

Foreword

The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation aims to advance dialogue and policy for sustainable development and peace, grounded in and building on the legacy of Dag Hammarskjöld. A fundamental corner stone of this legacy is the conviction and belief he held in the cruciality of an international civil service upholding the highest standards of integrity, independence and loyalty to the Charter of the United Nations (UN). This dedication, that Hammarskjöld himself relentlessly embodied, has served as an inspiration to countless leaders and civil servants since his time. 'The Art of Leadership in the United Nations: Our duty to find new forms' is the third edition in the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation's leadership report series, following 'Framing what's blue' in 2020 and 'Painting perspectives, staying true to principles' in 2022.

This report aims to contribute to reflection and dialogue on UN leadership – both at an institutional and an individual level. Being at the center of a fragmented and ever-evolving multilateral system, in today's world the UN faces challenges that appear overwhelming with a constant presence of parallel crises, uncertain resources and decreasing trust in its capacity and credibility. The intended audience is everyone with an interest in enabling the most efficient and principled UN leadership for all those who depend on it.

At the opening of its 78th session in September 2023, Secretary-General António Guterres reminded the General Assembly that 'the UN was created precisely for moments like this – moments of maximum danger and minimum agreement'. And in these moments, it is completely dependent on principled, innovative and courageous individuals to lead the work of finding inclusive and sustainable solutions to the massive and sometimes even existential challenges of today.

However, successful leadership more often than not demands a collective endeavour. The acute problems facing the world are beyond the capacity of individual organisations to handle alone. New problems demand

new solutions spanning across institutional divides and mandates in the multilateral and regional ecosystem of actors. In the same way, leadership within the UN cannot be carried by 'single heroes'. It requires internal and institutionally agreed normative standards, peer support and governance structures as well as the reliable backing by Member States, adapted to an uncertain and rapidly changing world.

In his address on the 25th anniversary of the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1954, Dag Hammarskjöld drew parallels between leadership in modern international politics and modern art, emphasising that to 'reach mastery', we must constantly find new forms, rather than look back nostalgically to the past. But it takes firmness, perseverance and relentless effort.

With this report, we hope to provide inspiration and new insights for this endeavour.

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Per Knutsson
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‘Even in the political sphere we are likely to look to the creations of the past with nostalgia. But we know that those creations can never be brought back to life, that ours is the duty to find new forms, starting often from nothing. And we know that these forms will not be found without the courage of that deep sincerity which is shown in the search of the great artists of our time, or without the firmness and perseverance which they have demonstrated in their relentless efforts to reach mastery.’

—— Dag Hammarskjöld, Address on occasion of the opening ceremonies of the 25th Anniversary of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1954.