

A Bold Campaign to Confront Global Crises

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By Lawrence S. Wittner November 20, 2025



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Although the world is experiencing severe global crises, there are new efforts underway to create a more effective means of coping with them.

The crises are clear enough. They include vast slaughter in horrific wars, worldwide climate catastrophe, massive population displacement, and deepening poverty.

Moreover, these disastrous situations are likely to worsen in coming years. Modern wars are fought with increasingly devastating weapons, and preparations for nuclear war have escalated to the level of global annihilation. Similarly, time is running out for saving the planet from an environmental cataclysm, which will surely lead to heightened displacement and poverty.

There is, of course, a global organization formally tasked with tackling global problems: the United Nations. And the officials of that international entity do frequently make admirable recommendations for how these problems can be solved. Indeed, there is a consensus among most of the UN's 193 nations about what should be done to preserve a decent future for humanity: end the wars; foster nuclear disarmament; sharply reduce the burning of fossil fuels; assist refugees; promote social progress; and feed the hungry.

The problem is that the United Nations, despite its virtues, remains at the mercy of the major military and economic powers that created it. And they are not only frequently at odds with one another, but are usually determined to see to it that their national interests—as they define them—prevail over the interests of the world community.

When it comes to international security, each of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States) can veto UN action—and all too often do so.

When it comes to UN efforts to address climate change, the situation is not much better, for the great powers continue to burn and (as in the case of Russia and the United States) extract and profit from selling vast quantities of fossil fuel. Consequently, they weaken or sabotage UN-sponsored climate agreements.

Another way the great powers hamstring the United Nations is by abandoning its operations and reducing its meager funding. The U.S. government, under Donald Trump, is particularly flagrant in this regard, pulling the United States out of key UN agencies and slashing voluntary contributions and mandated dues payments to the world organization. As of this October, the United States has compiled a debt of \$1.5 billion in mandated funding to the United Nations, followed by China (\$192 million) and Russia (\$72 million).

Frustrated by the UN's inability to adequately handle global challenges, a network of civil society organizations, scholars, policy experts, and diplomats took action on September 22, 2025 to launch Article 109, an international coalition to mobilize public opinion, social movements, and national governments to activate a UN Charter Review conference.

When the UN Charter was signed in 1945, the document's drafters provided for its evolution through Article 109, which states that a Charter Review Conference can be launched by a two-thirds vote of the General Assembly and any nine members of the Security Council. As today's Article 109 Coalition observes, this conference could update and empower the United Nations by enacting structural changes (e.g., reforming the Security Council, creating a UN Parliamentary Assembly, and establishing a Climate Council), as well as by making normative upgrades (e.g., supporting gender equality).

More than 40 civil society organizations are now part of the Article 109 Coalition. They include global campaigning organizations like Oxfam International, Democracy Without Borders, the Global Governance Forum, and the World Federalist Association; regional organizations in Africa and Latin America; think tanks like the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft; and national organizations like EYC (which empowers youth in Cambodia)

and Citizens for Global Solutions (which organizes in the United States). The Club de Madrid, a recent endorser of Charter review, is a forum that brings together more than 100 former Heads of State.

Indeed, recent heads of state and current government officials participated prominently in the September 22 launch event. Mary Robinson, former Irish President and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, delivered the keynote address. She was followed by Alexander De Croo (former Belgian Prime Minister), Helen Clark (former New Zealand Prime Minister and UN Development Program Administrator), and Ambassador Muhammadou Kah (The Gambia's Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva).

UN Charter review has several potential drawbacks. For example, it could end up producing an amendment that reduces the purview of the international organization. Furthermore, the process will be lengthy. The Article 109 Coalition envisions a UN vote in 2027 to authorize a Charter review conference to convene in 2030. Finally, any amendment to the Charter must be ratified not only by two thirds of the UN membership, but by all permanent members of the Security Council—the five great powers that have helped enfeeble the world organization.

But these obstacles could be overcome. If there is a major campaign to strengthen the UN among members of the public, organizations, and nations, an amended Charter is likely to produce a more robust international institution. In addition, delaying a review conference until 2030 will provide the Article 109 campaign with the time to gather momentum and, also, increase the likelihood that some or all the world's most stridently nationalist rulers (e.g., Trump, Putin, and Netanyahu) are no longer in office. Indeed, who really knows what kind of reforms the leadership of the Security Council's five permanent members would be willing to accept in the future, especially if global conditions worsen and there is substantial worldwide pressure for action?

Farsighted national leaders, at least, are ready for the challenge and, like Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, are busy organizing for UN Charter Review. Addressing the September 2025 launch of the Article 109 campaign, Ireland's Mary Robinson spoke out decisively for UN empowerment, proclaiming: "The moment has come, and we need to be brave."

