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Erskine Barton Childers

- For a democratic United Nations and the Rule of Law



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Erskine Barton Childers – For a democratic United Nations and the Rule of Law

Edited by Marjolijn Snippe, Vijay Mehta and Henning Melber

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To the memory of
Erskine Childers
and for the future of
his son David and
his generation.



Preface

Henning Melber

‘...there will always be enough people
to fight for a decent future’
(Dag Hammarskjöld)

For Erskine Barton Childers, the United Nations’s second Secretary-General was a role model who inspired his own commitments. Childers clearly devoted his career as an international civil servant and his too short life thereafter to the tireless promotion of ideals and visions that both acknowledged and were animated by the spirit of Dag Hammarskjöld. His numerous writings, of which this volume contains only a selection, testify to his convictions and commitments, and thereby translate the legacy of ‘the boss’, as Hammarskjöld was referred to with fond respect by his staff, into political discourse and practice in our times.

The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation has long benefited from Erskine Childers’s inspiration. His thought-provoking and pioneering ideas on reform of the UN system were also published (with Sir Brian Urquhart as co-author) in the very same *Development Dialogue* series. They set unmatched standards in the reform debate and remain valid today.¹ The current volume, published 15 years after the death of Childers as a kind of homage to the man, at the same time keeps alive the spirit of Hammarskjöld, whose untimely death occurred half a century ago this year.

During his term in office as Secretary-General, at a time when the ‘winds of change’ had just started to blow across Africa, Hammarskjöld had already clearly, and contrary to the prevailing *Zeitgeist*, dismissed any claims to superiority based on some kind of naturalist conception of dominance rooted in supposed biological advancement over others. He also questioned the legitimacy sought by dominant classes

¹ See B. Urquhart and E. Childers (1990), ‘A World in Need of Leadership: Tomorrow’s United Nations’, *Development Dialogue*, Nos. 1-2; B. Urquhart and E. Childers (1996), *A World in Need of Leadership: Tomorrow’s United Nations. A Fresh Appraisal*, Uppsala: Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation (revised 2nd ed. of 1990 text); E. Childers and B. Urquhart (1991), ‘Towards a More Effective United Nations’, *Development Dialogue*, Nos. 1-2 (published in 1992); E. Childers and B. Urquhart (1994), ‘Renewing the United Nations System’, *Development Dialogue*, No. 1.

to justify their privileges. As he categorically stated in an address on ‘Asia, Africa, and the West’, delivered to the academic association of the University of Lund on 4 May 1959:

The health and strength of a community depend on every citizen’s feeling of solidarity with the other citizens, and on his willingness, in the name of this solidarity, to shoulder his part of the burdens and responsibilities of the community. The same is of course true of humanity as a whole. And just [as] it cannot be argued that within a community an economic upper class holds its favored position by virtue of greater ability, as a quality which is, as it were, vested in the group by nature, so it is, of course, impossible to maintain this in regard to nations in their mutual relationships.

He therefore concluded:

We thus live in a world where, no more internationally than nationally, any distinct group can claim superiority in mental gifts and potentialities of development [...] Those democratic ideals which demand equal opportunities for all should be applied also to peoples and races [...] no nation or group of nations can base its future on a claim of supremacy.²

Like Hammarskjöld, Childers felt strongly that through truly democratic reform of the UN system and much stronger commitment by the community of states, the UN as a global governance body – a UN equipped with the necessary independence and a competent staff and with sufficient financial resources – could meet the challenges of achieving greater peace, democracy and human rights and a way of life based on more sustainable management of our planet, and thereby reduce the risks for its future. He shared Hammarskjöld’s beliefs in the role the UN could play if only its member states would accept what common sense seemed to suggest.

In what proved to be Hammarskjöld’s last annual statement on the role and future of the UN, delivered as the introduction to his annual report to the General Assembly a month before his death, Hammarskjöld reiterated that concept of the UN that was also to serve as a guiding principle for Erskine Barton Childers. ‘In the Preamble to the Charter,’ Hammarskjöld reasoned:

² D. Hammarskjöld, ‘Asia, Africa, and the West’, address before the Academic Association of the University of Lund, 4 May 1959 (UN Press Release SG/813, May 4, 1959), in A.W. Cordier and W. Foote (eds) (1974), *Public Papers of the Secretaries-General of The United Nations. Vol. IV: Dag Hammarskjöld 1958-1960*, New York and London: Columbia University Press, pp. 383-4.

...member nations have reaffirmed their faith ‘in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small,’ a principle which also has found many other expressions in the Charter. Thus, it restates the basic democratic principle of equal political rights, independently of the position of the individual or of the Member country in respect of its strength, as determined by territory, population, or wealth. The words just quoted must, however, be considered as going further and imply an endorsement as well of a right to equal economic opportunities [...] It would seem that those who regard the Organisation as a conference machinery, ‘neutral’ in relation to the direction of policies on a national or international basis and serving solely as an instrument for the solution of conflicts by reconciliation, do not pay adequate attention to those essential principles of the Charter to which reference has just been made.³

During a visit to India in early February 1956, Hammarskjöld addressed the Indian Council of World Affairs. Prompted by a moving encounter with local culture, his mainly extemporaneous speech explored the dimensions of human universalism, a commonality beyond Western – or, indeed, any other culturally, religiously or geographically limited – ideology or conviction:

It is no news to anybody, but we sense it in different degrees, that our world of today is more than ever before *one* world. The weakness of one is the weakness of all, and the strength of one – not the military strength, but the real strength, the economic and social strength, the happiness of people – is indirectly the strength of all. Through various developments which are familiar to all, world solidarity has, so to say, been forced upon us. This is no longer a choice of enlightened spirits; it is something which those whose temperament leads them in the direction of isolationism have also to accept.⁴

This document expresses, as does his address to the University of Lund, Hammarskjöld’s firm belief in the unity of humankind and its shared values and norms. Half a century after his untimely death, much remains to be done in this world to give effect to and to enhance such understanding. Childers was among those who carried the torch. Like Hammarskjöld, he was aware of the need to embrace the challenge

3 D. Hammarskjöld, ‘Introduction to the Sixteenth Annual Report’, New York, 17 August 1961, in Cordier and Foote (eds) (1975), *Public Papers*, Vol. V, pp. 544f.

4 D. Hammarskjöld, ‘The United Nations – Its Ideology and Activities. Address before the Indian Council of World Affairs’, 3 February 1956, in Cordier and Foote (eds) (1972), *Public Papers*, Vol. II, p. 661.

of reducing the gross imbalances that, in a very concrete and lasting material sense, prevent the full achievement of universal ethical and moral norms to the benefit of most if not all of humankind.

The lack of progress we have witnessed since the UN came into existence does not invalidate Hammarskjöld's words and visions as impractical or unrealistic. For him, the work of the organisation was to build on the commonality of humankind, its conduct and experience: 'With respect to the United Nations as a symbol of faith, it may [...] be said that to every man it stands as a kind of "yes" to the ability of man to form his own destiny, and form his own destiny so as to create a world where the dignity of man can come fully into its own.' These words should continue as a leitmotif. 'In such a world', the late Secretary-General went on, 'it is impossible to maintain the status of "haves" and "have-nots", just as impossible as it has grown to be inside the nation state.'⁵ The challenge to turn his words into social and political realities remains our agenda.

The second Secretary-General was aware that achieving a global contract would be an uphill battle, a global contract that would not only express but also give effect to shared responsibility over matters of general human concern. In an address on 1 May 1960 at the University of Chicago, he gave a sobering but realistic assessment that still reflects the political realities within the not so United Nations system today:

Those who advocate world government, and this or that special form of world federalism, often present challenging theories and ideas, but we, like our ancestors, can only press against the receding wall which hides the future. It is by such efforts, pursued to the best of our ability, more than by the construction of ideal patterns to be imposed upon society, that we lay the basis and pave the way for the society of the future.⁶

The road is indeed long and winding. It requires patience, perseverance and many other virtues to cope with the setbacks and disappointments without capitulating or resignation. Dag Hammarskjöld, who embodied many of these virtues in his personal beliefs, was aware of the time required for this endeavour to bear fruit. As he stated in his address to New York University on 20 May 1956:

⁵ Ibid., pp. 660 and 661.

⁶ Quoted from K. Falkman (ed.) (2005), *To speak for the world. Speeches and statements by Dag Hammarskjöld*, Stockholm: Atlantis, p. 164.

...we are still seeking ways to make our international institutions fulfill more effectively the fundamental purpose expressed in Woodrow Wilson's words – 'to be the eye of the nations to keep watch upon the common interest'. I have no doubt that forty years from now we shall also be engaged in the same pursuit. How could we expect otherwise? World organisation is still a new adventure in human history. It needs much perfecting in the crucible of experiences and there is no substitute for time in that respect.⁷

More than 50 years later, we still have not reached the desired goal. Let's hope that time is not running out. We have certainly entered a stage in the reproduction of the human species where even more urgent measures are needed to secure a future for men, women and their children on this earth. Hammarskjöld then had faith in the future of mankind, as he had trust in the moral compass of the people. As the transcript of extemporaneous remarks at the UN Correspondents Association luncheon in his honour on 9 April 1958 reveals, he maintained a 'belief and the faith that the future will be all right because there will always be enough people to fight for a decent future'. He also believed firmly that 'there are enough people who are solidly engaged in this fight and who are strong enough and dedicated enough to guarantee its success.'⁸

Erskine Barton Childers was one of those people who focused their energy on the fight for a decent future. In his life and writings he set an example of how, as a committed disciple of Hammarskjöld, to promote the ideal of and belief in the relevance of a truly united family of nations. So do all of those, who, despite their scepticism about the honesty of the hegemonic players who shape the dominant agenda of the UN and thereby limit its role in changing the world for the better, have provided their reflections on the selected texts by Childers included in this publication. It is certainly no coincidence that several among them have long been part of the Foundation's network. Their statements testify to the continuing relevance of the positions taken by Childers, who was a friend to all of them. Their reinforcement of his message represents the kind of advocacy we need to give practical meaning to the often-quoted formula popularised by Hammarskjöld, 'that the United Nations was not created in order to bring us to heaven, but in order to save us from hell'.⁹

7 Quoted from *ibid.*, pp. 67-8.

8 Quoted from *ibid.*, pp. 51-2.

9 D. Hammarskjöld, Address at the University of California Convocation, 13 May 1954, in Cordier and Foote (eds) (1972), *Public Papers, Vol. II*, p. 301.

A short preface is not an adequate introduction to what follows. Those wanting a sense of what is to come are well advised to first read Marjolijn Snippe's personal epilogue, which concludes this volume. It is, moreover, thanks to her that we can share the lasting legacy of Erskine Barton Childers in this way and help to keep it alive.

I would like to thank Marjolijn for considering the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation's *Development Dialogue*, to which Erskine earlier contributed some milestone analyses on UN reform, as the appropriate platform for making these texts and comments available to a wider audience. They are reproduced in their original form. I also gratefully acknowledge the support of Vijay Mehta, who, by organising the annual Erskine Childers Lecture, keeps alive the spirit of this truly cosmopolitan humanist who followed in the footsteps of Hammarskjöld.

Thanks are also due to the less visible but always reliable team ensuring the quality of this printed result: Mattias Lasson for his creative skills in turning the texts into an appealing and attractive visual format and Peter Colenbrander for his sensitive language editing. I would like to end with his words. In concluding the work on this volume, he commented: 'Working on the articles has been a revelation to me. It is hard not to be drawn to a man so convinced and convincing about the need for a fairer world, and so capable of eliciting such warm tributes from so many great and good contributors.'

Introduction

Vijay Mehta

Erskine Childers (1929–96) worked and sacrificed his life in pursuit of ideals that can improve the quality of life for all of us by allowing us to live in a more civilised way. He was a free-thinker and a critic and constructive analyst of the United Nations. He was also a significant part of the rich Irish contribution to the UN in the areas of international peace and security, poverty reduction and development. He travelled the globe tirelessly exposing the faults of the UN system and passionately advocating for its long overdue and urgent reform.

Erskine Childers belonged to that camp that believes the UN is the only institution with the unique representative authority to confer legitimacy on the important decisions on the challenges and threats facing the world today. He also believed that there is no alternative to the UN and that if we did not have the UN, we would need to invent it.

Recently, I read Childers's lecture on 'In a Time beyond Warnings – Strengthening the United Nations System', which he gave in London in 1993. The information contained in the lecture on UN reform and his underlying reasoning for such reform are as relevant today as when he gave the talk. He criticised powerful nations for advancing their own agendas and for continuously weakening the UN's capacity to govern. For example, during the Gulf War, when the UN was not actively pursuing peace in the region, he was not afraid to speak the truth and blamed former Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar for breaching UN Charter safeguards and thus for not doing his job properly.

In his London lecture, Childers advocated important reforms to the UN and expressed his opinion about how they should be enforced. He suggested that:

- The UN should be directed at root causes and not merely be responsive;
- All UN agencies should work in coordination under the leadership of the UN Secretary-General. For maximum results, he advocated that the UN should have four Deputy Secretary-Generals;

- To bridge the deepening North–South divide, the UN should undergo structural reform to achieve equality among nations small and large;
- For the purposes of peacekeeping, he stressed that the UN should equip itself with a full range of capacities to prevent the worst effects of war, violence, misery and the violation of human rights;
- The UN should strengthen its capacity to provide humanitarian relief efficiently; and
- The Security Council (what he called a private club) should become more representative to break the monopoly of the big powers and their use of military might and to rebalance its role in the peace and security sector.

The present volume is the fruit of planning by Marjolijn and me over a two-year period. Our organisation, Action for UN Renewal (part of Uniting for Peace), has hosted the annual Childers Lectures in London since 1997, shortly after the untimely death of Childers in 1996 while giving a speech in Luxemburg. These lectures are delivered by eminent persons who not only assess the successes and failures of the UN but also put forward ideas for reform of the world body to enable it to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

The 2008 Childers Lecture was delivered by Nobel Laureate Mairead Corrigan Maguire and was attended by Marjolijn and David (Marjolijn and Childers's son). Over dinner, Marjolijn and I briefly discussed the possibility of compiling Childers's talks into a volume. Marjolijn sent me copies of the texts of the speeches given in 1990s. Upon reading them, I was left in no doubt that they are as relevant today as when they were given. I was convinced that they needed to be published as a collection and deserved a wider audience.

In 2009, I was in the Netherlands to give a lecture at a conference organised by the Universal Peace Federation. Before taking my flight back to London, I rang Marjolijn and we met at Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam, where we had a brief discussion about the project. I suggested that the collection should include comment on the texts of the lectures by distinguished friends of Childers, some of whom worked or had worked for the UN. She agreed, and over a cup of coffee the fate of the publication was sealed. The last bit of the jigsaw puzzle fell into place when Henning Melber generously agreed to publish the collection as no. 56 in the *Development Dialogue* series.

It is a great pleasure to see the thoughts and writings of Childers in print. He was very passionate about the value of the UN and worked tirelessly for its reform. I hope this volume will do justice to his great body of work in which he tried to transform the UN into a truly accountable, transparent and democratic organisation. Let us hope we can continue the work to make his dream come true, for as he said: ‘Now, we have to go forward in the giant undertaking of building a democratic United Nations to make the real world safe, just and sustainable for all its children.’

Now, we have to go forward
in the giant undertaking
of building a democratic
United Nations to make the
real world safe, just and
sustainable for all its children.





In a time beyond warnings – Strengthening the United Nations System¹



Remarks by Erskine Childers at
Conference on Reforming the United Nations
Heythrop College, The University of London,
23 January 1993

Introduction

The renewal of interest in Britain in the United Nations – reflected in this conference – is immensely encouraging to anyone who has been deeply involved in the world organisation. Decent people of this country poured their hopes and their inherited experience of international relations into the founding of the UN. Britain has given us some of the most distinguished names in the rolls of the civil servants and the diplomats of the UN System. And it is surely time, overtime, to renew that investment of hope and of support, because since the UN was founded there have been more attempts to weaken it from powerful sources here than anywhere else, excepting only the United States.

This compels me to make clear why I have criticisms of the UN System and why I do advocate reforms, lest cynics and UN bashers seek to exploit my remarks. I advocate reform of the UN *to improve on the already extraordinary*; to strengthen a System that has already recorded breathtaking advances on the great canvas of world history. I can only cite a quick handful of its achievements in these remarks but this I must do.

While denied by the powers its own ready-response peace-maintaining capacities under Article 43², and while deliberately kept on the brink of bankruptcy by its very host country (the United States), in the last four years the United Nations has nonetheless managed to mount as many new peace-keeping operations as in all the 40 previous years, deploying four times more troops, 70 times more police and over 100

1 This address gave rise to E. Childers (1993), *Time Beyond Warnings: Strengthening the United Nations System*, London: Catholic Institute for International Relations.

2 Article 43: All Members of the United Nations, in order to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security, undertake to make available to the Security Council, on its call and in accordance with a special agreement or agreements, armed forces, assistance, and facilities, including rights of passage, necessary for the purpose of maintaining international peace and security...

times more civilian support staff. Delays, errors, warts and all, that is in itself an incredible achievement.

Next, if the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council had done nothing else at all in 46 years than enable 51 rising to 179 member nations of every culture and condition to negotiate and adopt the 70 detailed instruments of Human Rights that are now part of international treaty or declaratory law, they would have more than refuted the Western media sneer that they are ‘mere talking shops’. They need improvement. But it would be to the eternal credit of a single, homogeneous country if its parliament had in that span of time produced the International Bill of Rights, which is changing human society forever.

Discrepancies within the UN System

I will be very severe about governments, because what the UN System is, and what needs to be overhauled and strengthened in it, is the product of *their* governance, *their* inefficient and often quixotic choice of its executive heads, *their* decisions and *their* indecision. But the extraordinary thing is that, alongside the weaknesses the UN has again and again brought out the best in governments: to learn to co-operate, to reach far more consensus than the media ever report, and often to yield treasured pieces of their sovereignty, as in the massive Convention on the Law of the Sea, the first significant change in such law in 300 years. Another example of the UN bringing out the best in governments recalls the legacies of colonialism that still afflict the peoples of the third world every day of their lives. Britain left Ghana with only 95 university graduates among 9 million citizens, a ratio to total population which, had it applied here, would have meant that Britain in 1960 would have had only 600 graduates for all needs. But in only 20 years the UN Development Programme, with UNESCO, trained over one million teachers, more than half of whom were in Africa. I know: I helped in this work. The United States withdrew from UNESCO in the very year when this enormous achievement could be announced.

Yet even as the goal of one million new teachers was reached, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), supposedly a part of the System, was demanding that Third World governments *dismiss* tens of thousands of those very teachers, under its ‘structural adjustment’ policies supported by the Group of Seven (G-7) powers who control it. Whole portions, up to a third, of the educational staffs so painstakingly built up by the rest of the System – and incidentally also with the G-7’s own bilateral aid – have

been wiped out in the last decade. This is an example of *no-sense* contradictions in the System that simply must now be confronted.

I can cite only one other achievement in my limited time, one that illustrates the UN System working at its best in four ways: in harnessing global expertise to analyse a common problem; in getting states to agree a global strategy and action plan; in strengthening the capacities of weaker ones to help implement that plan; and in then working it daily, simultaneously, everywhere. In 1967 there were some 15 million known cases of smallpox on earth. To attack that scourge required simultaneous action in every single country in the world, and strengthened capacities in many: one missed case, one carrier across a frontier, could keep the whole pandemic alive. The UN System mobilised for this effort. Only ten years later, from 15 million there was *one* known case of smallpox left. In 1980 the World Health Assembly declared this dreaded disease eliminated from the planet. The cost was only 300 million dollars.

Poisonweed

Now if we are to focus on the most important reforms in this already remarkable UN System we need first to clear away some particularly foul poisonweed planted by the bashers and media cynics about what they invariably call its ‘vast sprawling, swollen bureaucracy’.

The total staff of the United Nations System (the UN proper, and all its specialized technical agencies and development funds) world-wide and excluding only the World Bank and IMF staff who are not part of the common UN civil service, and peace-keeping troops who are temporary, numbers 51,500³. Let me emphasise: counting *all* staff, drivers to directors, there are 51,500 to serve some 180 countries. They work in the General Assembly and other organs of the UN, and in everything from civil aviation to agriculture, from human rights to health, from children and education to population planning, from industry and telecommunications to the World Weather Watch, and all the other technical work of the System around the planet. 51,500 civil servants to serve over 5,000 million people. That is fewer than the District Health staff of Wales;⁴ fewer than the civil service of the City

3 Report of Secretary-General to the 47th Session of the General Assembly, UN Doc. A/47/593, Table 8 (levels as of end-1990), United Nations, 3 November 1992.

4 *Public Bodies 1991*, Office of the Minister for Civil Services (London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1991), p. 99, citing the staff of the District Health Authorities of Wales at 54,200.

of Stockholm;⁵ fewer than all government staff in the North American State of Wyoming with population less than half a million.⁶

The budget of the System is constantly depicted as a monstrous and wasteful drain on the treasuries of its major contributors. It is becoming more and more difficult to separate normative from emergency costs in peace-keeping and humanitarian work, but setting estimates for these aside, and the World Bank and IMF whose funds are raised in a totally different manner, the current total of the budgets for the whole system's normative activities, all its agencies and including its development funds, is about \$8 billion a year. That is roughly what the British public spends on alcohol in somewhat less than six months. It is about what Western children spent last Christmas, or what US citizens spend in a year on cut flowers and potted plants.

The current cost of the UN System's world-wide emergency peace-keeping and humanitarian relief is estimated about \$4 billion, which is of course another absolutely horrendous burden on exchequers: it is equal to the combined budgets of the Police and Fire Departments of New York City.

From the foregoing you will understand that the reforms I advocate in the UN System do not include further reducing its perilously understaffed civil service, or its pitiable budgets. We do, however, need to improve how these are used, and indeed how we can attain public support for adequate resourcing to meet the enormous challenges of the post-Cold War world.

Global inequities

The world of the 1990s is a far, far more dangerous place than many hoped at the apparent end of East-West nuclear confrontation. Extremely serious global problems inherited from the age of empires and neglected during the monumental distraction of the cold war are now converging with its grim legacies.

There is unprecedented restiveness among huge numbers of human beings. Traditional nation-state structures are weakening. The frontiers of the great majority of the membership of the UN were drawn without consultation among the people on either side of them during the

5 *Kommunal Personal 1991*, Svenska Kommunförbundet (Swedish Association of Local Authorities), Stockholm, 1992.

6 *Public Employment 1991*, Table 6, Doc. GE/91-1, U.S. Department of Commerce, Washington D.C. 1992.

age of empires – not only in the South but also in the North. The fact that UN membership then made these frontiers sacrosanct is less and less relevant to those who have had enough of having their cultural identity buried, or even split by such frontiers, so that an entire distinct peoples (for example, the 10 million Quechua in the Andes) are treated as so-called ‘minorities’ inside several adjacent states. Like a vast mine-field buried under ice across the planet and now re-surfacing as the ice melts, these long-neglected imperial legacies are now producing more and more violence, including vicious ‘ethnic cleansing’ and tidal waves of displaced persons. Currently over 40 million are displaced, about 1 in every 135 human beings alive today. Some 36 major armed conflicts are raging across the world this morning; a world littered with the most ghastly debris of the cold war, the armaments of its protagonists, and still being stalked by their own eager merchants of more.

There are severe, potentially catastrophic economic inequities between the North and South. The G-7 powers have very largely ignored these, but they have not conveniently gone away, rather they have become steadily worse. In 1960 the richest one-fifth of the world’s population enjoyed 30 times the income of the poorest fifth; by 1989 the richest fifth was receiving 60 times the income of the poorest.⁷ This ratio of 20:80, or worse, dominates our world today. As the 1990s opened, the 20 per cent Northern minority of humankind had 82.7 per cent of world gross national product; 81.2 per cent of world trade; had 94.6 per cent of all commercial lending; 80.6 per cent of all domestic savings; 80.5 per cent of all domestic investment, and 94 per cent of all research and development.⁸ The 80 per cent majority of humanity in the South get the 20 per cent (or less) scraps from the tables of the affluent.

In the South, some 1.2 billion people now live in absolute poverty, on the very margins of survival itself. More are driven into this condition every day, 40 per cent more in the last 20 years. They include over 560 million rural women whose numbers in such misery are rising faster than men, with 75 million women the sole heads of rural households containing over 500 million children and older people. Over 15 million of the rural poor die each year from starvation and disease aggravated by malnutrition.⁹ Not less than 24,000 children still die wholly unnecessarily every day¹⁰. An African woman has a 1 in 14 chance of dying

7 UNDP *Human Development Report 1992*, (New York/Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 34-36.

8 UNDP *Human Development Report 1992*, *op. cit.*

9 Data in foregoing sentences from *The State of World Rural Poverty, an Inquiry into its Causes and Consequences*, International Fund for Agricultural Development, Rome, 1992.

10 UNICEF data.

in childbirth, and in large parts of Asia a scarcely better chance; here in the North, a woman has only a 1 in 4,000 chance, in many Northern countries only a 1 in 7,000 chance of dying while giving birth.¹¹ New pandemic health threats like AIDS made 20,000 children orphans in 1992 in Uganda alone, while mosquitoes breeding their own immunity against pesticide have made malaria present again in over 100 countries, infecting over 260 million people, especially in Africa.¹²

As Lord Timberlake has recorded, British owners of pet cats spend more per year on them than the annual income of human beings in the least developed countries. A pet cat in Britain is fed twice as much protein per day as the average African human being.¹³

The dearth of global coordination

Within a country, these terrible inequities would be seen as the classic conditions for a massive and usually violent revolution. We live now in the equivalent of a country, in a global interdependence that is not at all as benign as the word sounds; an interdependence in which policy made in the North has catastrophic effect in the South, and then rebounds with unending consequences for international peace, and thus sooner or later for the North. These inequitable policies make absolutely no sense in the North's own interests.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has estimated that the combination of protectionism against attempted Southern exports to the North, interest rates unilaterally manipulated in Northern financial centres, and other inequities, is depriving the developing countries of \$500 billion a year in income. That is ten times all Northern 'aid' to the developing countries. That simply does not make sense – in the interests of the North as well as so tragically of the South.

Another example: the UN System and the European Community's Development Fund are trying to help the development of pastoral agriculture in Africa and the stimulation of intra-African trade in meat products. But EC beef is being sold in Togo, for example, at 25 per cent less than the price of live Togolese cattle (and at 80 per cent less than general world beef prices). The UN can do nothing about this: the G-7 powers say that trade is a matter for GATT, which is dedicated to 'free trade'. Northern countries invariably manage

11 *Meeting the Population Challenge*, UNFPA, 1989, New York.

