



“SUMMIT OF THE FUTURE” – But what about the Present? A critical approach and reflection on the Summit of the Future’s Action Days

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Monday, 23rd of September of 2024. The Pact for the Future has been adopted and the Summit of the Future is about to come to an end, with successful results, most will say: we had two Action Days where youth and civil society took part, and then the Pact was adopted — despite Russia's attempts to derail it. A motion submitted by the Democratic Republic of the Congo to reject Russia's amendment was accepted by a resounding majority of 143 votes in the General Assembly.

However, did we not wake up on Thursday, the first day of the Action Days, with the news that Israel had violated international humanitarian law, as well as the territorial integrity of a sovereign State, by detonating exploding pagers and radios in Lebanon, reaching a death toll of 32?¹ And did we not wake up today, the last day of the *once-in-a-lifetime* Summit, with the news that the country launched hundreds of airstrikes in southern and eastern Lebanon, killing more than 350 people in the deadliest day since the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war?² In the shadow of these events, one must ask: When we speak of the Summit and the Pact for the Future, whose future are we really talking about? And what becomes of the present?

The Action Days, intended to engage a broad spectrum of voices—youth, civil society, private sector, academia, and local authorities—to provide the opportunity for inclusion, underlying the importance of all of those actors for the implementation of the Pact for the Future. Youth, in particular, were highlighted as catalysts of change. Terry Otieno, the UN Major Group for

¹ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR). (2024, September 25). *Exploding pagers and radios: terrifying violation of international law, say UN*. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/09/exploding-pagers-and-radios-terrifying-violation-international-law-say-un>

² Associated Press. (2024, September 25). *Lebanon-Israel strikes: Hamas war updates*. AP News. <https://apnews.com/live/lebanon-israel-strikes-hamas-war-updates>



Children and Youth's focal point for disaster reduction, declared at the Opening Ceremony, **"We are the present. We are the future. The time to act is now."**

Yet, despite the rhetoric of inclusivity, there were clear signs of exclusion. During a panel with Secretary-General António Guterres, who admitted to the mistakes made by his generation, the conversation ended up shifting to the so-called "budgetary constraints" preventing youth participation in decision-making. This contradiction—acknowledging youth as essential while failing to make room for them—echoed throughout the Summit. Shirley Chisholm in that very same situation would tell us that, if "they don't give us a seat at the table, we shall bring a folding chair." But in this table, there seems to be no space left.

The first day of the Action Days saw forums on topics like Anti-racist Economies that leave no one Behind, but true dissenting voices remained rare. An indigenous woman could only speak during the final round of questions, and while her input was valuable, it was symptomatic of a broader dynamic: lip service was paid to inclusion, but few concrete proposals were made, specially on day one. Which was even more frustrating, considering that it was the "Youth-led afternoon", leaving us again on the side, while trying to gather all our realities under the very same umbrella.

Nevertheless, the frustration came after, as I joined the panel on Innovative Solutions in Humanitarian Action. There, we heard amazing and heartwarming stories from survivors and refugees, we discussed initiatives and even mentioned how the trauma passes from one generation to another. Still, the Youth Ambassador for the Kingdom of the Netherlands claimed his country centered youth refugees in its policies, acknowledging their resilience and leadership. Are we talking about the same country that has asked for an opt-out of the European migration policies?³ During those days, I truly hoped for a live fact-checker. As Amina J. Mohammed, the Deputy Secretary General of the UN shared, "Chad was the poorest country in the world and still welcomed two million refugees. Opened their schools and hospitals for them. Their system collapsed, but they still did. And some of the richest countries in the world complain about welcoming 10 thousand." But being so the case, I believe, the best person to speak on a refugee panel is not a representative of a country that is literally closing the doors for the people that seek a better future — or a future at all.

³ Quell, M. & Casert, R. (2024, March 18). *EU migration: Dutch far-right leader Wilders calls for stricter rules amid influx*. AP News. <https://apnews.com/article/eu-migration-netherlands-wilders-far-right-50085da4973432a115677afbd34c100d>



The day ended with a Closing Ceremony in the ECOSOC Chambers, where two young women leaders—Isadora, a gender and disability activist from Chile, and Leticia, a climate and sustainability activist from Ecuador—highlighted the unique challenges faced by indigenous communities regarding climate change, that threatens their lands, traditional knowledge, and way of living. Their words were powerful, yet they had been relegated to the closing session, their names not even featured in the official program. This sidelining of marginalized voices, particularly from the Global South, was compounded by the visa issues that kept many from attending altogether. Despite the Summit's claims of broad engagement, structural barriers remained.

But most importantly: no one. Not a single panelist mentioned the brutal violation of international law committed by Israel the day before. A Security Council meeting on the matter was taking place in parallel while we were discussing how to put objectives on paper. Objectives for the future, objectives that were inclusive, that left not one behind, that served all humanity. Objectives, technically by and for the youth. But whose youth? Whose future?

