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# MEDIA

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Priorities in the new age: Reshaping the future

By Tilia Benattou

The world seems to have come to a stop. Or at least, this was the general impression while series of lockdown and restrictive measures fell upon every country all over the globe. Time slowed down, as if days were getting longer and while simultaneously blending together in a haze. It was, however, the occasion to stop and stare: what are our priorities in a world that has dramatically changed in the last two decades?

For many, the 21st century was the future, and here they are living through events no one could have imagined. To only quote a few, who could have expected the rise of terrorism and populism, the acceleration of the global warming threat or more recently a technology-reliant pandemic life? Many struggles are up ahead for the new generation in order to shape the future they would like to have.

To improve our collective future, the United Nations are working on the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030. Not much time is left to complete the goals, but this is the framework on which our collective efforts must focus. Among the 17 objectives, many are directly linked to the first one: to end poverty in all its forms. Indeed, the following goals deal with hunger, health and education – all of them, at their core, a consequence of unequal wealth distribution.

To tackle the issue head-on, global action is needed. An effort in terms of monetary funds to sustain struggling economies would of course be of great help. However, as every country is still trying to work through the consequences of COVID-19, such a plan seems difficult to achieve. The only way to reach various of objectives of the SDGs nonetheless hinges around a global partnership, and revitalizing cooperation among countries is the first step to get the program back on track.

Indeed, the COVID-19 situation has more than ever revealed the disparity in quality of life between countries and populations. Countries are certainly not equal in the fight against COVID-19. And there are clear divides even inside the national borders.

To fight the pandemic, the only solution was to stop the propagation: lockdowns and little to no socialization. How can you do that when you do not have a home to speak of? How can you follow any sanitary measure when you live in a precarious state, with much more pressing concerns on your mind? These were day-to-day issues for millions of migrants and refugees fleeing devastated countries, who live in overcrowded camps, where they had no choice but to be confined.

The true extent of the dysfunction of the health system was another shock. Even though it is well-known that in some geographic areas the access to health services is still somewhat lacking, the COVID-19 crisis revealed the inability to cope when faced with a massive number of patients. Shortage of medicine, technologies and health professionals soon appeared, leaving stranded millions of people in need. That should not happen in our time and age, and yet it did.

This is the time for change. The moment to think hard about the kind of future we want for the world. Many of the Sustainable Development goals have not yet been met, and in this new decade we must act to fulfil them. We can do more.
Priorities in the new age: Reshaping the future

By Barbara Tabea

Greta Thunberg speaks so passionately about saving the earth, yet some of us are still not acting. We know that climate change and environmental degradation are real, but we are not willing to change our lifestyles to save the planet. We expect leaders and scientists to come up with solutions to preserve the earth, yet this is supposed to be a fight for everyone. We need to develop a set of standards and values that will enable us to preserve the environment for future generations. We need to make a trade-off and let go of our luxurious lifestyles to ensure our great-grandchildren get to live on this planet and enjoy what it has to offer. We need to work on small habits like taking a train instead of a plane, eating less imported fruits, separating our trash, and picking up small pieces of debris as we walk. Such habits can sum up and contribute to the slowing down of climate and environmental-related problems.

As motivation to join the fight in saving mother earth, the pandemic has enlightened us on what the world would look like with less pollution. We could observe clear blue skies during lockdowns, and fresh air was running through our respiratory systems. Many of us, especially those in developed countries, have not inhaled such air in decades. We could see clear blue oceans and aquatic life enjoying their habitats without interruption from humans. The pandemic has allowed us to see a different side of the world, one where we can co-exist with nature.

But as we know, with the creation of vaccines, the pandemic is bound to end soon. How then shall we motivate ourselves to continue acting to save the planet for future generations? The answer is simple, by questioning our choices. Whenever you want to buy the latest iPhone, ask yourself, what is the composition of that iPhone and how is its manufacture affecting the environment? Each time you go shopping at Zara or H&M, think of the livelihoods you are endangering in Bangladesh. Fast fashion is one of the largest contributors to water pollution. As you enter fast fashion stores, reflect on the families consuming polluted water because you want to upgrade your wardrobe.

