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RENEWING THE UNITED NATIONS

Forty years ago, in a basement in Beirut, I held my three children as the bombs fell and made a promise that, if they were spared, I would devote my life to peace. I have kept that promise across forty years and four continents, as an ambassador, a peace negotiator, a cabinet minister and an advocate. The work I would bring to the United Nations is the continuation, on the largest possible scale, of the vow I made that night.

I seek the United Nations' highest office to help return the world body to what it was created to be, and to what many of us still believe it can become. I come as someone who has spent a career making things work across the dividing lines of language, region and ideology, and who has the vision, the courage and the fortitude to change it.

The United Nations turns eighty this year. It was built from the ashes of the most destructive war in human history by people who understood that no nation, however powerful, could secure peace alone. That founding insight remains true. But an institution can be indispensable and in need of renewal at the same time, and ours is both. It is failing to live up to its own Charter, not for want of purpose but for want of focus and discipline.

Let me make one promise before all others. The authority of this office rests on a single foundation, which is independence. Under the Charter, the Secretary-General serves the United Nations and the whole of its membership, and no government, no bloc and no ideology.

I have spent a lifetime building trust across the widest divides, and I will bring that same impartiality to this office, holding the powerful and the vulnerable to one standard and keeping the door open to every capital. It is precisely because I am willing to speak candidly with each of them that I can be trusted by all of them.

What the United Nations needs now is not another caretaker, but a peacemaker. That calls for renewal: a return to its founding mission, but with clear eyes about how far today's world has moved from the one that emerged in 1945.

Where others speak of reform, I go beyond with a talk of renewal: a renewal that must be pursued with the speed, the honesty and the appetite for results the world has a right to expect.

This is not work any Secretary-General can do alone, and I will not pretend otherwise. It will take partners among member states, in the Security Council and the General Assembly, and the courage to draw talent and ideas from beyond the institution, from the private sector and from the civil-society organizations that often deliver where governments cannot.

This program of renewal I would begin on the first day rests on five commitments: a United Nations that prevents and ends wars; a Security Council worthy of the century; development that reaches the lives of ordinary people; the dignity of the human person defended as the world changes around it; and an institution renewed from within to deliver on them all.

I. A United Nations That Keeps the Peace

The first purpose named in our Charter is to maintain international peace and security. It is the purpose on which the United Nations is now most visibly struggling, and it is an area in which I bring direct, personal experience.

The numbers tell a sobering story. United Nations peacekeeping, once the Organization's most recognizable instrument, has contracted sharply. Today there are 11 active operations, down from 16 a decade ago, and roughly 61,000 personnel in the field, down from some 107,000 in 2015.[1] No new peacekeeping operation has been authorized since 2014.[2]

We must not draw from this the false conclusion that war itself is receding. The opposite is true. By the count of the Peace Research Institute Oslo, 61 state-based conflicts were active in 2024, the highest number since 1946.[3]

Is the contraction in the number of missions, then, a failure? Not in itself; some had outlived their usefulness. The real failure is that the decline of peacekeeping has not been matched by any corresponding investment in what is cheaper and more effective, which is the prevention and the patient mediation of conflict before it consumes a country. The Organization's own analysis is unambiguous: violence costs the world economy on the order of 13.6 trillion dollars a year, and a serious prevention system could save tens of billions annually.[4] We spend fortunes responding to wars and woefully too little stopping them.

Meanwhile the Security Council, the body charged with acting, is too often paralyzed. In 2024 alone, seven draft resolutions were vetoed, the most in a single year since 1986.[5] A New Agenda for Peace in 2023[6] and the Pact for the Future in 2024[7] set out the right diagnosis. What is missing is execution.

Here I speak from my own experience rather than from a brief. I learned the craft of peace in a region that has known war. I took part in the process that ended the border conflict between Ecuador and Peru, a settlement signed in Brasilia in 1998 that brought to a close the last interstate war on the South American continent.[8]

What made that settlement hold is instructive, and it is a method, not a slogan. A small group of trusted guarantor states, Argentina, Brazil, Chile and the United States, remained engaged through years of negotiation, provided verification on the ground, and helped both governments

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[1] UN Peacekeeping fact sheet, June 2025: 11 active operations and approximately 61,000 uniformed and civilian personnel; the approved peacekeeping budget for 2025-2026 is about 5.4 billion US dollars.

