

Call for papers

*The Challenges of the United Nations in the light of its 80th Anniversary –
Critical Reflections and Perspectives*
9 and 10 October 2025 – Aix-en-Provence (France)

Background. Founded in 1945 in a post-war context, the United Nations (UN) was conceived as a universal forum for maintaining international peace and security, promoting cooperation and friendly relations among States while encouraging development and respect for human rights.

However, as the UN emerged as a central player in international relations, voices were quickly raised to rethink how it operated.

As early as the 1960s, Grenville Clark and Louis Sohn were already thinking about the possibility of strengthening the UN's means of action to make it a "world federal state"¹. While their approach seems particularly ambitious, the idea of Charter reform is far from isolated. Indeed, since 1945, the questioning of the functioning of the UN has been considered on many occasions by doctrine², states³, other international organizations⁴, and even the UN itself⁵.

These debates focus on its ability to adapt both about the changes in international society and about the new challenges it faces.

Indeed, these developments raise questions about the coherence of the text of the Charter, which is 80 years old, with current reality. For example, the expansion of the number of Member States – from 51 in 1945 to 193 today – has profoundly changed the institutional dynamics of the Organization, raising issues of representativeness and adaptation to contemporary realities. Since its creation in 1963, the Organization of African Unity has been warning about this situation. Within the UN itself, the need for a change in the composition of the Security Council has been discussed many times. Recently, on August 12, 2024, the Council debated about "*La représentation limitée de l'Afrique au sein du Conseil de sécurité restreint la capacité du continent à résoudre les conflits de manière efficace et concrète*",⁶ without much result. This question of representativeness within the Security Council, which was raised more than 60 years ago, in addition to the difficulties linked to the body's recurrent blockages, has fuelled numerous debates and proposals for revising the Charter.

¹ C. GRENVILLE, L. SOHN, *World Peace Through World Law*, Harvard, University Press, 1958, 540 p.

² See, among others, A. NOVOSSELOFF, "La réforme des Nations Unies. Défis et perspectives", *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali*, vol. 68, n°1 (269), 2001, pp. 3-31.

³ Permanent Representation of France to the United Nations in New York, *La réforme de l'ONU*, May 2020.

⁴ J. M. THOUVENIN, "Les positions européennes à l'égard du projet de réforme des Nations Unies", *Revue du Marché commun et de l'Union européenne*, No. 513, 2007, p. 665 *et seq.*

⁵ See the words spoken by Mr. D. FRANCIS, President of the United Nations General Assembly on 12 August 2024, available at <https://press.un.org/fr/>.

⁶ United Nations, « Le Conseil de sécurité débat du renforcement de la représentation de l'Afrique en son sein, afin de « remédier à l'injustice historique » et « une omission flagrante », CS/15788, 12 August 2024, available at <https://press.un.org/fr/>.

At the same time, the United Nations faces global challenges that go beyond its traditional scope of activity. The General Assembly, on the 75th anniversary of the Organization in 2020 and as it sets out the "disappointments" with the UN's record, also highlights the world "is plagued by growing inequality" related to new global challenges⁷.

The Covid-19 pandemic was a striking example of crisis that shook international society as a whole⁸. It has deepened existing socio-economic inequalities, particularly affecting vulnerable people⁹. It also highlighted regional disparities in the security of their populations¹⁰.

In a less sudden, but just as profound way, digital technology has also transformed society. Seen as an opportunity for socio-economic prosperity and the promotion of justice and peace by some, the digital age could also accentuate the marginalization of already disadvantaged populations¹¹. If "enhancing connectivity" digital technology "can be a great equaliser", 800 million individuals could lose their jobs by 2030 due to automation, according to the McKinsey group¹².

These examples are not isolated. According to the General Assembly, the obstacles facing the United Nations today are all interrelated. Only with "reinvigorated multilateralism"¹³ can it overcome them.

In addition, the Organization has nevertheless been able to be inventive in responding to emerging challenges. This is evidenced by the gradual broadening of its areas of intervention¹⁴ and the practice of the General Assembly to deal with international crises in the event of a blockage of the Council through a broad interpretation of the Charter¹⁵. Moreover, and despite the criticism levelled at them, peacekeeping operations have had a concrete impact in restoring peace¹⁶.