12 World Health Organisation.

13 Lloyd Timberlake, *Only One Earth*.

to convert this to unfree and unfair trade for the South. Again: no coordination; *no sense*. Before long, when the frenetic North-North trade competition begins to peter out and Northern countries anxiously look to the South's potentially gigantic markets, if these absurdly short-sighted policies persist they will find several billion people still too poor to buy anything from them. What then?

Population is increasing by 90 million a year. Only half the world's reproductive-age women have access to any information and services to enable them to choose means of their own fertility regulation. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and other bodies are trying to increase that access, which requires expanded public health services. The G-7 powers make such population work a strong condition of their 'aid'. But under the structural adjustment conditionalities of the IMF which the same G-7 powers control, third world countries have had to slash their health service infrastructure by as much as 25 per cent. If population work is slowed during the next ten years it will result by the year 2050 in an additional 4 billion people on earth: the whole world population of 1975. Again, no coordination; *no sense*.

The international community also faces massive ecological degradation wrought by industry and population increase. Only 270 million people in North America now consume every day as much energy as all 4 billion people in the South. It will require a massive act of intellectual and scientific partnership to develop ways in which the 4 billion can climb out of poverty without needing 15 times the ecologically devastating forms of energy of the 270 million. Resource wars are all too easy to forecast. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) estimates that by the year 2000 humankind will be consuming a thousand times more of the pure water supply of the planet than in 1900. Yet already millennial aquifers are being depleted beyond their natural replenishment in every region. Forty per cent of all humanity lives in river and lake basins shared by two or more states. These, too, are equations for disaster.

Tackling the System's weaknesses

I hope that this necessarily terribly cursory sketch of our *real* world – the world of five and a half billion human beings, not what the G-7 mean when their communiqués refer to 'the world economy' – suggests what we urgently need of the United Nations System.

First, we need to equip it to overcome the single most pervasive weakness of our international relations throughout this century. This is the failure

to address the root cause of problems that are under our noses but are neglected, which then intensify and generate chain reactions with other problems, and invariably result in cause transmuted into intransigent, multi-faceted and explosive effect, spilling over frontiers or demanding international intervention inside a collapsed country. These effects then cost the world community far more, not only in human lives but in money, than if it had addressed the causes in the first place.

It will henceforth be the most urgent possible business of the inter-governmental fora of the System – and above all of the UN itself – to formulate and agree master-strategies to tackle these dangerous, complex root causes comprehensively, and in time. The UN must become *root-cause directed*, not merely responsive.

This will call for far more courageous, intellectual policy-leadership under its Secretaries-General in the years ahead. Such leadership begins with effective early warning and forecasting, along the entire spectrum of problems I have sketched, whether socio-economic, political, or environmental. The System has within it valuable data-assembling and analytical staff capacities, but is under-staffed for this in several crucial areas. The structures are also inadequate to draw early-warning information together on a multi-disciplinary basis, as is necessary for the formulation of creative strategy with clear policy options that the Secretary-General should present to governments.

Mr. Boutros-Ghali, the current Secretary-General, has made a start in reorganizing the UN Secretariat as a tighter working organism. I remain convinced that it will not work at the optimum until there are four Deputy Secretaries-General, senior to all other executive heads in the System: one each for, and to pull together coherently:

- political affairs and peace and security;
- humanitarian emergency response and human rights;
- all economic and environmental policy and co-operation; and
- administration.

These four should act as the Secretary-General's inner core of top-calibre advisers. I have never heard any sound argument against such Deputies (which were intended, by the way, when the UN Charter was signed in 1945); the only argument I have ever heard down the years is that such Deputies would 'derogate from the prestige of the Office of Secretary-General'. It may be common in national public

service but we simply cannot afford egotism and jealousy about limelight-sharing anywhere in the United Nations.

If we are at last to address the root causes of deprivation of economic and social human rights, and of more and more likely wars over poverty, we simply must tackle the System's weaknesses in the social, economic, environmental and development fields.

Forgotten aims of the UN's founders

It is often said that the UN system of agencies was not designed by its founders for the degree of multi-sectoral policy coherence and programme co-ordination that our present era demands. In some important respects this is true. But if you go back into the archives to learn what those founders (including Philip Noel-Baker, C. K. Webster and John Maynard Keynes) intended, the result is astonishing and contains vital lessons for us today.

By the time the San Francisco Conference on the United Nations opened in 1945, sectoral 'functionalism', as it was called, was already entrenched in international thinking. The International Labour Organisation was already there as a separate agency, the constitutions of FAO and the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund had already been drafted, and work was advanced for a UNESCO. It therefore had to be accepted at San Francisco that the United Nations would not be a unitary organisation with its own built-in departments of agriculture, health, finance, trade, and so on.

Nonetheless, in their recommendations after San Francisco to the first General Assembly session meeting at Westminster Hall in January 1946, the founders on the UN Preparatory Commission made clear prescriptions for the United Nations to restrain the centrifugal forces of separate agencies.

First, they wrote into the Charter strong mandates in economic and social policy and action. Their records show that by 'economic' they meant that the UN should co-ordinate *all* the commanding heights of world macro-economic policy; currency and exchange, capital finance, trade and commodity prices, communications, transport. The abiding pity is that they did not insert these definitions in the Charter itself. This might have made it more difficult for the major powers to refuse even to discuss policy on international finance and currency, debt and trade at the UN, and to claim that the IMF and the World Bank and GATT, which they control, have these mandates.

Nonetheless, the founders *did* write into the Charter that the United Nations is constitutionally required to have policy command of all these factors that would be technically handled by the agencies. This is crystal clear in Article 58 of the Charter, but most people do not even know of it because it has never been implemented. It states, with the imperative, that the UN ‘shall’ make recommendations for the co-ordination of the policies (not only the activities) of the specialised agencies brought into agreed relationship with the UN – categorically to cover the Bretton Woods institutions and all other specialised agencies, including the then intended International Trade Organisation (ITO) which the United States refused to allow be created.

The Preparatory Commission also recommended that the headquarters of agencies should be at the same place as the UN. This sounds unbelievable, but it is there, in the records. They also recommended that each agency should submit its budget to the General Assembly to be consolidated with the UN’s, so that (in their words): ‘Members [would be enabled] to consider and vote, at one time and in one place, the budget of the Organisation and of the agencies within the consolidated system’.

There was a make-or-break factor, however, in this proposed remedial architecture for the System. Its separate organisations would have virtually the same member-governments. But would these same governments speak with the same voice in each organisation’s governing body? So clearly did the founders see this crucial determinant that they made a warning about it in the very last paragraph of their report. The task of the United Nations in co-ordinating the policies and activities of the specialized agencies, they wrote, ‘can be performed only if Members individually will assist in making co-ordination possible’.

Yet on each and every one of those crucial prescriptions for making coherent sense of the loose system already being formed, member governments failed miserably. There is today not one specialised agency headquarters at the seat of the UN, whose Host Country in any case gave it an impossibly cramped site in the abattoir area of Manhattan. Article 58, which makes it mandatory that the UN co-ordinate the policies of the agencies, has never been worked. And although the idea of a consolidated budget is there in the agreements with several agencies, they made so many objections that this, too, was quietly dropped – and governments, overwhelmingly the same governments supposed to implement Article 58 at the UN (and by the way overwhelmingly Western governments at that time), just allowed that to be dropped as well.

‘Too small for big things’

What we have today from this sad dissipation can perhaps be best perceived by analogue with a country.

The Secretary-General is not the Prime Minister of the UN System; it does not have one, either functionally or of course constitutionally. He chairs an Administrative Co-ordinating Committee (the ACC) that is not a Cabinet of the System: it meets only twice a year for a few days, and no executive head of an agency is required to heed any decision, or any exhortation by the Secretary-General to co-ordinate.

Governments in the governing bodies of each agency formulate its own policies and set its own budgetary resources. The equivalent would be that British farmers and agronomists meet in their own parliament, elect their own executive head and fashion their own agriculture policy and budget; that health officials in another parliament of themselves do the same for health; and so on. The prime minister would be elected and obtain a foreign policy and aid budget from a totally different parliament, and meeting for only some five days in a year with these autonomous sectoral chieftains. It is instructive to think in what condition the public affairs of Britain would be under such arrangements.

In the present reform discussions, however, there is no sign that governments are ready to amend the agency constitutions and create a new, unitary United Nations. We are left, therefore, with the absolute necessity of demanding that they properly work the present system.

Minimally, this will have to mean persistent parliamentary and NGO pressure on governments now, at last, to coordinate their own policies so that their delegations *do* speak with the same voice in each governing body of the System. This must include the Bank and the IMF, whose weighted voting must be reformed (and ironically has a better chance of being since the East Europeans have joined), and also a genuine International Trade Organisation also coordinated by the UN. The parliaments of member states should have a single committee on *all* policy issues in the UN System – diplomatic and sectoral – and should exert greater vigilance every year over the behaviour of the executive branch in these absolutely make-or-break matters.

If we could secure this co-ordination where it must start, in home capitals, then the heads of the agencies could be formally instructed by governments in their governing bodies that they constitute the

collectively responsible Cabinet of the System under the empowered leadership of the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

This, however, is still only part of it. We have got to reform the UN System so that governments also actually *meet* together with the right sectoral expertise on their own delegations to formulate the *multi-disciplinary* macro-policies needed for today's profoundly systemic problems and dangers. We will not achieve such coherent policies while Ministers of Finance talk only with each other in Washington, of Agriculture only with each other in Rome, of Trade only with each other in the not truly globally oriented GATT, and so on. The work of the Economic and Social Council must be shaped so that on each major theme or problem area – for example, food security, or natural resources, or debt or global fair trade – the Council meets with members of the relevant agencies' governing bodies integrated in the Council delegations of member governments. There is no excuse left for failure to do this in the UN: it is done in European parliamentary and council bodies, and in the OECD.

If this fails, then – although it may sound absurd at first hearing – I personally cannot rule out the idea of a Class Action at the World Court, the Principal Judicial Organ of the UN, by 'We, the Peoples' through a consortium of NGOs, against all Member States that are in violation of the United Nations Charter for failure to implement Article 58, as they most assuredly are.

I will quickly add another absurdity that must be tackled. The work of ECOSOC and the General Assembly must be rationalised and a realistic annual calendar established to enable governments there to formulate top-priority strategies for the world. It is quite absurd that they try to cram into a few months the equivalent of the work that national, and multinational parliaments spread over most of each year. Yes, this will cost a bit more money: that cost is currently in danger of qualifying for the old adage, 'for want of a nail ...', extended to our children's very future.

We must also urgently work for the development of a United Nations capacity to manage the international environment of economic and other factors that technology has accelerated out of the sovereign control of even the most powerful nation-states. This trend is of course currently sanctified by the new fundamentalist religion of 'the magic of the market', but hope springs eternal that intelligent women and men will perceive this fervour as the pied-piper trail to disaster that it really is. We have just witnessed a classic example of this in the finan-

cial panic of September 1992, when wholly un-regulated speculators could trade billions of dollars of nations' currencies electronically in seconds to any part of the world – having nothing whatever to do with productive investment, simply profiteering on the abject surrender of states to these uses of technology. Note, of course, that the IMF was inert throughout this world-wide chaos.

In a brilliant essay for the University of Sussex Professor Hans Singer has noted that, 'The state has become too big for the small things and too small for the big things ... The small things call for delegation downwards to the local level ... The big things call for delegation upwards, for co-ordination between national policies, or for transnational institutions',¹⁴

We must actively campaign for an understanding that it is in all states' interests, without exception, to build under United Nations auspices those transnational management capacities that are now inescapable.

Dangers of the North-South divide

But through all this runs a fundamental political issue: the constantly widening and deepening North-South divide. Developing countries are in a profound dilemma: they know that the System needs more cohesion, but they fear that its leading organisms are now being taken over by the Northern powers, and that a tighter System would only be the more able to impose Northern conditionalities on them. We face in this a potentially dangerous impasse: we need to enable the UN System to overcome this North-South divide and develop truly global policy leadership for all members; but Northern policies have so widened the divide that it acts itself as a countervailing force to those very reforms.

Thus, running through every aspect of needed reform there is the crying need for greater mutual trust among states, developed through genuine practice in the UN of democratic policy negotiation. We will not achieve management of transnational forces, we will not even begin to approach the establishment of global commons, without which our children's future is scarcely to be contemplated, until the minority of powerful states – who claim to be the champions of democracy – behave more democratically towards the weak majority in the UN System. The constant attempt to dictate and intimidate for votes by blunt economic threats, the refusal to discuss profound

¹⁴ In monograph 'International Governance', Jubilee Papers, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, 1992.

North-South structural flaws in economic relations, worse, the continuing talk of weighted voting being extended into the UN and the major agencies, is not only violation of the Charter principle of equality among nations large and small, it is the North shooting itself in the foot, and quite possibly also the future of world peace.

One argument used is that Northern states contribute most to the UN System's budgets. They do not. They only contribute the most in money amount. Involved in this is a principle at the very heart of Western democracy: the principle of *relative capacity to pay*, on which equality of political voice in governance and policy formation is grounded. The poorer citizen's equal vote accompanies his or her smaller tax contribution amount because that is at least as difficult a burden for him or her to find as the wealthier citizen's larger amount. And it most certainly is at least as difficult for Jamaica, or Ghana, or Bhutan to find their smaller amount of contribution to the UN as it is for Britain or Japan or the United States to find their larger amount.

Then there is the argument that many Third World states that make up the majority, with one-nation-one-vote, are not democratically governed. Apart from the awkward question of who installed or nourished almost all the dictators, the curious thing is that Western powers are if anything more resentful, and quite as unheeding of the policy positions in the UN, of the very Third World countries that are democratically governed! No, such argument is a manifest cover for the real problem, which is failure to date to see beyond the tip of the Northern nose; failure to realise that four-fifths of humankind are not going to oblige by getting off this whirling planet; and failure to realise that the North not only needs their advancement for its own very economic future, but will be totally unable to cope with the apocalyptic consequences if it does not respect them as equals and jointly formulate common sense, all-win global strategies.

Finally on this critically important issue, while we watch pluralist governance now emerge in more and more UN member countries (and pray that it will not be subverted by any power), it does so happen that the proportion of votes of the North and South in the General Assembly almost exactly matches their respective shares of world population. That really should be good enough to get on with.

Peace-keeping, humanitarian rights and human rights powers

I place peace-maintaining and emergency capacities last in this list of key reforms only because we are in danger now of so concentrating on them that we will continue to allow governments to neglect root cause. If we do this, within 20 years we will be again discussing the weakness of the UN in peace-maintaining in the face of vastly worse upheavals around the world, almost certainly including millions of desperate and angry people trying to migrate into the North.

Since, however, we are already far too late fully to catch root causes in many instances, we have got to equip the United Nations with the full range of capacities to try to prevent the worst effects in mass violence and misery.

The problems emerging as nation-state structure weakens, and suppressed communities invoke the UN's Human Rights, have no appropriate forum in the UN. We need a place in the UN forum to activate one of its historic attributes, to make these world-wide problems respectable to acknowledge. We need a forum to generate innovative forms of representation and governance – a place where government officials can comfortably discuss these enormously sensitive issues with political and social scientists and NGOs, and in which questing cultural groups can themselves join without fear. We need, I am convinced, a UN Council on Representation and Governance, either by amending the Charter to convert the now scarcely used Trusteeship Council, or by the General Assembly creating it under Article 22 as a subsidiary body¹⁵.

At the same time, however, we must vigorously strengthen the UN's capacities both to promote Human Rights and to protect people against the vicious horrors that pent-up cultural and ethnic forces can inflict on others. The UN Centre for Human Rights this day has only one professional to support six Special Rapporteurs, has fewer staff than Amnesty International, lacks even proper telefax equipment, has less than \$10 million a year for all its work, and barely \$100,000 for explicit public information about Human Rights among five thousand million citizens. That is an example of what the people who have spewed forth their malice about a vast bureaucracy that needs cutting down have done. Human Rights in the UN need a full-time Undersecretary-General, and the additional leverage around the

¹⁵ Article 22: The General Assembly may establish such subsidiary organs as it deems necessary for the performance of its functions.

Secretary-General of being part of the responsibility of one of the four Deputies I have urged.

There is just a chance that we shall make some progress at the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in June 1993. But all such chance is overladen with the distrust in the South – including amongst democratic governments – that the Northern powers seek only to make the UN an intrusive instrument of their realpolitik, and of their continued double standards in human rights.

These double standards steadily undermine the universal trust in the integrity of the UN that it needs in order to intervene over human rights. It is at least puzzling how the very governments whose intelligence agencies installed, financed and armed almost all of the dictators – and covertly destabilized promising popular movements – now think they can impose human rights and democracy conditions on their ‘aid’ without anyone raising an eyebrow. But the double standards practiced by the powers are noted by the rest of the world above all over the longest and most flagrant violations of the Charter, the Bill of Rights, the Geneva Conventions, and 45 years of literally hundreds of UN resolutions concerning the rights of the Palestinian people. And the work of every Western human-rights NGO is vitiated every day – and will be at Vienna – so long as their own governments remain complicit in the denial of United Nations principles and human rights to an entire small nation in Palestine.

The UN must be endowed with a more universal trust, and with capacities for far earlier and far more rapid preventative action upon the first signs of a serious conflict or large-scale deprivation of human rights. The Secretary-General should have a committed panel of eminent, manifestly disinterested women and men from around the world, ready to act as his Peace or Human Rights Commissioners on 36 hours’ notice. The UN must also far more seriously encourage regional peace capacities under Chapter VIII of the Charter. Mr. Boutros-Ghali’s proposal for nationally earmarked rapid-response forces, with adequate logistics support, should be promptly met. Such a force should visibly train and exercise in different parts of the world. Simply having such readiness known will often deter the need for its deployment – and alternatively, engender confidence to call for it from those who may otherwise seek more desperate remedies.

To provide humanitarian relief far more efficiently where the worst does happen, I am now convinced that we must create one coherent Department of Humanitarian Affairs out of the World Food Programme’s excellent emergency food aid capabilities, together with the emergency

relief functions of UNICEF and UNHCR, all in that one Department. The thoroughly worked out proposal of Mr. Justin Walker of this country, for contributed United Nations Airborne Rapid Rescue units, should also be strongly supported.

The Security Council and the UN Charter

But again, all such strengthening of the capacities of the United Nations to intervene are contingent on the repair of the deep distrust that has been provoked among the majority of member states by the powerful minority's use of the Security Council as a private club with a few rather disdained but well-intimidated associate members. Also by that minority's usurpation of the name of the United Nations to cloak use of their military might in the mantle of the Charter's noble principles.

In the Security Council Summit in 1992 the small and the weak were courageous enough despite intimidation to call for an end to dictation (India's very word) in the Council; for more genuine collegiality within its total membership; and for a re-balancing of its peace and security roles in relation to the responsibilities of the General Assembly. The Secretary-General's resultant 'Agenda for Peace' also alludes to these needs. They are thoroughly grounded in the Charter. Under Article 24 all the Members of the United Nations 'confer' on the Security Council 'primary responsibility' (note, only primary) 'for the maintenance of international peace and security' and agree that under this responsibility the Council 'acts on their behalf'. The Military Staff Committee should be activated, but to build trust among the wider membership the provision in Article 47 paragraph 2 for invitations to non-Permanent Members to join the Committee will have to be interpreted to provide for *standing* regional representation on it.

Until, however, we see the major powers ready to respect Article 24, the primacy of the General Assembly, and the numerous Charter references to the obligation of *all* Members to respect the equality of nations, we will have great difficulty over realising the capacities in this area so manifestly needed by the UN.

I can only say outright that in my personal view the Security Council Permanent Member and veto provisions of the Charter are utter anachronisms from the age of bully-powers. I do not see how any self-respecting country advocating democracy in the world can in the next breath insist on retaining these totally undemocratic privileges from another age without looking exceedingly – I would have thought

embarrassingly – foolish. However, if the powers now holding these archaic exclusivities have to be coddled along for a while by the rest of humankind, then the probable interim solution is to create Permanent Memberships for Japan, Germany, Brazil, Nigeria, Egypt, India and Indonesia, in order to fashion a total Council that will in effect operate by consensus.

The veto power over the appointment of Secretaries-General, and over amendments to the Charter simply has to go. It is outrageous that five out of 179 member governments should wield this hammerlock on the choice of the public servant who is supposed to represent all of ‘We, the peoples’. This is doubly the case in view of their performance down the years of this self-arrogated feudal privilege – including, of course, maintaining their unbroken record of gender discrimination. It is no less outrageous that only five out of 179 member governments can veto amendments to the Charter. We should appeal to the self-respect of these powers simply to agree and so declare that they relinquish these archaic entitlements, thereby affirming that they are indeed joining the new era of democracy.

‘We the Peoples of the United Nations’

I come finally to perhaps the ultimately most important reform in the UN System.

It is by now quite evident on their record that world peace and equity are far too important matters to be left to governments alone. They need help. Again, and with great pleasure, I turn back to one of the leaders present at the creation of the UN. In the debate on the nascent United Nations in the House of Commons in November 1945, Britain’s Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin made a quite remarkable appeal. I quote him: ‘We need a new study for the purpose of creating a world assembly elected directly from the people of the world as a whole, to whom the governments who form the United Nations are responsible ... not (as) a substitute for it but rather a completion of the development of it’.

It would be a fitting 50th birthday gift from the governments of the world – perhaps prompted by this island home of democracy? – to agree the formation of a commission comprising government representatives, leading international NGOs, members of the European Parliament for their experience, and some wise women and men from across the planet, to put into motion what Ernie Bevin urged even as the UN was in formation. It is certainly a formidable

challenge to devise an elected assembly representing the adults among (so far) 5.5 thousand million human beings, to meet alongside the General Assembly as regularly as makes best sense. But it is only arithmetically more formidable than the establishment of the European Parliament. It may take many years to develop and secure universal agreement to the optimal formula; it is now manifestly essential that we at least start to give meaning to the beginning of the Charter itself, where ‘We, the Peoples of the United Nations’ affirm all of its most crucial principles and goals, and then instruct governments to get on with implementing them. As I have, I hope, made clear, governments have done remarkably well with this charge in many respects, almost despite the tremendous handicaps which they themselves have imposed on the UN System. They need, and they deserve, the help of ‘We the Peoples’ to do far better again.

In conclusion I would like to recall a solemn warning that one of our wisest Secretaries-General, the late U Thant, issued in May 1969. I must quote it in full:

‘I do not wish to seem overdramatic, but I can only conclude from the information that is available to me as Secretary-General that the Members of the United Nations have perhaps ten years left in which to subordinate their ancient quarrels and launch a global partnership to curb the arms race, to improve the human environment, to defuse the population explosion and to supply the required momentum to development efforts. If such a global partnership is not forged within the next decade, then I very much fear that the problems I have mentioned will have reached such staggering proportions that they will be beyond our capacity to control’.

The ten years passed and this warning was not heeded. The partnership U Thant called for does not exist across the widening North-South abyss. The real problems in the real world have begun to go out of control. And the UN System has been deliberately made even weaker.

We are now in a time beyond warnings.



Erskine Childers

– A life dedicated to building a working world community¹

Sven Hamrell



Erskine Childers grew up in Ireland and began his working life as an independent writer and broadcaster specialising in international political and developmental affairs. In 1967 he joined the United Nations and served for 22 years with most of the organisations of the system at all levels and in all regions. His close cooperation with the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation began in 1990 when he co-authored, with Sir Brian Urquhart, the first in a series of studies on UN leadership. Before his death on 25 August 1996, he and Sir Brian co-authored another four studies on UN reform, under a programme developed by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation and the Ford Foundation. This eulogy was delivered in St. John's Church, Laragh, by Sven Hamrell, former Executive Director of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation.

It is not easy for me to speak on this occasion as a representative of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation about a man who has meant so much not only to me and to our Foundation in Uppsala but first and foremost to those ideas and ideals of public service, national and international, that he had inherited from his ancestors and shared with Dag Hammarskjöld—ideas and ideals that were to be embodied in the Charter of the United Nations and expressed in the dedicated work of its most outstanding international civil servants, of which Erskine Childers was one. It is not for me to speak here of his family heritage, but allow me to say that he often spoke to me about what the Irish heritage meant to him in his international work and that he wanted to spend the end of his life in a little cottage close to his ancestral home, Glan, which became a mysteriously attractive place to those of us who listened to him. A concrete example of what Ireland meant to him in his international work is that when asked to join the Board of the Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI), an advocacy organisation established to protect the world's

¹ Originally published in *Development Dialogue* 1997:1-2

plant genetic resources, he did not hesitate for one minute. He simply had to accept because he was too painfully aware of what the potato famine had meant to his country.

But the Foundation's relationship with Erskine had at first little to do with his Irish origins. It derived from the fact that we knew from the Congo crisis that Erskine Childers and Dag Hammarskjöld had in common a commitment to justice, equity and fairness in international affairs and a healthy distrust of the powers that be and of the vested interests of the former colonial empires in the four principal Third World continents, Africa, Arabia, Asia and Latin America. What attracted us was not least his profound understanding of the conflicts in the Middle East, accounted for in his early books and in his magnificent essay about 'The Western Image of the Arabs', but also, and even more important, his twenty-two years of service, since 1967, with all the organisations of the UN System at all levels in all regions of the world, ending his career as Senior Adviser to the UN Director for Development and International Cooperation, an office that was established as a result of a proposal made in the 1975 Dag Hammarskjöld Report on Development and International Cooperation, published under the title *What Now: Another Development*.

No wonder that we in the Foundation were anxious to benefit from Erskine's experience and wisdom, that we invited him to contribute to *Development Dialogue*, that our Board asked him and the former Undersecretary-General for Special Political Affairs, Sir Brian Urquhart, to team up after their retirement to look into the leadership issues in the world organisation and into the whole issue of a reform and renewal of the UN System.

