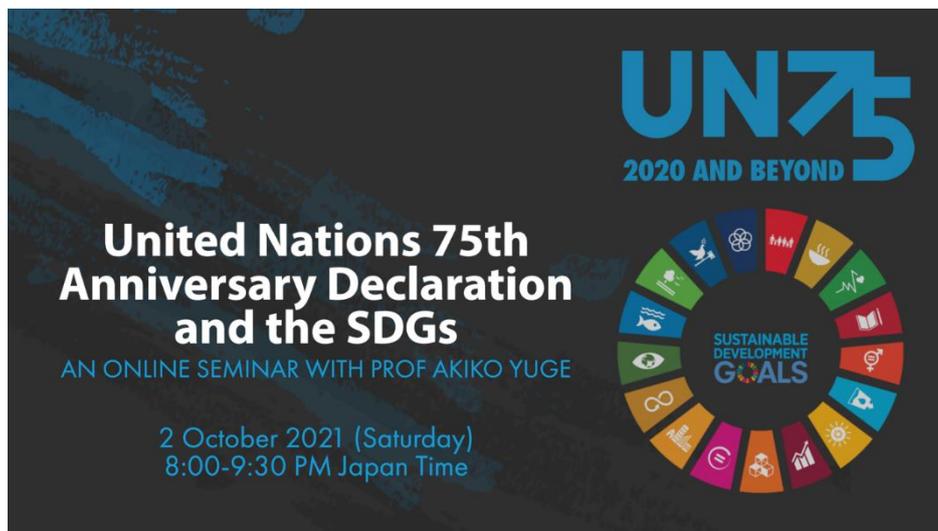




A summary of the
United Nations 75th Anniversary Declaration and the SDGs
online seminar



This seminar was jointly hosted by the Global Peacebuilding Association of Japan (GPAJ), the Association of Former International Civil Servants (AFICS) – Japan, the Academic Council on the UN System (ACUNS) Tokyo Office, and the Kyoto Peacebuilding Center (KPC)

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Speaker: Professor Akiko Yuge

Commentators: Mr. Norimasa Shimomura, Ms. Mikiko Tanaka and Ms. Chikako Takase

Introductory Remarks: Mr. Yasushi Akashi

Moderators: Professor Sukehiro Hasegawa and Dr. Dahlia Simangan

Report compiled by: Dr. Dahlia Simangan

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Introductory remarks by Mr. Yasushi Akashi



Last year, the United Nations celebrated its 75th anniversary. It was established in San Francisco in 1945, the year the Second World War ended. As compared to its predecessor, the League of Nations, the United Nations has so far lasted almost four times as long a life, with a great deal of courage, determination, imagination as well as good luck.

The 75 years of the UN history began with the difficult period of the Cold War between the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. From its outset, the UN experienced a stormy period in which the promise of keeping peace through the basic accord among the permanent members had to be tested. The UN had several achievements to its credit, beginning with the Korean War in 1950-1953, in which a multinational force organized by the United States restored peace in the Korean Peninsula. The UN was also instrumental in restoring and keeping the peace in the Middle East, focused on Israel and the Arab States. In Asia, India and Pakistan had several conflicts over Kashmir, and UN intervention in their conflicts has extended from 1948 to the present. The United Nations also played its intermediary role to facilitate independence of Indonesia from the Netherlands.

When the Cold War ended in 1989, the UN took advantage of the new climate to create divergent peacekeeping activities, starting with Namibia and followed by Cambodia, Mozambique and San Salvador. However, the wind of optimism changed and the UN was burdened with the violent ethnic conflicts in Somalia, Rwanda and former Yugoslavia. Thanks to the Brahimi report of August 2000, return to pragmatism and realism, based on a better dialogue between different organs, was attained on the examination of basic principles of the Organization. Today, the UN seems to be more selective of its means for intervention in the face of divergent situations prevailing in the world. At present, Myanmar and Afghanistan call for a comprehensive approach to meet a dire humanitarian situation and basic political reform which takes a lot of time, efforts and cooperation on the part of the UN membership.

In the meantime, the UN has embarked on the SDGs, a new approach in 2015 to end in 2030, calling for the mobilization of nongovernmental forces, composed of business circles, NGOs, intellectuals, and other segments of civil society, to deal with traditional challenges as well as new, environmental problems, going beyond normal intergovernmental efforts. With the slogan “nobody should be left behind”, the SDGs, consisting of 17 goals and 169 targets, has been proclaimed. Nongovernmental activities need to be combined with the efforts of member governments. Only a new global cooperation can succeed in this unprecedented struggle.

