

**24 June 2019**  
**Bi-Annual Civil Society Briefing**

Remarks by Mr. Michael Møller  
United Nations Under-Secretary-General  
Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva

Bi-Annual Civil Society Briefing

Monday, 24 June 2019 at 10:30  
Palais des Nations, Room XVI

Chers représentants d'organisations non gouvernementales,  
Chers collègues et amis :

Ceci est notre dernière réunion, et je voudrais commencer par remercier chacun d'entre vous. Merci à toutes et à tous pour tout ce chemin parcouru ensemble ces cinq dernières années.

Les organisations non gouvernementales accompagnent les Nations Unies dans la poursuite de leurs objectifs globaux depuis le début. À l'ONU à Genève, nous bénéficions d'un engagement constructif avec la société civile. Je vous remercie pour votre soutien et votre encouragement, pour votre honnêteté et vos critiques qui nous ont permis de progresser, ainsi que pour vos convictions et vos actions visant à rendre ce monde meilleur.

Les au revoir font réfléchir. À propos de ce qui a été entrepris, ou non; comment et pourquoi cela a été entrepris; quel héritage nous laissons derrière nous et ce qui nous attend ensuite.

C'est donc l'occasion pour moi aujourd'hui de revenir sur ces quelques années passées au poste de Directeur général, d'en tirer des leçons et de me tourner vers l'avenir.

Si je devais retenir un mot concernant mon ambition à faire grandir l'ONU à Genève au cours de ces dernières années, il s'agirait de celui-ci : les partenariats.

- D'abord, pour renforcer les partenariats existants au sein de la famille des Nations Unies présente à Genève. Une famille si diverse qu'elle touche à tous les aspects du multilatéralisme – de la paix et la sécurité aux droits de l'homme, en passant par le bien-être.

- Ensuite, pour développer de nouveaux liens avec d'autres organisations internationales, les ONG et la société civile, mais également les institutions académiques, les médias et le secteur privé afin de les inclure au réseau et à l'univers multilatéral dans lesquels nous évoluons.

- Et enfin, pour mettre en place un partenariat avec le public qui souvent – et même à Genève – ne voit souvent que la partie immergée de l'iceberg et ne réalise pas à quel point le multilatéralisme à la genevoise a un impact direct sur sa vie de tous les jours à la fois de manière visible et invisible.

La Genève internationale, fière et forte de son riche héritage centenaire a toujours représenté bien plus que la somme de ses parties – plus de 100 organisations internationales, 400 organisations non-gouvernementales, les représentations de 181 états, un secteur privé dynamique et des institutions académiques de renommée mondiale.

Mais pour tirer pleinement parti d'un potentiel aussi vaste et favoriser sa diversité, nécessité fut de développer un principe organisateur, un fil rouge autour duquel nous pouvons aligner les différentes perspectives, galvaniser les esprits et aiguïser notre objectif commun.

That is why the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development proved such a watershed moment.

Reflecting on the ways in which the 17 Sustainable Development Goals helped us to strengthen partnerships in Geneva, I am still struck by the speed, the depth and the scale of the transformation across the world. The change in mindset; the new spirit of collaboration; the shared sense of purpose; the ways in which outdated ideas about sectoral divides were cast aside and siloes broken down - in 40 years in the UN system, I never saw anything like it.

And I believe what we achieved here holds lessons that extend far beyond Geneva.

Firstly, because it points towards a future for multilateralism more broadly:

- A multilateralism that is networked, collaborative, and more inclusive;
- A multilateralism that acts locally as much as globally; that leaves no one behind; that is centred on states but empowers civil society and implicates the private sector in our collective efforts;
- A multilateralism firmly built around the United Nations, which - for all the drastic changes the world has seen in the past seven decades - remains the only truly global, truly neutral, truly legitimate table around which all of these stakeholders can come together on an equal footing.

And secondly, because our relentless focus on partnership and integration, wrapped in the 2030 Agenda, is the only credible way to meaningfully address the daunting challenges before us.

Because just as every challenge connects to another - with climate change entrenching poverty, and poverty breeding conflict - so too does every remedy reverberate, unlocking much broader progress.

Think about how achieving gender equality is about much more than ending a moral outrage; it is about unlocking humanity's full potential; it is about economic prosperity and social development.

Or consider how safeguarding human rights is not just an exercise in ethics; it is the very precondition for successful, prosperous and peaceful societies.

How else, then, to account for all of this than by working together - across disciplines, professions, and geographies? How else than by working, in one word, multilaterally?

Now, we have all heard that multilateralism is in "crisis". I don't agree - and I think that no one who spent any time in Geneva recently could. Still, we know that multilateralism is in a chaotic period of transition, and it certainly is not immune from the broader crisis of trust. Which is why our work is in no way done.

But here is why I am optimistic about the future: because we know what we need to do, and because at UN Geneva we have already laid down the foundation for that future:

- The "UN Geneva 2030 vision" we developed to make sure UN Geneva is a true global platform for multilateral dialogue, action and systems change sets ambitious yet clear goals for the years ahead. And by renovating the Palais through the Strategic Heritage Plan, we will ensure it remains the world's premier multilateral venue for decades to come.

- The countless initiatives and innovations I started with my colleagues - from the Perception Change Project and the SDG Lab to the Gender Champions and other initiatives - their example and impact already extends well beyond Geneva and it will certainly extend beyond my time at the helm.

In all our initiatives and innovations, civil society has been - and will remain - a key actor. Your inputs are essential to connect our collective work in Geneva with the situation on the ground and for the reality check that is sometimes missing in inter-governmental debates. It is of essence to ensure that the voices of minorities, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, youth, older persons, women and LGBT groups, to name a few, are represented. It is also of essence that an enabling environment be secured for the free, active, inclusive and meaningful engagement of civil society at all levels.

It has been my personal commitment to strengthen civil society space at the Palais des Nations. What I have witnessed during my time at UN Geneva, is not only that the number of NGOs accredited to UN Geneva has increased by 30%, reaching at the moment over one thousand NGOs, but also that your engagement has deepened and become stronger.

This engagement needs to be sustained, and I encourage you to extend the same level of cooperation and support to the incoming Director-General Tatiana Valovaya, who will start her term in August.

Serving the United Nations for 40 years has been the honour of my life. It has been difficult at times, but above all, it has been thrillingly rewarding. And I know I won't stop working to keep the promise of the UN alive; to keep, as Kofi Annan used to say, pushing the big rocks to the top of the mountain. Alone, it seems impossible, but together, we will succeed.

Which is why this is not goodbye, but rather: see you soon!

Thank you.