

A Dialogue on Global Governance and Societal Transformation with Enrique V. Iglesias

Enrique V. Iglesias is a Uruguayan politician, economist and author. He was Minister of External Relations for Uruguay and President of Uruguay's Central Bank; Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC); President of the Inter-American Development Bank and Secretary-General of Ibero-American General Secretariat.

DCR Team: Our societies are undergoing major transformations, with excessive inequalities, an erosion of social cohesion, the very concept of democracy in crisis, and a lack of trust in policymakers. How do you see society's situation evolving?

Enrique V. Iglesias: The statement in the question is correct. The aggravation of the economic, social, and political situation in contemporary societies, especially in the West, exacerbates inequalities and thus the potential for instability and conflict. It is clear that we are in a time of great turbulence forcing us to critically review our own paradigms. Politics needs to reinvent itself to revive its capacity to make societies governable by responding to the immediate and

long-term demands of citizens.

In particular, we need to take into account the rapid advance of global challenges such as climate change, the emergence of new powers, and a technological revolution, the destination is unknown, nor it is clear in whose hands' decisions should lie. All this inevitably leads us to face the weakening of global governance. Most global challenges are inextricably intertwined with local ones. And local action requires not only better policies, but also a higher level of citizen awareness and engagement and a political class capable of catching up; and providing a vision for the future that transcends electoral calendars and narrow interests.

DCR Team: Throughout your career, you have witnessed significant shifts in

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multilateralism. In your view, when and how did these shifts occur?

Enrique V. Iglesias: Today's multilateralism originated with the victors of the Second World War and was shaped by the values and principles of Western and Christian civilisation. The alternative powers were either defeated or silent. The project enshrined in the United Nations Charter, the Bretton Woods Institutions and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights gave hope to a humanity worn out by the horrors of war and a compass for the reconstruction of Europe and for decolonisation around the globe. Of course, following a model inspired by the West and supported by the Allies. I think it has given a lot. The UN system and its agencies, funds and programmes have been a formidable lever for progress in the living conditions of millions of people. For years, the Security Council prevented conflicts and above all enabled the development of the theory and practice of nuclear deterrence and the bringing together of forces with divergent interests. Today, the Security Council and the entire United Nations system need an update to meet the challenges, a change that is difficult to imagine in the current context. The model that emerged from the winner's camp of the Second World War has characteristics that seemed incontestable at the time. Bretton Woods established the supremacy of the dollar and mechanisms aimed at balancing and sustaining the viability of the capitalist production system, which had a global vocation. In the principles of the Charter and then of the Universal Declaration,

as the name suggests, human rights are seen as a goal for all cultures, systems, and people. The so-called Pax Americana, which began in 1945, has not worked to ensure a peaceful world that guarantees human rights and development, or it has been inadequate. We see that all this is not as solid and homogeneous as we may have believed for a few decades. It is difficult to imagine a future without effective international governance and it is very difficult to imagine how to achieve it.

DCR Team: In your view, what are the primary challenges facing multilateralism in promoting effective global development cooperation today?

Enrique V. Iglesias: UN Secretary General Guterres said it clearly: "The world is entering the Age of Chaos", "the Security Council has never been so bad", "international financial institutions favour the rich who designed them", he also said that "governments forget to be accountable, to respect human rights, making people lose confidence in political systems". The main challenge for the UN, the backbone of multilateralism, is its loss of real power. I know of no one more competent than the UN Secretary General to speak on this subject and he says it with courage. I refer you to his speech on 'Priorities for 2024' to the General Assembly on 7 February.

DCR Team: Conversely, what opportunities do you see for leveraging multilateralism to address these challenges?

Enrique V. Iglesias: In my view, the

only remaining chance to enhance multilateralism is for political leaders and other influential people to realize that we are at a crucial moment in time where we need to innovate and open the doors to broad popular participation. Many of the problems facing humanity, including the problem of its survival, require solving global challenges, many of which involve multiple countries or do not respect borders (climate, pandemics, inequality, standardisation of new technologies, scientific cooperation, conquest of space, migration). Multilateral cooperation is indispensable. If governments think it is more important to increase the military budget than the means for cooperation, then we will have missed the train of history.

DCR Team: What are the future scenarios you see for multilateral relations?

Enrique V. Iglesias: Ongoing geopolitical crises make it even more difficult to make predictions as balances, alliances and pressures are constantly changing. The inability of the major powers to define the outcomes of current confrontations and their unwillingness to place what should be their role in the hands of the UN casts doubts. The Security Council is geopolitically blocked, and its own permanent members are resisting change. These changes would mean adapting the Council to the new realities, including permanent members from all continents, diminishing the veto power, etc. The major powers, that avoid the issue, have invented their own negotiating spaces, such as the G7 or the G20. A few decades

ago, most people with great power and influence were presidents, monarchs, or dictators. They were at the head of states. Today they share this power with CEOs of large companies, investment fund managers, heads of large media and social media conglomerates, drug traffickers, influencers, and arms dealers.

DCR Team: What effects does polarisation have on the practice of multilateralism - an experimental poly-multi-plexipolar world? With or without dialogue? South-South cooperation, or trilateral cooperation?

Enrique V. Iglesias: The UN Secretary General and the UN General Assembly have called for a Summit of the Future on 23 and 24 September next. They propose that the Heads of State and Government of all countries sign a 'Pact for the Future'. There will be proposals for five major themes: I-Sustainable development and financing, II-International peace and security, III-Science, technology, innovation and digital cooperation, IV-Youth and future generations, V-Transformation of global governance.

All this comes on top of promises to leave no one behind, to end hunger, to reduce inequalities, to build just, inclusive, and peaceful societies, to provide decent work for all, to protect nature and resources. Who doesn't want that? Why are we not able to achieve it? I believe that the "Summit of the Future" has a chance to make itself heard from above if it addresses the mountains that are its people, and not just the other heads of state and government who are standing

on their own summits and who have less power today than in the past.

In conclusion, I would like to say that for me, all these questions are secondary to the big question: will our civilisation be able to imagine and set in motion a mobilisation of wills powerful enough to bring about the profound changes necessary for its survival? Our species, and so many others, progress in life thanks to two powerful mechanisms of evolution, egoism, and altruism. In nature, external conditions determine, on a case-by-case basis, which mechanism will prevail. Our

species invented civilisation and with it the concepts through which we interpret reality. Our civilisation, or if you like, our civilisations, have the opportunity to choose the winning mechanism. If they choose solidarity and altruism, we still have a chance. There is no other way than to involve the “last sovereign”, the mountains without which the summits do not exist, into the mobilisation. Our problems cannot be solved by brilliant ideas and the will of leaders alone. We need the will and the strength of the people to whom all these promises are dedicated.