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Second regular session of 2020 New York (virtual), 6 November 2020

Summary of deliberations

I. Introduction

1. The second regular session of 2020 of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) was held on 6 November 2020. Owing to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the session could not be held in person in New York, as originally planned. It was instead held entirely through videoconference and scaled down from one and a half days to four hours, with the Secretary-General chairing from New York.

2. The Secretary-General conveyed heartfelt congratulations to the Executive Director and staff of the World Food Programme (WFP) for winning the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize and paid tribute to their courage, determination, expertise and extraordinary work.

3. The session consisted of two segments, on the following themes: (a) "State of the world"; (b) "Future of multilateralism: common agenda and challenges for the United Nations system in a post-pandemic world". In the present summary, the highlights of the session's deliberations are provided.

II. Segment 1 – state of the world

4. The Secretary-General offered his reflections on the current state of the world and the multilateral system. Remarking on the devastating health and socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was increasing inequalities and creating more instability, the Secretary-General said that the world had experienced a "great leap backwards". Underscoring the need for coordinated responses and the important role of the United Nations system in the face of enormous challenges and persisting uncertainties for the international community, the Secretary-General called for a sustainable recovery, built on the pillars of inclusion, cohesion, solidarity and respect for human rights.

5. Welcoming positive developments with regard to climate change action and the leadership shown by significant actors in building a carbon-neutral and climate-resilient world, the Secretary-General warned about the risk of climate change becoming a lower priority in countries overwhelmed by the COVID-19 pandemic. He





called for strong cooperation among United Nations system entities to support a greener, better and stronger recovery.

6. The Secretary-General also emphasized the need to combat sexual exploitation and abuse within and across the United Nations system as a top priority, and that it was essential to strengthen accountability for the conduct of personnel, in particular by applying a zero-tolerance policy. Stressing the need for a coordinated United Nations response, he made a strong appeal to Board members for their continued leadership and their commitment to eradicating sexual exploitation and abuse from the United Nations.

7. In the ensuing discussion, the Board members considered global economic trends, including international trade, and the current and continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular on poverty rates, human capital development and human rights. Principals reflected on the impressive mobilization effort of the United Nations system in response to the pandemic, and the potential for collective action across all areas of responsibility, including with respect to addressing inequalities and discrimination and supporting social protection, debt relief and climate action. The Board also received an overview of developments in the areas of counter-terrorism, nuclear arms and nuclear capabilities for peaceful purposes.

III. Segment 2 – future of multilateralism: common agenda and challenges for the United Nations system in a post-pandemic world

8. Opening the second segment, the Secretary-General recalled the Declaration on the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations (General Assembly resolution 75/1), in which Member States had reaffirmed their commitment to multilateralism and had requested the Secretary-General to report back before the end of the seventy-fifth session of the Assembly with "recommendations to advance our common agenda and to respond to current and future challenges". Subsequently, the Board held a discussion, in two parts, as a collective reflection on the key elements of a post-pandemic world and on a common agenda for inclusive and networked multilateralism.

Key elements of a post-pandemic world

9. In the first part of the segment, CEB members focused on the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the United Nations system and the people whom it served. The moderator noted that in its response to the pandemic, a reformed United Nations system had demonstrated that it could collectively deliver during a time of crisis. The discussion provided an opportunity to consider the instrumental role that the United Nations system could play in ensuring that recovery reflected the Secretary-General's vision for a new global deal, based on a fair globalization, on the rights and dignity of every human being, on living in balance with nature, on taking account of the rights of future generations and on success measured in human rather than economic terms (A/75/1, para. 14).

10. In the course of its deliberations, the Board recognized the devastating effects that the COVID-19 pandemic had had on global health and the economy, and that it had further exposed pre-existing geopolitical tensions and inequalities. Although the pandemic was a serious setback to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, it had served to underscore the importance of pursuing them with unwavering determination and through collaboration and innovation.

11. In November 2020, the world was in a worse position than at the previous CEB meeting, in March 2020. Much of the goodwill that had helped to quell the first wave of the pandemic had disappeared, citizens were fatigued and Governments were navigating between safeguarding public health and imposing restrictions that would cause more economic hardship. Each day brought deepening inequalities and more suffering, not only because of the virus itself, but also because of the disruption to essential services and the tearing of the social fabric in countries throughout the world. International solidarity was needed.

12. The post-pandemic "normal" was expected to be a continuum and was likely to last longer than anyone had initially expected. The economic recovery would take a long time, but it was important to prioritize health above the economy. Designing responses to strengthen systems to be better prepared for the next crisis would be key. Three principles should shape the post-pandemic world:

(a) **People matter**. It was vital to put people at the heart of response and recovery efforts, and to have data in order to identify people's needs and where to channel help. A suggestion was made to consider creating legal digital identities to connect people to health care, social protection, food assistance, education and other services, as well as to support their financial inclusion.

