



Foreign Ministers, Ambassadors, Permanent Representatives, members of the Diplomatic Core, members of the International Press Core, members of the International Peace Institute, ladies and gentlemen,

I am honored to have been asked by the International Peace Institute to Chair this Independent Commission on Multilateralism.

There is a sense across the international community today that our world is fraying at the edges.

This is not just the view of foreign policy elites here in New York.

It's also the emerging view of much of the wider international community.

And indeed large parts of the human family itself.

It's as if the world is being pulled in two directions at the same time.

On the one hand, the forces of globalization which, over many decades now, have drawn our world closer and closer together.

On the other hand, the forces of ethno-nationalism and religious extremism working in the opposite direction, seeking to tear our world apart by seeking to relive ancient hostilities in our modern time.

While at the same time the great and enduring tasks of poverty eradication, opportunity for all and a sustainable planet continue to stare us all in the face.

It is easy to criticize the current international system for its failures.

Indeed, the critics of the United Nations itself are legion.

It always reminds me of Churchill's great observation about democracy: the worst system of government, apart from all the others.

So too with the United Nations: the worst system of international government, apart from all the others.

Therefore the challenge for all humankind is not to believe that there is some utopian system that our collective intelligence has yet to discover.

Rather it's to take our existing system and make it fit the purposes of our age.

I salute those who met in San Francisco nearly 70 years ago.

I salute those who crafted the UN Charter.

I salute those who, over the decades, have built this great institution – these United Nations – into the parliament of humankind.

I salute the efforts of our Secretary General to continue the reform of the system.

I salute those who have struggled to place the Millennium Development Goals at the center of our global agenda, and who, despite the setbacks, now present us with the possibility of sustainable development goals for the future.

Just as I salute those who continue to work at the great challenge of global sustainability and climate change – just as we have heard the voices of the world on the streets of this city in the last few days.

Women and men of good will are as we speak struggling and straining across the global and regional institutions of the world in constant pursuit of our common mission – the betterment of all human kind and the planet itself.

So to echo the words of the president of the IPI, the purpose of this independent commission on multilateralism is not to call into question the system itself. It is more to point the finger at where problems across the system undoubtedly exist.

It is to simply take a fresh look at how the system could be improved for the future to ensure that its functions and its structure are best suited to the purposes of our time.

Our starting point therefore is to accept as our foundation the post-2015 agenda on which Member States are currently deliberating.

The Independent Commission intends to consult comprehensively with Member States, with their Permanent Representatives here in New York, but also in Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi, as well as the UN Secretariat itself.

In these institutions lies so much accumulated wisdom from the past, as well as the real dilemmas faced by the practitioners of the multilateral system as they seek to bring about real solutions to complex problems requiring multiple participation.

The Independent Commission will also seek submissions from global civil society – to refresh our minds, and to encounter new voices from among the peoples of the world and their deep aspirations for a better future for their families, their communities, and their countries.

For these reasons, the Commission will not be in the business of reinventing the wheel.

There are enough wheels rolling around out there already.

But we will be asking questions and seeking answers on whether our collective efforts and energies are being harnessed in the right direction.

We do not wish to inflate expectations concerning this International Commission on Multilateralism.

We simply see it as offering our collective thoughts, to those of many other individuals and institutions, who believe passionately, as I have always done, in the inherent value and virtue of this institution we call the United Nations.

I thank the Governments of Norway and Canada for their support.

I thank the IPI for the trust they have placed in me for this task.

I thank his Excellency Hardeep Puri – Former Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations – who will act as Secretary General to this Independent Commission.

And we look forward soon to issuing our detailed terms of reference and work program to the international community so this process of consultation and deliberation can begin.

I thank you.

- *Kevin Rudd, Former Prime Minister of Australia and Chair of the Independent Commission on Multilateralism (ICM)*