Towards the Summit of the Future
Collective Statement by the Asia Pacific Regional CSOs Engagement Mechanism
To be delivered by Pam Rajput

The world today is at an inflection point in the global governance, sustainability and wellbeing of the humanity. Poverty reduction has stalled, hunger and inequality is rising. Violent conflicts and wars refuse to abate and pose serious questions to international peace and security. Recovery from the pandemic is incomplete and uneven. Trade and economic cooperation have failed to deliver shared prosperity. Climate crisis, biodiversity loss and pollution seem irreversible and the SDGs seem unachievable. Countries after country are falling into deep into debt and cost of living crisis. Multilateralism, a hallmark of the post-cold war “liberal era” seems to be folding. The normative foundations of a global international society seem to be cracking. Many states are retreating. Multilateralism faces never before challenges in governance, legitimacy and efficiency.

There is manifestly an urgent need and deep desire for the change in the global governance. This makes SOTF a relevant initiative. However, there is a varied understanding of the implications the SOTF will have on global governance. It’s not very clear yet whether the SOTF has a political buy.

The SOTF addresses a wide variety of issues. Many of these changes though desirable are outside the mandate of the SOTF. One fails to understand how these systemic changes can be brought in without making changes in the UN charter. APRCEM, though keen to support the UN as it believes that UN should be the only and legitimate institution of global governance based on the sovereign equality of the member states.

We recommend

1. Increase the ambition and address systemic barriers; while some parts of the SOTF look ambitious it just falls short of addressing the systemic barriers. The financial reforms do not talk about a binding convention on global tax cooperation, neither it talks about debt cancellation. The new agenda for peace or emergency platform do not envision wars and conflicts as a potential threat to the peace. They don’t address rising military expenditure, which is essential to ensure peace and attain sustainable development. Global digital compact does not talk about ending concentration of power in handful of digital companies and enhancing competition. They do not have a clear vision on how to reduce inequalities and address unpaid care work. UN reforms are most ambiguous and falls shy of demanding urgent reforms in power imbalance in the UN and overdue changes in the structure of the Security council, human rights council and peace building. This does not look ambitious and transformative enough to address challenges that we are facing.

2. End corporate creep into inclusive and networked multilateralism; Perhaps one feature across in all tracks of the SOTF is the inclusive and networked multilateralism (Stakeholderism) giving more space and role for the big business
and corporations. While the governments are accountable to its citizens, the corporations are only accountable to its shareholders for whom the foremost priority is increase in the profits of the corporations.

3. Thinking beyond Summitry as a solution; Summits have an effect of grandstanding but have poor record in enhancing political leadership and ensuring international collective action. SDG Summits and Climate summits have failed to create urgent changes in collective responses of the member states. Many believe that a negotiations based approached, will have more concrete and long lasting impacts than Summits.

4. Implications for CSOs participation in the UN processes; the OCA and the SOTF though ostensibly vouching for increased participation of the youth and future generations and the CSOs, pitches CSOs against corporates and member states. This arrangement will result in complete oversight of asymmetries in power relations among the state, corporates and the CSOs. The resources as well as avenues for the CSOs participation has reduced and SOTF has also restrained full and effective participation of the CSOs and has engaged only in ticking the box. The New York centred focus of the SOTF also needs to be decentralized so that SOTF can benefit from variety of thoughts and perspectives.