

FORUM ON THE FUTURE OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

« *How to reinvent **multilateralism**
in the service of peace, health, and education ?* »

WHITE PAPER

 HOUSE OF **UNESCO**
 **14 MARCH 2026**

Rotary 
District 1660



THE **FORUM** ON THE FUTURE OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

*« How to reinvent **multilateralism**
in the service of peace, health, and education ? »*

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This white paper is the result of the work carried out as part of the Forum held at the UNESCO House in Paris on March 13 and 14, 2026.

Over the course of a year, this initiative brought together Rotary International, 38 countries, 68 Rotary districts, more than 850 participants, as well as representatives from international organizations, government officials, academics, experts, and civil society actors.

Together, they shared their experiences and formulated recommendations based on a common conviction: peace is the essential prerequisite for any sustainable action. Without peace, there can be no health, no education, no economic development, and no environmental protection.

This White Paper compiles the key recommendations resulting from this work.

It is not a final conclusion, but a tool for reflection and action intended to support Rotary clubs, districts, institutions, international organizations, associations, and all those who wish to work for the common good.

The Forum has come to a close. But the work is just beginning.

We invite every reader to take ownership of these recommendations, to build upon them, to share them, and above all, to translate them into concrete actions. This White Paper will only have true value if it inspires initiatives, fosters new partnerships, and helps strengthen peace.

Throughout its history, Rotary has demonstrated that committed men and women can contribute to major advances in our world. True to this legacy, let us pursue this ambition together.

Actions change lives.

Ideas change the world.

Rotary has a duty to champion both.

Mamadou Camara,

Rotary International District 1660 Governor 2025-2026

*En toute confiance,
Paris, le 14.03.2026*



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Mamadou Camara

Governor 2025-2026

District 1660

Rotary International

There are periods in history when societies are called upon to make a choice. Moments when uncertainty grows, when balances become fragile, when institutions are called into question, and when people lose faith. We are living through one of those moments.

Around the world, tensions are mounting. Conflicts are multiplying. Divisions are deepening. The logic of power sometimes seems to take precedence over the rule of law. Identity-based isolationism is on the rise, while trust among peoples is eroding. Even more troubling is that the very idea of international cooperation—long considered an obvious necessity in the wake of the tragedies of the 20th century—is now being called into question.

MULTILATERALISM IS FACING A REAL CRISIS—A CRISIS OF TRUST, A CRISIS OF EFFECTIVENESS, AND SOMETIMES EVEN A CRISIS OF PURPOSE.

But does that mean we should give up? Should we consider international organizations to be a thing of the past? Or, on the contrary, should we reinvent them to make them more legitimate, more open, more effective, and more in tune with citizens' expectations?

This is not a theoretical question. For the challenges we face know no borders: conflicts are multiplying, pandemics are reemerging, inequalities in access to education are grow-

ing, technological and digital transformations are exacerbating tensions, and climate change spares no corner of our planet... No state, no institution, and no people can claim today to act alone.

It is in this spirit that, at my initiative, Rotary International has joined forces with its District 1660 to organize this Forum on the Future of International Organizations, here at UNESCO House in Paris, centered on the pressing question: “How can we reinvent multilateralism in the service of peace, health, and education?”

THE IDEA FOR THIS FORUM WAS BORN OUT OF A SIMPLE BELIEF: IN THE FACE OF THE WORLD'S DIVISIONS, WE CANNOT REMAIN BYSTANDERS.

We must create spaces where international institutions, civil society, experts, public officials, and citizens can come together to envision the future.

Rotary International has held this conviction since its inception. With a presence in nearly 200 countries

and territories, our movement has made mutual understanding among peoples a guiding principle, and District 1660 has further reinforced this with the theme I chose for the 2025–2026 year: “Culture: A Vehicle for Peace and Mutual Understanding.”

For history teaches us one essential lesson: peace cannot be decreed. It must be built. It is built through dialogue, through encounters, through mutual understanding, and through a constant willingness to reach out to others.

This White Paper embodies the legacy of this collective ambition and represents the culmination of this initiative.

Dear friends, partners, institutions, and members of civil society, let's make this work our own!

It brings together the key findings from the roundtable discussions and puts the challenges identified by the various contributors into perspective. It does not merely analyze the

divisions in the world; it offers a direction and formulates concrete proposals aimed at strengthening the role of international organizations. Let's take these proposals to heart and put them into practice. Let's keep the conclusions of this forum in mind as we take action, draw inspiration from the proposals in this book to come up with new ones, and view them as roadmaps for planning our projects.

Our shared future today calls for new spaces for dialogue, accountability, and collective action, and together we can make it happen.

May this white paper contribute, modestly but resolutely, to this ambition.





Sabina Colombo

Chief, Desk for Intergovernmental and Non-Governmental Organizations at the Sector for External Relations and Public Information of UNESCO

This Forum provides the ideal opportunity to recall the longstanding relationship between UNESCO and Rotary International, a relationship that dates back to the very origins of our Organization.

As you all know, Rotarians participated in the Conference of Allied

Ministers of Education, held in London during World War II, whose discussions between 1942 and 1945 helped pave the way for the creation of UNESCO.

Since then, Rotary International has remained closely engaged with our Organization, maintaining an official relationship since 1962 and supporting UNESCO's work in several areas of its mandate—from water safety to inclusive education—through its own initiatives as well as through its cooperation with UNESCO. This partnership has reflected a deep shared set of values and a common commitment to the ideals that inspire both UNESCO and Rotary International, such as the promotion of human dignity, mutual understanding among peoples, and the pursuit of lasting peace.

EIGHT DECADES LATER, THE UNESCO CHARTER REMAINS AS RELEVANT AS IT WAS IN 1945 AND REMINDS US THAT PEACE IS NEVER GUARANTEED.

It takes root every day through education, the sharing of knowledge, and scientific progress, as well as through dialogue between cultures and the free expression of our ideas.

Today, we face major and complex challenges that test the resilience of our society—from renewed tensions and persistent conflict to widening inequalities, climate change, and rapid digital and technological transformations. These are challenges that no single nation or institution can solve on its own.

Multilateral institutions, such as UNESCO, play a vital role in bringing together our various partners, providing a legitimate framework within which member states of international organizations, the private sector, and civil society can unite and work together to address these challenges. This collective effort cannot exist without the essential role played by civil society. Through their ability to mobilize, the breadth of their networks, and their deep roots in local realities, civil society organizations make a decisive contribution to strengthening multilateral action.

For more than a century, Rotary has embodied precisely this kind of international commitment based on service, solidarity, and dialogue among peoples, and continues, through its members around the world, to contribute to this collective effort, thanks to the strength of its network and the impact of its projects.

This Rotary Forum fully exemplifies this commitment. It also demonstrates a clear understanding of the need for collective action in the face of the challenges of our time.

This Forum, dedicated to “Reimagining Multilateralism in the Service of Peace, Health, and Education,” brings together precisely this diverse group of stakeholders—government representatives, public officials, experts, and civil society actors—and offers an opportunity to explore how our institutions and partnerships can continue to evolve to address the challenges of our time.



Francesco Arezzo

**President 2025-2026
Rotary International**

It is a privilege to be here at UNESCO — an institution that has stood, since its founding, for the idea that peace must be built not only through treaties and agreements, but through education, through science, through culture, through the daily work of people who believe that understanding across borders is not optional but essential.

Rotary believes that too. We have believed it for over a hundred and twenty years. And one of the things I am proudest of as President is the depth of Rotary's partnership with UNESCO and with the broader United Nations system.

This is not a ceremonial relationship. It is a working one. Rotary is an active member of the UNESCO NGO Liaison Committee, and we contribute — substantively, consistently — to the collective work of civil society within this institution. When there is a table where NGOs are helping to shape UNESCO's direction, Rotary is at that table.

Most recently, Rotary had the honor of chairing the UNESCO NGO International Forum on the Greening Education Partnership. That was not a symbolic role. It meant organizing, convening, and helping to guide a conversation about how education systems worldwide can equip young people to understand and respond to the environmental crisis.

Rotary is also a member of the UN Global Education Coalition and the UN Greening Education Partnership, both led and coordinated by

UNESCO. These partnerships matter to us because education is not peripheral to Rotary's mission — it is foundational to it.

YOU CANNOT BUILD PEACE WITHOUT EDUCATION. YOU CANNOT SUSTAIN DEVELOPMENT WITHOUT EDUCATION.

And you cannot address the climate crisis without a generation that has been educated to understand it.

But our multilateral engagement extends well beyond UNESCO. Rotary works in close partnership with the World Health Organization, with UNICEF, and with the United Nations system as a whole. Our longest and perhaps best-known collaboration is the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, where Rotary has worked alongside WHO and UNICEF for nearly four decades, mobilizing both funding and volunteers at a scale that no other civil society organization has matched for a single disease.

That partnership has taught us something profound about how global institutions and grassroots

networks can work together — and it is a model we are now applying to other challenges, from water and sanitation to maternal and child health to environmental sustainability.

I mention all of this because it speaks to the theme of this conference: Global Goals, Local Actions. This is a phrase that can sound like a slogan if you are not careful. But for Rotary, it describes something very specific about how we operate. The global goals — the Sustainable Development Goals, the ambitions of the Greening Education Partnership, the targets of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative — these are set at the international level, in rooms like this one, by institutions like UNESCO and the United Nations.

And they must be. The world needs shared frameworks. It needs common benchmarks. It needs institutions that can see across borders and set objectives that transcend any one nation's interests.

But those goals, no matter how well conceived, do not implement themselves. They are implemented lo-

cally. They are implemented by a Rotary club in rural India that builds a water filtration system.

By a Rotary club in Brazil that funds scholarships for girls who would otherwise leave school. By a Rotary club in Nigeria that organizes polio immunization days, going door to door in communities where trust in outside institutions is low but trust in local Rotarians is high. This is where global goals become real. Not in policy documents — in communities. Not through institutions alone — through people.

And this is what Rotary brings to these partnerships that is genuinely distinctive. We are not a government. We are not a multilateral agency. We are 1.4 million people, organized into 46,000 clubs, in virtually every country on earth, who show up in their own communities to do the work.

When UNESCO sets an agenda for greening education, Rotary can mobilize clubs in a hundred countries to implement it at the local level. When WHO identifies a health target, Rotary can deploy volunteers who already have relationships in

the communities where the work needs to happen. That connective tissue between global ambition and local capacity — that is what Rotary provides.

And it is, I believe, what multilateral institutions need more of, not less, in a world where the distance between policy and implementation has never felt wider.

I want to commend the district for an initiative that embodies exactly this spirit. During this conference, a White Paper on the Future of International Organizations will be released. This is a significant contribution — not just to Rotary's thinking, but to a broader conversation about how civil society and international institutions can work together more effectively in a world that is changing rapidly.

I encourage every Rotarian here to engage with it, to support it, and to bring its insights back to your clubs and districts. The questions it raises — about relevance, about partnership, about adaptation — are questions that every organization committed to multilateral cooperation must grapple with.

I will close with this thought. There is a temptation, in difficult times, to retreat from international engagement. To decide that the problems are too big, the institutions too slow, the politics too complicated.

Rotary has never done that. From our earliest decades, we have understood that the work of building peace and advancing human welfare does not stop at national borders — and neither can we. Our partnerships with UNESCO, with WHO, with UNICEF, with the United Nations — these are not gestures of goodwill. They are the infrastructure through which local action connects to global impact.

ar, I have asked Rotarians everywhere to Unite for Good. There is no better example of what that means than this room — representatives of civil society from around the world, gathered in an institution dedicated to the proposition that education, science, and culture can be forces for peace.

Let us continue to unite. Let us continue to act — globally in our ambitions and locally in our commitments. And let us make sure the world knows that when it comes to turning goals into results, Rotary is not on the sidelines. We are beside you as a force for good. Thank you.



Alain Van de Poel

Vice-President 2025-2026

Director 2024-2026

Rotary International

We are living in unusual times—a time when everything seems to be called into question: the world's balances of power, institutions, and sometimes even democratic principles themselves.

I sometimes ask myself a very simple question: are we still true to the original meaning of words? Take democracy, for example. I was fortu-

nate enough, in my youth, to study Latin for five years and Greek for six. I can assure you that those were among the best years of my life. Because in those studies, we discovered the origins of things. We understood where our ideas, our principles, and our ways of thinking about the world came from.

And that taught me one thing: we have no right to erase history with a single gesture, nor to believe that everything must be swept away simply because the times call for questioning everything.

WE CAN ASK OURSELVES QUESTIONS. WE MUST ASK OURSELVES QUESTIONS. BUT WE MUST ALSO KNOW WHAT IS WORTH PRESERVING.

Rotary, too, has a duty to ask itself questions about its future. We have this duty in Europe, and everywhere else. But there is one thing I am absolutely convinced of: our movement possesses extraordinary strength. That strength lies in our values.

Whether we are in Delhi, Washington, Paris, Madrid, Rome, or Brus-

sels, we share the same values. And these values can never be compromised.

Of course, structures may differ. Our Indian friends probably don't share the same organizational vision as our French friends. And let me reassure you: even the Belgians don't all see eye to eye! Since we're such a simple country, the Flemish and the Walloons may not always share the same vision either...

But that doesn't matter. Because, deep down, what unites us is stronger than what sets us apart. And what unites us, once again, are our values. They are what give meaning to our actions. They are what must be our starting point.

However, over the past several years, the world has changed. The pandemic, conflicts, and successive crises have profoundly transformed community life and the way citizens wish to get involved. I have seen dozens of extraordinary citizen-led initiatives emerge in Belgium's smallest municipality. Men and women who wanted to take concrete action—immediately and locally.

And we, too, at Rotary, have taken action.

But sometimes we forget one essential thing: it is not our actions that create our values; rather, it is our values that must give rise to our actions. This distinction is fundamental.

Because if our values are universal, then they can be shared. And if they are shared, they become a force for peace.

I firmly believe that we are peacemakers.

But let's also be realistic: we have an image problem. We still sometimes carry this reputation as an old-fashioned business club—a bit closed off, a bit elitist, a bit aging. My friends, this is a real issue! And yet, every time we talk with younger generations about our values, we find that they fully identify with them.

So we need to make room for them. But not just a symbolic space. Our International President, Francesco Arezzo, puts it very aptly: "Make way for the young." And I would add:

make way for the young by accepting the changes they propose, not the ones we imagine for them. We have a bad habit: speaking for them, thinking for them, deciding what they expect. Let's stop that! Let's listen to them!

I really like it when our President invites us to create "crazy clubs." I love this idea, because deep down, it simply means one thing: let's accept that our values can take on new forms. No matter the form, as long as the essence remains.

The world is changing. We must accept that we need to change with it. I am also convinced that we must work more closely with civil society. At the Europe–Africa–Middle East summit held in Brussels, we chose one word: fusion. Fusion between cultures. Fusion between regions. Fusion between the Rotary world and civil society. Because we have a lot to learn from one another. We are natural partners. We are also a deeply apolitical movement. We are not here to defend one side against another.

We have a single mission: to help build peace. And this is no small force. We are present in more than 200 countries. There are more than a million of us. Just imagine what that would mean if each of us, upon returning home—to our cities, our neighborhoods—carried that same message of peace, that same spirit of listening and openness. Imagine the power that would represent.

My dream is very simple. I'm not a numbers person, but I'd like to see twice as many—or even three times as many—Rotarians around the world tomorrow. Because I refuse to believe that the values we uphold cannot be shared more widely. Since 1905, since Paul Harris, we've been pursuing an idea that seemed almost crazy: putting ethics back at the heart of society.

What a challenge!

But I firmly believe that we are still capable today of rising to the most daunting challenges. On one condition: that we respect others, listen to others, preserve everyone's freedom, and build this peace first within ourselves.

Because that's always where it all begins.



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Cyril Noirtin

Dean of the Rotary Representatives Network.

Vice Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee of Rotary International and The Rotary Foundation.

In 2025, the United Nations and UNESCO celebrated their eightieth anniversaries.

Eighty years ago, in the wake of the chaos of World War II, the United Nations was founded on a conviction: that a world organized around the rule of law and cooperation would be safer, more just, and more

prosperous than a world governed solely by the laws of power. This vision, bold in 1945, is more relevant today than ever.

Rotary was there from the very beginning. Even before the UN was created, Rotary clubs from 21 nations gathered in London in 1942 to lay the foundation for what would become UNESCO. Three years later, 49 Rotarians participated in drafting the United Nations Charter at the San Francisco Conference.

It is worth noting just how much Rotary and the United Nations have, from the very beginning, shared the same ideal: to build a more peaceful, equitable, and humane world. This convergence is neither coincidental nor recent.

Since then, the ties forged between international organizations and Rotary have evolved, deepened, and adapted to the times—from early collaborations to the necessary withdrawal during the Cold War, and then to the strategic renewal spurred

by the PolioPlus initiative in the 1980s. At every stage, we have played the same essential role: that of a bridge between our clubs' local efforts and the goals of international institutions. As former Rotary International President Maurice Duperrey said, "Rotarians can serve as a bridge between nations."

In 1991, the creation of the Rotary Representatives Network strengthened this presence within the United Nations system and major international organizations. Today, Rotarians and Rotaractors officially represent our movement there, contributing to the dialogue between institutions and civil society.

Multilateralism is currently facing a period of fragility: geopolitical tensions are escalating, funding is becoming scarce, and commitments are eroding. Voices are being raised to question the very legitimacy of international organizations, even as global challenges demand greater cooperation and solidarity.

