itself in a shrinking political space as nationalist populism and other forms of authoritarianism spread and undermine core freedoms of association, assembly, and expression.[10] Finally, the militarization of public security – and, more broadly, of the public sphere in general – tends

to strengthen efforts to criminalize efforts by civil society actors.

This means that UN processes – not just debates about rules-setting, but also the implementation of established frameworks such as Agenda 2030, the Women Peace and Security Agenda and the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda – should better acknowledge, engage, and address the role of civil society in LAC. Some concrete examples of more effective participation of civil society coming out of the consultations include: more inclusive peace processes and post-conflict peacebuilding, especially with respect to women; better channels for input and dialogue into global normative debates on issues such as disarmament, migration, and human rights; more systematic engagement by country teams, especially outside major urban centres; and the institutionalization of such processes. One such mechanism for institutionalizing engagement would be to designate a focal point within the secretariat, but dialogue channels are also needed at country and regional levels. Through this combination of multi-level engagement, the United Nations would be better able to reach out to a broader swatch of civil society, including those operating at a distance from the capitals.

10 Sabatini, Christopher (2020) "Democracy Delayed: COVID-19's Effect on Latin American's Politics" Chatham House Expert Comment, 19 May: https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/democracy-delayed-covid-19-s-effect-latin-america-s-politics.

ii. An Empowered Peacebuilding Architecture

LAC authorities and diplomats have long argued in favour of a more preventive approach at the UN – a perspective that avoids excessive securitization (in the sense of framing issues narrowly as "hard" security problems that may require militaristic solutions) by allowing for conflict-sensitive development and conflict resolution. In the early to mid-2000s, several LAC states became champions for the creation of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), achieved in 2005, and of the other components of the Peacebuilding Architecture (Peacebuilding Support Office and Peacebuilding Fund).

To many of the region's states, this new architecture had the potential to embody a new approach to peace and conflict that did not rely on what many saw as the excessive militarism (interspersed with political paralysis) of the UN Security Council, and that would serve as a much-needed bridge between the Council and the General Assembly.[11] In this view, a strong PBC, with a well-defined mandate and strong political backing, would allow the UN to better harness its expertise and experience in development, violence reduction, and conflict prevention in more constructive ways. It would also allow them to follow a country-specific model, especially in post-conflict settings – a key engagement given the Council's already crowded agenda. However, many of those hopes were dashed, due largely to waning political will and especially the interests of the P-5. In the end, the PBC was created as a feebler version of that original vision, for instance with the Security Council maintaining a high degree of influence over the PBC, and with limited funding for the establishment of Country Specific Configurations.

Nevertheless, LAC countries did not abandon the effort to boost preventive action at the United Nations, working to make the peacebuilding architecture effective and legitimate. Many of them have been directly involved not only as elected or selected members of the Commission,[12] or through the Country-Specific Configurations of the PBC (Brazil, for example, has led the configuration for Guinea-Bissau). In addition, LAC-based bodies such as ECLAC have served as sounding boards

for states to provide inputs to the PBC, drawing on Latin American and Caribbean states' experiences with conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and the rule of law.[13] The Peacebuilding Fund, too, has engaged in the region, funding dozens of projects to date in Guatemala, Colombia, Haiti, El Salvador, and Ecuador.[14]

Despite ongoing reform efforts of the peacebuilding architecture, including those stemming from resolutions adopted by the General Assembly[15] and the Security Council[16] and notwithstanding Secretary-General António Guterres' emphasis on the need to enhance the bridging role of the peacebuilding architecture, this component of the UN system remains under-utilized. This point – along with a number or related recommendations – was voiced by several participants in the UN75 Americas dialogue and consultation. The expansion and strengthening of the Peacebuilding Commission, both geographically and thematically, would allow it to promote more effectively and in strategic places the Women, Peace and Security and Youth, Peace and Security agendas. Although the PBC began focused on the Country-Specific Configurations, it has addressed transversal themes – including the Women, Peace and Security and Youth, Peace and Security agendas – that reach far beyond the configurations, and these engagements should be expanded. Over time, this broadening of the agenda make way for the transformation of the Commission into a full-fledged Council – following the transformation model of the Human Rights Commission in 20106 – empowered through a well-defined mandate for conflict prevention.[17]

The peacebuilding architecture also offers a natural space within the UN system for the incorporation, in a more systematic fashion, of the climate and security paradigm. Among the tasks ahead are making risk assessments, preventive efforts, and responses more conflict- and climate-sensitive. A related recommendation is to accelerate the gradual transfer of functions from the Security Council – which remains not only frequently ineffective, but also over-burdened with an unwieldy

11 Neves, Gilda Motta Santos (2010) Comissão das Nações Unidas para Consolidação da Paz - Perspective Brasileira. Brasília: FUNAG.

