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**Global Climate Governance, Short-Termism, and  
the Vulnerability of Future Generations**

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*Ethics & International Affairs*

**Abstract**

Many societies are now having to live with the impacts of climate change and are confronted with heatwaves, wildfires, droughts, and rising sea-levels. Without radical action, future generations will inherit an even more degraded planet. This raises the question: How can political institutions be reformed to promote justice to future generations and to leave them an ecologically sustainable world? In this paper I address a particular version of this question, namely: How can supra-state institutions and transnational political processes be transformed to realize climate justice for future generations? The paper seeks to make two contributions. First, it considers what criteria should guide the evaluation of proposals for reform. It proposes four criteria, analyzing how they should be interpreted and applied. Second, it considers a raft of different proposals, commenting on their strengths and weaknesses. It presents ten proposals in all (including, among others, a high commissioner for future generations, a special envoy for future generations, a UN agency mandated to protect future generations, instituting representatives for the future in all key UN bodies, greater youth participation, and the further development of a global citizens assembly). In short, my aim is to outline some of the options available and to defend a normative framework that we can use to evaluate them.

**Keywords:** Short-termism, intergenerational justice, future generations, climate justice, citizens assembly

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Many people throughout the world—especially the poor and vulnerable—are experiencing the effects of climate change. Unless the governments of high emitting countries implement radical mitigation policies the situation will continue to deteriorate dramatically, and future generations will inherit an increasingly dangerous and degraded climate system. Governments are thus under a duty to effect a

just transition to a zero carbon economy and also to put in place the necessary adaptation policies to enable future societies to cope with the climate changes to which we are already committed. This requires political leaders to govern for the long-term.

As for their part, future generations are in a position of considerable vulnerability. They will have to live with the climate system the current generation bequeaths to them. Their situation is aptly described by Hans Jonas in *The Imperative of Responsibility*. Jonas writes that:

“only *present* interests make themselves heard and felt and enforce their consideration. It is to them that public agencies are accountable, and this is the way in which concretely the respecting of rights comes about (as distinct from their abstract acknowledgment). But the *future* is not represented, it is not a force that can throw its weight into the scales. The nonexistent has no lobby, and the unborn are powerless. Thus accountability to them has no political reality behind it in present decision-making, and when they can make their complaint, then we, the culprits, will no longer be there.”<sup>1</sup>

This, then, raises the question of how political institutions can be designed to ensure that future generations can enjoy the standard of living to which they are entitled. There is now a burgeoning literature on how domestic political institutions can be reformed to do this.<sup>2</sup> In addition, a number of countries have introduced reforms to their political systems to try to ensure that the interests of future people are given due protection. For example, Finland has a Committee for the Future and the Welsh government has recently created a Future Generations Commissioner.<sup>3</sup>

But what about supra-state institutions and international negotiations? Can global politics be reformed and designed to ensure that climate policies are enacted that give due protection to the interests of future generations? Is it possible to reform existing supra-state institutions or reconfigure the international framework for reaching decisions about climate change—such as the annual conferences of the United Nation Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)—in ways

that induce the decision-makers to reach agreements that honor responsibilities to future generations?<sup>4</sup>

The questions at the heart of this paper are increasingly being discussed. Indeed, they even feature in contemporary fiction. In 2020 the novelist Kim Stanley Robinson published a novel hypothesizing the creation of a United Nations body that is charged with averting a climate crisis and protecting the human rights of future generations. In Robinson's telling, this institution, dubbed the "Ministry for the Future," is set up at the 29<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC held in Bogotá.<sup>5</sup> Robinson's institutional innovation may seem farfetched to some. However, for several decades a number of different proposals for global institutional reform to better protect future generations have been advanced.

Some have been proposed or discussed by academics, coming from a variety of disciplines—including law, political theory, political science, international relations, and development economics.<sup>6</sup> Some have been advanced by NGOs, think tanks, and political campaigners.<sup>7</sup> And some have come from within the UN. For example, in his report entitled *Intergenerational Solidarity and the Needs of Future Generations* Ban Ki-moon explored several options for reform.<sup>8</sup> Most recently, in 2021, the current Secretary-General, António Guterres, published an ambitious and wide-ranging report, *Our Common Agenda*, that argued for a number of institutional reforms.<sup>9</sup>

There has, however, been little in the way of systematic analysis of the different options available. My aim in this short paper is to contribute to this process of systematic analysis. I do so by, first, identifying what I take to be the relevant criteria for evaluating any such proposal for institutional reform. Second, I draw together a list of the main proposals that have been advanced and their underlying reasoning. As I have noted above, reforms have been proposed by people from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds, but I am not aware of any discussion that collects them together in one article, describes them, and provides an account of their underlying rationales. I do not seek to provide a conclusive verdict on the various proposals. Rather, what I hope to do is provide answers

to the questions ‘What options are there?’ and ‘How should we evaluate them?’ (noting some of the proposals’ strengths and weaknesses as we proceed).<sup>10</sup>

