

REFORM OF THE UNITED NATIONS: WHERE TO NEXT?

Address by Senator Gareth Evans QC, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, to the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House, London, 19 December 1995

At the end of 1995, we can look back with some satisfaction, but also with some disappointment and frustration, on the UN's 50th Anniversary celebrations. A balanced and forward-looking Declaration, in which idealism was not wholly subordinated to world-weariness, was finally crafted and adopted at the Special General Assembly session - no mean feat when you had a drafting committee of 185! And a number of useful conferences were held around the world - including that on Social Development in Copenhagen, on Women in Beijing and on Cultural Diversity in Sydney - which focused concentrated agenda-setting attention on key issues. But overall, the orgy of rhetoric hasn't quite conceived the off spring that might have been hoped for.

We don't seem to have been able to overcome the prevailing scepticism and cynicism about the UN constantly fostered in our media, where throwaway lines about a bloated and ineffectual bureaucracy have continued to crowd out all the positive stories which can and should be told about what the UN system has done to fight starvation, disease, environmental degradation, and assaults on human rights. We would have liked things to have gone better in some of the more difficult and protracted peace missions in which the UN has been centrally involved. We would have liked to have made more progress in shaping and beginning to implement the Agenda for Development. We would have liked to have seen the Security Council not just being talked about, but being actually restructured to make it more genuinely representative of the kind of world we now live in. And we certainly did not want to see the UN plunged into the kind of financial crisis now engulfing us, with huge problems in the short term and no obvious solutions now evident for the longer term.

What, then, is to be done about all this? What should those of us among the UN's member states, and organisations and individuals who do care about the UN, be trying now to do to give substance to our idealism? Let me give you, from an Australian perspective, ten suggestions.

(1) Focus the UN's peace agenda on prevention

The UN's Charter responsibilities for peace and security extend right across the spectrum of possible responses to security problems - from peace maintenance to peace restoration to peace enforcement. But in a world where, as we are now all too conscious, political commitment and available resources are always likely to fall short of aspirations, it just makes more sense to concentrate on preventing conflicts occurring than trying to restore

peace after the event. This is true whether one is talking about traditional inter-state disputes and conflicts, or the nowadays far more common situations of intra-state conflict.

The most familiar kind of preventive strategy is preventive diplomacy - the mobilisation of diplomatic resources to try and stop disputes sliding across the threshold into armed conflict. The continuing efforts to stop conflict erupting in Burundi and the Korean peninsula and the South China Sea are some current examples of preventive diplomacy at work. But usually preventive diplomacy is a low-profile business; it lacks the obvious media impact of Blue Helmet peace keeping, let alone full scale, war-waging, peace enforcement.

Preventive diplomacy succeeds when things do not happen. Therein lies the political problem with any preventive activity: if it works nobody notices. It is an iron law of government, national or international, that everyone likes to be seen to be doing something: the notion that something might be inherently worth doing, or worth doing as an insurance premium to avoid a larger payout later, tends to be foreign to the political psyche. We are just going to have to put more effort into getting more people to see the point of that splendid observation attributed to Jean-Marie Lehn, who won the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1986: "Only those who can see the invisible can do the impossible."

The UN must upgrade its preventive diplomacy capacity - presently limited to some 50 personnel - to the point where it can offer an effective dispute resolution service to its members, providing low profile, skilled, third party assistance through good offices, mediation and the like. I have argued elsewhere that this could be done very effectively for a cost of around \$US20 million a year. By comparison, the UN's peace keeping budget for 1994 was \$US3.2 billion - while the cost to the UN coalition of waging the Gulf War has been estimated at \$US70 billion!

Even more important as a preventive strategy is, I believe, peace building. As the UN founders made clear in the Charter, building peace requires more than just avoiding war. It requires action to confront the fundamental underlying causes of disputes and conflicts - to ensure that they don't occur in the first place, or that if they do arise, they won't recur. Peace building operates at two levels, in-country and internationally.

