



INTERNATIONAL WEBINARS AND LIVE EVENTS

WebDebate*: Multilateral diplomacy in times of COVID-19

7 April 2020, by Diplo Foundation¹

* The debate was moderated by Ms **Katharina Hone** (Senior lecturer at DiploFoundation).



Amb. **Umej Bhatia**, Singapore's permanent representative to the UN Office in Geneva: It would be premature to call this time the end of multilateralism and liberal order. There is a need for the UN system, member states to come together, and send a signal of solidarity. It is important not to focus just on the negative aspects (populism, nationalism). The crucial role of solidarity for small countries. WHO very well coordinates the global response.

- **First resolution** adopted by the General Assembly on Covid-19² (submitted by Switzerland, Indonesia, Singapore, Norway, Liechtenstein and Ghana, and adopted by 188 of the 193 states).
- "No time for geopolitical turf battles" a Financial Times **article**³ co-written by the Presidents of Germany, Singapore, Ethiopia, Ecuador and a King of Jordan.
- Singapore, Canada, Australia, Chile, Brunei, Myanmar, and New Zealand committed to **keep supply chains open**, removing any trade restrictive measures on essential goods, esp. medical supplies.

If we do not do anything, this pandemic will take several years, and will go through several regions. A crucial thing: multilateral trade connectivity (supply chain, essential goods) should continue.



Fabrizio Hochschild-Drummond, a special adviser to the UN Secretary-General on the Preparations for the Commemoration of the UN's 75th Anniversary:

The Covid-19 crisis will have effect on how societies work and relate to each other, and cause a dramatic economic and development fallout. We have to look at it through the lens of solidarity, which is particularly needed between the most and the least fortunate countries.

Secretary-General's report⁴ calls to protect the poorest and the most disadvantaged. The initial response will always be a bit inward looking but in this globalization era we have to look to the wealth of everyone. We need to bring voices of more people to the global leaders everywhere⁵.

This crisis has greatly accelerated the trend to digitalization. Digital has shown its many virtues, but it also has a number of constraints: there is a need to overcome the digital divide.

4 key **concluding points**, what is needed is: (1) an honest and objective accounting after the crisis of what went well and what did not; (2) international cooperation to be much more inclusive; (3) a major mindset change is needed (being patriot is not only caring about your own country); (4) digital cooperation should be more inclusive, in order not to exacerbate the global inequalities.



Dr **Owain Williams**, a senior research fellow at the University of Leeds:

The effects of the crisis will be felt not only by the Western countries, but also in the developing world (India, countries of Sub-Saharan Africa). Huge tragedy will unfold unless multilateral system is agile and able to respond (every signal we have is not suggesting this is going to be the case – there is a lack of political will even on the national level). This is the crisis of

unprecedented scale – but it follows a number of other serious pandemic crises. The role of the WHO has to be commended for its crisis response since mid-February, but more funding for the WHO is needed. The role of the private sector is crucial in the development of new technologies to solve new and old medical problems. Work of the UN is hugely important, so is it the call for Global Ceasefire. 3 **concluding points**: (1) the need to invest in Global public goods (health); (2) health, climate and pollution are important values (and not just trade and globalization); (3) need for long-term oriented political and economic global culture.

Launched the "**COVID-19 Diaries**" digital platform, both a therapeutic and communicative tool that encourages people in the global health and diplomacy fields to record and share their experiences

¹ This event is organized within the framework of the International Forum on Diplomatic Training.

² A/RES/74/270: Global solidarity to fight the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)

³ [Five world leaders: No time for geopolitical turf battles](#) of 31 March 2020

⁴ [SHARED RESPONSIBILITY, GLOBAL SOLIDARITY: Responding to the socio-economic impacts](#), March 2020

⁵ 1-minute survey at www.un75.online to collect the views on global priorities on how the UN can do better.



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Comments by participants:

- OHCHR High Commissioner: UNOG is looking at various platforms to conduct virtual meetings with interpretation, and hoping to service an **informal dialogue of the Human Rights Council** with the High Commissioner on Thursday (9 April) with EN/FR interpretation.
- **International organizations**, including **WHO**, are behind the curve, they lack funding – hence the lack of agility in their response.
- Multilateral diplomacy is extremely important for the **least-developed countries** and **small island states**. The importance of the IT-diplomacy interface: many foreign ministries are lagging behind. The digital gap should be taken into consideration to guarantee that everyone can participate.
- The measures imposed, such as border closures or other movement restrictions, are already heavily affecting **developing societies**. They are impacting access to livelihoods for **vulnerable populations**, even further diminishing their ability to access healthcare or other basic services necessitating resources (outside of the impact of the actual disease itself).
- **Other stakeholders: Faith and religious organisations** are often forgotten as important player in multistakeholder space. **International NGOs and humanitarian actors** play a major role in addressing and complementing governments efforts in areas where sometimes politics have failed. In this crisis, the **private sector** should play a more critical role in Multilateral Diplomacy to ensure what it evolved into will be robust and sustainable.
- Pandemics do not happen in the vacuum, i.e. our ways of living are **unsustainable**. That needs addressing.
- We need interconnected and international cooperation for **public goods** such as health, education and clean environment, clean drinking water and sanitation.
- The most important lesson that we should learn from this crisis is that the **multilateral system should be revised** in order to address new kind of challenges, such as large-scale pandemics.
- The extent of the **reform of the UN system** will depend on how the global power balance changes as a result of the crisis. Transformation is necessary, essential even, but there are many interests in maintaining the status quo. Multilateralism that really puts collective interests first will continue to be seen as threatening to some.