BECAUSE MULTILATERALISM CANNOT BE IMPOSED: IT IS BUILT, PATIENTLY, THROUGH TRUST, DIALOGUE, AND COLLECTIVE ACTION.

It is in this spirit that a path forward is emerging for international organizations—that of “people-to-people multilateralism,” where cooperation is no longer limited to states alone but is fully grounded in civil society and communities.

That is why civil society actors—and Rotary foremost among them—have a crucial role to play. Rotary, in fact, occupies a strategic position. Through its community roots and its presence in more than 200 countries and territories, it brings an irreplaceable strength to international organizations: that of on-the-ground experience, local trust, and volunteer engagement.

In return, international institutions offer Rotary the universal compass of their sustainable development goals. Today, we can strengthen partnerships with governments and international organizations and promote multilateralism among nations, based on trust, mutual understanding, and joint action.

Recognized and respected for its integrity and effectiveness, Rotary must continue to promote the values of peace and respect among nations—the same values that inspired the Charter of San Francisco in 1945; not out of nostalgia for a golden age, but out of the conviction that humanity still needs institutions capable of speaking with one voice in the face of challenges that transcend borders.

It is this path of hope and high standards that this Forum — and the White Paper that will result from it — aims to chart.



Michael Remmert

**Rotary Representative to the
European Council.**

In recent years, the language of democratic decline has shifted from alarmist rhetoric to sober diagnosis. Across continents, civic space - the environment in which civil society can come together, express opinions and take action - has narrowed. Legal restrictions on non-governmental organizations (NGOs), smear campaigns against activists, the enactment and implementation of “foreign agents” laws, and the diver-

sion of public funding to government-aligned pseudo-civil society groups are no longer isolated phenomena. They are part of a broader pattern of democratic backsliding.

In this climate, cooperation between international organizations and civil society organizations (CSOs) is not a luxury. It is a necessity. If democratic values and the rule of law are to be maintained, monitored and strengthened, these two actors must work hand in hand - carefully, constructively, and with full awareness of the delicate balance that defines their relationship.

A delicate but essential balance

International organizations derive their political legitimacy - and their financial resources - from their member States. This foundational reality means that they cannot take political initiatives that are not backed or approved by those same States. Yet, some of the governments represented within these organizations are themselves the subject of criticism for shrinking civic space or threatening judicial independence. The tension is obvious:

how can an organization hold its own members accountable?

The answer lies not in confrontation for its own sake, but in principled cooperation anchored in shared commitments. Organizations such as the Council of Europe, the United Nations, and regional bodies across the globe were founded on normative frameworks that enshrine human rights, democracy and the rule of law. These are not external impositions; they are voluntarily assumed obligations. When international organizations work alongside civil society, they are not bypassing member States - they are helping them live up to the commitments they have already made.

The “2025 Report of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Towards a New Democratic Pact for Europe,”

(<https://www.coe.int/en/web/secretary-general/report-2025>)

underscores the urgency of protecting civic space as a cornerstone of democratic renewal. It calls for stronger cooperation among member States, international organiza-

tions and civil society to reverse current trends and reinforce democratic institutions. This call is not abstract. It reflects the recognition that without active civic participation, democratic institutions become hollow.

At the same time, international organizations must tread carefully. They cannot and should not replace national democratic processes. Instead, they can create enabling frameworks: monitoring mechanisms, peer-review procedures, advisory opinions, funding instruments and structured dialogue platforms. The recently convened Council of Europe Conference on shaping a New Democratic Pact for Europe, which I attended, aimed precisely at ensuring meaningful civil society participation through inclusive consultation and representation in decision-making processes. This is a model worth replicating: not civil society as an afterthought, but as a structured partner.

Civic space as the heart of the democratic ecosystem

Civic space must be understood as an integral part of a broader democratic ecosystem. Free elections, independent courts and accountable administrations cannot function in isolation. They require a vibrant civic sphere that can scrutinize power, articulate grievances and propose solutions.

Civic organizations amplify citizen concerns, monitor compliance with international agreements and help implement them. They bridge the gap between global policy and everyday life through public campaigns and community programmes. When a country ratifies a human or social rights-related convention, it is often civil society that tracks whether the promises made in international forums translate into changes in local schools, police stations or courtrooms.

Threats to civic space have become increasingly refined and pervasive. In some countries, public funding is increasingly channeled to parallel “civil society organizations” that do not promote democratic values and

lack internal democratic governance. Elsewhere, “foreign agents” laws stigmatize and financially suffocate NGOs, driving organizations and their members into exile. These measures create a chilling effect far beyond the targeted organizations. They signal that independent civic engagement is suspicious.

Attacks against civil society are attacks against our values and our value system. It is not primarily about the organizations or individuals themselves. It is about all of us - particularly those at the margins. Vulnerable communities often rely crucially on civic organizations to defend their rights, provide services and make their voices heard. When civic space shrinks, it is the marginalized who are silenced first.

The unique contribution of civil society

John Hewko, the Secretary General of Rotary International, in an article about civic organizations and the United Nations, reminds us that at this critical moment for the United Nations and its agencies, civic organizations must continue to do what they do best: educate the pub-

lic, mobilize grassroots networks to support multilateral cooperation, use storytelling to shape public opinion and advocate with governments and legislatures to sustain financial commitments

(<https://www.rotary.org/en/civic-organizations-in-Chicago-hold-a-crucial-key-to-the-un-future>).

Civil society's longstanding partnership with the United Nations and other international organizations demonstrates how much stronger the world can be when citizens and governments work together. International norms do not implement themselves. They require public understanding and local ownership. CSOs translate technical language into lived realities. They show why a convention on preventing violence, or a treaty on anti-corruption, matters in a specific community.

Positive stories, narrative and discourse are crucial in conveying the importance of civil society for democracy. Too often, the debate is framed defensively - responding to attacks, correcting misinformation, contesting restrictive laws. While this remains necessary, it is equally

important to articulate an affirmative vision: civic engagement as an expression of shared responsibility and solidarity.

Civil society is stronger when its players act as a coalition - not solely amongst civil-society organizations, but in alliance

with professional associations, local authorities, academia and the private sector. Empowering judges, lawyers and democratic institutions at all levels, including the local level, builds resilience. When courts are independent, when municipal councils engage openly with citizens, when bar associations defend professional ethics, the space for arbitrary power narrows.

International organizations as guardians and platforms

International organizations can serve as guardians of common standards and as platforms for exchange. Monitoring bodies, expert committees and special rapporteurs provide independent assessments that lend credibility to domestic reformers. Even when governments resist criticism, the existence of an

authoritative international finding can shift domestic debates and empower reform-minded actors.

However, because these organizations depend on member States, their actions must be grounded in consensus and legal mandates. This is precisely why collaboration with civil society is so important. CSOs can supply evidence, document trends and provide early warnings. They can also help international organizations calibrate their responses - identifying which interventions are likely to strengthen reformers without triggering counterproductive backlash.

Moreover, when governments under scrutiny are members of the same international organizations, peer dialogue becomes essential. Public condemnation may have symbolic value, but sustained engagement - supported by civil society input - can often yield more durable change. The aim is not to isolate States, but to encourage compliance with shared norms.

Organizations such as Rotary International, which operate at the intersection of local engagement and

global networks, have a particular role to play. Rotary International needs to continue to advocate for an enabling environment for civil society in all international organizations in which it is represented. By leveraging its credibility and grassroots reach, it can help ensure that civic space remains on the agenda of multilateral forums.

A shared responsibility

Ultimately, the defense of civic space is not about institutional turf. It is about safeguarding the conditions that allow democracy to function. International organizations bring normative frameworks, convening power and monitoring capacity. Civil society brings legitimacy from below, lived experience and the ability to mobilize citizens. Their relationship is mutually beneficial.

In an era of democratic backsliding, the temptation may be to retreat into institutional silos or to prioritize short-term political expediency. That would be a mistake. The shrinking of civic space is not an abstract trend; it is a warning sign. If citizens cannot come together, express opinions and take action freely, the rule of law becomes fragile.

Maintaining the delicate balance between respect for State sovereignty and the protection of shared democratic values is challenging. But it is precisely this balance that defines mature multilateralism. By working hand in hand - carefully, transparently and persistently - international organizations and civil society can reinforce one another. In doing so, they protect not only institutions, but the values that underpin them.

And in the end, those values belong to all of us.

PANEL 1

Global health: Strengthening health systems and international cooperation to prepare for future

MODERATOR : DR. FRANÇOIS SARKOZY



Pediatrician, consultant, and author, François Sarkozy is a pediatrician and an INSEAD graduate. He held executive positions in the pharmaceutical industry before founding healthcare consulting firms. He currently heads FSNB Health & Care and develops e-health projects.



PR. ANTOINE FLAHAULT



Antoine Flahault, a professor of public health with a Ph.D. in medicine and biomathematics, is a physician and professor of public health specializing in epidemic modeling. He has led several academic institutions in France and Switzerland and has collaborated with the WHO during major health crises. He is the author of more than 350 publications and has also written books on prevention and COVID-19.

CAROLINE CABONNELLE



A virologist specializing in infectious diseases, with more than 15 years of experience in research on high-risk pathogens and global health, she co-directed a P4 laboratory for more than 10 years and played a key role in the response to the Ebola epidemic in West Africa. She is currently Head of Scientific Networks and Partnerships at Sanofi.

PR. LIONEL COLLET



An ENT physician and researcher, Lionel Collet served as president of the University of Lyon 1 and chaired the Conference of University Presidents. After joining the Council of State, he now heads the High Authority for Health. His career combines medicine, research, and public governance.

TOBY COSGROVE, M.D.



A world-renowned cardiac surgeon, Delos “Toby” Cosgrove served as CEO of the Cleveland Clinic from 2004 to 2017. An innovator, he placed the patient at the center of the healthcare system. Today, he advises global healthcare leaders.

Pandemic preparedness must become an international strategic priority.

Global health must be viewed not as an expense, but as an essential investment in collective security and sustainable development. Following the discussions at this roundtable, here are the key lessons identified in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Strengthen the preparedness of health systems

- By improving coordination among institutions
- By providing staff with more comprehensive training
- By building strategic stockpiles
- By ensuring adequate and sustainable hospital infrastructure, including sufficient space (in the event of a massive influx of patients)

RECOMMENDATION 2

Improve early detection

- By streamlining coordination among institutions (drawing inspiration from the UNAIDS model, which very effectively coordinates the global response to HIV)
- By using artificial intelligence and mathematical models (to predict the short-term evolution of epidemics)
- By modeling epidemiological analyses
- By stepping up surveillance of our environment (particularly wastewater, an effective and low-cost method)

RECOMMENDATION 3

Develop public-private partnerships

- By accelerating vaccine research and production
- By establishing a funding model shared between governments and industry (similar to initiatives such as the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority—BARDA—in the United States; federal funding enabled the rapid development of vaccines, followed by their distribution through government agencies and hospitals, thereby maintaining production capacity ready to be activated quickly in the event of a pandemic)

RECOMMENDATION 4

Strengthen global health governance

- By strengthening the central role of international organizations
- By improving communication among institutions

RECOMMENDATION 5

Promote equity and health sovereignty

- By expanding regional production capacity (particularly in Africa)
- By ensuring equitable access to vaccines and treatments

Several years before the COVID-19 pandemic, Bill Gates had warned that the world was not prepared for the next global health crisis. At the time, many viewed this scenario as purely theoretical, and many of us were skeptical. Yet history has shown that he was right, and reality quickly proved him wrong.

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed both the remarkable strengths and the profound vulnerabilities of our health care systems. It has also reminded us of a fundamental truth: in the 21st century, global health is inextricably linked to global security. In today's globalized world, a health crisis inevitably becomes an economic crisis, a social crisis, and a security crisis.

Viruses recognize neither borders, nor political systems, nor levels of economic development. No country—no matter how powerful—can face such crises alone.

This pandemic has demonstrated the international community's extraordinary ability to respond and our capacity to cooperate.

The virus was identified at an unprecedented speed, thanks to global scientific collaboration and open data sharing.

Research teams across several continents were able to work together in real time.

Regulatory procedures, which typically take years to complete, were streamlined to just a few months to accelerate innovation and access to vaccines.

At the same time, this crisis has highlighted very different national responses:

Lockdown policies have varied widely across continents, countries, and even within individual states. For the record, the WHO did not decide on lockdowns in individual countries; it simply warned the world that there was a public health emergency of international concern.

Some countries succeeded in quickly securing the production and supply of vaccines, protective equipment, and intensive care capacity; others demonstrated the strength of community-based health systems, mobilizing pharmacists and local health professionals to support vaccination and patient care. We should also acknowledge the COVAX initiative.

Today, even though the Pandemic Agreement, adopted in May 2025, has not yet been ratified, everyone has learned lessons from this experience: health institutions, pharmaceutical companies, and hospitals.

With this in mind, Dr. Toby Cosgrove, founder of the Cleveland Clinic, shared his valuable recommendations with us.

It is important to establish command centers capable of managing crises of this magnitude.

Staff training must be ongoing and versatile.

Spaces must be examined more closely to understand how to manage the influx of patients more effectively.

Supplies of medical equipment must be improved, as must infection control in hospitals; regarding the latter, for example, negative-pressure systems should be used.

Finally, we need to be able to operate as a true “system” to coordinate organizations and hospitals, with improved communication.

Only these sustainable investments will be effective in preparing for pandemics.

Public-private partnerships

It is clear that public-private partnerships must be strengthened. As an example, we can cite initiatives such as BARDA—the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority—which has helped fund research and ensure vaccine production. This has thus been a remarkable example of a public-private partnership in the United States. Funding mechanisms like BARDA effectively finance operational readiness capabilities—that is, the capacity to produce vaccines on a large scale when needed.

In Europe, an initiative called HERA was launched in the wake of the pan-

demic to strengthen preparedness for public health emergencies. It is clearly modeled after BARDA but does not have the same level of funding.

These initiatives clearly illustrate the crucial role of collaboration between governments, scientific institutions, and the pharmaceutical industry.

Early detection

Another major issue raised during this roundtable discussion concerns early detection, and in particular the importance of detecting weak signals more quickly. A weak signal, taken on its own, may seem insignificant, but when all this information is brought together, it can provide important clues about the next public health threat.

That is why pharmaceutical companies such as Sanofi are now working more closely with international institutions and surveillance networks, such as: the GISRS, the Global Influenza Surveillance and Response System, or the GIHSN, the Global Hospital Influenza Surveillance Network. These systems ena-

ble the sharing of data from clinical trials, hospital systems, and academic research; this data exchange takes place between the public and private sectors and among different countries. Caroline Carbonnelle, a virologist and global head of scientific relations at Sanofi, responsible for pandemic preparedness, emphasizes the importance for laboratories of being able to collaborate with international institutions and such surveillance networks.

Thanks to Artificial Intelligence (AI), epidemiological modeling has opened up new possibilities. During the pandemic, Professor Antoine Flahault, an epidemiologist and member of the AP-HP's prevention task force, placed mathematical modeling at the center of his work and used ensemble models selected using AI, thereby enabling predictions one to two weeks in advance, much like weather forecasts.

It is nevertheless worth noting that certain existing practices, such as wastewater surveillance — a well-known method strongly supported by Rotary International for polio surveillance — can be utilized be-

cause they are highly effective and inexpensive. This, in turn, raises the question of private-sector involvement—not the pharmaceutical industry, but, for example, the water sector, which is privately operated in many parts of the world.

Global Health Governance

The issue of global health governance featured prominently in the discussions. UNAIDS's governance model has been a source of inspiration for those advocating for stronger global coordination, notably Professor Antoine Flahault: much like UNAIDS, which presents a strategic plan every four years that is then adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, and to which all organizations subsequently align themselves. The question arises as to whether the WHO, too, should operate more along these lines.

Strengthening coordination among international organizations raises questions about national sovereignty and the specific needs of different regions of the world. For while the relative dominance of the Western world within the United

Nations system long had a humanitarian aspect—particularly in the fields of health and education—to-day it is a matter of economics and sovereignty.

In the case of the African continent, only 4% of the medicines used today are produced in Africa. Africa must rely on the expertise of the pharmaceutical industry in the North and on balanced partnerships, but African companies must be able to make profits on the continent, which is becoming increasingly prosperous. In this context, developing local capacity to produce vaccines and medicines appears to be a strategic priority.

The key challenge now is to fully learn from the COVID-19 crisis in order to build a more resilient global system for prevention, detection, and response by strengthening global surveillance, developing production capacities spread across multiple regions of the world, and ensuring sustainable funding for pandemic preparedness.

PANEL 2

Education for all: Rethinking education in the age of digital technology and growing inequality

MODERATOR : MAÎTRE LAURENT MARTINET



A partner at a Paris law firm specializing in international business and commercial litigation, Laurent Martinet handles complex, often multi-jurisdictional disputes for major corporations, particularly in the energy, chemical, new technologies, automotive, and finance sectors. He has also held key institutional positions.



S.E. SIMONA-MIRELA MICULESCU



Simona Mirela Miculescu, Romania's Permanent Delegate to UNESCO since 2021, presided over the organization's 42nd General Conference (2023–2025). She previously served as Romania's Permanent Representative to the UN in New York and then as Representative of the UN Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office in Belgrade. As the first Romanian woman to lead a UNESCO body, she has held several senior positions within the multilateral system.

ÉLÉONORE CAROIT



A lawyer by training, with degrees from Sciences Po Paris and Columbia Law School, Éléonore Caroit is admitted to the bars of Paris, New York, and Geneva. A specialist in international arbitration, she practiced at several major law firms before becoming a member of the National Assembly representing French citizens living abroad. Since October 2025, she has served as Minister Delegate for the Francophonie, International Partnerships, and French Citizens Abroad.

