



Office of the President
of the General Assembly
80th Session



Better
Together

Civil Society Townhall

with

H.E. Ms. Annalena Baerbock, President of the General Assembly themed:

***“BETTER TOGETHER:
The role of civil society in strengthening the United Nations in fragmented times”***

29 January 2026, 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Conference Room 1, UN Headquarters, New York

Concept Note

Context

The Preamble of the Charter of the United Nations underlines the “*equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small*” – a cornerstone of the international order. On its eightieth anniversary, the multilateral system with the United Nations at its core is under massive pressure – politically and financially. The United Nations must adapt the way it responds to the challenges of today’s realities.

At the heart of this system lies the General Assembly, which must continue to deliver on the United Nation’s promises to the people it serves. The United Nations General Assembly is the place where all nations come together, where every country has a seat and a voice. Moreover, the work of the General Assembly benefits from decisions which are based on a wide range of inputs and broad engagement. This has become the guiding star of the eightieth session, bearing in mind the critical role played by civil society, science, research, youth and other stakeholders alike.

During the eightieth session, we need to join efforts to preserve what the United Nations has achieved since its establishment, to address current global crises and to adapt to emerging and future challenges. That is what this resumed session must be about – *leadership* and *reform*. The process of selecting and appointing the next Secretary-General is officially underway. The world is looking for the next Secretary-General to provide strong leadership and to embody a United Nations that reflects and responds to the people it serves. From conflicts and displacement to climate action, from digital disruption and inequalities to sustainable development, social justice and human rights, the next Secretary-General will inherit these challenges and opportunities in a fragmented world. The United Nations will need a leader that will chart a path to the future, with the United Nations Charter as their compass, while implementing reforms.

In this context, the United Nation's engagement with civil society is not merely beneficial to ensure that the United Nations today and tomorrow is fit-for-purpose, but it is also essential to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the realization of the commitments enshrined in the Pact for the Future.

To this end, the President of the General Assembly, during the resumed session of the Organization's eightieth session, will convene a Town Hall meeting with civil society representatives to amplify their views, promote the exchange of innovative ideas, solutions, and invite concrete recommendations. In the spirit of the theme of the eightieth session "*Better Together: 80 years and more for peace, development and human rights*", it is important to work together to advance the United Nation's key pillars of peace and security, sustainable development, and human rights. Civil society has a critical role to play in this.

Objectives of the Townhall

The meeting aims to facilitate a candid exchange with representatives of civil society, providing a platform for inclusive dialogue on the priorities for the eightieth session of the General Assembly. The Townhall also invites civil society organisations to engage and discuss how they will contribute to protect the principles of the United Nations, engage in the broader reform of the Organization to modernise and make it fit for the 21st century.

Guiding questions

1. What do civil society organizations envisage as the most important steps for the General Assembly, towards achieving reform in the context of the UN80 Initiative?
2. How do we better ensure that grassroots movements, including youth and women's organisations, participate in ongoing processes at the United Nations and that their voices are being heard?
3. What has the United Nations done for your country and region? And what have you done for the United Nations?
4. The United Nations is at a turning point, what do civil society organizations expect from the next Secretary General?