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From global pandemics, universal human rights, to nuclear nonproliferation and climate change, multilateral institutions have forged a global consensus on the most fundamental challenges humanity faces. These are remarkable accomplishments. Through our collective action, we have become collectively stronger.

Our multilateral system is made up of key institutions that enable us to work together to find solutions to global problems. Institutions such as the United Nations (UN), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization; international financial institutions like the Asian Development Bank; climate finance institutions; the World Health Organization; international development organizations; international trade bodies; the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and other regional organizations.

It is the foundation for a successful international order, imperfect but enduring. It gives voice to every country in the world. It has helped reach agreements and compromises—even with those we oppose or compete with. And it has served our world well in the 82 years since the Declaration of St James' Palace was signed in London, taking the first historic steps toward the creation of today's multilateral system.

The continued success of multilateralism is essential. But it is not inevitable. The world has changed since the multilateral system was forged 80 years ago. New challenges have arisen, and more needs to be done to ensure the voices of all countries are heard.

So while we must protect the multilateral system—it is right that we reform it to ensure it is inclusive and responsive.

The United Kingdom's five priorities for multilateral reform. In a key speech at Chatham House a few weeks ago, UK foreign secretary, James Cleverly, set out that the UK cares deeply about multilateralism. He made the case for a reformed and reinvigorated multilateral system, which is more inclusive, and more responsive to the most pressing global challenges, including the egregious violation of the UN charter by Russia, climate change, and the tech revolution. For it to succeed and thrive, he set out five transnational priorities.

Priority one is to reform the UN Security Council. The UK wants to see permanent African representation and membership extended to India, Brazil, Germany, and Japan.

Priority two is to reform international financial institutions. The UK wants to make finance, particularly climate finance, easier and quicker to access. We also want to see more investment.

Priorities three and four are stable and just tax revenues for developing and middle-income countries, and reforming the World Trade Organization (WTO) to reflect today's digital economy. Better enforcement of international tax rules will help governments to be able to collect the taxes that are due to them, with the revenue invested to support their own development.

Trade policy must be free, fair, and open. The WTO needs new rules that reflect today's digital economy. And a functioning dispute settlement mechanism so every country—no matter how big or small—has confidence that claims will be heard and adjudicated fairly.

We know that an open system helps grow the UK economy and makes the world more prosperous. In June 2023, I led the Philippines' launch of the UK's Developing Countries Trading Scheme (DCTS). With DCTS, we are offering simple and more generous trade arrangements for Philippines' businesses, with over 99 percent of goods exported from the Philippines eligible for duty-free access to the UK.

The UK's fifth reform priority is to champion a multilateral approach to tech regulation. Our global architecture must adjust to the digital age. We want to be able to exploit the gains of rapidly developing new technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), for global prosperity whilst mitigating the risks. This week, our foreign secretary chaired the first-ever UN Security Council discussion on AI, and the prime minister will host a global summit on AI regulation in the UK next year.

Let us reform, that we may preserve. The UK occupies a privileged place in many multilateral institutions. It is in our interest, and our obligation, to improve the effectiveness of the multilateral order.

Of course, we can deliver reform only if we work with others. Working multilaterally is also about compromise, and ensuring different perspectives are listened to and inform decisions. One of the most important aspects of my role as the UK's ambassador to the Philippines is to listen—to find shared ground for our common benefit.

Multilateralism is not at odds with national sovereignty and democracy. Its purpose is to protect and reinforce them. In a globally integrated world, our commitment to peace, prosperity, and development hinges on respecting fundamental laws and institutions. Let us work together to reinforce a dynamic and open international order in which all can thrive. If we can get reform right, the prize of a safer, fairer, healthier, and more prosperous world will be within our grasp. We have an obligation to future generations to make this happen.

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