Short biography: Mr. Yasushi Akashi served the UN as Under-Secretary-General (for Disarmament, Humanitarian Affairs, and Public Information) at the Headquarters and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Cambodia and the former Yugoslavia. He is currently the Special Advisor of both GPAJ and AFICS-Japan.



Presentation by Professor Akiko Yuge



Professor Yuge first talked about two key outcomes of the UN 75th Anniversary. The first was the “UN75 Initiative”, a year-long global consultation launched by the UN Secretary-General. The key results showed that the top immediate priority was “universal access to health care”, followed by “more investment in education and youth programmes” and “access to safe water and sanitation”. On longer-term priorities, the top priority was “more environmental protection”. Many respondents looked to the UN to lead in international cooperation, while also wanted the UN to innovate – to be more inclusive, engaged, accountable and effective.

The second key outcome was the adoption of the “Declaration on the Commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the UN” at the UN General Assembly in September 2020. The Declaration stated: “Our challenges are interconnected and can only be addressed through reinvigorated multilateralism”; and “There is no other global organization with the legitimacy, convening power, and normative impact of the United Nations”.

Responding to the outcome of the global consultation, and to address the world’s most pressing challenges, threats and opportunities, the UN75th Declaration included the following 12 commitments: 1) We will leave no one behind; 2) We will protect our planet; 3) We will promote peace and prevent conflicts; 4) We will abide by international law and ensure justice; 5) We will place women and girls at the centre; 6) We will build trust; 7) We will improve digital cooperation; 8) We will upgrade the United Nations; 9) We will ensure sustainable financing; 10) We will boost partnerships; 11) We will listen to and work with youth; and 12) We will be prepared. Professor Yuge commented that most of these commitments are covered in the “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” and SDGs.

She explained that in adopting the Declaration, Member States requested the Secretary-General to report back with recommendations to advance our common agenda. Accordingly, the Secretary-General carried out extensive consultations with Member States and other stakeholders, and released his report titled “Our Common Agenda” on 10 September 2021.

In the Report, the Secretary-General contrasts two possible futures: 1) a world heading towards breakdown and perpetual crisis; or 2) a more positive outlook based on solidarity and cooperation. The Report states: “Humanity faces a stark and urgent choice: breakdown or breakthrough”; “In this time of division, fracture and mistrust, the United Nations is needed more than ever”, and “Our Common Agenda is an agenda of action, designed to accelerate the implementation of multilateral agreements and cooperation – particularly the 2030 Agenda and SDGs.”

The Report contains 90 specific recommendations, and they are grouped under the following 4 broad areas: 1) Renewal of social contract, anchored in human rights, to rebuild trust and social cohesion; 2) Focus on the future, through a deepening of solidarity with the world’s young people and future generations; 3) Urgent action to protect and deliver our global commons and global public goods; and 4) An upgraded United Nations that is fit for a new era. For each of these broad areas, Professor Yuge explained the recommendations contained therein.

Professor Yuge stated that in order to implement these recommendations, we need a multilateralism that is more inclusive, more networked, more effective, more equitable, representative, and legitimate. She then elaborated on each of these aspects.



Professor Yuge then shared the following observations in moving forward: 1) The Report covers a broad range and contains many useful recommendations; 2) There has been overall positive reaction by Member States, global leaders, think tanks and other organizations, many praising as a landmark ambitious and visionary report; some civil society organizations wanted more in UN reform; 3) Delivering on these ambitions may be the most challenging part; 4) Examine, map out, and sequence the 90 recommendations based on urgency and complexity, and agree on a timeframe for implementation; 5) Implementation is most critical, and Member States must immediately start the intergovernmental process to materialize the recommendations through an inclusive multi-stakeholder process; political will and leadership of Member States is crucial; UN system and its agencies must immediately implement recommendations that can be materialized within their authority; 6) The proposed Summit meetings are important as they enable focused discussion on specific topics, and forge global agreements; 7) Now is NOT the time to complain and criticize what was not included; as the Report states, “Now is the time to take the next steps in our journey together, in solidarity with and for all people.”; 8) “Our Common Agenda” reinforces the need for robust action on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs; and 9) Periodic monitoring is needed on the progress of implementation.

