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Subject: EU priorities at the United Nations and the 75th United Nations General Assembly, September 2020 - September 2021
- Council conclusions (13 July 2020)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on EU priorities at the United Nations and the 75th United Nations General Assembly, September 2020 – September 2021, as adopted by the Council at its 3765th meeting held on 13 July 2020.

Council conclusions on EU priorities at the United Nations and the 75th United Nations General Assembly, September 2020 – September 2021¹

Championing multilateralism and a strong and effective UN that delivers for all

1. Today's interconnected world and the global challenges we face show that multilateral cooperation is more necessary than ever. The outbreak of COVID-19 clearly demonstrates that global challenges require collective action. COVID-19 is a test for our humanity and values, but also for the multilateral system itself. The rules-based international order – with the UN at its core – must be upheld and strengthened if we are to deal effectively with global challenges. Now is the time for international solidarity and cooperation.
2. In this joint endeavour, the EU and its Member States are at the forefront of the global response assisting those most in need to address the humanitarian, health, social and economic consequences of the crisis. The EU aims to lead by example in showing solidarity by supporting our partners across the world. To maximise our collective impact, we need an effective multilateral approach. That is why we will continue to rally behind the UN Secretary-General's efforts to coordinate a UN-wide response in close cooperation with other actors. Measures taken at the national level are also of importance. The EU will remain a strong and credible partner for all those who wish to champion multilateralism in line with the Council conclusions on EU action to strengthen rules-based multilateralism.

¹ Throughout this document the use of 'EU' does not prejudice whether the competence lies with 'EU', the 'EU and its Member States' or exclusively with 'Member States'.

3. The current crisis has demonstrated how crucial multilateral institutions are to global health, prosperity, and security. We must collectively learn the lessons to make the world more resilient in the future. In support of the UN Secretary-General's call to "recover better", we need to work together to set the stage for a recovery that builds sustainable, equal and inclusive societies in line with the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Building back better and greener is the best way forward. To achieve this, increasing the cross-pillar coherence of the UN's work as well as advancing on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus will be key. This is also a crucial moment to sharpen the focus on our common priorities, from human rights to conflict prevention, from climate and sustainable development to digital. Preserving the humanitarian space and ensuring respect for international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles will remain equally important.

4. This year we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the UN. It is a moment to innovate and strengthen the multilateral system for "the future we want, the UN we need", based on trust, shared values and common interests. Today we need a UN that demonstrates its added value, delivers for all and that is fit for purpose. That is why we will continue to be at the forefront of those advocating a more effective, efficient and sustainably financed UN, in full support of the UN Secretary-General's reform agenda. Collectively, the EU and its Member States are the single largest financial contributor to the UN. The EU will continue to harness its convening power in support of effective multilateralism by bringing global actors together towards common global solutions. We will continue to promote the revitalisation of the General Assembly and support efforts towards enhancing synergies and coherence in the agendas of the General Assembly and its subsidiary organs. We will support necessary reforms of the bodies and organs of the UN system, including the comprehensive reform of the UN Security Council, to make them more effective, transparent, democratic, representative and accountable.

Advancing human rights and gender equality

5. At a time of growing challenges to human rights, democracy and the rule of law, the EU will continue to be a global leader in advancing the promotion and protection of all human rights worldwide. Through dialogue and cooperation, we will promote respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law as prerequisites for building inclusive and resilient democratic societies. We will make all efforts to put human rights at the centre of the UN agenda, and reiterate the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness of all human rights. We will continue to promote a positive human rights narrative, including through the Good Human Rights Stories initiative. The EU will push back against the erosion and instrumentalisation of human rights. We will continue to denounce human rights violations and abuses wherever they occur and will advocate unrestricted access to international human rights mechanisms, strengthen accountability and international justice mechanisms, and the fight against impunity. The EU remains a steadfast supporter of the International Criminal Court.

