

UN aims 'to bring multilateralism back' as it adopts Pact for the Future

The United Nations General Assembly has adopted a "Pact for the Future", which UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres described as a landmark agreement that is a "step-change towards more effective, inclusive, networked multilateralism".

The pact, which also includes an annex on working towards a responsible and sustainable digital future, was adopted without a vote on Sunday at the start of a two-day Summit of the Future.

The agreement came after some nine months of negotiations. "We are here to bring multilateralism back from the brink," Guterres told the summit.

As an opener for the annual high-level week of the UN General Assembly, which begins on Tuesday, dozens of heads of state and government had gathered for the adoption of the pact.

Leaders pledged to bolster the multilateral system to "keep pace with a changing world" and to "protect the needs and interests of current and future generations" facing "persistent crisis".

"We believe there is a path to a brighter future for all of humanity," the document of the pact said.

The UN chief has long pushed for the pact, which covers themes including peace and security, global governance, sustainable development, climate change, digital cooperation, human rights, gender, youth and future generations. It lays out some 56 broad actions that countries pledged to achieve.

The adoption of the pact, however, faced a brief delay when

Russia's deputy minister of foreign affairs, Sergey Vershinin, introduced an amendment, emphasising the "principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of states".

Russia's objections were backed by allies Belarus, North Korea, Iran, Nicaragua and Syria, but its amendment was overwhelmingly dismissed in a motion to take no action.

"It was somewhat irritating that, in the end, Russia once again tried to stop the whole process," said German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, co-sponsor of the text.

Despite criticism of the pact, it is still "an opportunity to affirm our collective commitment to multilateralism, even in the difficult current geopolitical context", one diplomat told AFP news agency, emphasising the need to rebuild trust between the Global South and North.

"This pact gives us hope and inspiration for a better future," said Sierra Leone's President Julius Maada Bio, who has been a keen advocate for the Global South at the UN through his country's membership in the Security Council.

Developing countries have been particularly vocal in demanding concrete commitments on the reform of international financial institutions, aiming to secure easier access to preferential financing, especially considering the impacts of climate change.

"This [existing] approach to governance reinforces the notion that it is acceptable to have first-class and second-class citizens," said Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley.

The pact and its annexes – a Global Digital Compact and a Declaration on Future Generations – are nonbinding. This has raised concerns about implementation – especially as some principles, such as the protection of civilians in conflict, are violated daily.