Before we start two preliminary points should be made. First, the proposals that follow seek to ensure that current generations honor their responsibilities to future generations. I cannot defend an account of our climate-based duties to future generations here. I shall assume that, at the very least, current generations have duties:

- to do all that is reasonably possible to ensure that the global mean temperature does not increase by more than 1.5°C compared to pre-industrial times;<sup>11</sup>

and

- to do so on just terms (so, in ways that do not burden the disadvantaged and that enable them to develop).

These should be understood as one part of a broader set of responsibilities to current and future generations.

This takes us to the second point. The focus of this paper is on how to ensure in a fair and legitimate way that future generations do not inherit a seriously degraded climate system. That said, it is also important to protect future generations from other threats too. For this reason, many (but not all) of the proposals to be considered are concerned not just with climate change but with all the ways in which we can affect future generations for good and ill. Forward-looking global governance arrangements are required, among other things, to ensure that current generations preserve biodiversity; to minimize the threat of antimicrobial resistance and global pandemics and to put in place adequate preparations for both; to foster and regulate technological innovations so that they contribute to human well-being and do not undermine democracy, liberty, privacy, and social justice; and to leave a world free from poverty, discrimination, and invidious inequalities and divisions. Given the importance of all these, it is important, when evaluating proposals, to consider not just whether they will help bequeath future generations a healthy climate system, but also whether they promote intergenerational justice more generally.

## I: Criteria

How should we evaluate such proposals?<sup>12</sup>

### Criterion 1. Effectiveness

One obvious criterion for evaluating any proposal is its effectiveness. Judgments of effectiveness are, however, not straightforward.

First, we need to be clear on how best to interpret the idea of effectiveness. It can be interpreted in three ways:

Effectiveness<sub>1</sub> - Absolute Success: Does proposal P eradicate the problem?

Effectiveness<sub>2</sub> - Comparative Success: Does proposal P do a better job of addressing the problem than other proposals?

Effectiveness<sub>3</sub> - Absolute Improvement: How much of a positive difference does proposal P make?

It is important to distinguish between these because each is relevant for some questions but not for others. For example, suppose that a proposal will not solve the problem (that is, it fails to meet effectiveness<sub>1</sub>). Should we not adopt it for this reason? No, that would be a mistake. Effectiveness<sub>3</sub> is a more relevant consideration here. For suppose that although it does not fully resolve the problem it makes an improvement. If the improvement is significant enough then (depending on how well it performs on the other criteria) it may be worth implementing. A proposal may be good (as defined by effectiveness<sub>3</sub>) without perfectly resolving the problem. This is the main reason I emphasize the different kinds of effectiveness.

A further reason for doing so is that in certain circumstances the relevant criterion will be effectiveness<sub>2</sub>. Suppose we must choose between several options. Then we will want to know which

one (or ones) does a better job of addressing the problem than other proposals. What we need here is effectiveness<sub>2</sub>.

Does this mean that effectiveness<sub>1</sub> is irrelevant? No. Suppose now that we implement various proposals and that they make a positive difference. Should we implement yet more? To answer that we need to know whether the existing proposals together eradicate the problem. In other words, our concern is whether they jointly achieve effectiveness<sub>1</sub>. If they do not, more needs to be done.

A second point: while the conceptual distinctions are important, just as important, if not more so, is the fact that we lack much in the way of empirical evidence. One important feature of all the proposals is that none of them have been tried before. This should not lead us to reject them, but it means that any judgements about effectiveness should be expressed with caution and humility.

It also means that we need other means to identify effectiveness. In the absence of data (and even with data) we should require a justification for a proposal (a) to be based on an accurate understanding of what causes the problem it is seeking to tackle—in this case the problem is the failure to protect future generations. It should also (b) specify the causal mechanism by which the proposal would overcome that problem. Finally, (c) the causal mechanism should rest on realistic assumptions about human behavior and dispositions and how institutions work—not wishful thinking.

Assessments of effectiveness might also draw on our understanding of how different proposals that have been implemented in the past have fared. We can, for example, learn from how well a similar but different innovation that has been tried at the global level performed (“learning from global analogies”), or we might seek to draw lessons from what has been adopted within states (“learning from the domestic level”). Of course, we need to be extremely cautious in drawing inferences in these cases, and the disanalogies may be so great that little can be learned.