6. The COVID-19 pandemic poses a major threat to human rights, in particular having an exacerbated impact on the enjoyment of human rights by persons in vulnerable situations. Only by adopting a human rights-based approach can we guarantee an effective response and ensure that no one is left behind. At a time when human rights continue to be violated and where the space for civil society is severely constrained in many parts of the world, the EU strongly supports the UN Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights as well as his leadership in placing human rights at the core of the response to the COVID-19, and is determined to contribute to its implementation. We need to step up action to ensure a meaningful civil society and youth participation at the UN and beyond, use digital technologies to promote and protect human rights while mitigating potential risks, address the negative effects of climate change on human rights. The role of civic actors and human rights defenders is more important than ever to recover better and faster after the COVID-19 crisis.

7. We should redouble our efforts towards mainstreaming human rights. The EU will use all available tools to fulfil its commitments to human rights, including in the framework of the UN Human Rights Council, the UN General Assembly, the UN Security Council and any other relevant fora, consistent with the EU Treaty and the UN Charter. The EU will continue to support a strong and efficient Human Rights Council, while protecting the Council's achievements and recognising its unique role and added value in promoting and protecting human rights around the world. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Special Procedures and Treaty Bodies are essential components of the UN human rights system. The EU will continue to support their independence as well as the need for the UN's human rights work to be adequately resourced. We will continue to actively engage in the Review of the Treaty Body system with a view to strengthening its efficiency and effectiveness as well as safeguarding the independence and integrity of the Treaty Bodies.

8. 2020, marking the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, was intended to be ground-breaking for gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. Instead, the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused the postponement of the series of high-level meetings to revive existing commitments to gender equality and women's and girls' full enjoyment of all human rights. In particular, we now need to reinforce targeted actions and mainstreaming in order to achieve gender equality. The EU fully supports the UN Secretary-General's call for "peace in homes around the world" alongside all gender-responsive initiatives addressing the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls. The UN-EU Spotlight initiative focusing on eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls is at the centre of these efforts. Gender equality, the empowerment of all women and girls and their full enjoyment of all human rights will be essential to rebuild more equal, inclusive and resilient societies for all. The EU remains committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the outcomes of their review conferences and remains committed to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), in this context. Having that in mind, the EU reaffirms its commitment to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of the right of every individual to have full control over, and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality and sexual and reproductive health, free from discrimination, coercion and violence. The EU further stresses the need for universal access to quality and affordable comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information, education, including comprehensive sexuality education, and health-care services.

Promoting peace and security

9. In a world of increasing geopolitical tensions, the EU will continue to enhance its efforts to promote peace and security and strengthen its capacity to act together with other partners. The COVID-19 outbreak has highlighted the need to improve the resilience of states and regions around the world and address situations of fragility. At the same time, it has opened up opportunities to resolve conflicts and build peace. The EU strongly supports the appeal by the UN Secretary-General for a global ceasefire and reiterates the need to advance political solutions to today's complex and protracted conflicts – not only during the pandemic but also in its aftermath – as well as to ensure unimpeded access for principled humanitarian aid. We will continue to call on all parties to conflicts to comply fully with International Humanitarian Law. The EU will put its full diplomatic weight behind these efforts, including through the EU policy framework for mediation. The EU-UN conflict prevention dialogue will remain instrumental in this regard.

10. The 2020 UN Peacebuilding Architecture Review is crucial to achieve these goals and further strengthen the peace and security pillar of the UN by improving coherent peacebuilding and sustaining peace efforts in the field. The EU will maintain its support for this process with particular attention on ensuring adequate, predictable and sustainable financing and strengthening partnerships to that end, supporting the UN Peacebuilding Commission in fulfilling its advisory role to the UN Security Council and enhancing the strategic links between these two structures. Continuous efforts will be necessary to strengthen cooperation on the ground through joint analysis and planning, link early warning better with early action as well as to promote transitional justice and reconciliation. The EU welcomes the increased focus on the security implications of climate change across the UN system, which will help to better assess and address climate-related security risks. In light of the 15th anniversary of the adoption of the concept of Responsibility to Protect, the EU will continue to facilitate dialogue on and engagement with R2P in relevant UN fora.

