

Reclaiming multilateralism for social justice beyond 2030

Luc Triangle

General Secretary, International Trade Union
Confederation (ITUC)



Geopolitical tensions and growing polarization are undermining the foundations of multilateralism at a time when it is most needed. The world today is facing complex and interconnected challenges – peace, climate change, and widening inequalities among them – that demand collective, global responses.

In our most recent ITUC Congress statement (ITUC 2022), the affiliates of the ITUC reaffirmed their strong support for multilateralism and the United Nations (UN) as the pre-eminent global body tasked with fostering it. But for multilateralism to deliver on its promises, it must be urgently renewed – centred on democratic, inclusive governance and strengthened accountability mechanisms. Global agendas such as the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement on climate change and the current process to reform global taxation at the UN level provide concrete examples of what is possible when international cooperation is ambitious, inclusive and representative.

The Second World Summit for Social Development (UN n.d.) is a pivotal moment to revitalize the global commitment to social development. It is an opportunity to advance the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and breathe new life into multilateral cooperation on a basis of social justice and equity.

As the UN Secretary-General stated in his report, *Our Common Agenda*, “now is the time to renew the social contract between Governments and their people and within societies” (UN 2021). This call is both urgent and timely. To realize it, we must restore and reinforce social justice as the foundation of our global order— starting with the world of work.

The labour movement, as the world’s largest social and democratic movement, has been clear in its response. We are committed to a democracy that delivers for working people, and that means a new social contract with six core demands: the creation of decent and climate-friendly jobs through a just transition; trade union rights for all workers; living wages; universal social protection; equality; and inclusion. These pillars reflect workers’ lived experiences and aspirations and must be integrated into the heart of any renewed multilateral agenda.

The Second World Summit for Social Development offers a unique opportunity to reaffirm the centrality of international labour standards, human rights and fundamental freedoms. Concrete, measurable commitments from governments are essential. These should include extending social protection coverage by at least 2 per cent per year as a starting point, with a view to progressive expansion in the years to follow; formalizing 1 billion informal jobs by 2030; and creating 575 million decent jobs that uphold full rights for workers. Governments should also commit to supporting the achievement of living wages and developing road maps for their realization, in alignment with the ILO tripartite agreement on living wages. This includes improving the adequacy of minimum wages and expanding collective bargaining.

Moreover, acknowledging that one in five young people globally remains excluded from opportunities that enable their full participation in society, the Second World Summit should lead to efforts to accelerate the reduction of the number of young people not in

employment, education or training (NEETs). Member States with NEET rates above 10 per cent should adopt time-bound national targets to reduce these rates to below 10 per cent, taking into consideration national contexts.

These ambitions must be supported by adequate finance, through reform of the international financial architecture, including addressing debt challenges.

At the same time, we need urgent and unapologetic action to counter the backlash against gender equality. In too many countries, progress made over decades is being reversed by right-wing populist and authoritarian regimes that target women's participation in work, politics and education. Racism, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination are increasingly prevalent. The Second World Summit must adopt a transformative agenda for gender equality – strengthening rights, ensuring equal opportunities and confronting all forms of discrimination, particularly against those in vulnerable situations, including refugees and migrant workers.

Equally vital is a renewed commitment to democracy, the rule of law and accountable governance. These are not optional features of development, but indispensable foundations for a just and sustainable global future. Peace, rights and democracy are deeply intertwined – and their preservation is a shared responsibility.

For this reason, workers' demands for social justice must be placed at the centre of global multilateral agendas. A genuinely inclusive multilateral system – one in which social partners, including trade unions, are fully engaged – will be key to achieving policy coherence within the UN system and delivering results for people everywhere.

The Second World Summit must also establish a strong follow-up framework, including a revitalised Commission for Social Development with a prominent role for the International Labour Organization and its constituents. Finally, aligning the work of the Commission with the thematic reviews of the high-level political forum on sustainable development would further strengthen coherence across the UN system, especially in processes led by the Economic and Social Council.

There is no path to sustainable development without social justice. The Second World Summit must not only reaffirm this truth – it must act on it. That means building a multilateral system that is inclusive, accountable and grounded in the realities of the daily life of working people everywhere.

References

- ITUC (International Trade Union Confederation). 2022. *5th ITUC World Congress – Statement: A New Social Contract (FINAL)*.
- UN (United Nations). 2021. *Our Common Agenda – Report of the Secretary-General*. New York.
- UN. n.d. “*Second World Summit for Social Development 2025*”.