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for a sustainable future

Dear friends of multilateralism, sustainable development, human rights and democracy, 2025 will hardly be remembered as a pivotal year. Still, it was an eventful year. A bleak political scene and unstable geopolitical situation dominated the world.

Against this backdrop, global civil society organisations work indomitably to safeguard sustainable development, strengthen democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

What took place on December 10, 2025, could serve as a reminder of what we will be faced with this year, but also how we can better understand the complexity of all the things that we are working for. This article, written by Jan-Gustav Strandenaes, Senior Adviser and SF Board Member, is about three significant events that took place on the same day in 2025 in three different parts of the world. The events all contain messages of despair and resignation, but also of hope and optimism. As such, these events can also represent, in a way, the work carried out during 2025, but also the hope we have for 2026 and beyond.

With this, I would like to wish from all of us at the Stakeholder Forum to all of you a better new year than the one we sent to the archives of history and invite you to work together towards the world we all want to live in and leave to future generations.

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Trusting in Hope or Managing Disaster: UNEA 7, Human Rights and the Nobel Prizes

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On Wednesday, the 10th of December, in the last month of 2025, thousands of miles apart, three momentous events took place addressing a common goal: a better future for the world and its peoples. With outcomes dramatically different and ranging in content from substantiating hope in progress and in the future to managing disasters and deploring the state of the world, the conclusions would affect the future in substantive ways. That the events took place on the same day, is historically a coincidence. On that day, the Nobel prizes in Physics, Medicine, Chemistry, Economy and Literature were awarded in Stockholm, Sweden, the Nobel Peace prize in Oslo, Norway. On that day, the seventh Global Environment Outlook, the GEO report on the state of the world's environment was published in Nairobi, Kenya during the seventh UN Environment Assembly,

¹ Please note that the opinions expressed in the article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Stakeholder Forum.



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UNEA 7. On that day, administered by the UN Council for Human Rights, in Geneva, Switzerland, the peoples and governments of the world were asked to recognise and celebrate the Universal Human Rights Day.

Several interesting and highly different characteristics emanated from these three events, characteristics that coloured the events, affected their outcomes and those who participated. Eventually people all over the world would also be affected by these outcomes. And even though the three events were different they shared the same backgrounds, were aware of the same global political contexts, worked within the same reality and faced a common future.

Three opening speeches in three different places, reflected how dramatically different these events were: one anxiously outlined the predicaments of the planet's well-being, one pointed to the egregious and continued violations of human dignity and rights, and one celebrated people's creativity, new knowledge and ideas heralding a better future for humanity.

Professor Astrid Söderbergh Widding, Chair of the Board of the Nobel Foundation, opened the Nobel Ceremony in Stockholm by saying: "As we gather here in Stockholm for the festivities to celebrate this year's (Nobel) laureates, it is against a dark backdrop in the world at large. With its rapid, unpredictable, paradoxical and tangled developments, it may seem hard to inspire trust and confidence in the future."

Thousands of miles away, entering the dais of the plenary session at United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) 7 in Nairobi, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme, UNEP, Ms. Inger Anderson declared that "... this Assembly, (UNEA 7) must dig deep, because the world is in turbulent geopolitical waters, which adds stresses and strains to multilateral processes. I ask that we will ... be ambitious so that we can safeguard our collective future."

Sitting in New York at the UN Headquarters, Secretary General of the UN, Mr. António Guterres addressed the world by saying that: "Human rights — civil, political, economic, social and cultural — are inalienable, indivisible and interdependent. But recent years have brought a shrinking of civic space. We have grave violations that signal a flagrant disregard for rights, and a callous indifference to human suffering. Together, we have the power to confront these injustices: by protecting the institutions that make human rights a lived reality."

What set these three events apart, was how their themes were addressed and outcomes understood and expressed. But also, who participated. Politicians, civil society organisations and representatives from ministries populated the two UN events, researchers and scientists with their families as well as people working in arts and culture dominated the Nobel festivities. And what were common features were the outstanding knowledge and awareness of global affairs that all participants embodied. In an article I wrote in connection with the Summit of the Future, 2024, I made the following postulation that seems pertinent to repeat: "Without nature, there is no future. Without democracy there is no freedom. Without human rights, there is no justice. Without peace, there is no life." Let us now look at these four elements in the context of the three aforementioned



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events and begin with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights commemorated on December the 10th every year. What is the global rights-based situation like today?

