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## **Global Spotlight: What to Watch in 2025 from CIC Experts**

As the world enters 2025, a year that marks the 80th Anniversary of the United Nations (UN), the international landscape remains marked by profound challenges, opportunities, and unknowns. From escalating power rivalries between nations and entrenched horizontal and vertical inequalities to the enduring impact of unresolved conflicts and climate change—, the year ahead will test the resilience of global institutions, democratic norms, the creativity of leaders, and the fragile trust in multilateralism as a solution to global crises.

To shed light on what lies ahead, [experts from NYU's Center on International Cooperation \(CIC\)](#) have shared key perspectives, highlighting critical trends, moments, and developments to watch in 2025. They underscore the urgent need for collective action and innovative solutions to rebuild confidence in multilateral approaches and foster a more peaceful, just, and inclusive world.

Read on to explore what CIC experts foresee for 2025 and the pivotal opportunities to advance progress on these crucial fronts.

### **Multilateralism in Flux: Tethered Ambitions in a Changing World**

In 2024, a growing rejection of the status quo became evident as elections worldwide leaned towards change, often characterized by populist tendencies—whether through party changes or incumbents who won on populist platforms. Domestically, discontent fueled upheaval, while internationally, multilateralism faced a sense of ejection rather than outright rejection. The UN's Pact for the Future, passed last September, highlighted deepening [geopolitical fractures](#) despite its significance. [Similarly](#), the 21st replenishment of the International Development Association conference (IDA21) achieved its largest replenishment yet but fell short of addressing critical development challenges. Donors came with

willing hearts but a shorthand, embodying the global trend of restrained ambition without practical application.

**In 2025, expect a cautious optimism towards multilateral engagement tempered by persistent economic challenges.**

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) highlights a [“trilemma”](#) of slow growth, high debt levels, and constrained trade, creating a complex backdrop for global cooperation. Governments grappling with fiscal imbalances face mounting cost-of-living pressures and public discontent over unfulfilled social contracts. These domestic strains have sometimes escalated into significant social and political tensions.

Globally, economic pressures intersect with deepening geopolitical fissures. The landscape is marked by a hotbed of crises and uncertainties, including the ongoing fallout in the Middle East, Russia’s war on Ukraine nearing its third year, and the devastating humanitarian crisis in Sudan—the worst ever recorded in the country’s history. Meanwhile, neglected conflicts in Haiti and Myanmar continue to worsen, underscoring the global community’s struggle to address these compounding crises.

The story of last year suggests that international cooperation in 2025 will be defined by tethered aspirations. While the need for greater ambition is widely recognized, the outcomes often reflect a more measured approach. Yet, this realism can still inspire pragmatic and actionable solutions. Success on the international stage this year may hinge on three key approaches:

1. Prioritizing “low-hanging fruit” agreements that yield tangible results, helping restore trust in multilateralism.
2. Seizing every opportunity to build on common ground, including the recently adopted Pact for the Future.
3. Pursuing “greenfield solutions” to lay the groundwork for long-term progress.

Finally, as [financing](#) remains a major hurdle to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development, set to take place in Spain this July, will be pivotal in devising effective solutions to maximize impact within constrained resources.

## Rekindling a Shared Commitment for a Multilateral Approach to Peace and Security

The polarized climate of 2024 was characterized by distrust in the multilateral system, evident in several developments: an increasing inability to find agreement in the Security Council, governments calling for the withdrawal of peacekeeping missions in multiple nations, and a significant decline in financing for peacebuilding and prevention efforts, as well as continuing challenges such as concern among member states regarding external interventions.

Despite these challenges, member states' agreement on the Pact for the Future offers a glimmer of hope, albeit with moderate ambition, to rekindle a shared commitment to a multilateral approach to peace and security. A key element of this effort is nationally led prevention strategies, acknowledging their universal relevance, as no society is immune to violence. The Pact also envisions a redefined role for peace operations, designed to adapt more effectively to contemporary challenges and emerging realities. In this context, strengthening the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) emerges as a significant opportunity to drive meaningful progress.

**2025 offers a critical opportunity to build on these efforts by [implementing the commitments made in the Pact for the Future](#) and expanding them through the Peacebuilding Architecture Review (PBAR).**

By prioritizing measurable impact, this PBAR will help member states rebuild trust in the multilateral system through the identification and scaling up of effective strategies. Additionally, the PBAR is an opportunity to ensure the UN system is better positioned to support national efforts to prevent violence and foster sustainable peace. CIC is contributing to these efforts by [developing a practical tool](#) for decision-makers and practitioners to enhance the effectiveness of prevention and peacebuilding initiatives and measure their impact. Additionally, CIC is producing recommendations to support the development of effective national violence prevention strategies, including through the [PBC](#), and fostering collaboration with international financial institutions (IFIs).