## **Criterion 2. Political Legitimacy**

A second criterion is political legitimacy. We should assess proposals in terms of whether they depart from or realize values like democratic self-government. For example: Do they grant political power to unelected (and unaccountable) bodies? Are they representative of the people affected? Do they

reflect the diversity of views?<sup>13</sup> This criterion has a deontological or non-consequentialist dimension to it: Do the arrangements honor values like democracy? But it also has a consequentialist dimension. We might ask whether a proposal is likely to lead in the future to a greater realization of values like democracy or a reduction.

### **Criterion 3. Distributive Justice and Rights**

Third, proposals should be judged in terms of whether they might (or are likely to) further justice for contemporaries (as well as future generations) or whether they might (or are likely to) impose unjust burdens on some current generations.

### **Criterion 4. Attainability**

A fourth relevant consideration concerns the prospects of implementing any such proposal. This criterion is drawn from Allen Buchanan's account of "accessibility" and in particular its requirement that "there is a practicable route from where we are now to at least a reasonable approximation of the state of affairs that satisfies its principles".<sup>14</sup> This consideration is especially relevant if campaigning for a proposal is costly. Nonetheless, this criterion needs to be handled carefully. It would be rash, for example, to think that if a proposal seems utopian there can be no reason to campaign for it. In the first place, peoples' understanding of what is politically attainable is often flawed. This can be in part because of the unpredictable and capricious nature of political life; but also because those who benefit from the current state of affairs have an incentive and often the ability to manipulate perceptions of what is politically attainable and entrench the view that no change is possible. Second, campaigns for utopian projects can often expand people's political imagination and transform their understanding of what is politically possible, opening up a space for more radical options than would otherwise have been the case.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, research on social movements reveals that the pursuit of "radical" goals frequently strengthens the campaigns of more "moderate" movements—producing what Herbert Haines termed the "positive radical flank effect", and creating more change than would otherwise have been possible.<sup>16</sup>



## II: Reforming Global Governance Institutions

With these in mind let us now consider what institutional remedies might be adopted.

One proposal that has been advanced in different guises for several decades is that there should be a UN guardian, of some kind, for future generations. A pioneering case for such an institution was made by the Maltese delegation to the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.<sup>17</sup> They made a clear and cogent argument and so it is worth setting out their reasoning. The starting point of their proposal is that:

“Future generations are inherently disadvantaged with respect to present generations in three important ways: (a) they are "downstream" in time from us and thus subject to the long-term consequences of our actions; (b) they are "mute", having no representatives among present generations and so their interests are often neglected in present socio-economic and political planning; and (c) they cannot plea or bargain for reciprocal treatment since they have no voice and nothing they do will affect us.”<sup>18</sup>

They then add that, given this, it is important to have an agency charged with acting in the interests of future generations.<sup>19</sup> As they note, we do this for others who are unable to protect their own interests (such as children or those with severe cognitive disabilities). The reasoning that we apply in these cases—namely that they lack the capacity to campaign for and protect their own interests—applies, they argue, to this case too.<sup>20</sup>

On this basis they conclude that there should be a UN “guardian” for future generations that is “entitled to appear before institutions whose decisions could significantly affect the future of the species to argue the case on behalf of future generations, hence bringing out the long-term implications of proposed action and presenting alternatives.”<sup>21</sup>

But what kind of guardian should there be?

§1. One answer has been that

Proposal 1: The UN should create a UN High Commissioner for Future Generations.

For example, several political campaigners argued for this in 2012 before the Rio+20 Conference.<sup>22</sup> As some noted, the UN already has a High Commissioner for Refugees and a High Commissioner for Human Rights, and so there are models that can be built on.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, as I indicated above, evidence of how these have performed might provide some insight into how effective such an actor might be.

§2. A different proposal has recently been made by António Guterres. In *Our Common Agenda* he argued in favor of

Proposal 2: The creation of a Special Envoy for Future Generations, who would be charged with campaigning for further institutional reforms.<sup>24</sup>

Again, this builds on and extends an existing framework. A special envoy may have less influence than a high commissioner, but it is perhaps more politically feasible (criterion 4) since a secretary-general can create a special envoy for a given policy area so long as the Security Council has authorized the specified focus, but high commissioners need to be established by the UN General Assembly.<sup>25</sup>

§3. To the above, we ought to add a variation put forward by the Mary Robinson Foundation-Climate Justice. It argued that it was important to have an organization charged with defending future generations. However, it expressed concern about appointing a single individual to perform this role. It called instead for

Proposal 3: A “Commission for Future Generations”.<sup>26</sup>

It did so for several closely related points.<sup>27</sup> First, it argued, a commission could, and should, include members from poor as well as affluent countries and thereby ensure that justice to future generations does not impose unjust burdens on the world’s most marginalized and poor now (in line with criterion 3).