This was one of the most important decisions taken in the history of the Foundation. A better team could not have been found and it led to six years of intensely productive work and five singularly important studies in UN reform, namely:

- 1 *A World in Need of Leadership: Tomorrow's United Nations*, published in English, French and Spanish editions in 1990;
- 2 *Reorganisation of the United Nations Secretariat: A Suggested Outline of Needed Reforms*, 1991, proposing, *inter alia*, four Deputy Secretaries-General;

- 3 *Strengthening International Response to Humanitarian Emergencies*, 1991, largely Erskine Childers' work and a remarkable achievement because of its practical orientation;
- 4 *Renewing the United Nations System*, 1994, based primarily on Erskine Childers' development work and summarising his experiences and conclusions, a book so rich in its theoretical and practical dimensions that it is likely to be consulted for years to come;
- 5 *A World in Need of Leadership: Tomorrow's United Nations—A Fresh Appraisal*, 1996, recommending in a concluding chapter that the General Assembly adopt a comprehensive new approach based on a concerted search for the best possible person as Secretary-General to serve for a single term of seven years, urging the five Permanent Members to relinquish their veto over candidates and advocating that all governments, civil society organisations and the public at large be able to contribute suggestions at the outset and review a shortlist of candidates at mid-point.

These five studies in their many editions have so far been printed in well over 100,000 copies, made available through personalised mailings to cabinet ministers, foreign service officers, government officials and not least to non-governmental or rather civil society organisations all over the world.

Few decision-makers or political activists can therefore today claim ignorance of these studies. They also testify, to quote Sir Brian Urquhart, to Erskine Childers' 'enormous capacity for hard intellectual work', to his dedication to the ideals of the United Nations and to the endless struggle for human rights and gender equality, and to his abiding conviction, to use his own words, that 'the only hope of effectively dealing with the world's major problems in the interest of humankind is through the progressive development of a working world community'.

But Erskine knew that writing was not sufficient, that personal communication and institutional implementation of ideas and ideals were equally important. He therefore joined the World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA) as its Secretary-General in 1996, accepting a travel schedule and a series of speaking engagements that might have killed a much younger man. He paid for his commitment with his life, true to his family traditions.

We have also in the Hammarskjöld Foundation received many indications of what Erskine Childers meant to his friends in high governmental positions as well as to his ‘comrades in arms’ in the non-governmental world. I will just single out a passage from a faxed letter received only a few days after his death at the WFUNA Conference in Luxembourg on Sunday 25 August. It was sent to us by his old friend Charles Weitz, who had been International Coordinator of FAO’s Freedom from Hunger Campaign (1960–71) and who had served as a consultant to Erskine Childers and Brian Urquhart in the preparation of *Renewing the United Nations System*. Charles Weitz wrote:

I was devastated. Erskine Childers had become such a central figure in my life – from the years of the 70s when he was among the few in UNDP with whom I could have thorough, honest, relevant talks, into the 80s when he oversaw my lecturing for the United Nations in Canada and the USA, to several complex, delicate evaluation missions which I had done for him and then into the wonderful world of Reforming and the leadership studies ... what a great mind, what a great human being, what a potent and correct force in a world where so many seem to have lost their way ... Erskine was truly a giant.

Reading a letter like this, one is bound to ask oneself, what can be done to honour a man like Erskine Childers except trying to carry on to the best of one’s ability the work to which he had committed himself? I have, in fact, come to think that two more things can be done and should be done.

In 1991, after we had published Brian Urquhart’s and Erskine Childers’ first study in UN Reform, *A World in Need of Leadership*, I received a remarkable document from Erskine. It began like this:

‘“Acquit you well” is rather archaic shorthand for a guiding standard among those who wish to serve their society—local, national, planetary. It implies that there are standards, of ethical behaviour, cultural sensitivity, and human rights against which one should measure one’s efforts and try to acquit oneself as best one can. This is a book about such public service, seen through some of the stories of a multi-national family.’

What followed were 740 typed double-spaced pages of a fascinating and sometimes extremely dramatic family history illustrating the deadly serious moral issues facing the public servants in the family on both sides of the Atlantic over several hundred years. It would be a great loss to humankind if this remarkable work did not reach the printed page.

A tribute of a different kind to Erskine Childers would be to gather his many speeches and occasional papers produced over a long period and no longer easily available. The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, not being a publishing house, is precluded from performing such a public service to the world, but there is little doubt that such a gathering of Erskine Childers' fugitives would be greatly appreciated by many readers and many political activists all over the world and not least in his own country and in the Third World.

In concluding, one might ask how Erskine Childers perceived himself towards the end of his life. I think it can be said of him as it was said about a man he did not like, Winston Churchill, that 'he longed for fame but it was of a historic kind'. I think that this longing is now being fulfilled. I think that Erskine Childers' reputation is now secure, perhaps one of the most secure reputations of the kind he aspired to and that can be achieved in our time. The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation is grateful for the opportunity it has been given to assist Erskine Childers in his work.



United Nations myths and realities

Erskine Childers



The Rothko Chapel
and the Press Club of Houston, 19 January 1995
University of St. Thomas, Houston, Texas

Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld once remarked that ‘Everything will be all right when people stop seeing the United Nations as a weird Picasso drawing, and see it as a drawing they made themselves’. People have to date only a limited number of ways of ‘seeing’ the UN at all, and the Media are quite certainly their key window upon the world organisation. So I am especially grateful for the chance to talk with you about the problem that Hammarskjöld pointed to, because it has not gone away in all the years since we lost that great leader. The Picasso has even several layers of distortion on it, and most of them come from or have been the more powerfully applied within the United States. I am going to be very frank.

Let me begin with the single most serious problem of perceiving the UN through the myths that surround it. This is the problem of what ‘the UN’ means at any one moment. It is a problem quite akin to the one that people have when they see or hear the word, ‘the Government’: does that mean the executive – Mayor, Governor, President – or the legislature? In that case inside a country most political leaders and most media take a good deal of care to say what and whom they are talking about under the rubric ‘the government’. In the case of ‘the UN’, however, the term has been used so often down the years without any clarifying language that people have indeed been seeing in the Picasso drawing some sort of remote self-contained institution that can be criticised, trashed – seldom praised in this part of the world – or just given up on.

‘The UN’ is in reality at any one moment the Secretary-General and its staff of international civil servants; or it is the member-governments and the sum of (or the conflict between) *their policies* in the world ... and it is the governments more often than not; and more often than not that has really meant the policies of a handful of governments that like to call themselves great or major powers. If the media would tell their audiences *who* they are talking about when they refer to ‘the UN’, the people could see it and appraise its performance much more clearly.

Within this particular problem is the question of how independent the Secretary-General can be. It is true that the Secretary-General is the head of the Secretariat of the UN, which is named as a co-equal ‘Principal Organ’ in the Charter, along with the World Court, the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council and the Trusteeship Council. But since Hammarskjöld and U Thant, the Secretaries-General who have been squeezed out of the diplomatic old-boy (and I do mean old-*boy*) network through the filter of the five Permanent Members’ vetoes have been men whom those powers expect to be pretty subservient.

When Mr. Perez de Cuellar was standing for re-appointment, the British Ambassador cabled to London asking for instructions; Mrs. Thatcher replied, ‘I understand he has not made any trouble for us’, so the Delegation could go ahead and support him. An interesting definition of the qualities needed in the world’s chief public servant, the executive head of an organisation whose Charter begins with the words ‘We, the Peoples of the United Nations’ and which affirms the principle of ‘the equal rights of nations large and small’.

In this particular connexion, we will get a good deal of the gouache off the Picasso painting when three things happen:

- first, when the five countries that have made themselves totally unaccountable to the rest of the world at the UN get down off their high horses and give up their vetoes over the post of Secretary-General;
- secondly, when they join the real rest of the world in a proper search for the very best candidate, who should be expected to behave courteously, but independently when she or he judges it to be her over-riding responsibility to all the world’s peoples;
- and thirdly, men having generally made such a hash of their virtually exclusive stewardship of the domestic affairs of Planet Earth, we should elect as next Secretary-General an eminently qualified woman.

But if we peer closer at the Picasso drawing, we will find that people have been told to see in it – and I quote the standard epithet endlessly recycled by editors and commentators – ‘a vast, sprawling swollen bureaucracy’. This has powerfully helped to give the impression that ‘the UN’ is a sort of self-expanding monster thing, not really in anyone’s control unless the US Congress violates its obligations in treaty international law and refuses to pay its share of the membership dues. This demagoguery has indeed resulted in the United States, the *Host*

Country to the United Nations, keeping it on the edge of bankruptcy, a very peculiar form of hosting; owing it the equivalent of a whole half of a year's regular operating budget and up to two-thirds of its peace-keeping costs. Your Government is now saying that it would like other men and women to do the dying under the UN flag; but it's not easy to persuade other countries to put their troops in harm's way when they haven't even been paid their costs for their last contribution several years ago.

The UN bureaucracy certainly needs overhauling, like any public-service institution after fifty years, leave alone one that has 185 governors. But when you know the facts, the realities, about the UN's actual installed capacities, the demagoguery that media unfortunately just automatically repeat is truly exposed.

For the UN itself – for all its peace, political, legal, economic and social and human rights work, at New York and Geneva and Vienna and the regional commissions – governments have authorised some 3,000 professionals (800 of whom are interpreters for all the meetings in six languages, so really 2,000 or so professionals), and some 6,000 support staff. This civil service of 9,000 is smaller than the staff of the international advertising firm of Saatchi and Saatchi – or than the civil service of the provincial city of Winnipeg in Manitoba. You may know that Amnesty International has more paid staff than the United Nations is allowed for Human Rights work.

If we take the UN together with its grant development and humanitarian funds, and 13 specialised economic, social and technical agencies that are in the common UN System, the total staff of all grades from drivers to directors, world-wide, is a little less than 52,000, to serve 5.7 billion people. Again, for some rough comparisons, that is about 35 per cent less than the staff of the US State Department; it is less than the District Health staff of Wales in Britain, or the total civil servants in the State of Wyoming, population under half a million.

Incidentally, another hoary old myth is that the staff is now massively Third-World dominated. Three decades after the Third World entered the UN and did become its 78 per cent majority of members, as it is of humankind, the 22 per cent minority North still has 55 per cent of all regular professional posts and over 50 per cent of all senior political offices.

Now as to budget: in 1992 this 'vast, sprawling, swollen bureaucracy' which Senator Jesse Helms the other day called 'the nemesis of the

American people' had from the world's governments a total of \$10.5 billion to expend for everything. This included all peacekeeping costs, all humanitarian relief, all grant development assistance, and to name only a fraction of the other work, research and gathering the planet's statistics in every field, running WMO's 24-hour World Weather Watch for all the ships and planes and farmers of the world and FAO's early-warning system for drought and crop disease, organising the world's telecommunications channels through ITU and its civil aviation routes and the airport staff in every developing country through ICAO, keeping smallpox which the UN eliminated from ever re-surfacing, fighting AIDS and trying to assure women their human rights to control their own fertility, planning world conferences like the one on Environment at Rio, and serving the legal bodies that changed and radically expanded the Law of the Sea for the first time in 300 years.

For all this, and much more, ten and a half billion dollars. That is less than Americans spend in a year in barbershops, beauty parlours and health clubs. It would only keep Britain in alcoholic beverages for 15 weeks. It would pay for only half of the accessories that Western teenagers buy for their clothes in a year. It amounts to about 2 dollars per human being alive on Planet Earth per year. Governments are still spending well over one hundred and fifty dollars per capita every year on the world's military.

A great deal can and must now be done to improve the use that is made of these, the UN's actual human and financial resources. But the truth behind the cynical sneers that have so discouraged citizens is that the United Nations is a perilously – and a deliberately – *under-resourced* institution. The industrial powers succeeded in *cutting* the UN's staff by no less than 13 per cent only eight years ago – only to complain loudly when it didn't have enough to handle the sudden surge in peacekeeping that they began demanding of it.

A word about the dreadful, draining cost of this monstrous bureaucracy to the taxpayers of the United States, which Mr. Helms like so many of your leaders has been complaining about for years, saying the UN must be made 'more accountable'. This country's total legally obligated, assessed contribution to the UN would currently be about 1 billion dollars if it decides some time to pay it. Meanwhile, the United States continues to *make* more than 1 billion dollars a year out of the UN, in income from UN headquarters expenditure and in UN procurement of American goods and services. You see, when the myth is pierced, it might honestly be asked, who needs to be more 'accountable' to whom?

I personally believe that it is unhealthy for any one country – tomorrow it could be Germany or Japan – to pay as much as 25 per cent of the regular UN budget. But I am afraid that here, too, there has been a good deal of hoaxing. In 1985 my friend the late Prime Minister of Sweden, Olof Palme, proposed in the General Assembly a cap of 10 per cent on the contribution of any country, and that other countries should absorb the difference according to a revised assessment rate. Now from the ever-more shrill complaints heard in Washington, you would think that the first endorsement of this proposal would be by the United States of America. Instead, there was a resounding silence out of Washington, while anyone with an ear to the ground learned that officials were furious at Sweden. They wanted to go on telling the Congress and American taxpayers that the UN was too costly, but they did not want to lose the stranglehold on it that the 25 per cent assessment gave the United States. The Palme proposal died, in one more lost round between myth and reality.

Now before I go any further, let me anticipate what some of you may be wondering: how can the facts and realities of the UN be so different from these myths? I can only offer you my honest personal answer, after being based in New York for the last 18 years for my sins and pains as we say in Ireland.

First, the weird American drawing of the UN is part of a pretty weird drawing of the *world* by most foreign-policy moguls. From about 1960 when decolonisation brought the whole real world into the UN (except for China which America kept waiting to take the China seat for another decade), the dominant figures in the American foreign policy establishment decided that, as Senator Moynihan even titled his book about it, the UN was ‘a dangerous place’. It was dangerous because the United States had lost its leadership of a pretty comfortable Western majority – what a young Burmese delegate named U Thant had noted was ‘like a one-party system’ in the General Assembly.

The universalised UN was regarded as even more dangerous because upwards of a hundred of these upstart new members had the effrontery to declare themselves ‘non-aligned’ in the North-North Cold War. You know that Third World speeches are always ‘rhetoric’, Western ones are ‘important statements’ ... well, the place was filled with such rhetoric as this from the head of state of a newly independent developing country: ‘It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world ... constantly keeping in view that it is folly in a nation to look for disinterested favours from another ...’.

That was actually President George Washington in his Farewell Address, but never mind, his mid-20th century successors were determined to bring every Third World country into their warm embrace, even if it needed the CIA to overthrow the government and instal a client dictator who would be properly and dutifully aligned in the Holy War against Russia and would buy lots of expensive Western weapons and have his secret police and death squads properly trained to keep in line all those Marxist peasants who had never even had a chance to attend primary school.

These obsessions reached a point where every vote in the General Assembly was fed into a computer in the US Mission on First Avenue, and the voting record of countries were given ratings for their ‘anti-Americanism’ – with dire consequences ranging from very overt cuts in aid to very covert visits from the CIA. It clearly just did not occur to the foreign policy establishment that when a General Assembly vote on some resolution resulted in a solid half-page of the names of nearly every country in the world voting *for*, and then just two names – United States and Israel – voting against, with a few abstentions and absences, there might just be an explanation other than that ‘the UN’ was ‘anti-American’. There could just possibly be something plain *wrong* with US foreign policy; but no, year by year the obsession simply grew.

And this was plainly passed on into orthodox Western media establishments. They ceased to treat the UN as a priority beat, indeed to be assigned there became a Siberia of Western journalism. So the practice of even reporting on the UN to its citizens just faded away, except for the odd crisis and periodic bouts of bashing it. In the bashing, the language about the United Nations so degenerated that the *New York Times* was recurringly allowing Op-Ed articles about the UN using outright language of putrefaction. ‘Cesspool’ and ‘fetid swamp’ were among the milder phrases to describe my place of work in our Host Country’s press. And the hoary old epithets never stop. Here is a *Washington Post* headline two weeks ago, to an article whose writer actually quotes a study of mine in which I provide all the real facts about the size of the UN. The headline says, ‘MASSIVE WORLD BODY RESISTS SHAPING UP’.

There was another major reason for the virulent antagonism. Under the Charter, the UN was supposed to be the centrepiece leader in formulating global macro-economic strategies for ‘the economic and social advancement of all peoples’. As soon as it was clear that a genuine majority of ‘all peoples’ was going to enter the UN, the industrial powers began preventing Secretaries-General from acquiring the top-quality staff to formulate the needed new strategies, and began

building up the International Monetary Fund and World Bank which they solidly controlled. They refused year after year to discuss any such strategies in New York, claiming that these two agencies – and GATT for trade – were the ‘competent bodies’ ... while seeing to it that none of the three did any such thing.

More recently, it is said every year that the Summits of the G-7 industrial powers discuss the ‘global economy’. Here’s a *New York Times* headline: ‘Clinton Focusing on the World Economy’. So why is anyone complaining that the UN isn’t allowed to? The only trouble is that there is not one word in the small print about any strategies or steps to advance the *real* ‘global economy’ – of 5.7 billion people, 80 per cent of whom live in the South. The only steps reported are North-North – Japan, North America, and Europe; not even one-quarter of humankind.

Two indicators of the result of all this smoke and mirrors is that where in 1960 the Third World, with nearly 80 per cent of humankind, at least had 28 per cent of world trade, today it has only 18 per cent. Look behind quote ‘left-wing guerrillas’ in Chiapas, and quote ‘tribalism’ in Rwanda, and you will find the impact of trade barriers and the imposition of adjustment policies that are destroying more and more poor families. Secondly, the number of people in the world living in absolute poverty has increased by 40 per cent in the last 15 years, until today 1 in every 4 of our sisters and brothers on this planet are existing only on the margins of survival; and if the policies continue it will soon be 1 in every 3. When comparable disparities existed in Europe it exploded in bloody revolution, with the poor marching in despair and rage on every centre of affluence.

I used to feel every morning, going to the UN during all these years, that I was slipping behind siege barricades. It was as bad as that; and the unrelenting, undignified siege of foul gutter language and grossly undemocratic extortion of votes was what was totally un-American, at least in *my* reading of American history. Proof that something was wholly unnatural and not representative kept coming in from the annual Roper’s and other polls of American public opinion; citizens’ support for the UN never fell below 50 per cent and was often higher.

The Cold War has apparently evaporated, but there are still three standard arguments in use to justify American attempts to dictate to the UN and prevent it from getting on with the job it was assigned 50 years ago at San Francisco – to tackle the *causes* of upheaval and war in all-gain global economic policies, not just to try to cope with

the violent *consequences* of neglected causes. One of these arguments is that the United States contributes ‘the most’, and is therefore entitled to a proportionate voice and power in everything the UN does.

The system of assessed contributions to the budget of the UN (and the main Agencies) was fully accepted by all the founding members including the United States. It is grounded in the democratic principle of relative capacity to pay. This fundamental precept of democratic revenue-raising and governance holds that, since it is as difficult for the poorer citizen to find his or her smaller money amount of tax as it is for the wealthier citizen or corporation to find larger money amounts, the wealthier should not have any special voice or voting strength in government.

In the United Nations System, it is at least as difficult for Jamaica, or my country Ireland, or Tanzania or Australia to find their smaller money amount of assessed dues as it is for, say, Germany or the United States to find their larger money amount. In short, and straight out of the book of American democracy, for all we want the UN to achieve, *everyone* ‘pays most’. The people trying to introduce weighted voting and senior posts according to wealth would not dare even mention such an idea in their own country.

[It is often also claimed that those contributing the larger money amounts are justified in demanding special voice and voting strength, because the UN secretariats don’t handle funds well. This is another highly suspect argument, because the total volume of malfeasance in the UN System in a year could not even be registered on a bar-chart of a year’s corruption in any major Western *city* government. In one country whose officials constantly lecture the UN about ‘fiscal responsibility’, citizens recently lost the equivalent of 250 years of UN budgets through mis-management and corruption in their public savings and loan organisations. The UN’s management certainly needs improvement; but let us *improve* it, not surrender it to pre-democratic and semi-feudal control on the basis of allegations against an international civil service that has a remarkable record of probity. I can vouch for that: for ten years I was responsible for accounts in millions, and I was audited monthly, with memos coming back to me saying that my books were in error by 27 cents due to using the wrong exchange rate.]

There is also the perennial criticism that one-nation one-vote involves incredible disparities, so why should the United States bother to respect majority votes in the General Assembly? Of course there are crazy disparities, like the tiny atoll community of Palau now having one vote alongside the US. But the very ugly underside of this issue was well

exposed some years ago when an American television anchorman, interviewing that year's President of the General Assembly asked him, 'Isn't it absurd when some small weak country has a vote equal to that of a powerful and large country like the United States?' The President of the Assembly paused, and then replied, 'I am not sure I understand your question: I am the Prime Minister of Luxembourg'.

One small weak white and Western nation with one vote equal to the big ones – like Luxembourg or Ireland – isn't ever a problem; equal votes for peoples of colour and of other cultures is. That is another and very ugly reality.

One day we will get a more representative voting formula. Meanwhile, let me give you a fact practically never mentioned in this part of the world. The proportion of votes held at the UN by the affluent North and by the low-income South reflects the respective shares of Northern and Southern population on the planet with almost mathematical precision, and has done so down all fifty years. That rough equity in representation should be enough to get on with – because it may be taken as a plain reality that while the poison of mistrust generated by the minority trying to behave like a majority remains, the actual majority is not going to amend the Charter for any change from one-nation one-vote. Remember, the US and its partners in the great-power cabal can *veto* an amendment, but they can't get one adopted unless they use bribery and extortion on fully two-thirds of the members, at least 123 states that are supposed to be sovereign and respected as equal.

The Western powers do a great deal of this blackmail and bribery, and sometimes it creates another myth, as that the Gulf War was prosecuted 'under UN resolutions and with the full support of the international community'. The UN resolutions were not freely voted and there wasn't any such full support. Egypt joined the 'Coalition' only after getting a 25 billion dollar halving of its foreign debt, and Syria only when, miraculously, the night before, 2 billion dollars just happened to arrive electronically in its Treasury, equal to most of its current-account deficit. The force-authorising resolution went through only because Russia got a 4 billion dollar sweetener (Saudi money); France was scared of losing what President Mitterrand openly called 'our rank'; China abstained in return for special economic and diplomatic rewards; and all other members were brought into line except little Yemen which voted against. On the way out of the Security Council chamber a top-ranking US official was overheard saying to the Yemeni Ambassador, 'That was the most expensive vote your country ever cast here' ... and the next day all aid was cut, and Saudi Arabia expelled over 800,000 Yemeni remittance workers at bayonet point.

[This is how the three powers often behave at the UN, while preaching the virtues of democracy to the rest of the world. It is a form of state terrorism; for when a powerful government tells an impoverished country's government that it will lose its world credit rating, and all aid, unless it votes and speaks the right way next week in New York, it is not only practising criminal extortion; it is directly threatening to kill and maim possibly millions of children, women and men as surely as if it says it has bombers warming up.]

This does not make your country loved, I can assure you.

But the powers may win one and lose the next: a year ago they managed to intimidate just enough countries to block a resolution to ask the World Court for an advisory opinion whether the threat or use of nuclear weapons is contrary to international law. In the General Assembly a month ago, countries representing about two-thirds of humankind stayed solid despite the most massive attempt to bully them with the usual threats of loss of aid, no debt relief, poor credit rating through the IMF – and the motion carried. Double standards also screen reality. The nuclear powers demand that all other countries swear not to try to obtain weapons which they introduced into the world, abusing science to invent and refine devices deliberately designed indiscriminately to incinerate the maximum number of human beings in the shortest possible time; while they show no sign of readiness themselves to forgo them even though they say the Cold War is over.

It is also said almost daily in this part of the world that the General Assembly cannot be taken seriously because so few of its majority delegations come from democratically elected governments. I yield to no one in wishing for the day when they all will – and it will come, if at last those countries are left alone to evolve their own pluralist systems. But Australia's last Ambassador to the UN, the late Dr. Peter Wilenski, correctly observed that 'there is not much difference in the voting patterns of democratic and non-democratic states'. And Northern officials know very well in how many Third World countries the intelligence agencies of the powers installed those dictators, financed and armed them and saw to their sustained corruption by corporations ... or arranged for the destabilisation of countries through neighbouring installed client dictators, or settler regimes ... and in other countries tried to overthrow popular leadership, constantly building a siege authoritarianism.

This further ravaging of a major proportion of the peoples of this earth, even as they only began trying to recover from the ravages of

colonialism, now joins other, socio-economic causes of instability and upheaval in the South that confront the UN every week with new demands for peacekeeping and humanitarian relief. But the powers now expect the UN to cope with the consequences of what they wrought – not only without reparations, but without even proper support for the UN to try to care for the victims and at last help them to create stable society. I would cite to you as just one example the failure to resource the UN in an Angola bloodily torn apart by a gang directly sponsored by the United States and covertly armed by it through arrangement with the former South African apartheid regime and that long-nourished client, Mobutu of Zaire. Typically, it is now said that ‘the UN’ failed in Angola.

Finally, then, there is indeed the new chain of myths about something called ‘another UN peace-keeping fiasco’. There could be a genuine fiasco by the staff of the Secretary-General; they are only human, and they are totally over-stretched after all the years of staff cuts and deliberate refusal to allow capability for early-warning and contingency planning. But it just happens that so far when you look behind that phrase ‘UN fiasco’, you find something totally different.

The genocide in Rwanda was a shameful, horrible fiasco. But African countries had troops ready to move to prevent it; the only thing was they did not have long-range troop transports, and the countries that did would not provide them to the UN. The terrible treatment of dead American soldiers in the streets of Mogadishu in Somalia had nothing whatever to do with the UN. The Rangers were sent in, not even under the direction of the US officials already on the ground, leave alone anywhere near the UN peace-keeping chain of command. But in a fortnight that was another UN fiasco. This thing called ‘the UN’ is extremely convenient as a scapegoat.

To close, I want to pay my personal tribute to an American whose sensitivity and grit enabled this great country to make one of its finest and most enduring contributions to the United Nations. Better honoured for it in the rest of the world, what she launched deserves a place in every journalist’s working library. A little over 46 years ago, Eleanor Roosevelt strode up onto the rostrum of the General Assembly and, as President of the Commission that had negotiated it in only two years, read out to the world the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the decades that have followed, that first-ever magna carta of all humankind has been built upon like a solid foundation, until by now that ‘useless Third-World dominated talking shop’, the General Assembly,

has adopted some 70 instruments of human rights which are changing human society forever. This is *your* International Bill of Rights.

I salute Eleanor Roosevelt's memory. She understood well what an immortal phrase in the Declaration of Independence meant in being a member of the United Nations: 'a decent respect to the opinions of mankind'.



