



Keynote Address

"From Vision to Reality: The Pact of the Future and Africa's Next Generation"

By

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Introduction

1. I am honored to deliver this keynote address as we discuss the critical issue of youth and future generations. We will use the Pact for the Future — which also includes a Global Digital Compact and a Declaration on Future Generations [I will refer to all these as the Pact] — as our entry point into this discussion.
2. The United Nations describes the Pact for the Future as a "bold step forward" for international cooperation, aiming to create a world that is more equitable, sustainable, and prepared for the challenges of the coming decades. I invite you to remember those three key words: **equitable, sustainable, and prepared.**

3. Personally, the words of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres at the opening of the Summit resonated with me. He said, **"We cannot create a future fit for our grandchildren with a system built by our grandparents."**
4. That statement was profound. As we examine the Pact's relevance and applicability, let us remember that we are building a system that should serve our grandchildren; therefore, it must be forward-looking, long-term, and grounded in agile and astute ideas.
5. The Pact is the result of an inclusive, years-long process aimed at adapting international cooperation to the realities of today and the challenges of tomorrow. I was privileged to attend the Nairobi CSO Meeting on the Pact for the Future, where global civil society articulated its vision and contributions to the final draft of the Pact.
6. Today, the Pact stands as one of the most comprehensive international agreements in many years. It comes at a crucial point in the implementation of the SDGs, and it must be anchored within the framework of accelerating the achievement of these goals while redefining a future beyond them.
7. The Pact also explores entirely new terrain. Unlike the SDGs, it does not follow a specific goal framework but addresses fresh areas and perspectives where agreement has been elusive for decades.
8. A central principle of the Pact is to ensure that international institutions can effectively respond to a world that has changed dramatically since those institutions were established.
9. Therefore, the Pact serves as a comprehensive framework designed to tackle the pressing challenges facing the world and to reinforce the role of multilateralism.
10. Indeed, the Pact represents a breath of fresh air; it embodies an international consensus on how we can redefine the role of institutions like the United Nations and envision the future we desire for coming generations.

11. The motivation behind the passing of this Pact stems from the recognition that the world is at a critical tipping point. Climate disasters are escalating, inequality is widening, and conflicts are driving millions into precarious situations. Pandemics and poverty persist, highlighting the urgency of change.
12. It has become evident that the old ways of doing things are no longer sufficient. The clear message is that if we do not change our course soon, we risk becoming trapped in an endless cycle of crises. Continuing to do the same things while expecting different results is simply not sustainable.
13. However, despite the challenges we face today, there is a silver lining — an opportunity amid the crisis. This moment in history is rich with possibilities across various sectors. Our ability to endure the pandemic, bounce back stronger, and innovate in unprecedented ways proves that human resilience is alive and well. If we collaborate effectively, we can forge a better path for everyone. The future we desire remains within reach, but we must act swiftly.
14. This spirit is captured in the Pact through its 56 bold actions, which aim to ensure that our legacy as a global community transcends merely addressing today's challenges. It envisions a world where everyone can thrive — a roadmap for tackling current issues while reimagining future possibilities.

The Pact

15. The Pact is organized into chapters that outline the concerns we face and the actions required to confront them. Below are the primary themes and actions covered in the Pact, serving as a roadmap to address today's challenges and envision a better tomorrow.
16. **Sustainable Development and Financing for Development:** The Pact emphasizes the importance of eradicating poverty, accelerating climate action, and promoting gender equality. It advocates for policies that foster sustainable economic growth and environmental protection, mobilizing financial resources

for sustainable development initiatives, and strengthening international cooperation to achieve the SDGs.

17. **International Peace and Security:** In the area of International Peace and Security, the Pact focuses on conflict prevention, advancing nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, and upholding human rights on a global scale. Key actions include reforming the UN Security Council to better reflect contemporary geopolitical realities, enhancing peacekeeping operations, supporting post-conflict reconstruction, and promoting adherence to international humanitarian law.
18. **Science, Technology, Innovation, and Digital Cooperation:** The Pact highlights the significance of Science, Technology, Innovation, and Digital Cooperation. It calls for the establishment of frameworks for the ethical use of emerging technologies, the development of guidelines for the responsible deployment of artificial intelligence (AI), and encouragement for scientific research and technological innovation. Important initiatives include adopting a Global Digital Compact to ensure equitable access to digital technologies, implementing regulations to govern AI, and fostering international collaboration in scientific research.
19. **Youth and Future Generations:** The Pact places emphasis on Youth and Future Generations, recognizing the role of young people as agents of positive change and ensuring that policies consider the rights and needs of future generations. It involves young people in decision-making processes, adopts a ***Declaration on Future Generations*** to safeguard their interests, and invests in education and employment opportunities for youth.
20. **Transforming Global Governance:** The Pact underscores the need to transform global governance by strengthening the multilateral system to effectively address global challenges. This includes updating international institutions to reflect current global dynamics and ensuring inclusive decision-making. Key actions involve reforming international institutions to make them more representative and effective, enhancing transparency and accountability

in global governance, and promoting partnerships between governments, civil society, and the private sector.

