

Fulfilling the UN75 Declaration Expert Series

Experts Roundtable 3

UN75 Declaration commitments

#5 We will place women and girls at the center and #11 We will listen to and work with youth

Hosted on 1 April 2021

Synthesis of Major Insights & Recommendations

On April 1, 2021, a consortium of independent civil society organizations took part in the third roundtable of the “Fulfilling the UN75 Declaration Expert Series,” where thought leaders from global civil society engaged UN Missions and Secretariat officials in a candid dialogue on progress, challenges, and further measures needed to meet two of the twelve commitments presented in the [UN75 Declaration](#). This discussion, sponsored by the Coalition for the UN We Need, Baha’i International Community, the Center for Women’s Global Leadership, Search for Common Ground, Soroptimist International, and the Stimson Center, addressed the UN75 Declaration commitments #5 on “We will place women and girls at the center” and #11 on “We will listen to and work with youth.”

The series is intended to take stock of progress toward achieving the twelve UN75 Declaration commitments, introduce alternative institutional, policy, and normative measures for improving implementation, and consider steps for achieving such reforms, including a possible follow-on intergovernmental process as recommended in the [Eminent Persons Open Letter](#) signed by 49 former world leaders and UN officials. The expert series aims to contribute insights and concrete proposals for consideration in the Secretary-General’s forthcoming (*Our Common Agenda*) report—expected to be released by September 2021, prior to the UN General Assembly (UNGA) High-Level Week.¹

The roundtable’s lead-off speakers included: **Azzam Tomeh**, Search for Common Ground; **Krishanti Dharmaraj**, Center for Women’s Global Leadership; **Vivek Rai**, UN Women; and (*moderator*) **Saphira Rameshfar**, Representative to the United Nations, Baha’i International Community.

Key Lead-Off Speaker Quotes

“If the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us anything, it is how interdependent we are. And this generation of young people with creative ideas [...] can be a catalyst for shaping a better world. The

¹ The opinions, assessments, valuations, positions and, where applicable, judgements expressed are within the responsibility of the authors or the individual persons making the corresponding statements in this publication, which aims to capture and distill, while employing the Chatham House Rule, the ideas conveyed by the 1 April 2021 expert roundtable participants. They do not necessarily and not in every case correspond to the positions and opinions of the event co-sponsors and all participants.

Report of the UN Secretary-General on Youth, Peace and Security, presented in March 2020, lays out a bold opportunity to reimagine a partnership model for youth.”- **Azzam Tomeh**

“All women must be safe. The United Nations has everything it needs and the concentrated power to eradicate gender-based violence, but do we have the will?” - **Krishanti Dharmaraj**

“It’s not enough to bring youth and women to the table; it’s about creating an equal table, where decision making is shared equally.” - **Vivek Rai**

“It was observed that UN staff are sometimes reluctant to engage on issues that are sensitive and controversial, such as sexual and reproductive health, gender issues, families, and violent repression of young people who are engaged in activism. This is fed by a culture that is too often risk-averse and submissive to power, and it is further expressed by a system that rewards people for avoiding discontent with Member States.” - **Roundtable participants**

UN75 Declaration Commitment #5 - We will place women and girls at the center

Major Points Voiced by Participants

- The feminist movement is strong, but how do we find ways to ensure that the people who are driving this work become equitable partners in decision-making? Sharing power within the multilateral structure does not come easy.
- Gender-based violence (GBV) transcends borders, religion, culture, class, and all other identities. GBV must be recognized and addressed as a pandemic.
- Gender inequalities—and all inequalities—cannot be part of the future. We can change course, and the Secretary-General’s report in September 2021, should offer a sense of direction and opportunity.
- The idea that gender parity will not be achieved for 130 years must be rejected. There are opportunities to rethink and build gendered and intergenerational multilateralism.
- Intersectionality is key to expanding the framework and the understanding that women and girls are not a homogenous group; it also includes the LGBTQ+ community.
- There is a concern that anti-rights and anti-gender mobilization efforts are increasing in multilateral foras, which are often the only avenues of recourse for marginalized groups, such as the trans community.
- We need to acknowledge that certain groups, even among feminist movements, hold more power and privilege than others.

- Structural exclusion exists, even within the feminist movement. For instance, several leaders of Action Coalition 6 did not invite any NGOs to be part of their Commission on the Status of Women delegation. Support for feminist organizations can be mixed and imbalanced.
- The UN captures well the issues surrounding gender equality, including through campaigns and high-level dialogues, but this needs to be better translated into action at the community level.

Recommendations from individual participants: Policy, institutional, legal, normative, and operational reforms

