

# Restoring Hope

## **Vision statement of Christiana Figueres**

Candidate of Costa Rica for the position of UN Secretary-General

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The objective of the United Nations is to provide the architecture through which countries can address their common problems, peacefully resolve their disputes and support each other in building strong, prosperous and just societies. This is the foundation of international peace and security. Much has been achieved by this unique institution over the past 70 years, thanks to the dedication of its Member States and the commitment of its staff worldwide.

The question before us now is how to address the exigencies of a future so mired in complexity. In the face of rampant injustices, abuses, unrest and conflicts with increasing ramifications, there is understandable despair. But given the stakes, failure to address these challenges is simply not an option. Humanity has created these challenges, and we ourselves can and must step up to address them.

To do that, we need a UN that reclaims its standing as a beacon of hope; a reason for global optimism that calls us toward a compelling vision of the future, rekindling our confidence and inspiring each and every one of us to live up to our highest purpose.

**It is for the opportunity to pursue this vision that I am honored to accept the nomination of Costa Rica as candidate for the position of UN Secretary-General.**

## **If appointed, my time in office will be guided by two ways of working and will pursue four priorities.**

### **Ways of working**

**Collaboration:** Many of our toughest challenges extend beyond national boundaries and are global or regional in scope. In an age of global resource scarcity, we are becoming not only more interconnected but more intricately interdependent. To address this we need a new model of collaborative diplomacy. The gain of some can no longer come at the expense of others. The Paris Agreement has taught us the fundamental importance of respecting national circumstances, needs and interests. But it has also taught us that we can honor national priorities while finding ways of joining efforts for the common good, and focusing on our common humanity.

**Integration:** At its birth last century, the UN's strength rested on the three main pillars of its Charter: peace and security, human rights, and development. In this century, its strength must be built on the integration of these three pillars - such that success in one fosters success in the others.

Without stronger mechanisms for managing critical cross-border issues, including resource management, refugees, and migration, we will not build the shared security needed to support everyday practical cooperation. Without adequate restrictions on the proliferation and use of weapons, we will continue to see growing displacement and inequalities generated by conflict and violence. Without climate stability there will be no food or water security, reducing our ability to remain in our communities, towns and countries. Without securing women's rights to education, land ownership, and political participation, we will not see a rise in equitable economic development. Without building more resilience to natural disasters, we will not create the economic or political space to plan for long term development. Without respect for human rights, citizen participation, and reduced corruption, we cannot build the conditions for a sustained peace.

For these reasons and many more, integration will be fundamental in our increasingly intertwined world.

## **Priorities**

As Secretary-General I would pursue four core priorities. These are set out in more detail in each section of the document.

- 1. Peaceful settlement of disputes and strengthening our crisis response capacity**
- 2. Planting the seeds today to achieve a sustained peace tomorrow**
- 3. Forging an inclusive model of multilateralism: collaborative diplomacy**
- 4. Strengthening the United Nations**

## **Leadership**

The Secretary-General's essential role is to uphold the principles of the UN Charter, advance the agreements of Member States expressed through the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council, and manage an effective organization. But given the unique convening power and the unparalleled reach of the UN, the Secretary-General's core role is that of a leader. The UN, and the world, needs a Secretary-General who is a bridge builder, who can listen and consult, who can help resolve disputes, build agreements and anticipate problems. Beyond this, the UN also needs an organizational leader with a strong moral compass who sets a culture of collective wisdom, constant improvement, transparency and integrity. She or he needs to be a strategic leader who is able to build teams with the skills and experience needed to deliver outcomes.

But the world now also needs an inspirational leader who rekindles the sense of hope and determination that characterized the UN at its birth. These sentiments are currently in short supply and the risk of large elements of the global population falling into apathy and hopelessness is very real. I believe that together we can change this, and that an era of invigorated international cooperation and confidence can be ushered in.

If I am honored to be elected to serve the nations united under the blue flag, I will bring all of my purposeful optimism to this task. But to make that vision a reality, we must do it together.

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# **1. Peaceful settlement of disputes and strengthening our crisis response capacity**

The UN as a whole continues to be increasingly needed, and its role in maintaining international peace and security is as essential today as it was at its birth. The range of threats to peace and security extends from interstate wars, through civil wars - including those that spill over into neighboring countries - to more recent, mounting global threats like terrorism.