[2] Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 2025: United Nations operations have fallen from 16 missions and roughly 107,000 personnel in 2015; no new United Nations peacekeeping operation has been mandated since 2014.

[3] Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), Conflict Trends 2025, drawing on the Uppsala Conflict Data Program: 61 state-based armed conflicts were active in 2024, the highest number recorded since 1946.

[4] Pathways for Peace, World Bank and United Nations, 2018: the global economic cost of violence is cited at up to 13.6 trillion US dollars a year (Institute for Economics and Peace figure); effective prevention could save between 5 billion and nearly 70 billion US dollars annually.

[5] Security Council Report, In Hindsight (2024-2025): seven draft resolutions were vetoed in 2024, the most in a single year since 1986.

[6] A New Agenda for Peace, Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9, United Nations, July 2023.

[7] Pact for the Future, adopted at the Summit of the Future, 22 September 2024 (A/RES/79/1).

[8] Acta Presidencial de Brasilia, signed 26 October 1998 at the Itamaraty Palace, ending the Ecuador-Peru border dispute under the guarantor framework of Argentina, Brazil, Chile and the United States. US Department of State.

find a formula each could present at home as honorable rather than as surrender. Sovereignty was respected; face was saved ; the agreement endured. That patient, guarantor-backed method has rarely been applied systematically to the hardest conflicts on other continents. It can be.

There is also an immediate institutional test of whether the world is serious about letting regions secure their own peace. In December 2023, the Security Council unanimously agreed, through Resolution 2719, that United Nations-assessed contributions could fund up to 75 percent of peace operations led by regional organizations.[9] Two years on, that promise remains unfulfilled. No operation has yet been funded under it, and the first test case stalled.[10] A commitment made unanimously and then left unimplemented does more damage than no commitment at all.

Peace is never only the absence of war. It rests on the dignity of the person and on the protection of civilians from atrocity, and on the laws of war that the world adopted so that even conflict would have limits. Where those foundations hold, grievance finds outlets other than violence; where they are stripped away, the next war is already being prepared. I will keep the protection of civilians and respect for international humanitarian law at the center of the United Nations' work in every theater, because a peace that does not protect people is only a pause.

What I will do

First, I will rebalance the United Nations toward prevention. Mediation capacity should not depend on uncertain voluntary funding. I will place the United Nations' mediation and good-offices function on stable footing, and I will use the office of the Secretary-General as it was meant to be used, traveling to where the wars are, sitting with all parties, and offering the discipline of sustained mediation rather than the comfort of distance.

Second, I will apply the guarantor method to today's protracted conflicts. For each major file, I will work to assemble a small group of credible, trusted states to accompany a process from first contact to final verification. This is how durable peace is built, and it is the contribution I am uniquely placed to make.

Third, I will make Resolution 2719 real. I will work with the Security Council and regional organizations to fund the first operation under it without further delay, because a region willing to deploy its own people to keep the peace deserves the predictable backing the Council has already promised. The world owes a particular debt here to the nations that have long carried this burden, contributing hundreds of thousands of personnel to peace missions over the decades. Reliable financing for regionally-led peace operations honors that service and builds on it.

II. A Security Council Worthy of the 21st Century

Mediation and prevention will carry the United Nations only so far if its central decision-making body remains frozen in the geopolitical landscape of 1945. The Security Council was designed for a world of fifty-one member states. It now serves nearly two hundred, and its permanent

[9] Security Council Resolution 2719 (2023), adopted unanimously in December 2023, established a framework for United Nations assessed contributions to fund up to 75 percent of the cost of peace support operations led by regional organizations, first applied to operations led by the African Union and widely regarded as a model for regional peace operations more broadly. UN press release SC/15544.

[10] Institute for Security Studies, December 2025: two years on, Resolution 2719 remains unimplemented and consensus on its first application was not reached.

membership reflects the victors of a war that ended four generations ago. This is not merely unfair. It is the principal reason the Council so often fails to act.

Nowhere is the imbalance more glaring than in the exclusion of entire regions from permanent membership. Whole continents that together account for most of humanity, and that are the subject of much of the Council's agenda, hold no permanent seat. The case for change is clear and of long standing: an enlarged Council that admits new permanent and non-permanent members and ends the structural under-representation of the global majority. The Pact for the Future, adopted in 2024, for the first time named the redress of this historical injustice a priority,[11] and even some of the permanent members have now signaled support for expanding permanent representation.[12]

What I will do

Let me be clear: no renewal of the United Nations can be complete or credible while its Security Council remains unreformed. I will make that case without apology, and I will keep it near the top of the agenda rather than let it drift, as it has for thirty years.

