Shift One | Rebuild Trust in Multilateralism

Improve Legitimacy and Effectiveness through Inclusion and Accountability

"Effective multilateralism is only possible if … women and men are equally and meaningfully represented."

The Board's extensive consultations surfaced a clear call for a multilateral system that is people- and planet-centred, delivering tangible results for all while driving a circular, sustainable global economy.

To be people-centred, it also must be radically and systematically inclusive, offering meaningful opportunities for participation in global decision-making by all States, civil society, private sector actors, local and regional governments, and other groups that have been traditionally excluded from global governance. We must accept that individual aspirations are no longer principally mediated by national governments, though States continue to play a central role. Each one of us is simultaneously a stakeholder in multiple overlapping communities. Our vision of networked and inclusive multilateralism makes room for representatives of these communities in global governance.

Inclusive, effective multilateralism is more than merely adding seats around a table. It requires a fundamental transformation towards more distributed, networked decision-making for our collective well-being. It recognizes that in many areas, the future of global governance will not be based on worldwide unity or top-down control, but rather on connectivity across distinct domains, communities, and spheres of influence. Drawing inspiration from extensive consultations, this Board has identified key interlinked principles that should guide this transformation and contribute to rebuilding trust in the multilateral system. The recommendations throughout this report proceed from these principles.

Recommendation 1.
Represent "we the peoples" in the multilateral system.

Over the course of our consultations, no issue received greater advocacy than the need to make the multilateral system more inclusive of groups that have been traditionally left out or marginalized. The full range of proposals offered to the Board can be found on our website. Several impactful actions that could be adopted in the lead up to the Summit of the Future are highlighted here.

Strengthen the multilateral architecture for gender equality and equity. Gender equality and equity changes the lives of all women, men, boys, and girls, increasing their capabilities and choices, and supporting sustainable solutions to the current global and interrelated crises. Efforts to strengthen gender equality are transformative because they promote inclusiveness more broadly. It is now widely accepted that reducing gender disparities goes hand-in-hand with higher economic growth, greater economic stability and resilience, and lower income inequality. And there is overwhelming evidence that equal representation and inclusion is fundamental to effective multilateralism.[5]

Over the past 30 years, the multilateral system has developed a set of structures to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women.[6] Yet progress towards gender equality continues to be far too slow. It is worrying that much of the multilateral system's efforts on gender equality remain siloed in gender-specific processes, subject to frequent renegotiation, and without the resources to hold us all accountable for our commitments.[7]

Principles of Effective Multilateralism

Effective multilateralism is:

1

PEOPLE-CENTRED: delivering tangible results for people, responding to their needs and reflecting their priorities; measuring impact from the viewpoint of people; empowering women and girls, and youth; and systematically recognizing different voices in society.

2

REPRESENTATIVE: deriving legitimacy from meaningful representation and a clear role in decision-making for all stakeholders; and allowing representative majorities to make and implement decisions in the face of minority opposition where necessary to deliver on issues of global concern.[4]

3

TRANSPARENT: building open, common assessments of global risks; and ensuring universal access to public data and knowledge to deliver global public goods.

4

EQUITABLE: recognizing common but differentiated responsibilities to address issues of global concern; prioritizing delivery for vulnerable and historically excluded communities; and upholding the fundamental principles of gender equality and respect for human rights.

5

NETWORKED: bringing constellations of States and non-State actors together to achieve goals; encouraging exploration and innovation in response to issues of global concern; drawing on existing resources, structures, and knowledge to aggregate effort; encouraging constructive competition; and streamlining global and regional engagement.

6

RESOURCED: generating sufficient public and private financial flows to maintain, protect, and deliver global public goods, including key planetary resources; making available new and necessary technologies; and driving convergence on global rules and norms for people and planet.

7

MISSION-FOCUSED: building a common understanding of the tasks needed to achieve success; setting clear, measurable targets with meaningful benchmarks for assessing progress; and providing resources to implement and measure change.

8

FLEXIBLE: allowing sub-groupings of States to explore, innovate, and implement new approaches to global problems for broader deliberation and adoption.

9

ACCOUNTABLE: adopting common, enforceable rules that cannot be broken with impunity by any actor and which are reinforced by empowered, legitimate bodies and processes; and recognizing the crucial role that incentives, rules, and norms play together in influencing behaviour.

10

FUTURE-ORIENTED: responding to emerging risks and new global shocks quickly by harnessing networks of actors to generate resources and action in a timely fashion; and putting in place structures and processes that can evolve over time to meet the needs of future generations.

