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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

To get inputs for this Elements Paper for the Declaration for Future Generations, one briefing and two informal consultations with Member States and one stakeholder consultation were organized. In addition, a call for written inputs was shared over the summer. This call resulted in 75 submissions from groups and from individual Member States as well as from think tanks, academia, regional organizations, youth groups, civil society organizations and institutions that represent the interests of future generations. These inputs encompassed geographical representation from all regions. The contributions demonstrate overall support for the principle of intergenerational equity, as well as a recognition of responsibilities towards future generations and broadly expressed solidarity in securing the interests of future generations.

There is a strong consensus that the Declaration must be underpinned by norms and values that are reflected in existing UN agreements. These include the United Nations Charter and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. There is strong support to both build on existing frameworks and seek to ‘turbocharge’ existing processes. The Secretary General’s Report “Our Common Agenda”, that was requested by Member States in the UN 75 Declaration, was thought to present important proposals to build on these frameworks.

For the purpose of this Elements Paper, “future generations” have been defined as all those generations that do not yet exist, are yet to come and who will eventually inherit this planet.

Meaningful contributions of both young people – the standard bearers of future generations – and the wisdom and needs of older persons should be considered in drafting the Declaration, taking into account anticipated demographic trends. There were many calls to improve our knowledge and understanding of the interests and needs of future generations. A participatory and inclusive process can help Member States determine what areas to focus on when drafting the Declaration for Future Generations.

ELEMENTS PAPER

FOR THE DECLARATION FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

A wide range of inputs was collected for this Elements Paper. We have made an attempt to collate the input under four sections.

Member States and stakeholders clearly expressed that a Declaration for Future Generations should state a firm commitment to securing the interests of future generations in all decision making; by identifying, managing and monitoring global existential risks, and by focusing policies and programs on long-term sustainable development. Several practical suggestions were provided to implement this vision and follow up on the Declaration for Future Generations.

Section 1: Securing the interests of future generations

Many inputs stated that our decisions today have consequences well into the future and, conversely, that we need to develop and implement long-term approaches to address present and future challenges. The interests of future generations should therefore be considered at all levels of decision-making. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) remains the most important global objective. Since future generations are not represented in decision-making, an effort should be made to understand and integrate their needs and interests when drafting legal and political frameworks at the global, regional, national and local levels, guided by the principle of intergenerational equity and solidarity. Both Member States and stakeholders expressed that constructive engagement between policy makers and different stakeholders from academia, civil society, private sector, as well as young people and older persons is necessary in framing knowledge and policies. The interests of present and future generations may align, but Member States and stakeholders recognize that we need to place ourselves in the position of future generations when developing and implementing long-term policies for sustainable development, making sure that no one is left behind.

Section 2: Identifying, managing and monitoring major global risks

Many submissions acknowledged the responsibility of present generations to halt and prevent developments that could threaten the survival of future generations. This includes climate change, conflict and new technologies that could harm human interest, human dignity and well-being.

Global risks will change over time. Improving our understanding of what the future may look like, and what the impacts of our current actions are on the future will help determine which global issues to prioritize. There was a clear call to better link science and policy making in order to do this effectively. The importance of long-term policies based on strategic foresight and enhanced

preparedness to increase resilience to potential risks, particularly for the most vulnerable, clearly stood out.

Three elements were seen as prerequisites for a safe and sustainable future. These are planetary well-being and preserving life on earth; a safe and peaceful world; and the safe development of emerging technologies and digital cooperation.

a. *Planetary Well-being and Preserving Life on Earth*

There is a strong shared concern about the well-being of the planet among Member States and stakeholders, including but not limited to climate change, biodiversity loss, desertification, water scarcity and pollution. The need to ensure the sustainability of our planet including the preservation of natural resources necessary to sustain human life and the right to a clean and healthy environment came out very strongly. Eliminating poverty, eradicating hunger, disaster risk reduction, transforming global food and energy systems and meeting existing commitments, including on climate change are considered crucial by Member States and stakeholders.

b. *A Safe and Peaceful world*

Promoting peace and continued efforts to preventing conflict are essential for the well-being of future generations, not least because existing conflicts hamper development and bring about multi-generational costs. Nuclear war remains an existential threat to life on Earth. Strengthening the global movement for a culture of peace and interreligious and intercultural dialogue for peaceful and inclusive societies are powerful tools. Inclusive and meaningful engagement of citizens with their governments will build trust and is essential for peaceful societies. Improving informed decision-making on peacebuilding and prevention of conflict, including in outer space, can support this endeavor.

c. *Safe Developments of Emerging Technologies and Digital Cooperation*

Science, technology and innovation are seen to present transformative opportunities but also as potentially disruptive and destructive. Bridging the digital divide and better sharing of knowledge and technology, along with more data-driven approaches are crucial to accelerate development globally. There is a strong recognition that new technologies could also pose new threats to future generations, including in the areas of artificial intelligence and (manmade) biosecurity. There is a need to strengthen digital governance and regulation to enable equitable, safe and responsible advancement in technological breakthroughs and to build resilience to vulnerabilities that emerging technologies could bring.