Commentary by Phyllis Bennis

Reading Erskine's words, 15 years after he first uttered them in that inimitable Irish not-quite-brogue of his, I can only stand again in awe of his courage and his clear-sightedness. Certainly Erskine was brave in the general sense of being willing to speak out, to call a myth a myth and a lie a lie, but that is not what is central here. Erskine, more particularly, had the courage to say no to lies that too often passed for assumed wisdom. He also had the courage to say that a vote by virtually the entire General Assembly versus two, the United States and Israel, was not evidence that the United Nations was 'anti-American, but rather was damned good evidence that something was wrong with US foreign policy.

What was so extraordinary about Erskine's work, his life, his love for the UN *and* his courage was precisely his willingness to look beyond the too common assumption that telling the truth just wasn't worth the inevitable consequences, that nothing was going to change anyway, that the powers that be would always be. Erskine's real courage lay in his refusal, over and over again, to accept the notion that nothing can be done, that people cannot change their world. He knew, years before the slogan became popular, that 'another world is possible'.

Back in 1995, when Erskine delivered this speech at the Rothko Chapel in Houston, the first US war against Iraq was just four years past. That war, known as Desert Storm, had been waged in the name of the UN after the US bullying campaign for votes with the bribes, threats and punishments that Erskine so precisely dissected. It was, as the great Pakistani scholar Eqbal Ahmad described it, a multilateral fig leaf to launch a thoroughly unilateral war. And even today, more than a decade and a half later, that first US war against Iraq still serves as one of the best, clearest, most outrage-inducing examples of US domination of the UN and how that domination has worked to undermine, delegitimise and at times almost fatally weaken the global organisation.

When Erskine gave this speech, Washington's economic sanctions against Iraq, also imposed under US pressure in the name of the UN, had already begun to bite. Just over a year later, newly selected Secretary of State Madeleine Albright would utter the words that brought the US government to perhaps its very nadir of international disrepute. Asked on national television about the sanctions-caused deaths of over 500,000 children in Iraq, the former US ambassador to the UN replied without missing a beat that 'we think the price is worth it'. And those sanctions, like the war itself, were imposed in the name of the UN. Is it any wonder that so many Iraqis held the UN and the US equally culpable for the degradation and destruction of their country and their people?

I had been working as a journalist at the UN for four or five years when the Gulf crisis broke. For most of that time, 'the UN' was simply a venue where I could meet, interview, discuss world events with the widest range of international actors in those 1980s days of waning Cold War and continuing national liberation movements. The UN at that time was almost the only place in the US one could meet with the African National Congress, with the PLO, with the Vietnamese and the Sandinistas. But I paid little attention to the institution as a whole.

Until the summer of 1990, when Iraq invaded Kuwait. There were reasons, for sure: disputes over shared oil fields and debt repayment, so it was hardly unexpected. It was, certainly, a violation of international law. But Iraq was hardly the first Middle Eastern country to invade and occupy a neighbour – there was Morocco in Western Sahara, Turkey in Northern Cyprus, Israel in Palestine, Lebanon, Syria... But this time, the US was looking for an excuse to take the world to war, to demonstrate that despite the demise of its long-time Soviet sparring partner with the Cold War's collapse, the US remained a superpower. What better way to show the world than to launch a war in the name of the whole world – in the name of the UN?

As Erskine so witheringly documented in this speech, US diplomats launched a tough, take-no-prisoners campaign to threaten and bribe their way to a Security Council endorsement of war. The 'Yemen Precedent' is still spoken of in hushed tones in the corridors of the UN, the message Washington sent to every weak and dependent country in the world: 'Defy us on something important to us, and you will pay a price.' (We should not forget that Cuba, too, for reasons of principle, stood with Yemen in refusing to endorse war.) The campaign worked: the UN said 'war' and Desert Storm was recorded in history as officially legal – however illegitimate, immoral, inhumane and indeed criminal it was as well.

Watching that US instrumentalisation of the UN, that's when I started paying attention. I wrote a book – *Calling the Shots: How Washington Dominates Today's UN* – with a foreword by my close friend Erskine Childers. And over the next few years, those ideas that Erskine had been propounding for so long started to have some influence outside UN circles. Global activists and social movements on issues from women's rights to peace to development, from the North-South divide to nuclear weapons, human rights and beyond, all started paying more attention to the UN. It wasn't a pretty sight during the 1990s, as a sequence of UN-sponsored international conferences on many of those key issues travelled from capital to capital, continent to continent. For a while it looked as if civil society was making inroads – we were getting a bit of access, conference hosts were being forced to allow space and a meeting place and a few token entry passes for a few chosen non-governmental individuals. But overall, it was pretty dismal – 'access' was defined as a separate-and-not-even-close-to-equal parallel space often miles away, and, most importantly, the modicum of access never translated into influence. We had access sometimes, but no voice.

And people started to get angry. Human rights activists from around the world, many of whom knew far more than the diplomats and bureaucrats involved in the decision-making, were systematically excluded from UN deliberations. Women who had fought for their rights at enormous risk had few if any seats at the drafting table where UN covenants on women were to be written. Advocates for children's rights were systematically excluded when the children's summit itself was hijacked and diverted by US efforts to consolidate sufficient votes for war in Iraq.

The UN wasn't looking so good. For many global justice activists, 'the UN' – with all the ambiguities of definition Erskine reminds us of – was starting to be lumped in with the *real* global bad guys – the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO: all the international financial institutions whose structures and very *raison d'être* are based on a theory of one dollar/one vote. The UN was losing even more credibility.

But a few years on, something different happened. Conditions in the US got worse – much worse. War fever and unilateralism and disdain for international law took hold, and George W. Bush was elected president. The smirking Texas cowboy wasn't very popular in the rest of the world, it turned out. The world started paying attention, and it was in the UN that the world started to stand up and say 'not so fast'. In an unprecedented move, the US was voted off the Human Rights Commission. It lost its seat in the UN's drug agency. It was starting to look like the world was growing a collective backbone. It was early in 2001.

But then came September 11. The US people were the victims of a huge crime, and suddenly the whole world opened its arms in a global embrace of human solidarity. ‘Nous sommes tous americaines maintenant’, headlined the French newspapers. September 11 could have changed the world, but it didn’t. Because then came September 12. And that day marked the end of even the pretence of international cooperation, international law and multilateralism as the foundations of US foreign policy. Instead, Bush announced he was taking the world to war. You’re either with us, or with the terrorists, he announced. Human solidarity was over.

But then the amazing thing happened. All around the world protests arose against the threat of an illegal war. The US did launch a war against Afghanistan, based on the false claim that this was somehow justified as ‘self-defence’ under Article 51 of the UN Charter. Immediately anti-war mobilisations rose up, led by families of those who were killed in the World Trade Center, families who travelled to Afghanistan to find and mourn with their counterparts, those whose families were killed in this politically driven illegal war.

And then, as the threat of a massive war against Iraq loomed, the global movements for peace joined those fighting for economic and climate justice to resist. On one singular day, 15 February 2003, answering the unified call of those movements, ‘the world said no to war’. In 665 cities, beginning as the sun rose over the South Pacific and travelling west across the snowy steppes of Central Asia, throughout Africa and across all of Europe, jumping the pond to the cities and towns of Latin America and then, at last, to New York, where half a million people gathered on the coldest day of the year outside the UN. The *Guinness Book of World Records* said 12 to 14 million people came out that day, the largest gathering in the history of humanity. To say no to war.

That morning in New York a small group of us, led by South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, crossed the empty ‘frozen zone’ in front of the UN under police escort to meet with then-Secretary-General Kofi Annan. In the 38th floor conference room, the two African statesmen, Nobel peace laureates who had known each other for so long, greeted each other. Kofi (as everyone referred to him) looked grim, for he was under enormous US pressure to endorse the war. So far he had refused. Now here were his friends, supporters, with their own pressure, urging him to condemn it. Tutu began by telling the Secretary-General, ‘We are here today on behalf of the people marching in 665 cities all around the world. And we’re here to tell you that those people marching in those 665 cities, we claim the

United Nations as our own. We claim it in the name of the global mobilisation for peace.’ It was a haunting moment.

As we headed back out into the cold, we handed Kofi a blue ‘the world says no to war’ badge, urging him to wear it into the Security Council meeting. The rally outside continued, with activists, cultural workers, veterans, trade unionists and more taking part. After leaving the meeting with Kofi, the legendary singer/actor/activist Harry Belafonte stood before the half-million people gathered outside UN headquarters. He called out to this new movement rising against war and empire, reminding us that our movement could change the world, and that the world was counting on us to do so. ‘The world has sat with tremendous anxiety, in great fear that we did not exist,’ he said. ‘But America is a vast and diverse country, and we are part of the greater truth that makes our nation. We stand for peace, for the truth of what is at the heart of the American people. We WILL make a difference – that is the message that we send out to the world today.’

Following Harry came his close friend and long-time colleague, the activist actor Danny Glover. Danny spoke of earlier heroes, of Sojourner Truth, and Harriet Tubman and the great Paul Robeson. And then he shouted into the icy wind, ‘We stand here today because our right to dissent, and our right to participate in a real democracy has been hijacked by those who call for war. We stand at this threshold of history, and we say to them “Not In Our Name!”’ The enormous crowd, shivering in the bitter cold, took up the cry, and ‘Not in our name! Not in our name! Not in our name!’ echoed through the New York streets.

And a little bit later, we had another unbelievable moment. We got a call backstage about an Associated Press story that had just broken, dateline United Nations. Someone wrote down the two-line story, scrawling it on the back of a leaflet. There was a huddled discussion, should we go public, should we wait, what if it wasn’t true? But quickly we realised that this was big news, that it was something this crowd, in this place, needed to hear. After a minute’s discussion, one of the rally organisers said, ‘Phyllis, you’re our UN person, you’ve got to do it.’ I had already spoken earlier in the programme, but they pushed me back out on stage.

I added only one sentence of my own, looking out from the stage at this huge mass of people that had now grown to monumental, historic proportions. ‘If anyone here thinks that our protests today don’t matter,’ I said, ‘listen to this.’ And then I read the AP piece. It

was only two lines long: ‘Rattled by an outpouring of international anti-war sentiment, the United States and Britain began reworking a draft resolution Saturday to authorize force against Saddam Hussein. Diplomats, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the final product may be a softer text that does not explicitly call for war.’

People roared. Reading that report, at that moment, at that place, to that crowd, was the privilege of a lifetime. And I remember weeping as I left the stage – I think everyone backstage was weeping then – and thinking for that moment, that it looked as though we might change history. It was Erskine’s moment.

And two days later, the *New York Times* agreed. On the front page, above the fold, was written, ‘once again there are two super-powers in the world, the United States and global public opinion.’ The second superpower was born.

What the *Times* had not mentioned, of course, was what this super-power really meant. The protest in the streets was huge, the biggest in history. People around the world had come together and managed, in only six weeks, to organise parallel protests in cities across the globe under one slogan, shouted in scores of languages: The world says no to war. But there had been massive protests before, and would be again. What made this round different, what was born that day that was so different, was that this was not *only* about the protests in the streets. Certainly it was those social movements around the world, people mobilising in their own countries, that made up the solid core. But eventually, enough people mobilised in enough places that some governments, for reasons of their own (often narrowly defined national interest), also stood up to resist the US pressure for war. And then finally, when the ‘Uncommitted Six’ countries of the Security Council stood fast against the pressure, and the Secretary-General refused to endorse the war, the UN itself joined the global mobilisation for peace.

It was that three-part mobilisation – of people’s movements, governments and the UN – that made up, for a brief eight months, the second superpower to challenge the US drive towards war and empire. It didn’t last, of course, it didn’t stop this particular war. But it changed history. It created new power relations. It brought the UN back to our side, to the people’s side. ‘We the Peoples,’ claimed the UN in the name of the global mobilisation for peace. And it was Erskine who helped show us how.



Interventions

*The roles of the United Nations,
the Organisation of African Unity,
governments, and the NGO community*



Remarks by Erskine Childers at
Meeting of the European Working Group
On The Horn of Africa
InterChurch House, London
31 March 1993

If we are realistically to examine the roles of the United Nations, the Organisation of African Unity, Governments and Non-governmental Organisations, it may be useful to begin with the capabilities of these institutions in relation to the challenges they face. These capabilities, and the challenges, are profoundly shaped by the continuing consequences of colonialism and its offspring, neo-colonialism, and of the cold war. I will try in these remarks briefly to analyse some of the main issues, and then attempt to pull the whole together in some suggestions for the NGO community.

The United Nations

First, the United Nations, and beginning with the General Assembly.

The Assembly has recently shown the distinct unease the great majority of UN members have felt over their virtual exclusion from decision-making in the Security Council. For example, it was notable that in its special Declaration on higher-level Fact-Finding Missions in Resolution 46/59 the Assembly insisted that it, as well as the Security Council or the Secretary-General, can send such missions. And in December 1992 the Assembly voted to make a special study 'to promote the utilisation of the General Assembly ... to bring greater influence to bear in pre-empting or containing any situation which is potentially dangerous or might lead to international friction or dispute'.

That resolution (47/120) reiterated the importance of the Secretary-General developing a list of eminent and qualified experts in fact-finding. I myself believe this should be a panel of *already*-designated 'United Nations Peace and Human Rights Commissioners'; eminent, internationally trusted women and men who agree to be on 36-hour standby to the UN.

What the Assembly's invocation of its responsibilities in peace and security might mean will greatly depend on whether abuses of the Charter in the Security Council cease. Having largely frozen the evolution of the Security Council during the Cold War, between 1990 and now four so-called 'Permanent Members' set out to make it their private club, where they have on occasion distorted the UN Charter and hijacked the moral authority of the UN for their own purposes – often with outright lying as when, in January 1993, Washington and London blandly asserted that the No-Fly Zones in southern Iraq were authorised by the Council; a total fiction. I say four Permanent Members because China, the fifth holding this utterly archaic privileged status, has been conspicuously quiet, abstaining when wishing to register its disagreement with the other four.

On issues that touch their neo-colonial interests – oil, Israel, and so on – the four powers have decided among themselves on a resolution, then simply informed the rest of the Council that it is ready. But to prepare for each critical vote a form of state terrorism has been used against potentially troublesome 'non-permanent' members from the Third World. Their economies having already been ravaged by Northern policies, their governments are told how they had better vote, or at least only abstain, if they wish debt relief, or continued 'aid', or less severe IMF conditionalities.

It is, of course, ironic that these powers claim that they can and must police the world and that they know best, because they have shown the very reverse. With the sole exception of the deliberate Anglo-American evasion of peaceful settlement followed by high-technology massacre in the Gulf, they have shown a total *inability* to act together wherever hideous conflict has broken out. Their hesitant and un-coordinated behaviour in former Yugoslavia, causing delay that has proven disastrous, alone utterly disqualifies them from any last pretension to these privileged roles left over from the age of bully-powers. Again: the United States acted on Somalia only after its refusal to support earlier UN proposals for even minimal armed protection forces had been followed by such deterioration, so powerfully reported through media by NGOs, that Mr. Bush was confronted either by possible disgrace as he left office, or by the chance to reap some final glory for himself.

How much the Security Council may now change for the better is a function of several variables that are right now in flux. There are positive signs, and I will take these first. Key Third World governments while holding seats in the Council have more recently shown great courage even while under economic intimidation. India and Zimbabwe, in particular, refused to go along with the original American proposal to

send US troops into Somalia without any accountability whatever to the UN. Only because of this resistance did we get at least a resolution last December committing the UN in advance to picking up the pieces, enabling the clearly UN-directed mission now just approved, and with greater likelihood that the powers will now have to contribute serious resources to the new UN effort.

The Security Council resolution on Somalia adopted last Friday gained unanimity – meaning Third World assent – because for the first time ever it does place troops carrying out armed peace-enforcing instructions totally under the Secretary-General’s command, control and accountability to the membership, under ground rules acceptable to smaller countries and, not least, Africa. This is indeed a historic step. There are also positive signs, even from Washington under the new administration, towards the contribution of 24-hour standby troops trained in UN missions, but this will need consistent pressure on governments to bring it into being.

The future of the Security Council is thus a mixed picture right now, and still with unknown variables where the naked self-interests of powers may be involved. To what extent the Clinton Administration may alter Reagan-Bush abuses in such crises is not at all clear. Its conduct over the Palestinian deportees was just as disgraceful, but Clinton is openly biased in favour of the Zionist state, and this does not necessarily portend the same in all other disputes. French policies are totally up in the air. And on the other hand, the Yeltsin Government has shown signs of pressure from conservatives not to remain as subdued and docile a client of the West in the Council as it has been ever since the fall of Gorbachev. Beyond these uncertainties again, of course, are the looming questions of Japanese and German demands to join the Security Council club.

One immensely important factor is not in doubt. It is the timid acquiescence of the rest of the North, of the middle and smaller countries, when the four powers have abused the Charter. The future confidence of the Third World in the United Nations will very greatly depend on whether it sees European countries cease to behave like mere satrapies whenever these four may gang up again to try to hijack the image of the UN. Here, I believe the critically important thing is to advance on positive ground *rules for humanitarian intervention across traditional sovereignty*. I’ll return to this when I come to the roles of NGOs.

The third critical component is, of course, the Secretary-General and the several humanitarian agencies and their capacities. Let me first provide some facts against decades of disinformation.

For some thirty years right-wing zealots and cynical Western media have routinely called the UN ‘a vast sprawling, swollen bureaucracy’ – which of course has helped to turn so many NGO people away from it. The epithet has also been used by Northern governments to slash the budgets and staff of the UN. The fact is that the total line staff of the whole common UN System world-wide – excluding only temporary peace-keeping personnel, and for everything from civil aviation to agriculture, from security to health to human rights and humanitarian relief, all the agencies and all grades – numbers today some 51,500¹. That is less than the staff of the District Health service of Wales; less than the municipal government staff of the City of Stockholm; and by the way, since so much of this vicious disinformation has come from American sources, it is less than the combined federal, state and municipal civil servants in the State of Wyoming with a population under 500,000.

Now within this pitiful total let me provide a few figures that more specifically relate to our concerns here. For every aspect of Peace-keeping – from contingency planning through actually trying to negotiate troop and other contributions for an intervention, to raising the funds for each new operation, governments currently allow the Secretary-General a total of 14 professionals. This morning there are 36 major armed conflicts raging in the world and another some 90 wars of lesser but also deadly effect. For all this, 14 professionals. For all UN logistical support to all field missions of all kinds – today involving 60,000 peacekeepers in 13 operations – only another 23 professionals. If you were to total the civil servants in any medium-sized member-government in the North who are assigned just to *its* own contribution to these missions you would find they nearly equal what the Secretary-General has for the entire world.

That is the price ordinary human beings are paying for the stranglehold that a handful of wealthy powers has had on the UN for so long – and that other Northern countries have acquiesced in. The same countries whose politicians, media, and regrettably often NGOs are quick to denounce the UN for slow or fumbling response to crises.

To cite one other component of the problems we are dealing with today, I probably do not have to tell you that the United Nations has, for all action on Human Rights world-wide, in over 180 countries among 5.5 billion people, less staff than Amnesty International. Again, the price being paid today for so long a neglect, often a derisory indifference to, the world organisation – and again, it has to be said, not least by the NGO community.

¹ cf. Report of the Secretary-General on the Budgetary and Financial Situation of Organisations in the UN System, UN document A/47/593.

Now it may indeed be said that not all members of this relatively tiny international civil service are of top quality. That is true, as it is of any civil service. The mediocrities among the many truly dedicated are there because of two factors: the appalling behaviour of our governments in so many of their choices of the executive heads in the UN System, because every time a weak or pliable head is appointed the quality of recruitment and promotion suffers; and the constant pressures – no less from Northern than Third World governments – to have citizens appointed who are not the best, but someone's favourite. Again, both these things happen because of lack of vigilance by parliaments, NGOs and of course media. We, the citizens of the UN, get the UN we deserve if we allow our governments to erode the quality of its single most precious resource – its staff.

Finally in this necessarily quick survey of the UN pole of our framework, there is the question of its humanitarian relief arms. In 1991 the General Assembly adopted the best reform resolution (46/182) that could possibly have obtained consensus at that time, appointing a new Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and making all the right noises on paper about strong co-ordination of all the involved agencies. It just wasn't enough. It is important to bear in mind that the Secretary-General has given Mr. Eliasson only the same rank as the head of UNHCR and the head of UNICEF and the head of the World Food Programme – and one rank *lower* than the heads of UNDP, FAO and WHO. That simply does not make sense. Mr. Boutros-Ghali has so far declined to appoint Deputies Secretary-General around him, including such a rank for the Humanitarian Affairs post, which would at least solve the rank problem.

I strongly believe, however, that we have now got to go the root cause, once and for all, of the recurring problems of coherence and efficient operations – that governments created separate bodies in this field. There is no good reason why – preserving the identity of their *funds* for resource-mobilisation – the World Food Programme's emergency food aid work and staff should not be folded into Mr. Eliasson's Department; so also, all the material relief functions of UNHCR, which was set up to be a legal protection commission, not a truck convoy agency; and so also the emergency functions of UNICEF. But in urging real consolidation now, I must emphasise that this should be accompanied by real decentralisation of operational decision-making to the UN officials (properly chosen) on the ground in emergencies, working with NGOs. The worst kind of co-ordination structure is that which fails to delegate.

Among other weaknesses, one has been so powerful that it has quite literally wrecked efforts at initiative and intervention early enough to stave off disasters that then take tens of thousands of lives, and land NGOs in quagmire after quagmire. It is the issue of logistical support for UN missions. This is not just my own interpretation: Mr. Boutros-Ghali is on public record that the single most crucial factor that delayed early and strong enough UN protective intervention in Somalia was the UN's total lack of logistical – transport, communications and so on – resources. Unless the Secretary-General can immediately draw on these infrastructural resources, pledges of troops and other personnel are mere paper. To cite but one element in this: there are several hundred C-130 and AN-12 fixed wing cargo aircraft, and countless transport helicopters (e.g. Mi-26 and CH-47), parked un-used on airfields around the world. It is nothing less than scandalous that the UN cannot immediately draw on these from pre-arranged government standby pledges, including the costs of their operation, to ensure that the long agonising months of deterioration in Somalia in late 1991 and most of 1992 never happen again.

The OAU

I am reluctant to say too much about the Organisation of African Unity because comment on it should really be by Africans. But as its present Secretary-General Salim Salim has admitted, it has had little working experience in pacific settlement, leave alone active intervention, until quite recently.

It is entirely my own interpretation that the fundamental reason for this is that it has been an organisation built upon artificial sovereignties, externally imposed and then largely kept subordinated to Northern powers. One has to search with a magnifying glass on a map of the continent of Africa for the few tens of kilometres of frontier one could possibly describe as having any kind of sanction in accumulated African historical experience, any kind of felt cultural and kinship relationship with the people on either side of it. Africa today is still as culturally and linguistically and economically sliced apart and unviable, as when the European powers carved it up among themselves a hundred years ago.

The OAU was literally born in 1963 with a reluctant, uneasy compact that all its colonially inherited boundaries must be respected – not because Africa's real statespersons believed they were genuine and endogenous, but in fear that Africa, emerging from colonialism desperately poor and thus unstable, would not be left alone to re-negotiate boundaries that would make cultural, political and economic sense.

It is not difficult to understand this. Africa was *not* left alone, not for a month, not anywhere. To cite but one example, by 1963 the first independence leader of the Congo (now Zaire) had been murdered with the direct support of the C.I.A. and European governments; the country had been ravaged by inter-group and inter-provincial struggles deliberately fomented by outside powers – not, of course, to further Congolese self-determination in any one or another geographic construct, but to retain post-colonial control of the country's enormous mineral and other wealth and ensure that any leadership emerging was firmly in the West's grip.

Fear of subversion and destabilisation from outside the continent or from South Africa, or the virtual control of many regimes by outside powers, has thus pervaded Africa ever since decolonisation. Of course African leadership has made its own mistakes (what culture's or country's leadership hasn't in the last thirty years?). But anyone from a country that has known the nightmare of colonialism understands how very long is the memory, how deep the suspicions – and how often they are justified long, long after the token ceremony of only legal independence. Who would be prepared to stake money this morning that the peoples of the Horn of Africa can rest easy that no power covets any part of it? That France has ceased to rule whole parts of Africa? That President Mobutu has absolutely no support left from Washington and elsewhere? That Savimbi is only using the armaments the powers already stockpiled for him? And where was the outrage that should have been shouted from one end of Europe to the other over Savimbi's resumption of warfare and wrecking of UN-sponsored electoral processes? I want to say this with the utmost emphasis: *the silence of Europe over these extensions of the Cold War and the neo-colonial era provide no assurance in Africa* – and, ironically, provide defensive and demagogic argument for dictators.

Anywhere in the world this history and this present would make it extremely difficult for the head and staff of a regional organisation of governments to gain acceptance of the practice of taking effective responsibility for settlement of crises between or within countries of the region. The European Community has not exactly shown itself to be a model over former Yugoslavia *without* such background colonial and neo-colonial history. Nor was the UN allowed, or facilitated to promote and encourage the kinds of pacific settlement of local disputes through regional arrangements or agencies, such as the OAU, that is envisaged in Chapter VIII of the Charter. On one hand, the Northern powers did not want any such UN initiative in a continent which they made an arena for their Cold War machinations; on the other, African governments involved in conflict have, in almost every case, been clients of somebody outside the continent.

The end of the dictatorships almost entirely installed by the Western powers, and convincing evidence that they have truly ceased their vicious subversion and destabilisation, will powerfully facilitate building OAU capacities for effective action in these crises. The extremely promising Kampala Document's proposals for OAU-sponsored machinery to pre-empt or mediate in internal crises seem to be stalled. It needs the strongest possible encouragement by everyone.

I will come to the fourth pole – NGOs – in a moment, but before that I would like to complete some features of this overall canvas.

Decision-makers and many influential people and media in the former imperial countries and the American Imperium assert, of course, that colonialism is now merely a subject for desiccated historians, and that the only consequences of the Cold War needing attention are assistance to the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The refusal of Northern elites to accept any historical responsibility for the condition of Africa is a conveniently self-induced and now double-layered amnesia. It is so convenient: Africa's internal strife and mass human misery are now domestic problems.

Somalia suddenly ceased to be of any interest to the powers when the Cold War apparently ended. It did not matter that the evolution of viable, endogenously sanctioned modern political institutions had been made impossible by decades of Cold War intrigue and support for a form of dictatorship wholly alien to and itself destructive of Somali value-systems and structures of governance. It did not matter that most Somalis with political education and motivation had fled the country. It did not matter that the powers had left Somalia littered with more lethal weaponry than ten Somalis would need. Whatever now happened in Somalia was somebody else's problem.