In the same way, while the Covid-19 crisis has had disastrous consequences, the UN's support has helped to reduce the damage¹⁷. Similarly, and while the harmful effects of digitalization "are not yet fully known"¹⁸, the Secretary-General has set up the High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation that led to the adoption of a Global Digital Compact by the General

⁷ A/RES/75/1, *Strengthening of the United Nations system, Declaration on the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations*, 28 September 2020, para. 4.

⁸ *United Nations Comprehensive Response to COVID-19: Saving Lives, Protecting Societies, Recovering Better*, September 2020, available at <https://www.un.org/>.

⁹ United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report*, 2020, available at: <https://unstats.un.org/>.

¹⁰ *United Nations Comprehensive Response to COVID-19: Saving Lives, Protecting Societies, Recovering Better*, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

¹¹ UN75 2020 and beyond, *Shaping Our Future Together. The impact of digital technologies*, available at <https://www.un.org/>.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ A/RES/75/1, *op. cit.*, para. 5.

¹⁴ See, for example, the listed subsidiary organs of the United Nations General Assembly, available at <https://www.un.org/en/ga/about/subsidiary/index.shtml>.

¹⁵ See, for example, A/RES/377(V), *Uniting for peace*, 3 November 1950.

¹⁶ United Nations, *Does UN Peacekeeping work? Here's what the data says*, 11 December 2022, available at: <https://news.un.org/>.

¹⁷ *The United Nations System's Global Response to COVID-19: Saving Lives, Protecting Societies, Building Back Better*, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ *Global Digital Compact Revision No. 3*, GDC Rev 3 - Draft Under Silence Procedure, 11 July 2024, p. 13.

Assembly on 20 September 2024¹⁹. It has five main objectives towards which the drafters commit to working through concrete and measurable actions by 2030.

This mixed record testifies to both the successes and the limitations of the United Nations. The quest for lasting peace and international security, cooperation between states, development and the protection of human rights remain ongoing challenges. A more in-depth analysis of the actions carried out during its 80 years of existence would not only make it possible to assess its effectiveness, but also to anticipate the prospects for the Organization's evolution in the face of contemporary challenges.

Issues. Every ten years, the United Nations celebrates the anniversary of its creation. Each time it is an opportunity to adapt the Organization to the world around it. In 1995, the Secretary-General saw in the fiftieth anniversary the opportunity for a transition "de la vieille à la nouvelle ONU"²⁰. A similar ambition guided the "Millennium Summit" in 2005, during which it was a question of "using imagination to strengthen [the] structures", as Kofi Annan, then Secretary-General, pointed out. What about twenty years later?

In its Declaration on the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the Organization, the General Assembly foreshadowed for the next ten years a "decade of action and delivery for sustainable development", as it will be "the most critical of our generation"²¹. The year 2030 therefore appears to be a decisive turning point.

Yet, at the halfway point, the results seem heterogeneous and often insufficient, particularly in developing countries where successive crises have considerably slowed down the implementation of the SDGs²².

While 2020 was supposed to mark the beginning of a decade of ambitious actions, the Covid-19 pandemic led to a setback in the progress made. At the same time, climate change requires an acceleration of international efforts to limit warming to below 1.5°C, in accordance with the Paris Agreement. In this context, the ability of the United Nations to mobilize its Member States around concrete commitments is more crucial than ever. The coming years will be decisive in transforming political commitments into tangible actions and achieving the goals set by 2030²³.

Yet, the financing of the United Nations and its agencies is a major challenge, directly influencing its ability to fulfil its mandates. The regular budget of the United Nations is mainly financed by the assessed contributions of Member States, calculated according to a distribution key that considers their capacity to pay. However, delays and defaults by some States have led to liquidity crises, hampering the optimal functioning of the Organization²⁴. Moreover, the

¹⁹ A/79/L.2, *Strengthening of the United Nations system. The Pact for the Future*, 20 September 2024.

²⁰ A. NOVOSSELOFF, "La réforme des Nations Unies. Défis et perspectives", *op. cit.*, p. 3.

²¹ A/RES/75/1, *op. cit.*, para. 7.

²² Réseau des Solutions pour le Développement Durable, *Le monde risque de perdre une décennie de progrès sur les Objectifs de Développement Durable*, p. 2, available at <https://www.sdgindex.org/>. For the report, see *Sustainable Development Report*, Dublin, 2024, available at <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/>.

²³ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Tracking progress on food and agriculture-related SDG indicators*, 2023, available at <https://www.fao.org/>.