LUCILE RAMBERT



Lucile Rambert is an attorney admitted to the Paris Bar and the executive director of InitiaDROIT. Committed to promoting legal literacy, she works to develop legal awareness initiatives for middle and high school students. She has been named a Knight of the National Order of Merit.

DOCTEUR CHADY SAAD



Dean of the School of Law at La Sagesse University in Beirut and a member of the Beirut and Paris bar associations, he serves as a referee for the CAS, FIFA, DIAC, and LAMC, and is a lecturer at Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. He chairs Lebanese sports commissions and promotes mediation to resolve commercial and sports disputes.

ISABELLE MARTINEZ HAYER



Governor of District 5050 (British Columbia and Washington, Rotarian since 1989 and holder of a master's degree in leadership, she has worked for twenty-five years in finance and media and advocates for inclusive education and intercultural dialogue for peace.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1

Bridge the digital divide in education

- invest in digital infrastructure
- ensure equitable access to technology
- support schools located in underserved areas

RECOMMENDATION 2

Strengthen teacher training and support

- improve working conditions
- expand training in digital tools and artificial intelligence
- promote the social and educational role of teachers

RECOMMENDATION 3

Guide the use of educational technologies

- promote the ethical use of artificial intelligence
- protect students from misinformation and cyberbullying
- develop regulatory frameworks based on human rights

RECOMMENDATION 4

Strengthen international cooperation

- promote partnerships among governments, international organizations, and civil society
- support education systems weakened by crises
- share best practices on a global scale

RECOMMENDATION 5

Place young people at the center of educational governance

- Involve young people in consultation processes
- Encourage their participation in the development of education policies
- Foster their capacity for innovation and engagement

While technological tools offer unprecedented opportunities to expand access to knowledge, they also risk widening existing divides if their implementation is not accompanied by inclusive and responsible educational policies.

In light of this observation, the panelists at this roundtable sought to determine how education could be reinvented in the fragmented world in which we live.

The panelists began by noting that while education is an essential pillar of human development, social cohesion, and peace, it is also a significant economic driver; investment in education generates substantial economic benefits for nations.

Certain international data confirms the significant impact of education on individual and collective trajectories.

According to the latest UNESCO figures from 2024, for every dollar a government spends on education, GDP consistently increases by \$20. And according to the World Bank, at the individual level, each additional year of schooling equates to an

average of 10% in additional income for a given person. As for girls' education, every dollar invested in the education of a girl yields approximately three dollars for the global economy. This equation clearly illustrates that education helps reduce gender inequality.

Beyond these indicators, the central role that education plays in building democratic societies was unanimously emphasized. It fosters critical thinking, the ability to engage in dialogue, and an understanding of the rules that structure collective life.

How can we maintain access to equitable education when territorial and socioeconomic inequalities—as well as those linked to crises and conflicts—persist?

Equitable education

In fact, access to educational infrastructure and teaching resources varies considerably not only between regions of the world, but also within countries themselves, between urban and rural areas. People

living in rural or disadvantaged areas often have limited access to facilities, the Internet, or digital educational resources.

Families' social and economic circumstances have a significant impact on access to educational resources, particularly digital tools, and in certain regions of the world—such as Lebanon—political, economic, or security crises are profoundly disrupting education systems; entire generations may see their educational paths interrupted or severely compromised.

The digitization of education systems is now one of the most significant changes of recent years. Ms. Simona-Mirela Miculescu, Romania's Permanent Delegate to UNESCO, noted that UNESCO Member States recognized this as early as 2015 when they adopted the Qingdao Declaration. In 2022, at the United Nations Summit on the Transformation of Education, Member States reaffirmed this commitment by recognizing access to digital learning as a human right.

The fundamental role of teachers

But the rise of artificial intelligence tools is profoundly transforming educational practices. Dr. Chady Saad, dean of the Faculty of Law at La Sagesse University in Beirut, wished to clarify that these inequalities do not depend solely on access to technology, but also on the ability of institutions to integrate it in an educational and responsible manner. The university's mission is not merely to convey information, but to shape the mind and cultivate sound judgment.

For there is genuine concern about artificial intelligence and the way it is reflected in our school system. Various stakeholders are questioning the authenticity of student work and raising concerns about the risks posed by the spread of misinformation and the manipulation of digital content. In this context, it seems important that pedagogical innovation remains rooted in academic tradition and that the teacher-student relationship remains at the heart of the educational process.

Teachers play an essential role in imparting knowledge, but also in developing students' social and civic skills. Ms. Éléonore Caroit, Minister

Delegate to the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, highlighted the overall shortage of teachers, which is worsening today. By 2030, there will be a shortage of 44 million teachers needed to provide primary and secondary education for all.

In light of this shortage, excessive workloads, and a lack of institutional recognition, strengthening support for teachers is a strategic priority for improving the quality of education.

Education in citizenship and critical thinking

But this education must also help shape citizens capable of understanding institutions, legal rules, and democratic principles. This was emphasized by Lucile Rambert, a member of the Paris Bar.

In her view, teaching students the basics of the law and how institutions function should help young people understand that rules are not meant to restrict, but rather to establish the broadest possible common ground so that we can live together in peace.

Certain educational initiatives—particularly those led by stakeholders in the legal and nonprofit sectors—often rely on participatory methods that encourage reasoned debate, mutual listening, and the collective development of solutions. In this way, they help to strengthen the understanding of law as a tool for social regulation and peaceful coexistence.

Young people's concerns

The voices of young people were also heard through Isabelle Martinez Hayer, governor of Rotary District 5050. She presented the results of various surveys conducted among 18- to 30-year-olds. Among the major concerns expressed, mental health emerged as one of the primary issues of concern. Social pressures and digital transformations are contributing to a decline in their psychological well-being, as digital technologies play an ambivalent role in their lives.

While they certainly facilitate access to information and communication, they also foster harassment, misinformation, and social isolation. Young people want to be more involved in decisions regarding their education and their future. They want to participate in the development of educational curricula and be recognized as full partners in the transformation of the education system.

These solutions are based on a simple yet fundamental principle: making education a collective endeavor, grounded in equity, international cooperation, and shared responsibility. Investing in education means investing in the ability of future generations to understand the world, engage in dialogue, and build societies that are more just, more resilient, and more peaceful.



S.E. Simona-Mirela Miculescu

**Permanent Delegate of
Romania to UNESCO**

“Poverty begins the moment a single child is denied his or her fundamental right to education.”

— Kofi Annan

The digital transformation of education today forms part of a global dynamic that extends far beyond the technological sphere. It challenges the very foundations of the right to education as enshrined in international human rights law and as upheld, since its creation, by UNESCO. In a world marked by rapid change, persistent inequalities, and multiple crises, education remains one of the essential pillars of peace, sustaina-

ble development, and human dignity.

The Constitution of UNESCO reminds us that wars begin in the minds of women and men, and that it is in these minds that the defenses of peace must be constructed. This foundational affirmation assigns education an eminently political and ethical responsibility. Recognized as a fundamental human right by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, education is also understood—according to UNESCO’s longstanding approach—as a public good and a common good, the realization of which engages the collective responsibility of States and the international community. It must furthermore be exercised in accordance with the principle of equality and non-discrimination, notably enshrined in the 1960 UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education.

In this context, the digitalization of education cannot be regarded as a neutral or purely technical process. It requires clear political choices and deep ethical reflection. The question

is therefore straightforward: does digital technology genuinely reduce inequalities and guarantee equal opportunities, or does it risk further entrenching existing divides?

Education has always contained a form of ambivalence: it can broaden horizons, foster empowerment, and create new pathways. But if not carefully designed, it can also reproduce inequalities already present within our societies.

In the digital age, this tension does not disappear. It shifts—and at times intensifies.

Digital technologies have expanded access to educational resources, diversified pedagogical methods, and, in many contexts, ensured educational continuity during times of crisis, particularly in emergency situations and protracted crises. They offer increased flexibility, access to a plurality of content, and in some cases, more cost-effective solutions than traditional materials.

However, the right to education requires that education be genuinely accessible. In the digital environment, this requirement implies not only the availability of technological tools, but also access to appropriate devices, reliable and affordable connectivity, quality content, and sufficient digital skills. Despite their potential, digital technologies may become significant barriers when these conditions are not met. As education becomes increasingly dependent on connectivity, the absence of effective internet access risks preventing the full exercise of the right to education, particularly for the most vulnerable groups.

Recent UNESCO research clearly demonstrates that the digital divide extends beyond mere access to technology. It intersects with and amplifies socio-economic, geographic, gender, and generational inequalities.

Aware of these challenges, Member States committed in the 2015 Qingdao Declaration to ensure that by 2030 all children would have access to connected digital devices and rel-

evant learning environments, regardless of their economic, social, geographic situation, or disability. Ten years later, this commitment remains as relevant as ever.

In 2022, at the United Nations Transforming Education Summit, Member States reaffirmed this commitment by recognizing access to digital learning as a human right, with particular attention to the most marginalized groups.

For many learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, digital access is not an additional opportunity, it is a condition of inclusion or exclusion. Access to devices, connectivity, and an adequate learning environment remains closely linked to household resources. The risk of a two-tier education system is very real, especially when certain solutions—such as relying on students' personal devices—are implemented without clear guarantees of equity.

Geographic inequalities reinforce these dynamics. Globally, internet access rates in urban areas remain significantly higher than those in rural areas, placing many learners at a

structural disadvantage. These disparities are particularly pronounced in regions where access to electricity, digital infrastructure, and affordable connectivity remains limited, reflecting a persistent divide between the Global North and the Global South.

Gender inequalities are also evident in the digital education space. Women and girls continue to face specific barriers related to stereotypes, unequal distribution of family responsibilities, lack of time, and persistent gaps in digital skills. These factors limit their access to technological pathways and careers and hinder the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 5, which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Persons with disabilities face heightened risks of discrimination when educational technologies are not designed according to principles of universal accessibility.

The generational divide represents another often-underestimated challenge. In many countries, older persons remain largely excluded from

digital uses, limiting their access to lifelong learning, professional re-training, and civic participation.

Emergency and protracted crisis situations starkly expose the magnitude of these inequalities. Armed conflicts, natural disasters, and health crises deprive millions of children and young people of their right to education. In such contexts, education serves as a vital safety net, offering stability, psychosocial protection, and future prospects. Digital solutions can play a decisive role, provided they are accessible, adapted to local contexts, and delivered in learners' languages.

In the face of these challenges, the role of teachers remains irreplaceable. UNESCO consistently emphasizes that no technological progress can substitute for the educational relationship, which is grounded in human interaction, trust, and attention to each learner. Yet in many education systems, pedagogical training in digital tools remains insufficient, and technologies are too often deployed without clear frameworks,

adapted curricula, or thorough ethical reflection.

The vision promoted by UNESCO is rooted in a humanistic approach to education. Digital technology must be conceived as a tool serving the common good, human dignity, and non-discrimination—not as an end in itself. It must contribute to reducing inequalities, strengthening international solidarity, and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, in full respect of international human rights standards.

Accordingly, during its 42nd session, the UNESCO General Conference proclaimed—under my Presidency—19 March as the International Day for Digital Learning. This decision reflects recognition of the strategic importance of high-quality, accessible digital learning in addressing global educational challenges and promoting inclusive sustainable development.

Ensuring the effective realization of the right to education and the principle of non-discrimination constitutes a central requirement of the 2030 Agenda. In this regard,

UNESCO calls for a clear choice: to make digital education a deliberate, equitable, and profoundly human project. Guaranteeing genuine access to essential digital infrastructure—particularly in rural areas and for the most vulnerable populations—is not a political option; it is a requirement of justice. Investing in teachers, in their training, and in their capacity to mobilize digital technologies and artificial intelligence in service of learning and citizenship is a decisive investment in the future. Regulating educational technologies through human rights-based rules is equally essential in order to prevent bias, protect privacy, and ensure accountability.

Finally, only strengthened international cooperation will make it possible to move beyond fragmented responses and transform local innovations into shared solutions capable of making digital technology a true lever for equity, inclusion, and quality education for all, throughout life.

In the digital age, ensuring equal access to quality education and pro-

moting lifelong learning opportunities for all is not a slogan. This objective of the Sustainable Development Agenda must be pursued in the future post-2030 framework, building on today's achievements. It is a political, ethical, and collective responsibility. In this context, UNESCO will continue to play a crucial coordinating role as the specialized agency for education.



Chady Saad

Dean of the Faculty of Law
Université La Sagesse
in Beyrouth

Since 2019, our society has been marked by a succession of crises—economic, political, public health, and security—to the point that some students have never completed an academic year under normal conditions.

Despite power outages, instability, and limited internet access, these students continue to learn and hold

onto hope. This leads us to a fundamental question: what does “education for all” truly mean when the material conditions for learning are profoundly unequal?

To offer some food for thought, I will draw on a study conducted in 2024 among 200 students and 15 professors at the Faculty of Law of La Sagesse University in Beirut, and published on September 1, 2025, by LexisNexis.

I will structure my remarks around three main ideas.

First idea: digital technology: promise and the digital divide

Our study reveals a paradoxical reality. Students want digital tools to be integrated more extensively into teaching, while at the same time expressing concerns about the quality, ethics, and authenticity of the learning experience.

Thus, 56% of the students surveyed say they are satisfied with the current integration of technology, but more than 40% believe that efforts remain insufficient.

These results show that educational inequality depends not only on access to technology, but also on the ability of institutions to integrate it in a pedagogically sound and responsible manner.

Furthermore, the digital transformation poses significant challenges. Teachers are questioning the impact of artificial intelligence, while students are fascinated by its possibilities.

Second idea: train, not just inform

We live in a society saturated with information. But information is not the same as education. The university's mission is not merely to convey facts, but to shape the mind and cultivate judgment.

In a world where algorithms can generate texts and analyze data, what sets human beings apart remains their ability to question, interpret, and judge. In this context, pedagogical innovation must engage with academic tradition. The lecture, when rigorous and well-structured, remains an essential forum for the transmission of knowledge.

Students themselves are aware of this: 85% want to keep lectures, proof that innovation should not replace tradition but rather work in tandem with it.

Third idea: education: a collective responsibility

In the face of these transformations, the role of international institutions and organizations becomes crucial. They can play a vital role by supporting vulnerable education systems, fostering academic cooperation, and encouraging the ethical use of technology.

Furthermore, this technological transformation raises questions about the future of certain professions. In the legal field, artificial intelligence is already impacting tasks typically assigned to young lawyers, such as legal research and document analysis. This underscores the importance for universities to train lawyers who are capable not only of using these tools but also of developing skills that technology cannot replace: critical analysis, legal reasoning, and judgment.

Conclusion

If we truly want education for all, we must guarantee much more than just access to information. We must guarantee access to an education capable of fostering free, critical, and responsible minds.

But we must also guarantee peace, because no sustainable education can flourish amid instability and conflict.

Perhaps the central question we must continue to ask ourselves collectively is this: How can we prepare the next generations for a world where knowledge is instantaneous, but where understanding is becoming more essential than ever?



Isabelle Martinez Hayer

**Gouverneure 2025-2026
District 5050 du
Rotary International**

Socio-economic inequalities and access to inclusive and equitable quality education for all, independent of socio-economic conditions or cultural background. Is it fair to all concerned?

Focus and framing:

Rotary District 5050 spans the international border between the United States and Canada, connecting communities along the I-5 corridor from Everett, Washington north into the Lower Mainland of British Columbia (BC). Entering Canada through Surrey, BC, the district fol-

lows Highway 1, reaching west to North Delta and continuing east through the Fraser Valley to Hope, BC.

The District is home to 64 clubs and more than 2,200 active and honorary Rotarians and Rotaractors. It brings together change-makers of all ages, fostering leadership development and advancing sustainable, community-driven projects that create meaningful local impact.

Research for this paper included surveys conducted throughout the past Rotary year commencing on July 1, 2025, with additional surveys directed specifically to Youth Adventures in Leadership participants and Rotaract members in February 2026. Questions on the survey to youth asked:

1. What are the current challenges facing education systems?
2. What solutions do you propose related to youth, inclusion, and innovation?
3. How can we strengthen communication and collaboration with UNESCO and UNICEF?
4. If you could choose any profession, what would it be?

Context

Rotary District 5050 and its surrounding regions reflect significant socio-economic diversity, encompassing communities that range from extreme affluence to persistent homelessness. Increasing demand for food programs within schools and rising housing insecurity across the region signal a widening socio-economic divide. As this gap expands, more individuals and families experience instability and crisis.

These immediate needs reveal deeper systemic challenges. Rising mental health concerns, substance use disorders, and entrenched economic disparities that intersect in ways that limit both individual advancement, educator support, and broader governmental support. The result is a reinforcing cycle of inequity that perpetuates social disparity and restricts opportunity.

In both Canada and the United States, public education from Kindergarten through Grade 12 is predominantly government-funded, ensuring universal access to basic education. Independent schools, which often provide expanded pro-

gramming and additional resources, are primarily tuition-funded, though most receive partial government support. Post-secondary education is largely financed by the individual, with varying degrees of public subsidy for domestic students and significantly higher tuition costs for international students. While financial aid mechanisms exist particularly for lower and middle-income residents, tuition costs remain a significant barrier for many.

Educational inequities are increasingly visible within classrooms. Educators frequently supplement limited institutional resources with personal funds to deliver meaningful and comprehensive learning experiences. Government funding constraints, standardized curriculum, and unequal access to enrichment opportunities further exacerbate disparities between schools and communities. Educators navigate shortage of replacement support, burnout from increased workloads, emotional strain, and administrative demands, while attempting to provide their students with engag-

ing, government driven curriculum to the best of their abilities.