The brave people of Eritrea who have endured such hideous agony because the powers refused to recognise one of the single most clear claims for national self-determination, are now largely ignored as far as development assistance is concerned because their hard-won independence is not yet a suitably legal phenomenon.

In the same way, we have I'm sure all noted how Angola now has what Western media and politicians call a 'civil war', and so has Mozambique – as though no outside power had ever been near those two ravaged lands.

And while the IMF destroys with one hand whole portions of the social infrastructure of Africa so painfully built up through UN and bilateral

assistance, its G-7 controllers have also decided that ‘aid’ to Africa should be conditional upon African countries quickly becoming ‘democratic’ – as though its dictators had not, almost every one, been installed, financed and armed by the Northern powers, making sure that the foundations of viable and indigenous pluralistic institutions were either destroyed at the outset or delayed for half a century. Ordinary Africans in desperate need of development resources are now in danger of being punished for thirty years of foully undemocratic covert behaviour by the world’s most ardent public advocates of democracy.

This, then, is the context in which the role of NGOs has assumed, almost week by week, larger and larger importance. In the rest of these remarks I will try to raise the key questions as I see them, and offer hesitant suggested answers.

The role of NGOs

The first suggestion I need to make is one that underpins everything else. It is that the humanitarian NGO community must now complete its reluctant acknowledgement that it is in ‘politics’, whether it likes this or not.

As countries collapse under the ravages of Northern economic policies, the continuing consequences of the Cold War that was waged in them without their wish, the artificiality of their boundaries, and the relentless exposure of the classic Western nation-state model as not necessarily appropriate for them, humanitarian relief and human rights protection simply *is* embedded in politics. The work that NGOs want to do and are dedicated to do now suffers, and will suffer more and more intensely, from factors in the universe of politics that they have traditionally regarded as beyond them.

And so I would like to pose the question: since UN officials and UN bodies like the General Assembly have now shown far more recognition of their dependence on NGOs in humanitarian and human rights work, are we in danger of it becoming the NGO community that will now fail to take up and vigorously exploit these openings? In the suggestions I will make along, as it were, the spectrum of a crisis, facing up to this is absolutely fundamental.

First, it is simply no longer sensible for NGOs to take the ‘hold at arms length’ view of the UN system and stay out of reform and capacity-improving issues as ‘political’ – and then, in the midst of desperate crisis, to bear much of the consequences of UN inefficiencies and lack of coherence.

- The NGO community must become thoroughly informed about what is and is not happening in reform issues at the UN. I have no personal interest in it except that I tried for years to get it started; but the weekly independent and not-for-profit journal, *International Documents Review*, is more than worth its subscription costs.²
- For more detailed ‘breaking information’, some collaborative way of sustaining a reliable and expert NGO capacity at the UN to monitor and answer questions should be considered.
- Humanitarian NGOs should carry out their own study of co-ordination problems in the UN system and become *expert* in these. If they conclude, as I now do, that the present separate emergency capacities must be consolidated, they should start a strong and uninterrupted campaign to get this done. Such a campaign needs to be implemented by NGOs with their respective governments, at home, in the first place, because that is where the whole problem starts – in the failure of governments to co-ordinate their own policies as they instruct their delegations to the different funds and agencies. At key times in the sessions of UN bodies they should lobby unitedly and expertly.
- If, as I suspect, NGOs are still not satisfied with the arrangements for standing NGO liaison with the UN, both at global and ground-level, they must kick up a storm until these are improved. Whatever the pompousness and other attitudes still lingering, NGOs by now have the basis on which to demand that they be taken far more seriously.
- Humanitarian NGOs have perhaps the clearest and most indisputable right, as well as responsibility, to monitor and hold accountable all relevant UN bodies over the quality of the staff they employ in this work that is so vulnerable to its human resources. NGOs should hold their governments accountable in the first instance, and provide them with chapter and verse of unqualified or mediocre UN staff assignments, needless to say their own nationals but also all other nationals.
- Again, because it is essential work ahead of any crisis, the NGO community must raise a veritable storm until capable countries around the world pledge and dedicate logistical resources to the UN on a standby basis.

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Early warning

I think we will now see much more attention paid at the UN, by Undersecretary-General Kofi Annan and with the unanimous backing of the General Assembly in its latest resolution 47/120, to early warning of potential crisis situations. The Assembly has also explicitly urged that regional bodies develop their early-warning capacities in efficient communication with the UN. It is critically important that the combined NGO community indigenous to and working in the Horn find some means of building continuous channels for their enormously important, often indispensably sensitive and accurate contribution to this vital preventive and aversive process, both with the OAU and with the UN. Perhaps a consortium-based capacity at Addis is already being built, unknown to me; that would seem to me the right approach.

Needs and contingency assessments

When early warning fails to produce adequate preventive initiatives, and the worst begins to happen, am I wrong that NGOs still have a serious problem in sufficiently sound assessments of needs and the likely evolution of a humanitarian crisis? If I am right, is it not over-time to pool resources so that a team of people already knowledgeable about a country can go in and consult local NGO and community people and then provide to the whole NGO community – and of course concerned governments, the OAU, and the UN – their resultant initial needs assessment? (Obviously, thereafter individual NGOs will need to continue to make their own specialised follow-up assessments).

Intervention ground rules

The United Nations is, of course, now quite rapidly building up precedents for humanitarian intervention, and some will argue that this is the only way agreed ground rules can ever be fashioned. I am not so optimistic. As I mentioned, we got the new Security Council decision on UN action in Somalia only through dragging last-minute concessions out of George Bush that, as it were, dragged subsequent UN responsibility with them – but in a disgracefully vague and dangerously incoherent way. Former Yugoslavia has been tragically mired in precisely the lack of clear principles on humanitarian intervention.

- The NGO community in particular now has a major opportunity, as well as responsibility, to try to help those UN member governments – including Third World ones like India, Zimbabwe, Brazil, to name only a few – that do want to formulate clear ground rules³. I would seriously urge this be initiated on a collaborative basis.

³ As stated in, for example, the ECOSOC 1991 session on Humanitarian Emergencies; and the January 1992 Security Council 'summit'.

- For Africa, and the Horn, there are two documents now under the aegis of the OAU that should be invoked by African and assisting outside NGOs in an effort to help the OAU to formulate its ground rules. These are the Kampala Document on peace, security and development; and the Arusha Declaration on Popular Participation in African Economic Recovery and Development.

Policy on armed protection

Moving along the spectrum, I believe that the work done on the Protocol on the Rights and Responsibilities of NGOs provides an invaluable improvement at most of this dimension. I do believe that urgent work needs to be done in a comparable effort to evaluate experience over the issue of armed protection, and to make very clear to governments and the UN what the humanitarian NGO community expects from them in this obviously, tragically, increasing problem.

I know there are many differing views among NGOs on this. But I am quite convinced that it is now essential to make it clear to governments and to the United Nations that their early enough and adequate enough response to humanitarian crises involving armed conflict must from now on include – *as an integral, not afterthought, factor* – the protection needs of those who are on the front line trying to serve innocent civilians. The function of improved assessments is obviously vital in this; but here again we do have a ‘political’ policy issue that NGOs must become totally engaged in. Some of the most obvious questions surely include:

- Do NGOs really want to be dragged into the business of hiring their own armed guards? Are there any circumstances where, if the UN could provide such protection, still NGOs would prefer to provide it themselves? For me, this relates to a second crucial question:
- From actual NGO experience – and no one else can artificially try to assemble this – are there grounds for seeking special UN (hopefully down the road, joint UN/OAU) units trained and equipped and mandated solely for this protection work; the first to be introduced in a crisis, and deliberately kept separate from peace-enforcing and other armed units? What I have called United Nations Humanitarian Security Police?

NGO mediation roles?

I personally believe that the NGO community must also equip itself to offer actual mediation and conflict-resolution advisory services to the UN, the OAU and of course individual governments where this might be accepted.

We will see more and more truly ‘sociological’ crises in the erosion of the centralist nation-state as simply imposed, lock stock and barrel, from the West onto other cultures. We will see more and more situations where the all-important and crucially sensitive factors in conflict resolution are at the community, the tribe and the clan level – where the world’s traditional central-government and UN mediators are least at home, but which is the home of NGOs. I would urge the building of strong links between NGOs and sociologists and social anthropologists – first those of victim countries, working with selected ones from outside who know their indigenous associates. Not from any mere idealism, but because UN people are not all fools, in proportion to their being able to see this kind of capability in the NGO community, in that proportion they will very probably be glad to seek its help.

Conclusion

All of these questions revolve around the enormous, truly history-making changes in the roles of humanitarian NGOs that we have seen taking place at a pace which few would have thought remotely likely even a decade ago.

In my view it is no exaggeration at all to say that the humanitarian NGOs of victim countries and of helping countries have become – by the forces of all the neglected legacies of history now making their claims – the embodiments of that so long-ignored pillar of the Charter, ‘We, the peoples of the United Nations’.

It is tragic and ironic, but it seems to be true, that just as the suffering of tens of millions of civilian human beings in a world war brought about the creation of the United Nations, so the suffering of millions may bring about its democratisation.

The concept of humanitarian action remains as valid and worthy as it ever was. The realisation that it is irrevocably enmeshed with political institutions, and that its workers have both rights and responsibilities to get involved in their improvement, in order to continue to perform their noble missions, is in my view the single largest challenge that the NGO community faces today.



Commentary by Hanne Christensen

Introduction

In his article, ‘Interventions, The Roles of the United Nations, The Organisation of African Unity, Governments, and the NGO Community’ (31 March 1993), Erskine Childers argued against the present division of labour within the UN emergency response system. He saw the separate roles of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), World Food Programme (WFP) and the emergency wing of the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) as unnecessary and suggested that the agencies, including UNICEF’s emergency programming, be combined into one entity to deal with all types of emergencies, including those affecting non-refugee populations. What Erskine did not touch on in the article is the fact that emergencies often occur in a development context, diverting and delaying the development process, which then needs to be brought back on track. This article builds on Erskine’s thoughts and suggests a solution that involves the attachment of all UN emergency programming to a sustainable development process involving one agency, a much transformed OCHA, UN Development Programme (UNDP), UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP.

Present system

In the current response system, emergencies fall under several agencies. There is OCHA, which deals with coordination issues; UNDP, which has the overall responsibility for small-scale emergencies where no local humanitarian emergency coordinator has been appointed by OCHA; UNHCR, which provides protection and material assistance in the form of plastic tarpaulins and family tents for shelter, soap and mosquito nets (as required) and other supplies to populations affected by emergencies; UNICEF, which provides safe drinking water, oral rehydration salts for children and vaccinations against emergency-related diseases; and finally WFP, which provides food rations.

The flooding in Pakistan in July–August 2010, affecting over 17 million people, of whom eight million were in acute need of emergency assistance, highlighted this institutional split and the relationship between emergencies and development. Three weeks into the disaster, up to 1.4 million people had received clean water, some 800,000 had received food for one month while nearly a million had been given materials for

shelter (*UN Daily News* 2010a). Two days later, UN agencies announced they would redouble their efforts (*UN Daily News* 2010b). Eleven days after that, WFP announced they had reached nearly 3 million people, while almost 2 million had been given drinking water by UNICEF (*UN Daily News* 2010c). Thus the target of reaching those in need of emergency assistance was far from met by any UN agency, and the agencies reached uneven numbers of people. This situation can be only partly explained by the slow response to the emergency appeal made by the UN. The suspicion is that the various UN agencies performed unevenly, or under-performed. Some people got shelter but no food or drinking water, and vice versa. Children received rehydration salts, but other dehydrated persons did not. Millions fell into the assistance lacunae and got nothing at all. Coordination between agencies proved difficult, given the logistical nightmare as the River Indus swelled to 40 times its water volume at one point, and flooded an area as large as Great Britain (*UN Daily News*, 2010a). Many affected people lost everything, but, being cut off by flood water and the devastation to the infrastructure, could not be reached. As if this were not enough, the water spoiled the crops on agricultural lands and delayed the beginning of the new agricultural cycle. In addition, private homes and public buildings have collapsed and vanished; roads, bridges, telecommunication installations, power lines and health clinics been swept away; and agriculture and its derived industries been severely impacted. Consequently, the emergency will have a long-lasting effect on people's livelihoods and the development process in the country.

The initial emergency appeal by the UN for the Pakistan flood crisis amounted to US\$460 million, of which 67 per cent was funded five weeks into the emergency (*UN Daily News*, 2010c). The loss of wheat, cotton and sugar harvests is estimated at US\$1 billion, US\$900 million of which will be covered by a World Bank loan to Pakistan. Pakistani authorities estimate that reconstruction of the country will amount to US\$15 billion. Inflation, which has already increased because of shortages of commodities and the devastation to the infrastructure, compounds the difficulties of affected populations and will continue to do so in the years ahead. Hence, millions face a bleak future of ruined or severely reduced livelihoods combined with unaffordable accommodation and commodities.

Added to this is the country's already precarious economic situation before the flood crisis began: Pakistan had been negotiating a loan package of about US\$10 billion with the IMF to address the situation. Given the current emergency confronting it, Pakistan will find it more than difficult to honour its commitments under the package.

Thus, the country's debt is building, while the short-term development process is on hold, having been replaced by an acute need for reconstruction after the flood waters receded.

Once the emergency phase in Pakistan is over and reconstruction and development begin, the UN development group will come into the picture, namely UNDP, Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), etc. Here again, affected people may fall through the gaps in assistance. Not all those receiving emergency assistance are assured of receiving reconstruction aid and becoming part of the development process, even though many may still have need of such aid. The seeds of another emergency may thus be sown.

Clearly, amendments to the UN emergency response system cannot solve all the problems in Pakistan or elsewhere. However, the situation in Pakistan clearly shows that the problems of the country are connected and need to be dealt with in a closely coordinated manner.

From many to one

The current system represents a dilemma, in that the fragmentation of mandates and experiences within the UN system works against a satisfactory and generally accepted approach.

It is irrational, and somewhat arbitrary, to have emergency assistance programming, including coordination, split among agencies instead of concentrated in a single agency. This leads to lacunae in assistance, double standards, tensions and unhealthy competition among agencies, which tenaciously guard their turf by defending their particular policies and programmes. The decades-long inferiority complex of WFP in relation to UNHCR, and the competition between them, and the well-known and persistent difficulties OCHA has in coordinating independent UN agencies and programmes are cases in point. Coordinating programmes and actions, reaching people simultaneously with various relief efforts and presenting UN emergency assistance in a unified manner to target groups, would be facilitated and promoted if all of these tasks were handled by one and the same agency.

It also seems irrational to have emergency-prevention separated from development programming. Such separation risks unnecessary prolongation of relief programmes following a disaster. Given present climatic challenges, the development process needs to take disaster-prevention into account. This could be done through community-

based development actions that set aside an emergency fund and institute local and national emergency-preparedness plans. In the absence of these measures, an emergency may assume huge proportions and considerably delay the development process.

It also seems irrational to have emergency programming split from longer term recovery processes. This split suggests that people in need could fall through the cracks, or that emergency responses could be protracted at the expense of development. Instead, both should be tied together in one package, so that when reactive emergency measures end, reconstruction and development processes for the same target groups will take over to the extent necessary.

In short, emergencies cannot be dealt with in isolation, but need to be addressed through a unified approach, with preventive action built into ongoing development efforts, concerted emergency response measures and follow-up reconstruction and development processes to consolidate the intervention.

A single agency that unifies all UN emergency assistance to those affected by emergencies, man-made or natural, and ties emergency programming to prevention of future emergencies, on the one hand, and reconstruction and sustainable development, on the other, would result in holistic long-term programming. It would also lead to more equal assistance to target groups and better gear the system to the relationship between development action and emergency-preparedness and between emergency assistance and the development process.

The proposed entity would comprise three elements. The first would focus on preventive political action, including governance-related diplomacy, humanitarian diplomacy, early-warning information-gathering, deployment of humanitarian observers, dissemination of information to member states and the design of containment plans. The second would cover existing humanitarian aid programmes (OCHA, UNHCR, WFP and the emergency programming of UNICEF, excepting emergency vaccinations, which would be transferred to WHO). The target groups would be all kinds of displaced people and others affected by emergencies. Responses would include protection and emergency assistance to IDPs, refugees and returnees, stateless persons and expellees, as well as victims of natural disaster. The third element would be a development pillar with two branches (currently UNDP): branch A would be responsible for intensive development-oriented (previously emergency) programmes for target populations; and branch B would focus on regular sustainable development for

populations in countries or areas not exposed to massive or complex humanitarian emergencies. To guide the work of the proposed entity, one of its first tasks would be to issue the agenda for humanitarian action called for in General Assembly resolutions since 2002,⁴ but not yet issued by OCHA, the responsible entity. The document would spell out the modalities and linkages between emergency assistance, including prevention and emergency-preparedness, and sustainable development processes in a context of reaching all target populations.

The new agency would need a new name. The United Nations Coordinated Assistance Programme (UNCAP) would be one, appropriate, possibility. The new entity would have a staff exceeding 25,000, rather large by UN standards but modest compared to transnational corporations or federal government authorities.⁵

How will UNCAP fit into the current UN reform process, initiated in 1997? In some ways, it takes the process further down its established path. In others, it implies a change of direction. UNCAP conforms to the UN's one-line-of-command policy (1997 reform proposals) and builds on the trend to cluster agencies into groups (also in the 1997 proposals) with its suggestion of merging agencies and programmes into one organisation. Yet it is radically against dealing with humanitarian problems generated in a development context on their own, such as is entailed in the humanitarian segment of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) set up as part of the 1997 reforms to give guidance on overall humanitarian issues and coordination (UN General Assembly 1997).

The humanitarian segment could, however, serve another purpose: it could become the discussion forum for the following nexus: political preventive action – emergency preparedness – humanitarian assistance – resumed development process with inbuilt emergency-preparedness dividend. Substantiated ideas on these linkages would be helpful to the UN response system in its search for feasible approaches yielding tangible results, UNCAP in particular.

Conclusion

4 See, for example, United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/61/138, 19 December 2006.

5 In the context of the NGO-world, not much to talk about either, since quite a few worldwide NGOs come close to this number. World Vision, for instance, already in 2003 had 20,000 employees around the globe.

Erskine's call for the merger of UN emergency programmes is still valid and becomes more so when a development perspective is added, the need for which has become more apparent since his time. Most of the major humanitarian problems of the world today arise in developing countries, where they interrupt development practice, as in Pakistan, and must be treated as temporary interruptions. They are diversions from the ongoing development process, which needs to be salvaged and brought back on to a sustainable course through an even and unified approach, so that the people affected have a real chance to get on with their lives. This cannot be done through individual emergency responses by UN agencies. Nor can it be achieved in isolation from other development factors and contexts.

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An Agenda for Peace and an Agenda for Development

*The Security Council and the
Economic and Social Council on the front line*



Remarks by Erskine Childers

Colloquium

The United Nations at fifty:

Whither the next fifty years?

European Parliament, Brussels

8 September 1995

I am delighted to have been asked to speak under so very apt a title, linking our two Agendas and, especially and unusually, giving the Economic and Social Council equal importance with the Security Council ‘on the front line’. I will say much more about this, but I need first to make clear that these will not be observations from the School of ‘Realism’.

Its adherents argue that the only ‘sensible’ approach to international relations is that the economically mighty and the militarily most powerful will always determine the conduct of world affairs and the condition of our United Nations. Not ethics, not norms of international law; not the principles of democracy; not the wishes and views of the other 180 or so nations and of the huge majority of humankind – ‘realism’ dismisses such references as the irrelevancies of ‘idealists’ and ‘starry-eyed utopianists’ and insists that traditionally measured power is the arbiter of our destinies. And all the ordinary rest of us might as well accept this. I refuse to.

This ‘realism’ has been exerting great influence in international decision-making, and grotesquely distorting discussion about the reform and strengthening of the United Nations. One of its most insidious influences is the dictum that the governments that ‘contribute most’ to the UN’s budgets should naturally have special influence in its policies, and even in the composition of its organs – the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the General Assembly, everywhere throughout the United Nations System.

The General Assembly formula for each member's assessed share of the UN regular and peacekeeping budgets is based on the principle of relative capacity-to-pay. The same principle underlies the assessment system of major Specialized Agencies of the UN System like UNESCO and FAO. It is the root principle of democratic revenue-raising and governance in the very countries that demand special influence in the UN on grounds of their contributing the largest money amounts. It is the principle that it is as great a *burden* for the poorer citizen to find his or her smaller money amount of taxes as it is for the richer to find their larger money amount. Accordingly, since there is equity of burden, no one should have special influence in governance; no rich person and no corporation is entitled to special posts in or influence on the policies – or reforms – of public-service institutions. The citizens of Europe had to struggle for a long time to overcome precisely this undemocratic premise in their own countries; they would abandon democratic national governance to modern plutocrats and corporations if they now accepted it at home.

And it is most certainly as great a burden for Jamaica, or Tanzania, or Nepal to find their smaller money amounts of contribution to the UN budgets as it is for the United States or the other so-called 'major contributors' to find theirs. Thus, and as within every democratic country, in the United Nations, *everyone* 'pays most'.

Yet the 'realists' tell us *ad nauseam* that those who make the largest money contributions in the UN will always call the tune. It would be a signal contribution towards a stronger United Nations if everyone here could pledge never again to stay silent when someone invokes this argument. For if we continue to allow it to pre-dominate we might as well abandon the UN to the Host Country (which has nearly bankrupted it) and the others whose representatives make this argument day in, day out in every UN forum.

Let me now turn to the organs that are our focus in this session. The smaller countries at San Francisco struggled to ensure that these two organs could be – and I want to emphasise this – *the two sides of a common coin of social equity and peace*.

The economic and social *causes* of conflict were to be addressed by the Economic and Social Council under the authority of the General Assembly as the UN's paramount policy-making body. Where these causes of conflict could not be resolved or at least alleviated in time, the Security Council would have to address the *consequences* – but above all, under Chapter VI for *peaceful* settlement; least of all, and only in tragic last resort, Chapter VII and peace-enforcement.

I will begin with, and concentrate my remarks on the first part of the United Nations spectrum – causes – and on the Economic and Social

Council. For if we do not at least now enable the UN urgently to tackle the causes of conflict, then as surely as the sun will set tonight, the best-organised early-warning, preventive diplomacy, and peace-keeping capabilities we can instal will be overwhelmed within twenty years by a chain of upheavals that may well escalate into global convulsion.

For brevity I will use the common acronym for the Economic and Social Council, ‘ECOSOC’.

For sound reform in public-service institutions it is vital to know when *structure* is at fault, and when it is only a surface symptom of *political* problems. Current proposals calling for the closing down of ECOSOC and for its replacement by one or another smaller body, allegedly for ‘economic security’ are, to say the least, ill-founded. The Charter already mandates ECOSOC to play this economic-security role, under Article 55, to create (and I quote) the ‘conditions of stability and well-being which are necessary for peaceful and friendly relations among nations’.

In these very words of Article 55, building on the Preamble’s goals and the Purposes enunciated in Article 1, ECOSOC was mandated to tackle every one of today’s root-causes of upheaval and conflict: low standards of living; unemployment; no or inadequate economic and social progress and development; economic, social, health, educational and cultural problems that can only be tackled at the international dimension; and disrespect for and deprivation of human rights.

And at the largest dimension of these problems, the impoverishment of most of humankind, ECOSOC is also mandated to develop for the General Assembly global macro-economic and macro-social strategies that would, as the Preamble states, ‘promote the economic and social advancement of all peoples’. I emphasise, *all* peoples.

If ECOSOC has not been able to do this effectively enough, it is not the fault of the Charter or of the design of the Council, but of foreign and economic policy-elites of a small minority of member-countries who have sought to block the implementation of this crucial mandate, because in ECOSOC they have no veto; it demands too much democratic co-operation by them.

A second argument is that ECOSOC is ‘too large’ to be effective as a policy-negotiating body; therefore, we are told, it should be replaced by a smaller council. This is ‘realist’ code language for saying that the only chance of getting the industrial powers to allow the UN to address the macro-economic issues of the real world is if they can have predominant influence in a smaller body.

ECOSOC's 54 members are elected by the General Assembly to be representative of the full UN membership, though the Northern minority actually has a disproportionate number of seats (29 per cent compared with 23 per cent in the General Assembly). But the *size* of a representative body is not what inhibits complex policy negotiation; it is lack of trust among its members. When such trust develops – which depends above all on Europe – the 54 members of ECOSOC will be able to agree on a smaller body of themselves for such purposes.

The real and largest problem about ECOSOC is that ever since decolonisation began to give the majority of humankind its majority in the UN, the elites of the industrial powers have not been willing to allow the UN to exercise the global economic leadership which its founders intended.

Without legal or historical grounds they say that the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are mandated to deal with global macro-economic issues, and that they will therefore not participate substantively in any such discussions in ECOSOC or the General Assembly. But they do not allow the IMF and World Bank – which they control – to deal with these issues either. Nor do they address world macro-economic problems in their G-7 club. The G-7 Summit communiqués say that they address 'the global economy', but if you read the small print you discover that the G-7 definition of 'global economy' is the Japan-North America-Europe economy, of not even one-quarter of humankind.

The United Nations is thus disenfranchised from the real economy of all humankind.

And here enter again the 'realists'. Their traditional strength has been in diplomatic and political fields. In the early 1980s they acquired new allies in the field of international economic relations, from the rising advocates of the most dangerous fundamentalist religion in our world today – that which worships the magic of the market. As a result, their cynical perspective is reaching into the daily lives of vast numbers of our sisters and brothers across the world.

One in every four of us alive on Earth this afternoon is sunk in absolute poverty. The gap between the North and South has *doubled* since 1960: then, the poorest one-fifth of humankind was at least earning one-thirtieth what the richest one-fifth in the North was earning; today they cannot even earn one-*sixtieth* what people in the North earn. Eighty per cent of humankind now has only 19 per cent of world trade. But the hectoring preachers of the market religion insist that governments can do nothing effective about this and what is more, they should not even try, because only 'market forces' decide who prospers.

They may have almost destroyed an already Cold-War bankrupted Russian economy. The ‘miracles’ they hold up to the world may recurrently blow up in their faces, as in Mexico, hurtling more millions into poverty. One electronic speculator may earn over a billion dollars in personal profit in 36 hours of manipulating a whole portion of a nation’s currency reserve back and forth across the world. No matter and never mind; these are the mysterious forces of the market which governments must leave alone, and which the United Nations must not even discuss.