Second, a commission is a more politically realistic goal than a high commissioner (in line with criterion 4). Some countries had resisted the creation of a UN High Commissioner for Future Generations out of a fear that it may not be sufficiently attuned to the difficult circumstances some countries are currently in.

A third point that is hinted at, but which is very important and worth emphasizing, is that a commission is better equipped to reflect the cultural diversity in the world. There are competing visions of the future and it is important to have a mechanism that adequately reflects this (in line with criterion 2).

§4. These, however, are not the only options. In a recent article, Frances Stewart made several suggestions. In addition to endorsing the idea of a High Commissioner for Future Generations,<sup>28</sup> she mentions four other possibilities. These include:

Proposal 4: A UN agency (“UNIFGEN”) designated to campaign for and to advance the interests of future generations.

Stewart argues that it could perform a role similar to UNICEF.<sup>29</sup> Stewart also suggests three further reforms:

Proposal 5: Reforming the membership of the UN’s Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) so that member states send a representative for future generations as well as one for current generations.

Proposal 6: Reforming all UN “specialised agencies” (such as the WHO, UNEP, and so on) so that they each have a unit focused on future generations.

Proposal 7: The Security Council should include a “representative” for future people.<sup>30</sup>

One important feature of these is that they ‘mainstream’ a concern for the future, building it into the day-to-day operations of all UN agencies.

This is also an appropriate place to mention another proposal mooted by Guterres in *Our Common Agenda*:

Proposal 8: Re-configuring the UN Trusteeship Council and reconceiving of its role as that of advocating for future generations.<sup>31</sup>

### **III: More Radical Initiatives, More Inclusive Processes**

At this point someone might argue that these innovations, while potentially important, are focused exclusively on empowering high-level institutions—ones in which it is highly likely that the figures appointed to hold positions of authority will be senior figures drawn from political and legal élites. Given this, and bearing in mind criterion 2, there is a case for adopting a more radical and inclusive approach, one that draws more widely and includes voices normally excluded from political life. Doing so would better realize the values of political inclusion and political legitimacy (criterion 2).

§1. With this in mind it is worth considering youth representation. Under the aegis of YOUNGO, the UN negotiations on climate change include youth representatives.<sup>32</sup> Someone might argue that a moderate step towards reforming the process would be:

Proposal 9: Youth associations should have a much more meaningful role in the international negotiations on climate change policy.

Interestingly, Guterres's *Our Common Agenda* proposes the strengthening of youth involvement. He calls for creating “a dedicated United Nations Youth Office in the Secretariat,” and reports that the “Envoy on Youth will prepare recommendations for more meaningful, diverse and effective youth engagement in United Nations deliberative and decision-making processes.”<sup>33</sup>

When considering Proposal 9 it is worth distinguishing two versions. One holds that there should be greater inclusion of ordinary people across the world, including young people—a group so often neglected by politicians. A second holds that there is special reason to include younger generations and the same principles of inclusion should not be extended to other groups.

The first version seems very plausible to me and will be discussed below. But the second one is harder to justify. Why should the young alone receive privileged treatment? One answer might be that they are more vulnerable to climate change than current generations. However, if “vulnerability” is the relevant criterion, then some contemporary citizens of the world are just as vulnerable (if not more so) than some younger generations from some countries. Inclusion on the basis of vulnerability would not single out ‘*all* young people and *only* those people.’ Interestingly, an ethnographic study of the youth delegation from the U.K. found that many participants did not emphasize future generations and put their focus on the plight of those currently vulnerable—suggesting that they recognized precisely this point.<sup>34</sup>

Given this, why not consider ways of including ordinary people more generally? Several democratic theorists have advanced a much more radical proposal that seeks to do exactly this. They endorse:

Proposal 10: A Global Citizens Assembly.

For example, John Dryzek, André Bächtiger, and Karolina Milewicz have argued that there should be a “Deliberative Global Citizens’ Assembly” comprised of randomly selected individuals drawn from all over the world and with representation designed to be representative and proportionate to population size.<sup>35</sup> Such a body could (and should) be designed to include young people (as per Proposal 9) but it goes beyond this and could also include people from *all* groups across the world.

Advocates for this approach (and for the use of citizen assemblies more generally) make a number of points in their defense.