Remember, the purpose of such questions is not to stop you from purchasing that new gadget or buying that new cloth because all those things are necessary evils in this era. But in the long run, if billions of people worldwide ask themselves these questions, we could easily reach a point where we can put pressure on suppliers to change the process of manufacturing gadgets or even clothes. Life is full of choices, but we should make choices while considering the livelihood of future generations.
UNICEF: Integration of refugee and migrant children into their new societies

By Tilia Benattou

Millions of families around the world are fleeing situations of war and poverty. Many children find themselves uprooted, losing everything they had ever known. And sadly, not always for the better once they are settled in another country. From then on, they encounter many new challenges, such as the lack of access to basic services and the cultural and language barrier.

But the refugee or migrant status should never impede the right to a fulfilled life. Because a child is a child, and bear no responsibility whatsoever of the situation they find themselves in. Which is why UNICEF is working with governments to support their integration into the communities they now live in. This plan encompasses the reunification of children with their families, the access to help services, and is also focused on the access to educational services.

The right to education is therefore one of the key points for the integration of refugee and migrant children into their new societies. It is a way of developing healthy relationships with people their age, and of blending in their new country by learning its language and customs. Moreover, it allows these children who lost everything to build something new; to create a better future for themselves. For years the UNICEF has emphasized the need of children’s integration, stressing the importance of reforms in the education system to make it possible. And some encouraging actions were taken.

In Serbia for instance, the Ministry of Education called in 2018 for the implementation of plans to support migrant children in schools across the country. In order to do so, guides to manage stress and to learn the Serbian language were handed out to the academic staff. In Lebanon, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education launched the “Reaching All Children with Education” plan, which doubled the enrolment in the public school system and therefore required a drastic readjustment of education space, enrolment cost, and transportation system. Furthermore, alternative learning programmes were prepared for children who had missed some years of schooling.

These countries bet on facilitating the social integration of children, which helped them cope with their new situation. But the strategizing of educational reforms should go further yet. With financial aid and technical support from the international community, host countries should continue to revamp their education systems to include refugee and migrant children. Creating multiple pathways for them to re-enter formal learning should be a priority to fulfil their right to a decent life. However, the individual measures taken by governments can never be enough.

Coordination between countries is key to provide reliable data on migrant and refugee children and to reach out to them. Creating common data platforms would help figuring out the numbers of children in need, and how to prepare educational frameworks to
accommodate them. Another possibility is the creation of an international system of academic recognition. UNICEF is currently exploring the idea of “Learning Passports”, that would allow refugee and migrant children to have valid evidence of their learning progression in any country. But this could never work without the agreement of all countries to recognize the “passport”, and without a massive revision of global academic systems.

Many possibilities have yet to be explored, and UNICEF and partners keep on working to unite governments on a common strategizing plan in order to give refugee and migrant children the opportunities they deserve to have.
ECOFIN: E-commerce and employment opportunities

By Tilia Benattou

The notion of electronic commerce is still quite recent. The sector has however seen a rapid expansion since the end of the 1990s, creating both concerns and opportunities. E-commerce has indeed profoundly changed the market, and therefore the job dynamic. By enabling online global access to goods and services that usually required a physical element, the digitalisation of commerce saw the rise of new business models, new products and new skills: new needs.

Even though some traditional jobs were lost in the transition to e-commerce, the digitalisation was at first an opportunity for many low-skilled workers. Most companies began to rely on outsourcing in countries with low labour costs, which allowed their populations to find employment – even if under less than ideal conditions. Eventually, the countries used for outsourcing began to develop their own e-commerce increasing the demand for a low-wages workforce.

Along low-skilled workers, refugees were often the ones to fill in the ranks. Online work remains indeed a vague area in legislation, nearly considered “informal business”. Which means that even when a host country has restrictions on the type of job that a refugee can hold, the e-commerce field stays wide open. However, as the sector grows, so do the expectations. Nowadays this ecosystem demands some basic technological skills that many people lack, because they lack the required education and training.

This situation must be corrected in order to create more employment opportunities in the sector. On one side, some short formations should be proposed to new job seekers, so as to prepare them for this new environment. The manpower entering the job market would therefore be able to fill in the gaps instantly, and more efforts could be dedicated to expanding activities. On the other, updating courses could be planned for workers who are gradually becoming underqualified as technologies change and evolve. Developing specialized programs could prove essential for the future of e-commerce.

