

Summit of the Future Highlights: Sunday, 22 September 2024

After a series of broken silence procedures in the lead-up to the Summit, the Summit of the Future (SOF) opened under a cloud of uncertainty when the Russian Federation made a last-minute proposal for an amendment to the outcome document. However, following a quick voting round, delegates adopted the Summit's negotiated outcome, the Pact for the Future, and its two annexes: the Global Digital Compact and the Declaration of Future Generations. The rest of the day then proceeded largely as planned, with general statements by high-level representatives taking place in parallel with two interactive dialogues on the Summit's themes.

Opening Segment

Following a musical performance by singer Renée Fleming, Grammy award winner and World Health Organization Goodwill Ambassador for Arts and Health, and a video presentation featuring the just-concluded Action Days, Philémon Yang, President of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), declared the SOF open and invited delegates to adopt the Summit outcome documents.

Adoption of the Pact for the Future: The RUSSIAN FEDERATION tabled an amendment (A/79/L.3) to the draft Pact, citing a lack of transparency in the negotiating process and contravention of the UN principles of the sovereignty and equality of States. The amendment was co-sponsored by IRAN, the SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC, VENEZUELA, BELARUS, DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOREA and NICARAGUA. Opposing the amendment, Congo, for the AFRICAN GROUP, with support from MEXICO and CAMEROON, reiterated that increased global solidarity is needed to confront the complex challenges confronting the world today and guarantee a better future for all. President Yang then opened the vote, with 143 countries voting against adopting the amendment, 7 in favor, and 15 abstentions.

The Secretariat then drew attention to oral revisions of draft resolution text relating to the budgetary implications of proposed actions in the Pact, noting the Secretary General will submit proposals on resource requirements in 2025 and subsequent applicable years. He invited delegations to submit their views on the proposals by October 2024.

Opening Statements: UNGA President Yang thanked the six co-facilitators (Germany, Namibia, Sweden, Zambia, Jamaica, and the Netherlands) and the respective support teams for leading the complex negotiations. He expressed confidence that the newly adopted Pact reflects "our shared aspirations for the future" and lays the foundation for a sustainable, peaceful global order for all.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres recalled the origins of the Summit, stressing "we are here to bring multilateralism back from the brink." He expressed concern that the UN's authority to tackle mounting global challenges is fast eroding, and without reform of its composition and working methods "it will lose all credibility." Guterres stressed that the Pact for the Future lays the foundation for transformation that includes a groundbreaking commitment by governments to listen to young people and involve them in decision making at all levels and the first "truly universal agreement" on the governance and risks of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Noting that people never agree on the past, he expressed optimism that the SOF has set a course towards a future that can meet the expectations of all.

Three youth representatives then took the floor. Ghanim Mohammed Al-Muftah, Qatar, encouraged delegates to think of the future as "fathers, mothers, and guardians" who care about the future of all children and generations to follow. His experience as a person with disability, he stressed, taught him that "true progress" is not about overcoming personal challenges alone but how "as a society, we embrace each other's differences." Uniting his voice with those of the 1 billion people with disabilities worldwide, he called for inclusivity to be a "fundamental right, not a luxury."

Niria Alicia Garcia, US, lamented the lack of mention of frontline communities in the Pact for the Future, and delivered a call for greater support, recognition, and inclusion of Indigenous Peoples (IPs), including of Indigenous youths. Reminding the audience that IPs are the "stewards" of 80% of the world's biodiversity, she called for Member States to ratify the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, cut their military budget in favor of climate action, and "go home and ask your Indigenous youths how much money we need to bring our solutions to life."

Monicah Malith, South Sudan, began by asking delegates: "What encounters your eyes if you talk about the future? What voice overwhelms your ears? What taste lies on your tongue?" She called for political leadership in championing youth and refugees, particularly through education, explaining the role of universities and fellowships in her own journey as a refugee. Refugees from conflict, environmental disasters, or economic insecurity, she continued, are a collective responsibility and require long-term "compassionate solutions." Addressing fellow young people, she concluded: "The future is ours to forge. Not theirs to cling to. Not theirs to pass down like spoils of war."

Olaf Scholz, Chancellor, Germany, noted the Pact for the Future is needed "now more than ever" because everyone's fate

is deeply interlinked to with global challenges, including poverty, hunger, impediments to free and fair trade, and AI. He cautioned that future opportunities also hold potential for abuse and imbalances. He said the Pact outlines over 50 steps to be taken, and that “history will judge us” if we do not take them.

Nangolo Mbumba, President, Namibia, said the Pact’s adoption culminates 18 months of negotiations, embodying the African proverb that “tomorrow belongs to the people who plan for it today.” Noting that the compounding challenges faced may seem insurmountable, he said the Pact provides the opportunity for the world’s countries to combine their resources to confront them “head on.”