²⁴ United Nations, *UN Funding*, available at <https://www.un.org/>.

resources allocated to peacekeeping operations, which are essential for international stability, depend on geopolitical affinities and tensions. In general, they face recurrent budget deficits, limiting their effectiveness on the ground²⁵.

In addition, UN funds and programmes, such as UNICEF or UNDP, rely heavily on voluntary contributions from Member States and other donors. This dependence makes them vulnerable to fluctuations in donor commitments, undermining the planning and implementation of their programmes²⁶.

While the UN has historically gone through several financial crises, the report drawn up by the Secretary-General in May 2024 is alarming²⁷. It highlights fluctuating cash flow, the lowest collection rate in the last five years (82.3% in 2023) and record arrears of \$859 million, compromising the execution of mandates²⁸. The financial crisis is also affecting peacekeeping operations, with the risk of late payments to contributing countries²⁹. The report stresses the urgent need for sustainable solutions and better regularity of payments by Member States. In the face of these challenges, there have been calls for reform of the international financial system. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda and Goal 17 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasize capacity building and the global partnership for sustainable development, including innovative financing strategies³⁰. In short, ensuring stable and adequate funding for the United Nations is essential to ensure the effectiveness of its actions and the achievement of its global objectives.

For the 80th anniversary of the United Nations, this symposium offers an in-depth and multidisciplinary analysis of the achievements, limits and prospects of this founding organization of contemporary multilateralism. This scientific meeting aims to bring together academics, researchers, practitioners and experts around a critical and forward-looking reflection on the role and evolution of the UN in an international context marked by systemic upheavals and major geopolitical rebuilding.

²⁵ United Nations, *Selected General Assembly documents relating to the approved resources for UN Peacekeeping operations*, available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/>.

²⁶ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Funding*, available at <https://www.undp.org/>.

²⁷ A/78/524/Add.1, *Financial situation of the United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General*, 13 May 2024.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 10 and 14, pp. 4 and 5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-7.

³⁰ United Nations, *Addis Ababa Action Agenda and Financing for Development*, available at <https://www.un.org/>.

Thematic axes. To frame the reflections, three main axes have been identified, but are not exhaustive:

Axis 1: Justice and settlement of international disputes

This axis examines the role of the United Nations in the administration of international justice and the peaceful settlement of disputes. He is interested in the judicial and quasi-judicial institutions related to the UN system, in particular the evolution of the role and jurisprudence of the International Court of Justice. The analysis will also focus on the interactions between the different mechanisms for the settlement of conflicts, the coexistence of legal pluralism and the quest for universality of norms, as well as the challenges related to the execution of decisions and their legitimacy in a changing international order.

Axis 2: The United Nations between reforms and institutional blockages

This axis analyzes the internal dynamics of the UN system by focusing on the issues of governance, transparency and representativeness within the main and subsidiary organs. The aim is to examine institutional reforms, both those implemented and those that have remained at the project stage, by questioning their feasibility and their limits. Moreover, the question of the financing of the United Nations is a major issue, influencing both the independence of the Organization and its ability to act. Budgetary constraints, distribution of contributions and alternative financing strategies will be addressed as key factors in UN reform.

Axis 3: The place of specialized agencies and non-state actors in the UN system

This axis explores the role of specialized agencies, regional organizations, NGOs and private actors in the implementation of the UN's goals. The aim here is to analyse the complementarities and possible tensions between these actors and the UN bodies, by questioning their normative influence, their capacity for action and their legitimacy. The focus will include synergies and challenges faced by actors in key areas such as climate, global health or digitalisation.

Submission Procedures. Proposals for papers of no more than two pages should include a summary of the paper that sets out the research question, the research methods and the thesis defended. All proposals for papers should be accompanied by a *curriculum vitae* and a short bibliography. These proposals should be sent before **June 15, 2025** to the following address: afnuaix@gmail.com with the subject line: Colloque ONU, LAST NAME and first name.

Contributions can be submitted in French or English. Proposals will be reviewed by a scientific committee and successful authors will be notified by **July 15, 2025**.

We encourage contributions from PhD students and young researchers, as well as from practitioners responsible for applying and interpreting the law as well as from policy makers. The call is also open to all disciplines other than law, as long as the candidates have a research subject directly related to the research axes.

Publication. The selected papers may be published in a special issue of *the United Nations Observer*.

Organizing Committee.

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