

Summit of the Future?

Civil Society Must Reclaim the United Nations

Friday
21 June 2024

11:00 - 12:00

Palais des Nations
Room XXV

The importance of the role played by civil society representing the interests of the people, the unheard and those fighting for human rights, and to protect the environment at the international level is at an all-time high. In New York in September during the "Summit of the future", member states will discuss the "multilateralism we want", in a context of shrinking space for impactful civil society participation in UN processes. Against the backdrop of a trust and cooperation crisis in multilateralism, and the weakening of intergovernmental coordination mechanisms, civil society organizations are raising the alarm. We, civil society entities advocating the commons, reclaim the United Nations.

Because "We, the people..." is more than member states. The United Nations is our place, where citizens, through civil society organizations, defend human dignity and promote human rights, peace and development. It is up to the States' obligation to implement and guarantee these common objectives. We are speaking out today because they are incapable of doing so. The United Nations system is blocked by neo-colonial dynamics. The democratic potentials in UN diplomacy is suffocated by privatized states which constantly block the intergovernmental interplay, by turning it into their own interests. This is to the detriment of international cooperation, peace processes, human rights and the right to development. A stronger, adequately funded, decolonialized multilateral system led by United Nations is needed more than ever today, if we are to restore international law and the promise for a future in this world.

Because "We, the people..." is certainly not for private interests. We shall no longer accept to be mixed and confused with actors pretending to promote the social agenda, but in reality defending their vested private interests, as is the case with today's "multistakeholderism" and "networked multilateralism". This is the camouflaged arrangement for the relevant inclusion of the élites of the corporate sector, including in their philanthropic variant.

We are not naïve. We need reliable ground rules at the UN. We claim rules compelling the private sector to have a role, surely, but a role that is directly linked to guaranteeing social and economic rights and the right to development.

Today, private actors are more often than not at the center of structural conflicts of interest, in globalization's deregulated landscape, when it comes to international regulations about the fight against climate change, peace processes or the right to development. We are people and organizations fighting for human dignity and social rights, respect for ecosystems and the environment, for peace and human security. They are not. The difference could not be wider. WE are the civil society that multilateralism urgently needs to tackle the polycrisis of contemporary history.

Panelists will discuss a new report analyzing civil society engagement in UN fora, and propose ways forward to promote the protagonism of people and grassroots organizations.

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