

Preface

The world today is facing unprecedented challenges of governance far beyond what the United Nations (UN), established 75 years ago, was designed to face. The grave effects of global climate change are already manifesting themselves, requiring rapid, far-reaching, and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society to arrest catastrophic and probably irreversible consequences. Science has uncovered the frightening and rapid collapse in global biodiversity, threatening ecosystems across the planet that maintain the correct functioning of the biosphere, essential to human life. But there is more; there are other global catastrophic risks. There is today a diminished faith in our political leaders and the institutions that underpin our systems of governance; public disillusionment with hyper-partisan politics and willingness to believe populist promises; disturbingly high levels of income inequality; still much too persistent and widespread human rights violations; and the spread of corruption, coinciding with the rise of autocratic leaders, often intent on awakening the voices of nationalisms which were so destructive during past centuries. The recent rejection by some nations of the benefits of multilateralism and international cooperation, which have been at the center of the postwar global order, has heightened the risks of fundamental instabilities that could precipitate a range of major crises, disregarding the lessons of the past.

The forces of globalization have been undermining traditional institutions of government – including the state itself – and creating alternative centers of power. New forms of knowledge and networking, of information flows and manipulation, of finance and commerce, of digitization and artificial intelligence, are accelerating rates of change, undermining the traditional roles of various institutions, forms of organization, inherited assumptions and cultural patterns no longer adapted to the requirements of an emerging world society catalyzed by science and technology. The pushback of fundamentalist and reactionary movements, inter-state attempts to destabilize competitors in a struggle for domination, and the increasing social

fractures exploited for political ends are putting societies under strain and creating conditions for greater anarchy and chaos.

There are, however, also forces of integration and global progress at work, with positive examples of vibrant international civil society action, unprecedented cultural and scholarly exchange, economic innovation, technological solutions, and movements dedicated to human transformation and well-being; but they may not yet be sufficiently strong to overcome the current forces of dissolution and breakdown that are accelerating. To address the growing planetary climate crisis, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), convened under the auspices of the UN, has warned that only a decade remains to contain the damage caused by present energy systems and land use. The UN, in its 2030 Agenda, has called for a fundamental transformation in society, a paradigm shift away from the present trajectory, but government response has been lukewarm, with little political will for the efforts that are necessary. Humanity seems to be in a state of collective denial.

Our world is like a bus packed with passengers hurtling along a winding mountain road, with several people fighting for the driver's seat and no one really in control. Across the economic, social, and environmental domains, there are increasing predictions of severe crises ahead, some of them possibly taking the world into uncharted territory, with possibly irreversible effects. The resulting fear and frustration are driving the rise of populist movements and the rejection of multilateralism, a turning inward when the need is to reach out to each other and collaborate in finding solutions to our problems.

The last time that there was a serious debate about the kind of global order that needed to be created to ensure sustainable and just international peace and security, and to create a basis for universal human prosperity, was when the United States entered World War II and President Roosevelt called for the creation of the United Nations in early 1942. In early discussions, proposals for the UN Charter imagined an international entity informed by sound federalist principles, including the creation of a legislative body with some powers to enact laws that would be binding on member states. But the need to ensure the support of the Soviet Union and US Senate approval of the UN Charter resulted in a considerably weakened and structurally flawed organization.

In the late 1950s, Grenville Clark and Louis Sohn, in their groundbreaking *World Peace through World Law*, offered a comprehensive range of proposals to address the built-in flaws of the UN system. But, while much admired in many policymaking circles, their ideas did not trigger the reforms they suggested. By then the world was in the midst of the Cold War and entered a decades-long process of historically unprecedented arms build-up by the major powers, with multiple conflicts across the planet, great losses in human life and delayed economic and social development as resources were diverted to this arms race. Sixty years later, it is becoming increasingly evident that our current UN-based order, already known in 1945 to be inadequate, cannot cope with an increasingly complex and interconnected world and

does not yet possess the mechanisms that are vital to address a multitude of shared planetary problems.