Plenary Segment

More than a hundred high-level representatives of Member States and international agencies delivered statements throughout the day, of which 51 were heads of state or government.

BRAZIL recalled that the UN Secretary-General invited the General Assembly to rethink, renovate, and reform the UN twenty years ago, saying the SDGs are the biggest goal the UN has undertaken but are on track to be “the UN’s biggest failure.”

MALAWI lamented there is greater interest in “destroying” the future than in “replenishing” it and called for self-sufficiency through robust private sector involvement.

KYRGYSTAN called for expanded emergency funding for countries in need.

LIBERIA noted that developing countries’ debt burden is four times larger than it was ten years ago.

ESTONIA stated that aggression by a Security Council permanent member “screams for change.”

GHANA advocated a new global economic order, noting over 700 million people still live in extreme poverty. VIET NAM called for sharing science and technology advances to foster economic growth.

The MALDIVES said political courage is needed to grant Palestine full status in the UN and stop the Gaza genocide.

IRAQ called for climate justice in the context of drought and desertification.

YEMEN noted havoc caused by Iranian terrorist militias.

BARBADOS called on this generation to follow the model of those in history who dismantled slavery, acted to stop genocide, and gave women the vote.

LESOTHO said the principles of the UN Charter of 1945, founded on expectations of peace and security and betterment of living conditions of all people, are still relevant.

QATAR called for releasing all hostages and for a firm UN position on international human rights rules regarding attacks on hospitals and schools.

JAMAICA said the Summit exposes the lack of progress towards the SDGs, especially in Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and the glaring financing gap and concomitant food inequality and insecurity.

GREECE noted consensus was reached on climate change because everyone knew the stakes were so high. Noting the UN was created after a devastating world war, he urged everyone to take action before devastation this time.

ICELAND stressed that no other organization has the convening power of the UN and the successful outcome of the Pact is cause for celebration.

JAPAN urged the world not to tolerate unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force but resolve disputes through the rule of law.

BHUTAN cited its commitment to become a developed country by 2034, calling for political will, not rhetoric.

TIMOR-LESTE lamented “self-interested actors that value profit more than human dignity” and a world that can “fuel wars but not feed children.”

KENYA emphasized Africa’s lack of representation in the UN Security Council, while the CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC noted that the Security Council “no longer reflects today’s world.”

Uganda, on behalf of the GROUP OF 77 and CHINA, highlighted the widening gap between developed and developing nations, urging practical action and reaffirming commitment to the Beijing Declaration.

THE COMOROS specifically called for scientific and technological progress, especially in AI, to be paired with global partnerships and cooperation to reduce the digital divide and ensure shared benefits from the digital revolution.

AUSTRIA noted that its President had been held back due to the country grappling with the consequences of “unprecedented” floods.

Samoa, on behalf of the ALLIANCE OF SMALL ISLAND STATES, highlighted the existential threat of climate change to SIDS. She called for “breathing life into the Paris agreement with renewed vigor,” and ensuring that “our collective efforts are not a whisper but a clarion call to limit warming to 1.5°.”

NORTH MACEDONIA and SERBIA emphasized that international law is often disregarded by powerful countries, while smaller states bear the consequences, calling for greater compromise and understanding from major powers.

LITHUANIA called for a stronger multilateral response to the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine.

EGYPT emphasized the importance of upholding the UN Charter and sovereign equality of states to maintain global order. He criticized double standards in international governance, warning that justice in the international system “has been sorely tested” due to the international community’s “impotence” in resolving the conflict in the Middle East. He also stressed the need for nuclear disarmament and supported making the Middle East a nuclear-free zone.

ISRAEL warned against the rise of antisemitism worldwide.

Points made by multiple speakers encompassed issues such as:

- shared responsibility to build peace and justice;
- reform and restructuring of the international financing architecture, with development of innovative financing mechanisms;
- renewed commitment to international cooperation, multilateralism, and peace and security as the bedrock of global development;
- reform of the Security Council, with more permanent seats, to be more representative, inclusive, equitable, and accountable, and to better deter aggression;
- the need to reestablish trust in the UN;
- the fact that no one country can deal with shocks alone;
- cooperation on science, technology, and digitalization;
- strengthening of the UN development system to leave no one behind; and
- engagement with and empowerment of youth.

Interactive Dialogues

Interactive Dialogue 1: Transforming Global Governance and Turbocharging the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Co-Chair K.P Sharma Oli, Prime Minister of Nepal, introduced the theme of the session, expressing concern that only 17% of SDG targets are on track. Among priority actions, he identified the need to:

- bridge the SDG financing gap, which amounts to approximately 40% of the annual GDP of developing countries;
- reform international financial governance to enhance inclusion, transparency, and accountability;
- provide comprehensive debt relief;
- bridge the global digital divide; and
- ensure adequate and predictable climate financing for the most vulnerable countries.

