

Peace, *the* common *goal*

Let's forget for a moment our fears about the state of the world — it is neither useful nor constructive.

The shortcomings of the UN system have been acknowledged for decades, even if it now seems to us to have reached its peak. And yet, this imperfect system has survived the immediate post-war period, the Cold War, and the world(s) that emerged after September 11, 2001. It is not impossible that it will also withstand current tensions. Ultimately, the nature of its resilience remains unknown.

However, this does not mean that the silent majority should passively accept the system at hand, relinquishing the pursuit of one that is better suited to our times.

Much has been said about a crisis of multilateralism. Perhaps so. But it is not multilateralism itself that is in crisis, rather its form that is somehow evolving. In truth, multilateralism has already adapted, changed significantly, and continues to reinvent itself before our eyes. It advances through exclusions, self-exclusions, and new inclusions. It returns to more traditional forms of relations between governments,

while inviting civil society and the private sector to co-participate in decision-making. The recent context of negotiations on a global treaty on plastics highlights the difficulties encountered, but it also triggers a broad awakening.

Launched by the UN several years ago, the process seems extremely slow. It is worth keeping in mind nuanced, granular analyses. While the UN Security Council may be blocked, and divided, the General Assembly has not necessarily lost its purpose. Its revitalization could come through more specific tasks or by fostering reflection

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Demonstration of UN staff in Geneva,
May 1, 2025
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on the state of the world and shared visions for its future. Could this be one of the keys to rethinking the UN system? Is there a way to reimagine this role? As for the UN agencies, at least those based in the Geneva area, they show undeniable signs of vitality and achievement. The pandemic treaty under negotiation at WHO, despite a severe budget crisis, is a recent example.



Pascale Baeriswyl, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the UN and President of the Security Council for the month of October, shakes hands with Riyad Mansour, Palestinian Ambassador to the UN, during a Security Council meeting on the situation in the Middle East. May 2023
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The current great disorder is most likely temporary. Before speaking of an overhaul of the UN system, perhaps we should first take a more constructive look at the record of UN agencies (a pillar of International Geneva), of national and transnational civil society, and of national and transnational private sectors. Some of these may need to undergo painful yet perhaps necessary streamlining to increase their effectiveness and efficiency. Others may continue their work much as they do today. Still others might undergo profound reform.

In any case, International Geneva, compelled to reinvent itself, could, and perhaps should, remain the hub for sectoral governance, integrated policy thinking, and decision-making in the general interest. It is where climate and human rights issues, global health and trade, along with other crucial matters, are debated — all in pursuit of a common goal: peace.

Indeed, might this blend of sectoral and integrated work be both the lowest common denominator and Geneva's greatest added value, a place where peace and cooperation

The Salle de la Réformation during the first meeting of the League of Nations Assembly in January 1920

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between nations, and between state and non-state actors alike, are shaped? Geneva's immense comparative advantage lies in its density and diversity of actors and organisations working on the most critical issues for peace and the future of our planet: health, climate, human rights, humanitarian action, labour, trade, intellectual property, standards, and telecommunications.

Conference at the AI for Good 2024 event in Geneva.

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Where else in the world would be better placed than Geneva to become the nerve centre for dialogue and governance on the delicate issue of regulating artificial intelligence? Or outer space? The international organisation most capable and best equipped to host such efforts already exists — why reinvent it? On the contrary, we should strengthen its resources and influence.

If it is conceivable that some international institutions have run their course, it is equally useful to imagine other scenarios. One, among others, might take inspiration from the Japanese art of kintsugi, which restores broken objects by highlighting the repairs with gold seams. This art does



Bowl restored using the kintsugi technique

not aim to conceal flaws but to transform them into aesthetic features that tell the object's story. Would it not be wise to restore with care, without discarding or trampling on what has been achieved? Not embalming, but rather injecting fresh dynamism into institutions whose core principles are sound and globally minded.

Whatever happens, let us remember that Geneva was the cradle of the first wave of internationalism, the League of Nations; it became the roots of internationalism and multilateralism in the latter half of the twentieth century and the first quarter of

our own. It has the know-how, expertise, networks, density, diversity, respect for others, and the Swiss tradition of dialogue, all invaluable assets that would be costly to reproduce elsewhere.

Geneva is well placed to once again be the cradle of internationalism and new multilateralism, meant to be a pragmatic, open, inclusive, and respectful multilateralism, built on a fundamental common denominator: working to improve the human condition on our planet. And with the improvement of the human condition comes peace.



Flag on the Mont-Blanc Bridge celebrating 20 years of Interpeace.
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The Portail des Nations, the new UN Visitors' Centre in Geneva, will open its doors in March 2026. With no complacency and through its own immersive journey, it will continue the reflection on the true challenges of a reinvented multilateralism.

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