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'Revitalise the multilateral project'

Before the UN's 75th anniversary, it's time to listen to the people again, says Special Advisor Fabrizio Hochschild Drummond

Read this interview in German.

Next year, the UN will celebrate its 75th anniversary. Whilst this is certainly a reason to celebrate, various member states are increasingly pursuing unilateral approaches. How does the UN intend to counteract this development? And how can it convince these states of the multilateral approach?

UN Secretary-General António Guterres' vision is to take this opportunity of the 75th anniversary to go back to the people – the constituents of the United Nations – and to have a global discussion with them about some of the global threats facing humanity. Some of the global trends that will determine our future, that will determine the viability of the future of the planet. We have to listen to their views on the role of international cooperation, on countries coming from across the world to work harder to solve these problems.

We hope that in basically taking the microphone out to the people and listening to them, we will find a way to revitalise the multilateral project. The latter is so essential at a time when we face an ever-growing number of truly global threats that can only be solved, not through individual unilateral action or even by regions their own, but by cooperation across the whole globe.

What role could the Franco-German initiative "Alliance for Multilateralism" play here?

The Alliance for Multilateralism is a complementary effort and reflects a widespread feeling that we need to make an extra effort now if we're to save and revitalise this endeavour that has served humanity with ups and downs for 75 years. It's also important that the Alliance for Multilateralism remains open and cross-regional. But let’s face it, in a perfect world the Alliance for Multilateralism wouldn't be an

association of 65, but an association of 193 countries. In essence that is what the UN was intended as.

We are currently observing a growing number of protests by ordinary citizens worldwide, in Lebanon, Ecuador, Chile and others, as well as protests here in Europe. The protestors demand a bigger say in political and economic issues. How can the dissatisfied citizens be more involved from the UN's point of view?

It's hard to generalise because in each country the nurturing factors are a little different. But there are certain commonalties: a loss of sense of agency, a growing sense of distrust in traditional institutions, the weight of inequality, which even though humanity has made very good progress on poverty reduction, we're doing much less well when it comes to inequality. We need, at the political level, to listen and take seriously the demands, the concerns of those who feel left behind, who feel not listened to. And often that's the youth. Listening is important – and then tackling some of the big challenges of our time. Climate is one, inequality is another.

We also need to address some of the fears and uncertainties that have been brought about by the disruptive effect of new technologies and the resurgence of global politics. We need to be much more mindful and attentive to people's voices. That's also the reason why the Secretary-General wants to do this global listening tour for the UN's 75th anniversary. He wants to be able to bring back those voices to heads of state in September 2020, when all of them will be gathered in New York to mark the 75th anniversary of the United Nations.

This interview was conducted by Joanna Itzek and Claudia Detsch.



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