A critical focus for this year is the review of peace operations requested by the UN General Assembly as part of the Pact for the Future. CIC is actively contributing to this process through its [research and analysis](#). A related focus is examining [how the UN can support non-UN peace operations](#), particularly considering [the situation in Haiti](#) and the recent adoption of Security Council Resolution 2767. This resolution

approved a “hybrid implementation” of the 2719 financing framework for the African Union’s new mission in Somalia. These developments highlight the pressing need for innovative and adaptable approaches to peace and security in the year ahead.

## **SDG16+: A Blueprint for Inclusive Governance Amid Global Uncertainty in 2025**

The world entered 2025 against a dichotomous backdrop of pain and potential. Countries are backsliding on human rights and democratic practices while global crises—from conflict and climate to global debt, food and energy insecurity, forced displacement, the race for resources, and rapid technological change—expose shared yet unequal global fragility. Norms and governance systems meant to ensure the upholding of the basic tenets of social contracts and international law have been routinely corroded. The abrogation of such rules and responsibilities is broadcast over social media and news outlets, offering different truths. Trust in institutions, in information, and in one another suffers.

Yet, **2025 offers a chance to rebuild inclusive, adaptive governance, leveraging technological advancements to advance positive change.** With five years left to achieve the SDGs, SDG16—centered on peace, justice, and strong, inclusive institutions—remains a vital blueprint for a better world.

In a world fraught with compounding crises and governance challenges, SDG16 offers a set of policies and solutions to realize people’s daily needs and aspirations, rebuild trust in institutions, and catalyze progress across the SDGs, universally and at all levels.

**As we look to 2025, a critical focus will be on implementing the policies and pillars embedded in SDG16** while making a case for the centrality of its tenets in any global development agenda as a direct response to constituency demands, as a driver of results across SDGs, as a cost-effective investment with demonstrable returns, as a means to mitigate and prevent crises, and as a tool to leverage opportunity, from urbanization to green transitions and digitalization.

Opportunities to do so, and in tracking back from the 2027 SDG Summit and the 2028 Review of the Pact for the Future, include the ECOSOC Partnership Forum, the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development, the 2025 Peacebuilding Architecture Review, the High-level Political Forum, COP30, and the Second World Social Summit.

As new leaders emerge globally, preserving and advancing peace, justice, and inclusive institutions within a global development agenda will be critical to supporting adaptive governance systems and resilient social contracts that mitigate against crises and deliver for people and the planet amid rapid and uncertain change.

## **Fighting Against Everyday Violence in our Communities Amid Global Upheaval**

In 2025, ongoing conflicts, great power competition, and the risks of escalating conflicts are likely to dominate international focus. Amid the catastrophic impacts of war, the PBAR offers a timely opportunity to prioritize peacebuilding, negotiation, and disarmament. It is equally critical that the PBAR, along with the policies of member states and international organizations, prioritize addressing violence in homes and streets worldwide—whether in conflict zones, peaceful areas, great powers, or the global south. As outlined in the recent [Flagship Report of the Halving Global Violence Task Force](#), this often-overlooked violence accounts for most global violent deaths and costs trillions of dollars annually, diverting resources from critical development goals. The illicit trade and trafficking in small arms exacerbate this crisis, making disarmament and arms control policies essential for meaningful progress.

**In our current political climate, community-level crime is a pressing concern worldwide.** When leaders fail to address the violence affecting their communities, voters often turn to authoritarian leaders who promise swift results through heavy-handed, repressive tactics. While such approaches may escalate violence over time, the trade-off of democratic freedoms for short-term relief reflects the understandable frustration of those feeling neglected by their leaders.

Despite these alarming trends, effective and affordable violence reduction solutions grounded in human rights are within reach. Initiatives like [Peace in Our Cities](#) and the [Gender Equality Network for Small Arms Control \(GENSAC\)](#) demonstrate that challenges such as urban violence, gun violence, and gender-based violence can be significantly reduced. Success is most evident in cross-sector programs that empower local leaders and peacebuilders to take the lead. In 2025, tackling global violence will require prioritizing locally led, rights-based solutions that empower communities to foster lasting peace.

## Unjust and Unequal: 2025 Can Turn the Tide on Global Disparities

The World Justice Project recently [highlighted](#) a seventh consecutive year of global decline in the rule of law. Meanwhile, the [2025 Oxfam report](#) revealed that billionaire wealth has risen three times faster in 2024 than in 2023, while the number of people living in poverty has barely changed since 1990. These sobering statistics underscore the immense challenges 2025 presents in building a more inclusive and equitable world. However, they also highlight the **critical importance of advancing the global movement for people-centered justice**. This urgency was echoed by the UN secretary-general during the UN General Assembly in New York last September, where he called for decisive action to confront “a world of inequality—where injustices and grievances threaten to undermine countries or even push them over the edge.”

