

Foreword



Momentum for multilateralism: building global consensus and capacity for action

When the foundation stone of the Palais des Nations was laid in 1929, few could have imagined how our world would be transformed over the following 80 years. At the height of colonialism, many nations were not sovereign countries. The world did not possess the technology to channel news across the globe in an instant and connect individuals on all continents. We had yet to experience the destruction and terror of nuclear weapons. Greenhouse gas and emissions were not part of our everyday vocabulary.

Only 53 States in a world of some 2 billion people attended the foundation stone ceremony in 1929. But, they shared with the 192 Member States of today's United Nations, now representing over 6.5 billion global citizens, a clear understanding of our interdependence. They, too, had experienced the horrors of war and violent conflict. They had seen the human toll of a rapidly spreading influenza. They were on the brink of the largest economic meltdown of their century. The Palais des Nations represented their realization that only collective strategies would be effective in the face of these shared threats.

As the challenges before us have grown in complexity and scope, so have our mutual dependence and the need for multilateral action. We are living through a time of multiple crises: economic, financial, food and flu. None of these challenges can be confronted successfully by any one nation acting alone. This is the basis for the momentum for multilateralism that we have witnessed throughout 2009.

At the opening of the General Assembly in September 2009, our leaders reaffirmed their commitment to making the pledges of the Charter of the United Nations a reality for all. They highlighted the central role of the United Nations in shaping solutions for the global common good in our rapidly changing world. And over the past year, the international community has taken important steps in the areas of disarmament and non-proliferation, climate change, economic and social development, global public health and food security, acting on this recognition that our fates are interlinked.

As a key centre for multilateral diplomacy, the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) plays a valuable role in supporting, facilitating and implementing this new multilateralism. UNOG provides a forum for building global consensus as the indispensable basis of effective multilateral action. Through its close links with Member States, regional and other intergovernmental organizations, the research and academic community and other civil society actors, UNOG helps to create and consolidate partnerships for results. By reaching out to constituencies across the globe, we make a contribution to raising awareness of the Organization's priorities and mobilizing support for policies and programmes. As a platform for promoting tolerance through cross-cultural dialogue, UNOG helps to cultivate the respect and trust that drive the multilateral process.

With the expansion of the United Nations agenda and the number of people we serve, the character of our work is undergoing significant change. The conference diplomacy that takes place at the Palais des Nations and other venues is now complemented by a large presence in the field, from peacekeeping and humanitarian protection to advancing human rights and development. This ongoing shift towards a more operational engagement, coupled with the need for budget discipline, calls for constant adaptation to strengthen the Organization's capacity for action.

As a major service provider to the United Nations system, UNOG is closely involved in the conceptualization, development and implementation of new management and administrative processes to make the Organization faster, more flexible and more efficient for a greater impact. Making use of the latest technology and know-how, UNOG has been contributing throughout 2009 to the introduction of new human resources practices, resource and knowledge management, and security systems, which are all critical if we are to deliver on the growing mandates and fulfil our mission.

In all of these initiatives, we strive to limit our carbon footprint. With innovative measures, new partnerships and the full support of all staff, UNOG has reduced CO₂ emissions considerably and is fully engaged with the wider United Nations system for a climate-neutral Organization.

Across these activities, the Palais des Nations provides both infrastructure and inspiration to all those who come here in the service of multilateralism. It is our collective responsibility to preserve this unique shared heritage of the international community. In 2009, the first phase of the three-step Strategic Heritage Plan for a comprehensive renovation and refurbishment of the Palais was completed, laying the groundwork for the second phase. UNOG continues efforts, in close collaboration with Member States and United Nations Headquarters, towards implementation of the Plan.

This Annual Report outlines UNOG's efforts in 2009 in support of the renewed momentum for multilateralism and the ongoing reform efforts within the United Nations to meet the demands of our globalized world. Only when we act together, in solidarity and mutual support based on the principles of the United Nations, can we build a world of peace and prosperity for all. UNOG looks forward to working with all stakeholders for durable multilateral strategies to address the challenges of today and tomorrow.



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