PANEL: CLIMATE CHANGE, COVID-19 AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Clover Hogan, Founder and Executive Director of Force of Nature **Aron Cramer**, President and C.E.O., BSR **Paul Polman**, Co-Founder and Chair, IMAGINE

Moderated by **Daniel Holtgen**, Director of Communications and Spokesperson for the Secretary General, Council of Europe

Ms. Hogan argued that the climate crisis is the symptom of a broken system, the "bedrock" of which is a system of capitalism based on limitless growth with finite resources, the commodification of nature, and the long history of oppression of marginalized communities. She went on to argue that Covid-19 has exposed the fragility of the systems but has offered people the opportunity to rethink the future they want to live in. However, she proposed that the change must occur at a systemic level. Acknowledging that this can be overwhelming, she advocated that a very important and underestimated tool is that of "mindset." She suggested that the feeling of powerlessness is greater than any pandemic. She emphasized that this fear and anxiety can be a great motivator and ought to be turned into agency.

Mr. Cramer joined in to warn about the existential threats that democracy faces today. He added that businesses are a foundational element in society, so must play a role in the effort to create change. He proposed that corporations should create 21^{st} -century social contracts that work to tackle relevant societal and environmental issues to benefit the society in which they function. He added that it is very important to take advantage of the technological developments to create change but stressed that the safety of human rights must be ensured.

Mr. Polman concurred by claiming that the pandemic has presented governments with severe challenges on a global and a national level, revealing "holes" in the system from problems with cybersecurity, the interdependence of the global market to severe inequalities in several sectors. He added that the global government's support is low and that there has been a rise in populism due to the crises that democracy is facing. He feared that countries' pace on climate action is neither sufficient nor fast enough to get the expected results, as these systems are not designed to face the 21st-century challenges societies have been burdened with. He proposed that governments, and the private and public sectors must join forces to create the frameworks and conditions needed to make this systemic change possible. He suggested solutions such as creating a financial market more focused on the longer term, measuring environmental and social capital, and imposing strict policies that require the collaboration of civil society, businesses, and the state. A key goal ought to be to recover from the pandemic by creating new, more ecological and higher-paying jobs, and investing a significantly higher amount of the global GDP in the fight against climate change and the transition to greener economies. He reflected on the unsatisfactory handling of the 2008 financial crisis, which led to a cascade of events that has challenged democracy. He closed by emphasizing the importance of willpower in this effort.

In turn, Ms. Hogan emphasized that we need to shift our focus from polar bears and solar panels to climate solutions that create social contracts that will guarantee people's right to live respectfully and with purpose. She argued that such discussion cannot be carried out behind closed doors but, rather, must include in the center the very people who experience these challenges firsthand and whose livelihoods are at stake. She described the challenges the world is facing as exponential problems and that, as of now, societies only have linear solutions. Change, she continued, can only be achieved if young people's energy is brought together with the knowledge of experience. She commented, however, that this requires older generations to willingly give up power, something that is not easily done. She suggested that, apart from greater youth involvement, marginalized communities also ought to be allowed to join the effort to tackle these crises.

Mr. Polman agreed with Ms. Hogan on the wide exclusion of people from societal matters, arguing that the world is functioning for increasingly fewer people at the expense of others. He advocated that all people should be put in the middle of any global effort and that, therefore, inclusion ought to be enforced. He concluded by stating that not only should young people be given a "seat" at the table, but they ought to be given the whole table.

Ms. Hogan concluded the discussion by saying that while changing habits and being more conscious as a consumer is valuable, the responsibility does largely fall on corporations that generate the highest percentage of emissions. She pointed out that the best policy for a better world in the future is assuming responsibility and using the power that each of us possesses to implement positive change.

Summary prepared by:

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