Key opportunities to address the widening global justice gap lie ahead in 2025. Notably, the World Justice Forum will take place in Warsaw, Poland, in June, featuring a senior-level meeting of the [Justice Action Coalition](#). This key event for justice sector stakeholders will serve as a platform to advance the Coalition’s mission of driving measurable improvements in justice outcomes for people and communities worldwide. Later in the year, the Coalition will also host its inaugural biennial Ministerial Meeting under its new permanent structure, marking a significant milestone in its efforts to promote justice on a global scale.

The [Ibero-American Alliance for Access to Justice](#) and the newly launched [African Alliance for People-Centered Justice](#) will convene two inter-regional dialogues on people-centered approaches to justice, including one during the [5th World Congress on Justice for Children](#) in Madrid, Spain, next June. These dialogues will facilitate exchanges on regional challenges, opportunities, and solutions while identifying actionable insights that can be adapted to other contexts. Meanwhile, the [Young Justice Leaders](#) will continue bringing their unique perspectives, energy, and innovation to justice discourse—driving efforts to create more inclusive, equitable, and forward-looking justice systems.

As we look ahead to 2025, **addressing inequality remains a critical global challenge**. No single country can tackle this issue alone, especially in the face of tax havens, an unregulated digital economy, and the race to the bottom on corporate tax rates, which enable unchecked wealth accumulation by a privileged few. The [Inequality Solution Portal](#) will remain a vital resource in this endeavor, offering leaders, policymakers, and changemakers the tools and actionable strategies

necessary to address inequality effectively. Additionally, the ongoing [UN negotiations](#) to establish a treaty-based framework for international tax cooperation hold the promise of transformative change. Such a framework could ensure fair taxation of the ultra-rich and the digital economy while empowering domestic actors to address inequalities within their borders. This could unlock critical resources for low- and middle-income countries to achieve the SDGs, advancing global equity and justice.

## **Country Feature: DRC—A Nation at the Nexus of Conflict and Opportunity**

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) begins the year gripped by ongoing local and regional conflict. Much of the global attention remains focused on the [M23](#), a [Rwanda-supported](#) rebel movement in the eastern Congo, where more than 6 million are currently [displaced](#). Despite a formal ceasefire implemented since August 4, 2024, the M23 has now (as of writing) largely taken control of the city of Goma, a strategically important provincial capital of approximately 2 million people, despite the presence in the city of the Congolese army, UN peacekeepers, and southern African (SADC) forces. Hopes for peace seemed within reach in December 2024, as an Angola-led mediation effort—known as the Luanda process—appeared poised to produce a peace agreement and direct talks between the Congolese and Rwandan presidents. However, the initiative [unraveled](#) when Rwandan President Paul Kagame declined to attend the scheduled tripartite meeting in Luanda, Angola’s capital. His withdrawal was due to the DRC government’s refusal to negotiate directly with the M23. The summit’s failure triggered a war of words on social media, with both sides blaming each other for the breakdown of the mediation effort. Thus far, international responses to the M23 crisis have largely consisted of calls for peace which [have not prevented](#) its expansion. This year, members of the international community will likely attempt to revive the Luanda process or seek to pursue new, different attempts at mediation.

To date, the United States has been the primary source of political pressure on the two parties to achieve peace, even [leveraging American intelligence assets](#) to support the Angola-led process. However, the new US administration under Donald Trump may be less inclined to sustain this level of commitment, particularly in a global landscape where other conflicts dominate the international community’s attention.

Similarly, the fate of the “Lobito Corridor” project—championed by the Biden administration and the centerpiece of President Biden’s only [visit](#) to the African

continent in December 2024—remains uncertain under the Trump administration. However, there are some [indications](#) that this policy will continue under the new administration. This initiative, aimed at constructing or modernizing railway links between the copper-rich regions of Zambia and the DRC and the Atlantic port of Lobito in Angola, is viewed by Western governments as a strategic means for Western companies to access critical minerals, a sector currently dominated by China.

Finally, public debate in the DRC is expected to remain centered on the controversy surrounding President Tshisekedi's 2024 [proposal](#) to revise or replace the 2006 constitution. Critics, including a growing coalition of opposition parties and prominent figures—such as former president Joseph Kabila—view the proposal as a prelude to enabling Tshisekedi to seek a [third term](#) in office despite the current constitution's two-term limit.

**The road ahead will be challenging, but it is also filled with opportunities to drive meaningful progress.**

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