11. UN Peace operations remain one of the most important tools for advancing peace and security across the world. The EU and its Member States joined the UN Secretary General's Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative and renewed their political commitment to support peacekeeping operations in view of making them fit-for purpose by supporting, for example new approaches to improve force generation, equipment serviceability and sustainability. Improving the concrete, measurable impact on the ground is our highest priority. The EU remains strongly committed to reinforcing the EU-UN strategic partnership on peace operations and crisis management and to strengthening operational cooperation with the UN in the field and in that regard looks forward to the signature of UN-EU Framework for the Provision of Mutual Support in the context of their respective missions and operations. Increasing coordination with other regional and international organisations as well as International Financial Institutions will remain equally important. The African Union is our key partner, and efforts will continue to support African-led peace and security initiatives as well as to deepen trilateral AU-EU-UN cooperation. The trilateral partnership between the UN, the EU and the World Bank lies at the core of sustainable progress in peace and security. To ensure the full and meaningful participation of women in political and peace processes, the EU will continue to advance the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. This year marks the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, which should be a renewed and strengthened commitment to the agenda. We will continue to promote the inclusion of youth in peacebuilding and sustaining peace as part of our continuous support for the Youth, Peace and Security agenda. The protection of civilians, in particular women and children, persons with disabilities, and humanitarian and medical workers in conflict and post-conflict environment remains important.

12. The prevention of radicalisation leading to violent extremism and terrorism continue to be high priorities for the EU. The EU is committed to strengthen the UN's efforts to address the global threat of terrorism in full compliance with international law, including international human rights law, international humanitarian law and international refugee law, in line with the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. In a post-COVID era, a human rights-based approach and prevention is key to avoid fuelling further radicalisation leading to violent extremism and terrorism. More efforts, including through humanitarian exemptions, are needed to ensure that sanctions and counter-terrorism measures do not impede the delivery of principled humanitarian assistance.
13. In a time of rising international crime, the fourteenth UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice will contribute to strengthening international cooperation, crime prevention and criminal justice, in accordance with the rule of law and respect for human rights. The EU reiterates the importance of the special session of the General Assembly against corruption in 2021 to prevent and combat corruption, and will continue to promote the full and effective implementation of the UN Convention against Corruption.
14. The EU will continue to address the development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the context of international security, including through participation in the relevant UN processes. We will continue to work with partners to prevent conflict and to advance stability in cyberspace through the normative framework for responsible State behaviour, the implementation of confidence building measures and support for cyber capacity building. The EU will promote the full application of existing international law, including international human rights law and international humanitarian law, in cyberspace. The EU underlines its continuous support for the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime as a comprehensive multilateral legal framework for developing national legislation and international cooperation to tackle cybercrime.

15. At a time when the international disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control architecture is under severe pressure and increasingly challenged by geopolitical tensions, the EU will enhance efforts to preserve and strengthen it and to promote the full implementation of the international disarmament and arms control instruments while ensuring that they remain fit-for-purpose in light of new technological developments. The EU will continue working towards a successful outcome of the Tenth Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), in order to uphold and to strengthen the NPT as a key multilateral instrument for international peace, security, and stability, and to promote its universalisation and enhanced implementation. Support for the work of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) will continue to ensure that the global norm against the use of chemical weapons are upheld and those responsible for their use are held to account. Responsible behaviour in outer space and the prevention of an arms race in outer space will remain a specific focus, as well as supporting efforts to ensure that the Conference on Disarmament fulfils its mandate as the single multilateral negotiation forum on disarmament issues.
16. Preparations will begin for the forthcoming review conferences in 2021 of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC), and of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). The entry into force and the universalisation of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), as well as the universal adherence to and the effective implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) and of the Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation (HCoC) remain top priorities. We will continue to support the UN Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament, including commencing immediate negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT).

