



UN General Assembly 2023: Shifting Dynamics of Global Governance

The Global Policy Watch Team

Many world leaders during the UN General Assembly High-level General Debate (19 to 26 September 2023) referenced the sorry state of multilateralism and the various alignments and groupings, some to counter the lack of agency and redress power asymmetries across multiple policy streams. In conjunction with the historical responsibilities of developed countries for carbon emissions, many called for reparations for slavery and colonialism, highlighting the historical injustice that continues to disadvantage developing countries. Reform of the international financial architecture featured consistently on the agenda, as did a focus on demands for action on Loss and Damage at the upcoming COP 28 and the devastating debt distress, especially in small- and medium-sized countries.

All Member State statements, summaries, and video and audio recordings are available at the official UNGA General Debate [webpage](#).

Whither multilateralism: shifting alliances

Luiz Ignácio Lula da Silva, President of **BRAZIL**:

“The principle on which **multilateralism** is based, that of sovereign equality between nations, has been eroding at the main global governance levels.... When institutions reproduce inequalities, they are part of the problem, not the solution. Last year, the IMF made available US\$160 billion in special drawing rights to European countries and just US\$34 billion to African countries. The unequal and distorted representation to the management of the IMF and the World Bank is unacceptable. We have not corrected the excesses of market deregulation and the support of the minimum state. The foundations of a new economic governance have not been laid.

The **BRICS** [group] was the result of this paralysis and constitutes a strategic platform to promote cooperation between emerging countries. The recent expansion of the group at the Johannesburg Summit meeting strengthens the fight for an order which accommodates the economic, geographic and political plurality of the 21st century. We are a force that works towards fairer global trade in the context of a serious crisis in multilateralism. Rich countries’ protectionism has gained strength, and the World Trade Organization remains paralysed, especially its dispute settlement system.”

William Ruto, President of **KENYA**:

“Resorting to the pursuit of narrow, insular and antisocial agendas within **exclusive clubs** constituted to maintain the status quo that undermines and cannibalizes the United Nations system at the expense of progress in humanity’s collective journey to the future of our aspirations, is totally unacceptable.... The environment of pervasive mistrust - between the Global North versus South, developed versus the developing, rich versus poor, polluters versus victims and net emitters versus net victims - which

complicates and frustrates **multilateralism**, is the inevitable result of promises not kept, commitments not actualized, resolutions not honoured, and principles not observed. Multilateralism has been failed by the abuse of trust, negligence and impunity.”

Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, President of **PORTUGAL**:

“In an international order where some of its members are seeking to shift the **balance of power**, a sign of discontent with some of the existing rules, it is also important to re-evaluate the representation, scope and effectiveness of some financial organizations. As Secretary-General António Guterres said, ‘we need a new international financial architecture, a **new Bretton Woods**’. It is urgent to move forward along paths of respect for the values of the United Nations Charter, peace, sustainable development, climate action, correcting inequalities, reforming the United Nations and the world’s financial institutions.”

Macky Sall, President of **SENEGAL**:

“Senegal recognizes the valuable services that the **United Nations system** and that of **Bretton Woods** have provided to member countries for nearly eighty years. But we all know that the multilateral system, a legacy of a bygone past, has become obsolete. However, as Secretary-General António Guterres rightly warned, a system which continues to ignore the realities of its time and the needs of more than three quarters of its member countries, accentuates inequalities, generates the conditions for its challenge, and causes the risk of its fragmentation. If we want to avoid this divide, wisdom dictates that we reform global political, economic and financial governance, so that it is more representative of diversity, and thus reinforces its legitimacy.... The **G20** showed this by admitting the African Union as a full member.”

Charles Michel, President of the **EUROPEAN COUNCIL**:

“The **Bretton Woods** system must be reformed in depth. More equitable, more inclusive and more efficient.... These institutions were created when many countries were still under colonial supervision. Since then, the world has changed. However, the **G7** countries still hold almost all power there, absolute decision-making power. The European Union is ready to share power better, because the regions which have almost no say in the matter must be better involved in decisions that concern them....

Regional or continental organizations today play a growing role.... These organizations exert growing influence in the multilateral arena. They are essential contributors to stability. Their role must grow in the multilateral system, because they structure the multipolar world that we want. [Therefore,] the European Union has immediately supported the call of Senegalese President Macky Sall to include the African Union as a full member of the **G20**.”

Robert Dussey, Minister for Foreign Affairs of **TOGO**:

“Africa expects more equality, respect, equity and justice in its relations and partnerships with the rest of the world, with the major powers, whatever they may be. Today, Africans want to be **true partners**. In the concert of nations, Africa must be listened to for dialogue to have meaning. The lack of listening perverts the meaning of the dialogue, which turns into a juxtaposition of monologues and biased reasons.... Africa certainly does not have the same megaphones as the great powers of the world, but the voice of Africa counts and must count if we want to have Africa as a partner on major international issues.... Our allies cannot always expect unconditional support from the continent. Africa wants to cooperate with its allies on the basis of its well understood interests.... We want to be your partners, not your subjects. We want to serve our people and not serve foreign interests.”

