United Nations System CEB/2022/2

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Second regular session of 2022

Manhasset, New York, 27 and 28 October 2022

Summary of deliberations

I. Introduction

- 1. The second regular session of 2022 of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), chaired by the Secretary-General, was held at the Greentree Foundation estate in Manhasset, New York, on 27 and 28 October 2022.
- 2. The session consisted of three segments, on the following themes: (a) state of the world; (b) New Agenda for Peace; and (c) reclaiming the digital commons. The Board also received a lunch presentation on the "United Nations 2.0" survey.
- 3. In the present summary, the main points of the session are highlighted.

II. Segment 1 State of the world

- 4. The Secretary-General presented an overview of the current state of the world, reflecting on the impact of multiple, cascading and dramatic crises and geopolitical tensions affecting the multilateral system and the work of the United Nations system. Updates were provided on the challenges to non-proliferation, with a special focus on nuclear safety and security in Ukraine and on the work of the Global Crisis Response Group on Food, Energy and Finance, including the Initiative on the Safe Transportation of Grain and Foodstuffs from Ukrainian Ports.
- 5. In the ensuing dialogue, the Board members considered global economic trends, including in international trade, and the interlinkages between the global growth outlook and key sustainable development issues, including increasing inequalities, climate change, food security and health. Principals discussed the challenges that extreme polarization was creating in relation to the state of human rights, and the interconnection with the post-coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic recovery, the climate emergency and global economic and political realities. The Board underscored the importance of the multilateral system in upholding the values and principles of the United Nations and of concentrating its efforts on areas in which it could add value, while seizing opportunities and focusing on those most in need of support from the United Nations system.





III. Segment 2 New Agenda for Peace

- 6. In his opening remarks, the Secretary-General invited CEB members to share their views on what could constitute the New Agenda for Peace. He solicited ideas with respect to both the traditional peace and security sphere and emerging "ungoverned" domains, such as cyberspace, new weapons and outer space, where a meaningful role for the United Nations had yet to be identified. There was a need for a comprehensive approach to conflict prevention that incorporated elements such as poverty eradication, social cohesion and responses to the challenges associated with the digital space, as well as a peacebuilding strategy that incorporated sustainable development efforts and addressed the root causes of conflict to support countries through difficult transition processes.
- 7. The discussion was also informed by presentations by the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs and the Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations. The presenters, recognizing that each entity had a critical contribution to make, especially in addressing emerging drivers of conflict and in the light of the deteriorating peace and security environment, reiterated the importance of engaging the full United Nations system to increase cooperation in support of the New Agenda for Peace. Among the salient peace and security challenges that had emerged in recent years were the quickly evolving nature of conflicts; protracted conflicts; the erosion of norms and regional and other security frameworks and treaties; heightened geopolitical divisions; the impact of climate change on security; the emergence of cyberspace as a new domain for conflict; disruptive facets of new technologies; violence outside of conflict environments, such as that linked to organized criminal groups; growing exclusion and marginalization, exacerbated in part by the pandemic; and a lack of confidence in States and other institutions.
- 8. In their opening presentations, the above-mentioned speakers identified four areas in need of structural change, namely, (a) prevention: to do more and make better use of the tools provided for in Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations (Pacific Settlement of Disputes), including mediation, negotiation and other peaceful forms of conflict resolution, as well as to bolster the foresight capacity of the United Nations and invest more in national capacity for prevention; (b) peacebuilding: to strengthen the role of the Peacebuilding Commission and explore the possibility of creating similar mechanisms that could help to mobilize national political and financial support for prevention and peacebuilding; (c) inclusion: to focus more on efforts to engage women, young people and marginalized groups, including in the context of implementing the women and peace and security agenda; and (d) investment: to generate both financial and political support for prevention and peacebuilding.
- 9. The presenters envisioned the New Agenda for Peace as a bold but pragmatic plan containing concrete proposals that had been developed in consultation with States Members of the United Nations. In the New Agenda for Peace, the Organization should take a comprehensive approach to peace and security and identify opportunities for cooperative multipolarity, in order to move beyond the logic of competition. It could explore how to better respond to emerging drivers of conflict (e.g. effects of climate change and transnational criminal activities) and new forms of conflict enabled by digital technology (e.g., misinformation, online hate speech and cyberwarfare); better address the regional dimensions of conflict and the question of multilateral enforcement; and better involve communities, young people and women in peace operations. A new vision and agenda for disarmament could also be an important component of the New Agenda for Peace.