Building a fair globalisation

17. Accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs through the rights-based approach to development is key to achieve a transformative shift by 2030 that leaves no one behind. The SDGs underpin our values and future. They guide the EU's action across all sectors at home and abroad. The current COVID-19 crisis is a reminder that the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda and of the Paris Agreement is essential in order to equip the world better for future systemic shocks. Building on the 2019 SDG Summit's Political Declaration, we must keep our ambition high and use the Decade of Action for Sustainable Development to reinvigorate the momentum for action. We support the UN Secretary-General's call to build a fair globalisation and are ready to play our part working with all relevant stakeholders.

18. We need to scale up the global efforts to achieve universal health coverage and provide access to quality, affordable, inclusive and resilient health systems and services as well as to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation. We have to continue to promote global health as a public good for all in full support of the WHO's efforts as the leading UN body on global health. Through the EU-sponsored Coronavirus Global Response pledging initiative, we will continue to support global efforts to accelerate research on treatments, diagnostics and vaccines ensuring that they are a global public good that is equitably accessible to all. We should also review experience and lessons learned from the WHO-coordinated international health response to COVID-19 and make recommendations to improve global pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. The consensual adoption of the World Health Assembly's resolution initiated by the EU and its Member States underlines the importance of a collective response to the coronavirus pandemic.

19. We should use the recovery phase to tackle the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic and mitigate its impact on human wellbeing to leave no one behind. We need to make greater collective efforts to eradicate poverty, hunger, tackle rising inequalities, achieve gender equality and to promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth. Increasing food insecurity and malnutrition among the most vulnerable caused by the impacts of COVID-19 on livelihoods, food systems and supply chains requires efforts to secure access to food and agricultural supplies. The recovery should go hand in hand with social justice and decent work as well as investment in social protection systems. We need a recovery that links investments and debt relief to the SDGs. Responding to the COVID-19 crisis in a sustainable manner also requires the effective functioning of a global rules-based trading system.
20. We will continue working with partners to jointly address migration and forced displacement, including through the follow up to the first Global Refugee Forum, the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement and other relevant UN fora. We are committed to harnessing science, technology and innovation towards advancing the SDGs.
21. As the world's leading provider of Official Development Assistance, the EU and its Member States share a strong commitment to support partner countries, especially countries most in need, in implementing the 2030 Agenda, including the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development. The EU will work more closely with the UN on joint analysis and joint efficient division of labour in connection with the EU programming at country level in the programming phase of post-2020 cooperation. A more integrated, coherent, efficient and results-driven UN presence on the ground, led by the empowered UN Resident Coordinators and in line with the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, will play an important part in ensuring that countries recover better from the current crisis. In this endeavour, we need to further foster Integrated National Financing Frameworks, promote sustainable finance and scale up innovative solutions in order to mobilise sufficient funding to advance SDG implementation. We will seek to enhance visibility, transparency and effectiveness of international development cooperation.

Accelerating the global transition towards sustainable and climate-neutral future

22. The COVID-19 crisis has sharpened the focus on the inadequacy of the global response to the climate and biodiversity emergencies. It has reinforced the scientific evidence that the level of global ambition is insufficient and we must act decisively now. Recovery efforts have to be consistent with the low emissions transition agenda and should not exacerbate existing interrelated climate and environment emergencies. A new reality after COVID-19 should also mean a more modern, climate-neutral and circular economy that will make us less dependent on resources and boost our resilience. Investing in large-scale sustainable and green innovation, renewables, energy efficiency, clean energy and transport will be even more important than before. The fifth UN Environment Assembly provides an important opportunity to set the stage and drive ambition to foster a green recovery agenda and environmental sustainability. The commemoration of the first UN conference on the human environment in 2022 will contribute to positive momentum.