To allow more people into the sector, better regulation would also go a long way. Indeed, the legal uncertainty surrounding e-commerce at present means that workers have to do a bit of everything, and to basically hold several positions at the same time. If specialized legislation was established to clarify this situation, the following division of time and tasks would imply the creation of more jobs to replace the overwork previously done by the employees. On a side note, their working conditions would also doubtlessly improve.

As we mentioned, refugees comprise a substantial part of the e-commerce workforce. They are actually often hired because of their status, because they desperately need to find work and the e-
commerce sector does not look too closely at a cheap, available workforce. But the legal vagueness and lack of transparency will not help them in the long run. Asking for more regulations would obviously create trouble for these people walking the fine line between legal and illegal. Which is why governments must review the conditions on refugees’ employment and enable them to have a clear status and position.

In sum, the ever-expanding e-commerce sector already has a profound impact on the job market. With some appropriate measures, it could be a really positive one.
WHO: Realigning global efforts to combats NCDs

By Tilia Benattou

Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), or chronic diseases, are generally of long duration and the result of genetic, physiological, environmental and behaviours factors. The main types of NCDs are cardiovascular diseases, cancers, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes. People of all age groups and countries are affected, since they are equally vulnerable to factors contributing to NCDs, such as unhealthy diets, physical inactivity and exposure to harmful substances.

The 2023 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes a target of reducing premature death from NCDs; but this goal might not be reached in time. NCDs are quickly rising and are particularly linked to communities stricken by poverty, since socially disadvantaged people get sicker and die sooner than people with higher social positions. This is quite easily explained: in low-income settings, the health services are not easily accessed and even when they are, the treatment costs quickly drains any resources available.

The prevention of NCDs hinges around the ability to reduce the risk factors associated with these diseases. Because there is a wide range of potential factors, a comprehensive approach and collaboration across all sectors is needed to enable better prevention and control. Investing in the management of NCDs – which would include detecting, screening and treating them – is critical to help people in need. However, countries with inadequate health services or health insurance coverage are unlikely to provide access to essential NCD interventions.

WHO’s leadership and coordination role is therefore essential in promoting and monitoring global action against NCDs. In order to do so, WHO conducts periodic assessment of national capacity for NCD prevention and control, through a global survey known as the NCD Country Capacity Survey. Such periodic assessment allows both countries and WHO to monitor the situation and determine what measures can and should be taken in the various Member States.

The guiding role of WHO also shines through the development of the Global Action plan for the prevention and control of NCDs 2013-2020. Its main objectives were raising the priority accorded to NCDs in national agendas and strengthening national capacity, to improve country response for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases. WHO coordinates the engagement, international cooperation and collaboration of key players across the world in the promotion of universal health coverage but also in the increase – through domestic resource mobilization – of revenues for prevention and control of the NCDs.

In 2018, Heads of state and government committed to new measures to tackle on noncommunicable diseases. For instance, they jointly committed to implement WHO-recommended policies to curb exposure to risk factors and promote public awareness. This political declaration reaffirmed WHO’s role in the efforts to combat NCDs and urged for a more organized, global strategizing.

The Global action plan reached its end last year, but with an unprecedented pandemic taking over the world not many conclusions were drawn so far. However, WHO continues to provide support and expertise to assist countries in their fight against non-communicable diseases. NCDs are still an important point of the Sustainable Development Goals, and increasing development assistance to address it is still an international priority.
Deliberation on E-Commerce: to create employment opportunities with an emphasis on the inclusion of refugees

By Barbara Tabea

The invention of the internet has offered businesses the possibility of either operating fully online or partly online. Amazon, which grew from being an online bookstore to being the largest e-commerce store, has proved that online stores have a lot of potential in the 21st century. Today, you can order any item on Amazon, ranging from electronics to skin care products from almost anywhere in the world. In terms of advantages, e-commerce offers people the opportunity to work remotely and even be self-employed. Creating an e-commerce site does not require a work permit and several documents, as is the case with office jobs. This means foreigners can easily create an online business in the countries where they live. Also, creating an online store does not require one to have a college degree.

