

Opening Plenary Part-2



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Closing Keynote Address

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to join you here today – thank you for the opportunity to speak at your inaugural summit.

As Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs of the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs, and Officer-in-Charge of the UN Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology, but also on behalf of the UN Secretary-General, I welcome this initiative undertaken by GESDA towards advancing multilateral science and diplomacy with the aim of achieving a better future.

I would like to share with you today a few thoughts on diplomacy in the Anthropocene – our times, when human activity is changing the Earth on a planetary scale, perhaps irrevocably.

For many of us here, this is not news.

Indeed, in October 1987 – 34 years ago, almost to the day – the United Nations published 'Our Common Future' which spoke of the Earth, 'as a small and fragile ball', and how 'humanity's inability to fit its activities within it... (was) changing planetary systems, fundamentally.' Prime Minister Brundtland, in introducing the report, spoke of the need to move intentionally from 'One Earth to One World.' Since then, globalization and technology have indeed pushed us towards 'One World'. But this is far from the world we want.

Indeed, it may seem that diplomacy itself may have fallen behind the rapidity with which our world is being transformed. Many of our governance mechanisms and diplomacy are falling increasingly behind the pace of the private sector, particularly in the area of digital technologies. I would suggest that diplomatic institutions, crucial to how we realize 'our common future' in this age, may want to consider three imperatives for their work:

First, for everyone, the global interest is now also their national interest.

Second, science and technology are evolving rapidly, capable of influencing the world at planetary scales.

Third, diplomats need stakeholders from the science and technology communities, just as much as these communities need diplomats.

We don't need to look very far back to find examples of when these three imperatives have effectively guided our work. Just six years ago, in 2015, the world came together to agree to the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

Each one of these was the result of months of negotiation and consensus building, testament to political will and diplomatic skills, exemplifying the three imperatives I mentioned earlier. In particular, the Addis Ababa Agenda and the 2030 Agenda set up new institutional entry points for science and technology at the apex level of the UN General Assembly, through mandates for the Global Sustainable Development Report, as well as the Technology Facilitation Mechanism. My Department is privileged to operationalize both of them.

Since 2015, the urgency for incorporating these three imperatives as systematically as possible into our work has only grown. Take our experience with the pandemic. Like you, I have despaired at our lack of preparedness, been alarmed at the state of our public institutions, marvelled at the near miraculous advances in science and technology, and felt profoundly grieved at the unnecessary continuation of the pandemic in 'hot spots' around the world. Indeed – to borrow a phrase that many of you here use routinely – we may already be seeing 'alternate futures' evolving – between those with access to vaccines, social protection, technology capacities; and those without. Being able to envision such futures before they happen is critical for being able to make the choices that will ensure that only the best outcomes – for us, as well as for succeeding generations – are realized.

I would like to congratulate this group for supporting these capacities and trust their work will also expand such knowledge and tools to developing countries as well. 'Anticipation', of course, is only the first step – both global efforts such as those from IPCC and IIASA, and national ones such as the Global Trends project in the USA – show that turning foresight into timely action is no easy task. Which is why the recent report of Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, called 'Our Common Agenda', puts forward a suite of actions to help create a stronger, more networked and inclusive multilateral system, anchored within the UN – making the UN itself also more effective in dealing with the challenges of the present and the future. In addition, the Agenda puts a premium on the need for science as a basis for policy-making, stressing particularly that with regards to information, the "war on science" must end and that we must defend a common, empirically backed consensus around facts, science and knowledge.

One prominent set of actions recommended is around improving digital cooperation. The recommendations in 'Our Common Agenda' build on those of the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation and the Secretary-General's subsequent Roadmap on Digital Cooperation issued last year, and culminate in a Global Digital Compact

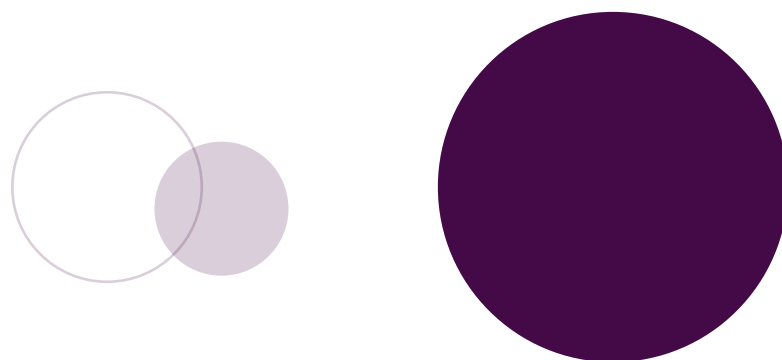
to be signed at the Summit of the Future in 2023. Throughout all this, we remain steadfastly committed to realizing a more open, free and secure digital future for all. Of the 90 recommendations contained in this report, there are many that are directly relevant to your work. I note, in particular, the proposal for the creation of the Emergency Platform and the enhanced use of strategic foresight through a Futures Lab to foster better anticipatory approaches and long-termism. Other actions promote a 'quintet of change' for the UN itself, including capacities for innovation, data, strategic foresight, results orientation and behavioural science.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I began my remarks by reminding us all that we are indeed in the Anthropocene epoch. As with other geologic epochs, scientific opinion is divided on when it started. But there is consensus that the direction this epoch takes, and how long it lasts, is in our hands.

I trust that our meeting today will strengthen your substantive engagement with the United Nations, bringing us together, in diplomacy and otherwise, to help realize a shared, benevolent future for people and the planet.

I thank you.



More information

[Session recording on YouTube](#)