In-country peace building means action - before as well as after conflict - to achieve economic and social development, democratisation, the elimination of gender and racial discrimination, respect for minorities, and systematic improvement in the effectiveness of institutions of government. Peace building strategies lie at the point where the UN Charter's key agendas - peace and security, development and human rights - intersect and overlap. Policies which enhance economic development and distributive justice, encourage the rule of law and protect fundamental human rights - including the right to participate through the ballot box in the making of the government decisions which fundamentally effect people's lives - are all in their own way security policies as well, addressing many of the problems which lie at the heart of violent conflict.

At the international level, peace building centres on building or strengthening international structures or regimes aimed at minimising threats to security, building confidence and trust and operating as forums for dialogue and cooperation. Examples of what I mean here are treaties governing traditionally volatile issues like the law of the sea; dispute resolution forums like the International Court of Justice; multilateral security dialogue and cooperation forums like the OSCE in Europe and the ASEAN Regional Forum in the Asia Pacific; and above all multilateral arms control and disarmament regimes.

Right now there is no better preventive contribution the international community could be making to peace and security than achieving once and for all the elimination from the face of the globe of all weapons of mass destruction. We have taken a big step forward in this respect with the negotiation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, and have taken partial steps, which need to be strengthened, with the Biological Weapons Convention.

The biggest challenge of all is, of course, nuclear weapons. The case for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons has never been more powerful - nor the circumstances for achieving this goal better. The end of the Cold War, the current and planned reductions in nuclear arsenals, the decision to extend indefinitely the NPT and to work for universal adherence to it, the commitment of the international community to conclude a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in 1996, and the international outcry against continued French and Chinese nuclear testing - an outcry disappointingly muted here in London, it must be said - add up to an opportunity to eliminate, once and for all, the threat posed fifty years ago by those clouds over Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

So the opportunity is there - but also the responsibility. For today, the biggest threat to global security arises not from the prospect of formal hostilities between two or more of the existing declared nuclear weapon states, but rather from the risk of the proliferation of nuclear weapons - among so-called threshold states, among rogue states and simply, among those states who may over time find it difficult to resist the argument that if a continued nuclear deterrent capacity is crucial for the United Kingdom or France, why should it not be equally desirable for them.

This threat of proliferation makes it imperative, I believe, for the existing declared nuclear weapons states to get absolutely serious about elimination - not just in the never-never, but here and now. It is an obligation they have already accepted by signing up to Article VI of the NPT, but it is not an obligation that they have hitherto taken seriously. But unless and until they do, we have a real problem elsewhere: nobody is going to play the non-proliferation game seriously from now on unless they see that the field is level.

The United Nations can lead the way forward here, through the specialist Conference of Disarmament, the General Assembly, the Security Council itself, and even through the International Court of Justice which is presently addressing the fascinating question of the

legality of the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. To try and craft an agenda for the UN - a practical step-by-step framework for actually achieving nuclear disarmament, not just talking about it, Australia has recently established the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. This brings together an outstanding group of fifteen eminent statesmen, scientists, disarmament experts and military strategists from around the world to work out - and recommend to the UN - how to get to zero, how to maintain stability on the way down, and how to ensure security and stability thereafter. The Commission includes from Britain Nobel Prize winner Joseph Rotblat and former Chief of the Defence Staff Field Marshal the Lord Carver (as well as Australia's Professor Bob O'Neill who Oxford now claims as its own!).

(2) Ensure that UN peace operations have clearly defined and achievable objectives

While prevention is always better than cure, there must still be some credible international capacity to deal collectively, and if necessary forcefully, with deadly conflicts and humanitarian crises that cannot be prevented or resolved by other means.

Since the end of the Cold War it has been easier to get the Security Council to agree to peace keeping or peace enforcement operations. But it hasn't always been easy to get them to agree to the right operations in the right place at the right time. The last few years have given us all too many examples of politically-influenced Security-Council mandates - driven above all by the need to be seen to be doing something - which have not been achievable in the field or which have lacked the clarity about goals and time frames which commanders could reasonably expect. As Britain knows only too well from its experience in Bosnia, peacekeepers have been sent when there is no peace to keep, and peace enforcers sent without adequate resources - until the very end - to do the job.

