



INDEPENDENT COMMISSION ON MULTILATERALISM

- Draft Concept Note-

New York, January 2011

Objective

It is proposed to launch an **Independent Commission on Multilateralism** (ICM) [*tentative name*]. The ICM will have an ambitious agenda. Using the body of knowledge already available as a starting point, the ICM will gather periodically, over a period of two years, to **consider concrete and operational policy proposals for the enhancement of multilateral action**.

These proposals will not only search for the appropriate decision-making mechanisms, but also for improving the structures (i.e., organizational architecture) and processes (i.e., policy implementations) of the multilateral system. The meeting of the ICM will also be an opportunity for a **forward-looking discussion** of global challenges and the implications for change and adaptation of the multilateral system.

Scope

The primary concern of the IMC will be the capability and effectiveness of the multilateral system to prevent and respond to global and regional challenges of this and future times. Multiple reports and materials have been produced on the topic. However, there is no forum for in-depth discussion among policy-makers on how to implement and achieve those transformations. Building on the most recent and solid proposals, the IMC intends to engage ministerial-level policy-makers and high-level practitioners in multilateral organizations, national governments, and civil society.

The **areas of engagement** of the ICM will include:

1. International Peace & Security
2. Humanitarian Emergencies
3. Development & Environment

In order to capture the interdependence and connections among institutions and challenges, something that often escaped previous inter-governmental reforms, the International Peace Institute (IPI), acting as Secretariat of the Commission, will compare and analyze each area of engagement as a whole to insure the coherence of the final proposals. However, specific recommendations might be articulated for different regions.

Structure

The ICM will be composed of:

- 1) A Ministerial-level Task Force,
 - 2) A High-level Advisory Group,
 - 3) A Secretariat.
- 1) The **Ministerial-level Task Force** will include high level government officials and will convene annually to **consider concrete proposals** for the enhancement of multilateral action in the areas mentioned above. A tentative list of participants will include key players in the multilateral system, as well as participants to smaller groupings, such as the G7+¹: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Brazil, China, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, and United States.
 - 2) The **High-level Advisory Group** will include former high-level government officials and leading experts in different fields and regions of the world. The Advisory Group will serve as “brain trust” of the IMC. It will gather bi-annually and work in partnership with the Secretariat in **providing advice to the analysis and proposals** that will be submitted for consideration to the Ministerial-level Task Force. The composition will ensure multidisciplinary and cross-culture exchange. Potential members of the Advisory Group could include: Kofi Annan, Louise Arbour, Lakhdar Brahimi, Paul Collier, Robert Cooper, Joschka Fischer, Ashraf Ghani, Kishore Mahbubani, Miguel Moratinos, Sadako Ogata, Ghassam Salamè, Ngaire Woods, etc...
 - 3) The **Secretariat** of the ICM will be organized by IPI. It will coordinate the initiative, draft the reports for the Ministerial-level Task Force, steer the discussions among experts in the Advisory Group, guarantee a constant flow of information among the different members and components of the ICM, and organize the meetings.

¹ The G7+ includes Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Nepal, the Solomon Islands, Sierra Leone, Southern Sudan and Timor-Leste.

Timeline

The initiative will develop over two years and half, from spring 2011 to December 2013. IPI proposes to arrange an initial **brainstorming retreat** to discuss the concept, structure, process, and agenda of such initiative. This brainstorming retreat could be organized among a core group of interested states in spring 2011.

Once there is an agreement on the key elements of the initiative, members will be invited to participate in the Task Force and in the Advisory Group with the goal of holding the first meeting before the end of 2011. The Advisory Group will gather every six months (September 2011, March and September 2012, March and September 2013), while the Ministerial-level Task Force will convene annually in the fall, starting in 2011.

Background Context

Rapid socioeconomic changes, demographic shifts, resource scarcity, environmental degradation, conflicts: the challenges that the world faces are many and of unprecedented complexity. As these **challenges** become increasingly **interconnected** across the globe, they become more dangerous and harder to solve. Indeed, no country can insulate itself from these threats nor solve these transnational challenges alone.

The post-Cold War period has demonstrated that **multilateralism** can play a critical role in helping governments and other actors in preventing or managing a range of crises, from humanitarian emergencies and state failure to epidemics and natural disasters. Yet, in the current multi-polar and complex global context, international institutions and the political relationships on which they are based have been severely challenged. Many international institutions are facing **rapid and turbulent evolution**. This is true for the international financial institutions, which are facing challenges to their political legitimacy and the risk of an increasing number of client countries in crisis or failure. It is also true for sectoral institutions like the International Atomic Energy Agency, which faces challenges in fulfilling its mandate given changing technological and political circumstances. Even regional institutions like the European Union (EU), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the African Union (AU) face major internal and external challenges to their core political and operational foundations.

Many **reforms have been attempted in the past**. The agenda proposed by the UN Secretary-General in the World Summit in September 2005 was the most recent and

comprehensive endeavor. Whether the 2005 Summit should be read as a success or a failure, it was nonetheless a major step in a longer reform effort. The Outcome Document provides only a partial indication of the state of debate, but can be seen as an open-ended foundation from which to move forward.

Much of the intellectual capital and political interest that exist on the subject of an **effective multilateral system** need not to be dissipated. However, the concrete steps to enhance the multilateral system will be seized or lost depending on the nature and quality of new initiatives. Too often, in fact, the answer has been to create new bodies focused on specific challenges rather than to bring coherence to an increasingly fragmented collection of mismatched global and regional policies and institutions. Moreover, many attempts ended up to be mere intellectual exercises due to the nature of the participants in the process – mainly past government officials who cannot provide the political buy-in necessary to implement the reforms.

In a multilayered and interconnected global landscape, the weakness and incoherence of the current multilateral system impedes robust responses. For policy-makers faced with actual crises, this uncertainty about multilateral institutions and their reliability constrains options for policy response and raises real concerns about collective capacity for crisis prevention and response.