At the current rate, it will take 132 years to reach gender parity in the workforce.[8] Global megatrends like climate change, livelihood shifts, demographic changes, and the pandemic have a distinct and often worse impact on women and girls.[9] Indeed, violence against women has its roots in inequality, which still affects one in three women globally, with far higher rates in fragile, conflict-affected areas.[10]

Effective multilateralism is only possible if SDG 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) is fully implemented and women and men are equally and meaningfully represented across the leadership and core work of all institutions and processes of global governance. The recommendations in this report reflect the pressing and continuous pursuit of full gender equality.

Several specific actions can be taken to address existing shortcomings. This Board proposes that the Summit of the Future include clear steps to place gender equality and equity at the heart of the multilateral architecture, including through:

›   A recommitment to the Beijing Platform of Action which states that governments, international organizations, civil society, and the private sector must safeguard women's rights and ensure that gender is taken into account in all national, regional, and international policies and programmes. This should be accompanied by systematic follow-up and a more ambitious set of implementation markers.

›   A declaration that effective multilateralism is only possible if women and men are equally and meaningfully represented across the leadership and core work of all institutions of global governance. Quotas and temporary special measures are a proven approach to reaching gender parity across the multilateral system. The declaration should be complemented by a commitment to generate, collect, and analyse data that track gender-specific goals and targets across all multilateral investments.

›   A conditioning of UN support to peace processes on the full, equal, and meaningful inclusion of women by all parties in all stages of a peace process.[11]

›   A commitment by all Member States to a whole-of-society approach on gender equality at the national level, including through the introduction and systematic use of gender-responsive budgeting systems for all macroeconomic plans and public governance.[12]
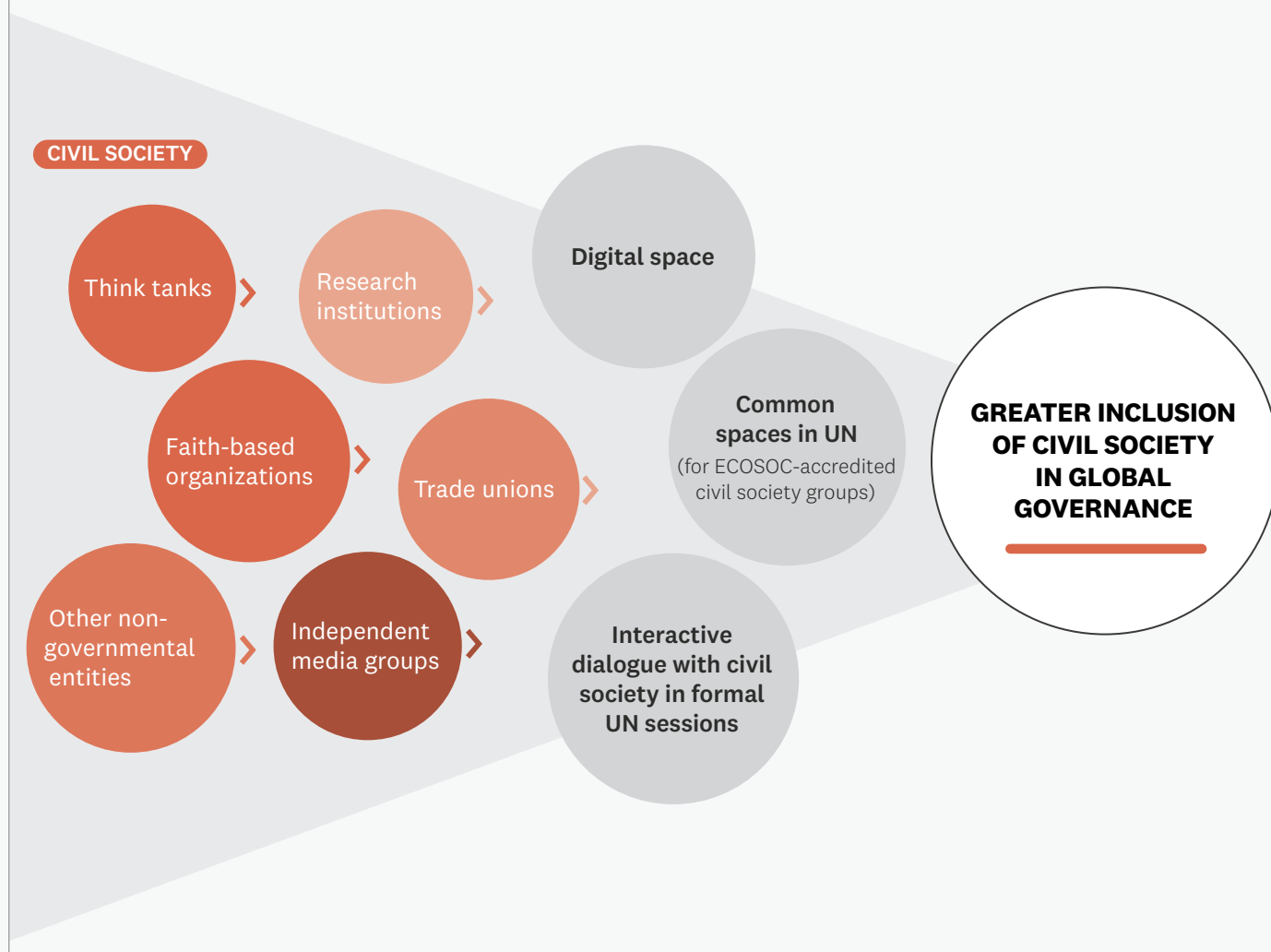
Taken together, these changes would hold the international community more accountable for its gender commitments. Also, it would help ensure that gender equality and equity are incorporated in national and multilateral processes worldwide.

