



Young UN
Agents for Change

Open Mic Diplomacy Series – “Next generation diplomacy and the future of the UN” – Event Summary

29 August 2018, Dag Hammarskjöld Library Reading Room

**Due to the Chatham House rules of the event, the content of the statements will be stated without attribution to the speaker.*

Agenda of the event:

The event started with the welcoming remarks by one of the members of the Young UN. In his opening remarks, the President of the General Assembly, His Excellency Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, noted number of issues he observed during his tenure with regards to the future development of the diplomacy at the UN. The discussion led by the moderator ensued on the topics below. The Secretary-General’s Special Envoy on Youth provided concluding remarks, while one member of the Young UN closed the session with final words.

Topics:

Future of diplomacy:

- Paradoxically with the increased availability and usage of new communication technologies, the diplomats in the UN communicate less.
- The scope of diplomacy has widened bringing number of seemingly unrelated topics with diplomacy to the forefront such as climate change, energy and unemployment.
- New foreign policy actors such as INGOs, church and business entities are setting global agenda nowadays.

Challenges:

- Multilateralism is under threat, which was a “great irony” as the problems we are facing today are becoming more global. Due to this, we are also facing the risk of rules being imposed by the most powerful.
- Lack of dialogue between people and the “us versus them” mentality leads to people talking only to like-minded as opposed to listening to the other side as well. Lack of striving for the middle ground is not diplomacy.
- UN’s relevance as the most representative body is coming under question.
- Cultural barriers between diplomats continue to be present.

- UN is “locking” itself in “its bubble”.
- At the UN nowadays, ideas are opposed because of who suggested them rather than what was suggested. Such politics are affecting decision-making.
- There is a disconnect between the Member States’ positions in formal and informal settings.
- There is a lack of institutional memory, including among UN civil servants, which often leads to “reinventing the wheel” scenarios without checking how it was done before.
- There is a gap between the political (delegates) and technical (UN expertise) side.
- Youth today see diplomacy as a secretive and elite profession.
- It is insufficient for a diplomat to be an expert in one area today, as issues tend to be interconnected.
- Even as issues are increasingly interconnected, institutions continue to operate in silos. There is need for multidisciplinary teams.
- Across the world, there is growing mistrust towards political institutions among young people.
- There is inefficient communication by the UN to the outside world about its processes.
- Today, those taking decisions concerning young people are predominantly from older age group. This is not sustainable.
- There is sometimes a misplaced sense of entitlement among the UN civil servants which makes them cut off from the people they serve.

Solutions:

- To stay relevant, the UN must foresee future challenges.
- UN has to work with the “right players” such as civil society and business partners by developing a formal mechanism for cooperation with UN organs.
- UN has to depart from its “old ways” and change the way it communicates within the system, as well as to the outside world.
- There is need for more informative meetings to diplomats on the content of the issues, as well as on how the UN works.
- Structures in the UN need to be less hierarchical.
- UN civil servants should go “back to basics” in order to realize why we are here.

Role of Youth:

- Youth needs to bring new ideas, to modernize the system. In order to do this, young people should be promoted within the UN system to render it more flexible.

Imagining the future UN:

The predominant themes among participant response were:

- The relevance of the UN will depend on the creation of a more diverse Security Council.
- The UN risks becoming irrelevant because other actors such as international corporations will continue to provide answers. While inevitably, new actors will replace traditional actors for service delivery in the humanitarian field as well, the UN for its part must thus reform its business methods and move to decisions faster.