Students themselves face layered challenges. A sampling of students aged 15 to 18 years of age reported a diminished sense of belonging, limited relevance between curriculum and lived experience, and insufficient inclusion of youth voice in decision-making processes. At the same time, social environments shaped by polarization, cultural difference, identity-based tensions, socio-economic inequality, and access to widely used digital technologies can foster judgment rather than understanding, unethical digital engagement rather than supportive connection. Without intentional efforts toward inclusion, dialogue, ethical digital engagement, and equity, these conditions risk undermining both academic achievement and social cohesion.

Addressing these realities requires not only financial investment, but also systemic reform that prioritizes equity, relevance, youth participation, ethical engagement, and inclusive dialogue as foundational elements of education.

At issue

Educational opportunity in Rotary District 5050 is increasingly determined by income, geography, individual abilities, linguistic background, and migration or residency status. Not all schools are created equal. Persistent disparities in school funding, infrastructure, and human resources result in unequal learning conditions and outcomes. Socio-economic advantage often correlates with the quality of education they receive. Families who can afford to live in affluent communities and have the time and capacity to support classrooms often access better resourced schools and, potentially, more experienced teachers, enriched programming, and supportive learning environments. This advantage translates into expanded future opportunities.

For migrants, refugees, and minorities, barriers to equitable participation are compounded by language proficiency, limited access to culturally responsive supports, and unfamiliarity with institutional systems. The ability to access information, navigate services, and fully engage

in school communities generally requires the capacity to speak the local language and have, at minimum, a grasp of intercultural understanding. Without intentional policy measures, these factors contribute to exclusion and reduced access to education and opportunity.

In a world increasingly dependent on digital technology, another layer of complexity has emerged. Success in education and employment now requires not only foundational academic skills, but also digital access, digital literacy, and the ability to afford and adapt to rapidly evolving technologies. Yet digital access remains deeply unequal. Access to affordable devices, reliable connectivity, assistive technologies, and technical support remains uneven, particularly for marginalized populations, rural and remote communities, low-income households, and non-dominant language speakers.

Digital technologies, including but not limited to, networked devices, software platforms, and assistive artificial intelligence systems, offer significant potential to expand access to knowledge and personalize

learning. At the same time, their rapid integration into daily life highlights the importance of access, digital literacy, ethical governance, and sustained human-centered oversight. Without inclusive policies and intentional safeguards considering ethical digital engagement, technological advancement risks deepening existing inequalities rather than reducing them.

At the same time, these powerful assistive AI integrated tools, embedded in everyday devices such as mobile phones and computers, can be misused to enable cyberbullying, spread misinformation, and shape distorted societal narratives. Ensuring that technology serves the public good requires not only innovation, but accountability, equity, and a shared commitment to ethical digital citizenship.

Within schools, technology continues to outpace the education system's ability to adapt in relevant and meaningful ways aligning curriculum, pedagogy, and teacher professional development with the speed of technological change. Beyond infrastructure, effective integration

requires sustained investment in educator capacity, inclusive design, and evidence-based approaches to digital learning and ethical engagement. Schools already disadvantaged by geography, funding, curriculum limitations, or staffing constraints face further inequity when access to robust digital literacy programs and ethical technology use is inconsistent. The rise of artificial intelligence adds yet another layer of complexity, raising concerns about overreliance, diminished critical thinking, and technology dependency.

Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all requires coordinated, inclusive strategies that address both current structural inequities and digital transformation while being adaptive for future possibilities. Physiologically safe and robust education is not only about the physical access to schools led by engaged professional educators, but is also about meaningful access to relevant knowledge, technology, and opportunity within safe, inclusive, and future-ready learning environments.

If education is to serve as a bridge to opportunity, then ethical digital learning environments must become a central priority.

Risks: the erosion of critical thinking, research literacy, and ethical engagement

The widespread accessibility of artificial intelligence (AI) tools represents a profound shift in how knowledge is produced, accessed, and applied. While AI offers efficiencies and supports innovation across sectors, its routine use also raises concerns regarding the development of critical thinking, research literacy, and ethical engagement.

AI systems can generate responses to tasks ranging from drafting correspondence, creating visual content, to solving complex mathematical or analytical problems. Although these tools can enhance productivity, there is a growing risk that users may concede cognitive effort to automated outputs rather than engaging in independent authentic analysis, verification, and reflective judgment. Overreliance on AI generated content may reduce opportunities for learners to develop essential

competencies such as critical thinking, problem solving, and scholarly evidence-based research.

At the same time, distinguishing between human-generated and AI generated content is becoming increasingly complex. Educators and students face growing challenges in evaluating authenticity, authorship, and academic integrity. This evolving educational landscape highlights the urgent need for strengthened digital and media literacy, including the equitable access to digital materials, and recognize AI content.

The broader AI integration into society has created increased reliance on the technology. Questionable social media platforms, manipulated video content, unverified content creation, and AI modified media have accelerated the spread of misinformation and disinformation. Traditional print media and journalism gatekeeping practices have diminished in influence, while user generated content circulates rapidly and often without verification. The assumption that information discovered online is fundamentally credible creates significant chal-

lenges for informed citizenship and social integrity.

In this context, education systems benefit from prioritizing the cultivation of critical thinking, ethical digital engagement, and robust research literacy. It is essential to create a process to ensure AI and emerging technologies serve as tools to enhance, rather than replace, ethical research thereby protecting inclusive, equitable, and quality education in an era of digital transformation.

To ensure a more inclusive discussion, I consulted with area youth who are connected in various ways to Rotary and Rotary youth programs. When asked about their preferred future professions, the top choices were First Responder, Education, Digital Technology production, and becoming a public figure.

When asked about their community passions and the types of projects they most want to engage in, the highest-ranked responses focused on climate sustainability and resilience, hands-on community initiatives addressing food and housing insecurity, and projects that foster

meaningful connections within their communities and with one another.

Barriers and challenges in the education system as shared from youth and students aged 15 to 18 in theme priority:

- Curriculum that is relevant to students (cultural competence, emerging topics, arts and culture)
- Language proficiency
- Social issues: Lack of belonging and connection leading to feelings of defeat, disengagement, anxiety, and mental health related issues
- Teachers lacking adaptability to student learning styles and preferred methods of engagement leading to student failure or disengagement
- Gender inequities – preference in rewarding male students
- Bullying leading to unwillingness to participate

Proposed solutions by youth to issues identified in their reflections:

- Mutually supportive social and educational environments en-

couraging belonging, authenticity, leadership skills building, and collaborative success – be kind with each other

- Administer curriculum that is relevant in today's world to today's students, includes world view, socialization learning, mandatory practical applications (i.e. budgets, cooking, home skills, leadership, post grade 12 job skills building) and includes student voice in design (student led classes)
- Harsher consequences to bullying and curriculum including the issue as a focus, not just a supplement, with integration in other areas
- Creation of clubs (i.e. international students, cultural, or focus area clubs)
- Teacher accountability and removing institutional barriers of engagement

Young professionals and students aged 18 - 35 in Rotary District 5050 shared their perspectives on barriers and challenges in the education system:

- Curriculum and projects that are relevant in today's world and to today's students (areas of focus such as: climate resiliency, inspire creativity and innovation, intentional future planning building resiliency)
- Educator supports in the classroom (more teacher and language assistants)
- Diminished critical thinking and creativity
- Technology and social media driven relationships rather than personal connections
- Bullying in the school environment
- Mobile phone addiction
- Social media algorithms and misinformation influencing people's thoughts and beliefs
- No common value system as a point of reference – lack of stable structure and appropriate AI engagement

Young professionals and students aged 18 - 35 recommendations on potential solutions to the issues identified above:

- Create more engaging and inclusive ways for students to connect

in person with each other, volunteer community clubs, cultural and social clubs, etc.

- Having Youth be a voice at the table in creating curriculum and solutions -decision making
- Ban cellphone technology in school and other technologies that can be used to hurt others
- Teach parents how to entertain their children without the use of technology, with conversation and in-person activities preferred
- Foster unity, service to others, kindness, collaboration, education for all, barrier free access to education
- Igniting a love for learning increased capacity for lifelong learning while empowering individuals to grow as confident, engaged, values-driven leaders

Themes have emerged from both groups:

- Both groups prioritize curriculum reform to be relevant and modernized serving the needs of the students in today's society. Education is perceived as outdated and disconnected from

lived experience, future employment realities, and global citizenship

- Students are not just seeking academic success, they are thirsty for personal development, leadership skills building, human connection, purpose, respect, and community contribution
- AI and other technologies are reshaping education, relationships, and personal resilience, often lacking ethical engagement or pedagogical guidance
- Educational systems are not sufficiently responsive to diverse identities, learning styles, and cultural sensitivities
- Participatory governance models: Young people seek agency, respect, inclusion, and a voice at the decision-making table

Solution-based themes emerging from both groups:

- Co-designed, student-informed curriculum that is practical, globally aware, creative, innovative, and forward looking
- Rebuilding shared values grounded in unity, respect, and

restore human connection and belonging

- Structured ethical digital literacy education
- Inclusive, barrier sensitive, accessible education for all
- Human centered, flexible, adaptable, collaborative learning models with professional accountability

When asked about their preferred future profession, First Responder, Digital Technology production, Practical labour work, and public figure remained as top sought-after professions.

Young people are asking for education to be reimaged and restructured to one that acknowledges diverse identities, ensures inclusive participation, builds competencies for an uncertain future, and strengthens meaningful human connection.

As District Governor for Rotary District 5050, I have had the privilege and responsibility of conducting official visits to each of the district's 64 clubs. During many of these visits, I invited members to participate in a

brief survey, asking where they believe their clubs can offer the greatest benefit to their communities. The priority areas identified were:

- Climate resilience and environmental sustainability
- Hands-on community service projects
- Disease prevention
- Youth initiatives
- Food insecurity
- Multi-club and community events that celebrate impact and foster connection
- Mental health initiatives focused on human resilience, connection, and well-being

When asked what brings them the greatest joy in Rotary, the leading response was clear: fellowship and the opportunity to do good in their communities and in the world.

These visits revealed a strong desire for deeper historical understanding and a genuine appreciation for recognizing and celebrating community impact. At the same time, they also highlighted an opportunity for growth. When asked about UNESCO and Rotary's relationship with it, ap-

proximately 80 percent of members were unaware of the work of the organization and the connection to Rotary. Similarly, many were unfamiliar with the Rotary Representative Network and Rotary Peace Centers.

This gap presents a tremendous opportunity to strengthen awareness, deepen global understanding, and further align local service with Rotary's powerful international legacy.

Strengthen awareness: tell the story clearly and often

Led by Paul P. Harris, Rotary held its founding meeting 121 years ago on February 23, 1905. The Rotary and UNESCO relationship have been bound together for over 80 years. Most members are deeply committed to service but unaware of Rotary's historic and ongoing global partnerships with multilateral organizations. Awareness might be built through:

- A short (5 – 10 minute) digital storytelling production that can be easily shared across platforms, providing an engaging, inspiring, call-to-action resource

for clubs to integrate into regular meetings.

- Visual, brand compliant resources for clubs, such as simple slides, infographics, or project engagement initiatives, highlighting Rotary's role in founding UNESCO, the Rotary Representative Network, and the Rotary Peace Centers.
- District monthly newsletter features, brand compliant resources that can be added to websites or newsletters highlighting how local projects reflect global priorities.
- Increased opportunities for connection to UNESCO through actionable and aligned activities. Clearly map out how Rotary's areas of Focus align with UNESCO priorities and how they can work together to provide impact.
- Develop a Rotary District UNESCO ambassador initiative. Identify area ambassadors, providing them with skills development to serve as liaisons and connect with their area to deepen the connection and knowledge sharing of international partnerships and peacebuilding.

- Engage Rotaract and youth programs. Young people are already passionate about climate resilience, food insecurity, and community connection. Integrating Rotary Peace Center materials or UNESCO themes into youth programming and education curriculum creates continuity between generations.
- Celebrate alignment publicly. When a club undertakes a climate, education, peace, mental health initiative, or any area of focus, explicitly frame it within global goals and context. This reinforces that local service contributes to global progress.
- Bridge fellowship with global purpose and impact. Rotarians report that fellowship and doing good in their communities and world brings them the most joy. Therefore, the Rotary-UNESCO-UN connection might be framed through the lens of local work connected to global peacebuilding. For example, understanding how local food insecurity projects connect to broader resilience building, and youth mentorship work contributes to global educa-

tion frameworks, elevates their sense of contribution and global relevance.

- The 80 percent opportunity. Rotarians are known as People of Action, imagine the impact if those 80 percent were fully engaged in and inspired to step up and participate in transformative peacebuilding through Rotary's global leadership and partners.
- Create meaningful pathways to inspire youth and Rotarians who seek global relevance to shape the future of education and peace in the world.

Conclusion

Education stands at a defining crossroad. In Rotary District 5050, inequality, digital transformation, and social fragmentation are intersecting in ways that challenge traditional educational systems. Socio-economic disparities, uneven access to resources, digital inequities, unethical digital engagement, and shifting social dynamics are reshaping how students learn, and experience belonging, opportunity, and hope.

The voices of youth and young professionals are clear and consistent. They are urging governments and policy makers to reimagine and restructure how education is delivered. They want curriculum that reflects their lived realities and future aspirations. They want learning environments that foster belonging, ethical engagement, and meaningful human connection. They want systems that cultivate critical thinking, creativity, leadership, and resilience, knowing that learning is increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence and rapidly evolving technologies. Above all, they want inclusion. Their voice is important and they want a meaningful role in shaping the systems designed to serve them.

Rotary's grassroots presence, youth engagement platforms, and peacebuilding initiatives offer practical avenues to advance UNESCO's priorities at the local level. When community service aligns with global educational goals, fellowship becomes a vehicle for peacebuilding, and local action contributes to global resilience. Strengthening awareness of

this historic and ongoing partnership can deepen civic engagement and mobilize volunteers as advocates for equitable, ethical, and future-ready education systems.

“Education for All” must ensure equitable access to relevance, belonging, ethical digital competence, and opportunity regardless of socio-economic status or social divisive markers. Reimagining education in the era of digital transformation and growing inequalities demands collaborative leadership across governments, educators, youth, society, and multilateral institutions.

It calls for co-designed curriculum, structured ethical digital literacy education, inclusive governance models, and renewed commitment to shared human values.

Let’s build bridges of opportunity for all and peace through intentionally strengthening the knowledge and connections in partnership with UNESCO’s global vision. Together, we can inspire academic achievement, a lifelong love of learning, service, resilience, relevance, peace, and responsible global citizenship.

PANEL 3

Peace and security: What role should international organizations play in preventing and resolving modern conflicts?

MODERATOR : MAÎTRE ARDAVAN AMIR-ASLANI



Ardavan Amir-Aslani, who holds a doctorate in law, is a member of the Paris Bar and a French foreign trade advisor. He is a senior partner at the law firm Cohen Amir-Aslani, where he heads the international law and state advisory departments. An expert in public international law, sanctions, asset recovery, and multi-jurisdictional litigation, he represents states before international courts and arbitral tribunals. A renowned essayist on Middle Eastern geopolitics and a lecturer at Sciences Po and the École de Guerre Économique, he is the author of numerous books and a reserve colonel in the Gendarmerie.



S.E. MUMTAZ ZAHRA BALOCH



Pakistan's Ambassador to France and Permanent Delegate to UNESCO since January 2025,

Mumtaz Zahra Baloch is the former spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and former Ambassador to South Korea. She has held key positions in Beijing, Washington, and Geneva. With degrees in physics, international relations (Fletcher School), and public administration (ENA), she has headed divisions at the ministry and the Foreign Service Academy in Islamabad.

MONSEIGNEUR ANTOINE DE ROMANET



Bishop of the French Armed Forces since 2017, he has jurisdiction over all French military personnel

and their families worldwide. A graduate of Sciences Po Paris, he holds a doctorate in economics and received theological training in Rome; he began his career as a commercial attaché in Cairo before entering the priesthood. As a parish priest in Washington and Paris, he co-directed the "Politics and Religions" department at the Bernardins and speaks on military ethics and peace.

MAURICE GOURDAULT-MONTAGNE



Maurice Gourdault-Montagne is a career French diplomat and a graduate of Sciences Po, where he

studied law and Oriental languages; he joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1978. He served as spokesperson for the Quai d'Orsay (1991–93), chief of staff to the Prime Minister (1995–97), and diplomatic advisor and sherpa to the President (2002–07), leading strategic dialogues with India and China. He served as ambassador to Japan (1998–02), the United Kingdom (2007–11), Germany (2011–14), and China (2014–17), and concluded his career as Secretary General of the Ministry (2017–19).