Professor Akiko Yuge assumed her current position as Professor of the Department of Global Politics, Faculty of Law of Hosei University, Tokyo in 2014. Prior to her current position, she served as the Director of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Representation Office in Tokyo and Special Advisor to the UNDP Administrator (2012-13), the UN Assistant Secretary-General/UNDP Assistant Administrator and Director, Bureau of Management in UNDP Headquarters (2006-2012), and the Director, UNDP Tokyo Office (2002-06), among many other positions.

Commentary by Mr. Norimasa Shimomura



Building on the presentation of Professor Yuge, Mr. Shimomura explained how the UN Secretary-General’s Our Common Agenda attempts to turn the UN fit-for-purpose to respond to the 21st-century realities, most of which require multilateralism and therefore places the UN at the heart of their solutions. Mr. Shimomura mentioned that it was therefore SG’s foresight to launch a three-tier UN reform – covering UN’s political areas, development system, and management.

Mr. Shimomura further explained that the UN development system reform has been the most far-reaching in the UN’s history, as many of these areas went beyond SG’s prerogative and required Member States actions that culminated in the adoption of GA resolution 72/279. The reform of the UN development system aims to enhance coherence, efficiency, effectiveness of the UN development system and make it more accountable to the Member States.

The UN development system reform involves a transformation at global, regional and country levels. Global reform entails the upgrading of UN Development Group (UNDG) to UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG), now chaired by Deputy SG and vice-chaired by UNDP Administrator, supported by UN Development Coordination Office (DCO), which too was upgraded from UN DOCO. At the regional level, UNSDG regional directors and UN Regional Economic Commissions (REC) now form a Regional Collaborative Platform to generate synergies and minimize duplications, chaired by Deputy SG and co-vice-chaired by the Executive Secretaries of the REC and UNDP Regional Directors.



At the heart of the country-level reform of the UN development system is the attempt to create a new generation of UN country teams, with empowered and more independent UN Resident Coordinators. This involved the introduction of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) as the single most important instrument to bring all UN agencies to provide coordinated support to help achieve the SDGs in the host countries. Reinvigoration of the UN Resident Coordinators involved their delinking from UNDP Resident Representatives, as they have now become the staff of UN Secretariat instead of UNDP.

The country-level reform has been successful overall, and yet, it still requires some time to achieve its intended results, partly as they require a shift in the mentalities of the UN agencies. Many enabling elements of the reform had been introduced in the pre-UN reform period, but the high-level commitment from all sides generated by the current reform helped these changes to take hold. Quoting former USG Mr. Akashi's introductory remark, Mr. Shimomura stressed that it is important for both Member States and the UN system to continue to implement the reform 'patiently and persistently' while making necessary calibrations.

Mr. Norimasa Shimomura is the UNDP Resident Representative in Indonesia. Prior to his current assignment, he served as the United Nations Resident Coordinator for Kazakhstan in 2015-2020 and UNDP Resident Representative for Kazakhstan until December 2018 when the global UN reform separated the positions of UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative. He has more than 25 years of experience at the UN, promoting sustainable human development in various countries.

Commentary by Ms. Mikiko Tanaka



Ms. Tanaka's comments drew on the case study of the UN Development System Reform-Spotlight Initiative in Guyana. She described the UN-EU Spotlight Initiative as an excellent example of a UN joint program that aligns with the UN Development System Reform and the reinvigorated RC/UNCT roles at the country level. The Spotlight Initiative is the largest global partnership (and program) singularly focused on eliminating violence against women and girls under SDG 5 Gender Equality. The partnership between the UN and the EU is underpinned by a generous EU contribution of €500 million that goes beyond a donor role.

Spotlight has a common global results framework derived from evidence-based analysis and addresses gender-based violence (GBV) holistically through six dimensions: laws and policies, institutions, prevention, services, data and women's movements. The framework is tailored to the context of individual countries or regions, and catalytic interventions are determined through extensive multistakeholder consultations.

According to Ms. Tanaka, joint programs like the Spotlight Initiative have been in existence for some time, but there are innovations in the design of the framework and institutional architecture that facilitate and strengthen the UN's ability to deliver development in more coherent and transformational ways: (1) clearer roles and accountability for results comprising the RC leadership, technical coherence lead agency, implementing UN agencies and the Program Coordination Team in the RC Office; (2) rigorous quality assurance and system coherence from the Spotlight Secretariat under the DSG; (3) emphasis on partnerships for advocacy with the EU, national government and civil society; (4) integrated approach through multi-SDGs and intra/inter-program synergies; (5) Leave No One Behind principle that highlights norms, values and harmful practices that perpetrate



GBV and grounds policies and services in the reality of victims/survivors and perpetrators of violence; (6) changing ways of UN business in a systemic manner, e.g., simplified common procedures to expand CSO access to funding.

