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# **Preview of the 79th Session of the UN General Assembly (including the Summit of the Future and 'Our Common Agenda')**

Federal Council report to the Foreign Affairs Committees

of 26 June 2024

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## 1. Preview of the 79th session of the UN General Assembly

The General Assembly (UN GA) is the only UN body in which all 193 member states are represented. As set out in Article 10<sup>1</sup> of the UN Charter, it discusses any issues within the scope of the Charter and thus addresses a wide range of subjects.

The aim of this preview is to provide an overview of selected discussions at the upcoming 79th session of the UN GA that are of particular interest to Switzerland. The impact of the current geopolitical situation and in particular of the armed conflicts and crises is likely to continue, thus leading to debates and initiatives on which Switzerland must take a position. Switzerland will also be interested in discussions on the international financial architecture, on the ongoing UN reforms as well as on potential reform initiatives arising from the secretary-general's 'Our Common Agenda' (OCA) report.

### a. 'Our Common Agenda'

The 'Our Common Agenda' report was published by the UN secretary-general (SG) in September 2021 and presents the SG's vision for the future of global cooperation. It calls for inclusive, interconnected and effective multilateralism. The OCA is based on a political declaration by the heads of state or government for the UN's 75th anniversary (2020 – A/RES/75/1). It calls on the SG to compile a report with proposals to strengthen multilateralism. The OCA covers a very wide range of topics, from education to measuring prosperity beyond GDP, to space governance, peace and future generations. In addition, the OCA wishes to strengthen and accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The OCA is not an internationally negotiated document and is not legally binding, but states can bring the proposals it contains into negotiations. A similarly wide range of proposals will mark discussions in the 79th UN GA.

This session will kick off with the **Summit of the Future** during the high-level opening week in September 2024. In particular, the Pact for the Future, a political declaration to be adopted at this summit, can highlight certain aspects of the OCA that could be included and fleshed out in negotiations taking place in the 79th UN GA year. Preparations for the last of the three OCA summits, the **World Social Summit** will also begin in this UN GA. This summit is planned for autumn 2025 and will focus on social development.

### b. International law

Unresolved conflicts and crises are putting international law under pressure. Rules of international law are increasingly being challenged or violated. At the same time, there is a tendency by some countries to systematically remove human rights from UN resolutions and political declarations. This year marks the 75th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions – an opportunity for states to commit to the respect of humanitarian international law. Also of importance to Switzerland will be the election to the UN Human Rights Council (October 2024 in the UN GA) and its presidential bid of the Council from January 2025.

The application of international law in the digital space will also be the focus of intense debate. In the digital space, human rights are at the centre of global digitalisation policy. States agree that international law applies in the cyberspace but how it should be applied is still unclear in some cases. Discussions on the opportunities and risks of artificial intelligence and on cybersecurity will feature in many UN negotiations.

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<sup>1</sup> Art. 10 Functions and powers: The General Assembly may discuss any questions or any matters within the scope of the present Charter or relating to the powers and functions of any organs provided for in the present Charter, and, except as provided in Article 12, may make recommendations to the Members of the United Nations or to the Security Council or to both on any such questions or matters.

### ***c. International financial system***

The current international financial architecture came into being after the Second World War and comprises UN specialised agencies, particularly the Bretton Woods institutions (the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank), as well as organisations outside the UN system, notably the OECD. In the meantime, however, macro-economic issues have also become a focus of debate in the UN GA. The SG is personally committed to reforming the financial architecture and attaches particular importance to the subject. As the developing and emerging countries have had only partial success in getting their demands accepted in the aforementioned institutions, they are increasingly trying to bring their concerns into the UN GA. Following the adoption of an initial resolution on taxes last year, further definition of international tax cooperation is planned for the 79th UN GA. This is expected to lead to the start of negotiations for a tax convention. At the same time, the UN GA is preparing an international conference in early July 2025 that seeks stronger alignment of financing flows and policies with UN development goals (Financing for Development, FfD). Due to the strained economic situation, even more innovative approaches for the funding of the 2030 Agenda with the involvement of the private sector need to be discussed.

### ***d. UN reforms***

Since it was founded in 1945, the UN has regularly undertaken reforms. Mention of 'UN reforms' today usually refers to the reform proposals made by the SG in the areas of (1) Peace and security, (2) Development and (3) Management. Many of the reform initiatives have already been implemented.

However, certain aspects still need to be negotiated between member states. Further reform steps will therefore be discussed in the 79th UN GA, enabling the UN to increase its effectiveness, for example by improving its use of data. The main focus of discussions will be the UN's development pillar. A comprehensive analysis will be presented here for the first time since reforms to the UN development system began in 2019. This will enable progress to be assessed and any necessary further steps to be defined. The ensuing resolution, which will set out the operational focus in the field of the development pillar for the next four years, has traditionally been facilitated by Switzerland since 2001.

## ***2. Appreciation of the topics and processes in the 79th UN GA***

From Switzerland's perspective, the above-mentioned topics are of particular importance in the discussions planned for the 79th UN GA. However, the UN GA addresses a very wide range of topics (e.g. peace and security, disarmament, sustainability, the environment, humanitarian aid, digitalisation and cybercrime). Switzerland supports a focused and effective multilateralism that places special emphasis on subsidiarity. Current geopolitical tensions are making multilateral negotiations harder. In certain subject areas, especially human rights, it is currently almost impossible to make progress. Increasingly it is a matter of taking a stand against backsliding and the watering down of standards.

Constructive discussions about reform are also increasingly being blocked by states that have no interest in an effective multilateral system. Multilateral negotiations within the UN are conducted among all 193 member states and when no consensus is found, decisions are made according to the principle of majority rule. In some cases, this means that discussions and votes do not align with the interests of Switzerland. For example, Switzerland would have preferred to hold discussions on tax matters in the existing bodies such as the OECD instead of in the UN GA. Here, however, because of the numerical superiority of developing countries, Switzerland and like-minded states were outvoted.

The OCA on the other hand, provides states with a sound basis for committing to the principles of the multilateral system (e.g. the UN Charter). But the OCA also provides certain reform initiatives (e.g. smaller, focused UN peace missions or a reform of the UN Peacebuilding Commission) that could be implemented in further negotiations. It remains to be seen whether the planned Pact for the Future can meet expectations for the implementation of certain elements of the OCA, in particular demands to accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

### **3. *Bases for Switzerland's position***

Switzerland's position in the UN GA is based on the Foreign Policy Strategy 2024–27, Switzerland's foreign economic policy strategy, the International Cooperation Strategy 2021–24, the Security Policy Report, the Digital Foreign Policy Strategy 2021–24, the Arms Control and Disarmament Strategy 2022–25, the Guidelines on Human Rights 2021–24, and all other relevant Federal Council strategies.