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Summit of the Future: Advancing African Perspectives for a Networked and Inclusive Multilateralism

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On February 1, 2024, the International Peace Institute (IPI) and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation Office in New York organized a roundtable in Addis Ababa on African perspectives on multilateralism in the lead-up to the United Nations Summit of the Future, taking place in September 2024 in New York. The roundtable brought together representatives from the African Union, the UN, member states, and civil society organizations, as well as experts. This discussion was held as part of IPI's work on bridging policy discussions in New York and Addis Ababa by bringing the perspectives of African multilateral institutions into the work of the UN in New York. This meeting note summarizes the main points raised in the roundtable discussion under the Chatham House rule of non-attribution and does not necessarily represent the views of all participants. This event was funded by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS) Office in New York.

Introduction

In September 2024, the UN will hold the Summit of the Future in New York, bringing together world leaders to “forge a new international consensus” on how to “deliver a better present and safeguard the future.”¹ One of the outcomes of the summit will be a Pact for the Future covering five key areas: sustainable development and financing for development; international peace and security; science, technology and innovation, and digital cooperation; youth and future generations; and transforming global governance.

Governments are negotiating this pact in the lead-up to the summit based on a zero draft that co-facilitators Germany and Namibia presented to member states on January 29, 2024. The zero draft is based on more than 500 submissions from member states, civil society groups, and representatives of academia and the private sector. The pact will also include two annexes, which are being negotiated separately: the Global Digital Compact, with negotiations co-facilitated by Sweden and Zambia, and the Declaration on Future Generations, with negotiations co-facilitated by Jamaica and the Netherlands. A related process that will feed into the pact's chapter on transforming global governance is the Intergovernmental Negotiations on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Other Matters Related to the Council (IGN), which is co-chaired by Austria and Kuwait.

While the intergovernmental negotiations on the Pact for the Future are meant to be consultative, they could include a broader cross-section of perspectives, including from the African continent. Therefore, IPI and KAS New York hosted a hybrid workshop on February 1, 2024, to gather the perspectives of African states, multilateral institutions, and African civil society organizations on the summit and its outcome. This workshop provided a platform for exchange between member states, the African Union (AU), the UN, civil society organizations, and experts based in Addis Ababa and New York. The workshop began with a briefing from the Executive Office of the UN Secretary-General to discuss the intergovernmental process around the summit and the pact, as well as opportunities for engagement by African member states. It then featured a panel of speakers followed by a discussion.

The workshop was held in Addis Ababa in recognition of the important role of African multilateral institutions such as the AU in contributing to the

¹ United Nations, “Summit of the Future: Multilateral Solutions for a Better Tomorrow,” available at <https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future>.

reform of the international system and reinvigorating global cooperation. Informed by continental perspectives and priorities, these institutions can offer valuable insights for the Summit of the Future and beyond. The convening aimed to foster a more inclusive and networked multilateralism by providing a platform for African stakeholders and by generating momentum around the summit outside the New York policy space.

Key Milestones and Processes Before and Beyond the Summit of the Future

The Summit of the Future is scheduled for September 22 and 23, 2024, in New York. To ensure a consultative process, it will be preceded and shaped by various initiatives and fora around the world.

The first major milestone was the release of the zero draft of the Pact for the Future in January. This draft recognizes the global challenges we face and the opportunity to respond to them collectively through strong and sustained international cooperation. It also lays out the principles that will guide the process of renewing international cooperation and reaffirms member states' commitment to the UN Charter and its three pillars: development, peace and security, and human rights.

In the lead-up to the Summit of the Future, there will be several consultations and advocacy opportunities that will allow stakeholders to shape the final Pact for the Future. This period will be critical for building momentum behind the summit and galvanizing African stakeholders to actively contribute to the process. Opportunities for engagement include the following:

- **The AU Summit**, which took place on February 17 and 18, 2024, was an opportunity for African decision makers and policymakers to articulate their priorities pertaining to the pact. However, there was no dedicated discussion on the Summit of the Future or the pact.²

- **The African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development**, scheduled for April 2024, will afford an opportunity for further engagement among policymakers, experts in regional and subregional organizations, the UN system, and civil society on key aspects of the pact pertaining to progress toward the SDGs and financing for development.
- **The Nairobi Civil Society Conference**, taking place on May 9 and 10, 2024, will specifically focus on the Summit of the Future and will produce a consolidated input from African civil society organizations for consideration by member states.
- **The Action Days**, taking place on September 20 and 21, right before the start of the summit, will be an avenue for a wide array of actors, including civil society, the private sector, and member states, to advance the goals of the summit through informal engagements. The Action Days also present an opportunity for the AU and its member states to showcase their initiatives to implement existing commitments across the five areas of the pact.