Alicia Bárcena Ibarra, Minister of Foreign Affairs of **MEXICO**:

“Mexico seeks agreements on all issues on the multilateral agenda because we're interested in reconciling positions without leaving anyone on the margins. But we're living in unprecedented times which require greater will to come to the fore to give voices to all in the Global South. Mexico belongs to

the Global South, indeed, through history and conviction. Consequently, Mexico is considering participating in the debates and work of **G77 and China** on those issues and in those fora in which we could contribute to strengthening the negotiating position of the Global South. Soon we will submit a proposal to G77 plus China for its consideration.”

Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Minister for External Affairs of **INDIA**:

“Even as we encourage collective endeavours, India also seeks to promote cooperation with diverse partners.... It is visible in the rapid growth of the Quad, a mechanism today so relevant to the Indo-Pacific. It is equally apparent in the expansion of the **BRICS** grouping of independent-minded nations.... This willingness to work in an open-minded manner on specific domains is now a defining characteristic of the emerging multipolar order.”

Demeke Mekonnen Hassen, Deputy Prime Minister of **ETHIOPIA**:

“Ethiopia and other developing countries have also been advocating for the reform of the United Nations system as a whole. We call for a more inclusive and effective multilateral mechanism that works fairly for developing countries. The **BRICS** have championed this call. That is why Ethiopia is grateful to have been invited to join the group.”

Ranil Wickremesinghe, President of **SRI LANKA**:

“**North-South divisions** are widening with the digital divide, the financial and debt crisis and the energy transition. Contrary to the promise of 2030, today we are seeing levels of poverty and hunger not witnessed since decades. Neutral, nonaligned countries of the Global South such as Sri Lanka are once again constrained in-between new global power configurations. In numerous recent declarations in the UN and beyond including at the **G20** in Delhi, at **BRICS** in Praetoria and **G7** in Hiroshima, we have agreed that our challenges are interconnected, across borders and all other divides. We must grasp the opportunity to unite in order to build an inclusive future for future generations.”

Reparatory Justice

Nana Akufo-Addo, President of **GHANA**:

“It is time to acknowledge openly that much of Europe and the United States have been built from the vast wealth harvested from the sweat, tears, blood and horrors of the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and the centuries of colonial exploitation. Maybe we should also admit that it cannot be easy to build confident and prosperous societies from nations that, for centuries, had their natural resources looted and their peoples traded as commodities.... **Reparations** must be paid for the slave trade. No amount of money will ever make up for the horrors, but it would make the point that evil was perpetrated, that millions of productive Africans were snatched from the embrace of our continent, and put to work in the Americas and the Caribbean without compensation for their labour.”

Philip Joseph Pierre, Prime Minister of **SAINT LUCIA**:

“We feel ourselves obliged to seek justice, through **reparations**, for the crimes against humanity that tore our ancestors from our African homeland and enslaved them in the lands of the Western hemisphere.... **Reparations for slavery** mean that the countries which benefited and developed from four hundred years of free labour from enslaved humans should now pay back for that free labour.”

Cyril Ramaphosa, President of **SOUTH AFRICA**:

“Centuries after the end of the slave trade, decades after the end of the **colonial exploitation** of Africa’s resources, the people of our continent are once again bearing the cost of the industrialisation and

development of the wealthy nations of the world. This is a price that the people of Africa are no longer prepared to pay. We urge global leaders to accelerate global decarbonisation while pursuing equality and shared prosperity.”

Mia Mottley, Prime Minister of **BARBADOS**:

“**Reparative justice** is a solemn obligation which we must confront, a conversation whose time has come.... It can't be a slow conversation taken up when people feel like it. It has to be a conversation in which equal partners discuss, it cannot be an act of charity of those who feel their conscience must be cleansed.”

Eamon Courtenay, Minister of Foreign Affairs of **BELIZE**: “The terrible injustice and the poisoned legacy of native genocide, slavery and the trans-Atlantic slave trade cannot continue to be ignored or to be the subject only of academic discussions. Descendants of slaves continue to struggle with persistent racial discrimination, marginalization and generational trauma.... **Reparatory justice** is essential to any redemption from a historical wrong that is so indelible that it can never be fully remedied but must be reckoned with.”