The mentioned benefits associated with e-commerce make it a suitable platform for the employment of refugees. For a long time now, refugees struggle to find jobs because of the difficulties linked to getting work permits. To add on, certain countries’ laws are still unclear on whether refugees should work and the number of hours they can work. E-commerce can provide these people with an opportunity to be employed. Several refugees are skilled in the arts and craft industry. They make a variety of crafts that can be sold online in large quantities. Refugees can also acquire skills in content creation and web design, which can allow them to work with online businesses. They could also decide to do freelance work enabling them to get contracts with individuals or even firms. Despite the vast opportunities e-commerce offers, there are some challenges that prevent refugees from being employed in the e-commerce sector.

First, several refugees lack computer skills because of limited education opportunities. This lack of knowledge in the use of computers prevents them from participating in online activities. Second, refugees may lack the language skills to operate an e-commerce site in their host country. Related to language, refugees may not have a clear understanding of the culture in their host country. Having a clear idea about the host nation’s culture is useful in identifying a target market when setting up an online store. Third many shelters that host refugees lack electricity and do not provide access to free computers.

For refugees to successfully engage in e-commerce, governments have to improve the living conditions in camps by providing electricity and access to WIFI. Once there is a large-scale presence of the internet in camps, refugees with well-developed computer skills can train others who would like to venture into E-commerce. There is also need to improve access to education in refugee camps through providing tutors or paying for online courses that can be accessed from computers. Additionally, refugees should be provided with intercultural training to allow them to understand the norms and values of the people in the host state. E-commerce could offer a life-changing opportunity for refugees once they have the tools and knowledge to participate in online activities. If Jeff Bezos could do it, then anyone can do it.
It’s a Bird, It’s a Plane, It’s a Plastic Bag Again—How the Future of Space Exploration Will Be Sustainable, Or It Will Not Be At All

By Chrystelle Dejean Servières

Curiosity’s time is past, and Perseverance’s safe landing on Mars opens a new decade for space exploration. But while the world races to colonize the Red Planet, the real issues lie closer to home.

It would not be right to start this article with anything else but the successful landing of Curiosity’s little brother: Perseverance. NASA and JPL’s newest space explorer safely landed on Martian soil on Thursday, February 18. Both American space agencies report that humanity’s most sophisticated rover to date is currently sitting in the middle of its target landing zone: the Jezero Crater. While this is groundbreaking news for the future of space exploration, one could be left to wonder: what’s next? The next decade might turn out to be more about shaping tomorrow’s playing field than about further pushing back the boundaries of space travel.

The real work seems to lie closer to home—both literally and in a figure of speech. Issues like waste disposal and the subsequent pollution of our oceans have reached our upper atmosphere. Fortunately for us, right now space is filled with more satellites and man-made debris than it is with astronauts. Which means that, thankfully, we do not have to live in our own landfill—not yet anyway. But what happens when more of us gain access to it? Anyone who has had to live with other people under the same roof will know, the most pressing issue never seems to be “Where are we going next,” but “Who’s going to clean that up”?

Now might actually be the best time to stop for a minute and ask ourselves the real important questions. What good is pushing back the boundaries of our world if it can bring neither peace nor sustainability to future generations? Could we even keep up the pace, in terms of funding? Is this race for the stars going to drain our resources? And will the ordinary citizen ever be a part of it?

What is at stake here is the very future of space exploration. If it is not economically or environmentally sustainable, or if it is seen as a factor of geopolitical unrest, then it will either become a catalyst for social tensions to rise or lose its legitimacy in the eyes of the public. What could help with both funding and inclusivity is to allow, and even encourage private companies to join the fray. Now, of course it is perfectly normal to be a little wary of taking our capitalism and geopolitical struggles to the stars. With our skies already turning into an international bloodbath to occupy as much space—literally—as possible, introducing more players to the field sounds like the worst space-related decision ever. But private companies have been eyeing it for years now. They have already taken a hold of satellites, and on May 30, 2020, SpaceX even became the first private company to send out humans into space. Instead of sitting around wondering whether or not they will be successful in their next endeavour, we should be jumping at the opportunity to fund and shape the next decade of peaceful and sustainable travel in outer space.