ALAIN OUDOT DE DAINVILLE



French Admiral Alain Oudot de Dainville served as Chief of Staff of the French Navy from 2005 to

2008. A carrier-based fighter pilot, he commanded the aircraft carrier *Clemenceau* in the former Yugoslavia and led the *Charles de Gaulle* project. As president of ODAS (2008–2014), he oversaw major defense contracts in the Middle East and is now focusing on maritime geopolitics.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Reform international governance

- By restructuring the UN Security Council to reflect current geopolitical balances
- By expanding its membership and further integrating emerging powers and underrepresented regions
- By reviewing the functioning of the veto right in order to limit deadlock situations
- By enhancing the democratic legitimacy of international institutions

RECOMMENDATION 2

Strengthen the effectiveness of international law

- By developing mechanisms that enable a more rigorous enforcement of international law
- By providing greater support to international courts
- By strengthening the capacity of institutions such as international courts to take action
- By providing greater protection for humanitarian rules during conflicts
- By establishing clearer accountability mechanisms for violations of the law

RECOMMENDATION 3

Develop new forms of cooperation

- By encouraging coalitions of middle powers capable of playing a mediating role
- By envisioning a more flexible form of multilateralism that complements major organizations
- By promoting regional partnerships to prevent crises
- By strengthening mechanisms for dialogue among states before the outbreak of conflicts

RECOMMENDATION 4

Strengthen conflict prevention tools

- By investing more in preventive diplomacy
- By establishing early warning systems
- By strengthening international mediation capabilities
- By improving coordination among international organizations and local actors

RECOMMENDATION 5

Address new strategic challenges

- By developing new international rules governing cyberspace
- By establishing standards for the use of artificial intelligence conflicts
- By providing greater oversight of emerging technologies that could affect international security
- By strengthening cooperation in the face of transnational threats

RECOMMENDATION 6

Strengthen the role of civil Society

- By further involving NGOs, researchers, universities, and local stakeholders in peace processes
- By increasing citizen participation in international debates
- By encouraging initiatives for intercultural dialogue

RECOMMENDATION 7

Put values back at the heart of international action

- By reaffirming the principles of justice, human dignity, and solidarity
- By fostering a culture of peace based on education
- By promoting a vision of security that goes beyond a purely military approach

The consensus is unanimous and becomes clear from the very start of the discussions: without peace or security, no sustainable progress is possible. So, in a world marked by the proliferation of conflicts and the growing erosion of international law, what solutions are available to us?

To answer this, we must first understand why international law is so frequently flouted today. Certain major powers, notably the United States, in fact unhesitatingly circumvent institutions such as the UN or the International Criminal Court and disregard them without hesitation. Criticized for their ineffectiveness and lack of resources, these institutions are seeing their credibility erode and no longer command authority.

Take, for example, the criticism leveled at the United Nations for its inability to find and propose solutions to major current conflicts, whether in the Middle East, Ukraine, or Kashmir. The Security Council appears paralyzed, notably due to the

veto power and its composition, which dates back to 1945, following World War II. Today, we can no longer view the world in the same way. It has become multipolar and more fragmented.

Changes in the international system

In terms of its nature and composition, the United Nations Security Council has already changed, but above all, what has changed is the rise of what are known as emerging countries; countries that, thanks to globalization, have become political, economic, military, and technological powers, and that also want to be able to voice their views, which carry weight in the organization of international affairs.

Ambassador Maurice Gourdault-Montagne specifically cites powers such as India, Brazil, South Africa, and Indonesia, which are demanding better representation and challenging institutions that are too often perceived as “Western-centric.”

The role of the UN is therefore clearly being called into question today; on the one hand, due to the

questioning of borders and systems—Admiral Alain Oudot de Dainville recalls, for the record, the Sykes-Picot agreements in the Middle East—and on the other hand, due to the nature of conflicts, which have become much more aggressive, just like the world around us. The emergence of drones, asymmetric conflicts, and terrorism partly illustrates this transformation of warfare. The trend toward the dehumanization of conflicts—particularly at sea through the use of technology—also contributes to this transformation.

The emergence of controversial concepts such as preemptive self-defense also raises questions. This preemptive self-defense amounts to granting oneself the right to strike a target that might pose a problem in the future.

The ongoing need for multilateralism

Despite their limitations, international organizations remain indispensable. With 193 member states, the UN remains, today, the only universal forum for dialogue. Certain advances, such as climate negotia-

tions, show that collective action remains possible, even when driven by more vulnerable countries. For the record, at the conclusion of COP 29 in Abu Dhabi in 2024, an important decision was made regarding the end of fossil fuel use. And it was the small island states that pushed through this decision against the wishes of larger countries; this is to the credit of the United Nations.

For Pakistan's ambassador to France, Ms. Mumtaz Zahra Baloch, the need for multilateralism represents an essential safeguard for small states that cannot act alone in the face of major powers. Her country, Pakistan, is a prime example of this; in the face of terrorism and regional tensions, cooperation is not an option. The need for reform has therefore never been more urgent.

How can we reform international governance?

Among the approaches suggested by the various speakers, reforming the Security Council to include emerging powers appears to be a priority, along with a parallel strengthening of the General Assembly's role.

To effectively coordinate the various levels of action, the valuable role of regional organizations, such as the African Union, was cited as a model. It has played a crucial role in matters of peace and security on the African continent. On this specific point, the question then becomes how these regional organizations should draw upon the UN system to ensure there is a universal principle on which everyone can agree.

Finally, the desire to promote an alliance of middle powers was raised. Ambassador Maurice Gourdault-Montagne referred to the proposal made by Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney at the most recent World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2026. Mark Carney proposed an alliance of democracies—an alliance of what he called “middle powers.” The idea here would indeed be to form a coalition of countries sharing common values, in order to rebalance the global balance of power.

The foundation of international law is the pursuit of the common good; this ethical and anthropological dimension of international relations

was highlighted by Bishop Antoine de Romanet, Bishop for the French Armed Forces. It is the pursuit of justice and equality among peoples, regardless of their size—this need for universal brotherhood, to which Rotary International is fully committed. For the crisis we are facing is also a moral and civilizational one—one that is leading us to shift from the rule of law to the law of force. There can be no peace without justice, and no justice without human dignity.

The discussions during this panel highlighted a central paradox: international organizations are weakened but more necessary than ever. Their future depends on structural reform, renewed political will on the part of states, and a global ethical awakening. The survival of multilateralism depends less on the institutions themselves than on the ability of states and societies to prioritize the common good over the interests of powerful nations.



Ardavan Amir-Aslani

Attorney at the Paris Bar – specialist in international law and legal diplomacy

An international order undermined by the resurgence of power politics

Since the founding of the United Nations in 1945, international organizations have been conceived as instruments for regulating the international system. Their objective was clear: to prevent conflicts, regulate the use of force, and promote the

peaceful resolution of disputes between states.

This multilateral system has made it possible to establish a legal framework unprecedented in the history of international relations. It has helped limit direct confrontations between major powers and promote unprecedented international cooperation in many areas.

But that balance now appears to be severely compromised.

The international system is undergoing a period of major realignment marked by the resurgence of geopolitical rivalries, the fragmentation of alliances, and the emergence of new powers. In this context, the logic of power often takes precedence over the normative logic that had structured the international order since the end of World War II.

This evolution presents international organizations with a fundamental contradiction: they are called upon to manage increasingly complex crises, even as their capacity for action depends heavily on the political will of states.

The central question, therefore, becomes: How can these institutions continue to play a role in conflict prevention and resolution at a time when geopolitical power struggles are intensifying?

Institutions designed for a world that no longer exists

International organizations are based on a delicate balance between collective cooperation and state sovereignty. This compromise is both their strength and their main limitation.

The United Nations Security Council, for example, was designed to be the central body for maintaining international peace. However, recent crises have highlighted the structural obstacles linked to the veto power and rivalries among major powers.

This phenomenon should not be interpreted as a failure of the multilateral system per se. Rather, it reflects the profound transformation of the international strategic environment.

The institutions created in 1945 were designed for a bipolar world dominated by states. Yet contempo-

rary conflicts go far beyond this framework. They now involve a multitude of actors: non-state armed groups, terrorist organizations, private companies, digital actors, and transnational networks.

Added to this is the emergence of new forms of conflict that blur the traditional boundaries between war and peace: cyberattacks, economic wars, information manipulation, the exploitation of energy resources, and proxy conflicts.

In the face of these changes, the institutional mechanisms of multilateralism sometimes appear too slow or too rigid to respond effectively to the dynamics of a crisis.

The evolution of conflicts: toward hybrid conflict

Contemporary conflicts are characterized by their complexity and their multidimensional nature. War is no longer solely military in nature. It is also economic, technological, informational, and legal. States are increasingly resorting to indirect strategies aimed at weakening their adversaries without crossing the threshold into open armed conflict.

In this strategic environment, conflict prevention requires a comprehensive approach. It involves integrating multiple dimensions: political stability, economic development, institutional governance, energy security, and societal resilience.

International organizations have numerous instruments at their disposal in these areas: peacekeeping missions, mediation mechanisms, international sanctions, development programs, and early warning systems.

However, these tools can only be effective if they are part of a coherent political strategy supported by member states.

The experience of recent decades shows that international organizations can prevent crises only when major powers agree to cooperate. Conversely, when geopolitical rivalries intensify, multilateral institutions often find themselves marginalized.

The crucial role of international law

In this uncertain context, international law remains an essential pillar of global stability.

Contrary to a widespread misconception, international law has never claimed to abolish the balance of power among states. Its function is more pragmatic: to provide a framework for this balance of power in order to limit its destructive effects.

In this regard, international organizations play a central role in developing and disseminating legal norms designed to regulate state behavior. They also provide institutional frameworks for the peaceful resolution of disputes.

International arbitration mechanisms, international courts, and procedures for the peaceful settlement of disputes are valuable tools for preventing the escalation of tensions.

In this regard, legal diplomacy represents an often-underestimated lever for conflict prevention. It makes it possible to transform political rivalries into legal discussions

and to open up avenues for negotiation where positions initially seem irreconcilable.

The effectiveness of these mechanisms, however, rests on one fundamental element: the willingness of states to recognize the authority of the rules they themselves have helped to establish.

Without this political commitment, international law cannot fully fulfill its regulatory function.

Reinventing multilateralism

In the face of profound changes in the international order, international organizations must evolve.

This does not necessarily mean completely overhauling the multilateral system, but rather adapting it to the realities of the 21st century.

Several areas of reform appear essential.

The first concerns the ability to anticipate crises. International organizations must strengthen their strategic analysis capabilities in order to identify destabilizing dynamics and risks of conflict more quickly.

The second area lies in the development of more flexible and responsive mediation mechanisms. Contemporary conflicts require diplomatic processes capable of incorporating a diverse range of state and non-state actors.

Finally, multilateralism must become more open to regional actors and civil society. Regional organizations, international financial institutions, humanitarian organizations, and think tanks now play a decisive role in crisis management.

Global governance can no longer be viewed as an exclusively intergovernmental system. It must incorporate a much broader ecosystem of actors.

Restoring the credibility of the international system

Beyond institutional reforms, the survival of multilateralism depends above all on one essential factor: trust.

International organizations can fulfill their mission only if states continue to view international cooperation as serving their fundamental interests.

Yet this conviction is now being tested by the rise of geopolitical rivalries and by the perception, in certain regions of the world, that the international order remains unbalanced.

Restoring the credibility of the multilateral system therefore requires strengthening the representativeness of international institutions and improving their ability to produce concrete results in crisis management.

International organizations must be perceived not as bureaucratic structures detached from realities on the ground, but as effective instruments in the service of collective peace and security.

Conclusion: preserving the spirit of multilateralism

International organizations are not perfect. They reflect the political balance of power in the world in which they operate.

Yet, despite their imperfections, they remain indispensable tools for organizing international cooperation and preventing conflicts.

In a world marked by intensifying strategic rivalries, the alternative to multilateralism is not a more effective system. It is the absence of common rules.

History shows that when international institutions weaken, the logic of power quickly takes over.

The challenge of our time is therefore to preserve the spirit of multilateralism while adapting it to the realities of a world that has become more fragmented, more complex, and more uncertain.

For beyond the institutions themselves, what is at stake is the international community's ability to replace confrontation with cooperation and to make the law an instrument of peace rather than a mere reflection of the balance of power.



Alain Oudot de Dainville

Admiral, Former Chief of Staff of the French Navy

Everything was simpler for our ancestors. They had a choice between force and submission. When Pompey, a citizen of the country that created the first legal system in history, wanted to eradicate piracy in the Mediterranean, he conquered its entire coastline without hesitation. When the Gauls during the Gallic Wars wished to resist Caesar, the tribes placed themselves under the protection of the strongest among them.

Jean de La Fontaine illustrated these two approaches in two fables: the law of the jungle in *The Wolf and the Lamb*, where “Might makes

right,” and vassalization in *The Gardener and His Lord*, whose moral still holds true today:

*“Little princes, settle your disputes among yourselves;
To call upon kings would make you great fools.
Never involve them in your wars,
Nor bring them into your lands.”*

How the rule of law imposed itself

The difficulty arises when there are two wolves in the same enclosure, tempted to devour one another. In the fifteenth century—the age of great discoveries—two powers confronted each other across the globe: Spain and Portugal. Renouncing war, they agreed to divide the newly opening world into two spheres of influence through the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, thereby challenging the notion of *terra nullius*.

A century and a half later, in 1648, the Treaty of Westphalia was signed to end one of the countless European wars. It gave birth to the Westphalian system, according to which each state exercises exclusive sover-

eignty over its own territory. It consecrated the nation-state, a fundamental principle later reaffirmed in the Charter of the United Nations, which states that “The Organization is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members.”

Although war has historically been the most common path to satisfying imperial ambition, it has not been the only method of expanding territory. Treaties and transactions have also contributed. The United States provides examples: the Louisiana Purchase (1803), Florida (1819), California (1848), Alaska (1867), Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines (1898), Hawaii (1898), and the Virgin Islands (1917).

Given that borders do not always reflect historical legacies or the aspirations of peoples, how can we avoid the prospect of millions of war dead, even if nuclear deterrence is supposed to protect us? The great massacres of the twentieth century pushed humanity to organize itself. The League of Nations (LoN) was the first intergovernmental organization created “to promote cooperation among nations and to guaran-

tee peace and security.” This initial attempt at global governance failed to withstand events and proved incapable of preventing the Second World War. It disappeared in 1946, giving way to the United Nations, founded on the slogan “Peace, dignity and equality on a healthy planet,” whose Charter makes sovereignty the cornerstone of international law.

Thus, a nation is considered sovereign regardless of its location, size, population, religion, history, or economic and military power. It may share part of its sovereignty by joining the UN, NATO, the Organization of American States, the African Union, the European Union, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Arab League, or dozens of other organizations.

How it is being weakened

Three-quarters of a century later, the very concept of national or popular sovereignty is being weakened, along with the rule of law that humanity took more than a millennium to establish as an alternative to the law of the jungle. The three fundamental principles of the UN sys-

tem—consent, impartiality, and non-use of force except in self-defense—are under attack, as aggressiveness replaces international law.

UN peacekeeping operations, deployed with the consent of the main parties to a conflict, are judged less effective than unilateral military action. Today neither the General Assembly, nor the Security Council, nor the International Court of Justice can impose peace in Europe, the Near and Middle East, or Africa, while artillery continues to thunder.

Criticism of the United Nations often focuses on the Security Council, at the risk of obscuring the successes of many of its agencies—such as the IAEA in combating nuclear proliferation, the IMO in regulating maritime trade, and many others whose roles are not contested. The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, regulating what was once a lawless domain, is authoritative even for states that have not ratified it.

The UN's failure to restore or maintain peace gives superpowers a pretext to question its relevance. They struggle to ensure that the lamb continues to fear the wolf, and that the

lord of the manor may still trample the gardener's field.

The Canadian Prime Minister, in his speech of January 20, 2026 at the World Economic Forum in Davos, offered a bitter observation:

“We knew that the story of the rules-based international order was partly false... That the strongest exempted themselves when it suited them. And we knew that international law was applied with varying rigor depending on the identity of the accused or the victim.”

The wolf will not react the same way to a lamb as to an elephant.

The weight of great powers

When the UN failed to fully satisfy American interests—particularly by refusing to grant George W. Bush legal authorization to invade Iraq—it was labeled “irrelevant.” The idea spread that the institution could not adapt to new global power dynamics and was not the appropriate forum for addressing major international issues.

This resurfaced recently with the proposal of a “Peace Council,”

which, according to the American President, would not replace the UN but “work in collaboration with the United Nations.” Its proposed charter describes it as “an international organization seeking to promote stability, restore reliable and legitimate governance, and ensure lasting peace in areas affected or threatened by conflict.”

For American leaders, international law can never supersede national law, which retains primacy—explaining the non-ratification of numerous treaties, from the Treaty of Versailles to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. American diplomacy has long been inspired by Theodore Roosevelt’s maxim: “Speak softly and carry a big stick.” To continue politics, one must be prepared to use other means, echoing Clausewitz’s famous formula about war as the continuation of politics by other means. The UN speaks softly but is reluctant to wield the big stick—another reason, for some, for its declining influence.

Chinese leaders also seek to reform the UN, but with a different approach. They sign treaties—often

with reservations, allowing room for maneuver—consistent with Sun Tzu’s principles advising rulers not to confront obstacles head-on. Deng Xiaoping declared in 1962: “It doesn’t matter whether a cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice.” In their rivalry, Americans and Chinese will always defend their interests; that is their duty as great powers.

China subtly reaffirmed its position in response to the Peace Council invitation. “China has always practiced true multilateralism. Whatever changes occur in the international situation, China firmly supports the UN-centered international system,” stated Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun on January 21, 2026.

China advocates a fairer and more balanced global governance system, as Prime Minister Li Qiang expressed in 2026: “If we were to return to the law of the jungle, human society would face greater brutality.” Yet China also invokes historical rights in tension with international law, notably in the South China Sea. According to Kevin Rudd, former

Australian Prime Minister, Xi Jinping's long-term strategy may be to "gradually reform the postwar international system based on law so as to better align it with China's interests." China seeks loyal partners—consumers of its production. It avoids open force for now, but asserts itself more boldly in regional waters, as illustrated by intimidation actions against Japanese aircraft by planes from a Chinese aircraft carrier in December 2025.