12 In 2020, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru are among the seven Commission members elected by the General Assembly; the Dominican Republic is among the seven members selected by the Security Council; and Brazil and Colombia are among the seven members elected by the Economic and Social Council. Colombia is vice-chair, along with Japan (UN Peacebuilding 2020).

13 ECLAC (2009) "Remarks by the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean at the opening of the regional seminar "United Nations Peacebuilding Commission" 14 September: https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/speech/files/37148-9-septiembre-14-Remarks-UN-peacebuilding-Commission.pdf.

14 UNDP (2020) "Trust Fund Factsheet: The Peacebuilding Fund": http://mptf.undp.org/factsheet/fund/PB000.

15 UN General Assembly (2016) "Review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture" A/RES/70/262: https://undocs.org/A/RES/70/262.

16 UN Security Council (2016) "Resolution 2282" S/RES/2282: https://undocs.org/A/RES/70/262.

17 Ponzio, Richard (2019) "Upgrading the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission into an Empowered Council" Stimson Center UN 75 Policy Brief 3, November: https://www.stimson.org/2019/upgrading-the-united-nations-peacebuilding-commission-into-an-empowered-council/

agenda – to the PBC. For instance, some issues of transnational organized crime, recurrent political instability, and electoral violence may be addressed more effectively by tailored approaches coordinated by the PBC, leaving the Security Council to focus on major, prolonged open conflict contexts. Through such changes, the peacebuilding architecture can help to make the vision of sustaining peace and a more preventive United Nations a concrete reality.

iii. Climate and Security

The debate about how climate and security are related is not new, but over the past three years, the topic has gained ground within research as well as policy circles. At the United Nations, the discussion began, rather slowly, at the UN Security Council and at the General Assembly in the 2000s. The theme gained momentum in the latter half of the 2010s through "Arria formula" informal Security Council debates and briefings on the security implications of climate change, as well as a series of country- and region-specific resolutions that acknowledged the role of climate in multiplying security risks. The 2018 creation of the Climate and Security Mechanism, located in the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA, formerly DPA) but also staffed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), has made important strides in making risk assessment and responses by the UN system more climate and security sensitive. It has also engaged with an independent Climate Security Expert Network, whose members provide advice on risk assessment and risk management strategies.[18]

However, these initiatives have been led almost entirely by rich countries, reflecting a particular view of how climate change: one that is related to the geopolitical interests of the great powers, for instance

as reflected in the heavy focus on Subsaharan Africa and on the links between climate and terrorism. In LAC, discussions of how climate influences security revolve not so much around open conflict (although the cases of Colombia and Haiti call attention to this aspect), but rather around issues of human security; food, water and energy security; and, in turn, how these shape patterns of violence and crime, including organized crime. There is growing concern in the region not only with the impact of extreme weather events, such as hurricanes in the Caribbean and landslides in South America, but also more incremental changes, such as soil erosion, and their disproportionate impact on vulnerable communities – dynamics that often involve extensive forced migration within and across states.[19]

Recent research has underscored the importance of social inequality in mediating the relationship between climate and security, for instance along gender, ethnic/racial, and geographic lines. Scholars and civil society entities from LAC have expressed concern that the climate-security debate may detract from the development and justice dimensions of climate change, and that mainstreaming the topic across the UN system is essential towards ensuring that the development and human rights aspects of that relationship are not overlooked. From a LAC perspective, UN discussions about how climate and security are linked, and resulting adjustments to risk assessment and responses, should be mainstreamed across the system (including partner regional organizations) rather than anchored narrowly in the Security Council. In addition, caution should be used in attempts to associate climate and security to the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) norm. Any discussion of climate change within the context of R2P should emphasize that R2P is a toolkit of mostly preventative and locally owned approaches for preventing certain international crimes in accordance with international law, and incorporating climate and security must not lead to further justifications for military actions.

18 Climate Security Expert Network (2020) "Short history of UNSC engagement on climate-security risks": https://climate-security-expert-network.org/#:~:text=The%20Climate%20Security%20Mechanism%20(CSM,to%20climate%2Drelated%20security%20risks.&text=It%20has%20provided%20assessments%20of,to%20help%20inform%20UN%20responses.

19 Abdenur, Adriana E. and Lukas Ruettiger (2020) "Climate-fragility Risk Brief: Latin America and the Caribbean" Adelphi: https://www.adelphi.de/en/publication/climate-fragility-risk-brief-latin-america-and-caribbean.

iv. Regional-Global Linkages

Regional and subregional organizations abound in LAC; the region is a veritable alphabet soup of overlapping arrangements. As of mid-2020, those bodies include the Organization of American States (OAS), the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), the Caribbean Community (Caricom), the Organization of East Caribbean States (OECS), the Union of South American States (UNASUR), the Andean Community (CAN), the Southern Common Market (Mercosur), the Latin American Parliament (LAP), the Latin American Integration Association (LAIA), the Latin American Economic System (LAES), the Central American Integration System (SICA), the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), and the Pacific Alliance (PA). They range in scope from the 32 full member states (as is the case of OAS) to the 4-member PA. They also vary greatly in the extent to which they engage with non-state actors such as civil society entities and public sector firms.