21. The Pact also includes annexes such as the ***Global Digital Compact*** and the ***Declaration on Future Generations***, which outline specific commitments in these areas. The Global Digital Compact aims to establish equitable access to digital technologies, promote ethical standards for their use, and foster innovation. This initiative seeks to bridge the digital divide, ensuring that all young people, regardless of their background, have the tools and opportunities to thrive in a digital world.

22. Conversely, the **Declaration on Future Generations** emphasizes intergenerational equity and the inclusion of youth in decision-making processes. It aims to protect the rights and interests of future generations by embedding their needs into today's policies. These commitments are more than mere policy declarations; they are a call to action for young people. They are invited to participate actively in shaping a future that is inclusive, sustainable, and just, ensuring their voices are heard and their potential is realized.

Limitations of the Pact: A Clear Overview

23. The Pact outlines several commendable objectives and actions across five thematic chapters, but it raises significant concerns regarding its feasibility, inclusivity, and implementation strategies. Here are seven key limitations:

24. **Ambitious but Unrealistic Goals:** The Pact sets ambitious aims, such as eradicating extreme poverty, achieving gender equality, and combating climate change. While these aspirations are admirable, the Pact lacks robust mechanisms to ensure they are realized. For instance, the Global Gender Gap Report 2024 indicates that it will take 134 years to achieve gender parity. How will the Pact accelerate efforts in this area? Additionally, the financial resources needed to achieve these goals are insufficiently addressed. Current commitments to mobilize funding primarily rely on voluntary contributions, which have historically fallen short of expectations. Without binding financial

commitments or innovative funding mechanisms, these goals risk remaining purely aspirational.

25. Insufficient Attention to Power Imbalances: The call for reforms in global governance and multilateral institutions is a recurring theme throughout the Pact. However, it fails to confront the entrenched power imbalances that hinder meaningful reform. Some countries continue to exert significant influence, committing serious violations without facing consequences. Proposals to reform the UN Security Council, for example, lack detail on how to navigate opposition from powerful member states that possess veto power. Africa, despite being represented by the most member states in the UN Assembly, struggles to secure at least two seats, with some countries treating this as a favor rather than a right. Furthermore, while the Pact emphasizes inclusivity, it does not adequately address the marginalization of voices from the Global South in global decision-making processes.

26. Voluntarism vs. Accountability: The Pact's reliance on voluntary commitments and partnerships raises serious concerns about accountability. There are no clear enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with the outlined actions. For instance, the Global Digital Compact promises equitable access to digital technologies yet does not specify how states or private entities will be held accountable for unethical practices or violations of digital rights. The absence of enforceable accountability measures undermines the credibility of the Pact's commitments.

27. Overemphasis on Multilateralism without Addressing Fragmentation: While the Pact emphasizes strengthening multilateralism, it does not sufficiently address the increasing polarization among member states, which has impeded international cooperation in recent years. There are instances where representatives from certain countries take the podium at the UN, causing others to leave the room in protest. These deep divisions must be addressed for the Pact to be effective. Without strategies to bridge ideological divides and build trust among nations, the Pact's multilateral approach risks perpetuating existing inefficiencies.

- 28. Lack of Specificity in Implementation Plans:** Many actions outlined in the Pact lack concrete timelines, measurable targets, or clear responsibilities. For example, the declaration on future generations is a commendable step toward intergenerational equity but does not include specific policy measures or monitoring frameworks. Similarly, the climate action commitments are not aligned with the urgent need for immediate and substantial emissions reductions. This oversight supports the adage that "what is not measured is not done."
- 29. Marginalization of Civil Society and Grassroots Movements:** While the Pact acknowledges the importance of partnerships, it does not sufficiently involve civil society and grassroots movements in decision-making processes. These groups are often at the forefront of implementing change but are relegated to peripheral roles within the Pact. At the UN, civil society organizations are often categorized as 'observers,' reflecting a narrative created by the UN that frames them as non-governmental. A more inclusive approach that amplifies the voices of local communities and marginalized groups, recognizing civil society as independent actors in their own right, is essential for the success of the Pact.
- 30. Missed Opportunities for Innovation:** The Pact's chapter on science, technology, and digital cooperation emphasizes important areas such as artificial intelligence and digital governance. However, it lacks proposals for bold innovations that could transform global governance and development. For example, it does not consider the potential of blockchain technology to enhance transparency in funding or the use of advanced data analytics to track progress on SDGs. Other innovative ideas are also overlooked.
- 31.** The Pact for the Future is a commendable attempt to address the world's most pressing challenges through a unified global framework. However, its lofty aspirations are undermined by a lack of specificity, enforceable accountability mechanisms, and genuine inclusivity. To transform the Pact into a meaningful roadmap for global progress, member states must commit to more robust reforms, innovative solutions, and inclusive decision-making processes. Only

then can the Pact move from rhetoric to action and deliver tangible outcomes for present and future generations. **This should be the advocacy agenda for young people as we think of ways to work with the Pact!**

SDGs and the Pact

32. Let me briefly touch on the SDGs and the Pact. These two frameworks are closely intertwined. The Pact serves as a comprehensive framework to accelerate progress towards the SDGs. It emphasizes the importance of sustainable development, international peace and security, science and technology, youth and future generations, and transforming global governance. By turbocharging the SDGs and the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Pact aims to address the root causes of global challenges and ensure that no one is left behind. This alignment is important. This is because it underscores the commitment of world leaders to create a safer, more peaceful, sustainable, and inclusive world for future generations.