One of the most evident weaknesses of UN peace operations, whether they be peacekeeping or related operations under Chapter VI or peace enforcement operations under Chapter VII, has been the inability to deploy forces quickly when a crisis is emerging. We all remain agonisingly conscious of the failure to react in time to prevent the genocide in Rwanda, where the timely deployment there of a "riot squad" of 5000 troops may well have saved the lives of 500,000 people. And you will recall that it took ten months before the Security Council's decision to enlarge UNPROFOR to protect "safe areas" in Bosnia was actually put into effect, and even then on a scale that was inadequate for the extremely difficult task they faced.

There has been a flurry of recent proposals and studies to consider how the UN could do better to deploy forces to crises more rapidly. My own view has moved backwards and forwards on this issue - I have no choice but to confess, since my inconsistent statements are all on the public record! - but I now firmly believe that our priority effort should be devoted not to chasing the will-o-the-wisp, attractive in principle though it may be, of a standing volunteer force, but rather to building the UN's headquarters capacity - to enable it to better conceptualise operations, construct their mandates, plan and organise them, and

rapidly set them in train.

The way forward in this respect has now been shown by the excellent Canadian study, *Towards a Rapid Reaction Capability for the United Nations*, recently presented to the General Assembly. Put simply, member states are likely to be much more willing to earmark and deliver standby military units for rapid reaction purposes if they have greater confidence than is the case now in the UN's strategic and operational planning capacity. The idea of a standing force is one that should continue to quietly explored, but it is not an idea whose time has yet come.

(3) Give equal weight to the UN's development agenda

The security agenda tends to dominate most popular perceptions of the UN's role, but we must never allow our attention to be diverted from the demands of the development agenda, now as pressing as ever. The key problem facing us is that, despite all efforts to the contrary, the gap between rich and poor countries continues to widen. The fact that some 1.3 billion of the 5.7 billion people alive today live at an unacceptable level of poverty is not only dangerous in security terms, but morally insupportable.

The United Nations of the future must, as a matter of the most urgent priority, forge a new agenda for development and reshape its relevant institutions to implement that agenda effectively. This is as important as any task it faces in the service of the human family, and in recreating itself as an institution fit for the 21st century. The agenda is available for all to see. It has been mapped in the Secretary-General's *An Agenda for Development* and fully described in the six global conferences held by the United Nations in the last four years - on children, the environment, human rights, population, social development and women. There have also been important studies by the international financial institutions and by academic institutions. We know now what we need to do. We must resolve, politically, to do it.

(4) Explain the human rights agenda properly and get serious about implementing it

Since 1945, the international community has created an impressive-looking array of human rights institutions, including treaty-based bodies created in accordance with the provisions of the six major UN human rights instruments. But in practice this machinery has been in something of a cul-de-sac - cut off from the mainstream of UN activity, largely neglected by member states, severely underfunded, understaffed, lacking coordination and simply not able to meet the steadily increasing demands placed upon it. A great deal of effort is going to have to go into refining these arrangements.

A major task ahead of the international community is to end the disparity between the proclaimed priorities - as articulated for example in the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 - and the UN's actual allocation of resources for the protection of human rights. What is needed is not so much the further proliferation of treaty bodies,

thematic and country rapporteurs, experts and working groups, but giving those that now exist the capacity to do their jobs really effectively.

The task would be much assisted if more member states were to get into the habit of talking about human rights in the way the founders intended, i.e. not just as extending to the political and civil rights so beloved of the Western democracies, but to economic, social and cultural rights as well. All of us have to understand the significance attached by developing states to the right to development and alleviation of poverty. Without the developed world recognising these aspirations as 'rights' properly so-called - and many governments remain extremely reluctant to do so - we risk increased divisions between governments of the developed and developing countries. It certainly makes it much harder to argue respect for the traditional political and civil rights of free speech, association and the like.

(5) Think of the UN's agendas for peace, development and human rights as an integrated whole

It is worth particularly emphasising again, as the interconnectedness of the UN's three basic agendas. In thinking about future directions for the UN, we really don't need to look much further than where we started. The challenge is essentially to reintegrate the functions of the United Nations in the way the founders intended. In the preamble to the Charter, and in its purposes and principles, the three basic objectives of peace (meeting the need for security), development (meeting economic needs) and human rights and justice (meeting the needs for individual and group dignity and liberty) are clearly set out. The trouble has been that during the Cold War years, the integral relationship of these different activities was not reflected in the UN's structure or work methods. They were treated as being in completely different conceptual and institutional boxes.