But the COVID-19 pandemic shows that, broadly put, LAC multilateral organizations have never been weaker – even though the region has a considerable history of cooperation, including in public health.[20] Despite several attempts by LAC stakeholders to foster integration within the region, many of its states have long adhered to a strong discourse of national sovereignty and non-interference, especially towards regional arrangements. This discourse is particularly evident around the Amazon basin, which faces multiple transnational challenges – from water management and organized crime to climate change.

The nine states of the Amazon basin have largely failed to rally around existing multilateral structures, such as the Amazon Treaty Organization Cooperation (ATCO). A combination of political disputes and low commitment levels have rendered these organizations increasingly ineffective when faced with major crises, whether the explosion of environmental crime in the Amazon, the slow collapse in Venezuela, or the novel coronavirus pandemic.

Some of these bodies, such as the OAS, CAIS, and CARICOM, are part of the UN system – the OAS has a formal cooperation agreement in place, and CAIS and CARICOM are both official UN Observers. Yet the political paralysis, combined with budget cuts, has led to a weakening of the links between the regional and global levels. The resulting governance gaps and weak spots are especially concerning given the fast-social changes underway in the region, now amplified by the pandemic and its dramatic impact on LAC's long-existing social inequalities. Consultation participants have that some regional bodies, especially the OAS, should undergo reforms so as to make it more effective and more credible, and they recommended strengthening the channels between LAC regional organizations and the UN secretariat, especially in the direction of promoting key agendas, such as the SDGs and climate action); boosting dialogue with civil society and the private sector; and enhancing collective strategies to tackle trans-border challenges such as climate change, intensifying migration, the impacts of automation on labor markets, and privacy issues associated with emerging technologies.

---

20 Riggirozzi, Pia (2020) "Coronavirus y el desafío para la gobernanza regional en América Latina" Fundación Carolina, 20 March: https://www.fundacioncarolina.es/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/AC-12.2020.pdf.

Conclusion

How can the UN's 75th anniversary be harnessed to advance positive changes in the way that the UN system interacts with, and impacts, Latin America and the Caribbean? Structural reform of the United Nations and its partner organizations is a necessary but insufficient condition for LAC to tackle the broad gamut challenges it faces – old and new. In addition to organizational change, a concerted political effort by national, subnational, and regional leaderships is also needed, as well as a more tailored strategy by the Secretariat to better engage with the region.

LAC's engagement with the United Nations dates back to the founding of the organization, and the UN system has, with few exceptions, been at the heart of the multilateralism strategy of most of the region's countries. This statement applies not only to LAC's large economies, but also (perhaps even more consistently) to its smallest ones. The crisis of multilateralism faced by the UN system, to which regional organizations are also subject, can be overcome if strategic political and institutional choices are made. The region's relatively robust civil society, including women's and youth-led organizations, can serve as strategic vectors for such change.

Two key moments should be seized to accelerate positive change. First, the UN's 75th anniversary presents an occasion to discuss and make better known the long history of mutual and overwhelmingly positive engagement between the United Nations and LAC – a history that populist nationalist leaderships are keen to suppress. Second, although discussions of recovery from the pandemic are still incipient across much of the region, those debates will require boosting shared knowledge, cooperation and coordination on issues such as inclusive and sustainable development, disaster resilience, and violence prevention. Regional organizations are a natural locus for this engagement, but momentum can be provided by leaderships outside the region.

The UN can better engage with the region's states, civil society, private sector and regional organizations by promoting dialogue and exchanges on effective approaches to tackling socio environmental inequalities, promoting exchanges and cooperation, and designing effective responses. Major frameworks such as Agenda 2030 and the Paris Climate Agreement offer overarching frameworks for doing this, but additional efforts are needed in making the UN system fit for purpose across the Americas.

TOGETHER FIRST

A GLOBAL SYSTEM THAT WORKS FOR ALL

**Stepping stones
for a better future**

10 IDEAS FOR WORLD LEADERS WHO ARE
SERIOUS ABOUT BUILDING BACK BETTER

Read our latest report: Stepping stones for a better future

In this report we present 10 ideas for world leaders who are serious about building back better.

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 Covid19, from entrenched inequalities to rising geopolitical tensions and new technologies. 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.

www.together1st.org

TOGETHER FIRST

A GLOBAL SYSTEM THAT WORKS FOR ALL