

*ECOSOC Contribution to the
75th Anniversary Commemoration of the United Nations*

**Multilateralism after COVID 19:
what kind of UN do we need at the 75th anniversary?**

17 July 2020 from 9:45 – 11:30 am.

Opening Remarks by the Moderator, as delivered

H.E. The Honourable Kevin Rudd AC

Chair of the Board of Directors of the International Peace Institute

Thank you very much, Madame President of ECOSOC,

It is great to hear just now from the Secretary-General, António Guterres, and friends of the UN around the world.

There is a temptation, I think, in any such gathering, for us to always regard the challenges of our own ages as being unique, uniquely difficult, uniquely impossible or just unique.

I think as we, in this particular panel, seek to look at the future of the UN system, it is always useful to reflect, just for a moment, on our history. If we think for a moment about our predecessors, those who had gathered together in San Francisco in 1945. They would regard their challenges as unique, uniquely impossible: how to build a multi-lateral system out of the ashes of the Second World War.

Then, if you think of predecessors around fifteen years later, at the time of the Cuban missile crisis. When we were about to reduce the planet to nuclear ashes, I think our predecessors then would have regarded their challenges as unique as well.

And so we come to our own age and we look at the difficult, impossible challenges of COVID-19 and, yes, they are unique as well, in their public health dimensions and their economic dimensions.

But it was just for such reasons that we decided, as a community of humankind, to come together, to form this body 75 years ago. I am always reminded of one of the previous occupants of the chair of the Secretary-Generalship, Dag Hammarskjöld, who when asked what the purpose of the UN was said “our mission is not to bring us to heaven, but to save humanity from hell.” And I think it is that level of simple effectiveness and pragmatic nature of our mission which commands our attention today.

So, when we are asked in this seminar on the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the UN what kind of UN do we need today, the question is the same as to every age.

Number one, what are our normative standards as an international community and how are they reflected in international law?

Secondly, how do we give practical effect through these standards to the institutions of the UN system in order to make a real difference in solving the problems of our age?

And so, this brings us to the important work done right now by the UN. , We should all get behind the Secretary-General's reform programme across all three pillars of the UN system to underpin the effectiveness of the system. I commend his work in doing that.

Finally, as we go to the panel, and looking at the challenges of our age and COVID-19, and what are those effectiveness challenges in public health, it is between us to develop a vaccine, between us to agree that it is a global public good, and then, once it is developed, to then deliver that vaccine to 7 billion members of the human family, no small challenge.

On the global economic recovery – and we will hear soon from Ángel Gurría – it is to deliver a return to employment; but it is to deliver a return to an economy which is sustainable so that Agenda 2030, climate change and biodiversity are at the center of our world economic recovery programme.

These two missions on public health and sustainable economic recovery are at the heart of this Economic and Social Council. When ECOSOC was established, way back when, one of my Australian predecessors, Dr. Evatt, talked about Article 56 as being the Australian pledge for employment coming out of the ashes of the Second World War. It seemed like a big challenge then but it is what we are looking at again today, so as we get behind the Secretary-General and get behind the institutions of the UN system, we need again, a revitalized coalition of States, a coalition of policy willing, of constructive powers, deploying our political diplomatic resources to make our system as effective as it can be given the challenges we have.

President of ECOSOC,

As we address these questions, in this particular seminar today, we are advantaged by having such a great panel: Ángel Gurría, Secretary-General of the OECD; Yasmine Fouad, President of the 14th meeting of the conference of parties of the UN Convention on Biodiversity; Sanda Ojiambo, CEO and Executive Director of the UN Global Compact; Zhang Xinsheng, President of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN); Jayathma Wickramanayake, the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth; and Julia Sanchez, Chair of the Board of Directors of CIVICUS and Secretary-General of Action Aid International.

It is a great panel and I am looking forward to this discussion.