Give more voice to civil society. Our consultations surfaced a consistent call for greater inclusion of civil society in the core work of global governance. "Civil society" is broadly defined here to mean non-governmental organizations operating in the civic space, such as trade unions, faith-based organizations, Indigenous networks, research institutions, think tanks, independent media groups, and other types of non-governmental entities.[13] There are a number of concrete steps that could improve inclusion of civil society, such as: (a) using digital space to involve more groups in UN processes; (b) formally including Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)-accredited civil society groups in common spaces in the UN; and (c) building interactive dialogue with civil society into formal UN sessions.[14]

These and other actions to more meaningfully include civil society in the multilateral system should be systematically linked into a network of formally recognized civil society focal points across the major institutions of the UN system, reflecting a system-wide strategy for civil society inclusion.[15]

Faith-based and charitable organizations play a significant role in providing public services, extending critical safety nets, peacemaking, and environmental efforts in many countries. Such organizations should continue to be engaged as multi-faith stakeholders in discussions and implementation, within and across countries, and as part of multilateral efforts.

Improving the inclusion of civil society in global decision-making

CIVIL SOCIETY

Think tanks

Research institutions

Digital space

Common spaces in UN
(for ECOSOC-accredited civil society groups)

Faith-based organizations

Trade unions

GREATER INCLUSION OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

Other non-governmental entities

Independent media groups

Interactive dialogue with civil society in formal UN sessions

Give refugees and forcibly displaced persons a say in decisions that affect their futures. Refugees should be included in peace processes and peacebuilding initiatives, including post-conflict reconstruction. Multilateral support to peacebuilding should encourage meaningful participation and representation of these groups. Their participation in peacebuilding and in post-conflict reconstruction improves the prospect of sustainable return.

Accountability towards youth in global decision-making. The legitimacy and effectiveness of the multilateral system depends on more meaningfully including youth — not only in the spaces of global governance, but also in its decision-making processes. This Board strongly supports the ongoing creation of the UN Youth Office, which will play an important role in driving youth coordination and advocacy for youth inclusion in multilateralism.

Accountability for youth inclusion and youth-focused engagement across the multilateral system remains a key gap. The Youth Office should offer creative incentives to encourage youth involvement, especially from under-represented regions — such as through youth-focused fellowship programmes, grants, paid internships, innovation prizes, and positions on high-level processes, which could become a mandatory part of every multilateral process. The Youth Envoy and Office could be complemented by an intergovernmental committee on youth, offering a global platform for young voices in the General Assembly to co-create the UN agenda on youth with Member States. **The Summit of the Future is an opportunity to commit to transparent, public accounting on our commitments to youth,** beyond accounting of the Youth2030 reports, regular reporting on progress on the World Programme

of Action for Youth, and strong resources to the Youth Office to ensure its work can be scaled up sufficiently. This could begin with Member States appointing at least one young person in their delegations for the Summit of the Future, both in the preparatory phases and the Summit itself.