India, the world's most populous power, increasingly expresses similar views in calling for UN reform.

The law of armed conflict

The absence of peace results in conflicts framed by the UN Charter and the law of armed conflict—the regulation of the "big stick." The system rests on a golden rule: "Do not do to others what you would not want done to you," a principle rooted in dominant cultures and religions.

Article 2(4) states:

"All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the ter-

ritorial integrity or political independence of any state."

Article 51 provides an exception:

"Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs."

However, the United States introduced the concept of anticipatory self-defense—a preventive intervention permitted only if three cumulative conditions are met: the threat must be imminent, the necessity of response immediate, and the response strictly proportionate. Military action based on abstract or non-imminent threats constitutes preventive war, formally prohibited by international law. Misused, this notion legitimizes the wolf's action against the lamb.

Similarly, the "law of retaliation" (*lex talionis*), though historically defended by Plato and Kant, is rejected legally since individuals or states cannot take justice into their own hands. Frequently invoked in Middle Eastern conflicts, it contravenes UN principles.

These divergences explain resistance to the International Criminal Court among states adhering to customary doctrines of this kind.

Rebuilding regulation

The law of the jungle cannot endure when two or three powers assume the role of the wolf. Regulation will have to be rebuilt to prevent them from tearing one another apart and devastating the planet.

The second half of this century, as the three major powers consolidate themselves, inspires concern. It is time to prepare by attempting to reconcile the demands of the wolf, the lamb, the gardener, and the lord.



Mgr. Antoine de Romanet

Bishop to the French Armed Forces

In the Face of the Totalitarian Impulses of Predatory Empires

The peace of the risen Christ

“Peace be with you.” This greeting found its full force on Easter evening on the lips of the Risen Jesus. “Peace be with you” (John 20:19, 21) is His word—a word that not only wishes for peace but brings about a definitive transformation in the one who receives it, and thus in all of reality.

It is within this intuition that peacemakers live—those who, amid the drama of what Pope Francis called “a third world war fought piecemeal,” continue to resist the conta-

gion of darkness like sentinels in the night.

An empire has no borders

One evening at the Tuileries, Napoleon Bonaparte and his brother Joseph speak of “dynasty”:

Joseph: “You could have yourself crowned King?”

Napoleon: “I do not want a kingdom that would confine me within borders... We need an Empire...”

Unlike a Nation, an Empire is by definition expansive. Today, the principal powers facing one another are the American Empire, the Chinese Empire, and the Russian Empire—with Greenland, Taiwan, and Ukraine as their “natural extensions.”

Among the common traits of empires are: strong centralized power + significant military capacity + a dominant culture and religion + expansionist ambitions at their margins + a belief in inherent superiority.

A totalitarian temptation

A decisive contribution of Christianity is the distinction between the

City of Man and the City of God—between the political and the religious. Caesar is legitimate within his proper order: he levies taxes and organizes life in society... but Caesar is only Caesar. He did not give me life, and he will not give me eternal life.

We are familiar with Jesus' dialogue with the Pharisees: "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?" "Whose image and inscription is this?" "Caesar's." "Render therefore unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and unto God what is God's."

Humanity's constant double temptation, born of pride, is idolatry and totalitarianism. An idol is a passing reality of this world before which one bows as if it could grant salvation. Totalitarianism is an authoritarian power seeking to control every person and the entirety of the human being within an ideological-political framework.

In response to this, secularism (laicity), in its Christian understanding, safeguards this fundamental distinction between the political and the religious, between the City of Man and the City of God—foundation of human rights and freedom of

conscience. Secularism is the refusal of submission to political idols as well as religious idols.

Today, however, we observe how politics and religion are being associated both in the West and the East, as though a religious dimension were enlisted to accompany the salvific mission of imperial power. This phenomenon is compounded by the intense use of digital media and social networks in a new idolatry of omnipotence: "AI-latry"—the worship of the digital as an instrument of political-religious alliance in a "cubed" totalitarianism. Not to mention how "the tech giants" aspire to forge a new religion of the enhanced human being, promising a form of eternity.

The thoughts of Pope Leo XIV – Peace is a path

Drawing from quotations of Pope Leo XIV's Message for the 59th World Day of Peace (January 1, 2026), and his address to members of the Diplomatic Corps (January 9, 2026), we enter into the thought of one who has placed his pontificate under the sign of Peace—disarmed and disarming.

Denouncing the instrumentalization of religions

“One essential service that religions must render to suffering humanity is to remain vigilant against the growing temptation to turn even thoughts and words into weapons.

The great spiritual traditions, as well as the proper use of reason, lead us beyond bonds of blood or ethnicity and beyond fraternities that recognize only those who resemble us while rejecting those who are different. Today we see that this cannot be taken for granted. Increasingly, in the contemporary landscape, words of faith are drawn into political struggle, nationalism is blessed, and violence and armed conflict are religiously justified.

Believers must actively refute—above all through their lives—these forms of blasphemy that obscure the holy name of God. This is why it is more necessary than ever to cultivate prayer, spirituality, and ecumenical and interreligious dialogue as pathways to peace and languages of encounter among traditions and cultures.

May every community become a ‘house of peace,’ where hostility is defused through dialogue, justice is practiced, and forgiveness is cultivated.”

The model of the two cities : the city of god and the earthly city

Saint Augustine, in *De Civitate Dei* (The City of God), interprets historical events through the model of two cities: the City of God—eternal and characterized by unconditional love of God (*amor Dei*) and love of neighbor, especially the poor—and the earthly city, a temporary dwelling where human beings live until death. Christians are called to dwell in the earthly city with their hearts and minds turned toward the heavenly city, their true homeland. Augustine offers no political program but profound reflections on social and political life, including the search for more just and peaceful co-existence among peoples.

Though our context differs from the fifth century, many parallels remain relevant: profound migratory movements, geopolitical reorganization, cultural paradigm shifts. As Pope Francis noted, we are not living

merely in an era of change, but in a change of era.

War and peace among nations

Today, the weakness of multilateralism is deeply concerning. Diplomacy promoting dialogue and consensus is increasingly replaced by a diplomacy of force—by individuals or allied groups. War has regained legitimacy, and warlike fervor spreads.

The post–World War II principle prohibiting the use of force to violate borders has been breached. Peace is no longer sought as a gift and good in itself—“in pursuit of an order willed by God, implying more perfect justice among men”—but rather through arms as a means of domination. This gravely threatens the rule of law, foundation of peaceful coexistence.

As Saint Augustine noted: “There is no one who does not desire peace. Even those who want war desire nothing other than victory; they wish to achieve a glorious peace through war. Victory is nothing other than the subjugation of those who resist—and when that occurs, peace follows... Even those who dis-

turb the peace in which they live do not hate peace; they simply want it subject to their will.”

Beyond legitimate self-defense, this antagonistic logic reflects today’s destabilized and unpredictable geopolitical reality.

The central role of the United Nations and multilateralism

In our present situation, the role of the United Nations is more essential than ever as a central pillar of multilateral cooperation - to prevent global catastrophes, preserve peace, defend fundamental human rights, and promote sustainable development. It is necessary that the United Nations reflect today’s world more than that of 1945 and become more effective in pursuing unity among the family of nations, not ideologies.

Words as a place of freedom, truth, and life

Rediscovering the meaning of words may be one of our era’s first challenges. Dialogue requires shared understanding of words and concepts. It is tragic when words lose their connection to reality, and reality itself becomes a matter of opinion and

ultimately unintelligible. Today language is increasingly ambiguous. It becomes less a means of encounter and more a weapon to deceive or wound opponents. Words must once again unequivocally express objective realities.

True freedom of expression depends precisely on the certainty of language anchored in truth. Yet genuine spaces of expression are shrinking, replaced by a new “Orwellian” language that, in striving for inclusion, excludes those who do not conform.

A “short circuit” of human rights

We are witnessing a true “short-circuit” of human rights. Freedom of expression, conscience, religion, even life, are restricted in the name of newly asserted rights. The entire human rights system weakens, leaving room for force and oppression.

When rights become self-referential and detached from objective reality, only self-love prevails. Pride obscures reality and empathy. Every conflict has its roots in pride. Realism is lost, and fear and darkness

open the path to confrontation and war.

Peace: the fruit of the alliance between courage and humility

Peace remains difficult yet possible. It is, as Saint Augustine writes, “the end of our good,” the ultimate end of the City of God, which we anticipate even within the earthly city. Peace requires humility and courage—the humility of truth and the courage of forgiveness. In Christian life, these are embodied in Christmas, where Truth becomes humble flesh, and in Easter, where the condemned Just One forgives His persecutors and gives them the life of the Risen Lord.

Next October marks the eighth centenary of the death of Saint Francis of Assisi—a man of peace and dialogue, universally recognized. His life radiated courage in truth and the conviction that a peaceful world begins with a humble heart turned toward the heavenly city. A humble heart of a peacemaker in the light of Easter—this is the way, the truth, and the life of our humanity, entrusted to the freedom of each one of us.

PANEL 4

International Organizations at a crossroads: challenges of legitimacy, effectiveness, and funding

MODERATOR : ARPAD SÁRKÖZY



As Deputy Chief of Staff at Richard Attias & Associates, Arpad Sárközy develops international strategies for governments and institutions. He leads efforts to attract investment, promote economic diversification, and enhance national image. He coordinates the Future Investment Initiative in Riyadh and its global summits.

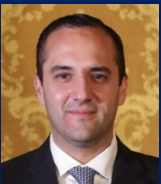


PABLO CASADO



Pablo Casado heads Hyperion, a pioneering fund in the defense, aerospace, and cybersecurity sectors, and serves as chairman of Data Section, a company listed in Japan. A former president of Spain's People's Party and candidate for prime minister, he leads the TLN–Johns Hopkins Atlantic Basin Initiative. He has participated in the World Economic Forum's New Leaders for Europe group and the Bilderberg Group.

S.E. JUAN CARLOS HOLGUÍN MALDONADO



Juan Carlos Holguín Maldonado served as Ecuador's Minister of Foreign Affairs (2022–2023) and as Special Envoy for “vaccine diplomacy.” A tech and tourism entrepreneur, he leads Ecuador Libre and Se Puede for Inclusion. A Georgetown University graduate, he served as Secretary of Development in Quito and ran for mayor.

H.P. GOLDFIELD



A former White House official under Ford and Reagan, H.P. Goldfield served as Assistant Secretary of Commerce (1985–89). With Hogan Lovells since 2007, he advises the Saudi Embassy, the PIF, and SAMI. As a co-founder of the Albright Stonebridge Group, he promotes U.S.-Saudi ties through SRC.

YVES DOUTRIAUX



Yves Doutriaux, a diplomat, served as ambassador to the OSCE (2003–2006), deputy permanent representative to the UN in New York (1998–2002), and consul general in Toronto. A member of the Council of State (2007–2023) specializing in litigation and finance, he teaches geopolitics at HEIP and ESCP. He is the author of books on the EU and diplomacy and is a regular commentator on LCI and France Info.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Reform international governance and representation

- By expanding the UN Security Council
- Increasing the number of members from 15 to approximately 25
- Ensuring greater representation of Africa, Latin America, and Asia in line with current demographic realities
- Combining permanent and non-permanent seats

Goal: To increase its legitimacy and its effectiveness.

- By making organizations more democratic
- Reforming nomination mechanisms
- Strengthening genuine citizen representation
- Reducing the sense of disconnect between international institutions and the public

Goal: restore democratic trust.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Strengthen the role of the UN Secretary-General

- By creating a more independent Secretary-General
- A 6- to 7-year term of office
- No possibility of reelection
- Election by the General Assembly

Goal: to avoid dependence on major powers and to foster the emergence of a global leader capable of speaking directly to the people.

- By opening up the role to the Global South
- Appointing a Latin American Secretary-General would send a strong signal

Goal: to restore balance in international representation.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Further involve civil society

- By establishing a formal mechanism for citizen participation
- Allowing civil society to address the Security Council and to place certain issues on the agenda (feasible without amending the UN Charter)

Goal: truly bring to life the principle: “We the People.”

- By institutionalizing dialogue with citizens
- Expanding consultations with NGOs and civil society organizations
- Strengthening initiatives already launched prior to the General Assemblies

Goal: restore a social foundation for multilateralism.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Reform the internal operations of organizations

- By launching an independent audit of the United Nations
- With the following questions to be addressed:
 - What is working?
 - What is no longer working?
 - What should be eliminated?
 - How should the structures be reorganized?

Goal: reduce red tape and the loss of credibility.

- By fostering a culture of results-based evaluation
- Including measures of the actual impact of programs
- Providing for direct consultation with beneficiaries

Goal: shift from a focus on resources to a focus on results.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Make youth employment a global priority

- By evaluating each program based on its impact on youth employment

Each agency should measure:

- Jobs created
- Job sustainability
- Long-term effects

Goal: prevent instability, radicalization, and future conflicts.

- By developing mentoring programs and partnerships
- Through the involvement of Rotary International
- Businesses
- Leaders
- Professional networks

Goal: to provide opportunities and support for young people.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Develop public-private partnerships

- By increasing the involvement of the private sector
- Such as foundations
- Major economic players
- International networks

Goal: complement the work of international organizations and strengthen their capacity to act

Are international organizations facing a crisis of legitimacy or a crisis of power?

The question is posed from the outset in a context radically different from the one that gave rise to the global architecture as we know it today (UN, World Bank, IMF, WHO, UNESCO).

In the aftermath of World War II, colonial empires still existed, China remained economically marginal, and there were only 2.5 billion people on our planet. Today, there are more than eight billion of us; Asia accounts for more than half of humanity; Africa will account for a quarter of the world's population by 2050; and Western dominance has vanished.

How, then, can international organizations remain legitimate, effective, and financially viable? Is the problem institutional or geopolitical? The answer varies depending on one's perspective.

Institutional or geopolitical crisis?

For Yves Doutriaux, a former ambassador, minister, and honorary member of the Council of State, the crisis facing international organizations does not stem from an inherent failure of the United Nations but from a lack of compromise among the major powers. He cites, for example, Russia's invasion of Ukraine; China's actions in the South China Sea; the United States' intervention in Iraq in 2003.

When the major powers fail to cooperate in the Security Council, the system cannot function. How, then, can we restore a spirit of compromise and cooperation? Nevertheless, he considers several organizations to remain highly effective, such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Health Organization.

Former Ecuadorian Minister Juan Carlos Holguín, for his part, believes that the issue of representation remains crucial.

He considers it completely unbalanced, clearly demonstrating that

the rules inherited from 1945 no longer reflect contemporary reality. In his view, Latin America is not simply underrepresented but “structurally excluded”; for the record, South America accounts for about 8% of the world’s population, while the Global South accounts for nearly 85%.

The absence of a permanent Latin American seat on the Security Council perfectly illustrates the gap between the demographic and strategic weight of the Global South and its actual representation. If certain actors do not feel they are being heard, they will eventually lose all interest in the results achieved.

According to H.P. Goldfield, former U.S. Under Secretary of Commerce for Trade and Development, member states should consider a better way to structure the debate. They must ensure that everyone is heard. When one looks at the five permanent members of the Security Council and the other members, it is clear that the veto power too often blocks action. He does not hold back in his criticism. In his view, certain institutions suffer from bureaucratic red

tape and a culture of very low risk-taking, which exacerbates their loss of credibility among the general public. He proposes an independent audit of these institutions and a systematic evaluation of public policies.

But beyond representation, does the question of legitimacy also stem from financial contributions?

Financial instability

The recent drastic decline in U.S. contributions, as well as cuts to development aid in certain European countries, is undermining international organizations in ways that go beyond the financial aspect. While it seems reasonable that the major contributors should have a greater say in the discussion and thus more opportunities to make their voices heard, this must never come at the expense of other stakeholders, who must also be heard.

And this brings us back to the importance of the debate: there is no guarantee that having greater financial clout automatically means being right or achieving better results. The wealthiest countries must continue to support the United Nations in the

common interest of all. The entire United Nations system represents approximately five or six billion dollars a year for all of humanity, which is relatively small on a global scale.

But the crisis facing international organizations also affects democracies themselves, and on this specific point, the roundtable participants wish to discuss the future of young people.

Youth unemployment: a factor in instability

More and more people believe that liberal democracy and capitalism are no longer the only possible model for organizing societies, and a growing proportion of young people tend to prioritize security over representative democracy.

Pablo Casado, the former president of Spain's People's Party, points out that many young people want, above all, a guaranteed income, a stable job, and access to housing—even if that means choosing an authoritarian leader.

This trend fuels populism and radicalization and risks increasing political fragmentation.

H.P. Goldfield identifies a particularly troubling issue: the potential surge in youth unemployment. Over the next ten years, more than one billion young people will be looking for work, but only about 400 million jobs are currently available.

Beyond the frustration and instability that this unbalanced equation could generate, a greater risk emerges: that of a form of radicalization. Looking at certain poor countries in Africa, Boko Haram has become a kind of employment agency. Because young people who are unemployed and lack prospects are given a motorcycle—and sometimes weapons—and this becomes their activity, their new job.

He therefore calls for an assessment of the impact of international policies on youth employment. While agencies such as the UNDP (United Nations Development Program) or the ILO (International Labor Organization) can report on the number of roads built or the amounts spent, they should also produce a report on their impact on youth employment.

The consequences of the digital revolution

The digital revolution has radically transformed the relationship between citizens and institutions. Citizens are no longer passive observers of international relations. They immediately see what institutions are doing—or failing to do. They increasingly expect an immediate response, as social media creates a direct link to those in power and traditional forms of intermediation lose their influence.