Huge economical gains could come from both relying on private companies’ own funds, and on their ability to innovate in order to cut down their costs. One of SpaceX’s starting ideas was to bring back and reuse as much material as possible, instead of leaving carriers and launchers to drift away and further clutter our atmosphere. Private companies have historically helped speed up innovation back here on Earth, and with relatively fewer government funds at that. They have already proven their ability to
successfully send satellites and humans alike into space. Official cooperation between countries has always taken time, but introducing more players to the field might just be the thing that will help pick up the pace.

Humans are at a point of our evolution where not much but space remains uncharted territory. However, now is no longer the time for aimless exploration. Or at least not just that anyway. Pushing back our boundaries is one thing, but durably and peacefully sustain our journey is yet another. In this endeavour, the private sector could turn out to be space travel’s best ally yet.
COVID-19 Debt—Are We Writing Cheques Our Economy Can’t Cash?

By Chrystelle Dejean Servières

The coronavirus prompted an unprecedented economic recession. Emergency funds were allocated, contingency plans were made, but who is going to foot the bill? Is cancelling the debt realistic? Is it even advisable?

If there is one thing 2020 taught us, it is that life may be priceless, but it does have a cost. “Whatever it takes” was the motto that guided most world leaders in their contingency planning. And for good reason: COVID-19 relief measures were taken in all urgency to alleviate not only the health, but also the economic fallout attributable to the crisis. Granted, the never-seen-before fiscal aid that was allocated managed to not only prevent catastrophic chain bankruptcies from taking place, but also inflation on prices. These remarkably good results—a relative stabilization of the economy and of our purchasing power—are sadly not enough to hide the fact that national debts have skyrocketed since March 2020.

We all know where this is going. The last time this happened was in 2008. The emergency funds that were allocated to save the economy from subprime trouble sent us straight to years of austerity. Of course, this is a far lesser evil than if the economy was to simply fail. However, one would not be entirely wrong in thinking most of the social unrest that affected the 2010s decade was imputable to these very austerity measures. The rise of extremist parties in Western political landscapes has debatable causes, but one that is not often challenged is the unending joblessness and unaffordability of property in most Western countries. As Steinbeck would put it: the Bank monster is sick. And when it is sick, it feeds on labour, payments, and taxes of tenets and land owners. Do we really want the situation to get any worse?

The debate over whether or not the COVID-19 debt should be cancelled—in part or in full—is just as much about politics as it is about economics. Which does not mean the two should be separated. Transitional unemployment is set to get even worse than what pre-COVID 19 forecasts let on. This is going to have dire consequences for recovering economies. For instance, in the USA, the 2,800 billion dollars that will gradually be injected in the economy since last year should save about 13 GDP points, and represent 129% of GDP. All of it is debt financed. In Europe, the debt percentage is slightly lower than in North America, but not by much. Each member must come up with its own solutions. For now, talks range between increasing the retirement age to a full cancellation of national debts. Now, all of these speculations are really a shot in the dark at this point. It is still much too soon to know, but what we can already tell is the potential social unrest, should austerity resume.

Some may say that is a question for later. And for good reason. Right now, all of the effort should be focused on relief measures. However, the scarecrow of an unending recession is already starting to be waved. On the one hand, cancelling the debt is simply too reckless to try. In fact, it is not even possible from a legal standpoint, and the economists in favour of it remain a minority. On the other hand, austerity measures are expected to render the governments issuing them hugely unpopular, especially if they go as far as to hinder the environmental transition. Younger people are especially likely to be in an uproar since they will be the ones mostly paying this debt when they are already set to have the hardest time finding a job and buying property. Nobody knows how long the pandemic is going to last, and
the creeping shadow of an unending crisis brings about the perspective of durably being taxed to the hilt. While leaving the situation resume its mid-subprime levels is not advisable, cancelling the debt has no legal grounds in most parts of the world. It is even clearer in the EU. European Central Bank director Christine Lagarde said it loud and clear: cancelling the debt would be a clear violation of the treaty of Rome, which prohibits monetary funding of the members. Even if it were possible—which it is not—it would have dire consequences of its own. Cancelling a national debt held by another state would relieve one but impoverish the other. Not to mention how it would durably impact confidence levels, make inflation levels skyrocket and consequently raise the cost of borrowing for households. Which, ultimately, would have worse consequences on economic growth since households would see their buying power significantly decreased.