23. The EU as a global leader will continue to fight climate change and biodiversity loss through ambitious policies at home and across the world. The European Green Deal, as proposed by the European Commission, is our roadmap for a sustainable, climate-neutral and resource-efficient future with the ambitious goal to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. We will build on the momentum created by the UN Climate Action Summit and continue to support the UN Secretary-General in his efforts to step up global climate action. Swift and full implementation of the Paris Agreement, in line with the latest science, in particular IPCC reports, is critical for addressing this existential challenge. The EU will step up climate diplomacy efforts, as part of Green Deal diplomacy, to build support for enhanced global ambition towards a just global green economy transition, also in the run-up to the next UN Climate Change Conference COP 26. The EU will continue to engage more intensely with all partners to help them to revise and implement their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and devise ambitious long-term low emissions development strategies while mobilising climate finance. We will continue to support the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction to reduce risks and exposure to climate-related hazards and thus strengthen resilience. We will accelerate the shift of financial flows towards sustainable and climate-aligned investments, promote sustainable and responsible global production and use of raw materials, and work towards the establishment of a Global Circular Economy Alliance.

24. The UN Biodiversity Summit must provide the necessary political momentum and pave the way towards an ambitious post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework to be adopted at the UN Convention of Biological Diversity COP 15 in 2021. The EU will work with partners to make it a turning point to bring the world's attention to the scale of biodiversity loss and its impacts on food security, health, the economy and its interdependence with climate change. In light of the COVID-19 crisis, we must be guided by the "one health" principle to ensure both human and ecosystem health. Deforestation, industrial agriculture, illegal wildlife trade, pollution, climate change, water scarcity, inefficient sanitation and waste management and other types of environmental degradation increase the risk of future pandemics and need to be tackled. The EU will aim for an ambitious UN High-Level Meeting on Water in 2021 with a view to accelerating progress on sustainable water management. The COVID-19 pandemic also threatens to undermine progress and expose deficiencies in our food systems, increase food insecurity and malnutrition. The EU will support inclusive preparations for effective deliverables at the UN Secretary-General's Food Systems Summit in order to scale up action to continue the transformation of the current food systems to make them healthier, more resilient and environmentally sustainable.
25. We will continue to work on strengthening international ocean governance and ensuring safe, secure and healthy oceans and seas at the forthcoming UN Ocean Conference and other relevant fora. We will be stepping up efforts to conclude the elaboration of a Treaty under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ). The EU as a global leader in environmental data governance will take an active role in development of the global environmental data strategy by 2025.

Leading the transition to a new digital world

26. Digital technologies are steadily transforming our world by bringing enormous benefits, but also risks and costs. The EU will support the UN's efforts to steer new technologies for positive change, which aligns with the EU's priority of making Europe fit for the digital age. We will lead the transition to a new digital world where everyone has a fair chance to reap the benefits of digitalisation, in line with the SDGs and in accordance with international human rights law. In doing so, we have to mitigate the potential risks by ensuring a human rights-based and human-centric approach to digital transformation.
27. The EU will address the broader challenges and opportunities of digital transformation with the initiatives to expand global digital connectivity, decrease digital disparities, improve digital skills, contribute to global digital capacity, enable digital entrepreneurship, and support standards that transpose EU values. The EU will share its regulatory experience to become a trustworthy digital leader and partner in the multilateral system. We will continue to build strategic partnerships to shape the global digital agenda and through a multi-stakeholder approach will contribute to the outcomes of the recommendations put forward by the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation, building on the input of the EU Global Tech Panel. The launch of the UNSG's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation marks an important milestone on the path towards harnessing the potential of digital technologies. The EU will closely follow the implementation of the roadmap.
28. We will continue to promote an ethical and human-centric approach ensuring the promotion and protection of human rights to the development and use of Artificial Intelligence as well as to build convergence towards modern personal data protection frameworks. The EU will work with all relevant stakeholders to ensure an open, free, secure and stable internet, protect privacy, combat hate speech and terrorist content online, improve online security and safety as well as to contribute to tackling disinformation and hybrid threats, in full compliance with international human rights law.

29. In these challenging times, the strategic partnership between the European Union and the United Nations is more important and stronger than ever. As we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the UN this year, the EU will continue to support the UN as an indispensable forum for multilateral solutions to global challenges. The post-COVID world will require more solidarity and cooperation. Building on the synergies between the EU and UN agendas, the EU will remain a major driving force behind multilateralism and will continue to demonstrate global leadership, in view of a safer and better world for all.