But any viable modern concept of international peace, let alone peace within states, must recognise that there can be no sustainable peace without development, and no development without peace. And there is not likely to be lasting or sustainable peace in any society if material needs are satisfied, but human rights - in the fullest sense, not just economic and social rights but civil and political rights as well - are not satisfied. Strategies to advise these objectives need to be coordinated and prioritised, and that simply doesn't happen at the moment.

(6) Be serious about organisational reform

Any organisation of the UN's size and complexity, serving as many differing constituencies with as many axes to grind, will always be a soft target for criticism. However ill-deserved some of the criticism may be - particularly when the UN is expected to deliver far more than it has in the past with manifestly inadequate resources - it is crucial that the money that is spent be well spent.

A hard look needs to be taken at the UN Secretariat, with a view to creating a more modern and efficient structure and administrative system. This should include a basic change to the senior decision-making structure of UN Headquarters in New York, to ensure that the Secretary-General has an effective chain of command to exercise authority over the whole range of major UN operations, not just in the peace and security area. I have been supporting in this context the argument, which has been around for some time, for creating a new working collegiate executive of four Deputy-Secretaries-General to work with the Secretary-General - responsible respectively for Economic and Social Affairs, Peace and Security Affairs, Humanitarian Affairs and Administration and Management.

This kind of restructuring is needed to consolidate and coordinate the more than forty separate departments, agencies, instrumentalities and commissions that currently report directly to the Secretary-General: flat management structures may be fashionable, but I don't think any MBA graduate could bring himself or herself to recommend the UN's existing one!

(7) Find answers fast for the UN's financial problems

There is no use talking about reintegrating the UN, or reshaping its responsibilities, if the resources are not available to meet member states' demands. Of course it is the responsibility of member states themselves to rectify the current financial problems, and the perennial cash crisis faced in UN headquarters because of overdue payments. One solution is obvious enough, even if apparently unattainable in practice - all member states should meet their obligations to pay their assessed contributions in full and on time.

But I have been arguing that the time has come to look again very seriously at possible additional external sources of income - whether by way of a small levy on foreign exchange transactions (which the UNDP has been studying very closely, with some encouraging early results), or a small levy on international airline passengers, or a small levy on issued passports, or a levy on some other transactions which have similar direct or indirect connections with the kind of benefits that the UN system provides. Any one of the methods I have specifically mentioned could raise \$3 billion or more - covering almost the whole cost of current UN peace operations - without, on the face of it, any significant adverse economic impact on the transactions in question or those engaging in them.

Provided the member states retain absolute control over how any such income is spent, there do not seem to be any great problems of principle which should inhibit the exploration of these options. My own soundings suggest that a great many member states would welcome the initiation by the Secretary-General of an appropriate study. I have no illusions about the practical and political difficulties involved in implementing any particular such strategy - not least because there will always be some member states, as well as many private lobbies, not especially uncomfortable about having a UN that is struggling to pay its way. But if we want to take the UN seriously, as we must, we have to

take its resource problems much more seriously than the international community has so far.

(8) Urgently grasp the nettle on Security Council restructuring

The structural problem in the UN system requiring the most urgent attention is the shape of the Security Council. We all know that the composition of the Council no longer represents the international community. Economic power has spread to new parts of the globe, just as the realities of political power have changed dramatically over the last half century. The principle of limited expansion of the Security Council is now generally accepted, but the questions of how many, how and who remain the subject of intense discussion.

The time for sniffing the wind, testing the water and engaging in abstract debate about basic concepts is over. The need now is for some very hard-headed bargaining to come up with a representativeness formula that meets, to the maximum extent possible, the competing national interests involved - not only of Japan and Germany and not only of the bigger countries in the developing world, but some other very large and important countries as well: there is no shortage of formulae for achieving this already on the table. And that negotiation needs to be concluded within the next year. If the argument drags on for much longer than that, the credibility of the UN will be dragged down with it.