Gaston Alphonso Browne, Prime Minister of **ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA**:

“[C]limate justice and **reparatory justice** are deeply intertwined.... Historically, the nations that thrived on the industrial revolution, did so on the backs of enslaved and victimized generations from the Caribbean and other corners of the African diaspora. It is unjust that countries that paid the highest human price are bearing the heaviest climate burden...while legal routes to compensation may be complex, it by no means nullifies the moral and ethical obligations stemming from these historical wrongs. SIDS cannot sit idly, while our countries sink beneath our feet or are crippled by a burden of **debt**, as we are left - abandoned by the international system - to rebuild within our own limited means, one disaster after another.”

Bola Ahmed Tinubu, President of **NIGERIA**:

“Today and for several decades, Africa has been asking for the same level of political commitment and devotion of resources that described the **Marshall Plan**. We realize that underlying conditions and causes of the economic challenges facing today's Africa are significantly different from those of post war Europe. We are not asking for identical programs and actions. What we seek is an equally firm commitment to partnership. We seek enhanced international cooperation with African nations to achieve the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals.”

Frederick Audley Mitchell, Minister for Foreign Affairs of **BAHAMAS**:

“[[I]t was shocking to hear one of our developed nation partners' position on **climate reparations for loss and damage** by his country. Their response was that under no circumstances would there be reparations for the loss and damage from climate change.... Millions of African peoples were ripped from the continent of Africa brought to the west and worked for free for 200 years.... Yet not one penny was paid to the slaves or to their descendants. Not even an apology is being offered for the moral tragedy which slavery represents.”

International Financial Architecture reform for equitable governance and financing

Cyril Ramaphosa, President of **SOUTH AFRICA**:

“To address the **developmental challenges** that face many people in the world, we require targeted

investment, technology transfer and capacity building support, especially in key areas such as industrialization, infrastructure, agriculture, water, energy, education and health. This also requires predictable and sustained financial support, including supportive trade policies, from the international community. We call on our partners from wealthier countries to meet [their] financial commitments [including] undertakings to mobilize US\$100 billion a year for developing economies to take **climate action**. We support the proposals outlined in the Secretary-General's **Sustainable Development Goals Stimulus**. In particular, we support the call to tackle debt and debt distress, to massively scale up affordable long-term financing to US\$500 billion a year, and to expand contingency financing to countries in need."

Ranil Wickremesinghe, President of **SRI LANKA**:

"National efforts alone will not suffice to ensure the success of the SDGs and reverse climate change. The need for global solidarity to restructure the **international financial architecture** is paramount. This is articulated loud and clear in multiple global fora including in G7, G20, and the BRICS. The Secretary-General's **SDG Stimulus** highlights the interconnections between the achievement of the SDGs, combating climate change and the concrete interventions required by creditors sovereign and private, as well as by International Financial Institutions (IFIs) including to mitigate the **debt crisis**."

Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar, Prime Minister of **PAKISTAN**:

"At yesterday's SDG Summit, far-reaching commitments were made to implement the Sustainable Development Goals. We must ensure implementation of the '**SDG Stimulus**'; the re-channelling of unused **Special Drawing Rights** for development; the expansion of concessional lending by the Multilateral Development Banks; and the resolution of the debt problems of the 59 countries in **debt** distress."

Saleumxay Kommasith, Deputy Prime Minister of **LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC**:

"Let me quote the call by the UN Secretary-General Guterres: 'the Global Financial System is biased, morally bankrupt and skewed to benefit wealthy countries' end of quote. This is a clear signal that the reform of the **international financial architecture** is an urgent and long-overdue task, and this cannot be done without strengthening the participation of developing countries in international economic decision-making, norm-setting and **global economic governance**, in order to adapt to the changing global economic landscape."

Alicia Bárcena Ibarra, Minister of Foreign Affairs of **MEXICO**:

"Estimates of the costs of the effects of **climate change** demonstrate that it will not only affect economic growth, but it will also affect the most vulnerable sectors of our societies. ...we emphasize the importance of having financing in place to tackle climate change and of giving priority to adaptation in particular, and especially to support the most vulnerable nations in our region, the Caribbean, first and foremost.... We are championing wholesale **reform of the international financial architecture**. This reform must address the deeply rooted asymmetries between countries. It must prioritize highly, heavily indebted countries with new instruments, with the redistribution of **Special Drawing Rights** to widen the fiscal space of developing nations. It should also prioritize **debt relief** in exchange for environmental services, debt for climate swaps."