This potentially catastrophic stream of intellectual rubbish seems to have taken such a grip on political minds across the North that one is entitled to wonder if someone has been putting something in their drinking water. Their surrender to this invisible ‘market’ even scares corporation heads: for example, in the June issue of ‘The Atlantic Monthly’ in 1993 the then Chairman of the mighty Sony Corporation, Akio Morita, published an open appeal to the G-7 leaders to re-install some regulatory influence over international currency movements.

If these political leaders do not soon come out of their trance – or are not shaken out of it by citizens – they will fulfil the projections of Claude Julien in this month’s ‘Le Monde Diplomatique’, of a world ‘going down the drain’ (‘un monde à veau l’eau’). For *no* institution, anywhere, is dealing with the macro-economic problems of the real world of over 5.7 billion human beings.

The third argument of those who propose to abolish ECOSOC is that it has ‘failed’ because, it is said – and I quote the standard phraseology – ‘it does not attract’ high-level economic participation. This is more sheer sophistry. It is not a case of ECOSOC failing to ‘attract’ high-level enough participation, as though the seats were not comfortable enough for senior Ministers. A few governments deliberately decide year after year not to send high-level macro-economic negotiators, so others do not either!

The proposed smaller council would also be bereft of any pretence at genuine representation of the world community. In the Global Governance Commission’s proposal for such a smaller council, what they call the ‘largest economies’ would be members ‘*as of right*’, with ‘a constituency system’ for representation of regions, and – I am again quoting *verbatim* – ‘some participation by smaller countries’.

So, after fifty years of having to endure *one* council in the UN containing ‘members as of right’ – a concept straight out of some pre-mediaeval feudal Charter – we are now urged to acquire another for economic matters.

The other major criticism of ECOSOC is that its agenda is too packed, with too many reports of subsidiary bodies; that it cannot handle them effectively and fulfil its function of co-ordinating the agencies of the System; and that there is duplication of debate with the also overloaded General Assembly. There is validity in these criticisms. But the governing factors behind these problems are that, in a period when the Council has had to add to its workload the staggering range of Agenda 21 issues reported out of the Commission on Sustainable Development, and enormously expanded activities in human rights and humanitarian emergencies, its working time has actually been *cut*.

Most people, seeing the Security Council in virtually continuous session, do not know that this other Council – which was supposed to reduce the volume of crises ever needing Security Council attention – only meets for a total of some five weeks in each year.

This, too, is not an accident; it is entirely in line with the effort to stifle all initiative for action by the United Nations in the most dangerous zone of conflict on our planet – the frontier of structural economic apartheid between the minority and the majority of humankind.

Let us, then, insist that we get serious about our UN organs, and enable them to work properly. I hope that, in the coming UN-reform debates, European members will have the courage to insist that ECOSOC be enabled to work on its Chartered mandates, and will make clear that Europe is now prepared to participate in formulating macro-economic policies in the UN for the full world. For complex negotiation ECOSOC should have an executive committee of its bureau, as the Secretary-General suggests in ‘An Agenda for Development’.

The agenda and workload problem needs the outright decision of its members (no Charter amendment would be required) to enable ECOSOC to work across the whole year. Incidentally, the same need to open up the calendar applies to the General Assembly, which has been kept essentially to only 14 weeks per year ever since the late 1940s.

I have spoken rather more about ECOSOC than about the Security Council, because the latter has enormously preponderant attention in the North – reflective of the continuing neglect of the causes of the conflicts the UN is then supposed to handle. But there are some fundamental observations about the Security Council that I submit must no longer be only whispered under the intimidation of politeness to ‘great powerdom’ or ignored before the blandishments of ‘realists’.

This organ is the locus of the virtually fascist flaws that were thrust by diktat 50 years ago into the otherwise noble, principled architecture of the United Nations Charter. Some may be shocked by the term ‘fascist’. But had not the powers in 1945 just led a world war against systems of governance in which a minority faction would, 1. create permanent, unelected seats for itself; 2. arrogate to itself the power to block admissions of others to the institution of governance; 3. wield the police power in the community; 4. hold the power to block nominations to the chief public-service post; and 5. have the power to block any amendments to the constitution giving themselves these special privileges? When I was doing my studies, this was indeed called fascism.

The inscription in the Charter by name of 5 out of now 185 countries as so-called ‘Permanent Members’; the fact that they have never been elected to the Council in fifty years; and their possession of archaic veto powers, are daily living affronts to the memory of those whose sacrifice in the struggle for international democracy we are also commemorating this year.

I am not among those who claim that this Security Council has ‘come into its own’ since the end of the Cold War. A more apt description would be that the inner clique that runs it – really elites within three governments – have brought down the credibility of the United Nations again and again (not least by labelling as ‘a UN fiasco’ the results of their own refusals to allow it adequate resources for the operations they have authorised). Moreover, they have abused the Charter more than at any time since 1945.

Of all such abuses, one of the darkest stains on the UN flag – and on these countries’ own ethical traditions – is their repeated extortion of the votes of weaker elected members by economic menaces and bribery: – “If you do not vote as we tell you next week, you will receive no more ‘aid’, no debt relief, no IMF credit-rating around the world, no IMF short-term credit to pay your last month’s oil-import bill’ ... or, alternatively, ‘Here are X billion dollars’, or ‘Here is most-favoured nation trade treatment, as the reward for your compliance with our wishes in the Security Council” (by the way, also in the General Assembly, as witness the railroading the other day of the Non-Proliferation Treaty proceedings).

Such extortion of votes is a criminal felony within the same countries practising it at the United Nations, and is among the gravest violations of the Charter. And here again there has been only meek silence from the rest of Europe about these state-terroristic threats to the health and nutrition, the livelihood and very lives of thousands or millions of citizens of weak countries, the number of potential victims only depending on which countries they target for coercion.

Yet there is now serious discussion about how to protract the undemocratic, unaccountable status of powers that behave thus, by expanding their tawdry club. The grand scheme now is to secure the admission of Germany and Japan to this reliquary cabal by seducing a few large Southern countries into it as well. And there is an unsavoury sameness about this design with the proposed replacement for the Economic and Social Council in which, again, a few large *Southern* countries would be members ‘as of right’. ‘Realism’ has thus produced a strategy that would seek institutionally to break the solidarity of the majority of humankind even more effectively than the ad hoc efforts by extortion to date.

None of this is the true way ahead. It seems very clever. It has the true macho ring about it. But it would be another betrayal of the hopes and dreams of those who fought to make the United Nations possible. We need a Security Council that can enjoy the confidence of the membership as a whole. Let there quite simply be no reform of it until we can refashion it into a slightly larger body (about 23 seats) entirely elected on the basis of regional representation and rotation, in which most of the big countries will always have seats. There must be no vetoes, but graduated majority voting according to the type and gravity of the decision to be taken.

In conclusion, then, the strength we need for an ethically directed United Nations must truly come from ‘We, the Peoples’, *all* the Peoples of the United Nations: respecting their cultures and dignity, branding as an outlaw any government seeking to tamper with their equal right to vote freely and without fear. We also need a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly directly elected by the peoples of the world so they can monitor and share responsibility with their national executive governments in the General Assembly next door. I salute the European Parliament for endorsing this.

Above all, the economic and social advancement of *all* peoples must now be seriously, urgently addressed, both because it is morally indefensible to delay any longer and because it will be catastrophically dangerous to world peace if we do delay any longer.

In all of these needs for our United Nations, Europe bears a heavy responsibility; for if the traditional-power elites will listen to anyone before they do their ultimate worst with our world, they will only listen to Europe.

This continent is where the dream began, in the struggle against political and economic authoritarianism. Let this continent have the courage now to join the majority of humankind to move the dream forward, while time remains.



Commentary by Muchkund Dubey

From the beginning of the 1980s, the major powers that have exercised hegemony in the world order since the Second World War, along with their allies, started a concerted, planned and coordinated effort to weaken the United Nations and whittle down its role and functions. By the early 1990s, they had more or less succeeded in their purpose, though the assault continued. This was about the time Erskine Childers and other like-minded people tried through their writings and speeches to defend the UN, bring out its true value for the international community and underline the indispensability of the rule of international law to maintaining order and stability in the world and improving the social and economic conditions of the vast majority of humankind. They argued that multilateralism under the UN, though by no means perfect, represented the highest stage of excellence in organising the international system and that there were no alternatives to it.

Erskine Childers's most important defence of multilateralism under the UN was the report entitled 'Renewing the United Nations System' that he and Sir Brian Urquhart prepared on behalf of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation in 1994. That report remains the most convincing and persuasive response to the propaganda war launched against the UN by think-tanks, media, diplomats and policy-makers in the major powers. Childers's other major work, in which I collaborated, was the input he provided into the South Centre's work on the UN, published in 1996 under the title 'For A Strong and Democratic United Nations: A South Perspective'.

The lecture 'An Agenda for Peace and an Agenda for Development: The Security Council and the Economic and Social Council on the Front Line' given by him in 1995 in Brussels at the European parliament constitutes a major defence of a democratic UN and the rule of law in international affairs. One of the most significant points in this lecture is that the UN was created not merely for conflict resolution and taking action to prevent 'Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace and Acts of Aggression' (the title of Chapter VII of the Charter), but also to eliminate the causes of war. This objective of the UN is emphatically pronounced in the very first clause of the Preamble of the Charter, which states: 'to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war'. The Charter adequately vests the UN with responsibilities, powers and functions to play its critical role of rooting out the causes of war. Among the UN's objectives is the promotion of 'social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom' (Preamble). In Article 1(3), one of the purposes of the UN is achieving 'international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural and humanitarian character'. Erskine

Childers in his lectures very aptly quotes the role described in Article 55 of the Charter, namely creating the ‘conditions of stability and well-being which are necessary for peaceful and friendly relations among nations’. This clause directly links the role of the UN in the economic, social and cultural fields with its role in the political and security fields.

To deal with non-military threats to security and promote human security as a basis for eliminating war, the UN established the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) as one of its principal organs. In addition, the UN brought within its fold specialised agencies working in the economic, social and cultural, educational, health and related fields. In terms of Article 57 of the Charter mandates, specialised agencies ‘shall be brought into relationship with the United Nations’, while Article 59 authorises the UN to initiate negotiations to create new specialised agencies. Article 58 mandates the organisation to ‘make recommendations for the coordination of the policies and activities of the specialized agencies’. The specialised agencies’ role in eliminating the causes of war is cogently and lucidly articulated in the UNESCO constitution in the following terms: ‘since war begins in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed’.

When Erskine Childers was busy writing and lecturing on the UN, reforms to the organisation were much in the air. He was himself one of the authors of the very first ambitious project on this subject sponsored by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation. The Commission on Global Governance was about to submit its report ‘Our Global Neighbourhood’. An independent working group on the future of the UN, whose report was later issued under the title ‘The United Nations in its Second Half Century’ was also looking into UN reform. Both Brian Urquhart and I were members of the working group.

Erskine Childers in his lecture categorically rejects the approach of the ‘realist’ school of UN reform: ‘there will be no observations from the school of realism,’ he warned. The ‘realist’ school takes for granted the continued dominance by the major powers of the international system. Therefore, according to this school, any reform proposal, to be worthwhile, must aim to keep major powers engaged and involved in the UN. For this to happen, reforms must be acceptable to these powers. Consequently, there is no place in such reforms for ideas that these powers do not perceive to be in their interest.

This approach to reform is gravely flawed. Its implications range from keeping the UN perpetually weak, ineffective and dependent on major powers to desisting from any effort to make it more democratic. Anything that increases the UN’s capacity to discharge its functions is anathema to the ‘realist’ school.

Moreover, a ‘realist’ reform package would have to accommodate all types of compromises of convenience and expediency. The outcome of negotiations on the package will remain uncertain till the end and will be a matter of accident rather than deliberate planning based on a set of principles, norms and commonly shared values. Finally, such reform package will be built on sand. It will collapse with each change to the world power equation or to the circumstances that led one or more major power to accept the package.

Acceptability to major powers has been the main criterion for almost all reform proposals submitted to and considered by the UN so far. This was true of the high-level panel recommendations on ‘Threats, Challenges and Change’ and the then Secretary-General’s report ‘Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights For All’. These two reports, on the basis of which the latest package on UN reform was adopted by the General Assembly at the end of its summit session in December 2005, essentially obliged the UN to adjust to the underlying power reality in the world.

I am at one with Erskine Childers in believing that any approach to UN reform must, to be worthwhile, be an idealistic one. It must be anchored in the commonly shared human values and the most evolved set of international laws underlying the UN.

The three fundamental purposes of the reforms should be to:

- a. restore to the UN the Charter functions it has lost over the last 30 years;
- b. establish the UN as the centrepiece of the multilateral system; and
- c. enhance the UN’s capacity by providing it the wherewithal to discharge its functions.

The UN’s functions in the economic field provided in the Charter, but by now largely transferred to the IMF, World Bank and WTO, should be restored. The UN must again be the forum for analysing, discussing and making recommendations on global economic issues like money, finance, trade, external indebtedness and development strategies. As Article 1(4) of the Charter states, it should be ‘a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations’ in these and other areas, and ECOSOC should, as the Charter mandates, be the forum for initiating actions and making recommendations in all these matters.

Unfortunately, the policies of the major powers over the last three decades have so eroded the UN’s economic functions that they have virtually ceased to be discharged. The emergence during the recent global financial

and economic crisis of the G20 as the premier forum for international economic cooperation represents a significant institutionalisation of the erosion of the UN's economic functions. Given its composition, the G20 is likely to be a forum for putting the emerging economies' stamp of approval on decisions taken by major developed countries. It will be used to maintain the status quo in the world economic order, with a few superficial changes to placate developing countries who are members of the group. The G20 will never be a forum for restructuring the international economic system to make it just and equitable. Any attempt to do this will be regarded as sheer bad manners, if not heresy. The rest of the UN members, numbering about 172, will remain outside the G20. They have an equal right to participate in the dialogue on international economic cooperation, and for them the UN is the only available forum for this purpose.

True to the provision in the Charter, the UN must be recognised as the central authority in the multilateral system, whose role cannot be usurped by any rival or alternative organisation. The re-establishment of the UN as the centrepiece of the multilateral system would call for, among other things, the following:

- i. The UN's association agreement with the IMF and World Bank should be revised to bring it into line with the agreements concluded with other specialised agencies.
- ii. WTO should be brought into association with the UN in accordance with Article 57 of the Charter.
- iii. ECOSOC, not any alternative body, should be the forum for discussing and harmonising the global macroeconomic policies of member states. For this purpose, its structure and functioning should be reformed. A plethora of suggestions have been made in this regard, including some very important ones by Erskine Childers. If a decision is made to restore to the UN its Charter functions in the economic field and there is a political will to make ECOSOC an effective forum for international economic cooperation, making the desired changes to its functioning should not be difficult.

Enhancing the UN's capacity is crucial to enabling it to discharge its Charter functions adequately and effectively, as well any new mandate it may be given. By far the most important measures to enhance its capacity relate to the financial resources at the UN's disposal, the policies relating to budget and the wherewithal for carrying out its peacemaking and peacekeeping functions.

Among the measures indispensable to strengthening the UN but never placed formally on the reform agenda are:

- i. The deliberate withholding of dues owing to the organisation should not be permitted;
- ii. The virtual embargo, persisting for several decades, on budget increases in real terms for UN organisations should end;
- iii. The voluntarisation of funding for the activities of the UN organisations should stop and the earlier practice reinstated whereby the bulk of the finances for these organisations come from assessed contributions;
- iv. The UN must be given access to new and predictably recurring sources for financing its activities. A whole array of proposals have been made in this regard. These range from levying taxes on the use of global commons to the Tobin Tax proposal, whereby capital transactions for speculative purposes would be taxed both to limit such transactions and raise resources for financing the activities of the organisations of the UN system;
- v. Enhancing the UN's capacity to mount operations under Chapters VI and VII of the Charter requires acceptance of some of the proposals in the then Secretary-General's report, 'An Agenda for Peace'. This included increasing the working capital fund and establishing a UN peace endowment fund;
- vi. There is also a strong case for approving and operationalising the proposed peace enforcement unit under the UN. This idea was first mooted by Brian Urquhart and subsequently included as a proposal in the 'Agenda for Peace'.

As already pointed out, these and other related proposals have never figured on the agenda for UN reform. The major powers are not interested in them because their objective has been to weaken the UN, not strengthen it. The European countries, which in the past had a relatively enlightened policy towards the UN, have over the last three decades joined the major powers in their efforts to marginalise the organisation. There are no popular movements in these countries obliging their governments to reverse this policy. Governments of developing countries, either out of expediency or under pressure from major powers, have made only feeble efforts to arrest the decline of UN multilateralism, let alone presenting blueprints or detailed proposals to strengthen it. We seem to be heading towards chaos in the international order. If this comes to pass, developing countries will suffer the most. Therefore, before it is too late, they must take the initiative to restore to the UN its Charter functions and enhance its capacity to discharge them.



The United Nations after the Gulf Crisis

Myths, realities and needed UN reform



Remarks by Erskine Childers at
The Norwegian Institute of International Affairs
Oslo, 25 October 1991

A strange and extremely unhealthy sort of silence has settled over the Gulf Crisis and 'War' only months after it was transfixing the media, was engaging the largest attack force assembled since World War II, and was costing the world an estimated 130 billion dollars (\$130,000,000,000).

There is not a word about the estimated 100,000 dead Iraqi soldiers, or how such a huge number were killed, by those who claim to be the most humane nations on earth, for less than 150 dead on their side. Never before in the history of war has there been such a 'kill ratio'. It was less a 'war' than a high-technology massacre. Thousands of them, trying to surrender, were first suffocated and then incinerated by fuel-air bombs – weapons which the war powers somehow claim are 'conventional'. Other thousands were eviscerated by the equally 'conventional' cluster bomb, a most brilliant achievement of Western science, a bomb that releases small bombs that in turn explode thousands of scientifically razor-sharpened slivers of steel. Thousands more were literally buried alive in their trenches by armoured bulldozers while waving surrender. It was indeed a 'victory' of which to be proud.

Under the second Geneva Convention the victors are obliged to account for the Iraqi dead and wounded. They have not done so, nor evince any concern to do so. In this as in so many other aspects of the behaviour of these powers, international law has been most sanctimoniously invoked against others, but most cynically evaded by themselves. None of this is apparently of any great consequence in the West; after all, they were only Arabs.

Every effort is made to prevent any significant public knowledge of the deliberate devastation of Iraq's entire civilian and development infrastructure, totally unconnected with military supply to Kuwait. UN civil servant teams' reports of this destruction have been intensely disliked by the war powers. Only those reports, and the voluntary

efforts of private university and non-governmental survey teams, have brought out knowledge of the one million Iraqi children now gravely malnourished; the thousands dying for lack of medicines, lack of nutrients, and lack of immunisation because Iraq's vaccine laboratories, built up with UN co-operation, were also deliberately targeted and destroyed; the lack of safe drinking water, and human exposure to raw sewage, because the water and sewage systems were also deliberately destroyed.

Every possible effort is, however, being made to keep public attention focussed on the discovery of Iraqi weapons development. Many Western media have almost dutifully continued to serve these propaganda campaigns, carefully avoiding any parallel references to the fact that Israel has had advanced missile-installed nuclear weapons, including hydrogen capability, plus chemical, biological and bacteriological weapons, for many years and without any admonition from the Western powers.

Meanwhile, however, in much of the Northern world there is an end to the long silence about the United Nations. There is a flood of discussion about how the United Nations has been 'reborn' ... 'rediscovered' ... 'reinvigorated' in the Gulf; about how the Security Council has 'come into its own'; and not least, how new UN initiatives, for example to intervene across borders for human rights, should be built up 'on the precedent of UN action in Iraq'. It has been claimed a thousand times that all action in the Gulf 'War' was taken 'with the support of the whole international community'.

Neither the silence nor the sudden love for the UN is healthy, because both are founded upon myths and lies – and upon an increasingly short focus to the eyes of many Northerners. I should like to offer you my thoughts about this eery, almost Kafkaesque atmosphere today.

First, it needs to be said outright, however unpleasant it is: nothing done using the name of the UN since the August 2 (1990) resolution condemning Iraq for its invasion of Kuwait has been done 'with the support of the whole international community'. This ritual claim from the Coalition leaders is the largest lie of many. After August the steps taken under the claimed moral authority of the UN had only varying degrees of support even of Northern governments, plus those Southern governments that were either bought or bullied into collaboration or acquiescence, in the most concentrated exercise in economic intimidation of UN members since 1945. The great majority of member governments stand horrified and angry at the use to which their United Nations has been put in the Gulf ever since.

Billions of dollars were used in this exercise – amounts like some \$25 billion in debt relief for Egypt; to Syria in return for joining the war, \$2.2 billion from Saudi Arabia, another \$1.5 billion from other Gulf countries, and the European Community unfroze \$190 million. There were more huge amounts to Turkey. US military aid to Kenya, suspended in 1990 on human rights grounds, was restored with the official announcement that this was ‘in appreciation for Kenya’s support in the Gulf’. Third World governments that were not willing to accept bribes or to be intimidated by threats of no debt relief or loss of aid have suffered one or both: for example, Tunisia’s aid has been cut. Others were silenced because, already driven to their knees by Northern-controlled international economic policies, they were then virtually bankrupted by the steep rise in oil prices, which Northern governments did not try to modulate but in fact allowed to become one of several sources of large-scale profiteering from the crisis. But anyone who is in touch with Third World leaders and intellectuals, who reads free Third World editorials and cartoons, knows that the reaction to the Gulf Massacre is one of seething rage – and a deep, possibly fatal loss of confidence in the United Nations and the former solidarity with like-minded people in the North.

How can there be this so harshly divided perception of the same events, resolutions, actions; of supposedly the same United Nations? The answer certainly involves the following factors.

There was a massive, very skilful official campaign of disinformation and censorship. And an astonishing number of Western media, doubtless swept up in the campaign’s demonisation of Saddam Hussein (using a major US public relations firm under contract to the Emir of Kuwait), swallowed the disinformation more thoroughly than any equivalent campaign that I can recall. Respectable media normally highly alert to P.R. tricks did not even pause over the fact that the audio-visuals and other materials wheeled into the Security Council chamber to portray Iraqi atrocities in Kuwait had been prepared by that P.R. firm.

There were indeed Iraqi occupation atrocities; but to see the indignant, sanctimonious Western media treatment of these allegations, one would think that United States troops never tortured and assassinated Vietnamese civilians; that British behaviour in its colonies and in Northern Ireland had been impeccable; that no Algerian was ever tortured and then shot by French forces. And one has had to search with magnifying glass in the back pages of only some journals to find any reporting of the refutation of atrocities so indignantly presented on front pages (for example, the fictitious story of the babies taken out of incubators).

Running alongside the demonisation campaign there were false trails as to the actual objectives of the war powers; yet an appalling, degrading readiness across the Western world to acquiesce in the obvious fact that each newly emerging objective belied the original high-principled enunciations – and was wholly beyond the purposes of the United Nations. For soon it was not just Iraq’s withdrawal from Kuwait, but the removal of the Saddam Hussein dictatorship, a goal neither within the Charter nor indeed the first resolutions addressing the crisis. Later again, however, it transpired that the war powers did not actually want the whole dictatorship removed and a pluralist governance substituted; they wanted the removal only of Saddam Hussein, with the retention of a tough central government that would not allow strong religious or ethnic freedoms, which might threaten Western hegemony. As the *New York Times* put it in a moment of unusual reporting candour, citing State Department officials, if Saddam Hussein is removed ‘then Washington would have the best of all worlds: an iron-fisted Iraqi junta without Saddam Hussein’.

Through all of this, the docility of most Northern countries also evinced a terrible ignorance of the United Nations Charter – our international constitution – which allowed the war powers to carry out violations of the Charter on a scale the equivalent of which in a national constitution would be impeachable treason. To identify the reforms we now need, it is essential to retrace the salient features of this coup against the Charter.

The war powers needed time – until January – to assemble their massive attack force in and around the Gulf. But they were never confident at any time that they could keep even the small, largely bought or intimidated non-permanent membership of the Security Council in line. Moreover, the crisis demonstrated that the original thesis of the major powers ‘policing the world’ cannot work; for the war powers were not even sure whether they could keep in line all the other Permanent Members. So the Council must not be allowed to decide for or against force, to decide what force might be used where and with what strength, or to decide when to halt it. The Council must be engineered to provide the moral authority of the United Nations for their attack, but no more. Under no circumstances could the war powers risk any initiative by the Council before their attack date – or, indeed, once they had launched it.

There is explicit evidence that the planning for all this began very early, in fact with the text of the Sanctions resolution of 6 August; it was on seeing its language that I personally first suspected something.

Chapter VII of the Charter was drafted with precision to prevent any one or more powers from rushing to war in the name of the UN. The drafters set down a chain-locked sequence of steps, from exhaustive negotiation, through sanctions, the thorough trying of sanctions and a Council ‘determination’ that they would not work; and then and only then, in absolute *last resort* the application of armed force. Article 41 provided all the authority the UN could need for sanctions. Yet the 6 August sanctions resolution did not mention Article 41, it only asserted ‘Acting under Chapter VII’. At once, anyone remotely familiar with the Charter could wonder, why?

By November the answer was very obvious. They never had any intention of trying to make sanctions work. As in the 1956 Suez Aggression against Egypt, sanctions were merely a delaying ploy to increase the demonisation of Iraq while building up the attack force. If they had invoked Article 41 of Chapter VII, they would have been locking themselves into the very sequence of steps which the Charter drafters had designed to prevent great-power brigandage. By not referring to Article 41, they would not have to perform the vital requirement of Article 42 – that before the Council could authorise armed force it must determine that sanctions had proved or would prove inadequate. The war powers had no intention of risking such an analysis and debate.

The success, before a supposedly well-informed West, of the next trick – to gain the moral cloak of the United Nations for their attack – was frightening. They railroaded through the Council on 29 November a resolution which again only invoked ‘Acting under Chapter VII’. It did not even refer to the sanctions, leave alone pronounce on their impact (all the evidence only days before was that they were working). And this force-authorising resolution 678 did not refer to the force-authorising Article 42 of Chapter VII. More even than all this, it did not even name the states that would be spuriously authorised to ‘take all necessary measures’ after 15 January. It merely gave this so-called authority to ‘states co-operating with the Government of Kuwait’.

They did not invoke the force-authorising Article 42 in the 29 November resolution because that Article makes it absolutely clear that any such force shall be decided by the Security Council, and it leads in turn to further Articles reinforcing this mandatory Council function every step of the way. The war powers were quite determined that the Security Council must be rendered impotent once it had given a ‘green light’ for force. And it was – totally, before the eyes of the world, of Europe.

