



A Word from the Initiator

Over the years I have watched many colleagues take their leave, in Brussels and in New York alike. There is always a farewell, always warm words, and then they are gone. What has always struck me is how much goes with them.

A negotiator accumulates an understanding of how agreement is actually reached: how a text that seemed impossible on Monday becomes acceptable by Thursday, whom to call when a process has stalled and what to say when the call is answered, how trust is built with a delegation whose instructions oppose your own on almost everything. I learned this in the ACP Group and at the European Union, where I served as Ambassador for over nine years, and again in the negotiations that produced the agreement now bearing my country's name. I have found it to be the same in every multilateral setting I have known, and again in the Alliance of Small Island States. Each has its own rhythm and its own unwritten rules, but what carries across them is practice rather than procedure.

That practice is rarely recorded anywhere. It appears in no official document. It lives in people, and when they leave, it leaves with them.

That seemed to me a loss the multilateral system can no longer afford, at a moment when we are asking a great deal of these institutions and confidence in them is uncertain. So I proposed to a group of fellow Ambassadors that we do something about it, and I have been moved by how readily they agreed.

Voices of Multilateralism exists to capture that knowledge before it disperses, and to pass it to those who come after us. It is an initiative of Ambassadors, speaking in our personal capacities and in our own voices, about the work as we have lived it. Coming from a small island State, I know what it means to be heard in these rooms, and what it takes. That is a story worth telling, and so is every other version of it. I invite colleagues, past and present, to tell theirs.

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