William Ruto, President of **KENYA**:

"The entire system of **risk assessment** and the opaque methodologies employed by **credit rating agencies** and risk analysis needs to be overhauled. We must all recall the miscalculation of subprime mortgage risk by these agencies two decades ago, which precipitated a financial crisis whose effects reverberate to date...any objective rating must also take into account principles of responsible sovereign lending and accounting, specifically emphasizing the need for international accounting systems that supports the proper valuation of mineral wealth, natural capital and ecosystem services, in the

computation of national **GDPs.**”

Paul Kagame, President of **RWANDA:**

“Developing countries are constrained by a **debt** crisis, including higher costs of borrowing. This is causing economic disparities to widen, and slowing down our collective progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. The primary cause of this crisis is **high interest rates** in developed economies, in order to correct for years of quantitative easing. At the same time, developing countries face exaggerated risk premiums for both currency and political risk, which are simply unjustified.... Increasing access to finance also requires reform of our **global financial institutions.**”

Gustavo Petro, President of **COLOMBIA:**

“Governments and powers who still believe that the **climate crisis** and that of life can be overcome with cheap loans are mistaken. They are deluded to propose that those countries of the Earth, which are already indebted, are indebted as a result of disease and greed, and that they can use more loans to overcome a problem that only the belching chimneys of the North have produced. It is not possible to overcome the crisis of life, this mega crisis with more **indebtedness.**....

The majority of the investment to decarbonize the world's economy should come from **public funds**, ...interlinking states and societies and planning for the great Marshall Plan of the revitalization of the planet. The **market** will help us somewhat, but we cannot ask for solutions from a mechanism which has no humanity, when it was this mechanism which produced the very problem. Private funds can be used, but they will be limited by their own logic. The force to do this will come from public funds, and these funds are currently weakened by debt.”

Spotlight on the Loss and Damage Fund:

The climate crisis is one of the biggest challenges facing developing countries; speakers across regions emphasized the urgency to operationalize the [Loss and Damage Fund agreed at COP 27](#).

Gaston Alphonso Browne, Prime Minister of **ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA:**

“Now we must insist at COP28, that the Loss and Damage Fund must be made operational and adequately funded. It must also provide sufficient financing to help SIDS withstand the inevitable ruin that the actions of the major polluters are continuing to wreak. If COP28 fails in this critical mission, it risks undermining global trust, potentially sabotaging cooperative efforts on myriad global challenges.”

Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa, Prime Minister of **SAMOA:**

“Our expectations for the upcoming COP 28 in the UAE include crystallized commitments to bring about our envisioned ‘reality’. In particular, we wish to highlight the importance of operationalizing the Loss and Damage Fund as quickly as possible. For all AOSIS members, maintaining global temperatures below 1.5°C is a point of no return. Crossing this threshold spells the end of many of our island societies.”

Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar, Prime Minister of **PAKISTAN:**

“Pakistan also looks forward to the fulfillment of the climate change commitments made by the developed world: to provide over **US\$100 billion** in annual climate finance; allocate at least half of such finance for adaptation in developing countries; operationalize the funding arrangements for Loss and Damage; and accelerate their carbon emission mitigation targets to ‘keep alive’ the goal of restricting global warming to 1.5 degrees centigrade. Attempts to selectively provide these funds on the basis of geopolitical considerations should be resisted.”

Miguel Díaz-Canel, President of **CUBA**:

“[I]t is profoundly disappointing that the goal of mobilizing no less than US\$100 billion a year up to 2020 as climate financing has never been met. On the eve of the 28th COP, the G77 countries will have as a priority the exercise of the global balance, the implementation of the Loss and Damage Fund, the definition of the framework for the adaptation goal and the establishment of the new climate financing goal, which fully abides by the **principle of common but differentiated responsibilities**. The G77 is convening a summit of leaders of the South to be held on the 2nd of December, in the context of COP 28 in Dubai.”

Tandi Dorji, Minister for Foreign Affairs of **BHUTAN**:

“While welcoming the breakthrough agreement to provide Loss and Damage funding for vulnerable countries on the frontline of the climate crisis during COP 27, we are hopeful that progress will be made and that it will be operationalized by COP 28. In addition, we need to mobilize new and additional **climate financing** while ensuring balance between financing for mitigation and adaptation.”

Lazarus McCarthy Chakwera, President of **MALAWI**:

“We need decision and action on the climate financing that has thus far been nothing more than a promissory note from the developed countries responsible for resourcing our efforts for mitigation, adaptation, and most urgently, Loss and Damage. We need decision and action on debt, for like most Least Developed Countries, Malawi is in distress because its debt is unsustainable, and so our call to action on behalf of all LDCs on this matter remains the same: **Cancel the Debts!** Cancel the Debts! Cancel the Debts!”

Leo Varadkar, Taoiseach of **IRELAND**:

“Earlier this year, the UN Secretary-General spoke of the world ‘hurtling towards a disaster, with eyes wide open’. We know that it is those who have done least to cause the climate crisis that are the most vulnerable to its effects. It is also clear that much of this is irreversible, particularly in Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States. In responding to this crisis, we cannot leave behind those who are already at the frontline. Adequate levels of **finance for adaptation** are urgently needed. And it is essential that the discussions this week on the Loss and Damage Fund make real progress. We need to be ready to take a definitive step at COP 28 in Dubai later this year.”

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