

Bled Strategic Times

Official Gazette of the Bled Strategic Forum · 2 — 3 September 2024

On the Road to Armageddon and still Pretending it is just a Normal Ride!

Is This the World we Want? We can and Must do Better!

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It has been 32 years since Agenda 21, a comprehensive international plan of action to build a global partnership for sustainable development to improve human lives and protect the environment, was adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Subsequently, at the turn of the millennium, UN member states gathered at the Millennium Summit and unanimously agreed on the Millennium Declaration, which defined eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) aimed at reducing extreme poverty by 2015. At the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2002 our goals and commitment to eradicating poverty and protecting the environment were reaffirmed.

In Rio de Janeiro in 2012, at the conference named Rio+20, we adopted the document “**The Future We Want**”, in which we defined the goals and began taking measures to fulfil the sustainable development goals. Based on these agreements, in 2015, at the UN General Assembly, we began the process of tracking the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. We clearly agreed on what our common challenges are and what we want to achieve by 2030. An annual analysis is published for each goal and objective.

However, **reading these annual reports offers no basis for optimism**. Only six years separate us from 2030, the year by which the United Nations member states are to have made significant progress on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, as agreed in 2015. The adoption of these goals has sent a strong signal to the world. It seemed that **the agreed global objective was to change the world and improve people’s lives**. Yet, every year, as we read the progress reports regarding the achievement of these goals, we see that while we initially made some decisive steps, we have mostly stagnated since 2019.

For illustration: this year’s report tells us that from 2019 to 2022 the number of people living in extreme hunger increased by an unacceptable 23 million. Approximately one-tenth of the global population suffers from hunger. Despite the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in the developed world, current data shows that total greenhouse gas emissions have risen to their highest level ever. Due to wars and persecution, the number of displaced persons has risen to 110 million. From 2022 to 2023, civilian casualties in armed conflicts increased by 72 percent.

UN analysts assure us that the quality of the data used to monitor the goals, which was initially poor in 2015, has significantly improved. Today we know very accurately what is happening in the world and where we



are headed. It seems that we know exactly how slow our progress is in achieving our agreed goals. **Does this mean that we lack the courage and responsibility to change the current path?**

Today’s world is based on the internationally agreed world order - multilateralism, respect for human rights and the rule of law. While in theory we all agree that egregious violations of international agreements, attempts to change internationally agreed and recognised borders, and blocking or violating UN Security Council resolutions are unacceptable, we still witness apathy on a daily basis.

It seems that **we live in times when the international order is changing**. The memory of World War II, which had devastating consequences for mankind, shook the world and brought about a new international order based on the rule of law and respect for human rights, is fading. What can we do to restore peace and stability in the world on the basis of the current order?

While in theory we all agree that egregious violations of international agreements, and attempts to change internationally agreed and recognised borders are unacceptable, we still witness apathy on a daily basis.

2024 is a momentous year because it is expected that elections will be held in countries that account for half of humanity’s population. Whom will we choose to represent and lead us, and what policies will we select? Will voters be able to decide based on political programmes? Will the elected politicians be able and willing to lead us to the goals we have set? Or will we fall for lies and promises, which have become a socially acceptable part of everyday life?

And let’s not forget the technological challenges we are facing. New technologies are offering numerous pos-

sibilities to enhance our life, develop new businesses and services and enable us to be better connected with our colleagues and the people we love. But technology is also bringing unprecedented challenges: What will happen with those who are left behind and cannot afford to be connected? What will happen when and if machines take over our responsibilities and start deciding on important issues contrary to our values? Is there a risk that machines will run the world?

It is hard to be optimistic as the facts and experiences are relentless. Yet, I do have hope. My hope is fuelled when I see concrete progress in some areas. For example, we have managed to reduce infant mortality and the data on increasing gender equality is equally encouraging.

This proves that **we can make progress if we want to**. My hope is also encouraged when I see **young people all over the world demanding concrete actions**. They are running numerous movements, some seemingly very minor, but of crucial importance for local communities and some of a real global nature, in which they are mobilising millions of people, especially youngsters demanding change. This is a very valuable expression of active citizenship and should be encouraged and valued. And it is up to politicians to find compromises and provide concrete responses to these demands.

Finding solutions is never easy nor straightforward. It requires solid facts and the articulation of legitimate interests and concerns, followed by a frank and respectful exchange of opinions on suitable solutions. **Sincere and open dialogue is the key.**

Considering the scale of the challenges we are facing, we must provide a framework for a fruitful and honest exchange of views and have an open conversation on what we are doing right and where we are lagging behind. The Bled Strategic Forum is an excellent opportunity for such discussions and could contribute to finding a way towards a better future. A future for all. ■