



University of Geneva

# How can we collectively empower young people to tackle global challenges?

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How can large global development goals respond to the voices of young people is a key concern of Nicolas Levrat, director of the Global Studies Institute at the University of Geneva. Like Secretary-general Antonio Guterres, Professor Levrat believes that young people have to be included in the decision-making that will shape the future they will live in.

In that respect, he has encouraged his students to take an active role in a UN75 dialogue organised on the International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace last April. Four Global Studies Institute students pondered on the very notion of multilateralism and published a policy brief presenting a project of Charter and Youth Assembly.

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## Call for an International Youth Assembly

Does multilateralism still have a future? This issue emerges at every international crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic is no exception. Nations' heterogeneous responses to the pandemic have highlighted our international institutions' ancient and deep powerlessness to lead global action. International solidarity seems incapable of transforming old alliances into opportunities. This year, in the context of the UN75 events, the UN opened various important dialogues with the public, creating an inclusive approach but revealing that during this sanitary crisis, the UN's relevance is questioned again.

On the International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace last April, during an online discussion with some high-ranking United Nations officials and senior representatives from other international organizations, a need for a more diverse and more inclusive multilateralism emerged. As youth representatives and as students from the University of Geneva's Global Studies Institute, we wish to lay the foundations to a new citizen contract within a Youth Charter that aims at contributing to the improvement of international governance. NGO, social media and civil society's growing importance force us to think beyond the idea that states are the only legitimate actors of the international scene.

Director general Ms. Tatiana Valovaya supported this call for multilateralism diversification by affirming that “the youth have the power to not only raise awareness, but also to reach out to the leaders and to provide concrete solutions to solve current challenges”. We believe that we can bring a fresh perspective to global issues and we trust we can suggest solutions in a totally independent manner, notwithstanding our home country's politics.

On June 26, 2020, we reiterated our call for a more diverse multilateralism and deposited a policy paper in person at the UN. This paper, based on a survey of 170 University of Geneva students and associations, shows clearly young people's desire for inclusion and sets out the main elements of our position.

Firstly, youth comes with a modern and fresh take on situations, with new vision and unique solutions for global issues. National interests often constraint global cooperation, therefore we are

calling for the Youth representatives to be independent from their home country.

Secondly, today's global mobilization is more than ever virtual, at a time when the whole world experienced quarantine. We would like to launch a digital citizen participation tool and an online mobilization movement as soon as possible. The convergence of young people's ideas from around the world should allow to implement solutions.

Thirdly, the participation tool will allow for important subjects to be discussed among the youth. We encourage higher institutions to include The Youth Charter's objectives in their programs. They will unify the youth around common themes and issues, freed from sociocultural barriers.

The UN needs to include and harness young people's energies into a new form of multilateralism in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda. That is why we are calling on it to recognize, support and implement the International Youth Assembly as a permanent UN's institution.

Last June, António Guterres told civil society: “We cannot go back to a pre-COVID world of inequality and fragility. We count on you to help us to recover better and to build inclusive and sustainable economies and societies.”

Today, we have an opportunity to give meaning to these words, let's take it.

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Rector  
Yves Flückiger,  
Director general  
Tatiana Valovaya  
and Federal  
Councillor  
Ignazio Cassis  
at the University  
of Geneva's  
conference on  
multilateralism,  
September 2019.

**Bernard Debarbieux**, Dean of the Geneva School of Social Sciences, states that the faculty is deeply interconnected to International Geneva, mainly through two master programs:

1. "Standardization, social regulation and sustainable development" focuses on the making and implementation of regulatory standards, especially those adopted in the frame of the International Organization for Standardization, when related to one or several dimensions of sustainability.
2. "Innovation, Human Development and Sustainability" trains students to analyze problems in terms of the governance of sustainability. It focuses on defining and developing concrete solutions for the SDGs through hands-on, team-based and project-driven activities.

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Moreover, the diverse and international student body mirrors that of international organizations. More than 40 nationalities are represented in these two programs, where students engage with UN and other organizations' officials in small classes. An internship in an international organization or NGO is part of the curriculum and it represents the climax of the students' learning experience, along with workshops addressing major sustainability issues with the participation of IGOs representatives.

As an example, through its WSIS Forum, the ITU provide high quality internship opportunities to University of Geneva students to gain experience in leveraging ICTs for achieving the SDGs. As the WSIS Forum is the only event of its kind where the program and agenda are completely crowdsourced, interns are encouraged to creatively integrate their interests into the 2020 Forum, ideally working in teams to achieve maximum impact. In return, they get hands-on work experience, tangible outcomes and full exposure to a multi-stakeholder process.

#### For more information:

Should you decide to contribute to the empowerment of university students either by intervening as a guest speaker in a course or by hiring a student as an intern or simply find out more about the University of Geneva's master's programs in relation to International Geneva, please contact Monica Patry: [monica.patry@unige.ch](mailto:monica.patry@unige.ch).

#### Useful links and addresses:

[unige.ch/sciences-societe/formations/masters](https://unige.ch/sciences-societe/formations/masters)  
[unige.ch/-/projet-un75](https://unige.ch/-/projet-un75)  
[unige.ch/-/academic-programs](https://unige.ch/-/academic-programs)

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