33. In practical terms, the SDGs have an inbuilt monitoring mechanism - known as the *Voluntary National Reviews* (VNR). These are presented annually to the High-Level Political Forum in July every year in New York to ensure global progress is tracked. We should use the VNR process to track the Pact. It is crucial to keep the Pact alive by reviewing our progress on the implementation of the five objectives of the Pact at the country and continental levels within Africa.

34. For Africa, the Pact also provides a vital framework to address pressing challenges and align with Africa's aspirations under Agenda 2063. Key issues include fostering international peace and security. This is consistent with the African aspirations under the AU's "Silencing the Guns by 2030" initiative. The demand for UN Security Council reform is also an important priority for Africa and consistent with the call to reform global institutions from grandparents and grandchildren structures. The Pact's call for transforming global governance therefore resonates with Africa's push for equitable representation in international institutions. This includes addressing all structural barriers. In the

financial bodies, Africa holds only 6.5% of IMF voting power. Yet Africa is the biggest customer of the IMF because of Africa's developmental needs.

35. Furthermore, the Pact's emphasis on planetary sustainability and inclusive development aligns with Africa's goals to mitigate climate change impacts. Climate change directly affects over 40% of Africa's population yet we are the least polluters in the world! The Pact also endorses the agenda of eradicating poverty which in Africa still plagues 33.3% of its people. Within the context of the Pact, strengthening partnerships, fostering dialogue through platforms, and leveraging digital monitoring systems will be crucial for moving forward with actionable strategies and achieving sustainable peace and development outcomes.

36. I invite you to use the AU Youth Envoy's office as an entry point for young people across Africa to ensure member states stay connected to Agenda 2063 and the Pact.

37. At the country level in Uganda, we must link the Pact to Uganda Vision 2040, NDP IV, and *Uganda's Financing Strategy for Growing the Economy Tenfold*. The tenfold economic growth strategy emphasizes transformative development through innovation, sustainability, and inclusivity. This strategy prioritizes key sectors such as agro-industrialization, tourism, mineral development, and science, technology, and innovation (STI), while leveraging cross-cutting measures like increased private sector participation, enhanced public-private partnerships (PPPs), and sustainable financing mechanisms. For young people, this presents a unique opportunity to harness their creativity and entrepreneurial spirit to drive growth in these sectors.

38. If young people explore avenues such as technology-driven agribusiness, eco-tourism, and high-tech manufacturing, young innovators can tap into the synergies between the tenfold strategy and the Pact for the Future. Additionally, the focus on STI and the knowledge economy offers a platform for youth to research, develop, and commercialize cutting-edge solutions, positioning them as key players in shaping a sustainable and prosperous future. With the right

skills, access to patient capital, and a commitment to innovation, young people can drive Uganda's transformation into a globally competitive economy.

39. The Pact represents a visionary framework for fostering sustainable development, unity, and innovation. In areas such as sports and culture, young people can leverage Africa's rich cultural heritage and the universal appeal of sports. African states should create opportunities for youth to engage in meaningful activities that promote social cohesion, leadership, and personal growth.
40. Sports serve as a powerful tool for breaking down barriers, fostering teamwork, and inspiring resilience. Cultural initiatives showcase and celebrate Africa's diversity and creativity, instilling pride and identity in young generations. Together, these elements have the potential to build a future where African youth are at the forefront of global progress, equipped with the skills, confidence, and platforms to drive change in their communities and beyond.
41. Ladies and gentlemen, while the future belongs to young people, youth is a transient phase; everyone moves in and out of this category. It is essential to remember that being young is just a window in a much longer trajectory that defines each individual's life. Because of this, young people must possess a sense of urgency and commitment to their purpose, ensuring that whatever they work on is seen as important and has the potential to outlast their own existence.
42. As we consider the Pact for the Future and the impact it promises to the world, we must remain focused on the reality that the world can only improve if young people leverage every moment and the circumstances around them. The digital world is one we cannot ignore. Artificial intelligence should not make us feel threatened but rather enhance our intelligence. Ultimately, the best intelligence comes from those who can interpret and understand the world in diverse ways — ways that any algorithm cannot fully capture.

43. We need to recognize this reality that surrounds us as a generation. Each generation has its own agenda, and it is crucial to seize that agenda and contribute your part. Remember, your small contribution can never be disregarded.

44. Let me conclude with an anecdote: a young boy was on the beach in Durban with a friend when big waves pushed many small sardines onto the shore. The boy was picking up each sardine and throwing them back into the water. His friend, feeling impatient, asked, "Why are you throwing just one little sardine back into the water? It won't make any difference." The boy responded, "It makes a difference to that one sardine!"

45. Ladies and gentlemen, if you are returning just one little sardine to the sea, that action is important.

I thank you for listening!