For decades, decisions were made among representatives of states; civil society remained on the sidelines. Greater involvement of civil society in decision-making could resolve this crisis of confidence.

Let us not forget that the opening words of the 1945 United Nations Charter in San Francisco were not “We the states,” but “We the peoples.” “The peoples” refers to civil society organizations, such as Rotary International and many others.

This is, in fact, what the UN Secretary-General is trying to do; every year, before the UN General Assem-

bly in New York, a meeting brings together representatives of civil society. These organizations must take more initiative.

Today, there are private initiatives that have become as influential as certain multilateral organizations, and cooperation between the public and private sectors is essential. Civil society must be able to play a much more active role.

The challenge is therefore not merely institutional, because citizens no longer have confidence in institutions. And that is the first thing we must change today. The major challenge, therefore, lies in our ability to preserve a framework for international cooperation in a profoundly transformed world—with greater representation, greater citizen participation, and more evaluation to ensure more visible results.

We must build strong and inclusive global organizations to manage the world’s transformations; otherwise, they will be the ones managing us!



H.P. Goldfield

**Former Assistant Secretary of
Commerce for Trade Develop-
ment**

The international system is losing the argument in the places that matter most. Whether it is due to the explosion of conflict with no end in sight across the globe – most recently in the Gulf as well as Sudan, etc. – or due to misinformation sowing distrust, or grand promises of change that remain distant from realization, the international system is quickly losing people’s trust.

The UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) boldly promise “decent work for all” and “peace, justice and strong institutions,” but the gap between the promises and the real-

ity for billions remains vast. The goals rightly show the level of ambition, but the follow-through has been lacking. This needs to change.

Make jobs the main metric of success

The promise of “full and productive employment and decent work for all” sounds ambitious enough. But jobs still sit at the distant edge of the traditional development business. Though agencies do count dollars disbursed, projects approved and workshops held, they rarely ask whether a young person leaving school or vocational training will find a sustainable job with real growth prospects.

That habit should end. If a development bank finances an industrial park or power plant, success should be measured in the number and quality of jobs that follow. That means tracking jobs created, the shift from informal to formal work and wage growth for those at low incomes. It also means being honest when the numbers disappoint.

To get there, international organizations need to invest in the essential

machinery that underpins real jobs. Vocational systems that teach skills that the modern economy needs, whether those are industrial and technical trades or those in the IT space. We need: governments that can credibly enforce basic rules; and credit systems that give entrepreneurs a genuine chance to grow. If an agency can count classrooms and kilometers of road, it can count decent jobs as well.

We should not ignore the simple fact that the history of development finance is more responsive to donor pressure than its critics allow. The rapid growth of climate finance, the pivot to SDG-linked lending, and the current scramble around digital development all followed coordinated donor signals rather than organizational initiative. A coalition of willing states that make labor market outcomes an explicit condition of funding approval can spur change.

Treat corruption as a “system,” not a seminar topic

The SDGs also promise to “substantially reduce corruption and bribery.” Here again, practice lags behind principle. Anti corruption in

development circles still often means standard wording in contracts and a familiar round of training sessions. A code of conduct without education or enforcement is negligent — and an open invitation for wrongdoing. Most large institutions now police their own portfolios through internal investigation units and blacklists. That is necessary, but it is not sufficient. The bigger prize is to strengthen the domestic watchdogs that citizens must ultimately rely on, such as auditors who can follow public money, investigators and prosecutors who can take on politically connected suspects, and judges who are both competent and independent.

One practical rule would help. Any large loan or budget support package should condition funding on the implementation of a serious program for anti-corruption bodies. Modern procurement systems that leave fewer gaps to exploit. Independent audit offices with adequate funding, staff, and a mandate to challenge how money is spent and to whom. Training and protection for investigators and judges. Public

portals that put tenders and contracts online where citizens, journalists, and donor governments can see them. Transparency is key!

Money should flow in phases. If a government publishes audited accounts on time and pursues serious malfeasance cases, more funding is unlocked. If those basics stall, so should the funds. The objection that conditionality punishes citizens rather than officials is real, but it argues for precision, not abandonment. Graduated, benchmark-linked disbursements, like those used in the IMF's Resilience and Sustainability Trust and the Compact with Africa framework, create genuine incentive effects without the blunt withdrawal of support that harms the most vulnerable. The question is not whether to attach conditions, but how to calibrate them so that reform becomes the path of least resistance and systemic improvement for governments, not an obstacle.

There is positive momentum on this front, especially in the Gulf. Saudi Arabia has transformed its anti-corruption drive into a permanent

agency — Nazaha — which regularly investigates and arrests officials and business figures and has tightened laws on bribery, asset recovery and whistleblower protection. Likewise, the UAE enhances its financial-crime and anti-money-laundering regulations and empowered its specialist prosecution and audit bodies, while promoting digital government and e-procurement to reduce opportunities for bribery and embezzlement. These are important steps forward, which, while not perfect, can be built upon and whose lessons are instructive for international development models.

The test for 2030 is whether the international system has made it easier to be a reformer than a rent-seeker. If the honest answer remains no, the fine words on “strong institutions” will not count for much.

Redefine the mission: build states, not just projects

The larger question is uncomfortable but unavoidable. What are international organizations for? For decades, they have been judged mainly on bureaucratic metrics: the size of their lending, the number of projects in their pipeline, the volume of technical assistance. That may keep systems busy, but belief in the UN remains under attack.

The real measure of success is whether countries emerge with stronger institutions of their own: tax authorities that can raise revenue without fear or favor, regulators that keep markets open and competitive, courts that enforce contracts and laws without political interference. The cache and legitimacy that organizations like the UN still have been key to opening the door for these reforms. Successfully building these institutions is how the UN and development banks retain and improve their standings in the minds of global citizens; but that requires three shifts in mindset.

First, boards should give priority to programs that clearly leave behind

more capable domestic institutions, even when the short-term numbers look modest.

Second, citizens need a stronger voice in shaping reform programs, particularly officials and civic actors who are already trying to clean up procurement systems or modernize labor laws. They are better placed than visiting missions to know where vested interests lie and which reforms are feasible. A greater emphasis on consultations with local populations and understanding their needs is key.

Third, finance should be linked explicitly to “institutional dividends.” When climate funds or development banks pledge large sums, a defined share should be reserved for the public bodies that will still be there long after the consultants have left: revenue services, planning ministries, oversight agencies. Every major program should answer two questions, not one: what will this build today, and what will it strengthen for tomorrow?

This is not without precedent. The Green Climate Fund’s Readiness and Preparatory Support Program

already dedicates a defined allocation specifically to building institutional capacity. While it is imperfect and underfunded, it is a proof of concept that can be expanded upon. The task now is to scale that logic across the full architecture of development finance and make it fast and responsive enough to deliver development funding into tangible progress.

None of this is idealism dressed up as policy. When contracts are enforced and public money is accounted for, when a young entrepreneur knows the rules will not shift overnight in favor of a connected rival, when a regulator cannot be bought and a license cannot be withheld without reason — that is the moment economic life changes character. The soft power of well-designed institutions is not soft at all. It is the infrastructure of ambition. Across the developing world, there is no shortage of people with the drive, the ideas, and the hunger to build something lasting. What has been in short supply is the predictable environment that makes the risk of starting worth taking.

Strong governance is the precondition for all of it.

What does long-term success look like? It is when entrepreneurs like Gates, Altman, and the generation of founders they have inspired are engaging students in the halls of Tehran University; not as diplomats, not as aid workers, but as peers talking about markets, technology, and what it takes to build something. That would be the lasting legacy of the international system's soft power; the dividend of every court that is just, every contract that holds, and every regulator who cannot be bought. For the young people in that room, it is the signal that the world is open to them and that their future can be bright! They will be able to own their journey to success. And that success will underpin a stronger community and more stable and prosperous economy and country.



Yves Doutriaux

Member of the State Council

The 80th anniversary of the entry into force of the United Nations Charter and the creation of the United Nations was marked by a general atmosphere of gloom — particularly among diplomats who, like myself, have devoted part of their careers to the multilateralism established at the end of the Second World War. In 1945, multilateralism was meant to guarantee a world order based on the restoration of peace, economic and social development, and respect for human rights. In 2026, that order appears deeply unsettled.

Certainly, the life of the UN has never been smooth. As early as

1946—just one year after its creation—the Cold War began between the USSR and the states then described as Western, gathered around the United States. Yet this rupture between former allies united against Nazi Germany and Japan did not prevent the United Nations—originally composed of barely fifty Member States—from expanding to 193 States today, largely due to decolonization, which brought many Asian and later African states to independence.

Around this universal UN, a “family” of specialized organizations developed: UNESCO in Paris, FAO in Rome, WHO in Geneva, among many others. In Washington, the Bretton Woods institutions—the World Bank and the IMF—were established. Later came additional agencies such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna and the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Geneva. The range of activities covered by international organizations is vast: combating poverty (UNDP, UNICEF), environmental protection (the COP conferences, including the Paris Climate

Agreement in 2015), nuclear non-proliferation (IAEA), peacekeeping, international criminal justice (the International Criminal Court in The Hague, established in 2000), space governance, and now artificial intelligence.

At the end of the Cold War, multilateralism experienced a golden period. The five permanent members of the UN Security Council (United States, Russia, China, United Kingdom and France), along with the ten non-permanent members, cooperated to end Saddam Hussein's aggression against Kuwait in 1991, support Cambodia's transition after the Khmer Rouge, restore peace in Angola, Mozambique, Kosovo, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire, and guide Namibia and later Timor-Leste to independence, among many other examples.

Admittedly, the UN failed to prevent the genocides in Rwanda (1994) and Srebrenica (1995), but that responsibility is shared with the permanent members of the Security Council, which nevertheless established international criminal tribunals to

prosecute those responsible for these grave crimes.

A dangerous drift

Today, unprecedented attacks against multilateralism—emanating notably from Moscow, Washington, and Beijing—are creating a dangerous drift for world peace.

I speak from twelve years of diplomatic service within multilateral institutions: first at the European Union (1988–1992), where I participated in the negotiation of the Maastricht Treaty, particularly its pillar on Common Foreign and Security Policy—more necessary than ever in 2026 in the face of Russian aggression in Ukraine and repeated blows by the U.S. administration against cohesion within NATO (for example, regarding Greenland's autonomous status within Denmark).

Later, from 1998 to 2002, as Deputy Ambassador to the UN in New York, I participated in preparing the Millennium Summit, which established the eight Millennium Development Goals, later expanded in 2005 into the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. In 2001, I accompanied Sec-

retary-General Kofi Annan to Oslo to receive the Nobel Peace Prize awarded jointly to him and the UN “for their work for a better organized and more peaceful world.” The Nobel Committee also recognized the UN’s response—despite “modest resources”—to HIV/AIDS and terrorism.

Finally, from 2003 to 2006, I served as French Ambassador to the OSCE, where I engaged in sometimes tense dialogue with my Russian counterpart, who argued that the “color revolutions” in Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004) were Western-engineered attempts to encircle Russia. I rediscovered a near-Cold War atmosphere—even as Russian and French missions at the UN had been aligned in opposing the illegal 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Meanwhile, China, initially focused on industrial expansion, later openly violated the law of the sea by militarizing artificial islands in the South China Sea and unlawfully claiming vast exclusive economic zones.

Undermining effectiveness and legitimacy

When permanent members of the Security Council fail to respect the UN Charter, it is unsurprising that the UN’s effectiveness is questioned. Russia vetoes condemnations of chemical weapons use in Syria, the annexation of Crimea, and its invasion of Ukraine. The United States vetoes criticism of Israel’s disproportionate actions against Palestinian civilians or settlement expansion in occupied territories.

France and many states have long proposed that the five permanent members voluntarily refrain from using the veto in cases of “mass atrocities.” Repeated paralysis in the Security Council—now compounded by President Trump’s proposal at Davos to establish a rival “Peace Council” chaired by himself with veto power—undermines the UN’s cornerstone.

Similarly, by blocking the WTO’s dispute settlement mechanism, the United States has weakened respect for international trade rules, already undermined by Chinese dumping

practices and American tariff manipulation.

Yet despite this erosion of the post-1945 international order, there have been successes: in 2025, the Nice UN Ocean Summit enabled the entry into force of the High Seas Treaty (BBNJ), and the WHO General Assembly adopted a global agreement to better protect populations against future pandemics.

Still, multilateralism's universality is weakened when the world's leading economic power withdraws from the Paris Climate Agreement, WHO, UNESCO, and other institutions.

Reform and financial crisis

Legitimacy is also undermined because reforms reflecting today's realities are perpetually postponed. The expansion of the Security Council to include India, Germany, Japan, Brazil and two African countries remain blocked by the U.S., China, and Russia. Emerging southern countries rightly demand greater voting rights at the IMF and World Bank, but the U.S. insists on retaining its veto—fueling BRICS+ ambitions to create alternative fi-

nancial institutions that could fracture universality.

The UN is also in severe financial crisis. The United States—contributing 22% of the regular budget—has reduced funding, which other countries, including France (whose multilateral development aid is also declining), cannot offset. The modest global budget (\$3.4 billion in 2026) has been cut by 7%, eliminating 2,400 positions. Peacekeeping funds may fall by 15%. Drastic U.S. aid reductions (–87% between 2025 and 2026) have forced the UNHCR to cut food rations by 30–50% in some refugee camps and suspend education and health programs for nearly 40 million displaced persons. FAO cuts are already visible in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and Yemen.

Secretary-General António Guterres warns: the UN is in danger. The most vulnerable states will suffer first—but humanity as a whole will bear the consequences.

A necessary coalition

Major “predatory” powers primarily pursue spheres of influence. The European Union, itself a multilateral entity functioning through negotiation, is well positioned to defend effective multilateralism—provided it builds coalitions with regional groups in Latin America, Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Arab world to protect global commons: democracy, human rights, trade, Palestinian rights, poverty reduction.

It is not too late to defend peace through law rather than force.

Responding to Marco Rubio’s remarks in Munich (February 2026) that the UN “offers no answers” on Gaza, Iran, and Ukraine: it is not the UN that is responsible for paralysis but the states that undermine agreements—whether by withdrawing from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, abandoning Ukraine, or sabotaging the Oslo Accords.

It falls to a broad coalition of middle powers, echoing Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney’s call in Davos, to “stand up to hegemonic forces” and save multilateralism.

It also falls to civil society—including global networks such as Rotary—to mobilize goodwill across five continents to support the UN’s mission for “a better organized and more peaceful world,” as envisioned by the Nobel Committee in 2001, and to implement the ambitious “Pact for the Future and New Generations” adopted in 2024.

ROUND TABLE

This roundtable discussion was held on the sidelines of the Forum at UNESCO.

Education, Culture, and Youth in Africa - Local Challenges, Global Impact

MODERATOR : SYNDIE AMOUSSOU-FLÉAN



A political scientist specializing in international relations, African geopolitics, security, and international cooperation—as well as a parliamentary aide in the Senate and a policy advisor on Africa–Europe relations—Syndie Amoussou-Fléan is also deeply committed to education and humanitarian efforts in Africa. As co-founder of a think tank on development policy, she will moderate the thematic session on education, culture, and youth ahead of the Rotary Forum on the Future of International Organizations at UNESCO in March 2026.



DOCTEUR SEIDIK ABBA



An academic and journalist, he is an associate researcher at the Université Polytechnique des Hauts-de-France and at UQAM. A specialist on the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin, he is the author of several seminal works on Boko Haram. Since 2023, he has served as president of the International Center for Reflection and Studies on the Sahel (CIRES).

AKLI MELLOULI



He is a Green Party senator from Val-de-Marne and vice chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defense, and the Armed Forces, as well as of the Senate Delegation for Overseas Territories. With a background as an educator and community leader, he is convinced that social justice and solidarity are built day by day.

MARIE-REINE HASSEN



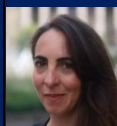
A leading political figure in the Central African Republic, she has served as Minister of Foreign Affairs, Deputy Minister of Economy and Planning, and Ambassador to Dakar. As a presidential candidate, she is promoting a plan to overhaul governance focused on transparency, institutional stability, and peace. Her priorities include strengthening education and culture, empowering women, and involving young people in public and economic life.

THANI MOHAMED-SOIHILI



A member of the Mayotte Bar Association and former president of the Bar, he is a senator from Mayotte. As Vice President of the Senate, he serves on the Committee on Laws and the Senate Delegation for Overseas Territories, focusing on land issues, human rights, education, health, and solidarity. Actively involved in local community work, he has chaired organizations combating youth exclusion and served as Secretary of State for francophonie.

LARA-SCARLETT GERVAIS



A photographer and explorer, Lara-Scarlett Gervais founded the Héritage & Civilisation association to use cultural heritage as a catalyst for resilience, education, and peace. In 2019, she launched ODYSSEE ÉDUCATION, a digital platform engaging more than 8,000 young people in 27 countries around natural, cultural, and intangible heritage, with a focus on fragile regions.

KERIM MESSADI



A data scientist and founder of LLMwave, he trains professionals and media outlets in generative AI in North Africa, documenting the digital divide between European and Mediterranean journalists. He has spearheaded two national ethical charters on AI and journalism and developed an AI roadmap for AFRIPOL in collaboration with Expertise France.



Syndie Amoussou-Fléan

Political scientist specializing in African geopolitics and president of the IFDIA think tank

At a time when the global balance of power is shifting, Africa stands out more than ever as a strategic region for envisioning the future of development, international cooperation, and dialogue among peoples.