The content of each event – the plight of human rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was agreed to and signed by UN member states on December the 10th, 1948. It was the first ever legal document protecting universal human rights and it is generally agreed to be the foundation of international human rights law. A couple of years later, in 1950, the UN General Assembly agreed that December the 10th would be known as the Human Rights Day and asked all member states of the UN – today they number 193 – to commemorate this day.

Justice and democracy are intrinsic elements of human rights; the one cannot thrive without the other. The global average democracy score, a survey taken by UNESCO and the Economist Intelligence Unit, fell to its lowest level in 2024 since the index began in 2006. The UNESCO 2022/2025 report on “World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development” sounded strongly the alarm on the worrying decline of press freedom around the world: data and original analysis confirms that 85 percent of the world’s population experienced a decline in press freedom in their country over the past five years.

The 2025 global report on the State of the World’s Human Rights from Amnesty International writes that: “In 2020, Amnesty International warned of authoritarian tendencies emerging across and within countries. We were right to be worried. In 2024, more authoritarian laws and practices were adopted. Attacks against political dissent intensified, including through mass arrests and enforced disappearances. More NGOs and more political parties were forcibly disbanded, suspended or targeted arbitrarily as extremist. There were disproportionate responses to civil disobedience and unprecedented criminalization of human rights defenders, climate activists, students and others expressing solidarity with Palestinians.”

Justice is another intrinsic element of Human Rights. The Pathfinder Group at the New York University, NYU, stated in their 2019 report that nearly 5 billion people – more than 60% of the global population - suffer from what they called the Justice Gap. More than 250 million live in extreme conditions of injustice, 1.5 billion people have justice problems they cannot resolve, and 450 million people are excluded from the opportunities the law provides. The Human Rights Watch states in its 2025 world report on the state of Human Rights that authoritarian governments are tightening their control over people. It writes: “Every voice in support of rights matters. Civil society organizations are more important than ever and can play a critical role in defending everyone’s rights, protecting minorities, and holding governments accountable, including by challenging populist narratives that frame rights as obstacles to progress. Many authoritarian governments have taken steps to silence and dismantle civil society organizations that speak out for human rights. Governments and leaders of multilateral institutions need to stand firm against efforts to erode



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independent checks on power – such as nongovernmental groups and the media – that are critical to protecting human rights.”

The Human Rights are in dire straits all over the world. And that is why the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, concluded his message to the world on December the 10th 2025 saying: “Our rights should never take second place to profit or power. Let us unite to protect them, for the dignity and freedom of all.”

The challenging state of the global environment

Thousands of miles away from the New York based UN headquarters, across the Atlantic and across Africa, in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, another UN chief, Ms. Inger Anderson, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme - UNEP, was busy with the seventh UN Environment Assembly (UNEA). The Assembly was not going well. As has presently become the fate of all intergovernmental multilateral institutions, UNEP, which also serves as the Secretariat to the UNEA, has also been struggling with finances and with increasing disagreement among member states paralysing its work. Negotiations at UNEA 7 were cumbersome and delegates often had to work late into the night and still failed to reach consensus on decisions and proposed resolutions. The Earth Negotiations Bulletin, reporting daily from UNEA, provided a telling perspective in their final report: “UNEA-7 convened at a moment of profound global strain as the impacts of the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, exacerbated by desertification, land degradation, and drought, continue to intensify. Compounding this, turbulent geopolitical dynamics are placing a high tax on multilateral processes through what delegations referred to as the “triple political crisis”: mistrust, misinformation, and populism.”

As with all conferences, there were successes and failures. The UNEAs are called the world’s highest level decision-making body on environmental policies, environmental governance and on overarching science and research on the environment. With more than 6,000 people participating this year, UNEA 7 managed to adopt 11 resolutions, three decisions and a Ministerial Declaration. The resolutions covered a wide range of themes: addressing environmentally sound management of critical minerals; a strengthened focus on environmental impacts of AI; global wildfire management; managing the Sargassum seaweed blooms; a focus on the cryosphere to preserve glaciers and mountain regions; a focus on the meaningful participation of youth in environmental processes and on environmental education; in connection with the global focus on climate issues, identifying global actions to promote the climate resilience of coral reefs; following up on earlier commitments by UNEA and UNEP on the sound management of chemicals and waste. UNEP is no foreigner to sports and a resolution was adopted to promote sustainable solutions through sport for a resilient planet.