Today we are witnessing a downward spiral of political dislocation, where lack of trust in political systems is leading people to seek solutions based on exclusion, division and isolation by community, ethnicity, religion, gender or nationality. Some of those who seek to impose their will through force have become more sophisticated and, unfortunately, more cruel - with increasing disregard of human rights.

The levels of human suffering in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Sudan, Nigeria and Yemen, among others, and the staggering, unprecedented numbers of the displaced and of refugees, shame us all. The UN system, led by the Security Council, is called on to address such threats, finding itself increasingly tested and stretched. It must rise to the task. Member States and their UN organization must do better for humanity by working to find solutions together.

The UN shines when it integrates all aspects of power – diplomatic and military, economic and legal, cultural and moral – in a multilateral fashion. But alignment can only come through patient and consistent diplomacy, and through mobilizing public support for action. The Secretary-General must exercise her or his responsibility in creating this consensus through private diplomacy and public advocacy, within the bounds of the office.

Reinforcing the role of the UN should start with greater investment in early-warning and reports to the Security Council, and in preventive diplomacy – both to be based on improved collaboration and information sharing.

Both States and the UN system must make effective use of Chapter VI on peaceful settlement of disputes. The Charter speaks of negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies in accordance with Chapter VIII and UNSC 2171, or other peaceful means chosen by the parties to a dispute. The Secretary-General must be tireless in encouraging States to see that, just as we need laws to regulate life within a state, we must give primacy to international law in relations between States.

When conflict looms or has begun, the Secretary-General must be equally assiduous in assisting the formation, where it would be helpful, of a group of closely concerned States and in supporting them in finding a way forward to reconcile contending parties.

The international community is immensely grateful for the work of international mediators, once the warring parties have come to the conference table. We should consider whether the UN should develop a larger internationally-recruited cadre of facilitators with legal, diplomatic and humanitarian skills, so that

sufficient resources can be mobilized quickly both before and after the Security Council has formally agreed UN action.

The number and complexity of peacekeeping operations has grown since the start of the millennium. Not only has the length of deployment of peacekeeping missions increased, they are more frequently deployed in fragile environments where there is no peace to keep.

So we would all benefit from strategies to ensure the success of peacekeeping missions – by giving peacekeeping operations both clear mandates, and the resources and equipment needed to achieve those mandates in a realistic timeframe. The Secretary-General must also be able to refuse to put personnel deployed under the UN control in harm's way if they do not have the military or political support needed to succeed.

The Peacebuilding Commission has had an important role in supporting the Security Council's work by assisting countries emerging from conflict in a wide range of areas, including by addressing the underlying causes of destabilization. In this regard, in the search for peace there is no substitute for diplomacy.

The UN and its Member States recognize their obligation not just to address security threats, and to protect civilians, but also to minimize the suffering of displaced people and to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.” Protection of civilians, in particular of women and children, is a key challenge in areas ridden with conflict. Difficult though it is, the Secretary-General should reinforce, and where necessary lead, the effort to raise funds from donors that measure up to the scale of the problem. Too often, campaigns have fallen short.

The scale and extent of the crises we face require an even greater partnership between UN agencies and other actors to alleviate human suffering as a result of conflict. We need yet more joint planning between agencies and organizations, longer time frames for humanitarian programs, and flexible funding to better suit evolving relief needs.

Finally, implementing UN Security Council Resolution 2272 and taking strong steps to end sexual exploitation and abuse by parties to conflict and by peacekeepers is imperative so that civilians have faith in those who have been tasked to protect them. Ensuring our peacekeeping forces are held accountable must start at home. Immunity is not impunity.

In short, the Secretary-General should focus on creating an environment that allows us to achieve the best cooperation and collaboration possible among Member States. Only through multilateralism can we address the growing threats of this century effectively and build stability and peace.

## **2. Planting the seeds today to achieve a sustained peace tomorrow**

Although the United Nations is often preoccupied with addressing immediate crises, we must ensure that space is created to allow a greater focus on deeper and longer-term peacebuilding efforts. Prioritizing the UN's work to seed peace globally today is our best insurance for stability tomorrow.

An essential component of this is securing the comprehensive coverage and consistent application of international law. This is particularly critical now since rising environmental and resource pressures are already creating international tensions. It is clear that the current system of managing international disputes over resource sharing, maritime boundaries and sea lane access is becoming overstretched by increasing resource demands. In order to preserve the rule of law as the route through which countries seek to resolve their disputes, these systems must be updated and strengthened. The Secretary-General has a duty to act as the guardian of international rule of law, ensuring the United Nations continues to be fit for purpose.

