United Nations System CEB/2022/1

Distr.: General 26 August 2022

Original: English

First regular session of 2022

Vienna, 12 and 13 May 2022

## **Summary of deliberations**

### I. Introduction

- 1. The first regular session of 2022 of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), chaired by the Secretary-General, was held at Palais Coburg in Vienna on 12 and 13 May 2022.
- 2. The session consisted of three segments, on the following themes: (a) state of the world; (b) challenges to the global economic recovery and rescuing the Sustainable Development Goals; and (c) "Our Common Agenda" and its contribution to the global economic recovery and rescuing the Sustainable Development Goals. The present summary highlights the main discussion points of the session.

# II. Segment 1 – state of the world

- 3. The Secretary-General presented an overview of the current state of the world, reflecting on rising geopolitical tensions and their impact on the multilateral system and the work of the United Nations system. He underscored the critical role of the system in responding to ongoing crises at the global, regional and local levels, in line with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and territorial integrity.
- 4. The Secretary-General discussed the socioeconomic impacts of cascading crises, including ongoing conflicts, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the uneven and unequal recovery from its impacts, and the climate emergency. He reiterated the commitment of the United Nations system to strengthen and amplify the capacity of the multilateral system to deliver on the ground and move ahead on all aspects of its human rights, humanitarian and development actions, as well as peace initiatives around the world.
- 5. In the ensuing dialogue, Board members considered global economic trends, including in international trade, and the implications of the global growth outlook for key issues including food security, health, climate and rising inequalities. Principals reflected on increasing political polarization and its impact on multilateralism, international law and human rights, and the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic.





An update was provided on the need for the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to re-establish monitoring capacity over potential nuclear threats.

# III. Segment 2 – challenges to the global economic recovery and rescuing the Sustainable Development Goals

- 6. In opening the segment, the Secretary-General underlined that the Sustainable Development Goals were not merely a set of targets to be achieved but a development strategy that integrated economic, social and environmental dimensions and included a set of policies that were more essential than ever. He noted that the global economic recovery was facing challenges and that there had been backsliding on achieving goals such as gender equality, human rights and good governance. The Secretary-General encouraged the United Nations system to intensify its commitment and to reverse the current trend by moving together to rescue the Sustainable Development Goals.
- 7. It was recalled that the creation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development had been a process driven by Member States. The Sustainable Development Goals represented a conceptual paradigm shift through which social, economic and environmental dimensions were integrated. In 2015 three major agendas were agreed upon: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development and the Paris Agreement adopted under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The 17 goals of the 2030 Agenda were important signposts which have remained as valid at present as they were in 2015.
- 8. In the context of multiple crises, including the climate emergency, the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, the need was articulated for hope and solutions, including being fit for purpose and having the right skill sets within the United Nations. There was a need to build momentum for opportunities and find ways to exit the crises. The United Nations could continue to work in a number of areas encompassing financing for sustainable development; transitions in energy, trade, industrialization and digitalization; and supporting the development and delivery of vaccines against COVID-19.
- 9. In the ensuing discussion, members acknowledged the current challenging world context. They highlighted the ongoing conflicts that had not been resolved even prior to the war in Ukraine and observed that rising inequalities, climate change, technological disruption, the spreading of misinformation and disinformation, and the pandemic had exacerbated conflicts. Increasing food and energy prices would affect many countries and could lead to unrest and conflict.
- 10. The Board recognized that the COVID-19 pandemic was an ongoing public health emergency in many countries where vaccination rates had not reached 70 per cent and that after the challenging economic circumstances arising from the pandemic the fiscal space of many countries had been exhausted. Concern was also raised about the risk of rising interest rates resulting in debt default. The COVID-19 pandemic was described as a magnifier of inequalities in many areas, including gender. It was considered indispensable to increase public investments in the care economy and to work on social protection systems, health insurance and pensions to reduce inequalities.
- 11. There was a real risk of fragmentation in international politics, trade and finance which was already having a negative effect on the multilateral system and its ability to respond to the crises. Employment was going downward in all regions across the world. The global economy was not delivering for people and failing to allow them