At the heart of these dynamics, education, culture, and youth form an essential triad. Together, they shape societies, foster innovation, and contribute to building sustainable and inclusive development pathways.

The African continent is characterized by remarkable demographic, cultural, and intellectual vitality.

Its youth population, one of the largest in the world, presents both a challenge and a tremendous opportunity. Investing in education, promoting cultural expression, and fostering youth engagement are all essential to supporting this transformation and strengthening social cohesion, political stability, and economic growth.

In an interconnected and interdependent world, these issues extend far beyond the continent's borders. African educational and cultural dynamics are now helping to renew approaches to development, enrich international exchanges, and assert an increasingly visible African presence in multilateral cooperation forums.

Jointly reflecting on issues of education, youth, and culture in Africa thus invites us not only to rethink public policies but also to highlight initiatives led by civil society, cultural actors, researchers, and educational institutions.

It is also an opportunity to examine the forms of international cooperation that could support these transformations, particularly within the framework of partnerships between Africa, Europe, and international organizations.

With this in mind, this roundtable is intended to be a space for dialogue and collective reflection. By bringing together experts, political leaders, cultural actors, and representatives of civil society, it aims to better understand the dynamics at play and to formulate concrete courses of action.

The contributions compiled in the White Paper will thus help fuel a broader discussion on Africa's place in the world's contemporary transformations and on the central role that education, culture, and youth can play in building a shared future.



Dr. Seidik Abba

Researcher, academic,
journalist

Youth and education: factors exacerbating the crisis in the Sahel

In the specific case of the Sahel—a pivotal region straddling the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa—education and youth are not only factors that exacerbate the endemic and multifaceted crisis, but also pillars of the appropriate paradigm for resolving it. Indeed, even though there are significant exogenous factors (the 1991 civil war in Algeria, the collapse of Libya) at the root of the current crisis in the central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger), the fact remains that it is the existence of fer-

tile ground that has allowed the crisis to spread so rapidly and take deep root there. Faced with a complex web of challenges (governance, climate change, financial resources), Sahelian countries are unable to guarantee sufficient jobs for their youth.

The Sahel has one of the fastest-growing populations in the world: an annual population growth rate of 3.6% for Mali; 3.9% for Niger; and 4% for Chad. As a result, approximately 325,000 young Malians enter the job market each year, which can offer fewer than a quarter of those jobs.

This results in a particularly high demographic dependency ratio (the difference between the working-age population and the dependent population). In Mali, for example, this demographic dependency ratio stands at 103 dependents (ages 0–14 and 65 and older) for every 100 working-age people (ages 15–65). Each year, approximately 900,000 children line up at the gates of Niger's schools to enroll in the first grade of elementary school. Unfortunately, not all of them will be ad-

mitted. However, a map of the presence of armed terrorist groups in the region clearly shows that they are advancing more rapidly where schools are most scarce, particularly in rural areas. Indeed, these groups have made schools their primary target: Boko Haram, a Nigerian extremist movement, means “school is a sin” in the Hausa language. This has led to operations targeting educational institutions and mass abductions of schoolchildren. The endemic youth unemployment and educational challenges in the Sahel thus become objective allies of the region’s extremist groups.

Youth and education: pillars of the paradigm for overcoming the Sahel crisis

However, the lack of results under the current paradigm of counterterrorism in the Sahel reinforces the hypothesis that education and youth are the keys to overcoming the current crisis. Indeed, neither the military takeovers (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger), nor the increase in budgetary resources allocated to the defense and security sector (27% of the budget allocated to defense and se-

curity) have so far succeeded in reversing the balance of power with extremist groups or halting the spread of the terrorist threat, which has even spread from the Sahel to the Gulf of Guinea. Only a new paradigm—with youth and education as its two main pillars—will make it possible to emerge from the Sahel crisis.

It is primarily through education that we will address youth unemployment, which makes young people vulnerable to the siren song of armed terrorist groups; and it is also through education that we will build the defenses that will enable them to resist the arguments of extremist movements. The solution to the tangled web of crises in the Sahel will come through education and youth - or it will not come at all.

Recommendations

Based on this contextual analysis, the following recommendations can be made:

1• Place a special emphasis on girls' education in Sahelian countries, addressing the current disparities between girls and boys in the school system. Partners can support the construction of boarding schools specifically dedicated to girls. In addition to the social justice aspect, it has been documented that ensuring girls receive a good education can even serve as a lever for better population control in the Sahel.

2• Bridge the gap between general education and vocational and technical training, which is the neglected area of the Sahel's school system. Due to a lack of sufficient and specialized institutions, technical trades (plumbers, electricians, masons, etc.) are still rare in some countries in the region. Some Sahelian countries have one or two vocational and technical high schools but no engineering schools. International technical and financial assistance can support the region's efforts in this regard.

3• Adapt curricula to local realities, including the needs of the economy. Unemployment among young graduates is largely due to the mismatch between the skills of those leaving the education system and the jobs available. Expertise can be provided to countries in the region to support this realignment.

4• Develop greater synergy among regional partners in the areas of education and youth support. It is not acceptable that while some partners advocate for high-quality teacher training, others argue that teachers are a financial burden on the public treasury and that priority should be given to hiring "contract teachers," who are less expensive than tenured teachers. This makes education the structural adjustment variable for public spending.

5• Support the modernization of the private sector to turn it into a true source of employment for young people; this would help reduce youth unemployment and dry up the recruitment pool for armed terrorist groups.



Lara-Scarlette Gervais

Photographer, explorer,
and founder of the *Héritage
& Civilisation* association

Observation: the urgent need for connection : a prerequisite for commitment and stability

The triad of education, youth, and culture is a key driver of sustainable development that is sensitive to local contexts and fosters social and democratic cohesion by encouraging younger generations to integrate into, interpret, and take ownership of their cultural context.

This context is understood in accordance with UNESCO's definition of heritage, encompassing both natural and intangible heritage. In many regions, the challenge is no

longer merely access to education, but the ability to “build a society” and understand the prevailing modes of governance and decision-making: social fragmentation, loss of shared points of reference, uneven academic motivation, and local cultural resources that remain too disconnected from the classroom or devalued by development that ignores them and by globalization that overlooks local riches.

Rebuilding connections—to oneself, to others, and to the local community—has become an urgent educational and civic priority: without these connections, there can be no lasting commitment, no peaceful embrace of diverse identities, no sincere cultural relationships, and no effective international cooperation.

Operational proposal: tools for “working together”

Héritage & Civilisation (a nonprofit organization under the French Law of 1901) is dedicated to the transmission and protection of cultural heritage—particularly among young people—and to fostering dialogue among peoples through education.

Within this framework, the *Odyssée* program (launched in 2019) has evolved into an EdTech platform (*Odyssée Éducation*) offering annual collaborative learning pathways (3–4 sessions) rooted in heritage (natural, cultural, intangible, memorial) and structured around the “Know → Do → Connect” method.

The program is based on:

- secure class partnerships (4–6),
- engagement of local partners (museums, organizations, artisans, artists, etc.),
- creative projects, public presentations, and integrated impact assessment.

Three key drivers strengthen the ability to “work together”:

- Discovering and embracing one’s heritage to share it: Students begin by exploring their environment (places, stories, biodiversity, traditional skills, collective memory), then document it and share it with other classes. This approach transforms heritage into a common language and gives each young person a sense

of belonging and pride that is inclusive of all.

- Artistic and cultural creation: creative projects (performances, theater, photography, podcasts, short films, exhibitions, illustrated stories) serve as a driving force for cooperation. They foster self-expression, discussion, respect for others’ work, and collective success.
- A hands-on adventure in active learning: Each program is designed as a structured “adventure” (quest, mission, challenges, stages), rooted in reality and driven by the class-crew. Students investigate, meet people, produce, and present their findings: we move from theoretical learning to action, and from action to responsibility.

Field results (since 2019):

- + 8,000 young people, 27 countries,
- + 300 teachers,
- + 150 partners; 90% of teachers report an improvement in skills.

Recommendations—for the white paper and for Rotary action

1 — Develop “Living Heritage Trails” as a foundation for youth empowerment: replicable annual projects combining the discovery of local heritage, field research, active “adventure”-style learning, artistic and cultural creation, supervised publication, interclass exchanges, and presentation of findings.

This involves: promoting African heritage (cultural, natural, and intangible); engaging in dialogue with cultural stakeholders (institutions, museums, guides, and custodians of memory—for example, experts in panegyrics or “ako”, family narratives in Benin); the systematic integration of cultural elements into teaching (in consultation with education stakeholders); material support to facilitate exchanges between classes; as well as direct artistic practice in the classroom to enable students to experiment with and engage with culture in a concrete way.

2 — Establish “qualified partnerships” (Africa-Africa, Africa-Europe) to expand the circle of “us,”

with a moderation framework, rules for cooperation, and regular meetings (asynchronous + video calls). This involves building a network of schools; providing teacher training through the network; and organizing regular videoconferences among teachers to promote the exchange of best practices and the sharing of experiences.

3 — Make the local community a co-educator: at least one cultural or local stakeholder per lesson (museum, artisan, nonprofit, community member), in order to reconnect learning, careers, heritage, and civic engagement.

4 — Establish a “safety & trust” framework (minors, moderation, rights, traceability) as a prerequisite for international expansion: no private exchanges, teacher approval, and reporting/removal protocols.

5 — Provide funding through impact-driven multi-stakeholder coalitions (public–private–philanthropy): fund cohorts of classes with shared indicators and reporting to make the collaboration scalable and sustainable.

6 — Embrace linguistic diversity as a driver of inclusion and intercultural dialogue. Rely on a common language of cooperation (often French at the outset) while explicitly making room for linguistic diversity (national, regional, local, and diaspora languages) depending on the context.

Specific value for Rotary: catalyzing regional coalitions and twinning initiatives

Rotary International is particularly well-positioned to: (i) facilitate partnerships between educational institutions, cultural organizations, and economic stakeholders; (ii) support meaningful twinning initiatives; (iii) promote a model for action that can be replicated by districts.

CONCLUSION





Francesco Arezzo

**President 2025-2026
Rotary International**

As we close, I will not pretend we can resolve, in a single session, a question as large as the future of international organizations. But we can do something else, something more honest: we can name what we heard—and what it asks of us.

A paradox appeared again and again, sometimes explicitly, sometimes between the lines:

Never have our challenges been more global—climate, health, displacement, conflict, information disorder. And never have people felt more alone inside them.

We have more connectivity, and less common ground. More information, and less agreement about what is real. More capacity to act, and more doubt about who “we” even are.

This paradox invites reflection, because it touches the central issue behind many of the issues: trust.

We can redesign mandates, improve coordination, and refine metrics. These efforts matter. But beneath them lies something deeper: do people still feel that international cooperation is for them—or merely over them?

Trust is not restored by declarations. Trust is restored by experience: by competence, yes—but also by respect; by what institutions do when there is conflict, tradeoff, scarcity, disappointment. People watch closely in difficult moments. They remember the tone as much as the policy.

Now I want to turn to gratitude, because today did not happen by itself.

The panelists and moderators who gave their time and expertise today made this conference what it was. A good panel is not a series of prepared statements read into a microphone. A good panel is a conversation — and today we had real conversations. Difficult questions were asked. Honest answers were given. Disagreements were aired respectfully. That is exactly what a conference held at UNESCO should look like, and I am grateful to everyone who stepped up to make that happen.

But behind every conference that runs smoothly is an organizing committee that has been working for months, solving problems most of us never see. I want to recognize three people in particular. District Governor Mamadou Camara, whose leadership and vision drove this conference from the beginning. RRN Dean Cyril Noirtin, whose intellectual rigor and institutional knowledge helped shape a program that was substantive and ambitious. And District Secretary Jean-Luc Tuffier, whose organizational skill and tireless attention to detail made sure

that everything you experienced today — from the schedule to the logistics to the small things that no one notices until they go wrong — actually worked. Mamadou, Cyril, Jean-Luc: on behalf of all of us, thank you. This conference is yours.

And let me extend that thanks to the full organizing committee and to everyone who contributed behind the scenes. Conferences are collaborative acts, and this one reflected the work of many hands.

I opened this morning by talking about the relationship between global goals and local actions. I want to close by saying that today itself was an example of that relationship in practice. We gathered in a global institution, surrounded by the flags and aspirations of the international community, and we talked about work that is happening in specific places — in schools, in communities, in partnerships that exist because someone decided to act rather than wait. That is Rotary at its best. Not choosing between the global and the local, but insisting that they are inseparable.

This year I have asked Rotarians to Unite for Good. Today, you did exactly that.

**NOW TAKE WHAT YOU'VE
LEARNED, TAKE THE WHITE
PAPER, TAKE THE CONNEC-
TIONS YOU'VE MADE, AND
BRING THEM HOME.**

The work continues tomorrow — in your communities, in your clubs, in the partnerships you build from here.

Let us be, in our work, more like the relay runner than the sprinter. Let us hand off what we build so that others can carry it forward—locally, visibly, credibly—until global goals feel real again.

Thank you for the seriousness of this conversation, and for the kind of attention that makes real cooperation possible.



Mamadou Camara

Governor 2025-2026

District 1660

Rotary International

I have given careful thought to how to conclude this White Paper.

Should I provide an additional summary? Should I reiterate the findings, figures, and proposals once again?

Or should I simply, with sincerity, explain why this Forum was convened and what it truly represents to me?

I'd like to share a personal conviction here: we are living in a time of upheaval.

All over the world, tensions are mounting, people are filled with doubt, international institutions are being challenged, sometimes weakened, and, in fact, rejected.

Dialogue is often giving way to power struggles.

In this climate of uncertainty, many end up believing that multilateralism belongs to a bygone era.

I absolutely do not believe this, and I refuse to even entertain the idea!

On the contrary, I believe that our duty is to reinvent it, to bring it closer to the people, and to give it back a human face.

It is precisely in this spirit that this Forum was organized in Paris, at UNESCO House.

More than 850 participants—Rotarians and non-Rotarians alike—from 38 countries and representing 68 Rotary districts gathered to listen, debate, and compare their worldviews.

Diplomats, academics, nonprofit leaders, international experts, entrepreneurs, students, members of civil society, and Rotarians have shown that it is still possible to reflect collectively on the future of our world.

And that, in itself, is already a message of hope.

For deep down, I remain convinced of one simple thing: peace cannot be decreed.

It is built.

It is built through encounter.

Through getting to know one another.

Through the ability to engage in dialogue despite our differences.

In my view, culture remains one of the most powerful vehicles for peace and mutual understanding.

This conviction has guided me throughout my year as Governor.

Because history teaches us an essential truth: peoples who know one an-

other are less likely to fight. Peoples who engage in dialogue build more.

And societies that invest in education, culture, and youth always pave the way for a more stable and peaceful future.

Rotary has championed this vision for over a century.

Our movement is not merely an organization dedicated to humanitarian action.

It is also, at its core, a space for dialogue among cultures, professions, generations, and nations.

In a world growing increasingly fragmented, this mission becomes imperative.

That is why I sincerely believe that Rotary has a unique role to play in the years ahead.

Not in place of governments or international organizations, but alongside them.

Because our clubs are rooted in local communities.

Because our members understand the human realities on the ground.

Because we know how to build bridges between women and men who would never have met otherwise.

With this White Paper, I therefore wish to send a clear message to international organizations: give greater consideration to organized civil society as strategic partners.

Think of Rotary as a reliable partner that can help turn ideas into concrete action.

THIS WHITE PAPER SHOULD NOT REMAIN A STATIC DOCUMENT. KEEP IT ALIVE. SHARE IT.

May it inspire you and, above all, spur you to action.

For ultimately, the greatest danger to our societies is not disagreement.

The greatest danger is inertia.

This sense of powerlessness, born of uncertainty, of mounting crises, and of the feeling, among both individuals and nations, that they no longer have any control over the profound

changes in the contemporary world—is gradually gaining ground.

Little by little, the dangerous idea takes hold that nothing can really change.

And yet, history teaches us exactly the opposite.

The greatest human transformations have often emerged during periods of darkness and fear. So perhaps we should turn this anxiety not into a reason to give up, but into a driving force to rethink the world as we would like to pass it on to future generations.

May we reject this sense of powerlessness.

And may we continue, each in our own way, to bring this simple yet essential idea to life: a more peaceful world always begins with a sincere desire to understand others.

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First and foremost, we extend our deepest gratitude to Francesco Arezzo, President of Rotary International for 2025–2026, whose presence, unwavering support, and trust in this initiative have been an honor for our District and a valuable source of encouragement in helping Rotary speak out on the major issues of our time.

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- Me Ardavan Amir-Aslani
- Arpad Sarkozy

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- Bernard Stirn
- Jean-David Levitte
- Jean-Claude Binoche
- All the staff at the Cercle de l'Union Interalliée.

Their commitment, dedication, and professionalism were essential to the success of this initiative.

Finally, we extend our gratitude to the 38 countries and 68 Rotary districts, the clubs, Rotarians, institutional partners, international organizations, and all 850 participants who agreed to believe in this vision and contribute to this collective reflection.

May this White Paper continue to live on, be enriched, and inspire those who work around the world in the service of peace, mutual understanding, and the common good.

As a legacy:

“Future generations will judge us less by what we have written than by what we have inspired. May this White Paper be the starting point for a renewed commitment by Rotary to the service of peace, mutual understanding, and cooperation among peoples.”

Mamadou Camara

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Mamadou Camara is responsible for the editorial coordination and monitoring of updates to this publication. Any suggestions for contributions, updates, or additions are welcome and may be included in future editions.

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