



**Office of the President
of the General Assembly
79th Session**



**Concluding Palaver Tree Dialogue on
The Future of Multilateralism: Leading through Crisis, Rebuilding Trust**

4 September 2025, 1 p.m. - 3.15 p.m.

**International Peace Institute,
12th floor, 777 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017**



Informal Summary

As part of efforts to revitalize the General Assembly's work, the President of the General Assembly convened a final Palaver Tree Dialogue on the *Future of Multilateralism: Leading through Crisis, Rebuilding Trust*. The dialogue gathered 26 Ambassadors, including the Presidents of the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council, and civil society experts. Below is an informal summary of the discussion.

Opening segment:

In his opening remarks, the President of the General Assembly stressed the importance of dialogue and diplomacy based on the UN Charter, reflecting on the challenges ahead, the need for reform of the United Nations, and the importance of courage and optimism. Dr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, President and CEO of the International Peace Institute, in his opening remarks, emphasized that the United Nations was not conceived as an instrument for consensus but as a marketplace for ideas. He encouraged diplomats to proactively engage and contribute ideas and to honour the role of General Assembly in finding solutions to crises, particularly when the Security Council was not able to produce them.

Panel Discussion:

Moderated by Dr. Ivor Fung, Chef de Cabinet of the President of the General Assembly, a panel discussion took place, featuring Ms. Minh-Thu Pham, CEO of Project Starling, who addressed the theme of "Multilateralism at a crossroads: Key challenges and seeds for renewal"; and Dr. Youssef Mahmoud, Senior Adviser Emeritus of the International Peace Institute, who addressed the theme of "Transforming multilateralism with the UN at its center through a futures-back thinking approach". H.E. Mr. Lok Bahadur Thapa, President of the Economic and Social Council; and H.E. Mr. Sangjin Kim, President of the Security Council for the month of September, served as respondents. This was followed by a discussion among the participants, moderated by Dr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein.

Facilitated Discussion:

1. Multilateralism at a crossroads

Participants drew attention to the crisis of trust in the multilateral system, which could be perceived as existing among Member States, between Member States and the public, and between the United Nations and its constituents. In this regard, it was noted that the general population are often unaware of the UN's work and dissatisfied about global institutions which they consider unable to effectively respond to their needs. A strong call was made to streamline the United Nations responsibilities to better showcase its relevance. Some speakers observed that its burgeoning work programme had diluted its focus away from addressing key issues, while many acknowledged the importance of recognising the inter-relationship and equality among the three pillars of the United Nations.

2. Role and potential of the General Assembly

Several speakers emphasized that the General Assembly remains the world's most inclusive, representative multilateral body, yet its potential could be more effectively harnessed. Some saw a role for the General Assembly in mobilising support for the multilateral system, emphasizing its potential as a platform for innovation and norm development.

3. Implementation and action, not just vision

Participants pointed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Pact for the Future, the Awaza Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries, among others, as evidence of the United Nations' excellence in goal setting and vision casting, while also stressing the need for implementation of agreed commitments. "No one has a monopoly on good ideas," one speaker observed, noting that every Permanent Representative (whether from a big or a small country) has the potential to be a catalyst for change. Courageous leadership must amplify solutions. Some advocated a shift towards more active involvement of Permanent Representatives at the United Nations, through the chairing of committees and processes, as well as efforts to advance initiatives and create space for diplomatic breakthroughs. Antipathy, not disagreement, is the greatest threat to multilateralism. Rebuilding trust requires that every Member State is engaged, particularly with 20 intergovernmental processes unfolding in the 80th session. The importance of behind-the-scenes discussions and avoiding prepared statements was raised in this regard.

4. Leadership and political will

Participants described a lack of political will and the need for change among Member States and leadership within the United Nations system. They explored models for leadership, with one panellist advocating a "liminal leadership approach" to transformation, facilitating a process of "crossing thresholds" and moving from a system that is collapsing to one that is renewed and reinforced. Others noted that fear of political backlash can often undermine bold leadership and weaken the United Nations' credibility. It was repeatedly noted that inclusive approaches are critical to legitimacy, with some speakers noting that civil society, women, youth, the private sector, and think tanks, among others, must be meaningfully engaged in leadership processes. A strong call was made for reform of the multilateral system to reflect cross-regional trust in the UN, with diplomacy used more effectively as a tool for preventing conflict, particularly among Heads of State and Government.

5. Importance of inclusive, egalitarian multilateralism

Speakers promoted a multilateral system that works for everyone, especially for those most affected by its action or inaction. Several underscored the need for solidarity among small States, which constitute

the majority of United Nations members and require an effective multilateral system, anchored on the United Nations Charter and international law, for their protection. While small States excel at exerting influence, the question of what prevents small States from mobilising requires exploration and response. In this regard, it was further emphasised by a number of speakers that Member States of the Global South are not waiting on the United Nations or traditional centres of power to assert themselves. They are already coalescing in ways that affect the rest of the world. Small States, in particular, can play a greater role in the General Assembly by elevating the importance of a rules-based international order and more effectively using their clout to harness the General Assembly as a moral compass.

6. Bridging the global-local gap

To address public dissatisfaction over the ability of global institutions to address local concerns, suggestions focused on enhancing the visibility and clarity of the United Nations' achievements at the grassroots level. It was emphasized that trust is earned at all levels. It is imperative that the Organization better explain and communicate its results. More effective strategic messaging is essential. Informal trust-building dialogues, among diplomats and between diplomats and civil society, can be institutionalised to bridge perception gaps. Calls were made to work more closely with regional organizations, which possess a deeper understanding of the local context. There is also a need to restore the urgency of diplomacy. Every Permanent Representative must be engaged, actively briefing and guiding domestic leaders to foster alignment between global and national action.

Looking Ahead: opportunities for strategic action

One year after the adoption of the Pact for the Future, speakers explored how best to embed the Pact into the current work of the United Nations, with some noting that the answer hinges on the idea of inter-relationship: among the three pillars of the United Nations and across both operational and geographic work streams. Speakers looked forward to further discussion on how the United Nations can enhance its capacity for implementation, with some noting that greater coherence between the Security Council and the General Assembly holds the potential for increased responsiveness to the needs of those most vulnerable. Others advocated for improved public outreach, better communication of the UN's work, and a tighter focus on the future of the Organization. In this connection, reform was embraced as a necessary way forward to ensure the necessary adaptation of the UN to the changing geopolitical circumstances after 80 years of existence.