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- to contribute to productive work and benefit from the results of that work. CEB members emphasized the need to integrate the concept of the social contract into crisis reactions and to build solidarity into financial and social policies.
- 12. In this context, the United Nations system had worked to support many countries in confronting immense challenges, including by encouraging the raising of their ambition with regard to nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement and assisting national Governments in their socioeconomic response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus was on a nexus approach where sustainable development, humanitarian, peace and security, and human rights work of the United Nations was coordinated at all levels, from the global to the local level.
- 13. The Board noted that cooperation in addressing inequalities and supporting Member States in making policy and budget decisions that were in their long-term interests was an area where the United Nations system could contribute. Members identified opportunities through which the system could further help Member States achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, including in the areas of energy security and access to energy, digital infrastructure, digital ecosystems and digital economies, pandemic response and preparedness, national revenue collection through taxation and support for social protection.
- 14. Observing a change in the context of financing for development, members expressed concern about declining donor support for development at a time when it was most needed. The reductions in official development assistance, including diversion to domestic spending, had further compounded the threat to multilateralism. It was acknowledged that humanitarian appeals were generally underfunded and that with the many competing priorities, including the war in Ukraine, there was a risk of development aid's being diverted. In concluding the segment, the Board agreed that investing in development was the best way to prevent crises and maintain international peace.

# IV. Segment 3 – "Our Common Agenda" and its contribution to the global economic recovery and rescuing the Sustainable Development Goals

- 15. In his opening remarks, the Secretary-General expressed concern that even without crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine the world would not be on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals owing to issues of global governance and the limited power of multilateral institutions. He recalled that the creation of these institutions after the Second World War had been influenced by the philosophy and attitudes of the time and stated that the composition of institutions and mechanisms was no longer aligned with modern realities.
- 16. Concerned about the prevalence of short-term perspectives in policymaking, which insufficiently addressed the problems of the future, the Secretary-General called for the introduction of a long-term perspective on the way international institutions and Member States operated. He provided a reminder that Our Common Agenda had underlined the need for strategic, future-oriented policymaking and that it aimed towards identifying options for the multilateral system with respect to improving its capacity to take transformative action. In this context, the Secretary-General noted that addressing governance issues, in particular in relation to global public goods, was one key requirement for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.
- 17. In his framing remarks, the Under-Secretary-General for Policy recalled that Our Common Agenda aimed towards lifting the thinking about what the world of the

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future could look like and encouraging consensus on what was desirable and what was not desirable. Describing the current situation as a new "triple San Francisco moment", with the international community confronted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the triple planetary crisis, the Under-Secretary-General highlighted that Our Common Agenda also presented an occasion to reinvigorate effective, inclusive and networked multilateralism based on sustainable development. He invoked the need to look beyond 2030 and to consider the effects of decision-making on future generations. The recent global shocks had only further illustrated the need for Our Common Agenda and for heeding its call for inclusivity and networking if the multilateral system was to maintain its relevance in the future. The Under-Secretary-General concluded that more needed to be done to overcome fragmentation in geopolitics and within multilateral institutions and to better connect the peace and security, development and human rights pillars.