§1. First Dryzek et al. argue that the assemblies tend to adopt policies that give due protection to future generations.<sup>36</sup> This, it is argued, arises, in part, because the members of these assemblies (unlike politicians) are not constrained by the need to adopt an electorally popular position and are not dependent on powerful private interests (such as companies) for funding,<sup>37</sup> and in part because deliberation has a tendency to produce fairer outcomes.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, its defenders argue that citizens assemblies have been tried throughout the world. This means that there is considerable experience to draw on (so there may be learning from the domestic level).<sup>39</sup>

Of course, this does not in itself show that the assemblies would result in more just climate policy toward future (and current) generations (criterion 1). That depends on what role they play. There are several possibilities. In a later book, Dryzek and his coauthors suggest that such a body could be authorized to make international law or to have veto rights over decisions by the General Assembly.<sup>40</sup> The prospects of these seem remote. However, there are other possibilities. For example, we could expand Proposal 10 to say that:

Proposal 10a: Submission: The Global Citizens Assembly can issue recommendations that it presents to the COP negotiations.

These recommendations could serve as a set of benchmarks which people throughout the world could use—and are likely to use—to compare and evaluate the decisions reached in COP negotiations.

Or one might propose:

Proposal 10b: Evaluation: The Global Citizens Assembly can participate in the “global stocktake” created by the Paris Agreement (Article 14). In particular, it could evaluate the steps taken by different countries (such as their “nationally determined contributions”) with reference to the Assembly’s normative framework.<sup>41</sup>

Or

Proposal 10c: Public Justification: COP negotiators are required to present their proposals at a public forum at which members of the Global Citizens Assembly are entitled to ask questions on the proposed text and call on negotiators to publicly justify their decisions.<sup>42</sup>

All of these might put some pressure on parties to the UNFCCC to agree to, and to comply with, principles of climate justice to future generations (criterion 1). We might further suggest that a Global Citizens Assembly could have similar powers to those affirmed in Proposals 10a,b,c in relation to other global organizations that affect the planet's sustainability (such as the World Bank, IMF, and WTO).

§2. Second, advocates for this kind of approach argue that citizen assemblies are a politically legitimate form of political participation (criterion 2). First, they are impartial, choosing people randomly (with adjustments made to ensure that they are representative). Second, and following on from this, they can represent the diversity of people's views right across the world.<sup>43</sup>

§3. Third, their decisions are likely to respect rights and social justice. Given the diverse range of people included they have an incentive to agree to principles that respect people's rights and also take into account people's material needs (criterion 3).<sup>44</sup>

This proposal will seem utopian to many (criterion 4). Whether it is depends partly on what kinds of roles and powers would be attributed to it, and to what extent it is expected that institutions like the UNFCCC will formally engage with it. However, not all versions are utopian. A version of this proposal—called the “Global Citizens Assembly”—was created in 2021 in advance of COP26 in Glasgow.<sup>45</sup> This initiative has two aspects.<sup>46</sup> First, the organizers set up a “Core Assembly” comprised of 100 randomly selected people from across the world. Second, the organizers are seeking to create a network of “Community Assemblies”—citizens assemblies set up all around the world. The members of the Core Assembly agreed on a Declaration that was issued at the start of the COP 26 negotiations.<sup>47</sup> The aim is for the Core Assembly and Community Assemblies to issue a report with their recommendations.<sup>48</sup> This is a bold and innovative plan that may well be able to put some pressure on

international negotiators to make more ambitious climate commitments. It would be rash, however, to speculate further on how well it will operate and what difference, if any, it will make on global negotiations. It does, however, suggest that we should not rush to assume that any such venture is infeasible.

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It is time to conclude. What I hope to have done in this short paper is to give a sense of some of the different ways in which one might reform global politics to better realize climate justice to future generations,<sup>49</sup> to set out the criteria we might employ to evaluate them, and to note some of the strengths and weaknesses of various proposals. I will close with two observations.

§1. First, it is striking that although there is considerable variation, many proposals draw inspiration from existing global initiatives (high commissioners, special envoys, dedicated agencies like UNICEF) or seek to redeploy existing (if dormant) institutions (the Trusteeship Council). As such they contrast with the last proposal, the Global Citizens Assembly, which takes its inspiration from what has been tried within societies across the world and which introduces a novel, more radical way of doing global politics.

