



## INTERNATIONAL WEBINARS AND LIVE EVENTS

**Multilateralism in the time of COVID-19** (24 April 2020)

**United Nations** event organized on the occasion of the *International Day of Multilateralism*,  
in collaboration with the

**Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, University of Geneva** and **Foraus**

Co-moderated by **Corinne Momal-Vanian** (Director of Conference Management of UN Office in Geneva) and **Alessandra Vellucci** (Director of the UN Information Service in Geneva).

- UN Secretary-General António Guterres message: “The COVID19 pandemic is a tragic reminder of how deeply connected we are. The virus knows no borders and is a quintessential global challenge. Combatting it requires us to work together as one human family.”
- Preliminary results of the UN75 Survey, based on the responses from 187 countries, indicate overwhelming public support to international cooperation.



**Tatiana Valovaya**, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva

This conversation is needed more than ever before. We are living an economic, financial, social, psychological crisis – a **watershed moment** that occurs every other few centuries. More effective and inclusive system of multilateral cooperation is needed.

**Climate change:** some people denied that it was manmade. We can now see that if we decrease our footprint, we can avoid climate emergency.

**Digitalization:** The digital world would serve nothing, if we did not have many basic but important jobs, which are often underpaid.

**Inequalities and poverty:** poorest countries are suffering the most from the virus.

The crisis will have long-lasting impact on our future. **Three possible scenarios:**

1. Unrealistic scenario – business-as-usual.
2. Pessimistic – forward to the past.
3. Optimistic – more democratic and inclusive new world, not only with global challenges, but also with global solutions.

Covid crisis will pass, but climate crisis, inequality, poverty will remain – and that makes solidarity and international cooperation in achieving Sustainable Development Agenda more important than ever.

**Youth** has the power not only to raise-awareness, but also to hold the world leaders accountable and propose solutions. The exhibition “The Future We Want” will open on 15 May 2020. Visit the UNOG website and vote for your favourite artwork.



**Guy Ryder**, Director-General of the International Labour Organization

Immediate and absolute priority is the **health response**. It is inevitable, however, that this health pandemic will have economic **effects** – estimated by the mid-2020: a loss of 195 million full-time jobs, increase in poverty, vulnerable people to face extraordinary difficulties.

We have to avoid putting the people of the world in front of the **impossible choice**: to protect their health and stay health, or to lose any source of income that they may have.

We need to tackle the health issues, and their economic and social consequences, and “**recover better**”.

There is no solution to climate change, unless we act like the Paris Agreement encourages us to do. We will not be available to achieve the SDGs unless we stick to 2030 Sustainable Agenda.

There is a strong popular support to international cooperation, but multilateralism is confronted with the crisis, governments are withdrawing their commitment to the theory and practice of multilateral cooperation.

We have to understand **why this is the case – and what to do**.



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**Three critics:** 1. Credibility (multilateralism is not effective enough, it is not working very well); 2. Increasing inequality and justice all over the world; 3. National sovereignty.

We need to ensure **social justice**, that people are heard and represented in the world institutions.

One positive thing: 170 million frontline health and social workers (who are often underpaid, the large proportion of them migrants, most of them women) are hailed as the heroes of the moment.



**Noel Curran**, Director-General, European Broadcasting Union

Misinformation and disinformation is despicable, especially when people are vulnerable. Fake news is nothing new. What is new is that they are challenged through social media which reached an unprecedented power.

**Self-regulation does not** work for tackling misinformation and disinformation. There has to be an element of regulation, particularly during the times of crisis. Any action should take into account the **freedom of speech**, there should be no clamp down of freedom of press, or quick introducing of new regulations. We need more **algorithmic transparency** from the social media platforms.

We need to be able to access **independent news on current affairs** – they should be prominent and easily accessible on social media platforms. If Covid taught us anything is that general public, including young people, turn to quality independent news outlets.

We need a multilateral international approach around all aspects – labour, political, media.



**Fabiola Gianotti**, Director-General, CERN

Science is by definition multilateral, **universal** (based on objective facts) and **unifying** (the quest for knowledge is a common aspiration shared by all humanity). It has no race, no political party, no gender. Scientists are “the **new heroes**”.

There is a rise in collaboration between scientists all over the world.

It is clear that the current crisis will increase the inequalities: between the developed and the developing countries, between those, who have access to education and those who do not.

Instead of asking “What is your job / what is your business” we should be asking “**Whom are you taking care of?**” The key word is not competition but collaboration and solidarity.



**Martin Chungong**, Secretary-General, Interparliamentary Union

We need multilateralism that is effective, efficient, inclusive, re-invented to **bring forward new technologies and stakeholders**, including civil society. It is a time to consider the opportunities rather than to challenge its validity. **Parliaments** are coping with extraordinary circumstances. They are embracing new technologies in order to be able to continue to function. Parliaments’ solutions are increasingly **gender-responsive**.

There is a strong case to be made for Multilateralism, for Inter-Parliamentary cooperation, strong support should be given to the United Nations and the specialized agencies from the Parliamentary perspective.

The role of Parliaments is also in holding the rule of law nationally, in the interest of the people.



**Houlin Zhao**, Secretary-General, International Telecommunications Union

The issue of **fake news** needs to be tackled.

**Digital divide** affects even developed people (e.g. the elderly)

**5G** becomes indispensable, and provides countless opportunities of 5G: (e.g. telesurgery).

The issue of **Cybersecurity** becomes ever so important.