

UNA-UK CEO Natalie Samarasinghe's remarks to the Coalition for the UN We Need Global Town Hall, 22 June 2021

I was pleased to be part of the team that delivered the UN75 global conversation last year, and to have been able to continue that work by supporting Igarape's digital stakeholder consultation - to help refine the broad priorities and ideas that emerged from the global public into bold, actionable proposals.

But today, to be clear, I am speaking as CEO of UNA-UK and co-founder of the Together First movement represented hundreds of NGOs that are deeply concerned about the health of our global system and actively working to make it more inclusive, transparent, accountable and - above all effective.

The observations I am sharing with you are my personal ones. I will focus on three themes I saw emerging from the digital consultation and from other civil society discussions - including with Member States.

The first theme is vision. In 2015, the SDGs and Paris Agreement were two highpoints bucking an otherwise gloomy trajectory, with progress imperilled due to the financial crisis, and the lack of action to tackle its root causes, provoking cycles of protest, conflict and backlash. What these documents did was set out a powerful vision for the future. They are still relevant - more so than ever - but after the disruption and devastation of the last years, there is a desire for inspiration, to go beyond the 'art of the possible' that was achieved in 2015 - and to feel like we are connected not only through shared trials of COVID but through a shared vision and purpose.

People are calling for a global system that takes account of future generations, adopts a human security approach and works with stakeholders to anticipate and respond to crises and challenges. They want a global system that champions a swift and just transition to 'carbon zero' well before 2050, works with stakeholders to manage global commons and global public goods, and nurtures the notion of global cooperation as a global good. They want a global system that delivers a green, equitable and inclusive recovery from COVID-19; supports female leadership and inclusive decision-making at all levels; and measures progress in relation to human and planetary well-being. And they want a global system that embraces inclusion; makes participation and consultation part of its DNA; and leverages the capacities of stakeholders, including through partnerships.

The second theme is transformation. What are the transformative shifts that will deliver our vision for the future. This is a challenging one because so often, solutions seem to pale in comparison to the scale of the problem - no single treaty or mechanism, however innovative, will be enough. Nor are these solutions in the gift of the UN.

Like the SDGs, like Paris, it is what happens at the regional, national and local level that counts, with support at the global level in terms of alignment and capacity. So proposals looked at mechanisms to boost foresight and preparedness - a council for global resilience, the application of the IPCC model to issues such as health, and to oversee global commons and global public goods. They put forward various approaches for creating a new social

contract, with monitoring linked to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

And the third theme - humility and recognition of the UN's role. This surprised me - I've spent years dealing with fervent UN supporters who want it to be a world government, and with fierce critics who fear it already is. Perhaps COVID has hammered home both the need for, and limitations of, the UN as an institution. This time, there were far fewer calls than expected for a security council that rules everything, and many that positioned the UN in a supporting role, pro-actively driving the shift from global system to global partnership by boosting the capacity of partners on the ground and focussing on its added value - tackling complex emergencies, providing mediation, championing human rights, putting its data to better use, helping societies to navigate the shift to digital and - perhaps of particular interest to this audience - protecting and expanding civic space, including through the appointment of a civil society focal point, as well as initiatives to increase input into the UN, for instance, through a parliamentary assembly, or citizens' petition initiative.

Let me end by noting that I have seen throughout the last year a genuine desire on the part of the UN to engage and to listen - let's seize these opportunities to make our voices heard.