It is impossible to rule out the possibility of a country facing bankruptcy—just like Greece did in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis. Tensions on the markets along with the possibility of a prolonged pandemic could very well lead states to experience similar sovereign debt crises. For now, never-ending debt payments seem more like an illusion than a real threat. The best course of action would be contingency planning around what the debt will be able to fund, and how to alleviate the cost this crisis will have on our societies.
War in Tigray Takes Its Toll on Refugees

By Chrystelle Dejean Servières

Mediation efforts are starting to bear fruit, but the process is slow. For thousands of refugees caught in the crossfire, it is too little too late—and the deadlock state of the conflict only worsens their plight.

On December 9, 2020, UN general secretary Antonio Guterres announced that an agreement had been found with the Ethiopian federal government. After weeks of refusing to negotiate until the rebel Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) was disarmed, Prime Minister and Nobel Peace prize laureate Abiy Ahmed eventually allowed NGOs to come and assist civilians affected by the conflict. However, accessing the region remains difficult. According to the Red Cross, humanitarian aid can only reach around 20 percent of Tigray territory. Armed forces still clash on a regular basis, and humanitarian actors report hundreds of casualties—as well as what could turn out to be the most important human migration recorded in the last two decades, in terms of sheer numbers. The UNHCR estimates that as of late November, around 45,000 people had fled Tigray and crossed its western border with Sudan. Sudanese authorities report around 3,000 entries from Tigray every day.

While this conflict officially began on November 4th—when the federal capital Addis-Ababa sent out armed forces in response to attacks of military outposts in Tigray—much older causes can be found. A series of provocations precedes this recent escalation in violence. Tensions had been steadily rising between Mekelle and Addis-Ababa ever since Abiy Ahmed took up office, and effectively put an end to the TPLF’s thirty-year-long dominant position in the ruling coalition. The most recent and obvious trigger however, was the local Tigray government’s choice to maintain elections in September—against the federal state’s decision to have them pushed back due to COVID. Tigray’s refusal to recognize Addis-Ababa’s legitimacy, given that his term might have ended had the elections taken place in September, was the final trigger that prompted a military intervention from the capital.

The international community in general—and the UN in particular—fear that this conflict might fester and destabilize the whole region. Despite the late November announcement of military operations coming to a close with the effective retaking of Mekelle, soldiers from both sides remain present on the ground. The resulting level of insecurity prevents humanitarian aid from reaching Tigray beyond northern main roads—which leaves rural areas more at risk. Estimates vary, but the Ethiopian Red Cross reports that, as of February 10th, around 3.8 million people are in dire need of humanitarian aid in Tigray—which represents more than half the region’s population. Ethiopian Red Cross director Abera Tola stated during an online press conference that, should humanitarian aid fail to get better access to the war zone, the death toll caused by famine alone could reach the tens of thousands within the next two months. He added that early signs of a full-blown famine are already showing, and that the number of victims is set to grow exponentially.
From Slowdown to Rebound. Reworking the Paris Agreement as the World Ushers into a New Decade

By Chrystelle Dejean Servières

The UN had qualified 2020 as a “super year” that marked the end of a 5-year cycle since the Paris Agreement. It was supposed to be the year when the COP26 took place, and when the world came together to define new climate objectives to reach by 2030. Then COVID-19 happened, the COP26 was pushed back to 2021, and 2020 almost ended up being the year where we lost all our progress. Thankfully, lost, it was not. Stories about massive carbon emission cuts from the production slowdown or the return of dolphins in the canals of Venice made the news on a global scale—even if there was nothing really new. We did gain some time by hitting the brakes in 2020, but will the world be able to see some leadership emerge and take advantage of this opportunity?

Back in 1992, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was unanimously received as a trailblazer. It set the stage for all future Conferences of Parties—the famed COP—to come. Almost thirty years later, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) published grim news on April 22, 2020. For the 50 th Earth Day anniversary, the WMO announced that global temperatures had risen up by 0.86 degrees Celsius, and that carbon emissions had made a worrying 26% leap forward in the last half century.