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- 10. In the ensuing discussion, the Board recognized that the United Nations was both a unique symbol of world peace and the pre-eminent international forum for the pursuit of peace and security. Members stressed the need for a paradigm shift and the need for structural change, including through the adoption of a more integrated crosspillar approach to peace and security. It was important that the New Agenda for Peace strengthen the peace, development and humanitarian nexus and enhance the integration of peace and security, development cooperation and human rights. The Board strongly reiterated the importance of working across the peace, development and humanitarian pillars within the United Nations system, as well as the need to ensure both vertical and horizontal integration across functions. The United Nations also needed to continue to advocate for human rights and demand accountability for perpetrators of violence. It should provide longer term strategic thinking, using evidence and data to systematically analyse potential threats and opportunities. This meant that the Organization must build its intelligence capacity and its foresight and forecasting capabilities.
- 11. The Board highlighted the role of prevention in enabling and accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and in relation to the realization of human rights. Members expressed concern regarding rising defence budgets and decreasing support for development, the degradation of norms and the rule of law, and rising impunity. Members observed that, in order to succeed in preventing conflicts and sustaining peace, the United Nations would require a strengthened mandate that enabled it to make proactive use of data and intelligence; address new technologies; address the root causes of conflicts, which included inequalities, a lack of social cohesion and climate change; better integrate United Nations country teams into prevention and peacebuilding efforts; engage with regional groups in a more systematic way; and raise awareness of the growing role of non-State actors. In this context, efforts to introduce a new global measure of social and economic progress that went beyond gross domestic product were seen as necessary to the creation of a just economy, which was essential to prevention.
- 12. Recognizing that women and girls were often disproportionally affected by conflict and war, members stressed the importance of making more and faster progress in including them in peace processes and of accelerating the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda. Similarly, routine engagement of young people as agents for peace should be pursued.
- 13. With regard to financing for peace and prevention, it was necessary to be realistic about the magnitude of resources that must be invested in prevention in order to avert crises. Donors must be persuaded to take a longer term view and the Organization must be able to demonstrate the impact of its efforts to maintain peace and prevent conflict. Members suggested that quantifying the costs of conflicts to societies and to the international community, as well as estimating the benefits of peace in financial terms, could strengthen the case for investment in prevention.
- 14. With regard to disarmament, more work was needed with regard to chemical and biological weapons and the challenges associated with emerging threats, such as lethal autonomous weapons systems and threats related to outer space where the role of non-State actors, including private individuals, was a new factor that could complicate efforts. Furthermore, members acknowledged that cybersecurity and cyberwarfare were increasingly salient in the peace and security context.
- 15. The Secretary-General concluded the discussion with some reflections on factors that could be included in the New Agenda for Peace, with a view to putting forward concrete proposals for consideration by Member States at the 2024 Summit of the Future. As a result of marked changes to the global peace and security environment since the establishment of the Organization's peacekeeping function, the

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United Nations must change both its perspective on peace and prevention and its operations, including by taking a comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach to peace, development and human rights. The Secretary-General said that he saw an opportunity to make better use of United Nations country teams to support peace and security efforts through an integrated approach and that there was a need for capacity-building in that context.

III. Segment 3 Reclaiming the digital commons

- 16. In his opening remarks, the Secretary-General said that the digital commons was among the most important domains for the future of humanity, holding both enormous potential and challenges. Digital technologies needed to be harnessed to support inclusivity, reduce inequalities and rescue the Sustainable Development Goals, but their governance posed serious challenges. The Secretary-General added that misinformation presented additional problems and that some business models risked undermining international law and privacy. He stressed the importance of making the most of digital opportunities, while addressing risks and harms.
- 17. Opening the discussion, the moderator, the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology, noted that the report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation included a reference to a digital commons architecture, a concept that was also raised in the report *Our Common Agenda*. He emphasized that a global digital commons approach required a comprehensive vision of governance and impact that covered: (a) missing content and data, as well as gaps in connectivity; (b) missed use of digital technologies and lack of capacity, infrastructure and interoperability; and (c) misuse in terms of governance, cooperation and accountability.
- 18. In their remarks, the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union noted that there had been significant growth and developments in the digital sphere, which were having an increasing impact on the lives of people around the world. However, public policy on governance and security of the digital commons lagged technical progress. They raised the importance of norms and regulations for the promotion of a digital commons that would benefit all people. The opportunities that existed for Member States to leverage those technologies for good was emphasized, as was the importance of international cooperation and capacity development to support positive uses of technologies. The limited progress in addressing the downsides of technology was also acknowledged.
- 19. In the wide-ranging discussion that followed the presentations, the Board focused on opportunities and benefits; risks and harms; laws, principles, and norms; and digital architecture and capacities. The Board saw great opportunities for digital technologies to rescue the Sustainable Development Goals and advance sustainable development, including by supporting access to financial systems and financial inclusion, access to information and data collection, agriculture, green technologies and just transitions, industrialization and economic diversification, e-commerce and digital trade, connectivity for migrants and refugees, sustainable smart cities and the amplification of the voices of marginalized people.
- 20. Acknowledging that digital technologies not only were vital to the work of the United Nations system, but also posed risks and caused harm, members discussed areas of concern such as the spread of misinformation, disinformation and harmful content, as well as radicalization in the digital realm. The impact of hate speech and harmful content on vulnerable groups, including women, minorities, children and refugees and migrants, was especially concerning. In the context of peace and

