Implications, Challenges and Opportunities of Multilateralism in Geneva: Public Policy and Citizenry

Implicaciones, desafíos y oportunidades del multilateralismo en Ginebra: política pública y ciudadanía

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Abstract

This article presents an overview of the main challenges and opportunities in the areas of human rights, labor, migration, disarmament, health, intellectual property, telecommunications and technological innovation that are addressed by Geneva-based international organizations. The author also underlines Mexico's role within these bodies and the need to strengthen multilateralism in order to articulate global and comprehensive solutions to international challenges.

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Resumen

En este artículo se expone un panorama general de los principales retos y oportunidades en materia de derechos humanos, trabajo, migración, desarme, salud, propiedad intelectual, telecomunicaciones e innovación tecnológica, temas que son tratados por los organismos internacionales con sede en Ginebra. La autora también se destaca el papel que desempeña México en estos organismos y la necesidad de fortalecer el multilateralismo para articular soluciones mundiales e integrales que hagan frente a retos mundiales.

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Keywords

Multilateralism, human rights, labor, migration, disarmament, health, intellectual property, telecommunications, technological innovation

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Palabras clave

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Introduction

The years 1989, 2001, 2008 and 2020 have marked a turning point in the history of humanity and have generated a paradigm shift in the development of strategic thinking in state bodies, academia, civil society and, of course, in multilateral fora.

Following many years of discussion about the emergence of a new international order, multipolarism and the true overcoming of the Cold War, forward-looking strategic thinking over the past 40 years has fallen short. Critical voices have warned about points of no return, about what needs to be rethought and reshaped in order to avoid the same systemic mistakes that have been repeated over the last eight decades and have resulted in the following structural elements: a widening gap in the distribution of wealth both within and between countries, unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, and the technological development of sophisticated and inhumane weapons of mass destruction.

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* English translation by Alexander Smith.

The most recent globally impactful event was the COVID-19 pandemic. Never before have we experienced such a global phenomenon. We have all, without exception, borne the brunt of this pandemic.

In the same proportion and with the same intensity, the systemic link between several crises—climate, food, economic and health—has been confirmed. The COVID-19 pandemic showed the full depth of globalization and how a crisis in the global health system severely impacted global production, distribution and supply chains; it triggered a food crisis and has led to hikes in inflation around the world.

The Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 brought another international security crisis on top of the four previously mentioned. In this context, all paths necessarily lead to the strengthening of a common space for diplomatic dialogue on an equal legal footing for states: multilateralism. Today, more than ever, it is the preferred option for finding global solutions to individual, local, regional and international problems.

Strengthening multilateralism is necessary and indispensable for the crafting of global and comprehensive solutions to international challenges. We have an obligation to share experiences and best practices, and to underpin international cooperation and solidarity to generate greater engagement of countries in international governance on key issues such as sustainable development, human rights, security, poverty eradication, peace, the democratic state, social welfare, and economic and environmental development.

In this heated context, international Geneva offers a space for diplomatic dialogue that has immediate effects on the lives of millions of citizens across the world.

Geneva's multilateralist tradition dates back to the second decade of the 20th century, with the creation of the League of Nations and the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. Geneva was chosen largely because of the presence of the International Red Cross and the founding of the International Labour Organization in 1919. Today, Geneva's global ecosystem encompasses some 40 international organizations, 200 think tanks and around 300 civil society organizations that actively participate in multilateral fora.

The Geneva-based international bodies of the United Nations have a very relevant role to play in the new governance that will be developed in this

much needed and optimistic process of transition to a world free not only from COVID-19, but also from both existing and potential global threats in the short, medium and long term.

Mexico's participation in the design of this new institutional governance architecture is crucial, considering our deep vocation and historical commitments to multilateralism, as well as our relative international weight.

The following is a general overview of the main challenges and opportunities facing some of the international organizations and their influence on the public policies of the 193 countries that make up the international Geneva ecosystem; it also highlights the historical contributions that Mexico has made, as well as the major challenges and opportunities for the next 15 years.

Human rights

One of the main hallmarks of international Geneva is human rights. With the creation of the Human Rights Council in 2006, the international community, with strong leadership from Mexico, decided to give decisive weight to the third pillar of the U.N. System: human rights.

The human rights ecosystem in Geneva, in addition to the Council with its three sessions per year and its 47 voting members elected by the U.N. General Assembly, includes the special procedures system, the universal periodic review (UPR), the treaty bodies, and naturally, the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The system of special procedures is composed of special rapporteurs, independent experts and working groups that deal with a very specific aspect of human rights, such as the rights of persons with disabilities, gender equality, freedom of expression or the right to water and sanitation. Some of these rapporteurs are in charge of monitoring the human rights situation in specific countries. There are 44 thematic mandates and 11 country mandates.

For its part, the UPR is a mechanism that represents one of the best examples in the United Nations of constructive recommendations and collaboration between member states on an equal footing. The UPR allows all States to be evaluated on an equal footing by other countries, as well

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as to make recommendations. Countries are currently in their fourth quadrennial evaluation cycle.