As RC in Guyana, Ms. Tanaka used her convening role to promote teamwork and partnerships for collective awareness raising and advocacy on GBV. She undertook joint visits to Spotlight target communities with the UN team, EU, government and CSOs to have conversations with community members and public services providers (police, health, schools). When community members felt their culture was being attacked or were in denial that GBV was a problem (particularly from male members), she and her team would all pitch in to offer information and perspectives. For example, together with the EU Ambassador, she would explain that GBV was a global issue and constituted an explicit target under the SDGs. This would help bring down the wall and open up the dialogue where women can also raise their issues. For Ms. Tanaka and her team, these conversations around very sensitive and complex issues brought the UN team and partners together and opened their eyes to the limitations of policies, laws and institutional systems that the UN had been advising and assisting over time. Achieving the SDGs is challenging in that it requires the systemic transformation of behaviors and attitudes. A fresh and critical look at how the UN delivers development assistance is warranted.

To conclude, Ms. Tanaka emphasized that the Spotlight Initiative offers a programmatic framework, architecture, and tools to operationalize the UN Development System reform. Institutional and human dynamics may not change overnight but the institutional environment has opened up to make changes in how the UN does business on the ground, and this opportunity has to be seized to help countries achieve the ambitious 2030 agenda.

Ms. Mikiko Tanaka was the UN Resident Coordinator in Guyana (2016-August 2021). She has 27 years of international development experience in sustainable development, youth and women empowerment, public administration and decentralization, rule of law, disaster risk management, conflict prevention and recovery, partnering with governments, private sector, civil society organisations, and UN agencies at field level and at the headquarters in New York.

Commentary by Ms. Chikako Takase



Noting the theme of the seminar being “United Nations 75th Anniversary Declaration and the SDGs,” Ms. Takase pointed out that the adoption of SDGs and making them as the framework for the post-2015 development agenda was the turning point in how “development” is considered at the UN and the development community. It made a clear departure from the previous period when “development” was considered as one directional with assistance going from the developed countries to the developing countries. In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, “development” is considered as a universal agenda. By bringing “Planet” into the picture, it became obvious that it concerns everyone. Ms. Takase further noted that in the Declaration, as well as in “Our Common

Agenda,” the commitments to fully achieve the SDGs in time are reaffirmed.

Ms. Takase pointed out that Mr. Guterres has been using the SDGs as a basis for his UN reform, not just on development, but also on the peace and security area.¹ For the development aspect, to

¹ For example, the remarks to the General Assembly High-level Dialogue on ‘Building sustainable peace for all: synergies between the 2030 agenda for sustainable development and sustaining peace’ on 24 January 2017 and the Report of the Work of the Organization, 2017 (A/72/1).



better deliver in countries, he has brought the RC system directly under him. Noting that the SDGs require integrated implementation, the efforts are made for the county teams to work closer and UN departments and divisions to work closely. On this point, Ms. Takase posed a question to Ms. Tanaka if there was any difference in the working environment of RC from the previous arrangement to the current arrangement.

On “Our Common Agenda,” Ms. Takase pointed out that many of the recommendations are in line with sustainable development. One of the major recommendations is the focus on the youth and the future generation and she reminded that sustainable development is an intergenerational concept. She pointed out that the definition presented by the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission) “Our Common Future” (1987) best explained this. Another recommendation she noted was reaching out for diverse actors, in particular civil society, cities and local governments. This was in line with the emphasis on the Major Groups in the sustainable development process, and a proposal to set up an Advisory Group on Local and Regional Governments reflected the importance of SDG 11. Noting the many recommendations that were presented in “Our Common Agenda,” Ms. Takase expressed the hope to see a good resolution from the current session of the General Assembly.

Ms. Chikako Takase retired from the United Nations in June 2017 after serving for 34 years. Among her many other past affiliations include the Division for Sustainable Development, the Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination of UN DESA as Deputy Chief of the Policy Coordination Branch, and the United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD) in Nagoya, Japan as Director. She currently teaches part-time at several universities and is a member of the Executive Committee of AFICS-Japan.

Open Discussion

The following are some of the questions and comments raised by the participants during the discussion.