(There was some talk at the time that this vagueness, this invocation only of ‘Chapter VII’ in general, was because the Military Staff Committee for which Chapter VII made provision was not active, and therefore the Security Council could not undertake the direction of any armed force that might be necessary. The politest language for this attempted excuse is meretricious hogwash. The Charter in no way makes the assumption by the Council of such responsibility for armed force conditional upon the proper functioning of a committee of itself; no constitutional lawyer would even contemplate trying such an argument. There was also continued effort to claim that any armed action could be taken under Article 51’s provision for ‘individual and collective self-defence’. Those who tried this counted, again, on the general abject ignorance of the Charter; because its drafters had carefully planted in the middle of Article 51 – again, precisely to prevent such trickery – a proviso that such self-defence claim could not apply once the Council was seized of the dispute in question. It was, as of resolution 660 on 2 August).

Our Charter was thus grossly abused to authorise a sort of international vigilantism by un-named states to decide for or against war in the name of the United Nations, to decide what force to use in the name of the UN, to choose what targets, to decide how long to attack, and to decide when to halt. Once that resolution 678 had been rammed through, the hijacking of the United Nations was virtually assured, unless someone would at last act as guardian of the Charter. No one did. The name and the repute of the UN, and of every country that acquiesced, were soon to be covered with blood and devastation. They still are.

We have thus seen international law simply shredded; we have seen resolutions adopted which, if proposed by a first-year student at Law as an exercise in application of the Charter, would not even obtain a grade; the student would be firmly told to seek some other field of study. Yet there is a virtually total silence even from academia, even from those who are in a sense the intellectual guardians of our Charter, all across the North ... only a few brave voices, like that of Professor Richard Falk of Princeton. Needless to say, the learned analyses already carried out in the South will get no public hearing in this part of the world, where everything about the Gulf Massacre except the disarming of Iraq is wrapped in this eery silence.

We have seen hypocrisy, deceit, and double standards practised on a global and lethal scale. Europe has drenched itself in this trickery and double standards, disgracing its noble heritage of building the concept of principled international behaviour, and giving the vast majority of

humankind in the South a clear impression that it has no moral will or voice of its own. Europe should be ashamed of itself.

Let us, however, now see what this hideous experience indicates for the repair and reform of our United Nations –praying that it can in fact survive this deadly blow to universal trust.

The drafters of the Charter were aware that even the most specific, detailed measures written down to compel states to move through attempted negotiation, and if still necessary sanctions, ‘before last-resort force’, could be nullified by the major powers. The vital additional factor was to be the non-permanent members of the Security Council, making independent judgements and votes, of their own free will and reflecting the wider membership. The veto-wielding presence on the Council of the five major powers puts a very high premium on the capability of the other ten members to act freely and with the interests of the whole international community in mind – only 10 out of some 150 members as this countervailing presence. What was never anticipated were two combining factors:

- non-permanent Council members so weakened economically by the policies of rich Northern countries that they could be either bullied or bought into acquiescing in what a few powers were determined to do;
- and no guardianship of the Charter from either the Secretary-General, or other governments in the General Assembly, or outside public opinion.

To set the context for envisaging reforms it is important at least briefly to illustrate these forces as they worked. Zaire was one of the precious ten non-permanent Council members. The regime of Mobutu in Zaire owed its very existence to the CIA and had been propped up, armed, financed and used in Africa for destabilisation ever since by Western powers. Its membership of the Council during the Gulf Crisis was not going to provide a free and representative judgement. On the other hand Yemen was another of the ten; and what happened to Yemen, whose government acted in a highly principled manner throughout – condemning the Iraqi invasion but opposing the chicanery with the Charter that followed – is highly illustrative of our problem. Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the world. After its first negative vote, a senior American official remarked to the press, ‘That was the most expensive vote Yemen ever cast’. Indeed it was – all aid was immediately cut; Saudi Arabia expelled nearly one million Yemeni remittance labourers; the cost to the Yemeni economy has been estimated at nearly a billion dollars.

To cite one other and equally grave example, in the week when the Cease-Fire resolution was before the Council – a resolution further violating the Charter – India was on the brink of defaulting on its oil payments, and had a senior official at International Monetary Fund headquarters seeking immediate hard-currency relief. The IMF was supposed to be the objective financial relief and stabilisation arm of the United Nations System, but it has become a blunt instrument of the realpolitik of its wealthiest, weighted-vote controlling Northern members. India therefore knew that if it ‘behaved badly’ in the Security Council over the cease-fire terms, of the war powers, it might not get IMF assistance. India therefore decided it must vote for the Cease-Fire resolution, but expressed the most profound reservations in an Explanation of Vote. Thus, one of the giants of the Non-Aligned and the Third World was brought to saying, in effect, ‘If we had been free to exercise our responsibilities under the Charter we could not possibly have voted in favour of this Cease-Fire regime; but we were not free’.

The uses to which the Northern powers, especially the US and the UK, have put the Security Council, and the fact that the majority of humankind has not been able to see any resistance to this even from among the former ‘like-minded’ in the North, have now made the Council totally suspect. The usefulness of the very organ of the UN in which the whole international community is supposed to vest confidence for the maintenance of international peace and security has been vitiated. Yet, to emphasise the weird unreality of this moment, countless worthy people in the North are actually saying that the same Security Council has ‘come into its own’; that its effectiveness has been strengthened; that we can build on its achievements in the Gulf Crisis.

The real question is whether we can repair the damage done. We need to look at this (as at all UN reforms) in two dimensions: what can be done without Charter amendment, and what could be done with such amendment.

A measure that would go far to protect us against another coup against the Charter would be General Assembly adoption of a straightforward resolution stating that armed force cannot be employed using the name or authority of the United Nations unless the United Nations is responsible for the decision itself, for the planning and for the direction, and for the termination of such force. Since this is the entire burthen of the Charter it could not be opposed on legal grounds, but it would undoubtedly worry one or more major powers. Let it. If nothing else were achieved, the debate would let them know that the

rest of the international community is highly suspicious of them, and not willing to be intimidated again.

To protect universal confidence in the United Nations as the world's peace-keeping and peace-building instrument, we clearly need guardians of the Charter, able to call an alert to the general community if one or more of the powers is obviously bent on playing tricks – as was already clear on 6th August when they pushed through a Sanctions resolution that did not even mention Article 41. There are potentially three guardians against such blatant manipulation of the United Nations Charter. In ascending order of immediate availability these are the World Court; the General Assembly; and the Secretary-General.

It is little known – again, because the whole Charter, our international Constitution, is so little known – that under Article 96.1 either the General Assembly or the Security Council can request the Court to give an advisory opinion 'on any legal question'. We must drive for a thorough debate in the General Assembly to review and to bring to the surface all its responsibilities in peace and security, because governments have for so long been accustomed to thinking that the Security Council is the organ for this that they do not even know what responsibilities they do have.

Contrary to a widespread impression that member states somehow vest the Council as an exclusive organ in peace and security, under Article 24.1 the members only 'confer' – that is a verb of delegation – upon the Council 'primary' (that is not total) responsibility in the maintenance of peace and security. We do indeed have the Charter prohibition under Article 12 that the Assembly cannot adopt any recommendation on a dispute of which the Council is already seized; but a debate is not a recommendation. Had the Assembly debated the Gulf Crisis early, before the economic intimidation took effect, world public opinion would have been mobilised for negotiation and against war. Equally, the Assembly could have requested a Court opinion on the Sanctions resolution, there and then: a request for an opinion of the Court would override the proscription on recommendations.

Next, there is the role of the Secretary-General. Mr. Perez de Cuellar himself said in a lecture at Oxford University in 1986 that there are times when the Secretary-General must meet a sacred duty as a guardian of the Charter. He showed no such guardianship during the Gulf Crisis. If he had been meeting his responsibilities to the membership as a whole, and as the head of a separate Principal Organ under Article 7.1, the Secretary-General could at least have publicly recommended

that the General Assembly request such an advisory opinion by the Court. Even if this had not actually worked, the very statement by the Secretary-General, explaining that there was at the least a grave issue concerning the proper application of the Charter, would have been an alerting signal to the world. Beyond this again, we need a Secretary-General who will be ready to threaten to resign, even to go to a Baghdad and announce that he is staying there, at the epicentre of a threatened attack, until all concerned come to their senses. We cannot afford to have, as our one universally responsible public leader, someone who lacks courage and interprets his responsibility as that of a servant of the Security Council alone. We will shortly see what sort of new leader the Permanent Members, under their present powers, will recommend to the General Assembly.

(Clearly, this is another area for urgent reform. Again, there are things that can be done even without formal amendment of the Charter. One of these is to invigorate the general membership with an awareness – yet again – of the delegatory, processes in the present Charter. Article 97 makes it perfectly clear that the Security Council only recommends to the General Assembly a candidate for Secretary-General whom the Assembly appoints. The Assembly can equally reject the Council's – currently translate, the 'Big Five's' – recommendation; thus, the General Assembly already has the real, the ultimate veto over this supremely important decision. The problem has again been a long-inculcated sense of subservience to the Permanent Members. We must end this ridiculous anachronism of only 5 out of over 160 governments, comprising less than one-third of humankind, dictating who will be the world's highest public official).

We must also provide the Secretary-General with a greater force-readiness. Over 60 member states – over a third of the whole membership of the UN – have borders in no way endogenously evolved, just drawn on the map by officials of Northern empires between the 1830s and the 1920s. We will face many more crises, where the general knowledge that the Secretary-General does have contributory forces ready to stand on disputed borders may become a vital diplomatic tool. It is supremely in the interests of the small and middle countries to work towards this. We need to see a time, soon, when an annual United Nations interposition training exercise is as regular an event, seen by the world, as the massive annual war games of the NATO and Warsaw Pact have been.

To achieve this force readiness we do indeed need to activate the Military Staff Committee; but Article 47.2 must be vigorously in-

terpreted to make sure that the Committee comprises at all times representatives of the membership as a whole.

We should also press for a strengthening of the regional peace-keeping and peace-building machinery under Chapter VIII of the Charter. We should encourage the kind of regional ombuds machinery that has been proposed for Africa (an African Peace Council of Elders) under the OAU in the Kampala Document of 22 May – a panel of eminent, clearly disinterested wise people, plus a representative of the Secretary-General, to advise on threats to peace, or human rights. The small and middle powers should also make it clear that they expect the Secretary-General to notify the membership whenever regional opportunities to negotiate are interfered with from outside – as was again and again done in the Gulf Crisis.

Ultimately, however, we will have to press for radical reform. The smaller and middle powers must move for abolition of the veto and the institution of Council decision by consensus. The veto is a ridiculous bully-power anachronism of the age of empires. We must demand representation of regions in the Security Council. This would at one stroke give Europe a voice of its own, counter-poised to that of North America (or the United States, if Canada becomes a free agent again), and at the same time ensure that the vast majority of humankind speaks with a collective power that may have a better chance of resisting the kind of brutal economic intimidation of individual members that we have witnessed in the last year.

It may well be asked, how can we secure the abolition of the veto when (under Article 108) the Permanent Members themselves can veto amendments? I believe there will be opportunities for ‘trade-offs’, because there will in any case be major-power pressures for change in the Security Council – the question of ‘USSR’, the place of Germany and Japan, whether the European Community as such is a ‘power’; and the impossibility of accommodating all these Northern issues without meeting the manifestly legitimate ‘power’ status of Brazil, Nigeria, India ... and so on. It can be kept in mind that work by consensus means that every one, at ultimate resort, has a ‘veto’!

In all probability also requiring Charter amendment (because it does now refer to the Assembly and Council), we should also ultimately ensure that the Secretary-General can request advisory opinions of the World Court.

If we now turn to the proposition that we can advance on United Nations protection of human rights from the Gulf experience, I believe we can perceive further needed reforms.

There can be only one possible explanation of the number of decent people in the North who are invoking the Gulf interventions in Iraq as precedents for such protection – that they do not know the extremely sordid background. For over 30 years Iraqi Kurdish groups have been financed, armed, and encouraged to rebel against the central Iraqi government by intelligence agencies of Northern powers, and their clients in the region. This has had absolutely nothing to do with the human rights of the Kurds, which the same powers have totally ignored ever since they refused to listen to the Kurdish Delegation at the Versailles Conference after World War One. These covert intelligence operations have been for their own realpolitik of the moment, whenever this required the weakening of Iraq. Whenever such incitement of the Kurds began to be less favourable for their larger designs they have cynically abandoned them, leaving them inevitably to face the more harsh oppression that the outside powers have thus guaranteed would be provoked.

Alongside this thoroughly cynical background to the Iraqi Kurdish tragedy of 1991 – when, again, they were armed and urged to revolt and then dropped – there has been a display of gross double standards which may be little known in the North, but is well known in the South where it turns people's stomachs. In the last six months alone, the Turkish government has been using 20,000 troops, aerial bombardment and artillery on another of its perennial murderous attacks on Kurds in Turkey – who were not even allowed to speak the Kurdish language, not even in a Turkish Court. But there has not been so much as a murmur of criticism from the same governments that have been expressing daily outrage over Baghdad's actions against its Kurds.

The same double standard behaviour was evident when the Gulf Coalition was daily expressing horror over Iraqi behaviour in its occupation of Kuwait, while Israeli behaviour in its occupation control of 1.7 million Palestinians has never even gained a threat of sanctions in the Security Council. Only in April 1990, the United States had vetoed so modest a proposal as to send a UN Commission to investigate how better to protect the Palestinians under the Geneva Conventions. Two days before the attack on Iraq, Israel placed all 1.7 million Palestinians under continuous 24-hour curfew, not allowed to leave their homes, not even to produce food or earn other income, not even to take sick family to

a doctor. To these further massive and brutal violations of the Geneva Convention there was no protest from the Western powers.

It is absurd to think that we can secure general international confidence in an expanded UN role to protect the human rights of civilians in major emergencies or under major oppression, across sovereign frontiers, while the entire subject is thus so riddled with hypocrisy, covert trickery, and double standards.

What, then, can we do in this area? First, I believe that with the evaporation of the Cold War depriving the powers of any possible justification, the time is ripe for a campaign to get a ban on all covert intervention within member-states, with funds or weapons. This compact should be signed in the form of a solemn declaration, at the United Nations – so that if the United Nations does intervene, that will be the only intervention. Again, the small and middle powers should table and start signing this compact – and let any major power be exposed before the world if it then refuses to sign.

Secondly, Northern small and middle countries must join with those Southern governments already expressing readiness to elaborate a new instrument at international law, a Convention, on the National and Collective Human Rights Responsibilities of States. This will give us the proper framework in international law.

Then again, we should encourage regional ombuds panels as already mentioned. For all these purposes we must build up high-calibre, trusted expert teams of mediators, human rights investigators and monitors, ready to serve the Secretary-General. And we must support constant vigilance by parliamentarians and human rights NGOs against every attempt at covert support of client dictatorships, any more training of their ‘security police’ and torture specialists, any more destabilisations of popular, pluralist movements.

Finally, among numerous improvements for which I do not have time, I must briefly refer to financial resources, and the disgraceful withholding of legal dues for political purposes which the general membership has allowed to develop. As of today, the United Nations is so nearly bankrupt that if some of the delinquent governments do not pay in more by the end of November, the Secretary-General may have to turn off the lights on the General Assembly itself. It is as bad as that. The leader of the ‘New World Order’, which claims to have rediscovered the United Nations and which has used its name to such effect in the last twelve months, is in default on its membership

obligations in an amount of over half a billion dollars to the main UN alone; another quarter of a billion dollars to the Specialized Agencies. The US has now announced that they will start to pay in some of this long-accumulating blackmail money over the next five years. We are all supposed to be grateful. Meanwhile there may not be enough funds to meet payrolls at the UN – just as it is supposed to mount such additional major operations as in Cambodia and Western Sahara.

If the UN is to survive and be strengthened, there has to be a limit to acceptance by other members of the dictates of any ‘super-power’. I am partly American by parentage, and there are many admirable things about the United States. But these do not include its behaviour at the United Nations. The member that has the unique privilege of being Host Country may well destroy the UN unless counter-balanced by principled and courageous initiative by other members.

As the Stockholm Initiative has urged, ‘it must not pay not to pay’. We also need to take up Olof Palme’s proposal and limit the percentage of UN budget that any one member can pay. While periodically protesting such a burden, when asked about this proposal Washington, of course, quickly averred that the US was quite prepared to accept its big percentage. It does indeed give the United States a hammerlock on UN capacities. This cannot continue. A redistribution would, as Mr. Palme urged, be relatively painless.

In all of this, a final plea – that Europe should get some courage, assert its membership, and rebuild its North–South bridges which were blown up early this year along with most of those in Iraq. I must again emphasise that, tragically, the South’s suspicions of the North are the greater because the South cannot see even Europe taking a principled stand. They see a virtually unbroken cloud of hypocrisy across the whole of the North. As we meet, where is Europe over the terms of the so-called ‘peace process’ between Israel, the Palestinians, and the Arab States? A ‘peace process’ in which the United Nations has been virtually excluded by unilateral demand of Israel? A ‘peace process’ in which Israel is allowed, in effect, to dictate the composition of the Palestinian representation? A ‘peace process’ in which Europe acquiesces in an American refusal so much as to allow discussion of a Palestinian national state – at the very time when Europe is welcoming immediate national self-determination for more Europeans?

Has Europe no smallest sense of shame in demanding that the Palestinian people pay, with their land, their homes, their very identity, for anti-Semitic crimes of Europeans against Europeans of Jewish faith in

Europe? Does Europe have no sense of the added hypocrisy of Soviet citizens of Jewish faith being compelled to emigrate to Israel, whether they wish to or not, because neither Europe nor North America is willing to give them alternatives – indeed, accepts the special Zionist pressures not to extend immigration to them? Is there no limit to Europe’s participation in this disgraceful history?

The tolerance of the poor majority of humankind is being stretched towards breaking point. If Europe remains drenched in double standards, and a subservient partner of the United States, in a decade this Institute may well be discussing, not the future of the United Nations, but what killed it. And humankind may be dangerously split apart, between a rich Northern minority turned in on itself, and an angry Southern majority building whatever association it can devise, but unable to control vast numbers of desperate people beginning to move towards the North. No Berlin immigration Wall will be strong enough or long enough to insulate an avaricious North from that human tide.

I refuse to believe that this will be the path Europe chooses. From their noble record in the United Nations over the last several decades, I refuse to believe that the decent people of Norway, and of other Nordic countries, will allow themselves to be drawn into what would be a travesty of all they have stood for.



Commentary by Richard Falk

Reflecting on the text of Erskine Childers’s wonderful lecture of 1991 delivered shortly after the first Gulf War reminds me how much he is missed and needed two decades later. Almost no one on the planet could talk with his extraordinary blend of professional experience and authority, moral passion, political awareness and fidelity to the core ideas of the United Nations and international law. In the intervening 20 years there has been no progress at the UN or in international society more generally with respect to the concerns that were so troubling back then in the relatively halcyon days following the end of the Cold War. What disturbed Childers back then has, if anything, worsened with the passage of time.

It is worth calling attention to several overriding concerns that were articulated with brilliant clarity by Childers in his lecture. The first of these was the promiscuous recourse to war in violation of the explicit

directives of the UN Charter, specifically the failure to adhere to Charter procedures designed to make sure that recourse to force was a last resort, and had on the basis of a prescribed process of authorisation by the Security Council that included mechanisms for continuous supervision to ensure the minimisation of violence. The relevant procedures in the period leading up to the Gulf War are set out in Articles 41 and 42 requiring a finding by the Security Council that the non-military measures adopted to induce Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait had been demonstrated to be ‘inadequate’. Instead, the allies of Kuwait relied on a vague, politically opportunistic and ultimately unconstitutional authority to act under Chapter VII without reference to the mandatory authorising provisions of the Charter – more specifically, the Charter requirement that a determination be formally made as to whether the sanctions and the threat of subsequent recourse to force were insufficient to achieve the goals of the Security Council to restore Kuwaiti sovereignty and territorial control. In effect, this approach to war-making subverted the efforts after the Second World War to ensure that force to resolve international disputes would not remain a matter of geopolitical discretion and control.

Childers argues convincingly what subsequent scholarly analysis confirms, namely that the United States and its allies always intended to wage war against Iraq, and that the imposition of sanctions was designed not to prevent war but to build wider support for a war policy decreed by grand strategy rather than law or morality. To achieve these wrongful ends, various techniques of misinformation and propaganda were relied upon to demonise Iraq and its leadership and thereby convince world public opinion that war was desirable and necessary under the circumstances. In the background was a momentous abandonment of the core commitment of the Charter ‘to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war’, which meant outlawing war as a policy option except as a last resort self-defence against armed attack. Perez de Cuellar, the then Secretary-General of the UN, was charged at the time with personally delivering an ultimatum to Saddam Hussein supposedly giving Iraq one final opportunity to withdraw on its own from Kuwait before the approaching deadline. Mr De Cuellar indicated in his memoirs that the Iraqi leader pointed to a map, asking what he should do to avoid an attack, and showed a readiness to comply if told. The Secretary-General responded that his mandate was strictly limited to communicating the ultimatum, which, not unreasonably, seemed to reinforce Saddam Hussein’s belief that there was no use in withdrawing and seeming to back down if the attack would take place in any event. As Childers made clear in the lecture, his criticism of the Gulf War as a UN undertaking centred on the unwillingness of Security Council

members to operate within the letter and spirit of the Charter, and the failure of cognate organs, particularly the General Assembly and Secretary-General, to do all that was legally and morally possible to fill a legal vacuum created by this geopolitical hijacking of UN procedures. As Childers points out, the General Assembly possessed the authority under the Charter to seek an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice as to the lawfulness of such recourse to force without a finding under Article 42, and the Secretary-General could have been more courageous in his role as guardian of the Charter by offering his resignation. In effect, the Gulf War dramatically manifested the willingness of the members to shut their eyes to such destructive geopolitical manoeuvres to undermine the central effort of the UN Charter to impose strict procedural and substantive limits on the use of force under the authority of the UN or by states. What outraged Childers, for good reason, was that the UN lent the US a legitimating fig leaf for waging a devastating war that could and should have been avoided. This caused great suffering to the people of Iraq and immeasurably damaged the reputation of the UN as dedicated to law and peace.

This general breakdown of the Charter and the international law framework was further accentuated by the extent to which the Security Council relinquished all responsibility for the conduct of military operations that it had authorised. The tactics and goals of the Gulf War were completely set in Washington, not at all what was envisioned in the Charter as the proper role of the Security Council and UN headquarters in those circumstances where force was used by the UN to fulfil its peace and security responsibilities. The UN was first brazenly shunted to one side with nary a whimper of protest, and then brought back on stage meekly to endorse a cruel and unlawful postwar approach (setting the stage for the second war initiated by ‘Shock and Awe’ in 2003). As Childers shows, this no-show UN performance was not a trivial matter of allowing military commanders to control military operations. This was rather an excessive use of force by a technologically dominant coalition of forces that killed 100,000 or so Iraqi soldiers (many of whom were conscripted against their will) and many civilians, while enduring losses of 150, and all the while flying a UN flag. As Childers observes, ‘[n]ever in the history of war has there been such a “kill ratio”’. He goes on to point out correctly that such a use of force is more appropriately viewed as a ‘massacre’ than a ‘war’, which implies some degree of reciprocity of capabilities, not a circumstance of essential helplessness. When the kill ratio involves such wide disparities, one is reminded of such unheroic historic uses of technological superiority in the colonising period, often against premodern peoples being dispossessed of their

ancient homelands by settler colonialism. This one-sidedness was even more acute in the Gulf War than appears when it is realised that a high proportion of coalition deaths resulted from ‘friendly fire’. It is a sign of moral depravity when such an outcome of a military conflict is celebrated as a victory. It also encourages imperial ambitions. It is no wonder that President George H.W. Bush’s first words after Baghdad’s acceptance of a ceasefire were ‘[w]e have finally kicked the Vietnam Syndrome’, meaning recourse to force was no longer politically inhibited by memories of defeat in Vietnam.

An element of the Gulf War that had not emerged quite so clearly by the time Childers spoke in Norway was the contours of the punitive peace imposed on Iraq. After devastating the Iraqi infrastructure in the course of the war itself, including its very fragile water purification system, the victorious coalition, with UN backing, imposed a punitive peace on Iraq that ended up costing several hundred thousand civilian lives over the course of the 12 years of comprehensive sanctions that preceded the Iraq War of 2003.

Two dedicated UN civil servants, Denis Halliday and Hans von Sponeck, charged with supervising the ‘oil for food’ programme in Iraq successively resigned because of their observations that the impact of UN sanctions amounted to crimes against humanity against the people of Iraq. Such a punitive peace was reminiscent of the Versailles approach taken by the victorious allied powers to defeated Germany after the First World War, later understood as partly responsible for the rise of Hitler and the onset of a second world war. The idea of punitive peace was totally rejected after the Second World War (despite the grotesque criminality of the Nazi regime). Instead, the victors relied with startling success on restoring German normalcy as quickly as possible by facilitating economic recovery and reintegration into world diplomacy. In light of the Iraq ‘peace’ in 1991, one can only wonder whether the idea of restorative peace was applicable only to the ‘civilised’ countries of the West, while punitive peace remained the modality of conflict-resolution for the barbarians of the Third World!

The Gulf War was followed by the NATO war of 1999 designed to free Kosovo from the threat of Serbian ethnic cleansing, again a war of choice, contrary to international law and the UN Charter (although this time without the backing of the Security Council, due to Russia’s readiness to use its veto if a mandate for force were requested), and even more one-sided in terms of casualties. NATO suffered no combat deaths during the 82 days of aerial bombardment, prompting the Pentagon boast that ‘zero casualty warfare’ was now a strategic real-

ity. Such militarist hubris encouraged and reinforced the attractiveness of the war option after the 9/11 attacks on the US, and continues to validate the worst fears of Erskine Childers to the effect that war was no longer subject to the discipline of international law and the Charter framework. True, the Security Council withheld its support, despite major pressure from Washington, for the Iraq War in 2003, but it did nothing to offer support to Iraq as the target of a war of aggression, and made no attempt to censure recourse to war by the US, the United Kingdom and their partners or to investigate allegations of war crimes in the course of the aggression against Iraq and the bloody occupation that continues to this day, despite the campaign promises of Barack Obama. As matters now stand, the US remains undeterred by its own public opinion, by international law, by the UN and even by its dismal showing while occupying Iraq and Afghanistan. Contrary to international law, the US continues to insist that it has the authority to wage war where and when it chooses, whether or not the Security Council issues ‘a permission slip’. When Washington is able to twist enough arms to win approval for its wars from the UN it will try to win approval, but when the political realities preclude this, then it acts unilaterally or by forming a subordinate ad hoc ‘coalition of the willing’. If Childers were alive today, I would think his rage and disappointment would be even more intense than it was back in 1991, as the overall situation that disturbed him then is worse now.