The treaty bodies are committees of independent experts that follow up and monitor the effective implementation of the nine core international human rights instruments.[1] They also prepare general observations or recommendations on specific articles or rights contained in the conventions to guide states on practical measures, whether legislative or political, which can be applied in the fulfillment of their obligations. As part of the obligations that States acquire when ratifying the conventions, there is the submission of reports and the presentation of these reports to expert bodies that raise issues of interest and concern regarding various aspects related to the subject matter of each instrument. These exercises of dialogue and joint collaboration allow the authorities to share developments and best practices, while also identifying the challenges that require additional efforts to ensure the effective fulfillment of rights for all people.

The mandate of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is to promote and protect the enjoyment and full realization of human rights for all, and to enhance international cooperation to this end.

In addition, through the ecosystem, States are provided with tools to develop a national architecture for compliance.

Strengthening the ecosystem for the promotion and protection of human rights in the world requires greater emphasis, visibility and budget

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[1]   The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and its optional protocols; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966); the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) and its optional protocol (1999); the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984); the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and its optional protocols (2000); the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990); the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006); and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (2006). See OHCHR, "The Core International Human Rights Instruments and their monitoring bodies," at *https://www.ohchr.org/en/core-international-human-rights-instruments-and-their-monitoring-bodies* (date consulted: March 18, 2023).

in line with the pillars of peace and security, and development. The three pillars are closely related and complement each other, although in terms of budget they are disproportionate. The U.N. System and member countries should invest more financial and human resources to build a preventive system that strengthens the role of experts, rapporteurs and mandates to help countries in turn strengthen their national policies. This is taking place in a context of increased polarization and politicization that is threatening a real setback in the construction of the universal human rights system built since 1945. This polarization is due to several elements: the continuing geopolitical instability caused by the end of the Cold War with the emergence of new state actors of considerable weight in the global economic and security reconfiguration as well as non-state actors; the widening gap in economic and development inequality and the concentration of wealth between countries in the Global South and Global North, and within countries; the failure of years of economic and strategic presence of several countries and U.N. agencies in Afghanistan and Yemen; the recent invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation and the resulting virtual paralysis of the Security Council, among others.

On substantive issues, we face an extremely complex context for Mexico's priority agendas, such as the gender equality agenda and the rights of LGBTIQ+ people, given that there is a coordinated effort by several countries to push for setbacks in these areas. The same is true for core issues such as freedom of expression and association, which are rights enshrined in international covenants and other conventions.

The composition of the Human Rights Council plays a decisive role in advancing, or failing to advance, international human rights standards on certain issues. Mexico has sought to promote effective coordination and dialogue with all countries in order to generate mutual understanding and possible solutions, while continuing to promote ambitious initiatives that will contribute to achieving our proposed objectives.

The Council faces a serious problem in terms of workload. Global situations and challenges have required the Council to address an increasing number of issues. The mechanisms, dialogues and panels promoted by States, through resolutions, which aim to foster a discussion on better ways to address new issues, also entail both financial and human resources, as well as time implications in order to attend to all these issues.

The Bureau of the Human Rights Council promotes rationalization and efficiency in resolutions and related requests, without having achieved significant changes so far. There are countries that are not yet open to the possibility of exploring new ways of operating.

Strengthening the entire ecosystem of human rights promotion and protection in the U.N. System requires willingness, financial[2] and human resources, and renewed, far-sighted action that puts the individuality and indivisibility of human rights promotion and protection at the heart of U.N. action, so that they are addressed with the seriousness, depth and reflection required.

Human mobility

Migration is a permanent feature of human evolution and will continue to be a central element in the development of contemporary societies for economic, social, cultural, natural disaster, climate change, human rights and many other reasons.

The ecosystem of human mobility in international Geneva is constituted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM)[3] and the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Their latest reports aim to conceptualize migrants, refugees and asylum seekers as a phenomenon of human mobility which, of course, has legal and national integration implications of varying nature in each of its categories.

Mexico has been a highly active and committed Member State of IOM, given its extensive experience in the field, a natural product of its

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[2] The Office of the OHCHR has estimated that strengthening the human rights system would require USD 452 million. "OHCHR's Funding and budget," at *https://www.ohchr.org/en/about-us/funding-and-budget* (date consulted: March 18, 2023).

[3] The IOM was established in 1951 and has ample experience in the movement of migrants through international cooperation and the provision of humanitarian assistance. It has a membership of 175 Member States. IOM, "Who We Are," at *https://www.iom.int/who-we-are* (date consulted: May 1, 2023). Mexico has been a member of the IOM since 2001 and chaired its Council in 2005. Since our membership, we have actively participated in IOM Councils, both with initiatives and with the contribution of Mexico's extensive experience in the field.

geographical position. The country experiences the four facets of migration on a daily basis: origin, destination, transition and return. By having the on-the-ground experience, institutional capacity has been built to support initiatives to improve migration governance. One example is the co-facilitation in the negotiation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which also contributed to the internal strengthening of the Organization, mainly through its incorporation into the U.N. System, as well as the reconceptualization of migration with an emphasis on its benefits for both the economies and social fabric of countries. It is worth noting that migrants contribute to the development of countries of origin and destination: they generate 9% of the world's GDP and send USD 551 billion in remittances.[4]

The Global Compact for Migration represented a paradigm shift in addressing migration as the first cooperative framework to address migration challenges in a comprehensive manner, with full respect for human rights and the promotion of shared responsibility among countries of origin, transit and destination of migrants.