§2. My second point is this: My focus in this paper has been on global climate governance arrangements. It is important however to put these in context. Some may reason that since climate change is a global phenomenon it follows that the key institutional fora for resolving them must be global institutions. As a number of political scientists have persuasively argued, however, this rests on a mistaken understanding of political conflicts over climate change. Michaël Aklin and Matto Mildemberger, for example, persuasively challenge the picture of climate change as a global “collective action problem”, and convincingly argue that it is rather a “distributive” conflict within states between those who benefit from carbon-based economic systems and those who challenge them.<sup>50</sup> Jeff Colgan, Jessica Green and Thomas Hale similarly put the emphasis on the distributive conflicts within states between those with what they term “climate-forcing assets” (those who benefit from assets that cause



climate change) and those with what they term “climate-vulnerable assets” (those with interests jeopardized by climate change), and they criticize the emphasis on climate change as a global collective action problem.<sup>51</sup> This does not mean that global governance arrangements do not matter. However, it does mean that we should not exaggerate their role, and that attempts to protect future generations should not overlook the central role of the state and the need to reform it to better protect future generations.<sup>52</sup>

**Disclosure: Please see footnote 26. I wrote a commissioned paper for Mary Robinson Foundation Climate Justice and one of the recommendations was a ‘Commission for Future Generations’. It has advocated this.**

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), translated by Hans Jonas with the Collaboration of David Herr, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> See Iñigo González-Ricoy and Axel Gosseries (eds.), *Institutions for Future Generations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Jonathan Boston, *Governing for the Future: Designing Democratic Institutions for a Better Tomorrow* (Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing, 2017); and Graham Smith, *Can Democracy Safeguard the Future?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2021). For my own contribution see Simon Caney, “Political Institutions for the Future: A Five-fold Proposal,” in González-Ricoy and Gosseries, eds., *Institutions for Future Generations*, pp. 135-155.

<sup>3</sup> See, respectively, <https://www.eduskunta.fi/EN/valiokunnat/tulevaisuusvaliokunta/Pages/default.aspx> and [https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2015/2/pdfs/anaw\\_20150002\\_en.pdf](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2015/2/pdfs/anaw_20150002_en.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> One important actor that I cannot include here for reasons of space is the European Union.

<sup>5</sup> Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Ministry for the Future* (London: Orbit, 2020), especially ch. 3.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the contributions made by the legal scholar Edith Brown Weiss, *In Fairness to Future Generations: International Law, Common Patrimony, and Intergenerational Equity* (Irvington-on-Hudson, New York: Transnational Publishers Inc., 1989), especially ch. V. See also work by the development economist Frances Stewart, “The Double Democratic Deficit: Global Governance and Future Generations,” in Lori Keleher and Stacy J. Kosko, eds., *Agency and Democracy in Development Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 325-349; and Stewart “Overcoming Short-Termism: Incorporating Future Generations into Current Decision-Making,” *Irish Studies in International Affairs* vol.31 (2020), pp. 1-17. For a contribution from a political theorist, a political scientist, and an international relations scholar see John S. Dryzek, André Bächtiger, and Karolina Milewicz, “Toward a Deliberative Global Citizens’ Assembly,” *Global Policy* vol.2 no.1 (2011), pp. 33-42.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Halina Ward, Peter Roderick, and Catherine Pearce, *The Mandate of a UN High Commissioner for Future Generations* (Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development & World Future Council: 14<sup>th</sup> February 2012) available at

<https://www.fdsd.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/UN-High-Commissioner-for-FGs-mandate.pdf>; Halina Ward, *Committing to the Future We Want: A High Commissioner for Future Generations at Rio+20* (Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development & World Future Council, Discussion Paper, March 2012) available at:

<http://www.fdsd.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Committing-to-the-future-we-want-main-report.pdf>; Marcos Orellana, Catherine Pearce, and Yulia Genin, *The High Commissioner for Future Generations: The Future We Want* (Center for International Environmental Law & World Future Council, 4<sup>th</sup> June 2012) available at: [https://www.worldfuturecouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/CIEL\\_WFC\\_High\\_Commissioner\\_for\\_Future\\_Generations.pdf](https://www.worldfuturecouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/CIEL_WFC_High_Commissioner_for_Future_Generations.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> See United Nations Secretary-General “Intergenerational Solidarity and the Needs of Future Generations: Report of the Secretary-General,” Sixty-Eighth Session of United Nations General Assembly, 5 August 2013. See especially sections III and IV. The report is available online at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2006future.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> See United Nations Secretary-General *Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary-General* (New York: United Nations, 2021). See especially ch. III. This is available online at:

[https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common\\_Agenda\\_Report\\_English.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> My concerns here are thus distinct from those explored by Stephen Gardiner in “A Call for a Global Constitutional Convention Focused on Future Generations,” *Ethics & International Affairs* vol.28 no.3 (2014), pp. 299-315. His are more procedural in character and explore the question ‘by what process should global institutional reform come about?’.

<sup>11</sup> This formulation is modelled on the commitment affirmed in Article 2.1(a) of the Paris Agreement (and reiterated in Article 15 of the Glasgow Climate Pact) but is more ambitious, putting greater emphasis on the importance of the 1.5°C target. The Paris Agreement is available here: [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english\\_paris\\_agreement.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf). The Glasgow Climate Pact is available here: [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cop26\\_auv\\_2f\\_cover\\_decision.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cop26_auv_2f_cover_decision.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> The following draws on, but revises, my earlier account in Caney “Political Institutions for the Future: A Five-fold Package,” pp. 140-142.