Another resolution covered urgent health issues: UNEP, the World Health Organisation, (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), and the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) formed, a while back, the One Health Quadripartite alliance working on health synergies. These



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have now evolved into concrete policies and the issue at UNEA 7 was the environmental dimensions of antimicrobial resistance (AMR). First raised at UNEA-6 as a crosscutting concern in discussions on the One Health Approach, its outcome results fed into the high-level meeting on AMR which was convened during the 79th session of the UN General Assembly in 2024. The GA called for coordinated cross-sectoral responses. Delegates at UNEA 7 picked up the gauntlet and delivered a strong message to UNEP through a resolution to reinforce attention to AMR infusing UNEP's environmental mandate with global health efforts to strengthen work on health and the environment and thus created a clear direction for implementation.

UNEP is home to several of the Multilateral Environment Agreements, MEAs, and efforts to coordinate the MEAs have been given increasing attention of late. A resolution was adopted emphasising synergies, cooperation and collaboration for national implementation of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and other relevant environmental instruments.

Three decisions were also taken – of which the most important one was the Medium- Term Strategy, the MTS, upon which UNEP's Programme of Work is based. The MTS decides the top priority for UNEP for the next four years and gives a fair indication of the amount of money to finance its work to safeguard the planet's environment. As such it is a hugely significant decision to be agreed upon. And this time, it was adopted with the smallest margin possible. One could, with some justification, criticise several of the participating member states to be advocates of brinkmanship when it comes to environmental policies. The difficulties encountered in agreeing to the MTS are indicative of political undercurrents that are today endangering the global environment. Even though the delegates at UNEA 7 agreed on the final outcome report, and the Ministerial Declaration expressed continued support for dealing with the Triple Planetary Crisis, several delegates and the majority of the participating civil society representatives were seriously distraught at the overall content and outcomes of UNEA 7. When statements like 'at least this conference did not make things worse' becomes the measure of success, something is seriously wrong. And there were participants who were extremely dissatisfied with that low level of accomplishment.

Undercurrents jeopardising planet safety

The need to protect the environment through regulation guided by and based on scientific facts was met with greater opposition than at earlier UNEAs. This reflects the onslaught of populism into every corner of politics. Even at this prestigious organisation, fake news and scepticism levelled against science, riddled with unfounded arguments, crept into the debates.

The delegation of Vanuatu did not leave UNEA 7 in elated moods. Vanuatu had submitted a resolution to protect the seabed to curb uncontrolled deep-sea mining enterprises. Large tracts of the global oceans have never been investigated, and the need for caution and regulation have long been expressed by scientists and civil organisations alike. Oceanography is clear in its verdict, asserting that deep-sea mining will cause uncontrolled damage to the stability of the oceans with



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unforeseen environmental consequences to the planet. As the seabed is thought to contain large deposits of rare metals, several nations expressed strong reservations to the draft resolution, claiming it was too restrictive. A few delegates made serious efforts to derail the resolution by questioning UNEP's authority to work on this area even indicating that UNEP was trespassing on the mandates of other UN entities. Currently, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the International Seabed Authority (ISA) are the two main UN bodies dealing with jurisdictional issues related to the planet's ocean. Several delegates implied that mining the seabed was a necessity to get to the rare metals needed for a transition from fossil fuels to renewables and thus felt that the Vanuatu's resolution was undermining efforts to halt global warming. The irony of these statements was not lost on members of civil society. Several of the delegations opposing Vanuatu's resolution argued that accessing the rare metals on the seabed was a necessity to develop new technology producing low cost renewable energy and fight climate change. At the same time, in another committee, the same countries would be opposed to regulating fossil fuels extraction. The debate on the resolution on sound management of critical minerals further seemed to exacerbate these double standards.

On December 10, Vanuatu withdrew the draft resolution but stated strongly that safeguarding ocean ecosystems remained an urgent, valid and necessary undertaking with possible negative global consequences if left completely unregulated. The delegation however, announced that they would launch a next-phase scientific initiative for deep-sea science for knowledge sharing, including Indigenous science.