IOM's work has a clear impact in Mexico. It contributes to the country's objectives by supporting the implementation of policies and strategies that improve migration management. Examples include projects to facilitate the regularization of migrants, the promotion of inclusion, and the prevention of human trafficking and smuggling. In addition, IOM has played a key role in the humanitarian response to the arrival of migrant caravans at the southern border.

For its part, UNHCR's work in Mexico contributes to the country's objectives by supporting the implementation of policies and strategies that improve protection and assistance to refugees. Examples include the support UNHCR has provided to strengthen the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR) and in the structuring of local integration programs.

Mexico has contributed to UNHCR's work by actively participating in decision-making processes, promoting compliance with international refugee law and supporting the implementation of programs and projects in the

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[4] U. N. Population Division, "International Migrant Stock," at *https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock* (date consulted: March 14, 2023).

field. Concrete results include Mexico's recent facilitating role in the ne-gotiation of an Executive Committee conclusion on mental health and the successful implementation of the country's labor inclusion program, which has been taken as an example and benchmark in other countries and regions.

Both IOM and UNHCR have in the immediate past faced an increase in the scale and complexity of human mobility. In the case of refugee movements, they doubled from 10.5 million refugees in 2012 to 21.3 million in 2021.[5] Migrants, meanwhile, increased from 153 million people in 1990 to 281 million in 2020 (3.6% of the world's population), with intra-regional migration also increasing from 2013 onwards, more than south to north patterns.[6]

In addition to the challenges in terms of the numbers and complexity of human mobility, there are also the following challenges ahead for the next 10 to 15 years:

1. The underfunding of both institutions, whose regular budgets are prov-ing to be inadequate. In the case of UNHCR, it has been forced to operate with an annual deficit of around 50%. The IOM, despite a recent and very complex negotiation to increase its budget, faces a lack of resourc-es for its regular operation, which is financed by earmarked donations that prevent it from attending to the migration phenomenon from a global and rational perspective.
2. Global challenges such as climate change, the lack of a structural solu-tion to the causes forcing people to seek refuge and a polarized polit-ical environment generate increased demand for the services of these agencies.
3. The phenomenon of human mobility clearly requires comprehensive solutions addressing people's human rights, their legal stay in host countries and their possible economic insertion, among the most de-termining factors.

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5 UNHCR, Refugees by sex 2012-2021, in Refugee Data Finder, at *https://www.unhcr.org/ref-ugee-statistics/download/?url=A0jzMe* (date consulted: March 17, 2023).

6 U. N. Population Division, *op. cit.*

4. An approach is required which contributes to a short, medium and long term solution under an inter-agency coordination of various U.N. agencies, a rational financing and application of the resources of these agencies and, of course, a full and constructive collaboration of the Member States.

Disarmament

One of the most emblematic pillars of the U.N. System is international peace and security, which is intrinsically linked to the production, distribution and use of all types of weapons. Disarmament and nonproliferation are indispensable for creating a secure and development-friendly environment as enshrined in the U.N. Charter.

In 2021, the global military spending figure was USD 2113 billion.[7] This figure contrasts sharply with the regular U.N. budget of the Office of the OHCHR, around USD 144.3 million by 2023.[8] The U.N. Office for Disarmament states that the world is over-armed and peace is under-funded.

Geneva is home to much of the multilateral disarmament architecture, the most notable disarmament instruments having been produced in its meeting rooms. First is the Conference on Disarmament (CD),[9] the multilateral disarmament negotiating forum whose membership includes the five nuclear-weapon states recognized by the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation

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[7] Stockholm Initiative Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), "World Military Expenditure passes $2 Trillion for First Time," press release, April 25, 2022, at *https://sipri.org/media/press-release/2022/world-military-expenditure-passes-2-trillion-first-time* (date consulted: April 25, 2023).

[8] OHCHR, "OHCHR's Funding...".

[9] The Conference on Disarmament was recognized during the 10th special session on Disarmament of the U.N. General Assembly in 1978. See U.N. General Assembly, "S-10/2 Final document of the Tenth Special Session of the General Assembly," A/RES/S-10/2, in *Resolutions Adopted by the General Assembly during its 10th Special Session*, New York, U.N., 1978, pp. 3-15, at *https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/107/51/IMG/NR010751.pdf* (date consulted: March 18, 2023).

of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).[10] The CD and its predecessors have negotiated important multilateral agreements such as the NPT itself, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction (BTWC),[11] the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (CWC) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). While the CD once negotiated treaties that form today's disarmament apparatus, such as those mentioned above, the disarmament apparatus has ceased to deliver results for over 26 years.