I will also be honest about what this office should and should not do. It is not for a Secretary-General to anoint which nations should hold new seats; that choice belongs to the membership, and a Secretary-General who plays favorites forfeits the trust the role depends on. What I will champion is the principle, not the personalities: permanent representation for the regions that history has left out, across Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia, and an end to a veto that too often turns the Council from an instrument of action into a venue for paralysis.

The Secretary-General does not vote on the Council's composition, but the Secretary-General is not without influence, and silence on a question this central is itself a choice. I will not be silent. Where I can convene, I will convene. Where I can press, I will press. We need a Council that reflects today's world, not the world of the last century.

III. Development and a Fairer Fiscal World

Renewal must reach the lives of ordinary people, and to do that it must reach beyond the Organization's own budget to the wider economy that shapes those lives. The promises of the international system mean little to a country that cannot afford to keep them.

The Sustainable Development Goals were the world's promise to itself, and that promise is not being kept. Fewer than a fifth of the targets are on track for 2030.[13] The failure is rarely one of ambition; it is one of delivery, and its deepest cause is financial. I will not treat development as something the United Nations does to countries, but as something it helps them do for themselves, shifting from direct implementation toward strengthening national and local capacity, so that governments, enterprises and communities can carry the work forward long after the agencies have gone.

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[11] Pact for the Future (22 September 2024), Action 39: reform should redress the historical injustice of under-representation and improve the representation of under-represented regions on the Security Council.

[12] In September 2024 the United States announced support for expanding permanent representation on the Security Council, adding to its long-standing support for new permanent seats for additional states and regions. US Mission to the United Nations.

[13] United Nations, The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024: with less than one fifth of the targets on track (about 17 percent), the world is failing to deliver on the promise of the 2030 Agenda.

Nowhere is that financial obstacle heavier than in debt. In the developing world, home to more than three billion people, one country in three now spends more on debt interest than on the health or the education of its people.[14] Money that should build clinics and classrooms is sent abroad to service loans, and the goals stall for want of the fiscal space to pursue them.

The overall gap between what the Goals require and what is being financed now stands at roughly 4 trillion dollars a year.[15] That gap will not be closed by aid alone. It will be closed by unlocking new sources of finance rather than new layers of debt, and by rewriting rules that were written for a different age.

I bring to this a record, not only a position. I led the Yasuni-ITT Initiative in Ecuador, the first serious attempt to compensate a developing country for leaving its oil in the ground rather than extracting it, an idea that anticipated the debt-for-nature and loss-and-damage mechanisms now in use across the world.[16] Ecuador went on to complete the largest debt-for-nature conversion in history, retiring roughly 1.6 billion dollars of sovereign debt and freeing hundreds of millions for conservation.[17] These are not abstractions to me. I helped build the instruments themselves.

What I will do

First, I will make the reform of unsustainable debt a standing priority of this office, using its convening power and legitimacy to move creditors, debtors and the financial institutions toward faster and fairer resolution.

Second, I will turn the United Nations' own development work toward enabling national and local delivery, measuring success by what a country can sustain on its own rather than by what the system spends.

Third, I will champion a fairer financial architecture, including a real voice for developing countries in the rules that govern global finance and taxation,[18] and I will scale the innovative instruments, from debt-for-nature conversions to blended finance, that turn conservation and development into investable propositions. Renewing the system that funds the world's ambitions is not separate from renewing the United Nations; it is the same work, seen from the side of those the Organization exists to serve.

IV. Human Dignity in a Changing World

The Charter placed the dignity of the human person alongside peace and development, and I will keep it there. The erosion of human rights is the earliest warning we have of coming conflict,

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[14] UNCTAD, A World of Debt 2024: in the developing world, home to some 3.3 billion people, one country in three spends more on debt interest payments than on education or health.

[15] Financing for Sustainable Development Report 2024, UN DESA: the financing gap for the Sustainable Development Goals is estimated at about 4.2 trillion US dollars a year.

[16] Yasuni-ITT Initiative (Ecuador, launched 2007): a proposal to leave oil unextracted in exchange for 3.6 billion US dollars in international contributions; discontinued in 2013, after which a 2023 national referendum voted to halt extraction.