A strategy to implement children's rights. Children are the only group with a specific human rights treaty that lacks a dedicated UN-wide strategy to ensure coherence, implement obligations, and protect rights across the multilateral system. This shortcoming undermines the Secretary-General's call for a renewed social contract that is "anchored in a comprehensive approach to human rights" and constitutes a significant hole in global governance. A UN-wide approach to children's rights is crucial to reinforce the UN's capacity to support Member States' actions at the national level, and to orient global governance towards the future. As a step towards development of such a strategy, clear guidance on mainstreaming children's rights across the multilateral system should be prioritized. **The Summit of the Future should consider how children's rights to food, health, and education can be protected globally.**[16]

A future-fit multilateral system. The most excluded group in the multilateral system is the set of generations yet to be born, despite our commitment to "succeeding generations" in the UN Charter. *Our Common Agenda* calls for a radical transformation of global governance, representing the needs and interests of future generations across all its work. This requires three related steps: (1) a normative recognition of the rights of future generations, which should be a centrepiece of the outcome declaration at the Summit of the Future; (2) the design of future-fit organizations and processes that meaningfully include long-term analysis, goal-setting, and impact assessments;[17] and (3) a system of accountability that will hold all actors responsible for their commitments to future generations. In this context, this Board strongly supports the Secretary-General's intention to appoint an Envoy for Future Generations, and proposes that the position be provided with a broad mandate to hold the multilateral system to account for commitments to future generations, and resourced to lead future-oriented analyses and build capacities.

● ## Recommendation **2.**
A role for cities and subnational regions in multilateralism.

Cities and other local and regional governments (LRGs) are the frontline of much of today's global governance, responsible for addressing the impacts of climate change, socioeconomic inequalities, health risks, violence, migration flows, and demographic changes. They are at the core of the social contract and will continue to grow in importance as the world urbanizes.[18] Cities also have demonstrated a remarkable ability to create effective global networks,[19] yet they remain largely sidelined in the formal mechanisms of global governance.[20] There is, however, a growing appetite among UN entities and regional commissions to involve LRGs in stakeholder consultation processes. This Board supports the ongoing efforts to develop an Advisory Group to the Secretary-General on Local and Regional Governments and proposes two interrelated steps that would meaningfully bring subnational governments into global governance without diluting the central role played by States.

A special status for cities and regions. The Summit of the Future can identify relevant institutions and processes where LRGs are offered a formal and permanent status, independent of civil society and non-governmental organizations, notably in the areas of the environment, global health, migration, refugee response, addressing transnational organized crime, and sustainable development. Consideration should be given to involving LRGs directly in relevant multilateral treaty processes, allowing them to become signatories with responsibilities in much the same way the current plastics treaty is looking to involve and obligate the private sector.[21]

Invigorate the localization agenda of 2030. While local and regional governments are at the forefront of implementing Agenda 2030, often they lack necessary resources. Localization — used here to mean the process of including and resourcing local authorities — should be explicitly part of national commitments on Agenda 2030.

Photo: Angus Wall. Cities are often on the frontline of today's challenges, including climate change and socioeconomic inequalities.

The Summit of the Future could recognize this central role played by local and regional governments and make specific commitments around partnering and supporting them going forward.[22]

Recommendation 3. Include and obligate the private sector.

Our global governance system has a glaring hole: the private sector. Companies of all sizes drive advancements in new technologies; energy, industrial, and agricultural companies are responsible for a huge portion of our global carbon emissions and pollution; banks and finance companies handle our global financial flows; and private companies deliver most of our goods. But our multilateral treaties largely ignore these actors, wrongly assuming that State action is sufficient to regulate this global network of private actors. Even when the private sector is engaged, this engagement is often based on their size or clout, not necessarily the positive role they might play in addressing issues of global concern. The result is a system where a relatively small number of large private sector actors can influence processes without being held to account. This must change.