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[10] The NPT was first opened for signature in London, Moscow and Washington, D.C. on July 1, 1968, and entered into force on March 5, 1970. See "Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons," in U.N. Office for Disarmament Affairs, section "Status of the Treaty," at *https://treaties.unoda.org/t/npt* (date consulted: May 1, 2023). The NPT currently has 191 States parties, including the five nuclear-weapon States. The number of countries that have ratified the NPT is greater than any other arms limitation and disarmament agreement. However, four nuclear-weapon states are not party to the instrument (India, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Israel and Pakistan), see "Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)," in U.N. Office for Disarmament Affairs, at *https://disarmament.unoda.org/wmd/nuclear/npt* (date consulted: May 1, 2023). The NPT is an international treaty whose objective is to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and to further the goal of achieving both nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament. The Treaty represents the only binding commitment in a multilateral treaty to the objective of disarmament by the nuclear-weapon States. In order to promote the objective of nonproliferation and as a confidence-building measure among States parties, the Treaty establishes a safeguards system under the responsibility of the IAEA. The nuclear weapon States question the compatibility of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) with the NPT.

[11] The Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction (BTWC) was negotiated by the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament in Geneva. It was opened for signature on April 10, 1972, and entered into force on March 26, 1975. The BTWC complements the 1925 Geneva Protocol, which prohibited only the use of biological weapons. The BTWC currently has 185 States parties. The BTWC effectively prohibits the development, production, acquisition, transfer, stockpiling and use of biological and toxin weapons. It was the first multilateral disarmament treaty to ban an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. It is questioned for lacking adequate institutionality compared to other disarmament instruments. See "Biological Weapons Convention," in U.N. Office for Disarmament Affairs, at *https://disarmament.unoda.org/biological-weapons/* (date consulted: May 1, 2023).

Moreover, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) includes a comprehensive set of prohibitions on engagement in any nuclear weapons-related activity.[12] The TPNW is a symbol of the value of multilateral diplomacy and underlines the fact that the majority of the international community is acting in favor of a safer, more secure and peaceful world.

The Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) is another valuable instrument that, as with the process leading to the adoption of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention a decade earlier,[13] the Oslo Process was characterized by close cooperation not only among states but also with international organizations and civil society actors. The presence and vocal participation of cluster munition survivors throughout the process was another important feature that contributed to bringing about a new convention in record time.[14]

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[12] Mexico and other humanitarian disarmament advocates pushed for the negotiation and adoption of the TPNW at the U.N. General Assembly as a measure to address the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons. The TPNW was adopted with 123 States voting in favor in the General Assembly, but the nuclear-weapon states and their allies abstained from even participating in the negotiations. The Treaty entered into force on January 22, 2021 after reaching 50 ratifications and has 68 States parties and 24 signatories. The entry into force of the TPNW ensures consistency in the international legal system so that nuclear weapons are unequivocally prohibited. It also recognizes the rights of victims and environmental remediation and establishes the process to ensure verification of the instrument. "Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons," in U.N. Office for Disarmament Affairs, at *https://disarmament.unoda.org/wmd/nuclear/tpnw/* (date consulted: May 1, 2023).

[13] Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction (APMBT). The Ottawa process was driven by a group of countries committed to the humanitarian cause (including Mexico) and their close collaboration with civil society (the International Campaign to Ban Landmines) and the ICRC. The process concluded with the adoption of the APMBT in September 1997 and its entry into force in March 1999. The APMBT currently has 164 States parties. Based on the principle of international humanitarian law that the right of parties to an armed conflict to choose methods or means of warfare is not unlimited, the APMBT prohibits the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines and requires the destruction of existing mines. "History and Text," in Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, at *https://www.apminebanconvention.org/en/the-convention/history-and-text/* (date consulted: May 1, 2023).

[14] The CCM is considered one of the most successful instruments in the field of disarmament and humanitarian disarmament; 37 States parties have already destroyed 99% of the world's total stockpiles of cluster munitions. According to the *Cluster Munition Monitor 2022*, 2021 was the first time in a decade that no new casualties from cluster munition

Mexico has been a key player in multilateral disarmament. From the Treaty of Tlatelolco to the valuable contributions it has made both in negotiations and in the day-to-day management of the institutional and multilateral disarmament framework, the country has always been an advocate of humanitarian disarmament, focusing on the prohibition of nuclear weapons to prevent the horrendous effects on health, social, environmental and economic aspects caused by this type of weaponry.

At the end of 2023 Mexico will chair the 12th meeting of States Parties (12MSP) to the CCM. One of the objectives of the Mexican presidency will be to contribute to the universalization of the Convention, particularly with Latin American countries and humanitarian disarmament partners. Priority will also be given to issues such as victim assistance (including psychological assistance), attention to persons with disabilities and the integration of a gender perspective into the Convention.

Future disarmament challenges are complex and bleak:

1. Global military spending is on the rise. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has unfortunately generated a de facto war economy not only in Europe, but also in the United States, so its impacts are global. Its effects have been profound, not only in terms of civilian casualties and the destruction of vast areas in Ukraine, but also in affecting the supply of global production chains, increasing inflation and not to mention the politicization of forums such as the Human Rights Council.