(b) **Health matters**. Beyond the direct health impact of COVID-19, the pandemic had also caused severe disruptions to essential services, including in the areas of immunization, nutrition, non-communicable diseases, mental health and family planning, which could result in deaths from vaccine-preventable diseases surpassing deaths caused by the coronavirus. The COVID-19 vaccines would not be a silver bullet; strong national health systems were vital to people's long-term wellbeing and to countries' preparedness for the next health crisis.

(c) Leadership matters. It was critical that leadership, including that shown by the United Nations system, was multilateral and inclusive. It was stressed that COVID-19 could only be defeated if every country was constructively engaged.

13. The Board considered the pandemic to be a test of multilateralism and of the United Nations system, as well as an opportunity to forge a new era of multilateralism in which the United Nations would be more relevant than ever. Openness, inclusiveness and respect for diversity were essential elements of multilateralism that had enabled the United Nations, since its establishment 75 years earlier, to grow into a well-established, rules-based international system. Members agreed that it was necessary to defend that platform against challenges and that the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic should lay the foundation for multilateralism in the decades to come. Furthermore, the crisis had brought the imperative of public policy to the fore. That provided the United Nations with an opportunity to ensure that public policy was driven by a number of interdependent elements, namely good data and analytics, good science, good governance, fact-based media and transparency.

14. Looking at key governance trends, the Board reflected on what had been learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. It was noted that the pandemic had exacerbated pre-existing tensions and resulted in increasing inequality and economic nationalism. Whereas all global actors had agreed to cooperate during the financial crisis of 2008 and 2009, there had been no common understanding of the challenges faced and no common international action during the current crisis. The lack of clear agreement and multilateral action had delayed the success of efforts to overcome the pandemic. It was suggested that more of a soft-power approach to consensus-building and rule-making could help to address the structural challenges to multilateralism.

15. It was also recalled that there had been immense challenges for humanitarian action even before the pandemic, owing to unaddressed underlying causes, such as

conflict, climate change, debt and economic instability. It was therefore all the more important to ensure a holistic response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The United Nations needed to engage with stakeholders on a number of new fronts to: mobilize the entire system to avoid the very serious risk of major famines in the coming years; develop an approach to deploy vaccines rapidly, without them being financed in the poorest countries at the expense of other critical humanitarian activities, including other immunization efforts; and, improve messaging about lockdown measures, which had high costs in fragile and conflict-affected countries, in particular in the absence of social protection.

16. Several members stressed the importance of leaving no one behind and addressing marginalization. The COVID-19 pandemic had had a particularly severe impact on people on the move, who had been hit hard by border closures, poverty and hunger. That situation could spiral into further migration. Going forward, the United Nations needed to be better at conveying the extent to which vulnerabilities were interconnected. In addition, it was emphasized that, while women had been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, in particular because they bore the brunt of the burden of unpaid care work and because of an increase in gender-based violence, they were critical accelerators for change. It was crucial to maintain a strong focus on the protection of women's rights and to scale up interventions that focused on women, in order not to undo progress that had been made.

17. Education had been subject to major disruption, and yet the massive acceleration in the use of technology as a consequence of the pandemic had also brought considerable benefits in that regard. A pressing issue was the reopening of schools, especially for girls to resume their schooling. In the longer term, it was critical to build more resilient education systems. Over the next decade, the United Nations system should support Member States in investing in the next generation by connecting every school and community in the world and providing a globally networked digital learning platform for education and skills development. Several members underscored the importance of bridging the digital divide during the current period of accelerated digitalization. In order to bring the unconnected half of the global population online in the next 10 years, the United Nations system needed to support national information and communications technology strategies and help countries to create environments conducive to attracting private investment in such technology. Members stressed the importance of driving technology and science as a common good, and, in that context, the importance of normative instruments on the ethics of artificial intelligence and on open science.

18. Access to reliable information, freedom of the press and efforts to combat hate speech were highlighted during the discussion. One existing trend had been accelerated: social network platforms had become powerful actors in the information space but with little regulation. It was suggested that the United Nations system should work to encourage more transparency as to how information was handled and distributed, whether through algorithms or human intervention; to support journalism; and to promote global citizenship education and media and information literacy.

19. With regard to the environment, the pandemic demonstrated that crisis shocks could come from areas not previously considered in conjunction with each other. There were three different crises affecting the planet, of which to be mindful: the climate crisis, the nature crisis and the pollution and waste crisis, all of which were driven by unsustainable consumption and production. Climate change should not be seen as a stand-alone issue, but as interlinked with peace and security, human rights, debt and other areas. The need to provide cities with guidance on how to design, finance and govern green urban growth in order to have a positive impact on human life was also underscored. Emphasis was also placed on the importance of the United Nations system anchoring its recommendations, such as those related to the

environment, agriculture and health, on solid macrofiscal policies. The pandemic had shown more clearly that interlinkages existed between food systems, agriculture and other areas, and that innovation, not only in technology, but also in policy and business models, could enhance the transformation of food systems.

