



**Opening remarks by Ms. Tatiana Valovaya
United Nations Under-Secretary-General
Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva**

WAAS – UNOG Conference: Global Leadership for the 21st century
15 December 2020, 10:00-10:30

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Welcome to the Palais des Nations in Geneva, a place where diverse expertise from all fields is gathered; where international organizations, governments, civil society, academia and the private sector closely collaborate; and where actionable ideas flourish.
- It is a great pleasure to co-host such a high-profile event which combines a wealth of knowledge from all disciplines. I would like to thank our numerous partners and experts, whose contributions, papers and panel discussions laid the intellectual foundation of this conference.
- I would also like to thank our esteemed co-host, the World Academy of Art and Science, for this excellent collaboration.
- The World Academy of Art and Science was founded in 1960 by outstanding scientists, who wanted to harness their knowledge for the good of all and who were concerned about the devastating effects that the misuse of science can have. WAAS Fellows are pioneers in their fields and strong advocates for issues such as democracy and global governance, international security and peace, climate change, global health, education and equality.
- Our partnership with the World Academy of Art and Science has been a long and successful one, born out of the deep desire to better utilize the findings of science to jointly address global social challenges. Our work has many overlapping areas, and it was only a logical step to let it culminate in a grand project like this.
- When we started this project over a year ago, the task we gave ourselves and our partners, was already complex: to develop global leadership strategies for social progress in the 21st century.

- At that time, we could not foresee how a microscopic virus would reinforce the importance of our work. UN Secretary-General Guterres evoked a powerful image when he compared the pandemic to an X-Ray, that laid bare existing fragilities in our societies: Global change is continuing at record speed and complexity, increasing uncertainty especially for the most vulnerable in society. We are faced with urgent ecological challenges and we are lagging behind in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Our challenges are coupled with a dangerous retreat from multilateralism that renders conventional leadership models ineffective or even potentially obsolete.
- We need more active global leadership and transformative strategies for our future.
- The United Nations has therefore started a globe-spanning discussion this year: On the occasion of our 75th anniversary, we reached out to the people. Through dialogues – two of those held here - and surveys, we asked them what kind of future - and what kind of UN - they want and need. The majority of respondents see the value of cooperation to solve the challenges ahead of us - from global health, to climate change and conflicts. An important priority for them is to rethink our social and economic system, to build a more inclusive version of it and to rebalance the relationship between economic growth, environment and public priorities. For the vast majority of people, solidarity, multilateralism and international cooperation are the most important tools for this.
- Today's conference therefore comes at an ideal time and the results of the UN75 initiative will be an important impulse for the ongoing discussions.
- The aim of the next two days is to go beyond assessing the status quo and to articulate actionable strategies for sustainable global leadership, including for the workings of the United Nations and its partners.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I am looking forward to many inspiring discussions with actionable ideas for a better future.
- Thank you very much.



Closing remarks by Ms. Tatiana Valovaya
United Nations Under-Secretary-General
Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva

WAAS – UNOG Conference: Global Leadership for the 21st century

16 December 2020, 16:00-17:00

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- It has been a privilege to co-host this conference and participate in such rich and diverse discussions. I would like to thank the World Academy of Art and Science for a successful and inspiring partnership that will certainly outlive this project.
- I share the conviction that hard times frequently inspire extraordinary solutions. The past two days are proof of that. We have heard from various distinguished leaders - thinkers, experts and practitioners in their respective fields, and their inputs have been a great source of lessons learnt from the past, but also of innovative thinking and new ideas. I would like to thank everyone for their participation in and valuable contribution to this conference.
- Let me focus on some key takeaways from these two days, with the United Nations system in mind.
- The United Nations system has long been the most advanced international governance model humanity has devised to manage global affairs. However, the world around us has greatly changed over the last decades, and global leadership has not kept up with the pace: The 21st century is marked by a world population soon reaching eight billion people and a planet that is suffering heavily under the human impact. We live in a highly globalized world marked by inequalities among and within countries. We are part of unprecedented technological advancements, which have both positive and negative consequences for our collective well-being.
- These trends are all part of a broader paradigm shift, a systemic transformation that started before the COVID-19 pandemic. As many panelists have emphasized, a new social and economic paradigm is shaping up before our eyes.
- In this challenging environment and considering the current deficiencies in terms of global leadership, innovative solutions are required to catch up with the accelerating pace of change and to leave no one behind. International organizations are at the heart of the multilateral

system, but currently are not entrusted with the required power and resources to effectively tackle the many serious challenges the world faces.