2. Within the CD, the lack of political will and trust between states to reach minimum agreements is a constant and the demoralization of

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attacks were recorded. However, this significant reduction in casualties has been over-shadowed by the devastating number of cluster munition attacks during the Russian invasion of Ukraine, so much remains to be done. It is worth noting that civilians are the primary victims of cluster munitions at the time of attacks, and once the conflict is over, children are particularly at risk—they make up two-thirds of the cluster munition remnants casualties recorded in the 2022 report. The socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic also appears to have increased the risks, as the population is forced to engage in unsafe and dangerous practices in contaminated territories, and the lack of funding (both at the national level and through international cooperation) is an obstacle to the release of territory. Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC), *Cluster Munition Monitor 2022*, Geneva, CMC/International Campaign to Ban Landmines, 2022, at *http://www.the-monitor.org/media/3348257/Cluster-Munition-Monitor-2022-Web_HR.pdf* (date consulted: May 1, 2023).

its member countries increases with each meeting. Although an institutional framework of agreements has been achieved, it falls short in the face of the constant threat of the use of force and the polarization between blocs with opposing positions, which has become more pronounced in recent years.[15]

3. Emerging technologies in disarmament create a very dangerous area of concern. The Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (laws) is a valuable mechanism that will require additional efforts and resources to fulfill its purpose of assessing ethical perspectives, identifying prohibitions and regulations regarding the incorporation of autonomous force functionalities in the use of these systems. The issue of drone use has been addressed within laws, as well as in U.N. cybersecurity fora.

4. The promotion of a paradigm shift is urgent, in which the dividends of world peace are revalued against the costs of research and production of new and improved weaponry and, above all, the potential of the capacity to destroy, even in a context of *realpolitik*. Destruction is relatively cheap and easy, compared to the efforts of the international community to rebuild a locality, country or region and entire generations of human beings who lose everything.

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[15] The cd, as a subsidiary body of the General Assembly, has a different dynamic from, for example, the Security Council. The members of the cd are organized into three different groups, plus China (Group of One). The largest is the Group of 21, which reflects the composition of the Non-Aligned Movement and other states parties in other fora, and is made up of 33 countries. There is also the Western European and Other States Group (weog), composed of 25 countries; it should be noted that several Eastern European countries and Argentina have joined this group. Finally, there is the Eastern European Group, which has been losing members and is currently made up of only six countries. It should be noted that the group dynamics in the cd are in crisis, as there are serious divisions among its members. The G21 is composed of both countries that push for humanitarian disarmament and the absolute prohibition of nuclear weapons (several tpnw states) and three countries that possess nuclear weapons and are not party to the npt (Pakistan, India and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea); their positions are often anachronistic and repetitive. The Eastern European group has lost members since the end of the Cold War, with many of its former members joining nato, and is currently paralyzed by the fracture between Russia and Ukraine. Finally, while weog appears at first glance to be a more uniform bloc, there are also important differences of position; in that sense, they operate more as a group for agreeing positions in the cd and for dialogue rather than for presenting proposals.

Health

One of the most urgent and pressing issues emerging in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic is health,[16] which is governed internationally by the World Health Organization (WHO).[17]

The WHO designs and implements global plans, programs and strategies adopted by governing bodies, as well as developing global health guidelines and standards. For this reason, the WHO's work has an impact on international, regional and national public health. One example is the implementation of the WHO *Guiding Principles and Framework Manual for Front-of-Pack Nutrition Labeling to promote healthy diets*,[18] which several countries have used to design public policies aimed at improving the food environment.[19] In Mexico, the application of these principles led to the amendment of the

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[16] Globally, as of February 28, 2023, the WHO reported 6 859 093 deaths from COVID-19, compared, for example, to 650 000 from AIDS in 2021 and 619 000 from malaria in 2021. See "Global HIV & AIDS statistics—Fact sheet," in UNAIDS, at *https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/fact-sheet* (date consulted: December 8, 2022); "Q&A with Dr Abdisalan Noor, Head of the Strategic Information for Response unit, WHO Global Malaria Programme," in World Malaria Report 2022, at *https://www.who.int/teams/global-malaria-programme/reports/world-malaria-report-2022/questions-and-answers* (date consulted: December 8, 2022).

[17] The WHO has been the directing and coordinating authority on international health action within the U.N. System since 1948 and currently has 194 Member States. Mexico is one of the founding members and hosted the Eighth World Health Assembly in 1955. The main governing bodies of the WHO are the World Health Assembly and the Executive Board. The WHO has adapted to the needs of States and international health challenges over time, taking into account social, demographic, economic and other factors. Throughout its existence, the Organization has played an important role in the creation of networks of public health experts around the world and as a center for the exchange of good practices. "About WHO," at *https://www.who.int/about* (date consulted: March 13, 2023). Today, the WHO has a network of more than 800 institutions across 80 countries, known as collaborating centres, which assist in fulfilling its mandate, see "Collaborating Centres," at *https://www.who.int/about/collaboration/collaborating-centres* (date consulted: March 13, 2023).

[18] WHO, *Guiding Principles and Framework Manual for Front-Of-Pack Labelling for Promoting Healthy Diet*, Geneva, WHO, 2019, at *https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/guidingprinciples-labelling-promoting-healthydiet* (date consulted: May 13, 2019).

[19] "Reconocimiento a México por sus avances en implementación de sistema de etiquetado," in PAHO, November 10, 2022, at *https://www.paho.org/es/noticias/10-11-2022-reconocimiento-mexico-por-sus-avances-implementacion-sistema-etiquetado-frontal* (date consulted: November 10, 2022).

General Health Law in 2020 and Official Mexican Standard 051 in 2021, which established a new front-of-pack labeling system for prepackaged foods and nonalcoholic beverages.