While commending various efforts of the UN, including broad-based consultations and reforms, Ms. **Kae YANAGISAWA** (former Ambassador of Japan to Malawi, former Vice President of JICA, and Member of the Board of Trustees of KPC) shared her observation that these processes are happening mostly in New York, and the level of understanding of host countries is not sufficient. She also asked how many Japanese Resident Coordinators are currently serving the UN.



Professor **TAKAHIRO Shinyo** of Kwansei Gakuin University and current president of Japan Association for United Nations Studies asked the panelists, as representatives of UN agencies in developing countries, if their work involves democracy promotion or not because neither the UN Charter nor the SDGs mentions democracy. He also noted that the UN activities do not sufficiently deal with the promotion and protection of fundamental freedoms and human rights despite being enshrined in Article 1 of the UN Charter. Meanwhile, the Human Rights Council is also becoming an insufficient venue for discussing human rights because it involves non-democratic countries that are not observing human rights criteria. Professor Shinyo sought the opinion of the panelists about these contradictions surrounding democracy and human rights within the UN.



While recognizing that multilateralism is indispensable when dealing with global issues, **Ms. Yumiko KANEKO** of UNDP Philippines also acknowledged the difficulty of reaching a consensus both at the global and country levels. For example, some donors prefer bilateral agreements over joint funding because single donors are more visible and they have different priorities. She then asked the panelists how would the UN take a leading role in facilitating multilateralism and if there are any alternatives to multilateralism when addressing global issues.



Mr. **Ken INOUE**, Vice-President of GPAJ, noted the prominence of bilateral issues over multilateral issues that suggests a focus on China-US relations. Relatedly, he asked the panelists if they have had observations of China influencing the UN programs in their countries of deployment. For example, there have been observations of China trying to influence peacekeeping operations by reducing the budget for human rights and gender affairs officers.



Ms. **Fumiko HAKOYAMA** of AFICS-Japan recalled her experience working with UNICEF in Mauritania when the RC system was introduced 20 years ago. Although the system was a welcome change for the Mauritanian government, it caused confusion among UN agencies in the country, which also happened in other countries. She inquired about the discussion and orientations within the UN about the RC system during the past 20 years.



Mr. **Kenichi SUZUKI** of the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan asked about the characteristics and qualities of leaders of UN organizations because, nowadays, the positions of heads of UN organizations are filled by former heads of states. He sought advice from the panelists regarding the advantages and disadvantages of appointing former heads of states to the lead UN organizations, whether this trend will continue, and if so, what is the reason behind it.

The responses and discussions pertinent to the comments and questions above can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/Xms3QN7qOmA>.



Concluding Remarks by Professor Sukehiro Hasegawa



In his concluding remarks, Professor Hasegawa said that the seminar revealed that the achievement of SDGs requires the concerted efforts of not only the Government but also business and other civil society organizations, as mentioned by Mr. Akashi and elaborated by Professor Yuge. As Professor Yuge said, the global problems and challenges should be dealt with in a multilateral approach that is more inclusive, networked, interconnected, effective, and representative. Professor Hasegawa also referred to the points made by Ambassadors Shinyo and Yanagisawa as well as Inoue-san, Kaneka-san, Ikeda-san, Hakoyama-san, Suzuki-san and others.

Prof. Hasegawa highlighted two points. First, as stated in the Secretary-General's report to the General Assembly of this year, there is the need to continue strengthening the role of RC's convening and coordinating power. This requires the change of mindset, mentality, and attitudes of all concerned. It is the ultimate role of RCs. Secondly, it was alarming to note that there are currently no Japanese RCs. By showing the photo of the members of the High-Level Panel on SDGs commissioned in 2015, Professor Hasegawa noted that the photo reflected the declining interest of Japanese political leaders and the public in the role of the UN in setting goals, norms, and standards of the international community. He found it essential that Japan renew its interest and commitment to multilateral diplomacy and the UN, in particular.

Professor Sukehiro Hasegawa is Distinguished Professor of the Kyoto University of the Arts and Director of Kyoto Peacebuilding Center. He is also the President of GPAJ, Executive Director for Academic Exchange of UN Association of Japan, and Director of ACUNS-Tokyo Liaison Office. He is former UN SRSG for Timor-Leste, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in South Pacific, Rwanda and Timor-Leste, Deputy Executive Coordinator of the UN Volunteers Programme, UNDP Deputy Assistant Administrator and Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, and Director of Policy Planning for UNOSOM II in Somalia.