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*Plenary Session: How to Mobilize Conscience and Action to Build New Frameworks for
Multilateralism and International Law*

Excellencies, distinguished speakers, members and friends of the Centesimus Annus Pro-Pontifice Foundation,

It is a privilege to be part of this conversation.

The multilateral system was built on clear evidence: that there are problems no country can solve on its own. The UN Charter and International law were built on the recognition that our fates are linked, that human dignity is universal, and that justice cannot stop at borders. That premise has not changed. What has changed is the scale and speed of those problems, and the gap between what our existing institutions were designed to handle and what the world now demands of them.

The question before this session is not whether we need reform. That is settled, the world is more interconnected but also more fragmented. The question is what kind of reform, and how we build the political will to make it real.

International law and multilateral institutions were shaped by the realities of 1945. They assumed that risks would be primarily state-based, that harm would cross borders through deliberate acts, and that national governments would be both the primary actors and the primary victims.

What I have learnt in my engaging in reducing the risk of disasters is that:

Climate breakdown and ecological crisis do not fit that model, and we know that crisis are cascading across systems and sectors. A drought in the Sahel, rising seas in Pacific Island states, or compounding wildfires that burn across entire seasons: these are not acts of a government. They are the accumulated result of global economic choices, and their costs fall most heavily on those who contributed least to causing them. These tangible reality makes a first consideration clear **multilateralism - is a moral project** touching upon human values, societal well-being, and the long-term health of the planet.

The emerging framework on the Protection of Persons in the Event of Disasters is one promising sign that international law can evolve (from soft commitments to binding obligations). It recognizes that people displaced or harmed by disasters have rights, not only needs. That shift, from humanitarian need to legal responsibility, talks towards the rule of rights and the rule of duties (a claim-right held by one person always implies a duty owed by another).

But we need to go further, and faster.

Five Shifts That Are Not Optional that I will put forwards through the elements of disaster prevention

1 Multilateralism and diplomacy are not abstract, it needs to mobilize both conscience and actions as well as broadening participation. **Youth are giving the right signal we need to listen to them:**

UNDRR undertook a global survey on youth and disaster prevention. This is what they conveyed *“Effective prevention is based on collaboration and tangible dialogue from diverse sectoral interests from private sector to civil society. Collaboration must be both vertical and horizontal. Dialogue must lead to constructive actions”*.

2. **From sovereignty to solidarity:** We have all learnt the reaction of the stock market: one action in a part of the world has repercussion across the world. Similarly, disasters do not respect borders. A flood in Mozambique, a cyclone in Vanuatu, wildfires in California: each sends ripples far beyond the country it strikes. The question is not whether we share these challenges. **It is whether our legal and financial systems are built to respond as if we do.**

3. **Recognizing common public good and nurture it:** Disaster Risk Reduction is an example of common good: Safe infrastructure, risk informed planning, environmental stewardship, and inclusive policies benefits everyone, especially the most vulnerable. When neglected it is often the poor, the marginalized and the voiceless that suffers the most. Every dollar invested in prevention saves between four and eleven dollars in post-disaster response and reconstruction. Yet less than one per cent of official development assistance goes to disaster risk reduction.

A reformed multilateral framework needs to be clear on what these public goods are and develop around them agreed targets, dedicated financing, and accountability mechanisms that track whether commitments are actually kept.

4. From charity to solidarity and rights

Too often “charity” has become synonyms of “tax write-off” and justice optional. Resilience is not a favor the wealthy extend to the vulnerable. It is a matter of solidarity, rights, equity, and accountability. It is an expression of solidarity, where we are responsible one of the other. A new legal framework must embed human rights, climate justice, and gender equality not as aspirational language in preambles, but as operative standards that can be monitored and required.

5. A multilateral framework that lacks the trust of the Global South will fail. The countries most exposed to climate and disaster risk are precisely those that contributed least to creating it. Their experience, their knowledge, and their moral authority belong at the centre of these negotiations, not at the margins.

Beyond states, real reform requires bringing in the voices that have been systematically excluded: civil society, faith communities, local governments, the private sector, and young people.

Let me conclude by highlighting that **local implementation as the test of success.** The real measure of any multilateral reform is whether it changes outcomes at the local level. Frameworks that are agreed in New York or Geneva but never reach a municipality in Mozambique or a coastal community in Vanuatu are not a success. **Subsidiarity, as Catholic Social Teaching shows us, is not just a principle. It is a design requirement.**

The renewal of multilateralism is not a theoretical ambition. It is a practical necessity. The institutions we have are not adequate to the challenges we face, and we know it. What this moment calls for is the political courage to move from principle to architecture.

The moral voice that Catholic Social Thought brings to this conversation, grounded in the dignity of every person and the responsibility we hold toward future generations, is a necessity.

I look forward to the discussion. Thank you.