The rework of the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) is now more crucial than ever. NDCs were first introduced in the Paris Agreement, and were meant to be revised every 5 years. COVID-19 did not just force us to postpone this revision by a year—it completely reshuffled the cards and will force us to take into account a world forever changed by the pandemic. The first NDCs were never meant to achieve the goals mentioned in the Paris Agreement in the first place. They were a stepping-stone, a first round of measures that were to be followed by more ambitious ones every five years. One of the reasons behind this moderation was that too daunting resolutions would cause cold feet among members, who would then opt out of the Agreement. However, there is a crucial balance to reach there. If the accord’s ambitions are too low, then its terms would be deemed pointless and the agreement could end up being dropped altogether.

COVID-19 could turn out to be a blessing in disguise. What we need is indeed not just a standard rework of objectives that was planned years ago—what we need is a full reform of the negotiation process. A crisis like this pandemic—which put a hold on international reunions in particular anyway—is the perfect time to adapt our decision-making process. One possibility would be to fuse the Summit on biodiversity, the Conference of the Parties, and the Convention on desertification all together, which would focus all the attention on just one summit. Another possibility would be to bring the five-year timeframe down to just two years, which would make us more reactive. Closer deadlines would also encourage governments to take faster, more drastic action.

We are presented with a unique opportunity here. For the first time ever, humanity was able to turn back the clock on the consequences of its own actions. If we want to devise a better plan for the future, we need to do it now—or forever hold our peace.
Cyberspace Dynamics in the AI era. Tackling threats to International Peace and Security

By Barbara Tabea

Long gone are the days when countries would threaten each other solely based on their military and nuclear abilities. Today, nations can freely exercise political threats and sabotage within cyberspace. Cyberspace can be defined as the environment of the internet and digital technology. It provides an efficient and mostly anonymous platform for jeopardizing the affairs of another country. Various countries have been victims of cyber intelligence operations since the early 2000s. One of the most notable incidents was the case of Stuxnet, a malware introduced by the US and Israel to sabotage Iranian computers and centrifuges with the aim of slowing down Iran’s nuclear enrichment capacity. Another renown case was that of the US carrying out electronic surveillance on a couple of world leaders during the Obama administration. Such activities pose a great threat to international security and should be resolved using diplomacy which has effectively worked to maintain world peace since the early days of the Greek city-states.

But dealing with cybercrimes has proven to be a challenging task for diplomacy because it is difficult to identify the perpetrators. Cyberspace allows these perpetrators to remain anonymous. To make matters worse, the Vienna Convention of 1961 which is supposed to be the ‘diplomatic Bible’ lacks provisions to adequately address such crimes. This means responses to cybercrime can vary from country to country depending on what the country sees most fit as a solution. The lack of binding international laws to settle cybercrime gives more technologically advanced countries power to sabotage the less advanced ones in cyberspace and get away untouched. Even though diplomacy is still limited in addressing cybercrimes, individual victim states have developed measures to address them. Some states have solved cybercrime by being vocal through naming and shaming the attacker in the media. This is mostly done by states that do not share strong diplomatic relations. Countries that share close ties with the attacking country usually decide to put out the flames of the cyber-attack in secrecy. Exposure of such attacks to the media would terminate their strong relationship.

To improve responses to cybercrimes, there is need to strengthen network diplomacy. Since diplomats do not undergo training to solve cybercrimes, they should work closely with owners of large tech corporations such as Google and other tech experts. Such interactions will enable diplomats to gain more knowledge on how to maintain peace in cyberspace. The United Nations should also continue hosting summits such as the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) of 2003 to allow countries to negotiate the working of cyberspace and set more rules to control this new space dimension. Finally, the proliferation of new issue areas such as cybercrime in the 21st century is a signal that diplomacy must undergo some changes to meet the challenges of this era. There is need to update documents that provide the framework of diplomatic conduct so that diplomacy can effectively tackle the new issue areas of this century. Diplomacy is enduring but at the same time requires constant refreshment because the world keeps evolving.
Chloé Christin on Gen Z and having a +=+ mindset

By Besma Abdallah

Chloé is currently studying International Relations at the University of Geneva. She will be chairing the HRC committee for the 2021 GIMUN Annual Conference. In this interview she shares her hopes for a post-Covid world and opens up about her generation’s political engagement.