20. With regard to other specific sectors, it was noted that the aviation and tourism industries had been devastated, which had disconnected the world and caused tremendous economic damage in both developed and developing countries. There was a disproportionate effect on women, young people and informal workers, while local communities that relied on tourism risked falling into poverty. International shipping had proved more resilient and had been crucial to supporting food security and global trade. United Nations system organizations had an important role to play in guiding and supporting safe travel and a coordinated opening of borders, as well as in aiding seafarers affected by the crisis. Members also reflected on how the pandemic could lead to the reshaping of various sectors to support building back greener, with the decarbonization of shipping referred to as an example.

Common agenda for inclusive and networked multilateralism

21. In the second part of the segment, members focused on a common agenda for inclusive and networked multilateralism. Setting the scene, the moderator highlighted two related and opposing trends: the growing disconnect between people and the institutions that were supposed to serve them, which had manifested itself in recent years in an increase in social movements and protests against governance structures (for example, on gender equality, climate action and racial justice issues); and a decrease in international cooperation at a time when addressing global risks and issues required such cooperation more than ever - a reality that had led the Secretary-General to call for effective, inclusive and networked multilateralism. Taking into account those dynamics and the preceding reflections, CEB members were invited to share ideas on how to achieve the desired shift in favour of multilateralism, what needed to change and what type of governance mechanisms could accompany such changes.

22. Members reflected on possible key elements of a common agenda that would build on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Multilateralism was fundamentally both about and for people and required the buy-in of society: people needed to see that the United Nations was working with them and for them. In order to achieve that buy-in, agreement was needed on concrete objectives. The example of COVID-19 vaccines was provided. Through the common agenda, the United Nations system could facilitate agreement on shared challenges and solutions in a postpandemic world. In view of the evolving role of States, the concept of collective selfinterest might be the basis on which multilateralism could operate, and also around the notions of "global public goods" and the "global commons". However, it could not be taken for granted that societies necessarily had a shared view of "common goods".

23. A number of members, supporting the Secretary-General's call for a form of multilateralism that was more inclusive and networked, highlighted the importance of engaging with a wide variety of actors in their work, while at the same time preserving the intergovernmental nature of the United Nations. With its strategic overview of the situation, the United Nations could play the role of "conductor", directing positive forces to work together to produce transformative change. To that end, the new global deal should enable better representation of all countries in global institutions and support the participation of a range of stakeholders in order to promote social dialogue and achieve economic growth. Regional frameworks and regional collaboration were being strengthened and should feature prominently in an inclusive and networked multilateral approach. Local governments should be engaged

meaningfully in the process, while the sovereignty of Member States be respected. Finding new ways of better connecting civil society and the private sector – not only multinationals but, more importantly, small and medium-sized enterprises – with the work of the United Nations was also critical.

24. Members shared ideas as to how the United Nations system could prepare for a post-pandemic world and support the Secretary-General's call for the development of a new social contract, which was welcomed by the Board. First and foremost, they recognized that the pandemic had brought to the surface the underlying rupture of the social contract. Against that reality, the United Nations could position itself as the primary agent for renewing the social contract, with the 2030 Agenda at the core of such efforts. Members asserted that the global social contract should focus on equity and sustainability; include employment, sustainable development and social protection grounded in human rights for all; and address underlying circumstances, in particular those faced by the worst-affected communities. Activating networked multilateralism, while applying a truly integrated approach to policymaking, would be key to renewing the social contract.

25. Members emphasized that ensuring social protection was not just the right thing to do, but also the smart thing to do. Among other benefits, it shielded people from shocks, built resilience, improved health outcomes, encouraged economic growth, promoted human development, enhanced human capital, reduced inequality and strengthened social cohesion. The reality, however, was that only 27 per cent of the world's population was fully covered by social protection schemes. The approximately 2 billion workers in the informal economy and in precarious forms of employment, the majority of whom were women, were particularly at risk. It was also emphasized that social protection was affordable and could be funded through sustainable, equitable and reliable forms of domestic financing.

26. On the topic of changes to global governance that might help to address current and future challenges, CEB members offered several possibilities. A fundamental change to the international system established after the Second World War, namely strengthened cooperation between international financial institutions and the United Nations system, was already under way. That process needed to continue, also bringing together the respective counterparts in Governments. Members also observed that, as the economic dimensions of multilateralism became more pronounced, regional development banks would play an increasingly important role, alongside more and better-governed private sector financing. Only with all actors working together within a comprehensive framework could the required solutions be delivered optimally.