Section 3: Long-term sustainable development

The interests of future generations are grounded in sustainable development. A reversal of progress on the SDGs is a shared concern. The SDGs provide the most important blueprint both for securing the interests of present generations, and for building the foundations for enhancing the interests of future generations. The SDGs are thought to have strong intergenerational relevance.

The fulfillment of human rights, fighting inequality and eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions are central for sustainable development, are therefore essential when it comes to securing the interests of future generations. There is a need for accelerated actions in all these areas, in line with the principle of intergenerational equity.

The intergenerational transmission of inequality also highlights the importance of gender equality. The social, political and economic empowerment of women and girls functions as multiplier for long-term sustainable development. Empowerment and meaningful engagement of young people are seen as critical building blocks for a sustainable future. The submissions mention that while we have a shared common set of values, cultural diversity is a positive force for building resilience, adaptation and solidarity. Both present and future generations will benefit from stronger global systems that put long-term development at the center in areas like health, social protection, and education, while taking into account the current needs. Demographic trends, including human mobility, should be taken into account. The process of global digital transformation calls for investments in education and lifelong learning to ensure that all generations, including youth, have the skills to navigate in this rapidly changing environment and are able to find employment and decent jobs. To achieve this, commonly shared objectives like universal health coverage, are key for the transformative changes we need to make to safeguard the interests of future generations. A much stronger focus on means of implementation and financing the SDGs is the key starting point therefore.

There is a recognition that institutions need to be more resilient, adaptive and open. This includes the global economic governance system. The measurement of progress beyond GDP is also part of that. There is a strong sense that better accountability mechanisms need to be put in place to hold each other accountable for the shared effort to tackle global challenges.

Section 4: Suggestions for taking forward the Declaration for Future Generations

The need to look beyond short-term interests should be reflected in strategies, policies and investments if we are serious about protecting the interests and needs of future generations. Member states and stakeholders provided some practical suggestions to deliver on commitments to be made in the Declaration for Future Generations for consideration. These are outlined below.

Anchoring the interest of future generations at the national, regional or international levels through the establishment of new bodies, or, through the appointment of representatives to act on behalf of future generations were considered important. Some suggestions made in the Our Common Agenda report were also mentioned, including the appointment of a UN Special Envoy for Future Generations, as well regional Guardians for Future Generations and Ombudspersons for Future Generations.

Some existing best practices were offered, including references to future generations in national constitutions and other legal instruments as well as embedding the interests of future generations in national and international justice systems.

Suggestions were also made for developing monitoring and reporting mechanisms to ensure accountability to future generations. These included using a ‘generational test’ that evaluates decisions and policies against their long-term impact on different generations; establishing specialist institutions to assess the impact of policies, the development of an Intergenerational Sustainability Index and a Universal Periodic Review mechanism. Another suggestion was to put more effort into reviewing UN decisions from a future generations’ perspective and in understanding whether UN decisions had any unintended adverse consequences for future generations.

Investing in knowledge-building and sharing to enhance present generations’ understanding of future risks and challenges and to prepare for different scenarios was another overarching theme. Among the many ideas, concrete proposals in this regard included a future generations theme for the ECOSOC cycle, the creation of an open-access knowledge base with data on intergenerational trends and good practices, the creation of Science Policy Transfer offices at institutions focused on future generations, the establishment of a UN Emergency Platform and Futures Lab. The need to enhance capacity on strategic foresight at all levels to encourage long-term approaches and anticipatory decision making is also seen as important.

Strengthening global governance and improved effective multilateralism with the UN at the center was considered key. The Summit of the Future could provide an opportunity to commit to a long-term approach to safeguard the well-being of future generations. Apart from the need for reforms, suggestions included exploring new strategic partnerships within and outside the UN system to promote more effective international cooperation. A new agenda for peace and a global digital compact could offer further commitments and means of implementation for a safe and responsible future.

Ensuring the means to implement agreed frameworks and future proposals are necessary investments in securing the interests of future generations. Also, innovative ideas should be explored to secure sustainable and predictable financing from both governments and private sector.