(9) Sell hard the UN's achievements

No organisation has suffered more than the UN from what seems to be the first rule of the Fourth Estate: that good news is not news. We have heard all about, ad nauseam, mission failures in Bosnia and Somalia and Rwanda. And we are now hearing, ad nauseam, how many of the recent advances that have occurred in peace and security have been made outside the framework of the UN - in the Middle East peace process, in Northern Ireland and with the NATO strike-led change of fortunes in Bosnia. But how much has been written or talked about the successful missions in Namibia and Mozambique, in El Salvador and Haiti, and in Cambodia, or the spectacularly successful first humanitarian phase of the Somalian operation?

How much has been written to remind the world of the role that the UN has played in curbing or outlawing weapons of mass destruction? Or of the extraordinary role played by the UN in achieving decolonisation, something which writers hundreds of years hence will certainly regard as being at least as significant historically as the Cold War? Or the role played by the UN in feeding 52 million starving people last year? Or in eradicating smallpox and polio? Or its more prosaic role in enabling us simply to fly abroad, post letters internationally and watch satellite TV?

What is necessary here is not merely a consciousness raising exercise of a traditional UN kind. Sending kits to schools is useful and admirable, but not enough. The current

criticisms levelled at the United Nations are so damaging and corrosive that a more aggressive approach in attacking these criticisms has to be developed. One useful innovation in this respect might be for the UN's regional offices to play not just an information role, but a frank and overt PR role. I discovered with some bemusement, for example, that it was only last year that the UN Information Centre in Sydney was authorised to respond directly to media enquiries: it previously had to contact New York for instructions on how to respond!

(10) Put the cost of the UN system into perspective

It has seemed to me for some time that of all the stories that need to be told about the UN, the most necessary message to get out is that - despite all the many structural and organisational and personnel reforms that can and must be made within the system to improve its efficiency - the UN system, taking into account what it delivers and applying any reasonable standard of comparison, is simply not either unduly expensive or self-evidently bloated.

The core functions of the UN (involving the Headquarters in New York, the Offices in Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi, and the five regional Commissions) cost just Pounds 780 million between them, considerably less than just one department - the New York Police Department - in one city in one of the UN's 185 member states. The total number of personnel needed to run those UN core functions is around 10,700: the Metropolitan police force in greater London, by contrast, employs some 42,000 police and civilians.

If you add to the core functions the related programs and organs like UNDP and UNHCR, and the other specialised programs and agencies of the entire UN family - the FAO, ILO, UNESCO and WHO, plus the IAEA - and put into the equation as well the Bretton Woods Institutions (the World Bank group and the IMF, which between them employ nearly 10,000 people and spend nearly \$US5 billion annually), then you are still talking about total UN personnel of only around 61,400 and a total UN system cost of just under Pounds 12 billion.

By comparison, Barclays Bank has a staff of 95,000 and an annual turnover of about the same as the entire UN system budget - around Pounds 12 billion. The entire UN system employs fewer people than the three Disney theme parks in California, Florida and France. And three times as many people - 183,000 - sell McDonald's hamburgers around the world as work for the UN system

Putting all this together, I do hold high hopes that we can create a reformed world body which pursues all its stated objectives - peace, development and human rights - rather than consigning some to the too-hard basket; which acts on its concern for human security as well as state security; which devotes more of its intellectual and material capital to preventing conflicts, not just fixing them; and which - putting it at its plainest - works better.

For all its flaws, I believe that the UN is one of the truly remarkable institutions created by mankind, and deserves more than the grudging and half-hearted support it habitually gets from political leaders. There has been from the outset an unashamedly moral and idealistic dimension to the UN's role which deserves to be accepted on its own terms, without the usual overlay of scepticism and cynicism to which all of us in the political and diplomatic business are professionally subject.

The historian E.H. Carr, when dedicating his *The Twenty Years' Crisis* to the statesmen of San Francisco, expressed the need for both moral and pragmatic considerations to determine international affairs: "If ... it is utopian to ignore the element of power, it is an unreal kind of realism which ignores the element of morality in any world order".

In reforming the United Nations, we should not succumb either to utopianism or to an unreal kind of realism. Our efforts should be driven, rather, by the vision both of a saner, safer world, and by a practical understanding of the difficulties of actually building such a world. May the United Nations, and the men and women who determine its future, continue to chart a course, difficult as it is, between realism and idealism: to have the wisdom to determine what needs to be done, and the capacity to do it.