Populistic arguments undermining the credibility of science

On the same day, December the 10th, UNEP launched the seventh Global Environment Outlook (GEO-7). Reading like an encyclopaedia on the environment and the future, the more than one-thousand page document represents a robust, authoritative document based on science to inform environmental policymaking. "GEO-7 is billed as the most comprehensive global environment assessment, highlighting that investing in planetary health can deliver substantial socioeconomic benefits including, GDP growth, improved health, and poverty reduction" wrote ENB. The EU called it – "the most comprehensive scientific assessment of the global environment to this day. It brings together the voices of 287 experts from 82 countries. The findings of the report highlight the stark risks of inaction, but also the enormous potential of sustainable policies and technologies to tackle climate change impacts, pollution and the biodiversity crisis."

And still several delegations voiced concern about the GEO-7 report. The concerns centred around the approval by delegates of the Summary for Policy Makers. Arguments bordering on incredulity were heard in the corridors when delegates failed to accept the proposed summary. How can you negotiate scientific facts and have them agreed to by politicians, was a repeated question.

Seasoned delegates confided unofficially that they had never heard so much unfounded criticism of environmental science. Established scientific facts that had been translated into actionable policies



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in various resolutions were questioned and often reduced to generic statements reducing the urgency of content. The Earth Negotiation Bulletin (ENB) states in its final report from UNEA 7: “Strained negotiations saw denial of evidence-based environmental realities and the severity of issues, including on a draft resolution for strengthening the global response to the growing harm caused by Sargassum seaweed blooms”. A delegation from an affected region, frustrated by the discussions questioning the evidence base of the (environmental) crisis, stressed, “Those that live it, feel it!” Similarly, the well-documented water and energy stresses caused by data centres was contested in a draft resolution addressing the environmental sustainability of artificial intelligence systems. Political arguments disregarding science took priority and often won the day.

UNEA 7 concludes with concerns but with a glimmer of hope

Ocean Care, a large NGO network with solid knowledge of ocean issues wrote about UNEA 7 that it “concludes amid concerns over erosion of science and science-based decision-making and shrinking civic participation, while a solid number of countries push back to defend science-based global environmental governance. These developments are increasingly evident in international fora, driven by a group of countries that fail to meet their responsibility to tackle the triple planetary crisis. National political agendas, short-term economic interests – particularly the profit-motives of the fossil fuel industry – combined with an evident paralysis in global decision-making stemming from geopolitical dynamics.”

Fiji’s final comment, often referred to, served as a powerful reminder of the stakes ahead: “If UNEA turns against us, where will we turn?” Executive Director of UNEP, Ms. Inger Anderson in her concluding remarks pointed to all that was accomplished. Perhaps slightly overoptimistic and referring to the outcomes, she claimed that “the beacon of environmental multilateralism that rises above the fog of geopolitical differences today shines a little brighter.”

The optimism of the Nobel ceremony – a celebration of science, peace and democracy

Thousands of miles to the north of Kenya, on the same day, December the 10th, in Norway and Sweden, the Nobel ceremonies took place: the Peace prize awarded in Oslo, capital of Norway, the prizes for medicine, physics, chemistry, economy and literature in Stockholm, capital of Sweden. While not ignoring the bleak political backdrop provided by the politics of our world today, the atmosphere of the ceremonies was one of optimism. There was of course the celebratory pageantry around the prizes, but this did not belie the seriousness behind them. According to the will of Alfred Nobel, each of the prizes shall be bestowed upon those who shall have conferred the greatest benefit to humankind in the preceding year. For the laureates, the prizes were an enormous recognition of their work, but also for the causes behind their work.

Nobel believed strongly in science, and culture, and five of the prizes reflect this. Inspired by the peace activist and close friend, Bertha von Suttner, Nobel also established the peace prize promoting and honouring work promoting peaceful coexistence among the peoples of the world.

The six prizes of hope



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- **For Peace**

The Nobel Peace Prize for 2025 was given to Maria Corvina Machado “for her tireless work promoting democratic rights for the people of Venezuela and for her struggle to achieve a just and peaceful transition from dictatorship to democracy.” And as the Nobel Committee added – as democracy is also in retreat internationally, the prize is an encouragement for all those engaged in fighting for democracy in countries and between countries. Democracies do not fight each other, is a basic tenet in Democratic Peace Theory with historical roots in Immanuel Kant’s philosophy and voiced by modern political leaders like Bill Clinton and George Bush.