This new system has promoted better decision-making by consumers in Mexico and, in turn, has driven continuous product improvement by the food industry.[20] The National Institute of Public Health (INSP) indicates that this new system has encouraged product reformulation in a large number of companies, and in one particular case, up to 82% of the product portfolio was reformulated.[21]

A major recent Mexican contribution to the governing bodies was the initiative, together with Portugal, to extend the WHO Global Plan of Action on Promoting the Health of Refugees and Migrants 2019-2023 to 2030, a resolution adopted at the 152nd session of the WHO Executive Board.[22] The decision will increase surveillance and information gathering on the health situation of millions of migrants and refugees, guide global research on the topic and provide technical support to WHO's membership.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the WHO has begun a series of reforms to optimize its operations and is in the process of assessing its financial and administrative structure. It has also established new indicators to measure the impact of its work, aligned with the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The two most important processes in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic are the negotiations of amendments

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[20] Ana Munguía *et al*., "Etiquetado de advertencia de alimentos y bebidas en México: una estrategia de prevención de obesidad y enfermedades no transmisibles," in Juan Ángel Rivera Dommarco, Tonatiuh Barrientos Gutiérrez and Carlos Oropeza Abúndez (eds.), *Síntesis sobre políticas de salud. Propuestas basadas en evidencia*, Cuernavaca, INSP, 2021, pp. 110-114, at *https://insp.mx/assets/documents/webinars/2021/CINYS_Etiquetado.pdf* (date consulted: March 13, 2023).

[21] INSP, "Respuesta técnica del Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública (INSP) sobre el impacto del etiquetado frontal de advertencia relativo a la nota publicada en la revista *Forbes* el 8 de junio de 2021," June 13, 2021, p. 3, at *https://www.insp.mx/resources/images/stories/Centros/cinys/EstudiosEtiquetado/210614_respuesta_tecnica_2.pdf* (date consulted: March 10, 2021).

[22] WHO, "Extension of the WHO Global Action Plan on Promoting the Health of Refugees and Migrants, 2019–2023 to 2030," EB152(17), February 6, 2023, at *https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB152/B152(17)-en.pdf* (date consulted: March 17, 2023).

to the International Health Regulations (IHR) and an international pandemic treaty.

Despite constant transformation, the WHO still faces major challenges[23] in meeting current and future health needs:

1. The lack of a predictable and sustainable financing system, as well as strengthening its role as the central authority in the international health system, as new international agencies specializing in health are created without universal membership.
2. Regarding the IHR and the pandemic treaty, the issues of equity in technology transfer mechanisms, suspension of intellectual property rights of certain products during the emergency, public funding of R&D, transparency, financial commitment at the national level for pandemic preparedness and response (which could account for 5% of GDP), timing and methods for sharing information (genetic sequencing, samples, etc.), including verification by States or the WHO, among others, stand out.
3. Another major challenge is the application of the "One Health" approach, an innovative concept that recognizes the interrelationship between human, animal and ecosystem health. Greater collaboration between ecologists, zoologists and public health officials is not only desirable but necessary in the immediate future and could help to address not only health problems, but also their social and economic impacts.

Work

Work is one of the central elements in the lives of human beings, not only in terms of providing dignity, but also because it recreates the economic and sociological fabric of countries and the international community. The international body in Geneva that regulates this matter was created

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23 Germán Velásquez, "The World Health Organization Reforms in the Time of COVID-19," in *Vaccines, Medicines and COVID-19: How Can WHO Be Given a Stronger Voice?*, Cham, Springer, (Springer Briefs in Public Health), 2022, pp. 93-108, at *https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-89125-1_6* (date consulted: February 1, 2023).

in 1919 as part of the Treaty of Versailles: the International Labour Organization (ILO).[24] Its principles stress the pursuit of peace and the recognition of social justice as a vehicle for achieving it. The ILO aims to improve working conditions in order to achieve inclusive economic development.

The issues addressed by the first ILO conventions included hours of work in industry, unemployment, maternity protection, night work for women, minimum age for employment, and night work of minors in industry, among others.

For over a century, the ILO has been the benchmark for the advancement of international labor protection standards. The International Labour Conference (ILC), its main governing body, has to date adopted 190 Conventions, 6 Protocols—all binding once ratified by Member States—and 206 Recommendations. These cover all areas and sectors of the world of work.

ILO international standards have a profound impact on countries and regions. ILO conventions have been ratified 8320 times to date;[25] Mexico has ratified 82 conventions, of which nine are considered fundamental.[26]

Since joining the ILO in September 1931, Mexico has been active in deliberations in the governance bodies and has held the chair of the Governing

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[24] The ILO is a U.N. agency focused on the promotion of labor rights and is the only one of a tripartite nature; its governance structure is composed of 187 Member States represented by governments, employers and workers. Its three main bodies are: the International Labour Conference (ILC) which meets once a year and is the supreme body of the ILO and deals with social and labor issues; the Governing Body, the executive body of the ILO which meets three times a year in Geneva and takes decisions on ILO policy, program and budget and the International Labour Office; and the permanent secretariat of the ILO. In addition, the ILO has a robust standards supervisory system, which regularly reviews the application of ILO conventions in Member States and identifies areas where implementation could be improved. See the website at *https://www.ilo.org/global/lang--en/index.htm.*

[25] ILO, "NORMLEX," at *https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:1:* (date consulted: March 17, 2023).