A key part of this guardianship is protecting and promoting adherence to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This declaration is not only a fundamental priority; it is our moral compass. Seeking an end to human rights abuses and to global injustices will lay the foundation for a more prosperous future for all. The task starts at home. The Human Rights Up Front Initiative to ensure the UN system takes early action must be continued and strengthened. In the field we need to work together to ensure citizens around the world can freely speak their minds without reprisal, practice the religion they want without discrimination, and have equal opportunity no matter the markers of their identity.

The work of the UN must also reflect the fact that peacebuilding does not begin with crisis nor end when hostilities cease. In fragile States and regions, peacebuilding is a continuous task of strengthening the capacity of societies to manage disputes and change. That means promoting good governance by creating safety and security in times of peace through security reforms, encouraging credible systems of law and justice, and securing women and youth's equitable participation in political processes, as mandated by Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 2250. It also means addressing the enablers of conflict by making it harder to profit from exploitation of conflict minerals, illicit wildlife products or timber; cracking down on organized crime, corruption and stopping illegal profits moving into offshore financial centers; and preventing the proliferation and accumulation of weapons.

The arc of peacebuilding also extends over the transformational and inspiring goals for action that the international community agreed in 2015, as therein lie the seeds of long term peace and conflict avoidance.

The 2030 Agenda, encompassing the Sustainable Development Goals, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Sendai Framework for Disaster and Risk Reduction, and the Paris Climate Agreement, give us a clear direction. Effective and coordinated implementation of these agendas on the ground is a fundamental pathway to food security, water security, energy security and the avoidance of forced migration. They therefore must be understood as an urgent and sustained priority of the UN system, as they are building blocks of tomorrow's peace.

The 2030 Agenda is critical for social safety and economic prosperity. We have to work on all of the areas equally and in tandem, challenging as this will be. Environmental protection, economic growth, and human development are intrinsically linked and interconnected, not separate and to be pursued in isolation. We now have a global development agenda that sends an unmistakable message: addressing environmental degradation goes hand-in-hand with eliminating poverty and improving the lives of the most vulnerable. Appropriate and timely risk management and resilience reforms should be built into and across the system.

We have a historic opportunity, in fact a historical responsibility, over the next few years to sow the seeds of lasting peace and prosperity by delivering and exceeding the historic commitments made in 2015. Those agreements give us a framework that, taken together, will improve lives and grow global prosperity in an environment that can continue to flourish. But while we appreciate their benefit, we must also realize their urgency. We have reached the point where there are no second chances. If we fail to stabilize the climate or prevent irreversible environmental damage in a timely manner we cannot just fix it later. It would condemn millions of people to levels of poverty from which they could never emerge, leading to ceaseless conflict and a world that is unacceptable to all of us.

One core element that must be recognized is that our goals will only be achieved if women and girls are at the center of our efforts. Women and girls still face profound inequalities across all countries, both in public and private spheres. We must recognize that greater gender equality means better outcomes for everyone, and that when we invest in a woman or a girl, we see the ripple effect of her potential, as well as the potential of her family, her community, and entire society.

The next Secretary-General must bring the full authority of her or his office to encourage and accelerate the efforts of a broad network of national and subnational governments, private sector, finance sector, insurance sector and civil society at large to implement the 2030 Agenda for people, planet, prosperity and - above all - peace.

### **3. Forging an inclusive model of multilateralism: collaborative diplomacy**

The 21st century has already been defined by problems that seem too big to fix. Inequality, social exclusion, terrorism, resource depletion and environmental degradation all combine to create a sense of powerlessness in many individuals across all countries. This sense of exclusion and that the system isn't working itself creates deeper problems - as responses that range from depression and apathy to radicalization further destabilize our world. This cycle must be stopped before it consumes our collective future.

The truth is that the problems of today can only be addressed through working together; using multilateral dialogue to find common ground and take collective action. The last few years have seen a discrediting of multilateralism, as international dialogues from trade to humanitarian agreement have disappointed time and again, and these failures have themselves further fed the narrative that our problems have grown beyond our control.

It does not have to be this way. The Paris Climate Agreement was not an accident; it was the result of a strategy and an attitude. It was the culmination of six years of patient rebuilding of a broken system that had lost all trust and confidence, into one that was capable of entering an upward spiraling of commitment and ambition. It was the result of a collective realization that we would all be losers if we did not find a way to win together. It was the harvest of years of careful listening that enabled the elusive common ground to emerge.