- Gender equality benefits all and placing women at the center requires ensuring they feel mentally, physically, and sexually safe. Safety is central to well-being. Human rights frameworks provide us with opportunities for addressing GBV.
- Advancing women and girl's rights also entails being inclusive of the marginalized communities within the wider societal group of women and girls, in all their diversities, such as indigenous women, women of color, LGBTQ+, and those from all socioeconomic and educational backgrounds.
- It is critical to ensure financing for gender equality in pandemic recovery efforts, but also "building forward better" with a feminist lens that allows for proper power rebalancing.
- There is a need to close the data gap to adequately reflect the reality on the ground for issues such as child marriage and trafficking. At the same time, the narrative must be changed to show that women are not just victims, but leaders and protagonists of change.
- Intersectional approaches must be understood along with structural exclusion. The response to structural exclusion is more than sharing power but shifting power to allow other under-represented voices opportunities to meaningfully participate. Patriarchal attitudes must change or a seat at the table is only tokenism.
- Engaging men and boys in placing women and girls at the center require healthy role models of manhood/masculinity and accountability.
- Similar to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women being adopted as a city ordinance or resolution, we need to think of bringing the Generation Equality Forum to cities. Cities are where many modern trends are enhanced, they harbor deep inequalities, and have been greatly impacted by COVID-19. Bringing cities closer to gender issues will be beneficial in the long term.
- The gender-based violence framework should be used over that on violence against women and girls, given that the former is more inclusive. The GBV framework includes (in addition to violence and discrimination against women and girls) bisexual, lesbian, trans women, and trans and intersex men—or those that don't identify as either (nonbinary).
- The issue of gender-based violence, combined with peace and security issues, must continue to be a standing agenda item at the United Nations.

UN75 Declaration Commitment #11 - We will listen to and work with youth

Major Points Voiced by Participants

- Youth are standing in solidarity with one another, but they are frustrated with the systems in place. Governments and multilateral systems have not adapted to the needs of youth. In some countries and regions (such as Africa), youth are the majority of the population, but they are overlooked by governments who have the tools to help them succeed. If young people fail today, countries struggle to succeed in the long run and meeting their commitments to norms and practices for an open and just society for all.
- The pushback against multilateralism from several countries has prompted youth to question the UN and global cooperation, in general. The UN's 75 years of history depicts an organization that is patriarchal and bureaucratic, and in need of revitalization.
- Youth mobilization and action are driven forward by many stakeholders, but we still need to find ways to include youth as equitable partners in decision-making. Also, representation within youth groups is important, as those marginalized tend to not have a voice in multilateral settings.
- There are governments that do not work for youth and even less with them. One of the avenues young people have to share their voices at the UN is through the UN Delegates program. However, the program is led by governments, which means that it is not the youth who are deciding who represents their voice at the UN.
- Youth can benefit from intergenerational cooperation. Older generations have the experience to guide younger generations, and this knowledge can be handed down to youth, along with resources and funding. It's important to also understand that youth can contribute new perspectives and approaches to older generations.
- Structural exclusion responses should go beyond sharing power. Power should be shifted to marginalized groups, and that power should be given up to allow those who are directly impacted to be included and heard.

Recommendations from individual participants: Policy, institutional, legal, normative, and operational reforms

- It is crucial that the UN responds to the new generation, who are engaging and working on issues of social justice and equality. The UN must encourage and facilitate partnerships between youth, civil society, and multilateral systems to create a space that reflects the world we know today.

- The UN must expand its space for discussion to include youth and civil society. In expanding civic spaces, increased communications between Member States and youth will create new ways of learning and empower youth to expand their contributions to transnational issues of critical importance.
- Intergenerational approaches can help to engender positive structural changes across the UN system. Youth engagement does not mean that other age groups are supplanted, but rather that older generations are co-creating and co-designing solutions with younger generations for a better future for all.
- International institutions must create and use parallel channels of communication to reach marginalized and disenfranchised communities. Utilizing existing channels of communication more efficiently can allow messages and knowledge to reach grassroots levels and vice-versa. Those with decision-making power have to leave their places of safety and engage marginalized communities to understand and better advocate for their needs.
- At the country level, youth should be engaged and encouraged by the United Nations to speak out and lead on issues of critical importance.
- International institutions should aim to invest U.S. \$1 per young person living in the world today (this could be over U.S. 2 billion in investments in youth) and remove burdensome requirements for accessing grants.

Participant List

Mio Akita, Permanent Mission of Japan to the UN
Dana Khalid Al-Anzy, Y17 Society & Qatari youth activist
Josue Arguelles, A Call to Men
Kehkashan Basu, Green Hope Foundation & NGO Major Group
Mabel Bianco, Foundation for Studies and Research on Women (FEIM)
Robert Chatrnuch, Permanent Mission of Slovakia to the UN
Isabela Cunha, UNICEF
Krishanti Dharmaraj, Center for Women's Global Leadership
Amanda Ellis, Global Partnerships, Wrigley Global Futures Laboratory at Arizona State University
Safae El-Yaaqoubi, Embassy of Qatar to the United States
Maria Fernanda Espinosa, President of the UN 73rd Session of the General Assembly
Sharon Fisher, Soroptimist International
Susana Fried, CREA
Rebecca Hallin, Permanent Mission of Sweden to the UN
Carlos Infante, Generation Change International
Xenia Kellner, Young Feminist Europe
Giovanna Kuele, Igarape Institute
Dragica Mikavica, Save the Children
Sahar Moazami, Outright International
Vitorino Mello Oliveira, Permanent Mission of Portugal to the UN
Richard Ponzio, Stimson Center
Alana Poole, Executive Office of the Secretary-General
Vivek Rai, UN Women
Saphira Rameshfar, Baha'i International Community
Alma E. Santa Ana, Permanent Mission of Mexico to the UN
Anjum Sultana, Canada YWCA
Azzam Tomeh, Search for Common Ground
Megan White, Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom to the UN
Yoriko Yasukawa, Foundation for Global Governance and Sustainability
Soon-Young Yoon, International Alliance of Women
Nudhara Yusuf, WFUNA, Former Youth Dialogue Coordinator for UN75
Daniel Zavala, Permanent Mission of Costa Rica to the UN