Key Priorities for the AU, Its Member States, and African Civil Society

Participants highlighted key priorities that need to be reflected in the Summit of the Future and its outcome. A number of proposals and recommendations were put forward, particularly in relation to international peace and security and the reform of global governance.

Reform of Multilateral Institutions

Participants highlighted the deep flaws of the current multilateral system, including its organization and structure. They discussed the enduring effects of historical injustices and Africa's colonial history on the UN Charter and the UN system, evident in Africa's lack of permanent representa-

² The 6th mid-year coordination of the AU, regional economic communities, and Regional Mechanisms that will take place in July 2024 is another opportunity for African policymakers to articulate priorities.

tion on the UN Security Council despite African contexts featuring prominently on the council's agenda. Participants underscored the legitimacy and credibility crisis that emerges when decisions are made without adequate representation of those affected.

Another factor that has eroded the credibility of the multilateral system is the increasing violations of fundamental principles of international law and disregard for international humanitarian law in various conflict zones. As one participant stressed, major powers must uphold this basic minimum of principles on which international cooperation is built; ensuring commitment to these fundamentals is a prerequisite to any meaningful progress toward reform of the multilateral system. However, participants questioned whether major powers are willing to recommit to adhering to such principles. At this critical juncture, perceptions of Africa and the role it plays in moderating geopolitical divisions will determine the continent's position in the emerging multilateral order.

Participants particularly noted their frustration with double standards and the selective application of norms. The stark contrast in the level of attention afforded to African conflicts compared to other crises, such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the ongoing crisis in Gaza, has led many to conclude that there exists a "hierarchy of humans." As emphasized by the secretary-general, the principle of universality is crucial to a reformed multilateral system. However, questions remain over how universality will be achieved, particularly in relation to the application of sanctions.

One proposed avenue for reforming the multilateral system is the invocation of Article 109 of the UN Charter. The article lays out a process for amending the Charter through a General Conference, which can be convened by a vote of the members of the General Assembly and any nine members of the Security Council. Importantly, this decision cannot be vetoed by the council's five permanent members. From the perspective of many African governments, there is a need to build a coalition within the General Assembly to invoke this article and put the Charter review conference on the agenda of the Summit of the Future. More generally, one participant stressed that the United

Nations must strive for greater efficiency in responding to current and future challenges rather than getting bogged down in bureaucracy.

Participants also acknowledged some of the gains of the multilateral system. One participant made reference to the popular quote that "the UN was not created to take humanity to heaven but to save it from hell," emphasizing that while the UN can do more to advance peace and security, it has fulfilled its primary purpose of averting the world's total destruction. Another participant argued that some aspects of the multilateral order are still functioning, making reference to the International Court of Justice's recent ruling requiring Israel to take provisional measures. Thus, the goal of reform is not to discard the international system but to ensure it is rules-based and limits the whims of powerful states.

Reform of the International Financial Architecture

Participants noted that the current financial system was established by the victors of World War II with a primary focus on serving and rebuilding Europe rather than catering to Africa's needs. Consequently, there is a desire for Africa to have a seat at the table rather than being treated as part of the "menu." Despite the dominant narrative that Africa relies on external assistance, the continent possesses abundant resources of its own, though these are often undervalued when placed on the global market by external actors. Given that the continent does not receive the full value of its resources, it is imperative to explore strategies for optimizing returns through internal trade to counter the discrimination African states face in global markets. Another option is to establish a group for countries that produce critical minerals to coordinate policies and exert more influence on the market.

Participants underscored the link between the structures of the financial system and the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They indicated that without reform of financial and economic systems, it will be extremely difficult to achieve the SDGs. There is a need to move beyond the immediate issues of debt relief to bring about more structural change, including by increasing

Africa's representation in international financial institutions and reallocating special drawing rights (SDRs) to increase the continent's share.

International Peace and Security and Reform of the UN Security Council

Participants discussed various priorities for peace and security, including those relevant to the ongoing discussions between the AU and UN on peace operations. As outlined in the UN Charter, regional organizations are part of the global toolbox for the maintenance of peace and security. While the recently adopted Security Council Resolution 2719 (2023) is a critical step toward securing UN financial support for African-led peace support operations, its operationalization needs to be further examined.³ Participants emphasized the need for the AU, regional economic communities, and their member states to take advantage of the opportunity created by the resolution.

At the same time, participants underscored the importance of using a wider range of tools to respond to conflicts and crises rather than relying on military approaches. They emphasized the primacy of politics, including the centrality of diplomacy, to conflict resolution. Participants also highlighted the importance of national reconciliation, transitional justice, and accountability, as well as the need to deepen the mutually beneficial partnership between the AU and the UN, anchored in complementarity and comparative advantage. One participant reflected on the critical challenge of states using the principle of sovereignty as a shield to hamper conflict prevention and resolution and suggested reframing sovereignty as a responsibility.

