

14 September 2021



"60 years ago this month, the world lost a servant of peace, and the UN lost one of our greatest: Dag Hammarskjöld. His wisdom, humanity and integrity remain a reference and an inspiration to all of us devoted to public service." UN Secretary-General António Guterres

© UN Photo, 2021

Generations Z and Alpha: how will they influence 21st century international civil service?

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the plane crash that claimed the lives of UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld and those on board with him in Ndola, Zambia. Addressing a commemoration event, UNV Executive Coordinator Toily Kurbanov spoke of how the international civil service of the 21st century will be shaped and defined by those coming of age in a vastly different world.

A skilled mediator and diplomat remembered for his advocacy for decolonization and his dedication to international cooperation, Hammarskjöld's efforts saw the UN through a period of intense change in an era characterized by great power competition.

The historical contributions of his leadership as UN Secretary-General have had lasting impacts. Many aspects of that legacy, particularly his defence of the values enshrined in the

UN Charter, his dedication to strengthening the international civil service and his commitment to adaptability and reform, remain relevant today.

The President of the General Assembly, in cooperation with the Permanent Missions of Sweden and Tunisia, and with support from the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, hosted the informal commemoration of the contribution of the late Secretary-General. This included a panel discussion titled *Enabling an International Civil Service for the 21st Century*.

“ If, in the 20th century, the civil service was a lifetime pathway, in the 21st century it might come through shorter separate stints, and volunteer work will grow from a youth phenomenon to a new normal at all stages of career. [...] Look at UN Volunteer assignments as a prologue, an intermission and an epilogue for being civil servants of the future. --Toily Kurbanov, UNV Executive Coordinator

On the panel were Mr Kurbanov, Ms Grete Foremo, Under Secretary General and Executive Director of the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and Natalie Samarasinghe, Chief Speechwriter for the President of the 73rd Session of the UN General Assembly.

Mr Kurbanov spoke of how Generations Z and Alpha – those born since the turn of the century and aged between five and 25 today – will drive forward the development agenda and make or break the new civil service.

Mr Kurbanov remarked that in a few years, these generations will take over and do everything their own way. The question, then, he said, is "what will motivate them?" He noted that Generations Z and Alpha are much more digitally and globally networked. Unlike their predecessors, they are growing up in a multipolar world less bound by the us-versus-them identities – East-West and North-South – which characterize the world as we know it.

He also cautioned it is possible that international borders among civil servants will be replaced by domestic divides such as class, income, and social origins. "Much," Mr Kurbanov said, "depends on the progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, and eradication of inequality and exclusion in society."

The generation of Dag Hammarskjöld lived through two world wars, he reflected; their experience of "untold sorrows to mankind" ensured strong resolve to uphold world peace.

“ Dag Hammarskjöld’s himself once said, "Our work for peace must begin within each of us". To me this is a present and profound insight,

“ but for him it must have been also a deeply personal statement, in a way that I, unfortunately or fortunately, cannot relate.

Looking ahead, Mr Kurbanov shared his hope that for Generations Z and Alpha, the 21st century's civil servants, their drive will come "not from common fears, but from shared positive aspirations and their ultimate achievement will be not only to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, but, indeed, to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom."

```
{"preview_thumbnail":"/sites/default/files/styles/video_embed_wysiwyg_preview/public/video_thumbnails/82R0C9trlw8.jpg?itok=MWKrk9KQ","video_url":"https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=82R0C9trlw8","settings":{"responsive":1,"width":"854","height":"480","autoplay":1},"settings_summary":["Embedded Video (Responsive, autoplaying)."]}
```

View the full recording of the General Assembly event on UN Web TV [here](#).

Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth](#) [SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals](#)