To you, who are real-life heroes?
For me, real-life heroes are the ones who save lives, like firefighters, healthcare workers, or humanitarian aid workers, but also those who take on the responsibility of defending everyday people, like police officers or even the Blue Helmets of the United Nations.

What is the greatest injustice of the world we live in today?
Unfortunately, the world we live in today faces many injustices. It is hard to choose just one. But if I absolutely had to choose, I think that the lack of access to basic goods and services (food, drinkable water, healthcare) is surely one of the greatest injustices of our time.

A country is nothing without its…?
A country is nothing without its people, its citizens. In fact, population is one of the primary criteria for a country to be considered a State according to international law. To illustrate my point, I could say that a country can be likened to a brain, and its people are the cells that feed and provide for the brain. Without those cells, the brain cannot survive.

A society that tends toward progress is a society that invests in…?
A society that tends toward progress is a society that invests in its future, in my opinion. Progress permits us to improve on things in different areas and thus to change the future (and especially our future society). But progress can be both positive and negative, which is why it is necessary to regulate it in one way or another in order not to lead ourselves down the road to ruin.

If you had to live in one country for the rest of your life, which country would you choose and why?
That is a difficult question, because there are many factors to take into account. Although I have a certain interest in many Asian countries, I think I would choose the Netherlands or Canada simply because they are both countries with very high-quality education systems where English is widely spoken, but where there is also a multicultural environment. They are also countries with a generally high quality of life. The only drawback would probably be the climate, but that is something one can get used to.

Would you describe yourself as more emotional or practical?
It all depends on context. If I had yet to take a step back from a given situation, I would be more emotional and vice versa. In my daily life, with my friends or my family, I am more
emotional, but with my studies, I am more practical.

Is discomfort an inconvenience or a necessity?
Discomfort is both an inconvenience and a necessity. On one hand, discomfort can keep us from achieving things, but on the other hand, it makes us stronger and gives us courage, perhaps more than those who have not experienced discomfort or never will.

What is one life lesson the Covid crisis has taught you?
The global pandemic has taught me that collaboration between the different countries of the world is necessary, that solidarity is necessary, and that we must fight together against phenomena of this scale.

Being part of a generation that grew up with the internet, what’s the best thing this has given you in comparison to previous generations? And what’s the worst?
I think that the best thing the internet has given me is access to practically infinite sources of information. In fact, thanks to the internet it is easy for us to be able to inform ourselves on subjects that interest us, and on subjects in various areas, and therefore to be able to quench our thirst for knowledge. Nevertheless, this multitude of sources of information is also, in a sense, the worst thing. In fact, due to the internet, and to social media networks in particular, disinformation and the transmission of “fake news” is extremely dangerous, as we have seen with the COVID-19 crisis.

Do you think that we are more or less engaged today?
I think that we are more engaged today, especially within the younger generation. In fact, it is easier for us to engage with subjects that are close to our hearts nowadays, compared to in the past. For example, sharing content on social media is considered a form of engagement. Moreover, young people are increasingly aware of societal problems, and are more rapidly developing critical thinking, which pushes them to campaign for or against certain situations.

What is a lesson that you try to live by?
I think that the lesson that has helped me most in life is the famous formula ++, or in other words, a positive mindset leads to positive results.

Which public figures do you look up to the most?
A major French public figure who I admire is Simone Veil, especially in her key role in the fight against discrimination against women in France, through the adoption of the Veil law. I also admire Martin Luther King, who fought to obtain civil rights for African Americans in the United States for a large part of his life, in order to fight against the racism and discrimination that they suffered from, but also to fight against poverty and for peace in general.

What would you say to “you” from the past?
I think I would tell myself not to give up and to always give my all to the things that are close to my heart, even if that might seem like a cliché answer.

What would you ask “you” from the future?
I would ask myself to always keep the motivation that I have gained today, but also to never stop helping others and people in difficulty. And above all, to not abandon my values and to stay true to myself, even in the most complicated situations.

What do you hope that our society is going to achieve in 10 years?
Even though it might seem utopian, I hope that in ten years, our society will have found a solution to fight against injustices all over the world, to fight against the failure to respect human rights at a personal level, and also that countries will have put in place the necessary provisions in order to fight against global warming and its many consequences.
Geneva International Model United Nations

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