Some participants noted that the collapse of the international collective security system as a result of breaches of international law and norms requires

the establishment of new frameworks. While Africa has been at the forefront of calls for reforming the Security Council, including by adopting the Ezulwini Consensus of 2005, participants expressed reservations on the relevance of this model given the current geopolitical context.⁴ As one participant noted, the transformation into a "UN 2.0" will not be accomplished by simply rearranging the seats but by charting a new approach.⁵ It was indicated that the continent would need to reconsider its approach and focus more on broader reforms of the UN, including the strengthening of the General Assembly, Peacebuilding Commission, and ECOSOC.⁶

Reparations and Historical Justice

One participant noted that while the zero draft addresses the reform of the international financial architecture and mentions ongoing efforts to improve existing mechanisms, there is a major oversight concerning the global reparations movement. The participant underscored the continental quest for reparations to address historical injustices, arguing that this must be part of the pact and that justice remains essential for the realization of peace and development, both on the African continent and globally.

To this end, the AU is working toward a declaration on reparations that recognizes the historical injustices committed against the continent and its peoples. The Accra Reparations Conference, held in Ghana in November 2023, adopted a proclamation on reparations that is expected to feed in to the AU process.⁷ The negotiations on the Pact for the Future are an opportunity for the AU and its member states to bring these discussions to New York. Although the co-facilitators are tasked with building consensus around the future of multilateralism, participants emphasized that the past cannot be overlooked, as historical injustices continue to influence the present.

³ UN Security Council Resolution 2719 (December 21, 2023), UN Doc. S/RES/2719; UN Security Council, *Gabon, Ghana and Mozambique: Draft Resolution*, UN Doc. S/2023/999, December 21, 2023.

⁴ African Union, *The Common African Position on the Proposed Reform of the United Nations: The Ezulwini Consensus*, AU Doc. Ext/EX.CL/2 (VII), March 8, 2005.

⁵ United Nations, "UN 2.0: Forward-Thinking Culture and Cutting-Edge Skills for Better UN System Impact," September 2023.

⁶ For further insights on African views on peace and security and the New Agenda for Peace, see: NeTT4Peace, "African Perspectives on the New Agenda for Peace," January 2024.

⁷ African Union, "Accra Proclamation on Reparations," November 17, 2023, available at <https://au.int/en/decisions/accra-proclamation-reparations>.

Conclusion

Overall, there was broad agreement on the need to reform the multilateral system as a prerequisite for ensuring its credibility and legitimacy. Many participants viewed the Summit of the Future as an opportunity for Africa to contribute to shaping this reform process given the continent's absence when the UN system was first established. They noted that even if the summit does not solve the multilateral system's core structural challenges, it presents an important opportunity to restore faith in the system.

However, some participants expressed skepticism that the summit will bring about concrete changes for the continent and questioned the added value of a series of high-level convenings. Others voiced reservations over the extent to which Africans will be able to exercise agency in the process and have their views incorporated when global powers continue to dictate the rules of engagement. One participant also emphasized that African member states must set aside national interests for collective interest to ensure that key priorities for the continent are reflected in the pact. Another noted that African civil society organizations and academics have an important role to play in supporting member states in developing strategies to engage in the summit.

Participants also underscored the importance of implementation after the summit. The success of the summit will be determined by the level of follow-through on commitments beyond the pledges made in declarations and outcome documents. To hold member states accountable for their commitments and pledges, a monitoring and evaluation framework has to be clearly outlined in

the period between the summit and the eightieth session of the UN General Assembly in 2025 (the timeline indicated in the pact). Beyond the follow-up mechanisms indicated in the pact, the next review of the UN peacebuilding architecture in 2025 can also provide an opportunity to monitor progress.

The following points emerged as key considerations to ensure that the summit and pact deliver on revitalizing inclusive multilateral cooperation.

- **Reform of the multilateral system** is critical to restore its credibility and legitimacy and will require, at the very least, renewed commitment by member states to the foundational principles of the UN Charter.
- **Reform of the international financial architecture** needs to include increasing Africa's representation in international financial institutions and ensuring that Africa benefits from its own resources.
- **International peace and security** needs to be underpinned by a broader toolbox for responding to conflicts and crises, a deeper AU-UN partnership, and greater representation for Africa on the Security Council.
- **Reparations and historical justice** should be the foundation of efforts to advance peace and development and meaningful reform of the multilateral system.
- **Africa's engagement in the summit** should include active participation by African civil society organizations and academics in support of member states to advance key priorities for the continent.

The **INTERNATIONAL PEACE INSTITUTE** (IPI) is an independent, non-profit organization working to strengthen inclusive multilateralism for a more peaceful and sustainable planet. Through its research, convening, and strategic advising, IPI provides innovative recommendations for the United Nations System, member states, regional organizations, civil society, and the private sector. With staff from around the world and a broad range of academic fields, IPI has offices facing United Nations headquarters in New York and an office in Manama.



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