

Summit of the Future Highlights: Monday, 23 September 2024

On the second and final day, discussions at the Summit of the Future (SOTF) continued in two parallel tracks. In plenary, more than 60 heads of state and government and over 70 ministers and other high-level speakers offered their views on how to reform the multilateral system. The final two Interactive Dialogues also took place, focusing on the two annexes of the Pact for the Future: how to bridge the global digital divide, and enhancing the global system for current and future generations. Seventy-nine speakers, of whom 43 were Member State representatives, took the floor during the Dialogues.

Plenary Segment

Many speakers welcomed the adoption of the Pact for the Future and its two annexes, likening it to hitting the restart button in charting a more inclusive, fair, and rules-based global system. However, laments on a gloomy future were also generally heard. Many asserted that global targets will not be achieved without the full empowerment of women, youth, and other excluded groups, with some specifying the need for a female Secretary-General for the UN.

Most statements noted the impact of multiple serious conflicts happening around the world, with several speakers noting that global peace and security has never been under such threat since World War II. In particular, the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza, and South Sudan were repeatedly mentioned.

Some speakers also pointed to specific interests or proposals:

FINLAND presented a three-point plan for UN Security Council reform that entails: adding five new permanent seats for underrepresented regions—two each for Africa and Latin America and one for Asia; scrapping all veto powers; and withdrawing voting privileges for countries that blatantly violate the UN Charter. TONGA called for SIDS representation on the Security Council.

Along with many other speakers, GABON urged meaningful reform of the international financial architecture to tackle debt and innovative funding mechanisms for sustainable development such as debt-for-nature swaps.

NAURU welcomed the adoption of the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index, noting it offers a tool for channeling concessional financing to countries most affected by the climate crisis. Saying the Pact provides a clear road map for the future, CROATIA called for: investing in conflict prevention; maintaining a focus on sustainable development; and, along with numerous other countries, striving for a more inclusive global governance architecture.

NORWAY expressed its support for negotiations towards the proposed UN framework convention on international tax

cooperation and called for an ambitious outcome to the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development in Spain in 2025. SPAIN also added its support for fairer taxation, such as a global minimum wealth tax and taxing multilateral corporations. The WORLD BANK said the International Development Association multiplies donor contributions fourfold in several significant areas.

INDIA offered to share its model of digital public infrastructure. UZBEKISTAN expressed support for the UN Secretary-General's proposal for an annual digital collaboration forum.

SYRIA said that despite Israel's ongoing violation of international law, it believes in dialogue and diplomacy and upholding the UN Charter. IRAN called for a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction and an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.

UKRAINE noted that some countries are actively opposing initiatives to strengthen the UN Charter, citing "seven accomplices" and asserting its resistance to Russia's "colonial aggression." The DOMINICAN REPUBLIC called for digital sovereignty to transform health care. MAURITANIA said Africa's SDG-aligned Agenda 2063 undertakes to fight violence, terrorism, vulnerability and poverty. LIBYA noted that as a transit country it is suffering from unregulated migration and called for addressing the root causes through development assistance to the relevant countries.

COLOMBIA warned against letting capitalism "be the only winner" from artificial intelligence (AI). MAURITIUS highlighted that SIDS are a microcosm of the climate emergency, economic fragility, and existential threats that must be addressed. HAITI requested an urgent global response to the existential threats it is experiencing, citing organ, arms, and drug trafficking and increasing hurricanes, and droughts due to climate change. PALESTINE said it is striving to respond to global challenges despite the burden of Israel's occupation and manmade catastrophes. MOROCCO urged focusing on Africa as an "indicator" to measure collective action to enhance peace and stability in the world.

Interactive Dialogues

Interactive Dialogue 3: Towards a Common Digital Future: Strengthening Inclusive Innovation and Cooperation to Bridge the Digital Divides: Co-Chair Alar Karis, President of the Republic of Estonia, described his country's success in enhancing transparency, openness, and innovation through digital technologies, noting they had taken the country's startups, education, policy making, trade, and other sectors to a new level. He cited X-Road, an open-source data exchange solution, developed by Estonia and used by other countries, as an example of successful cross border collaboration.

Co-Chair Mohamed Muizzu, President of the Republic of Maldives, stressed the pressing need to bridge the digital divide in Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs), and Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs). He called for initiatives that enable young people to participate in the digital economy and which safeguard consumer rights.

Doreen Bogdan-Martin, Secretary-General, International Telecommunications Union (ITU), said “game changing” digital solutions could accelerate 70% of SDG targets, but warned the digital divide threatens this opportunity. “We are in a race against time,” she concluded, and urged that digital inclusion keep up with the pace of digital transformation. Juan M. Lavista Ferres, Corporate Vice President and Chief Data Scientist, AI for Good Lab, Microsoft, urged that “mistakes of the past,” such as the usual delay for a global uptake of new technologies, not be repeated, and said Microsoft partners with ITU in mapping communities unconnected to the internet.