- 18. In the discussion that followed, the Board echoed the observations that global governance presented a fundamental challenge and that the current system was reflecting the power dynamics of a very different era and not mirroring present geopolitical realities. It was observed that finding agreement on global conventions had become increasingly difficult and that normative standard-setting remained an important tool for engagement with different actors and stakeholders to create a common frame of reference. Against this backdrop, Our Common Agenda was perceived as offering an important opportunity for decision makers to exhibit leadership and adopt a longer-term approach to governance. United Nations system organizations could assist by providing Member States with strong, positive visions of the future.
- 19. A recurrent observation in the discussion concerned the need to build trust in institutions, including for strengthening governance, fostering solidarity, supporting multilateralism and realizing Our Common Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. Members stressed that trust was easy to lose and difficult to rebuild. Different options for restoring trust were identified, for example, increasing the accessibility of data, opening up and defending civic space, standing up for fundamental freedoms and taking steps towards achieving a more equitable distribution of income. The Board emphasized the need to strengthen networked multilateralism and support reform efforts that aimed towards increasing participation and inclusion of marginalized groups and local and regional governments and promoting dialogue with civil society and the private sector. Giving greater weight to the collective interests of younger and future generations was also considered vital in preparing for the future, in particular against the backdrop of changing demographics.
- 20. The new agenda for peace proposed in Our Common Agenda was highlighted by CEB members as key to addressing the root causes of conflict, including non-traditional threats such as climate change, and dealing with the negative aspects of new technologies and regulating weapons. It was noted that regional multilateralism was indispensable to political efforts related to peace and security, in particular to protect nations against powerful non-State actors, and that the United Nations system could contribute to strengthening it. Our Common Agenda could be leveraged to help build stronger consensus on emerging drivers of conflict in order to factor them into peacekeeping mandates and the related resource allocations.
- 21. Referring to the digital world, Board members expressed concern about a general lack of regulation and standards on transparency of algorithms of digital platforms. Governing and harnessing digital data for the global good were considered a key governance challenge, as the power concentration increased and digital and data divides continued to grow. It was observed that data governance was a politically sensitive subject, requiring a multidisciplinary approach, including human rights,

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privacy, security and economic aspects, to deal with the data divide and concentration of economic power.

- 22. Members also emphasized the role of governance in cyberspace. Anticipating problems and building processes in the short term that would achieve long-term goals were considered crucial in dealing with cyber in intergovernmental processes. Recognizing the applicability of existing international law, members felt that it was essential to adopt a human-centred approach to cyber affairs and in particular to advocate for adherence to humanitarian law in cyberspace. Cyberspace was perceived as an area where the United Nations could become more active and visible as convener and accelerator in promoting international agreements on security.
- 23. On outer space, the Board acknowledged that the United Nations was well placed to deal with governance issues, given its strong track record over the past decades, and to bring to everyone everywhere the benefits of space as part of the global commons.
- 24. Members recognized the impact of the United Nations system and underscored the need for its organizations to continue working in good faith and based on principles. Members welcomed that work on Beyond GDP, contributing to measuring and valuing what matters to people and the planet as part of the renewed social contract, had been progressing well within the High-level Committee on Programmes. It was recalled that the effort was rooted in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Sustainable Development Goal target 17.19) and that it was in support of Our Common Agenda. The Board agreed to work even more closely together to help realize the Sustainable Development Goals in order to meet expectations that the United Nations system delivers as one in an integrated approach. It was also recognized that United Nations system organizations were embracing change in order to better serve a fast-changing world and to be fit for the future. The role of the Board's High-level Committee on Management in helping to shape the next-generation United Nations was highlighted.
- 25. Based on experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was considered key to strengthen the organizations' communication capacities, while also drawing on behavioural science. In view of the increasingly common spread of misinformation and disinformation, members called for redoubled efforts to ensure that United Nations data and other official statistics were trusted and available to monitor progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in countries.
- 26. In closing the session, the Secretary-General expressed appreciation for the insightful discussion and reiterated his appeal for synchronizing the work to realize Our Common Agenda with efforts of the United Nations system to rescue the Sustainable Development Goals. He called for accelerating actions that were within the organizations' mandated authority and proceeding with implementation of initiatives that had received support from Member States.

### V. Other matters

#### A. Tributes to Board members

27. The Secretary-General welcomed the Director General of the Universal Postal Union, Masahiko Metoki; the Director General of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, Gerd Müller; the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, Catherine M. Russell; and Officer in Charge, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Mario Cimoli, who were attending a CEB session for the first time in their current roles.

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28. The Secretary-General paid tribute to the Director General of the International Labour Organization, Guy Ryder, and the President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development, Gilbert Houngbo, who were attending a CEB session for the last time in their current roles.

### B. Endorsement of documents

29. The reports of the High-level Committee on Programmes (CEB/2022/4) and the High-level Committee on Management (CEB/2022/3) at their respective forty-third sessions were endorsed electronically outside of the CEB session.

### C. Date and venue of forthcoming sessions

30. Board members were reminded of the CEB second regular session of 2022, scheduled to be held in person in New York, with dates to be identified.

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