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director-General, World Trade Organization, underscored the centrality of trade in ensuring a prosperous and dignified future for all, and called for reimagining globalization to include those at the margins. She identified ongoing efforts to reform fossil fuel subsidies and other environmentally and socially harmful policies that could help unlock trillions of dollars in additional funding for a just transition.

Ajay Banga, President, World Bank Group, highlighted efforts to redirect 45% of the Bank's funding towards climate change adaptation and mitigation. He underscored the need to build coalitions of willing partners to tackle the scale of the challenges, such as spiraling youth unemployment.

Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director, International Monetary Fund (IMF) said that while global economic recovery has been better than expected, overall prospects for growth are at their lowest level in decades, especially for low-income economies who are also facing elevated debt burdens. She identified IMF efforts to harness green growth opportunities, including through:

- supporting members to develop sound macroeconomic policies;
- helping countries address the debt conundrum; and
- becoming more inclusive in its governance arrangements.

In subsequent discussions, 45 speakers, including heads of state, ministers, leaders of international organizations, academic institutions, civil society, and other stakeholders, offered perspectives on the dialogue's theme.

SOUTH AFRICA highlighted her country's leadership in calling for a fundamental transformation of the global finance architecture. EGYPT called for improvements in debt sustainability analysis and credit rating methodologies, and reallocating Special Drawing Rights to strengthen global liquidity and capacity to respond to shocks.

LUXEMBOURG said his country was among a handful of Member States that have surpassed the official development assistance (ODA) target of 0.7% of their GDP, further noting the bulk of funds have been directed towards climate-vulnerable LDCs.

The EU said that while the region remains the world's largest provider of ODA, there is need to collectively unlock sustainable financing at scale, pointing to the imminent launch of a new EU voluntary standard for green bonds.

Observing that "we will either drown in debt or be drowned by the sea," TUVALU pointed to the UN High Seas Treaty as a

good example of what we can achieve if we work together. CUBA urged tackling unconditional coercive measures. LIBERIA noted that, while transformation is an imperative, "if we don't agree on what this means for all countries we cannot move towards it equitably." MALAWI favored the development of a global framework on the safe use of AI. The GROUP OF FRIENDS OF UN-HABITAT stressed the SDGs can only be achieved if cities become just, sustainable, and resilient. The UK expressed support for a more inclusive UN Security Council.

Other issues highlighted by speakers included the need to:

- tackle poverty through green and decent jobs;
- empower women and youth;
- strengthen the use of data to measure SDG progress; and
- pursue digital inclusion.

Interactive Dialogue 2: Enhancing multilateralism for international peace and security: Co-Chair Julius Maada Bio, President of Sierra Leone, opened the Dialogue, stressing the transformative power of peacebuilding, reconciliation, as the foundations for sustainable development. He called the equitable and transparent reform of the Security Council and other institutions a priority because erosion of trust and resurgence of nationalism are testing the very foundations of the UN. He said the G7+ group of 20 UN Member States calls for embracing science and technology, innovation and digital cooperation, with investment in the capacities of fragile states, and ensuring active participation of youth and future generations as agents of change.

Co-Chair Simon Harris, Taoiseach of Ireland, called for reinvigorating multilateralism, better promoting peace and security, and continuing to leverage the technology revolution, given the context of proliferating conflict, rising tensions, and threats to peace and security from new technologies. Calling the upholding of international law the minimum requirement to restore trust, he pledged that Ireland would call out any violation, calling on others to defend values. He also called for ending the use of veto power and for an architecture to make the Security Council more representative, including in particular women and youth at the center of UN work.

In remarks to set the scene, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, former President of Liberia, called for "learning from the bitter past," emphasizing the world's fragility given the pandemic, conflicts, climate change, and the emergence of complex security risks.

Juan Manuel Santos, former President of Colombia, for the group of "Elders" founded by Nelson Mandela, said the commitment to inclusion of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding has not been realized, noting that he witnessed an "astonishingly successful" outcome to negotiations between the sides involved in a Colombian conflict when women were involved. He called for ensuring institutions governing new technologies, especially AI, are transparent and inclusive, citing the implications of incorporating AI into nuclear command and control.

Comfort Ero, President and CEO of the International Crisis Group, cited rising violence and conflict juxtaposed against the UN's ability to respond, noting the Pact's provision of decision-making bodies and tools. He bemoaned weak language on how climate change leads to conflict and called for reviewing peacekeeping operations, building coalitions of states across the Security Council, generating political will, and working with regional organizations, enhancing aid.