A first step is to **identify multilateral processes where the private sector should be directly involved.** Good examples of this include the tripartite governance structure of the International Labour Organization (ILO) (involving States, employers, and employee organizations) and the current negotiations on a plastics treaty, where major polluting industries have a seat at the table and where all workers in the life cycle of production are taken into account.[23] While this form of inclusion should be approached carefully, participation of the private sector is an unavoidable and necessary aspect of more effective multilateralism and would enable greater accountability in areas of global concern.[24]
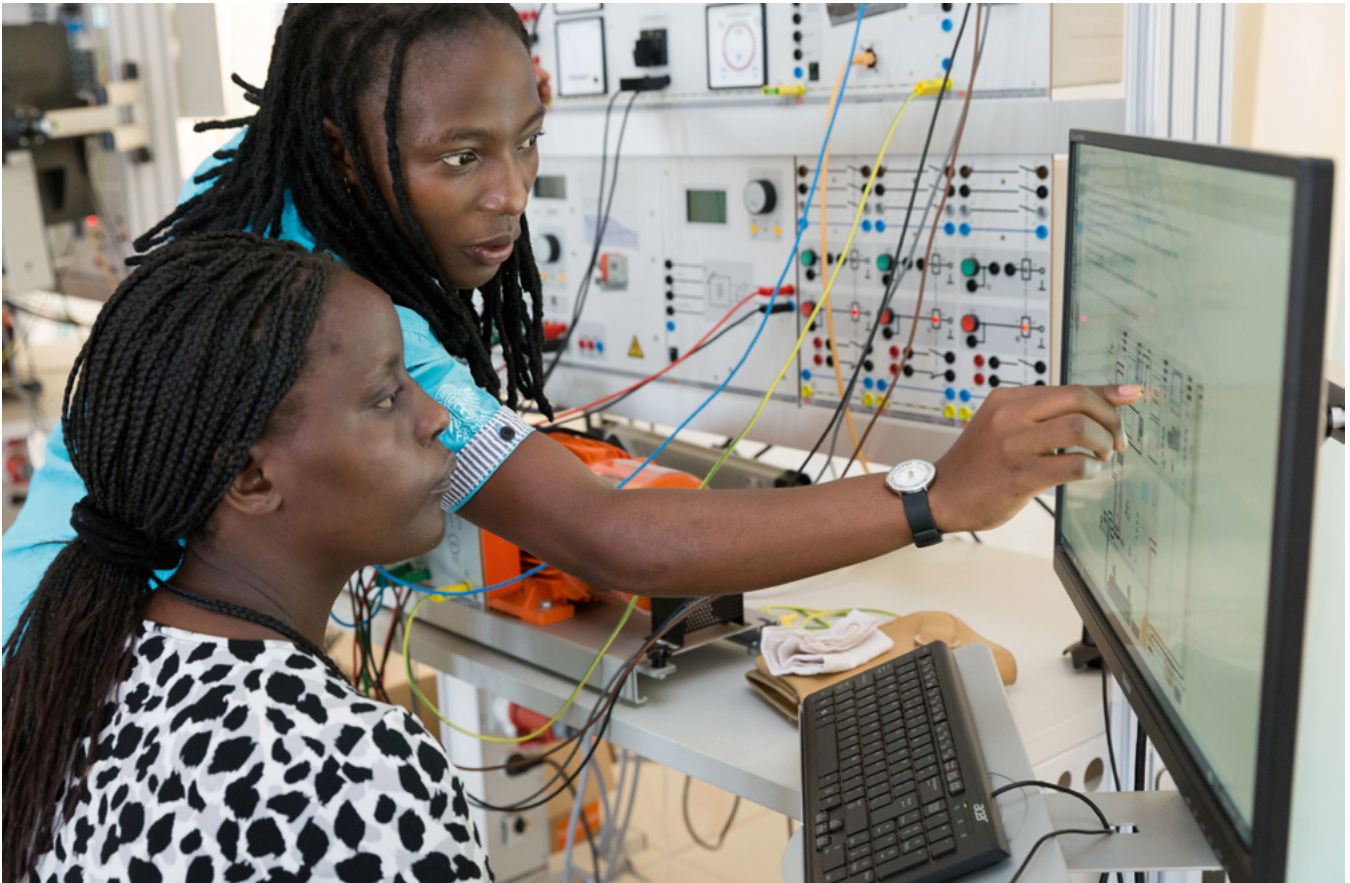
Photo: Kelley Lynch / World Bank. "Our global governance system has a glaring hole: the private sector."

The UN should also more **systematically identify private sector actors playing a positive role in addressing issues of global concern,** helping to highlight their work and connect them to multilateral processes. For example, in the context of the Net Zero for non-State Actors process, the UN could track companies that offer innovative approaches to reaching net zero, helping to promote positive work globally.[25] This should include a specific focus on smaller businesses, highlighting more local practices that could be scaled up or supported at the global level.

Many existing initiatives worldwide are taking on a significant aspect of the global governance needs identified here. A dedicated page is available on the website of the High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism where the many ideas and proposals received can be reviewed. Wherever possible, stakeholders should draw on this work and attempt to connect and network ongoing initiatives rather than create parallel tracks. This report is designed to be complementary of the existing tracks of the *Our Common Agenda*, helping to accelerate the SDGs and hold us responsible for the commitments at the heart of our multilateral system.