The second Action Day began with words on how to derive impact and catalyze change. Navigating through the schedule, I decided to attend a panel on Translating Gender Equality into Transformative Action. I was struck by the data presented by Sima Bahous, executive director of UN Women. She advocated for the appointment of a female Secretary-General and highlighted the alarming state of gender inequality worldwide. But once again, the victims were overshadowed by high-level representatives. This dynamic repeated itself in the last panel of the day before the Closing Ceremony, when there was a review on the UN High Impact Initiative to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls: while the room was packed for the speeches of the dignitaries, it emptied when the survivors took the stage. Jaha Dukureh, a survivor of female genital mutilation, described how she had risen despite others wanting her to remain a victim. "They forgot I am a seed," she said. Yet I couldn't help but wish more people had been there to hear her.

These events reminded me of the broader commitments made by the UN in 2015 with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) promised to end poverty, protect the planet, reduce inequalities and ensure peace and prosperity for all. But how far have we really come? Only 10% of the heads of state present for the Summit were women. Debt continues to be used as a tool for economic



colonization and control of the Global South,⁴ disproportionately impacting women and girls,⁵ but in the forums on Tax Cooperation and Debt they decided not to address it.

The panel on Parliaments and Multilateralism began with the words of Mr. Lukas Mandl, talking about the European Parliament's role and responsibility in upholding the human rights protected by the United Nations. Concerning, if we consider how his parliamentary group - *EPP* - sides policies that are not precisely rights-centered, such as their position on migration and asylum, for which they pushed towards a greater budget for Frontex⁶, that systematically overlooks (and commits) human rights violations against asylum seekers in the sea.⁷ The moment came, where a deputy from Lebanon took the stage and stole the show. She was the first woman. The first of only two speakers raising their voice on genocide. **The only black woman speaking.** And the only one who spoke on behalf of the youth, the ones on the streets, on the protests, the ones who camped at Universities, and the ones who are suffering the bombing on their own skins. She claimed to be sick when reading the Agenda, and made the other Parliamentarians face their hypocrisy and disconnection while talking big words on the importance of multilateralism to upholding human rights, but not saying anything on what was happening then. What is happening right now.

The session on Reforming the UN Security Council for an Equal and Sustainable Future offered little comfort. The Security Council was labeled as the biggest failure on multilateralism. The veto has been nationalized and weaponized. "Because the members who oppose its extension believe it would be a threat to their national security. And it can only be a threat if it is a weapon." The Pact for the Future includes a commitment in action 41(b) of "*credible, timely and decisive action by the Security Council, in exercise of its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, to prevent or end the commission of genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes.*" But what happens when veto-wielding powers deny the reality of genocide, as the U.S. did with Gaza, and will do now

⁴ Woolfenden, T. (2023). *The colonial roots of global south debt*. Debt Justice.

<https://debtjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/The-colonial-roots-of-global-south-debt.pdf>

⁵ Gosh, J. (2021). *Delivering climate finance for inclusive, locally-led adaptation: Can the adaptation fund pioneer new approaches?* IIED. <https://www.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2021-12/20691iied.pdf>

⁶ Liboreiro, J. (2024, May 7). *EU elections: What do parties want to do on migration and asylum?* Euronews. <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/05/07/eu-elections-what-do-parties-want-to-do-on-migration-and-asylum>

⁷ Chereseva, M. & Stavinoha, L. (2024, February 26). *Schengen in sights: EU and Frontex overlook violent Bulgarian pushbacks*. Balkan Insight. <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/02/26/schengen-in-sights-eu-and-frontex-overlook-violent-bulgarian-pushbacks/>



with Lebanon? Multilateralism remains paralyzed by national interests... as it happened as well in Syria, Myanmar and Ukraine.

The United Nations was founded on the promise of “**Never Again**”. And it happened once again. It has clearly been happening since October the 7th for the Palestinian population, but we must be aware it did not start then. It is happening in South Sudan. It is happening in Ukraine. It is happening to the Rohingyas in Myanmar, to the Uyghurs in China, and to indigenous peoples all over the world. We must reflect on the words of Giles Duley, who, in a discussion on the Protection of Civilians in Urban Settings, asked: “When did we stop feeling anger and rage when seeing entire cities come to ashes?” Have we become so numb to the suffering of civilians that we prioritize future goals over addressing present crises?

During those days, I have had several times the doubt of whether it was “Summit for the Future” or “Summit of the Future”. It is the second — and I guess it makes sense, as we talk about a future that today, simply, is not guaranteed. The Pact for the Future rightly sets long-term necessary global goals, but we must not let it become an excuse for inaction today. As the youth are marching all over the world for Palestine, for Ukraine, and against climate change, we must not stay silent. When we say, “the time to act is now,” we should not only mean drafting a declaration of principles for the future—but ensuring that this future is secured for us all: **We the Peoples of the United Nations**.

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