Paris can be an anomaly or it can become the norm for multilateralism in the 21st century. We must ensure it is the latter, so that we can rebuild the world's confidence in the ability of the UN and its Member States to work together and solve the toughest problems of our times.

## **To achieve this, we need to do two things:**

First, we need to embrace a more dynamic multilateralism that is already emerging. It has been emerging through the creative, and often unseen, efforts of millions of people over the past decade. This approach blends the best of governmental and non-government action, it preserves the legitimate and primary role of States while inviting the contribution of others, recognizing that more can be achieved through the collaboration of all.

Second, we need to take responsibility for the fact that political and public attitudes underpin our ability to achieve ambitious multilateral agreements. We must work to ensure that citizens feel like stakeholders in a future they are invested in since, without this, disengagement and despair are the only path open to them. We can do this through deliberate outreach and by celebrating each small marker of success. By cultivating purposeful optimism we can break the cycle of apathy and start feeding a positive cycle of ambition.

The Paris Agreement was not just a climate change agreement - it was a multilateral commitment to a safer future and to making the changes we need to in order to achieve that. I believe the lessons learned are critical and can be applied elsewhere. History has taught us that by fully embracing the UN's unique role in convening, catalyzing, legitimizing and codifying international collaboration we can unlock the latent potential and energy of a much wider range of actors. By embracing this new form of multilateralism we can address the wide array of international peace and security threats we face. It is our best chance to improve the lives of people everywhere.

## **4. Strengthening the United Nations**

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The UN is facing increasing systemic stresses from a confluence of emerging global challenges and rapidly shifting political and security dynamics.

The organization has dedicated and professional staff that often work in the field in dangerous, difficult and challenging environments. However, motivation is uneven across the organization, given the internal difficulties of succeeding with routine operational tasks, let alone the challenges of instituting innovative approaches.

No organization is static. Five major waves of UN reform were conceived between 1992 and 2007, followed by the last Five Year Action Plan for 2011-2016. The majority of these change proposals to make the organization more efficient and effective have been implemented to varying degrees, including those set forth in the recent Five Year Plan. This shows that the institution can evolve.

Yet despite these operational and structural changes, there is a prevalent feeling that the UN has stagnated, operates excessively in silos, and is not fit for purpose. Further reforms under the three separate pillars are on the table for consideration, and concrete suggestions have been made on how to enhance their integration, including in the report “The Future We Want, The United Nations We Need”. All of these will require careful assessment by the new Secretary-General and Member States in terms of costs and benefits. Progress on these issues will rely on alignment between Member States through the 5th Committee, PGA, staff unions, secretariat, and leadership of the organization.

Leaving structural changes aside for further collective consideration, at the heart of any organization is its culture. The most transformative internal challenge for the UN is to evolve toward a culture of innovation and flexibility. This cannot be achieved through a singular event or a particular reform initiative. It is a process that needs to be buttressed by a commitment to continual improvement, over time, across the institution. If the UN is to deliver its full scope, the new Secretary-General will need to strengthen the esprit de corps of the organization. She/he will have to lead the evolution of the organizational culture to one that enables instead of constrains operational activities, is results oriented, delegates more authority to the field, and does a better job at managing performance in order to move toward stronger accountability.

Organizational change is hard and adjustments can be uncomfortable. It should always be led in a manner that is appreciative, respectful and committed to the continued well being of all those who have sacrificed so much to support the UN and its mission.

## **Invitation**

We have a transformational opportunity over the next few years to advance toward a better world. And we must. Nothing else is acceptable. By standing still we will lose ground, and we cannot.

The United Nations cannot work miracles, but it is indispensable. Our rapidly changing world presents many interlinked challenges, but also has the resources and capacities to not just solve them, but to build a better and safer life for everyone on the planet.

The path ahead is untested and fraught with trials, some now predictable, many still unknown. But an approach that brings optimism instead of despair, and a perspective that looks for possibilities instead of resignation, can create a cycle of increasing confidence and hope. I believe that together we can precipitate this change on the basis of the fundamental conviction that collective human ingenuity and dedication can and should be harnessed for the common good.

**Impossible is not a fact, it is an attitude.**

**That is my conviction and my experience.**

**It is also my invitation; together we can restore hope.**