[17] Galapagos debt-for-nature conversion (2023), the largest of its kind at the time: Ecuador retired approximately 1.6 billion US dollars of sovereign debt, freeing some 450 million US dollars for marine conservation. Galapagos Life Fund; Pew Charitable Trusts.

[18] UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation: the General Assembly adopted its terms of reference, advanced by developing countries, by a vote of 125 to 48 in August 2024. Tax Justice Network.

because wherever rights are crushed, instability follows close behind. I will defend the independence of the United Nations' human-rights work, protect the space of civil society and of those who defend the rights of others at great personal risk, and measure our protection of the vulnerable by what happens to real people rather than by what is written in resolutions.

The dignity of the person now reaches into domains the founders could not have imagined. Within a single generation, artificial intelligence, biotechnology and the digital economy are remaking knowledge, work, warfare, and the human body itself, and they are moving faster than our ability to grasp their consequences. Today these forces are shaped by a handful of states and companies, largely without the world's consent. No single government can write the rules alone; no corporation holds the legitimacy to write them for everyone; and no purely technical body can supply the trust such decisions demand. This is the United Nations' role: not to govern these frontiers, but to be the one table at which every nation, and not only the powerful, helps set the guardrails. Building on the Global Digital Compact,[19] I will make the United Nations a credible convener on artificial intelligence and the new technologies, so that their benefits are shared and their risks are not written by the powerful alone.

These are, above all, the questions of the young. A generation is coming of age that will inherit both the promise of these tools and the price of our failure to govern them, and too many of them are quietly concluding that the institutions of their parents can no longer deliver.

I will bring young people into the work of the United Nations not as decoration but as a matter of legitimacy, because the renewal I am describing is, in the end, being carried out on their behalf.

No account of human dignity is complete without action on the changing climate, which now influences the security, the livelihoods and the survival of hundreds of millions. Here I will be candid. For all the conferences, communiques and reports the United Nations has produced, too little has translated into practical, sustainable results, in part because climate has become a political lightning rod where debates over the questions of science and policy become muddled and turned into battles of competing ideologies and finger-pointing. I respect the scientific consensus. But respecting the science does not oblige us to accept policies that would upend the lives of the very people we mean to protect, no matter how well-intentioned they are. Pretending otherwise has cost us dearly in terms of lost-time and increased risk. The United Nations can help lower the temperature of this debate and raise the seriousness of the response.

This response must widen. The most climate-vulnerable are pushed deeper by disasters they did nothing to cause. We cannot lose sight of this.

For years the focus has fallen almost entirely on lowering carbon emissions. Mitigation remains essential, and energy transition and the shift to cleaner energy are now irreversible. But we owe equal attention to adaptation, to protecting the lives, homes and infrastructure of people already living with floods, drought and rising seas, most of them in nations that did least to cause the harm.[20] The fund intended to help them recover from loss and damage has attracted only a few

[19] Global Digital Compact, adopted as an annex to the Pact for the Future, 22 September 2024: the first comprehensive global framework for the governance of digital technologies and artificial intelligence.

[20] UNEP and the World Meteorological Organization: the least developed and developing countries contribute a small fraction of global greenhouse-gas emissions yet face disproportionate climate impacts.

hundred million dollars against a need measured in the hundreds of billions,[21] and that shortfall is itself a question of justice.

What I will do

First, I will defend the independence of the United Nations' human-rights work and the people who carry it out, judging our protection of the vulnerable by what happens to real people.

Second, building on the Global Digital Compact, I will make the United Nations the credible convener on artificial intelligence and the new technologies.

Third, I will bring young people into the institution's work as a matter of legitimacy, not decoration.

Finally, I will pursue a climate agenda that respects the science and the livelihoods of ordinary people alike, giving adaptation the weight it has long been denied and pressing for the finance the most vulnerable were promised.

V. A United Nations Renewed From Within

I turn, finally, to the management of the United Nations institution itself.

The United Nations has become slow, fragmented and expensive in ways that would not be tolerated in any serious government or private enterprise. This is not a partisan observation. It is the conclusion of the Organization's own review of itself.