27. Changes to revitalize the international trade system, such as by improving trade finance, updating trade rules in the context of the digital economy, strengthening the contribution of trade to the promotion of stewardship of the planet and updating agricultural trade agreements to support food security, could support the post-pandemic recovery and also have a positive impact on addressing a broad spectrum of challenges. United Nations system organizations, using their respective strengths and capacities in different sectors, should increase advocacy for fair, inclusive and greener globalization and help Member States to develop a stable, secure and sustainable global value chain.

28. With regard to intellectual property rights, members perceived the need for a transformed model that would deliver health technologies as public goods for all, provide for the open and collaborative sharing of knowledge and coordinate international public investment in health care and health security. It was also observed that innovation and creativity had become increasingly globalized, and that a more balanced and inclusive intellectual property rights system could be a vehicle for improving people's lives, driving enterprise growth, creating social vibrancy and

contributing to solutions to complex problems, such as climate change. As the world was becoming more digitalized, United Nations system organizations could help people to bring their ideas to the global market and promote a collaborative approach to innovation and the sharing of technologies. The United Nations system was also seen to have a role to play in helping Member States to address cybersecurity issues.

29. Benefits could be expected from a reformed and revitalized peace and security mechanism capable of addressing global challenges. That would require the Security Council to further review its work and consider new and emerging threats, with a focus on conflict prevention. It would also require the imbalance between assessed contributions (paying for peacekeeping) and voluntary funding (paying for prevention) to be reviewed through a strengthened ability to use data and evidence-based approaches to demonstrate the impact of conflict prevention efforts, in order to increase investment in that regard.

30. On the issue of the broader funding of multilateralism, while it was expected that assessed contributions would continue to be met, it was projected that it would be increasingly challenging to attract voluntary contributions, even for humanitarian causes. Members, acknowledging this fact, said that the United Nations system needed to consider a more business-oriented governance structure and a smarter approach to efficiency, to ensure that every contribution went further. It was suggested that new system-wide funding mechanisms of pooled resources, similar to the Gavi Alliance and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, could improve and ensure the integrity of the policy functions.

31. In order to contribute to achieving inclusive and networked multilateralism, CEB members should advocate it more effectively and needed to work to restore trust in the United Nations system. There were important voices in favour of multilateralism in the international community; amplifying those voices could strengthen trust.

32. While recognizing the meaningful and impactful contributions that the United Nations system had made and continued to make, members agreed that multilateral organizations had to perform to a higher degree of efficiency, become nimbler and more innovative, and respond more quickly to a fast-changing landscape. Improving and enhancing horizontal work across mandates and organizations, increasing collaborative action and reducing bureaucracy were critical to that endeavour. Several members observed that the United Nations system needed to communicate differently and in a way that was more broadly understandable. Terms and concepts like "multilateralism" and "social contract" had little meaning to many people, including young people.

33. Members stressed that the United Nations system should continue to play to its strengths by providing a forum for discussion and trust-building, mobilizing stakeholders that shared common objectives, maintaining strong thought leadership on policies, fulfilling its unique normative and policy functions, and playing the role of an honest broker. The United Nations system needed to remain an arena in which collective policy agendas were curated and then popularized, and closer consideration should be given to the triple bottom line: social, environmental and economic dimensions.

34. Members highlighted their growing data capacity, which was seen as critical to delivering effectively in an ever more complex context. The sharing of data and analytics was a crucial part of integration efforts throughout the United Nations system. Members illustrated ways in which the Secretary-General's call for United Nations organizations to be data-driven and innovative was being heeded, including through work by the High-level Committee on Programmes to innovate data and statistics.

35. In closing the session, the Secretary-General expressed appreciation for the rich debate and the ideas contributed by CEB members, as well as for their support for his approach to developing a common agenda. He indicated that he envisioned responding to the request made by the General Assembly in its resolution 75/1 with a "manifesto", an agenda for people and the planet. It would build on the 2030 Agenda by including additional aspects with regard to tackling inequalities, peace and security, and human rights. It would strive to convey a vision and ideas that were clear, concrete and easily understandable, and that humanity could gather around. He wished for the manifesto to serve as a source of inspiration and a driving force for the kind of transformation that the world needed.

IV. Other matters

Endorsement of documents

36. The following documents were endorsed electronically after the conclusion of the CEB session:

(a) Report of the High-level Committee on Management at its fortieth session (CEB/2020/5);

(b) Report of the High-level Committee on Programmes at its fortieth session (CEB/2020/6);

(c) Building an inclusive, sustainable and resilient future with indigenous peoples: a call to action (CEB/2020/2/Add.1).