The Independent Commission on Multilateralism

Ambassadorial Board Meeting

Wednesday, May 27, 2015
6:00-7:30pm

Executive Summary

The First Ambassadorial Board Meeting of the Independent Commission on Multilateralism took place from 6:00-7:30pm at the International Peace Institute in New York. The meeting was chaired by Rt. Hon. Kevin Rudd, Chair of the ICM. The following is a summary of the discussion.

Welcome Remarks

The Chair welcomed the members of the Ambassadorial Board indicating this would be the **first of two meetings** this year. The Ambassadorial Board is one of the four tiers of the ICM, the other three comprising 'co-chairs', 'Ministerial Board' and 'Eminent Persons Board' (please see list accompanying list.) The Chair indicated that the **Ministerial Board would convene on the margins of the High Level week** of the UN General Assembly this fall.

The purpose of the meeting was to present to the Ambassadorial Board the ICM's outputs thus far. Each Permanent Representative received a background booklet containing the ICM membership list, a summary of ICM's outreach to UN Regional Groups, the first four ICM issue papers, and the retreat agendas and list of participants.

Though the ICM was officially launched in September 2014, the Chair indicated that momentum has built up significantly since February 2015. The ICM has **convened 4 out of 16** thematic retreats. On **June 19-20**, the fifth retreat will take place on **Women, Peace and Security** and on **July 10-11**, the sixth retreat on **Forced Displacement, Refugees and Migration**. The Chair expressed his gratitude to all Permanent Representatives that have participated in past retreats and recognized their invaluable contribution. All Permanent

Representatives are welcome to future ICM retreats but **priority will be given to members of the ICM Ambassadorial Board.**

The Chair described the ICM's initial global outreach with launches in Geneva and Vienna and outreach visits to Ottawa and Madrid. Other consultations on ICM related issues took place bilaterally by the Chair in Delhi, Beijing, Brussels and Singapore. Local outreach engagements have also included bilateral consultations with members of the diplomatic and policy community in New York along with briefings to the UN Regional Groups and select Permanent Missions. This outreach will continue throughout the year, with **planned launches in Addis Ababa and Nairobi** as well as outreach visits to other capitals around the globe.

To complement the work of the Ambassadorial Board in New York, the Chair indicated that the ICM has **set up two additional Ambassadorial Boards** in Geneva and Vienna which will have their first meetings in September 2015. The ICM is also in the process of **creating an Ambassadorial Board in Addis Ababa.**

Discussion

The ICM was described by participants as timely, well-structured and as providing a unique vantage point from which to put forward policy recommendations on how to make the system more "fit for purpose". Past retreats were commended for providing an open space that encouraged 'blue sky' thinking and out of the box ideas, bringing together a diverse set of voices and unique perspectives. The atmosphere of congeniality was recognized as a catalyst for free thinking.

When asked about the criteria for member state invitations to retreats, the Chair responded that any Permanent Representative deeply committed to one of the particular areas of reform is welcome to participate in said retreat. The policy of a **general and continuing open invitation** will be upheld as a means to keep the exercise inclusive and transparent. In terms of planning ahead, the Chair reiterated the importance of the **ICM monthly newsletter** as an important source of information for member states, with a detailed timeline on upcoming events and retreats.

On retreat participation, a suggestion was made to **increase engagement with the UN Secretariat**. Though the Secretariat has been invited to and indeed participated at past retreats, there may be virtue in a deeper engagement, particularly to better understand the administrative processes, budgeting, and overall response of the Secretariat vis-a-vis the sixteen issue areas. The Chair reiterated that such an idea will be looked into more closely, while reiterating that the UN Secretary General continues to be briefed on the process.