Consider the scale of the burden. The Secretariat today must implement mandates contained in more than 40,000 resolutions accumulated since 1946. In a single recent year, it serviced some 27,000 meetings, produced more than 1,100 separate mandated reports, and generated roughly 2,300 pages of documentation every day, at a cost exceeding 360 million dollars, close to one tenth of the entire regular budget, spent simply on servicing the machinery of mandates rather than on the people those mandates are meant to serve.[22]

The system has also grown into a thicket of overlapping bodies, with several separate agencies working the same problems, from food security to refugees and migration, each with its own leadership, its own budget and its own administrative overhead, while coordination among them is left largely to goodwill. The result is an organization that spends a great deal of money to move slowly.

All of this is now compounded by a fiscal emergency. The Organization entered an acute liquidity crisis in 2025, with roughly $1.8 billion in assessed contributions unpaid for the year, and the Secretary-General has warned openly of the risk of insolvency.[23]

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[21] Climate Policy Initiative (2025): pledges to the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage reached roughly 768 million US dollars as of early 2025, against estimated needs measured in the hundreds of billions.

[22] UN80 Mandate Implementation Review (2025): mandates contained in over 40,000 resolutions since 1946; in 2024 the Secretariat serviced some 27,000 meetings and produced more than 1,100 mandated reports at a cost exceeding 360 million US dollars, about 10 percent of the regular budget, generating roughly 2,300 pages of documentation each day.

[23] House of Commons Library, briefing CBP-10379 (2025): some 1.8 billion US dollars in assessed contributions remained unpaid for the 2025 financial year; the Secretary-General warned of a liquidity crisis.

In response, the UN80 Initiative, launched in March 2025, has begun the most serious internal restructuring in the UN's history. The 2026 regular budget was cut to about $3.45 billion, roughly 2,900 posts were removed (a reduction of close to 19 percent), and consolidation of administrative and payroll functions has begun.[24]

I support this direction. But I will say candidly what others have been reluctant to say: a renewal driven by a cash crisis is not the same as a renewal driven by a vision, and cuts imposed under financial pressure too often fall on the wrong things, weakening the human-rights and prevention work that is already the most underfunded while leaving deeper structural waste untouched. If I am entrusted with this office, efficiency will not be a budgetary reflex. It will be a governing principle, pursued in good times and bad, and measured against a single test: does this spending reach the person it is meant to help?

Renewal of this kind is, finally, a question of culture. Too much of the United Nations has come to prize process over results and self-preservation over mission. I intend to change that, and I am clear-eyed that a Secretary-General cannot do it by decree. Past attempts have faltered precisely because they were imposed from a single office. This one will be built with allies: partners in the Security Council and the General Assembly willing to vote for discipline, and fresh talent drawn from the private sector and from the global organizations that deliver results in the hardest places, brought in to help modernize how the United Nations manages itself. An institution that embraces change rather than guarding the status quo is a precondition for everything else in this vision.

What I will do

First, I will treat mandate discipline as a permanent function, not a one-time exercise. Every recurring mandate should carry a sunset clause and a clear measure of whether it is working. Reports that no one reads should be discontinued. The objective is to reduce the documentary and meeting burden substantially within a single budget cycle and to redirect those savings to operations in the field.

Second, I will consolidate where consolidation serves delivery, and resist it where it does not. Merging entities for the sake of an organizational chart achieves little. Merging back-office functions, procurement, payroll, human resources and digital systems across the system achieves a great deal. I will pursue shared services aggressively and protect mandates that are distinct.

Third, I will make the Organization's finances transparent and its performance measurable. Member states that pay their assessments are entitled to know what their contributions purchase. I will publish clear, comparable results data, and I will be equally candid that the liquidity crisis cannot be solved by the Secretariat alone: member states must pay what they owe, in full and on time, and I will say so to every capital, without exception.

A Renewal Worthy of the Charter

Let me end where I began. Forty years ago I made a promise to my three children in a basement in Beirut, as the bombs fell, that if they were spared I would give my life to peace. Few who seek

[24] UN80 Initiative (launched 12 March 2025) and UN press release GA/12748: the 2026 regular budget was set at about 3.45 billion US dollars, with roughly 2,900 posts removed, a reduction of close to 19 percent.

this office have lived through war at first hand; I have, and I have spent the four decades since keeping that promise across four continents.

If I am chosen as the tenth Secretary-General, I will renew that promise on the largest stage the world has, and bend this office to the purpose for which the United Nations was created: to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. That promise is as urgent today as it was eighty years ago. What has aged is not the mission but the path the United Nations has taken to pursue it. I am asking for the chance to correct that path, to lead the renewal I have set out here, and to return the United Nations to the work for which it was built.