

Talking Points In Favour of a High Commissioner for Future Generations

Key Points:

- We have a key opportunity to ensure that there is meaningful follow-up of the Secretary-General report *Intergenerational Solidarity and the Needs of Future Generations*.
- Member States are expected to discuss the report at the 2nd meeting of the High Level Political Forum in July this year.
- If we miss this opportunity, we are unlikely to secure another.
- MGCY are advocating for the first suggestion in the report, a High Commissioner For Future Generations.
- We should remind Member States in meetings, speeches and letters that this would be a small independent office that would work in cooperation with existing UN agencies, Member States and stakeholders acting as an advocate for future generations, offering support, advice and fostering policy expertise.
- As part of the broader UN institutional framework and policy approach, the High Commissioner could work alongside the HLPF to help ensure sound delivery of the SDGs and effective, applied understanding of how we look to the long term.

Background:

A call for a High Commissioner for Future Generations was one of the key Major Group Children and Youth (MGCY) positions going into Rio+20. A 'High Level Representative for Sustainable Development and Future Generations' was backed most strongly by Germany, the EU in general, Japan, Mexico, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and many countries in the G77, including Algeria as G77 Chair.

Unfortunately, it fell during the final hours of the summit. Instead Member States asked the UN Secretary-General to provide a report on the issue. The report was published in August last year, '*Intergenerational Solidarity and the Needs of Future Generations*' which provides a balanced approach, touching upon the concerns associated with taking into account the needs of future generations. It builds up a strong, compelling case for action.

The report put forward four proposals:

- 1) A High Commissioner for Future Generations
- 2) A Special Envoy for Future Generations
- 3) An agenda item for the HLPF (High Level Political Forum, the newly established UN body dedicated to sustainable development)
- 4) UN inter-agency cooperation on this issue

Option 1) is closest to MGCY's initial call, an independent office, mandated by Member States, able to reach across sectors and agencies. Option 2) is weaker as it would be appointed by the Secretary-General unit, with limited mandate and

would not necessarily have the support from all Member States if SG led. Option 3) may get lost amid an already overloaded agenda. Option 4) is very weak by default.

Next Steps:

The report recommends that this agenda and the proposals be discussed in July during the second meeting of the High Level Political Forum. We sent out a round of letters to key Member States last year, to which we had positive responses. Many supportive MS are looking to ensure good discussion at the HLPF. We have also raised the topic a number of times throughout the Open Working Group (OWG) process.

Ultimately the decision concerning a High Commissioner for Future Generations lies with Member States. We would encourage that Member States drive this process: deciding the mandate, form and functions, and ultimately being responsible for selecting and appointing the individual. We should remind States that the Secretary-General report is due to be discussed and ask them to support the proposal for a High Commissioner for Future Generations. Opportunities to raise the proposal of a High Commissioner for Future Generations in letters to ministers and missions, and meetings on the ground taking into account the following talking points, will ensure that the report and this initiative for a UN representative will be discussed, and we hope with strong action oriented decisions made. We should also continue to raise this issue at relevant speaking opportunities especially ones at which the High Level Political Forum and Governance are the core subject area. If these conversations happen we need to inform each other so a good overall picture can be built up.

Talking Points:

Why are we calling for a High Commissioner for Future Generations?

Calling for a High Commissioner for Future Generations was one of the key MGCY positions in the run up to Rio+20. A High Commissioner for FG (HCFG), as the strongest option within the report, fits this as indicated above.

The objective of a High Commissioner for Future Generations is to balance the short-term nature of policy making processes and act as the UN's principal advocate for the interests and needs of future generations. They would evaluate policy proposals for their impact on the lives of future generations, inviting a common vision and responsibility. He or she would be an individual with the leadership skills, the moral authority and vision to set an agenda where the needs of future generations are considered alongside the needs of the present. The role can catalyse responses, foster diagonal, cross cutting approaches, to bring long lasting, meaningful commitments. The SG report specifically identified the role as acting as an advocate, offering support and advice where requested, undertaking research, fostering expertise on policy practices, while interacting with Member States, UN entities, and others.

Future generations are explicitly referenced *everywhere* when we're talking about SD (think Brundtland: *Sustainable development is development that meets the*

needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.) and it has *NEVER* been institutionally interpreted at the international level. Now is our opportunity to change that.

Why are we mindful of this issue now?

As noted above the Secretary-General report suggested that this matter be raised at the second meeting of the HLPF (30th June-9th July). The HLPF is still a new body and whilst the initial format and organisational aspects have largely been agreed,¹ we are at a unique juncture at which new mechanisms and working practices will be decided upon. We have an opening in which an international representative for future generations could be a reality. Once the HLPF and the implementation of the SDGs have been fully agreed upon the opportunity to advocate for a separate institution will likely be far more difficult. We have a great opportunity right now!

Where would it sit?

As an independent body sitting alongside current UN structures a High Commissioner for Future Generations would work alongside the High Level Political Forum providing support and facilitation whilst giving a focus to the needs and interests of future generations. Reporting to the General Assembly and the HLPF on an annual basis the body would remain accountable to Member States. A fully transparent reporting process would help to ensure the body is working most effectively and would bring important visibility to critical issues amongst a broader audience outside the UN structures.

Budget and Size

The title High Commissioner can be misleading since the scale of the budget and size of the staff of both the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the High Commissioner for Refugees would not be an appropriate comparison. These are far larger than anticipated for the office of a High Commissioner for Future Generations. A small office (max 10 people) with a multi-disciplinary staff working in cooperation with existing institutions, agencies and stakeholders is a small cost compared to the savings that would be made by more efficient policy-making. From consideration of existing examples, an annual budget of US\$2-3 million would be sufficient.²

In that regard, a 'hybrid' could be possible – not a High Commissioner, but not a Special Envoy. A position autonomous from the UNSG Unit, appointed and mandated by Member States but working to a much smaller budget and office size.

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¹ http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/67/290&Lang=E

² The World Bank Inspection Panel's budget is approximately US\$3.5 million per annum. This covers all operations including salaries and administrative fees