We think that the time is ripe to reexamine the architecture of our current institutions of global governance, not as an academic exercise but to assist in catalyzing processes of change that lead to concrete progress. Failure to strengthen the international order now will increase the likelihood of societies around the world being overwhelmed by global crises with devastating worldwide consequences. The survivors may be forced to rebuild a global institutional framework after a third world war or nuclear exchange, the collapse of the global economy, a pandemic wiping out a significant part of the world's population, or extreme climate change which is already beginning to produce mass migrations, any of which would overwhelm existing institutions.

Each of us, from our different economic, legal, and environmental perspectives, our shared common values and decades of experience within the international system, has felt the need to make the intellectual effort to overcome the blockage of diminished expectations for global governance, and to map possible ways forward. This book is the result. Too many "realists" say that change is not possible, but the other reality is the awareness of the multiple crises ahead, if not already upsetting the planet's equilibrium, and of the human suffering that will inevitably result.

Our cautious optimism to engage in such discussions now, in the year of the 75th anniversary of the UN Charter, is grounded on several, mutually reinforcing factors.

First, the current system has few credible defenders who are persuasively arguing that the status quo is the optimal strategy, and that human society can just "muddle through" for the next several decades without meaningfully addressing some of the risks that cast a shadow over its collective future.

Second, the world is immeasurably more integrated today than half a century ago, and the costs of non-cooperation are also much higher. A war between global powers, in the age of nuclear weapons, would be unimaginably more catastrophic in its consequences than anything humanity has witnessed in the past. The 2008 financial crisis started in one country but rapidly spilled over and became global, deeply destabilizing, and costly.

Third, civil society and the business community are empowered today in a way that was not the case in the 1950s. Many major successful initiatives in the area of international cooperation in the past several decades – from the creation of the International Criminal Court to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons – could not have been undertaken without the involvement of stakeholders beyond government. These relatively new forces of transnational civil society are showing increasingly sophisticated and effective methods to catalyze and shape significant changes in the architecture of global governance.

Fourth, science and communications technologies and the spread of education have made it much easier to mobilize public opinion. There is much greater

awareness, globally, of the problems facing the world and the risks that they carry. At the same time, the intellectual and professional classes in various fields, whether in international law, business, economics or the international civil service generally, are increasingly frustrated with institutions as they stand, creating much latent capacity for engagement in global governance reform. There is great potential for “bottom-up” and “top-down” synergies among communities of interest who are deeply concerned about global catastrophic risks and current institutional limitations.

We hope this book will start a discussion on the reforms that are necessary to enhance the effectiveness of the global institutional architecture in order to respond proactively to the risks that threaten the future of humanity. Of course, we do not have all the answers, but we want to show that reasonable answers are possible and that reforming global governance is not utopian, but a necessity for our survival. Rather than tinkering at the margins of the present UN system, we propose a comprehensive set of reforms that would correct its fundamental flaws, empowering institutions of global governance to address the multiple problems and catastrophic risks we face and enabling us all to respond constructively to reduce or eliminate them. We envision a system with justice at its core and an equitable sharing of responsibilities, a system that can put its high principles into action, building on its ethical foundations to achieve unprecedented progress in the development of global civilization.

The proposals that we submit here are put forward in a spirit of humility, as a contribution to the necessarily wide-ranging consultations on how to catalyze and to craft reforms that will allow us to build on our strengths – from the spread of knowledge and new technologies to the availability of wealth and resources, citizen engagement, the progressive empowerment of women, our inherent international cultural diversity, among others – to chart a better future. We invite all to join in an effort to stimulate creative thinking, to explore possible governance mechanisms, institutional reforms, and pathways forward toward a positive and secured collective future. The enormous difficulties of this undertaking and the challenging times ahead should be acknowledged, but every global citizen needs to be inspired by positive visions of the better future that is possible. The world urgently needs an ever-widening circle of those working for the institutional and social reforms necessary to transition to a sustainable, globalized yet diverse society.

Reshaping international governance is not ultimately solely about institutions, structures or even funding. It is about protecting all that we hold dear and ensuring a safe path for humanity during and beyond the 21st century. It is about leaving to our children and successive generations a better world than the one we were born into, one in which they find the conditions that will enable them to develop fully all their capacities, not one in which they will have to deal with the painful consequences of an unpredictable and deeply dysfunctional global order.