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security, the importance of cybersecurity was underlined, as was the need to prevent the digital commons from becoming a sphere of conflict. Inequalities were identified as a major obstacle to sustainable development, especially inequalities that increased exposure to the risks of digital technologies, and gender inequalities, in particular, required further action. Furthermore, the potential for inequalities between the North and the South to increase was raised as a key issue that needed to be addressed.

- 21. During the discussion, the vital role of the United Nations system in the area of international laws, principles and norms to govern the digital commons was highlighted. Board members recognized that technology was advancing faster than regulations could be formulated and that the speed of innovation was accelerating. It was noted that the United Nations system had made significant progress in the field of human rights, the ethics of artificial intelligence, a proposed cybercrime convention, a code of conduct on integrity in public information, and data governance.
- 22. Members noted that the digital commons was dominated by private sector actors, including several very large companies, which posed governance challenges at the local, regional and global levels. The United Nations was seen as an objective convenor, which could bring together Member States and other stakeholders to work to reclaim the digital commons for the benefit of all and to promote human agency and sustainability. Norms based on evidence and knowledge, and values such as transparency, accountability and equality were needed to help to protect people from the risks of digital technologies and to facilitate inclusive governance of digital technologies, with the involvement of people from the South, women, young people and people with disabilities. Members proposed to facilitate exchanges of experiences in the governance of the digital commons and to engage with the private sector to reflect on business models and incentives to mitigate harm. There was an opportunity to use incentives and policies aimed at protecting the digital commons to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
- 23. In his concluding remarks, the Secretary-General acknowledged the unpredictability of the digital transformation and its trajectory and emphasized that the United Nations system had to ensure that digital technologies supported the greater good by promoting human rights, human agency, inclusivity, sustainability and the 2030 Agenda. He saw a need for the United Nations system to better coordinate its own use of technologies, as well as data collection, management and use; to develop a strategic approach to the use of technologies to rescue the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda; to intensify efforts to inform digital platform and social media good practices; and to facilitate exchanges of experiences among Member States and other stakeholders.

IV. Other matters

A. Tributes to Board members

24. The Secretary-General welcomed the President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development, Alvaro Lario, the Acting Executive Director of the United Nations Office for Project Services, Jens Wandel, the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Li Junhua, the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Simon Stiell, the Acting Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, Antonio Pedro, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, who were attending a CEB session for the first time in their current roles.

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25. The Secretary-General paid tribute to the Rector of the United Nations University, David Malone, and the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union, Houlin Zhao, who were attending a CEB session for the last time in their current roles.

B. Lunch presentation on the United Nations 2.0 survey

26. The Board was presented with the results of an assessment of the "next-generation" capabilities needed to transform the Organization into the "United Nations 2.0". As outlined in the Secretary-General's report *Our Common Agenda*, these capabilities relate to data, digital transformation, innovation, strategic foresight and behavioural science. Respondents to the survey, the results of which had been sent to the Board, felt in general that the five capabilities were important for the future and for the ability of the United Nations to make an impact, including through its support to Member States. The survey results showed that, while there had been good progress between 2020 and 2022 in the areas of data, innovation and digital abilities, work remained to build up behavioural science and foresight capacities. It was recommended that Board members initiate discussions with their relevant experts in the five domains to explore ways to move forward in their organizations. The Executive Office of the Secretary-General would continue to provide support to help entities to advance the United Nations 2.0 vision.

C. Endorsement of documents

27. The report of the High-level Committee on Programmes (CEB/2022/6) at its forty-fourth session, including the Principles for the Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence in the United Nations System (CEB/2022/2/Add.1), as well as the report of the High-level Committee on Management (CEB/2022/5) at its forty-fourth session, were endorsed electronically by CEB after the session.

D. Date and venue of the forthcoming session

28. The Board members were reminded of the confirmed dates of the CEB first regular session of 2023, namely, 4 and 5 May 2023, to be hosted jointly in Nairobi by the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and the United Nations Office at Nairobi.

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