● Recommendation **4.**
More effective decision-making.

A frequent obstacle to more effective multilateralism is the overreliance on decisions by consensus, which has been interpreted in many settings to mean unanimity without objection.[26] While ostensibly a reflection of collective decision-making, in practice this highly inefficient and unfair approach allows a small number of States to block action that is clearly needed to address issues of global concern. It has led to stagnation on denuclearization, hampered more-equitable global finance, and enabled a minority to obstruct meaningful action on the environment. This does not mean there is no place for consensus; in some settings, it is an important mechanism to protect against excesses of power and prevent impunity. But where consensus prevents equitable and effective decision-making on issues of global concern, alternatives must be found.

The Summit of the Future should identify key processes to be shifted to qualified majority, double majority, or non-unanimous definitions of consensus voting systems. While making every effort to achieve unanimous decisions in all multilateral forums, our response to issues of global concern cannot be decided by a small number who benefit from the status quo. Shifting towards qualified majorities, or a new definition of consensus that does not require unanimity in the case of deadlock in multilateral processes, could help to address long-standing shortcomings in environmental governance,[27] the Conference on Disarmament's meetings on denuclearization, international financial institutions, and other areas noted throughout this report. Such a shift would constitute a significant improvement in the efficiency and effectiveness of global governance.

The Summit of the Future could also include agreement to develop a code of conduct for negotiating international agreements on issues of global concern that would consolidate commitments on data transparency, reliance on independent scientific research, gender parity, and inclusion of a range of traditionally marginalized groups (youth, women, civil society, smaller States, and local and regional authorities).[28] This code of conduct also should help to increase accountability from the outset by establishing standardized implementation and enforcement processes, pairing commitments with the resources and capacities to track implementation. Such a step would help to address long-standing criticism that international negotiations lack teeth and allow for open-ended commitments without accountability.

The Summit of the Future should take account of the crucial importance of regional actors within the multilateral system. While having widely differing capacities, regional organizations have a special set of responsibilities and roles that make them indispensable for addressing issues of global concern. The meaningful political and financial investment in regional bodies proposed in this report would align the UN system with the principle of subsidiarity, deliver greater legitimacy across the multilateral system, and address many of the shortcomings in global governance identified in *Our Common Agenda*.

Principles in Action
Networked, Flexible, and Future-Oriented Approaches for Effective Decision-Making

"It is widely recognized that the good governance of outer space will increasingly require the inclusion of experts beyond the Committee membership."

We are in a renewed era of exploration and use of outer space, with active programmes to return humans to the Moon and to take the first steps beyond. Space assets have transformed the way we live. We have become increasingly dependent on space science and technology applications at all levels of activity and daily life. Space systems are vital for understanding and solving global problems, and for the implementation of the SDGs and climate action. These uses of outer space are expanding exponentially, driven by the industrial, commercial, and private sectors, who are now increasingly significant actors in a USD 400 billion space economy. As integral as space is to socioeconomic development, outer space remains an arena for geo-political and strategic competition, as technical developments and their dual-use nature create new risks to security, safety, and sustainability of outer space activities.

The United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS), established in 1959 as a permanent body under the General Assembly, is the instrumental platform for developing, through consensus, the global governance of outer space activities. This consensus model can make it more difficult to introduce new agenda items and debates on controversial-but-critical developments related to outer space. It is widely recognized that the good governance of outer space will increasingly require the inclusion of experts beyond the Committee membership.

COPUOS could consider innovating its procedural framework to facilitate broader and more regular consultations with diverse stakeholder groups. Such engagement models already exist. The Security Council deemed it necessary to create a mechanism to obtain valuable information from

Council outsiders; "Arria Formula"[29] meetings have provided the Council with a working method to take advantage of expertise and information outside formal Council meetings. Arria Formula meetings have not only been used to introduce outside views, but they are also an accepted meeting format when there is no Council agreement for a formal meeting.

A model for broader operational stakeholder inclusion should also be considered for COPUOS to ensure that it remains at the forefront of developments. Investing in inclusion will also support meaningful and results-driven exchanges on effective governance models and operational requirements among governmental and non-governmental actors. COPUOS could adopt Arria Formula meetings as a means of gathering candid, expert views through more regular exchanges with stakeholders in a confidential setting. This small innovation could help the Committee achieve its goals while also enhancing its working methods.