Linda Bonyo, Founder, Lawyers Hub, said that, to help close the digital divide, startups in the developing world should be empowered and the issue of restrictive visa regimes should be addressed, as these prevent African, Latin American, and Asian professionals from sharing local expertise in global fora.

ALBANIA said the country was developing AI models to assist in their negotiations with EU for membership. NORWAY noted they provide financing for digital public goods in sectors such as climate, agriculture, and health systems, and cited the Digital Public Good Alliance as an example of multistakeholder partnership.

BRAZIL warned against the “exponential growth” of misinformation, misogyny, and hate speech on social media. BHUTAN described its transition from isolation to global integration as one of the last countries to introduce television and internet, noting that 34% of its population has received digital training.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION said it has developed more than 80 AI-based projects in areas ranging from public transport fares to public security.

Other issues highlighted in the discussions included the Global Digital Compact’s capacity to enhance multistakeholder cooperation, as well as the potential of youth as “digital natives” to spearhead the digital transformation.

Interactive Dialogue 4: The Future Starts Now: Enhancing the Global System for Current and Future Generations:

Co-Chair Andrew Holness, Prime Minister of Jamaica, opened the Dialogue, stressing that “we must seize this opportunity to ensure that multilateralism is not a relic of the past, but a dynamic force for the 21st century.” Luc Mercelina, Prime Minister of Sint Maarten, said the Pact for the Future puts future generations, who cannot represent themselves, at the center of decision-making.

Volker Turk, UN High-Commissioner for Human Rights, stressed human rights must be protected as they “grew on the lessons of the past, bringing them into the decisions of today to protect the present and future.” Mafalda Duarte, Executive Director of the Green Climate Fund (GCF), warned that progress on climate is not fast enough. She called for changing how we measure and assess risk and reminded delegates that the GCF has a roadmap for administering US\$50 billion in aggregate capitalization by 2030.

Felipe Paullier, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Youth Affairs, stressed young people must be engaged as full-fledged partners across all aspects of decision-making and encouraged delegates to implement Action 36 of the Pact for the Future on strengthening youth participation at the national level.

SINGAPORE said the need for anticipatory planning and foresight has never been greater. BURUNDI noted his country set up a Youth Investment Bank to empower young people to be “agents of peace and development.”

The COMOROS, along with other SIDS, described the existential threat of sea level rise for the country, stressing their future depends on international cooperation and financing. SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS said the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index, the Pact for the Future, and the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS signal positive changes in the “culture of global sustainability.” The US described the President’s Emergency Plan for Adaptation and Resilience, which seeks to help more than half a billion people in developing countries adapt to and manage the impacts of climate change by 2030. SPAIN stressed that countries should not have to choose “between the pain of debt or dealing with climate change.”

The UN SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN said the direct and indirect costs of violence against children are estimated to impact around 11% of annual global GDP. CIVICS UNPLUGGED described a network of high school students that produce advisory reports on global issues such as AI, climate change, and education.

In final reflections, Kitty van der Heijden, Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF, warned the “triple three,” namely Covid-19, climate change and conflict, are unravelling decades of progress on children’s wellbeing but said there is hope in “courage, determination, and sustained investment.”

Closing Plenary

In a brief closing session in the evening, UNGA President Yang said the SOTF and its outcome documents had answered the UN Charter’s call to better respond to current and future challenges and reinvigorate multilateralism. He congratulated Member States for working with focus and solidarity over the last two years to meet this “historic milestone” but stressed that the work does not end here. Yang added that the SOTF “must propel our collective ability to deliver in future.” He urged that stakeholders never forget “the lives already lost under the weight of poverty, hunger and want,” and those still suffering from conflict, violence and deprivation. He concluded by urging that no one ever lose sight of those future generations “to whom we owe our best efforts to create a world that outlives and empowers all of humanity, leaving no one behind.” He declared the Summit closed at 8.11 pm.

In the Corridors

Observers of the Summit of the Future are waiting to see how the agreements reached on the Pact, the Declaration, and the Compact will be taken forward. There has been little to no opposition heard at the Summit to the idea that the UN system is no longer “fit for purpose.” The world, as is consistently being pointed out, is far different from the post-World War II world of 1945, when the UN was founded. Worries about “global collapse,” catastrophe,” and “existential threats” were heard many times during this event—indeed, perhaps even losing some of their shock value. While a review of the Pact is on the books at UNGA83 in 2028, many observed that the question remains on how to push forward in the next four years and put action to the words. In closing the Summit, UNGA President Yang pointed to the three conferences expected to take place in 2025 as critical to sustaining action and called on Member States to continue to push for decisive action and meaningful progress, as the extent of early “next steps” officially envisaged.