Perhaps the most courageous Peace Prize awarded was the one given to the German journalist Carl von Ossietzky in 1935, who openly opposed the Nazis and exposed their tyranny and terrorism. That award was widely interpreted as an international rebuke of Nazism and a massive propaganda blow to the German government. Hitler was furious with the Norwegians back then. Ossietzky was tortured by the Nazis and died in prison in Berlin in 1938. Political despots and authoritarian rulers including all those with such tendencies today, those who disregard the rule of law, and pursue egotistical self-centred policies, who persecute, rebuke and suppress their political opponents, who deal with them in vengeful ways, always lose in the end. History is proof of that. In the meantime, until such rulers have been relegated to the archives of history and people have been able to obliterate their shameful and destructive policies, humanity needs encouragement and awards like the Nobel prizes to honour and remind us of the enduring will of people to see and fight for peace, justice, human rights and democracy.

- **For Chemistry**

The Nobel Prize in Chemistry was awarded for further developing the Metal-Organic Framework, MOFs. The laureates were Susumu Kitagawa, Richard Robson and Omar M. Yaghi. The discovery of MOFs is not new, but this year’s prize is given for further developing the understanding of MOFs, including its usability. What caught the attention of lay people was the MOF’s ability to store gas, such as hydrogen and carbon dioxide, the infamous green-house gas recognized as the key driver in global warming. “Due to their versatile structural motifs that can be modified during synthesis, MOFs also have a great promise for green applications including air and water pollution remediation (Science Direct, Chemosphere, 2022).” The urgency of environmental remediation within areas such as climate change, the energy crisis, even in medicine to combat epidemics, is a necessity and MOFs can contribute to solve this urgency. No wonder the message emanating from this Nobel prize was one of hope.

- **For Physics and Medicine**

Big data issues have penetrated academia and has made substantial inroads into the business world. Large supercomputers are needed to be able to use this data, and those who can afford such machines, let alone use them to make sense of all the information, are rich and powerful. To counter a budding and powerful monopoly of supercomputers, and democratise all information,



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new, reliable and more affordable computers are needed. “This year’s Nobel Prize in Physics has provided opportunities for developing the next generation of quantum technology, including quantum cryptography, quantum computers, and quantum sensors” (the Swedish Nobel Committee). Technical solutions seem always to be available to complex technical issues. Computers are needed to deal with data in reliable and concrete ways, making data available and understood by people. An inherent challenge is always making this data available in democratic frameworks. The laureates were John Clarke, Michel H. Devoret and John M. Martinis.

The Prize in medicine dealt with the immune system, and again, ground-breaking discoveries have been made. This year’s prize was about understanding what prevents our immune system from harming our body. “The discoveries have laid the foundation for a new field of research and spurred the development of new treatments, for example for cancer and autoimmune diseases” (the Swedish Nobel Committee). Fact based hope in cancer treatment sounds like a utopian statement, even an unfounded hope, but this year’s prize holds the promise of revolutionising cancer treatment for the future. The laureates were Mary E. Brunkow, Fred Ramsdell and Shimon Sakaguchi.

- **For the literature and economy**

Writing in the great Central European tradition, the laureate in literature, László Krasznahorkai, has been labelled an author whose writing touches on dystopian messages, in an apocalyptic setting. But, as reviewers are quick to point out, with also a message of enduring hope. And as the writer himself said at the Nobel Galla, there is always hope, despite the grim background of today’s world.

The last two centuries have experienced an unprecedented growth in economy, but it has been growth that has created a world of contrasts, on one side people are left in poverty, on the other side, growth of billionaires during the last decade seems to be an unstoppable phenomenon. And yet, the system has also lifted vast numbers of people out of poverty and laid the foundation of our prosperity. There are numerous threats to economic growth, and growth cannot be taken for granted, the laureates, Joel Mokyr, Philippe Aghion and Peter Howitt, assert. But innovation with regulation has the potential to create a better world.

A contrasting end of a year – but hope and optimism can prevail

“We are free to change the world”, the eminent political theorist Hannah Arendt stated. The sum total of all the efforts of people working inside or for the UN is precisely that, changing the world for the better. There is no denying that we seem to be at cross-roads at the moment, where politics are becoming increasingly adversarial and prospects for a better future are dim. While we must not – or never – underestimate our opponents, downgrade or minimise challenges or adorn the world with a cosmetic veil, let us also be reminded of progress and improvements made. Applying true perspectives to reality will always provide us with more than one way to interpret and understand this reality. This article has tried to summarise the outcomes from three momentous events that



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took place on the same day, December the 10th in 2025. One outcome was clearly optimistic, one had pessimistic overtones, and one provided us with feelings of resignation.