Delegates then made statements, many of which focused on ways to reform the Security Council, its inability to deal with humanitarian crises and concomitant reduction in its legitimacy, the need to respect the UN Peacebuilding Commission's recommendations, nuclear disarmament, inclusive multilateralism as a foundation for global security, and the role of women and youth.

MOZAMBIQUE bemoaned underrepresentation of current geopolitical realities and called for strengthening the role of the Peacebuilding Commission.

LIECHTENSTEIN suggested empowering the General Assembly to take action when the Security Council is unable to do so, to weaken veto power so that no party to a dispute can block action.

ETHIOPIA echoed calls for appropriate representation for Africa in the Security Council.

NIGERIA called for strong professional armies to defeat terrorism in Africa and for early detection of illegal financial flows, organized crime, and piracy.

LATVIA urged that the next UN Secretary-General be female.

KYRGYZSTAN called for redressing the injustice that it has never been elected to the Security Council, noting endorsement by all central Asian countries.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA recalled a UN General Assembly resolution designating 11 July 2024 as International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica, which took place within a UN-designated safe zone.

OMAN said we must be willing to speak to people we have branded as enemies, noting the Zionist project made all people of that region less safe.

SOUTH SUDAN said recognition of his country is an example of UN's success in facilitating negotiations.

NORTH MACEDONIA called for a UN rapid reaction force for when needed.

ZIMBABWE lamented that multilateralism is being discarded in favor of unilateralism and exceptionalism.

ANGOLA called for two permanent Security Council seats for the African continent.

INDIA said structures designed 80 years ago are ineffective in an interconnected multipolar world with rising terrorism and risks from emerging technologies.

TÜRKIYE favored abolishing or limiting veto power in the Security Council because increasing the number of Security Council members would exacerbate existing problems.

BELARUS said the current geopolitical crisis was triggered by certain Western countries to attain global hegemony and questioned how to reverse it.

AFGHANISTAN said the Taliban's rule highlights the importance of multilateral action to prioritize the participation of women and called a strong response to terrorism essential, based in international law.

The REPUBLIC OF KOREA said North Korea is blatantly violating UN resolutions with its nuclear program and the Russian Federation is cooperating militarily with it.

INTERPOL noted the readiness of criminals to exploit every weakness, with their own "multilateral" cross-border connections.

THE LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES lamented that the UN's paralysis meant it took almost a year for the Security Council to call for a ceasefire in Gaza, due to "double standards."

THE OFFICE OF THE UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES said forced displacement due to conflicts has increased for twelve consecutive years, affecting one in 70 people now, with the humanitarian system at a breaking point.

ASOCIAȚIA ELIBERARE called for challenging systems countering human trafficking which put the burden of identification on victims, lowering the thresholds for accessing services, and reversing the under-resourcing of assistance to and reintegration of victims.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS discussed the need for fine-grained geographical and temporal "fencing" of cyber operations and urged technical companies to set up systems to detect harmful information on their platforms and humanitarian organizations to secure their databases.

THE UN OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME announced the recent finalization of the UN Convention on Cybercrime, citing lessons on letting women lead, injecting the urgency of emerging issues into the negotiations, and obtaining civil society and private sector help in steering conversations away from geopolitics.

Under-Secretary General for Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary Anne DiCarlo responded, observing that the commitment to diplomacy needs boosting, with investment in mechanisms to keep channels open and diffuse tensions and in conflict prevention; peace may be difficult but it pays off in the long term; and that the benefits of international cooperation must be tangible and equitable to achieve buy-in to tackle our common challenges.

In the Corridors

While the Pact for the Future, along with the annexed Declaration on Future Generations and Global Digital Compact, was adopted as planned during the Opening Segment of the Summit, the day began with significant tension. In a move that did not come as a surprise to most observers, given a series of breaks in the silence procedure on successive drafts of the negotiating texts, the Russian Federation issued a forceful statement opposing the draft Pact in its current form. They called for an amendment that emphasized the intergovernmental nature of the UN and criticized the exclusion of the principle of non-interference, claiming that "Western countries" were attempting to impose new obligations.

Despite near consensus on approving a motion to take no action, many observers in the lead-up to the Summit had expressed concern that geopolitical tensions would divert attention from the ambitious and wide-ranging agenda to set the world on a more transformative path. These tensions, which later featured in plenary statements, serve as a stark reminder that the Pact and its advocates swim against the tide in an uncertain security climate.

The long-term spirit of the Pact had also encountered significant challenges during the negotiations, with youth observers expressing concerns that the language regarding youth and future generations had been progressively "watered down." They also commented that the initial push to link the interests of future generations with climate action had been sidelined in favor of a greater emphasis on security due to the evolving geopolitical situation, raising the question: how can the interests of young and future generations be adequately represented when security concerns dominate the agenda?