

**Permanent Representative of Qatar to the UN, Her Excellency Ambassador Alya Ahmed bin Saif Al-Thani**  
**Permanent Representative of Sweden to the UN, Her Excellency Ambassador Anna Karin Eneström**

Your Excellencies,

Together First, a coalition of 150+ civil society organisations representing all regions of the world, is writing in response to the zero draft of the political declaration to be adopted on the occasion of the UN's 75th anniversary. We primarily wanted to thank you for your leadership and express our support for a promising beginning.

In this spirit, we would like to offer three quick observations on the draft ahead of your consultation tomorrow and our report *Stepping stones for a better future* (attached), which outlines 10 steps we hope world leaders will take as they seek to “build back better” following the Covid-19 crisis. These steps are the product of an inclusive 18 months consultation exercise to find the most pressing and viable proposals for reforming our global system and might support you with some key ideas.

1), We wonder if the current draft shows **sufficient ambition** in the 12 commitments given the existential threats we face.

- a) The stirring preamble to the declaration calls for “greater action”, and “reinvigorated multilateralism” to “build back better”. Yet the reforms highlighted in the second half of the draft do not correspond to the ambition set out in the first paragraphs. We would urge you to seriously consider a more ambitious and systemic menu of reforms in the second half of your document to better realise the ambition of its first half. Clearly our reform agenda must go beyond a few modest tweaks - a wide-ranging and comprehensive package of reforms is required; business as usual will not suffice.
- b) Ambition is also a matter of which subjects are mentioned and which omitted. The absence of climate change from the UNSO declaration appears, in retrospect, a mistake of historic proportions. We would urge you to guard against such an error on this occasion, and would therefore suggest the inclusion of the risks posed by certain emerging technologies - particularly Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems - and weapons of mass destruction in your list of existential threats.

2) We wonder if the current draft reflects the goal you raised in the elements paper of including “**concrete action points**”.

- a) Although we do appreciate that finding proposals that are acceptable to all member states is very challenging, there are a number of places where the proposal could be made more tangible by using language which has either been previously agreed or at very least already enjoys widespread support. For example:
  - i) On gender, one could make reference to the need to complete work on the Platform for Action of the Beijing Declaration, or to ensure that women are represented in all conversations within our global system;
  - ii) On climate change, one could recommit to ending fossil fuel subsidies or call for more ambitious Nationally Determined Contributions.
- b) In this regard we also commend to you the ideas in our “Stepping Stones” report and the wider Together First ideas hub. In particular we think our ideas for a high-level civil society champion, a strengthened Peacebuilding Commission, and a Youth Council could considerably strengthen your sections on partnerships, peace and security and youth, respectively.

3) We must emphasise the crucial importance of a well-resourced, inclusive and politically supported **follow up mechanism**.

- a) The process outlined in the draft resolution for an ongoing process led by the Secretary-General would appear appropriate. However, for it to be effective, it will require sufficient resourcing and to be championed at a senior level. It is therefore important that member states lay the groundwork for a meaningful reform agenda by ensuring that this mechanism is given suitable budget and staffing, and that the highest echelons of the Organisation declare this process to be a priority.
- b) Together First have spent considerable time studying the history of UN reform efforts to determine what works and what does not. The continued and ongoing partnership with civil society and other implementing partners is required to ensure that reforms are both developed from the bottom up, and are ultimately seen through. We therefore firmly hope that an ongoing dialogue with the public and civil society will be integrated into the follow up mechanism. Together First stands ready in this regard, and we are sure you will also find willing partners in the UN2020 coalition of civil society organisations.
- c) We also note the relevance of two UN processes: the UN75 process of holding “the world’s biggest conversation” on “the future we want and the UN we need” and the intention, announced in the Secretary-General’s Call to Action on Human Rights, to “launch a dialogue on more systematic participation of civil society in United Nations bodies and agencies”. Together these mechanisms could provide the building blocks required for a meaningful ongoing conversation in support of reform.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch should you wish to discuss any of the above. Once again we would like to thank you for all your efforts and leadership, and wish to reiterate our broad support for the positive and inspiring vision you have outlined.

Sincerely,

**Together First**