2025 will be remembered for many things: undermining the authority and credibility of the UN, making broad efforts to undermine science including climate, major conflicts in the world from Ukraine to Sudan; it will be remembered for the growth of the political right and its attack on democracy, embracing suppressive politics supplied with simple and inane solutions to complex national and global issues including its fabrication of lies to win political support. 2025 will also be remembered for an apparent lack of progress in curbing climate gas emissions, lack of safeguarding the environment and failing to protect human rights at all levels in all corners of the world.

But will this be its lasting legacy? Without the proverbial cosmetic veil on global and national affairs, was 2025 a year with no hope for future years? Despite setbacks, millions of people are working to make their lives, and those of fellow human beings better. And these are people from all walks of life. Besides, there are several positive accomplishments in 2025:

The Paris climate agreement of 2015 started something which now is reaping its good tasting fruits. Writes The Guardian in December of 2025: “Renewable energy smashed records last year, is growing by 15% and is now accounting for more than 90% of all new power generation capacity. Investment in clean energy has topped 2 trillion US Dollars, outstripping that into fossil fuels by two to one.” According to the International Energy Agency, IEA, renewable power capacity is increasing in more than 80% of all countries in the world.

Last year’s climate cop, COP 30, which concluded its negotiations at the end of November 2025, may not have been amongst the most dynamic of the COPs. Still, the poorer countries achieved a tripling of finance for adaptation projects, to USD 120 billion annually, but only effective as of 2035. 90 countries supported and agreed to commit to implement the roadmap to end deforestation by 2030. A funding platform to protect existing forest areas called the Tropical Forests Forever Facility (TFFF) was also established at COP 30.

Early in 2025, in February, Indigenous Peoples were formally recognised at UN level as leaders in protection and stewardship of the world’s biodiversity and global decision making on conservation.

On the 20th of June 2025, UNEP with its member states established the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution (ISP-CWP). This is a new, independent intergovernmental body established to strengthen the global science-policy interface. As UNEP writes: “Pollution is now recognized as a leading threat to planetary and human well-being, yet the global response remains fragmented and uneven. ISP-CWP aims to fill this gap by assessing knowledge, identifying policy options, and catalysing action that is effective, inclusive, and grounded in scientific evidence.”

The world’s highest court, the International Court of Justice, ICJ, issued a landmark decision in 2025. The decision cleared the way for countries to sue each other over climate change issues. Even



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though the ruling is non-binding, jurists say that the ICJ ruling may significantly influence the way climate cases are handled from now on.

After having negotiated the protection of the high seas for decades, an agreement was reached in 2023 and in September 2025, this agreement was ratified by enough countries to bring the agreement into force. This agreement, the High Seas Treaty, pledges to put 30% of the world's oceans into Marine Protected Areas, comprising species and healthy marine ecosystems.

And what is hopeful?

Admittedly, for the world, the bigger picture is littered with dark clouds. And yet, never in the history of humanity has so many been able to enjoy such a high material living standard and welfare. Our cumulative knowledge has never been larger; our technical skills have never been better; our combined resources have never been more plentiful. Founded in 1945, the United Nations celebrated 80 years in 2025. At the beginning there were 51 member states, today there are 193, or nearly all countries in the world. Despite egregious shortcomings, together these nations have built, all the same, a world that has been mutually beneficial for all member states. They have worked and work together to solve problems of mutual interest by means of dialogue arriving at consensus decisions where all have ownership. The rule of law and peaceful coexistence with mutual respect are the basic values expressed in the UN Charter, to which all countries have committed themselves (at least in theory).

The world has always been a complex organism, and its complexities are growing daily. A complex organism, such as the world polity, gives rise to complex questions, and complex questions will yield complex answers that must be interpreted. Relevant and meaningful interpretations can only be done in reciprocal collaboration, whether through a democratically and justly elected parliamentary body, or a multilateral institution like the UN. The ultra-right and populist movements provide the world with simple answers to complex questions, answers that are mostly inaccurate or downright wrong and more often than not, based on lies. The ultra-right solutions always result in despotism and dictatorships and loss of freedom for the general public.