With regards to complementarity, a query was raised as to how the ICM would fit in the outputs of ongoing UN processes and reports like the High Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (headed by ICM co-chair Jose Ramos-Horta) and the Advisory Group of Experts on Review on Peacebuilding Architecture. This particular issue will be addressed by the ICM specifically under Issue Area 10 on **'Armed Conflict'** which will now place a greater

emphasis on issues pertaining to mediation, conciliation and conflict resolution. The ICM is **mindful of existing processes** and, in an effort to avoid duplication and maximize complementarity, the retreats on these issues will invariably be scheduled after such reports have been published. Indeed, a similar scheduling approach will be taken for Issue 14 (**Global Pandemics and Global Public Health**) which will take place *after* **t**he High Level Panel on Global Response to Health Crises report is published in December and Issue Area 12 (**Sustainable Development, Climate Change and the Post-2015 Development Agenda**) which will take place *after* the September launch of the SDG report (New York) and the United Nations Climate Change Conference in December (Paris). The way in which the ICM hopes to distinguish its own report will be with regards to how such policy recommendations can be **better implemented** by the multiple actors in the multilateral arena: from the United Nations to the Breton Woods institutions and regional/sub-regional organizations.

The ICM's approach is a comprehensive one. When asked if 'climate change' could be treated as a separate issue from the post-2015 sustainable development agenda, the Chair reiterated that Goal 13 is precisely about climate change and that, like the SDGs, the ICM is committed towards greater integration. Such a notion is based on the belief that, greater integration could yield defined institutional responsibilities within the UN family itself and less overlap/duplication of efforts.

A number of questions were raised regarding the UN's communication strategy, particularly, how the UN could enhance global awareness of its achievements as a means to generate greater political buy-in from member states. The Chair reiterated that Issue Area 15 '**Communication Strategy for the UN Multilateral System**' will provide a very serious and comprehensive analysis of this issue, bringing together key thinkers and practitioners including members of the United Nations Information Center from around the globe who have recently been brainstorming innovative strategies in this regard. The ICM in itself will use the experience of trying to disseminate its own outputs and messages as a means to generate novel ideas on how the multilateral system itself can better inform the global community. The Chair reiterated that, for the ICM thus far, outreach and messaging has mainly been pursued through bilateral meetings in New York and elsewhere, ICM presentations at various public events around the globe, **the website** (www.icm2016.org) and Twitter, through its own accounts (**#icm2016**) and cross-tweets on accounts of members of the ICM secretariat. In the future, greater awareness will also be generated once discussion papers are circulated for comment and once the ICM begins to convene its public hearings on each of the sixteen issue areas.

A final query was raised regarding the multiplicity of actors in the multilateral arena and whether the ICM initiative was too "UN-centric' in an era where regional and sub-regional organizations are proliferating. The Chair expressed that today's new challenges require a **new innovative multilateral architecture** and a novel approach though emphasized the need to **tweak existing institutions** before attempting to reinvent the wheel. Rather than a specific audit of each of the various players – from the Breton Woods institution to regional

organizations – the ICM is dedicated to better understanding the inter-linkages between the UN and such institutions and how to make these linkages more efficient. Issue Area 15 "**The Relationship between the UN and Regional Organizations, Civil Society, the Private Sector and NGOs**" will be particularly mindful of these issues. This is especially crucial when it comes to the implementation of the SDGs, the success of which will depend on an efficient distribution of responsibilities between member states, regional organizations and international financial institutions.

The exercise will not be too New York-centric – indeed the global outreach is a testament to this goal – though the Chair reiterated his belief in the need to reassert the UN's position as the core of the multilateral system given its important history, core values, convening power and the ever-relevant raison d'etre of its founders.

Specific recommendations:

1. Engage the UN Secretariat more actively in the process, with a particular emphasis on administrative processes and budgeting vis-à-vis the sixteen issue areas.
2. Schedule retreats accordingly to complement ongoing multilateral processes/reports and in accordance of their priority of the issue on the global peace and security agenda.
3. Ensure that the discussion on Issue Area 15 "The Relationship between the UN and Regional Organizations, Civil Society, the Private Sector and NGOs" is given due attention, potentially through extending the duration of the retreat.
4. Ensure that the issue of climate change is given adequate attention beyond its role within the post-2015 sustainable development agenda.
5. Enhance the ICM's outreach capacity by communicating outputs regularly in traditional and digital media outlets.
6. Reorient the ICM Final Report's recommendations vis-a-vis existing UN processes and reports towards the notion of "getting implementation right."