- Moving forward, various scenarios could unfold, including a return to “business as usual” or a continued shift towards unilateral actions. However, as this conference has confirmed, there are many forces striving towards a transformed multilateralism.
- Fabrizio has already spoken about our UN75 initiative and I wish to underline three points: The findings show that most people are united in a strong desire to find solutions collectively. The overwhelming majority believes in solidarity and sees the United Nations at the center of achieving a better future for all.
- So, what is the way forward for the United Nations?
- The pandemic has been a powerful wake-up call. In the thematic discussions, we have heard new strategies for areas such as human security and peacebuilding, the economy and the environment, financing the SDGs.
- The Sustainable Development Goals will remain our yardstick for the next decade, and this has been confirmed in all 12 sessions. They are our fundamental framework for addressing human security in all its dimensions and will be key to build back better.
- Panelists have also repeatedly stressed the social and economic tipping point we are facing and the need for social justice. We must rebuild our society and economy to be more inclusive, equitable and sustainable. This is fully aligned with the most important priorities of the United Nations and it transpired through our UN75 dialogues. Our international community needs equitable access to global resources – from tangible ones to intangible ones such as knowledge, information and technology.
- Lastly, climate change is the defining issue of our time and it affects us all without exception. Climate change exposes deep inequalities within our societies and threatens the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. It has been encouraging to see how climate action has been a mainstream topic throughout all sessions. The United Nations is working with all its force towards tackling climate change. As one speaker aptly put it: We cannot rebuild glaciers that have already melted.
- That leads me to an important point: What are the means to ensure that our priorities are successfully addressed?
- The UN75 dialogues have also revealed that many see the United Nations as being too distant from people’s lives. We need to provide more entry points for engaging with and through the UN to enhance the trust and public confidence in multilateral organizations.
- The United Nations needs to be more inclusive. Today we have heard strong voices of civil society, youth networks and social movements, especially in the area of environmental protection. We need to build on this momentum. International decision-making needs to

include the voices of not only governments, but also of local and regional actors, youth leaders, women leaders, civil society, the business community, academia and many others. One of the ideas presented during this conference was a global public polling platform. I believe that our outreach in the context of the UN75 initiative, with two dialogues held in Geneva, aimed mostly at youth audiences, can serve as a good example to take this proposal forward.

- Many participants in this conference have also called for better inter-agency coordination, for breaking siloes across disciplines and greater multi-stakeholder initiatives. The most serious challenges ahead of us are transnational in nature. The United Nations needs to foster more networked problem-solving approaches that inspire better solutions.
- So, how could this look in the day-to-day work of international organizations?
- If we look at the need for a more inclusive and networked multilateralism and at the most important priorities for the next decades, we see that International Geneva is well equipped to lead by example and is already doing so. The discussions have mentioned the need for a global platform for action. International Geneva offers an excellent testing ground for global governance innovations. The city is home to the Permanent Missions of 180 Member States, the headquarters of many international organizations, 750 non-governmental organizations, a large private sector, many media outlets and other actors. The diversity of voices across disciplines, professions and geographies makes Geneva a unique environment to forge new synergies.
- In my office, we have set up several initiatives to make UN Geneva more inclusive and open to partners. For example, the SDG Lab, which also participated in the session on SDG financing yesterday, is a platform to connect actors in Geneva and beyond to promote work on the Sustainable Development Goals. Also, the Perception Change Project creatively communicates about the work of international organizations in Geneva. This is extremely valuable to make the UN more approachable and promote the value of our work.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- One important last question remains: How do we create the momentum for visionary leadership for the coming decades?
- The challenges that our common planet faces are real, and – as we have seen in many discussions - the answers really do lie within our grasp. Many of those will be published in the report following our joint project. In this endeavor, we need ‘all hands on deck’ to move towards this new form of multilateralism. We also need greater political will – or courage as one speaker defined it -, determination and contributions of Member States, underpinned by the United Nations system; with participation from all relevant actors and all generations– to keep our promise to humanity.

- I trust that we can count on all speakers and participants of this event in creating the much-needed momentum for change.
- Thank you very much for your participation and your commitment to global leadership fit for the 21st century.