[26] The ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (adopted in 1998, amended in 2022) recognizes five fundamental principles and ten related conventions, namely: freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labor; the effective abolition of child labor; the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation; and a safe and healthy working environment. "ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work," at *https://www.ilo.org/declaration/lang--en/index.htm* (date consulted: March 13, 2023).

Body. It has also led complex discussions, most notably Mexico's chairmanship of the Tripartite Working Group on Decent Work in Supply Chains. In June 2022, after six years without agreement, Mexico managed to reach tripartite conclusions for an ILO strategy on this issue, as well as on work on digital platforms.

The main challenge for the ILO lies in ensuring that its body of standards, policies and technical assistance effectively respond to the emerging needs of countries undergoing profound change in the world of work with technological advances, the climate crisis, demographic shifts and armed conflicts.

Intellectual Property

At the heart of productive development and industrial and scientific progress is intellectual property. The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) is the global forum for intellectual property services, policy, cooperation and information.[27] WIPO's mission is to promote the development of a balanced and effective international intellectual property system, enabling innovation and creativity for the benefit of all. It has programs and activities linked to issues of global concern such as health, the environment, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions and has been working to align its activities with the goals of the 2030 Agenda.

WIPO undertakes its activities with the vision of achieving "a world in which innovation and creativity are underpinned by intellectual property for the benefit of all people".

Mexico maintains close cooperation with WIPO and has benefited from multiple activities to strengthen its capacities in the different areas of intellectual property (patents, trademarks, geographical indications and copyright). It has also received support from the Organization to implement projects aimed at promoting the participation of women in the patent system; designing a strategy for MSMEs linked to intellectual property, among others.

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[27] WIPO is a specialized agency of the U.N. System, created in 1967 with the signing of the Stockholm Convention, dedicated to promoting the use and protection of works of human intellect. It is made up of 193 member countries. WIPO, "Member States," at *https://www.wipo.int/members/en/index.html* (date consulted: May 1, 2023).

Mexico has promoted, based on its feminist foreign policy, actions to monitor gender equity in the intellectual property system, raising awareness of the issue and leading the WIPO Secretariat to take action to collect internationally comparable and disaggregated data on the sex of intellectual property rights holders and creators in order to mainstream gender in its programs and policies.

Intellectual property offers tools to stimulate innovation for economic development and to address global challenges such as climate change and health emergencies, like the recently experienced COVID-19. One of the pressing challenges is to harness the potential of intellectual property and transform it into actions that benefit society, which will depend on the implementation of government policies that support research and development, as well as strategic alliances between research centers and universities and the private sector.

Telecommunications

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) was established in 1865. It has 193 Member States and 900 companies, universities and both international and regional organizations. Its purpose is to facilitate international connectivity in communications networks, allocate global radio spectrum and satellite orbits, develop technical standards ensuring that networks and technologies interconnect seamlessly, and improve access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) for unconnected communities around the world.

ITU promotes the mobilization of governments, regulators, entrepreneurs and various stakeholders and partners to harness ICTs, to achieve the SDGs and to accelerate access to connectivity on equal and inclusive terms.[28] It seeks to play an important role in the implementation of the U.N. Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation, in particular in the

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[28] According to an ITU study, USD 428 billion is needed to connect 3 billion people to broadband internet by 2030. ITU, *Connecting Humanity: Assessing Investment Needs of Connecting Humanity to the Internet by 2030*, Geneva, ITU, 2020, at *https://www.itu.int/en/myitu/Publications/2020/08/31/08/38/Connecting-Humanity* (date consulted: February 25, 2023).

areas of connectivity and national capacity building, and also in the process towards the Secretary-General's proposed Global Digital Compact.[29]

Mexico has been an active member of the ITU Council since 1952, which continues to work to strengthen the Union and improve the coordination of the visions and positions of all its members. It has contributed to establishing policies and strategies that respond to the evolution of ICTs in the digital era and can contribute to ITU action towards universal telecommunication development.[30]

The main challenges for ICTs in the ITU framework will continue to be, on the one hand, equitable access to technology for the poorest countries and vulnerable populations, as well as the regulation of digital platforms and access to the internet.

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[29] Some of its most prominent initiatives in recent years include the Global Platform for Network Resilience to share best practices, initiatives and information to protect telecommunications networks during the COVID-19 crisis; the BeHe @ lthy BeMobile initiative which consists of sending text messages with health information to help people without internet access to prevent COVID-19, mainly children and youth; the Giga Initiative which aims to connect all schools to the internet; and the Partner2Connect initiative which focuses on connecting people everywhere, empowering communities, building digital ecosystems and incentivizing investment. See "Welcome to REG4COVID," at *https://reg4covid.itu.int/* (date consulted: February 2, 2023); "Unleashing information technology to defeat COVID-19," in ITU, April 20, 2020, at *https://www.itu.int/en/mediacentre/Pages/STMNT02-2020-who-itu-joint-statement-covid-19-be-healthy-be-mobile.aspx* (date consulted: February 2, 2023); "Giga–Connecting Every School to the Internet," in ITU, at *https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Initiatives/GIGA/Pages/default.aspx* (date consulted: February 2, 2023); "ITU Partner2Connect Digital Coalition," in ITU Associated Websites, at *https://www.itu.int/itu-d/sites/partner2connect/* (date consulted: February 2, 2023).