<sup>13</sup> I owe this point to conversations with Graham Smith. See also his *Can Democracy Safeguard the Future?*, pp. 56-57 and p. 117.

<sup>14</sup> Buchanan *Justice, Legitimacy, and Self-Determination: Moral Foundations for International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 61.

<sup>15</sup> See Leszek Kołakowski ‘The Concept of the Left’ in *Toward a Marxist Humanism: Essays on the Left Today* (New York: Grove Press, 1968) translated from the Polish by Jane Zielonko Peel, pp. 70-72, and Max Weber ‘The Profession and Vocation of Politics’ in *Weber: Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994 [1919]) edited by Peter Lassman and Ronald Speirs, p. 369.

<sup>16</sup> See Herbert H. Haines “Black Radicalization and the Funding of Civil Rights: 1957-1970,” *Social Problems* vol.32 no.1 (1984), pp. 31-43 (esp. p.32). See also Jo Freeman, *The Politics of Women's Liberation: A Case Study of An Emerging Social Movement and its Relation to the Policy Process* (New York: David McKay Company, 1975), p. 236, and Todd Schifeling and Andrew J. Hoffman “Bill McKibben’s Influence on U.S. Climate Change Discourse: Shifting Field-Level Debates through Radical Flank Effects,” *Organization & Environment* vol.32 no.3 (2019), pp. 213-233.

<sup>17</sup> See “Principles on General Rights and Obligations, Addendum”, Proposal and comments submitted by the delegation of Malta to Working Group III of the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Fourth Session, New York, 2 March - 3 April 1992, Item 3 of the Provisional Agenda, A/CONF.151/PC/WG.III/L.8/Rev.1/Add.2, 21 February 1992. (Hereafter “Proposal and comments submitted by the delegation of Malta.”) (This is available here:

<http://193.166.3.2/pub/doc/world/UnitedNations/EnvironConf/PreConfDocs/wg3l8add02>.

<sup>18</sup> “Proposal and comments submitted by the delegation of Malta,” paragraph 6. See also paragraph 5.

<sup>19</sup> “Proposal and comments submitted by the delegation of Malta,” paragraph 9.

<sup>20</sup> “Proposal and comments submitted by the delegation of Malta,” paragraphs 10 and 11.

<sup>21</sup> “Proposal and comments submitted by the delegation of Malta,” paragraph 12. See also paragraphs 13, 15, 16, and 17.

<sup>22</sup> See the sources cited in footnote 7.

<sup>23</sup> See Ward *Committing to the Future We Want*, especially pp. 8-9.

<sup>24</sup> United Nations Secretary-General *Our Common Agenda*, Ch. III, §58, p. 45 & Ch. V, §115, p. 73.

<sup>25</sup> My understanding of the creation and appointment of envoys comes from <https://ask.un.org/faq/85706>.

<sup>26</sup> See Mary Robinson Foundation Climate Justice *A Case for Guardians for Future Generations* (Position Paper: Second Edition – February 2017), p. 5 (available at:

<https://www.mrfcj.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Position-Paper-The-Case-for-Guardians-for-Future-Generations-Mary-Robinson-Foundation-Climate-Justice-Feb-2017.pdf>). For an earlier defence of a Commission see Weiss *In Fairness to Future Generations*, pp. 148-150. Disclosure: I wrote a commissioned paper for the Mary Robinson Foundation Climate Justice and this was one of the recommendations.

<sup>27</sup> For all three see Mary Robinson Foundation Climate Justice *A Case for Guardians for Future Generations*, p.5; and *Global Guardians: A Voice for Future Generations* (Position Paper: Third Edition – April 2017) (available at:

<https://www.mrfcj.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Global-Guardians-A-Voice-for-Future-Generations-April-2017.pdf>), p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Stewart, “Overcoming Short-Termism,” p. 15.

<sup>29</sup> Stewart “The Double Democratic Deficit,” p.343 and “Overcoming Short-Termism,” p. 15.

<sup>30</sup> For these three proposals see Stewart “Overcoming Short-Termism”, p. 15.

<sup>31</sup> United Nations Secretary-General *Our Common Agenda*, Summary (pp. 4 and 7), Ch. III, §58, p. 45, and Ch. IV, §102, p. 66.

<sup>32</sup> See <http://www.youngo.uno>.

<sup>33</sup> United Nations Secretary-General, *Our Common Agenda*, Ch. III, §47, p. 40. See, more generally, Ch. III, §§43-51, pp. 39-43.

