

Speaking Notes – Dialogue 7 Feb 2022 -Mandeep Tiwana, CIVICUS

The UNGA OCA Consultation's timing coincides roughly with the mid-point of Agenda 2030. This should give occasion to pause and evaluate progress or lack of on what's arguably the greatest ever human endeavour to create just, equal and sustainable societies.

The Sustainable Development Goals are unique in their emphasis on the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development. Their adoption in 2015 was hailed as a historic achievement. Seven years down the line, several gaps in progress on these three dimensions remain.

The [World Inequality Report](#) reveals a stark imbalance in incomes between those at the top and those at the bottom. The poorest half of the world's population account for 8% of global income while the top 10% garner 52% of the income share. At least 811 million people go to bed hungry every night according to the [World Food Programme](#). There are at least 82 million forcibly displaced people according to the [UN High Commissioner for Refugees](#). Despite commitments in Agenda 2030 on responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision making; access to information and fundamental freedoms; and effective civil society partnerships, civic space conditions around the globe remain highly challenging. The [CIVICUS Monitor](#) reports just 3.1% of global population live in countries with enabling civic space conditions. From the Arctic to the Amazon, environmental degradation and loss of bio-diversity which fuel climate change remains a persistent global threat yet several countries refuse to give up their reliance on fossil fuels and wish to peak emissions before reducing them.

Within the above scenario, global military spending has continued to rise even during the pandemic, inching towards \$2 Trillion according to the [Swedish International Peace Research Institute](#). If states are serious about financing for development all they need to do is make systematic cuts in military spending and divert money from paying for weapons of war to creating better lives for all. The Our Common Agenda report highlights critical global issues such as vaccine equity and social protection floors which could be enabled by reduction in military expenditures.

With regards to the Our Common Agenda report and consultations, we'd like to highlight three key issues for consideration. These are:

1. New Social Contract and UN reform – the UN Secretary General's emphasis on rebuilding trust, fostering gender equal participation and social protection is a step in the right direction. Further, considerations for 'networked, inclusive and effective multilateralism,' reform of the Trusteeship Council and an updated resolution on how civil society and other stakeholders engage with ECOSOC, UNGA and UNSC require a rethink about how deliberations are carried out and decisions are made at the UN. Current processes are bureaucratic and heavily state centric, often screening the UN from the everyday struggles and demands of people, including victims and those excluded from decision making. Mechanisms like a World Citizen's Initiative and a UN Parliamentary Assembly can provide pathways to match the ambition of the OCA report with transformative actions. (See the We the People's Campaign on Inclusive Global Governance <https://www.wethepeoples.org/>)

2. Promoting Integrity of Public Information – the UN Secretary General's call for a global code of conduct to counter the "infodemic plaguing our world" is a step in the right direction. UN will need to equip itself to effectively call out states engaging in rampant censorship and propaganda which are contributing to the current infodemic. Integrity of public information and investments in civic space go hand in hand. Enabled civic space where the media and civil society are able to freely verify public

information is crucial. A plan of action to implement the UNSG's [Call to Action for Human Rights](#) as well as the [UN guidance on protection and promotion of civic space](#) could be considered.

3. Civil Society Participation – the UN Secretary General's report notably affirms that civil society remains a part and parcel of the UN's work across sectors and at multilateral forums. The Secretary General's recognition of the role of Civil Society as an integral part of the UN eco-system is a step in the right direction. To foster inclusion, UN entities have been urged to set up civil society focal points. A first step by the UN to enhance the effectiveness of these focal points could be to gather good practices across UN agencies and departments on civil society participation and engagement. Moreover, the work of the focal points could be better harmonized through the appointment of a Civil Society Envoy to drive the UN's outreach to Civil Society and ensure more consistent modalities for participation across UN agencies and offices. The call for a Civil Society Envoy which has been acknowledged in the OCA report needs to be considered in earnest. (See Together First Coalition's Case for a Civil Society Champion <https://together1st.org/storage/novapages/CaseforUNCivSocChampion.pdf>)