[30] Mexico has developed the *Aldeas Inteligentes, Bienestar Sostenible* programme which, inspired by the ITU's Smart Villages model, brings free satellite connectivity to rural communities to support the productive activities of the population. In addition, the 2021-2022 Social Coverage Program has identified 7537 localities that require telecommunications services in conditions of availability, affordability and accessibility. Similarly, through the Public Site Connectivity Program 2022, 24 814 public sites have been identified to offer free broadband and internet connectivity. The government is also enabling the deployment and development of Red Compartida, a state-of-the-art wholesale network that by 2028 will have a population coverage of 92.2%. See Ministry of Infrastructure, Communications and Transport (SICT), "Aldeas inteligentes, Bienestar sostenible," in Portal Cobertura Universal, at *https://coberturauniversal.gob.mx/aldeas-inteligentes* (date consulted: February 23, 2023); SICT, "Programa de Cobertura Social 2021-2022," p. 16, in Portal Cobertura Universal, at *https://coberturauniversal.gob.mx/pdf/PCS_2021-2022.pdf* (date consulted: February 23, 2023); SICT, "Programa de Conectividad en Sitios Públicos 2022," in Portal Cobertura Universal, at *https://coberturauniversal.gob.mx/conectividad-sitios-publicos-2022* (date consulted: February 23, 2023).

Technological innovation

Another area of attention and work in Geneva is technological innovation. The recently created Geneva Science and Diplomacy Anticipation (GESDA) initiative aims to discuss these challenges and propose actions in a multi-disciplinary perspective with the participation of representatives of actors involved in five central areas: quantum revolutions and artificial intelligences, human augmentation, eco-regeneration/geoengineering, the relationship between science and diplomacy, and knowledge foundations (education, synthetic biology, etc.).

The hosting of this initiative is significant as Geneva is home to some 40 specialized international and regional organizations (such as CERN) which, directly or indirectly, relate to technology or its effects.

In 2022, the mid-term opening of the Open Quantum Institute was announced as a first deliverable, which will enable information and databases to be shared among scientists from numerous universities on SDG-related projects.

The first challenge of this science diplomacy initiative is to reflect on and analyze the ethical, institutional and regulatory consequences of the development and use of the five areas of technological innovation mentioned above. In short, it is a matter of reaching the immediate future before its implications are beyond the purposes for which they are being created: to improve the quality of life of human beings and, of course, of ecosystems.

Conclusion

International organizations in Geneva are known as technical and specialized bodies, where politics does not necessarily play a role. Nothing could be more wrong and unrealistic. In Geneva, delegates from the member countries that make up the Geneva ecosystem make multilateral public policy. Every resolution, decision, program or declaration that is negotiated has real implications for the daily lives of citizens around the world.

In their negotiating rooms, one observes the implications of the *realpolitik* that characterizes all multilateral fora, just as, indeed, technical issues such as the effects of wetland protection under the Ramsar Convention

on the Ukrainian territories invaded by the Russian Federation, or the real implications of sanctions under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), have to be discussed and negotiated.

The challenges in international Geneva are wide-ranging and complex. They range from a re-engineering of various international organizations which, in order to completely fulfill their role and address the enormous challenges, require a rationalization of functions and resources and, at the same time, an efficient and effective coordination between the institutional fabric that characterizes all organizations. There is constant criticism of "working in silos," of poor coordination between agencies and overlaps when the challenges are systemic, without institutional boundaries and with clear cross-cutting issues to address such as gender equality, the promotion of the rights of the LGBTIQ+ community, migrants, indigenous peoples and children.

On the other hand, the growing polarization and politicization of multilateral fora in Geneva requires the strengthening of spaces for diplomatic dialogue. A frank, open and transparent dialogue in which we learn to listen to and better understand our interlocutors. From better understanding comes solidarity-based action. Spaces for understanding and action must be found.

Technological innovation faces major challenges. The world of quantum technology, for example, is fascinating. If we barely understand its uses, the risks are even less comprehensible. Quantum technology is not an imaginary idea of the future. It is already the present. And it is up to diplomacy to work through and analyze its practical uses, as well as its ethical implications.

It is essential to generate new paradigms, as was the case with the 2030 Agenda, which succeeded in generating a methodology for identifying, grouping and measuring the major challenges facing the international community in the 21st century. As noted in this article, several issues are guided by the 2030 Agenda. We need to continue to apply it and, I reiterate, recreate new paradigms.

A three dimensional approach (3D) could be a good tool to systematize the major challenges of the daily and international realities that agencies in Geneva are dealing with, namely: a linear approach in time that addresses

in parallel the roots of the challenges, how to solve the existing ones and a preventive approach that can shield future problems; an approach to impacts and solutions that manages to interrelate the local, national, regional and global levels; and a multidimensional approach to the challenges.

There is no time to waste. The challenges are pressing and the solutions can be manifold. Let us generate ideas, will and commitments to arrive together at real proposals and leave no one behind.

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