<sup>34</sup> Harriet Thew, Lucie Middlemiss, and Jouni Paavola, “‘Youth is not a Political Position’: Exploring Justice Claims-Making in the UN Climate Change Negotiations,” *Global Environmental Change* vol.61 (2020): 102036 (pp. 1-10).

<sup>35</sup> Dryzek, Bächtiger, and Milewicz, “Toward a Deliberative Global Citizens’ Assembly”.

<sup>36</sup> Dryzek et al., “Toward a Deliberative Global Citizens’ Assembly”, p. 38.

<sup>37</sup> Smith, *Can Democracy Safeguard the Future*, pp. 97 and 99.

<sup>38</sup> John S. Dryzek, Quinlan Bowman, Jonathan Kuyper, Jonathan Pickering, Jensen Sass, and Hayley Stevenson, *Deliberative Global Governance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 10-12. See also Smith, *Can Democracy Safeguard the Future?*, pp. 89-93.

<sup>39</sup> On the widespread use of citizen assemblies see Smith’s discussion in *Can Democracy Safeguard the Future?* of assemblies in Denmark, Canada, Australia, the US and the UK (pp. 94-96), Ireland, Spain and Poland (pp. 102-104) and Brazil (pp. 107-108). See also Dryzek et al., “Toward a Deliberative Global Citizens’ Assembly”, p. 36. See Dryzek et al., *Deliberative Global Governance* throughout. For the point that we can also learn from earlier citizen assemblies on how to improve them and get the best out of them see Dryzek et al., “Toward a Deliberative Global Citizens’ Assembly”, pp. 36-37.

<sup>40</sup> Dryzek et al., *Deliberative Global Governance*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>41</sup> [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english\\_paris\\_agreement.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> For the concept of ‘public justification’ see John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001) edited by Erin Kelly, pp. 26-29. For its role in global governance see Simon Caney “Cosmopolitan Justice and Institutional Design: An Egalitarian Liberal Conception of Global Governance,” *Social Theory and Practice* vol.32 no.4 (2006), p. 750.

<sup>43</sup> On the legitimacy of the procedure see Dryzek et al., “Toward a Deliberative Global Citizens’ Assembly”, pp.36 and 39; Dryzek et al., *Deliberative Global Governance* pp. 7-9; and Smith *Can Democracy Safeguard the Future?* pp. 96-97.

<sup>44</sup> For relevant discussion see Smith, *Can Democracy Safeguard the Future?*, pp. 98-99.

<sup>45</sup> <https://globalassembly.org>.

<sup>46</sup> <https://globalassembly.org/how-it-works>.

<sup>47</sup> <https://globalassembly.org/declaration>.

<sup>48</sup> <https://globalassembly.org/community-assemblies>.

<sup>49</sup> I stress “some” because space has precluded including other ideas such as Guterres’s proposals for a “Futures Laboratory” and a “Declaration on Future Generations” (*Our Common Agenda* Ch. III, §56, p. 45 & Ch. III, §59 p. 45). See also the many suggestions in Hayley Stevenson and John S. Dryzek, *Democratizing Global Climate Governance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), ch. 8; Dryzek et al., *Deliberative Global Governance*, chs. 3 and 4; and John S. Dryzek and Ana Tanasoca, *Democratizing Global Justice: Deliberating Global Goals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), ch. 7.

<sup>50</sup> Michaël Aklin and Matto Mildemberger “Prisoners of the Wrong Dilemma: Why Distributive Conflict, Not Collective Action, Characterizes the Politics of Climate Change,” *Global Environmental Politics* vol.20 no.4 (2020), esp pp. 5 & 9-11 but also p. 11ff (on why it is a distributive problem) & esp pp. 6-9 & 11-23 (on the limitations of seeing climate change as a global collective action problem).

<sup>51</sup> For the concepts of “climate-forcing assets” and “climate-vulnerable assets” see Jeff D. Colgan, Jessica F. Green, Thomas N. Hale “Asset Revaluation and the Existential Politics of Climate Change,” *International Organization* vol.75 Special Issue 2 ‘Challenges to the Liberal International Order: International Organization at 75’ (2021), p. 587. See also esp pp. 586-587 & 589 (on why it is misleading to see climate change as a global collective action problem) and pp. 587, 589-592 & esp. 592-601 (for their own theory).

<sup>52</sup> On the latter see Simon Caney “Democratic Reform, Intergenerational Justice and the Challenges of the Long-Term,” *CUSP Essay Series on the Morality of Sustainable Prosperity*, no.11 (2019). This is available at: <https://www.cusp.ac.uk/themes/m/m1-11/>.