The internet has become a tool for providing false knowledge and information. Unregulated AI exacerbates this development. Misinformation, spreading lies, developing conspiracy theories, creating fear by spreading suspicion about ethnic groups, all this deprive society of trust, and trust is a basis for any functional democracy. Lack of trust also feeds into feelings of uncertainty exacerbating fear. Fear between individuals make people act in irrational ways. Use of weapons and assaults have increased in certain parts of society. Again, if uncertainty becomes a driving force in any society, people will ask for simple explanations, so they have an illusion of feeling safe and secure. And people will easily lean on a political leader who can come up with simple answers and solutions.

One of the most frightening tendencies today, which has grown stronger during 2025, is the growth of fake news, false information provided by ultra-right movements, whether they be in government



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or outside, and the undermining and disestablishment of science and fact-based research. A massive assault on independent, reliable and trustworthy science continues. Businesses are also using scientific research to promote their own ends. And even reasons and motivation behind science has been altered in some cases. “The ethic of discovery that once governed science has evolved into an expectation of impact. The autonomy and integrity of science are now up for grabs.... One price to be paid, as the demands on science turn into science on demand, is the surrender of individual autonomy.” (Turner and Chubin, *The Changing Temptations of Science* 2022). Science must fight for its independence and build credibility, also through better communication with the public at large. “We must teach for discovery and not for success in monetary terms,” said one of the Nobel laureates in the discussion following the reward ceremony in Stockholm.

Why were the messages coming from the UN in 2025 messages infused with lethargy and the messages from the Nobel ceremonies imbued with optimism? Have we fallen prey to the dictum saying, ‘we shall frighten people into action’, and because of that approach, we have to paint a bleakest possible picture, like: ‘If we do not deal with global warming, we are doomed! If we do not protect the complete ocean and all of nature, the world will turn into a desert and we will all die’. These messages are first of all inaccurate, second of all they contain no perspective, and finally they turn people away from the real issues. During 2025, I have moderated several webinars on the environment of the world and its future, and in every webinar, the participants, who came from all over the world, asked us who organised these webinars to come up with positive narratives. Not false information, not wishful information, but information that would convey a message that what we do to safeguard the environment, and democracy also accomplishes something positive.

A recent study carried out by the University of Bergen in Norway shows that antagonistic messages and recriminating statements between politicians often heighten divisions and significantly heighten perceptions of conflict in society. “These findings contribute to understanding the boundary conditions of elite influence, suggesting that for political leaders, it is easier to fan the flames of conflict than to put out the fire” (Berntzen and Draege, 2025). Given a deeply polarized society, an occasional positive statement will not reduce the negative image created. A positive narrative will have to be consciously developed from day one, but also be realistic, based on science, be credible and be based on and create trust.

The communication emanating from the UN is more often than not quite negative emphasising how far away we are from reaching our goals. The communication from the Nobel ceremonies were positive, impressive, credible and trustworthy. It was a manifestation of the good powers of science, of culture and of peace. But the speakers at the Nobel ceremonies also began their statements by referring to the dire straits of the world. Having done so, their messages were clear – we recognise the difficulties the world is in, we understand it, and now we will deal with it together, together with you. And then all laureates seemed to say – come join us, let us find solutions to the problems of this world.



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We need the UN now more than ever, and we need to strengthen its independence and its operative abilities. The UN provides a unique forum for dialogue and for solving disputes through arbitration and understanding, for reaching out to people in distress and in the long run for establishing and keeping peace. We need Nobel awards and their inspiration to promote the well-being of humanity. With these and similar institutions we need to endeavour to create and maintain a rigorous dissemination of true facts, and at the same time identify and be proud of what we all accomplish and build a realistic and positive narrative to motivate people to believe in each other and in the future.

In 1913, the Indian author and polymath Rabindranath Tagore received the Nobel prize in literature. A wise person, he gave perspectives in his writing and once stated: “I have become my own version of an optimist. If I can't make it through one door, I'll go through another door - or I'll make a door. Something terrific will come no matter how dark the present.”

91 years later, in 2004, Wangari Mathai was the first African woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. Addressing an audience, she said “I think what the Nobel committee is doing is going beyond war and looking at what humanity can do to prevent war. Sustainable management of our natural resources will promote peace.”

A lot took place in 2025, and events somehow coalesced on the 10th of December that year indicating that the way forward will not be easy, but that we do a lot of things right. We just have to scale up the things we do right and ensure they dominate development. One of the Laureates ended his speech with a statement that can serve as a slogan for the future: ‘Let us now create a planet worthy of our hopes.’

Knapstad, Norway, December 31st, 2025

Jan-Gustav Strandenaes