Childers makes clear his belief that adopting a posture of greater fidelity to the Charter, although indispensable, would not be sufficient to address his deeper concerns about the future of the UN. With a mixture of lofty sentiment and a superb instinct for global justice, Childers urges abolishing the veto in the Security Council. He wisely views the veto as a damaging absurdity from the perspective of the rule of law. As experience has demonstrated, a right of veto amounted to providing the five permanent members and their friends with an exemption from any obligation to comply with the UN Charter, at least in matters of peace and security. Of course, this embeds in the Charter an ‘illegitimate’ rule of law that imposes unconditional legal constraints only on those countries that lack military clout or strong geopolitical friends. Israel has notoriously been avoiding its obligations under international law and the Charter for decades by hiding beneath the impunity blanket thrown across its criminal behaviour in the form of an American veto handily available as needed. Childers deplores double standards as hypocritically vitiating any UN claim to base the behaviour of states on the rule of law rather than the rule of power. If anything, the world in 2011 is further away from seriously contemplating a reformed UN than it was at the time of Childers’s eloquently phrased call for dras-

tic reform. In all this period, it has not even been able to modify the long embarrassment of a permanent membership of the UN Security Council that continues to reflect the geopolitical landscape of 1945. It should be evident to any attentive observer that Brazil, India, Nigeria, Indonesia, Germany and Japan are more deserving of permanent membership than France or the UK. Further, the rise of the European Union would suggest that a regional representative for Europe should supplant traditional statist representation. Childers thought, somewhat too optimistically, that trade-offs could produce reform by making governments with entrenched, but anachronistic, advantages ready to exchange their status so as to achieve and participate in a more effective organ of world peace and security. Unfortunately, rationality, much less public spiritedness, seems no match for selfish and myopic attachment to the symbols and substance of status, no matter how ill-deserved and dysfunctional.

Unfortunately, similar disappointments have been the fate of Childers's other enduringly sensible suggestions for a more efficient and legally oriented UN. He particularly wanted to check the geopolitical ascendancy of the Security Council by re-empowering the General Assembly. To this end, he emphasised that the Charter only 'confers' primary authority on the Security Council for the maintenance of peace and security. This, he argued, is a conditional delegation that does not suspend the foundational responsibility in the event the Security Council fails to act both effectively and in full accordance with Charter norms and procedures. Along the same lines, creating useful checks on the unwillingness of major UN members to abide by the Charter, Childers hoped for a Secretary-General who would be ready to resign rather than implement policies and decisions that violated international law. He also favoured an amendment to the Charter that would allow a Secretary-General to request an advisory opinion from the World Court whenever the UN itself seemed to be supporting unlawful initiatives. In an important respect, many of Childers's criticisms and proposals contained in this inspiring lecture go along the same line of seeking ways to diminish the leverage and discretion of the most powerful countries to wage wars that tarnish the vision of

the Charter and stature of the UN, and along the way subvert peace and obstruct justice. In retrospect, Childers clearly underestimated the cunning and leverage of dominant member states, especially the US. Instead of seeking candidates for Secretary-General notable for their integrity and courage, it has seemed that such admirable characteristics are treated as disqualifications, and only those public figures who can be counted on not to challenge the geopolitical control over the actions and policies of the UN gain the support needed to become Secretary-General.

Finally, we are tempted to wonder what Erskine Childers might say to an audience a decade into the 21st century. Would his hopes have been dashed by the intervening failures of the UN to do better? Or would he continue to hope against hope that sanity and virtue might yet prevail despite all the intervening evidence to the contrary? My sense of and love for the man strongly incline me to think that he would have lost none of his fierce passion for a just world order whose actors subscribed to a genuine rule of law that finally enabled a UN reformed along the lines he proposed back in 1991 to come into being. He might have been even more deeply disappointed than when the lecture was delivered, and certainly angrier, but not disillusioned, and still struggling for the kind of UN that the world so desperately needs at this precarious time in human history. It is up to all of us to carry on this struggle that Erskine Childers so magnificently embodied in his life and work. I think he might have turned even further away from counting on leading governments to do the right thing, and placed his bets on a future mobilisation of civil society, perhaps activated as much by a mission to save the planet from global warming as by the traditional peace and security priorities of the UN.



The Gulf Crisis as a mirror



Remarks by Erskine Childers
Seminar of the Uppsala Chapter
Swedish United Nations Association
Uppsala, 26 May 1992

The Iraq–Kuwait crisis of 1990 and the ensuing ‘war’ is seen by many commentators as an unusual episode, unlikely to be replicated because of the very special number of factors that converged around it. On the surface, this perspective seems quite plausible. Oil is not a major focus of all international crises. The 200 billion dollars of Kuwaiti investment in Western economies was another particular factor. Perhaps a Soviet Union not on the edge of collapse would have opposed the powers’ war plans. But having noted these special characteristics, if we look below the surface of the Gulf Crisis we can find mirrored in it virtually all of the major phenomena and trends that will affect international relations, and the role – possibly the very future – of the United Nations, in this decade.

The Cold War was, in reality, as cold as ice in its effect on the evolution of global political and economic relationships. Only technology remained dynamic, and it did indeed race forward – militarily; in a new consumerist life style; and in transnational communications.

There was a vast geographic expansion of modern weapons, far beyond but often stimulated by the East–West confrontation; highly profitable for Northern armaments industries, and generating enormous debts for Third World countries. The consumerist consequence of the acceleration of technology was an insatiable Western dependence on oil, on the lowest possible prices for materials still needed from other parts of humankind, and on goods that relentlessly erode the ecological balance of the planet.

Communication radiated the libertarian ideal throughout humankind – but the message as *received* was not only civil and political human rights, nor even also economic and social rights, but the idea as well of self-determination among cultural, ethnic and linguistic groups, if necessary challenging the nation–state boundaries around them.

These were indeed three powerful dynamics during the Cold War period. But when we look to see what was happening in the politics and economics of our world – the elements that should have been *the responding framework* for these dynamics – we find that they were largely frozen.

First, let us look at the global structure of the nation-state. The United Nations was born at a moment when there was no intention of dissolving the empires of the North – either the Western or the Soviet-Russian empires. At San Francisco in 1945 only a few people, dismissed as left-wing cranks, were envisaging decolonisation of the Western European empires even by the end of this century. In Russia, emerging from World War II nearly in ruins with 25 million dead compared with half a million Americans from the same size population, Stalin and his colleagues were determined never again to allow an attack from the West. The United States had emerged from World War II with commanding economic and military power. Its political elite had been repeating the messianic theme of America destined to lead the world for fully a hundred years; and the Cold War confrontation with Communism unleashed these essentially imperial urges. The very structure of the UN in its Security Council already reflected the over-riding power which the four major Northern powers (plus China, then presumed a firm ally of the United States), intended to wield – either together, or blocking each other.

When decolonisation so suddenly exploded across the Third World this immediate postwar structure seemed, on the surface, to be changed forever. In the main fora of the UN, the Third World suddenly had a majority, and at least the Western European empires seemed to have disappeared. But if we look more closely at what really happened, we have to see a very different and by no means so dynamic picture.

First, the formal dissolution of the Western European empires did *not* produce endogenous cultural and political self-determination. The empires had for the most part simultaneously carved out their territories, at the Congress of Berlin, at Versailles, and in various bilateral treaties, without any regard to the cultural heritage and political aspirations of the peoples on either side of them. But decolonisation was geographically staggered even within the same empire, so that each national liberation movement was compelled either to accept the existing colonial boundaries, or to accept a last-minute partition that also slashed through and divided numerous distinct peoples.

The admission to the United Nations of the newly independent states thus, in reality, *froze* – as though in ice – national boundaries that had simply been drawn on the map by imperial officials. The Cold War contest then further postponed the time of reckoning, with Western powers installing and arming favourable client regimes inside the post-colonial frontiers, and in some instances the Soviet Union backing a contestant – the two superpowers sometimes actually exchanging sides, as in Ethiopia and Somalia. Most of the dictatorships of the Third World were installed outright or, if somehow rising on their own were quickly embraced, by one or more Western powers, then lavished with huge, very profitable loans for weapons and ruinously inappropriate development projects.

Thirty years later, there is not one endogenously evolved and accepted frontier in the whole of Africa, the Arab world, parts of Eastern Europe, or most of South and Central Asia. Even in Latin America frontiers established by the Conquistadores of the Spanish Empire slice right through the survivors of their genocide, like the 12 million indigenous Quechua of the Andes, a people with an ancient culture, language, all the non-legal attributes of a nation, split among and treated as ‘minorities’ in three supposedly ‘modern’ states. And the Quechua, too, are now rising.

In addition to all the imperial frontiers still intact in the Third World but now increasingly challenged by peoples seeking their own kinships, all the frontiers frozen artificially inside the Russian–Soviet empire of Eastern Europe and South Central Asia are now revealed as dangerously lacking in endogenous sanction. The Commonwealth of Independent States quickly did exactly what the Organisation of African Unity had felt compelled to do – agree to accept the imperially drawn frontiers. But everyone knows these nervous mutual acceptances are wholly expedient, and do not resolve the deep-seated longings of literally hundreds of millions of human beings.

It needs to be emphasised that the frontiers of the Northern empires not only distorted rough traditional boundaries that some peoples had recognised between themselves; the empires established frontiers where they had never existed before. The Arabs had only quasi-provincial toll-collecting points between Morocco and Iraq until French, Italian, and British officials between the 1830s and the 1920s established today’s frontiers, without the slightest consultation with the Arabs. The whole eastern Arab region was dismembered by Britain and France after the first world war despite coherent, repeated demands for genuine, independent Arab unity.

The Gulf Crisis had one of its major origins in this freezing of legacies of the age of empire. Before Saddam Hussein had even been born, Iraqis had been claiming that Kuwait was part of Basra Province. Sliced away by British officials for imperial and commercial purposes, Kuwait had been admitted to the UN, and its frontiers thus brought under the non-aggression protective clauses of the Charter, literally while under British military protection. And neither the Security Council's condemnation nor the military disaster of the Iraqi invasion has changed these political realities so long frozen. Veteran professional observers still find today that – to quote Godfrey Jansen in a despatch from Iraq two weeks ago – 'there is hardly an Iraqi who is not absolutely convinced that Kuwait was, is and always should be a part of Iraq'.

The Gulf Crisis in this respect thus mirrored one of the major challenges to peace, and to the United Nations and its Charter, that emerges from the end of the Cold War ice age. It might be very convenient if they would, but distinct peoples possessing their own cultures just do not forget their real heritage. The fact is that the frontiers of well over half of the entire membership of the United Nations have never had the free endorsement of the peoples on either side of them. But the peaceful redress machinery of the Charter was very largely designed to deal with traditional disputes between states – the premise being, as we saw over Kuwait, that each state frontier is sacrosanct no matter how exogenous, how alien its origins. How can the UN be equipped to respond more dynamically to *prevent* explosions across or within frontiers, or both simultaneously?

First, we need a place in the UN where these enormous and dangerous problems can be discussed as problems affecting most of humankind. We need a forum that can build a new climate of understanding that it is not only not derogatory, it is indeed admirable to set out to adjust boundaries (or means of representation) so that they do reasonably relate to cultures, languages, ethnicities; and that countries doing so will be helped through the immensely difficult transition by the international community. Serious consideration should be given to converting the Trusteeship Council, which is now almost out of business, into something like a Council on Cultural Identity and Governance.

We also clearly need to improve on early warning. It was all too obvious that there was no remotely adequate system of early warning in the UN about the Iraq-Kuwait disputes – nor, for that matter, about Yugoslavia (over which there was, of course, additional inertia because Northern leaders had for decades very patronisingly said, 'The

UN will never be needed in Europe’!). The Secretary-General must be given the resources – and helped by academic research institutions – to become expert, highly sensitive, and the *first* to see when one of these minefields of imperialism may explode.

Then, too, we need new, appropriate UN mechanisms to provide mediating assistance to states wishing to resolve their frontier and ethnic agonies. For the best type of response to such dangers, indeed for the whole field of human rights, and humanitarian emergency, we should work to develop the *ombuds* concept, within the UN and regionally. It is heartening to see that in the Kampala Document it is proposed that the OAU should have an equivalent of the CSCE and, as part of that new machinery, an ombuds-type ‘African Peace Council of Elders’. The Netherlands is proposing ombudspersons in CSCE for human rights issues. We should encourage all such regional machinery; but since regional machinery can simply break down for political reasons, I am convinced that the time has come for the Secretary-General to have available a panel of United Nations Peace Commissioners – internationally eminent women and men, whose very names command confidence in their disinterestedness, who can be sent on short notice to try to de-fuse, to mediate.

This in turn connects with the potentially extremely important General Assembly adoption last December of a new Declaration on Fact-Finding Missions, elevating such Missions to an altogether higher level. These can be used to express the concern of the international community not only about a danger to peace but also about deprivations of human rights. The Declaration calls for the Secretary-General to maintain rosters of people suitable for such Fact-Finding Missions – key roles for the Peace Commissioners I have proposed.

Happily, we have made excellent advances in the use of the UN for non-forcible interventions that can help guide troubled ethnic groups through to more comfortable and viable endogenous self-determination. The precedents already established in Central America and Africa, and hopefully soon in Cambodia, for UN-arranged, administered, and monitored elections or referenda can be invaluable where prompt enough mediation averts an armed explosion.

If, however, all such improved efforts to prevent an explosion fail, we do face a major watershed in the history of UN machinery: we have to forge *universal* agreement that it is no longer tolerable that large numbers of civilians should be killed, maimed, uprooted, in the kind of dreadful, anarchic armed violence we now witness in Yugoslavia,

or Somalia or only yesterday in Liberia. We need to build UN and regional machinery that can, first, rapidly come to internationally accepted judgement that such devastation is beyond all norms of just battle, and must be halted. I have deliberately used the phrase, ‘beyond all norms of just battle’, because at least I personally cannot yet accept that every armed struggle is wrong and must be stopped; and I do believe that we will not get the international community as a whole to accept any such automatic premise.

I come back, then, first to the *ombuds* concept. Wise persons, known for their sense of justice and their deep knowledge of the aspirations and deprivations of peoples in a region, could offer their judgement as to whether the point has been reached where intervention is essential, and *right*. Such impartial judgement machinery need not be slow if the panels already exist.

But a new climate of confidence will also have to be established – that if the blue helmets *have* to cross a frontier, that will be *the only intervention*. All efforts to make the intervention over the Kurds of Iraq the precedent are suspect wherever people know that for over thirty years Western intelligence agencies and their local clients have repeatedly given covert encouragement, funds, and arms to the Iraqi Kurds to rebel – not for a moment to advance their human rights, just for the powers’ own changing realpolitik. We need a solemn compact signed in the General Assembly pledging an end to all covert intervention across borders.

For United Nations interventions that will then truly be the only ones, we need internationally accepted mechanisms for contributed standby national units to be deployed as rapid-response armed forces inside a country or along a frontier. We should encourage these within regions, but we must make the United Nations ready for such rapid-response intervention where regional machinery fails. This UN rapid-response force should carry out highly visible training exercises once a year, in different parts of the world. If a UN force had been quickly flown to the Saudi-Kuwaiti border, and the known wish of Iraq for a diplomatic solution had been pursued, I am quite certain we could have avoided war in the Gulf.

It is here, however, that the role and present use of the Security Council must be forthrightly addressed. But this is another instance where the Gulf Crisis reflected a major legacy of the age of empires that was frozen throughout the Cold War period: the imperial world economic system.

The Western powers emerged from World War II determined to maintain the essentials of that system, strengthened by the new Bretton Woods institutions of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank – which they would effectively control through weighted voting. In 1944-1945 this was not predicted to cause any serious difficulties: the empires were going to continue, suppressing the socio-economic aspirations of most of humankind; there might at most be about 75 states seeking their proportionate share of world product and trade. Here again, however, when decolonisation suddenly arrived its real effect was minimal.

Although decolonisation more than doubled the number of states each seeking its fair share of world product and trade, this had no serious effect on the West's imperial economic behaviour. Yes, the good-hearted citizens of the West saw to it that programmes of development assistance were launched, but 'aid' alone could never enable the poor countries to move ahead fast enough to avert population growth. The powers continued to reject all proposals for a genuine International Trade Organisation; they rejected a low-interest United Nations Capital Fund (SUNFED) because they could not control it in the new General Assembly; they insisted on retaining control of the entire world's monetary system, including interest rates that might benefit their mis-managed economies while deepening Third World poverty; and they rejected all proposals for equitable multilateral management of the pricing of primary commodities, the only export potential which colonialism had left to the Third World.

Right at that point, another root of the Iraq-Kuwait crisis began growing. It was clear to anyone with ordinary common sense in the late 1960s that the world had only a very short time to decide – as a genuine, collective, 'all-win' change in the global economic system – that primary natural resources needed by the whole of humankind should be brought under the management of humankind, with the pricing and the distribution of income from such resources determined through an appropriately created democratic UN body.

Instead, all such ideas were labelled communist, or crazy. Northern oil-producing powers had no intention of placing *their* oil under such management. Western corporations also expected to continue making enormous profits from the oil (and other precious mineral resources) in the Third World, and to be protected and helped in this by Western governments and intelligence agencies. So, on the one hand, the independence unity of the Congo (Zaire) was destroyed by the mining companies in Katanga; that country's first leader was assas-

minated by the CIA, replaced by a dictator who has ever since become rich in service to the imperial system; and we lost our one and only Dag Hammarskjöld there as well. The independence of mineral-rich Angola was subverted by South Africa with the covert support of the Western powers. In the same way, when Prime Minister Mossadegh nationalised the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in Iran, the CIA arranged for his overthrow on behalf of the Western powers. And on the other hand, Western obduracy made certain that Third World countries having internationally needed resources would have no possible grounds to support proposals for multilateral management.

Two major consequences developed from this blind persistence of the imperial economic system, both building the certainty of an Iraq-Kuwait crisis. One was that the Third World's oil producers decided to develop their own production and pricing association, OPEC, and to increase prices sharply through it. This historic move, however, meant that if any member began manipulating prices against the interests of another member, dangerous crisis could result – and because of the Western powers' refusal to create an international management system, the international community as a whole had no machinery to stop such manoeuvres.

Meanwhile, another root of the Iraq-Kuwait crisis began growing from all this: the incredible disparities of wealth between the oil sheikhdoms of the Arabian Peninsula, and the tens of millions of Arabs in other countries, not to mention the hundreds of millions of other Third World poor. By 1989 less than 500,000 Kuwaitis had a gross national product of nearly \$17,000 per capita. This grotesquely concentrated wealth contrasted with per capita GNPs of \$820 in Yemen; \$700 in Egypt; \$800 in Morocco, leave alone similar or worse levels of poverty outside the Arab region. It was true that Kuwait had a commendable-looking record of 'aid'; it was also true that 90 per cent of its investments, exceeding \$200 billion, were in Western countries.

At the end of the 1970s, the West simply refused any longer even to discuss Third World proposals for a new international economic order. But not one of the problems on that agenda conveniently disappeared merely because those maintaining the imperial economic system told Third World delegates to 'be realistic' and 'stop the rhetoric'. Each and every one of the imbalances and inequities in a supposedly decolonized world continued, and steadily worsened. And these factors – of protectionist barriers against exports, and exorbitant

interest rates on loans – have been far more powerful than the Third World’s inevitable share of economic mismanagement.

By 1990, the share of world trade of 80 per cent of humankind in the Third World had dropped from 29 to barely 18 per cent. The interest rates the Third World had to pay averaged 17 per cent; the North’s, only 4 per cent. Between 1983 and 1989 the Third World had to make net transfers to the wealthy North of no less than \$242 billion. The number of people living in absolute poverty had increased by 50 per cent, to 1.2 billion. As the Kuwaitis began manipulating the price of oil to the severe disadvantage of Iraq, most of the Third World was economically on its knees.

Within days of Iraq’s invasion the controllers of oil prices sharply raised them and Western governments did nothing to prevent this. Third World countries were quickly driven even deeper towards bankruptcy by these oil bills. And it was this that enabled the powers to hijack the Security Council and fashion their war coalition for their own goals.

With constant urging by Israel, they had decided on war against Iraq for reasons of their own realpolitik (dramatically changed from so recently bolstering Iraq against Iran). For their war they needed two things from the UN: its moral authority for their actions, but a device to ensure no UN *control* over their actions. Blocking every promising diplomatic opportunity to de-fuse the crisis under Chapter VI, the powers used the deep impoverishment of the Third World to buy or economically blackmail non-permanent members of the Council and other governments into support or silence. Those who refused to be purchased or pressured were punished – with no, or less debt relief; no, or less IMF credits; no, or less economic aid.

On 29 November 1990 the hijacking was completed in the incredible Council resolution authorising a group of *un-named* states to use force at a time of their own choosing, against their own choice of targets, inflicting whatever amount of devastation and death they would decide and ending the attack only when they would decide ... *all in the claimed name of the United Nations*.

The lie was spread throughout the Western world that those actions had the support of ‘the whole international community’, as American and British leaders still insist. But nothing done in the Council after the first condemnation of Iraq had such support. The high-technology massacres of Iraqis caused a wave of revulsion throughout the

Third World. The Gulf Crisis nearly destroyed the United Nations as a universal institution. There is now less confidence in the United Nations among the vast majority of ‘We, the peoples’ than I think at any time in its history.

The same powers’ latest actions in the Council, over Libya, have now extended their abuse of the Charter to the role of the World Court. Under Chapter VII sanctions require that the Security Council determine that there is an imminent threat to the peace by the state to be sanctioned. Whatever its past behaviour may or may not have been, Libya had responded under the 1971 Montreal Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against Civil Aviation promptly and correctly to the charges against the two Libyans, and was offering more than sufficient good faith proposals. The only ‘threat to peace’ in sight was the constant rumour that the powers themselves might again bomb Libya.

Yet the Security Council was railroaded into jumping clear over Chapter VI’s Articles 32 and 36 providing for judicial settlement and resort to the World Court as measures for peaceful redress, into sanctions on a member state even while the World Court was hearing that state’s appeal under directly applicable international law. And although privately enraged by this, the Judges of the World Court were then compelled to rule that the Court was powerless to *make* any ruling at all on Libya’s appeal – because all member states had already been bound to accept and carry out a Security Council decision, which over-rides any other international instrument. The powers have thus found a way to render the principal judicial organ of the UN useless as an instrument of judicial settlement of disputes.

These are extremely dangerous trends. At a time when enormous unrest, and likely violence, are threatened from political, religious, ethnic, natural-resource, and economic tensions, and even from ecological degradation, the careful procedures for *peaceful* redress of disputes that the founders wrote into the Charter are being undermined in favour of force dictated by one or two governments on their own selective targets.

The smaller countries at San Francisco had to accept the major powers’ insistence on having a veto *against* any disliked action in the Security Council. But they thought they achieved some balance by building into it a majority of non-permanent members whom the powers would have to carry *for* any action they wanted. In this they assumed that the non-permanent members would be free to vote their inde-

pendent judgement, and would reflect the views of the membership as a whole outside the Council. The smaller founders reinforced this balance by writing into the Preamble ‘the equality of nations large and small’, and in Article 2 that the UN’s first principle is the sovereign equality of all its members. They even got the San Francisco Conference to adopt a definition of that sovereign equality, including ‘respect for the political independence’ and the ‘personality’ of each state. They never envisaged that there could be non-permanent members of the Security Council so deeply impoverished that their votes could be bought or suborned by threats to the very lives, health, and education of their peoples.

The effect of this imperial behaviour is not simply crisis by crisis. The regime of economic coercion has made it actually unsafe for an economically weak country to be elected to the Security Council. Already one country has withdrawn from nomination rather than face the bullying and the blackmail. Nor is the extortion limited to the Council; it has been used in the General Assembly, for example to get the votes to rescind the Zionism is racism resolution.

As a European I am ashamed to have to say it; but this ominous behaviour has *only* been possible because of the silence of Europe. This is noted with great sadness in the Third World. If continued, it will destroy the United Nations as a universal institution. If, however, there is still independent pride and morality in Europe, and recognition of Europe’s global responsibilities, then we can save the UN and move ahead to equip it to be the primary response mechanism for the gigantic dangers and deprivations that stalk our planet.

To do this, the smaller and middle countries must together re-assert the democratic principles that the founders carefully wrote into the Charter. Any power that uses the poverty and indebtedness of a member state to extort its vote or its acquiescence must be made ashamed of such conduct as a gross violation of the first Principle of the Charter. The Assembly must also re-assert its right to make the UN itself an effective agent of the world economy, and strenuous efforts must be made to bring the Bretton Woods institutions under democratic governance – or terminate their agency relationship with the UN once and for all.

More than this, we must re-establish a proper balance, and a transparent relationship between the Security Council and the membership as a whole in the General Assembly. We must, first, re-assert the clear precept in the Charter that the Security Council is *not* a separately

established organ with its own direct legal authority. Article 24 states quite clearly that the Members of the UN ‘confer’ – a verb of *delegation* – on the Council ‘primary’ and only primary responsibility for the maintenance of peace and security. These little-known Charter provisions are in open contempt at present.

Next, the General Assembly should adopt a Declaration that no state or group of states may apply armed force in the name of the United Nations unless such armed force is applied fully under the *direction* of the UN as provided in Chapter VII of the Charter.

We must activate the Military Staff Committee but, under Article 47 paragraph 2, only with the *continuous* membership on the Committee of representatives of the membership as a whole.

Again from the experience of the Gulf Crisis, the smaller and middle countries must insist to the Secretary-General that he is the head of a Charter-designated Principal Organ (Article 7.1) responsible to the membership as a whole, not only to the Council. The Assembly should clearly empower the Secretary-General to refer legal issues of interpretation of the Charter to the World Court. The Assembly should, however, also mandate its Legal Committee to monitor use of the Charter, and Chapters VI and VII, and to recommend when the *Assembly* – already empowered under Article 96.1 – must promptly seek a Court advisory opinion. The Assembly must establish that it cannot be prohibited from such a request to the Court by the prohibition in Article 12 against it making any ‘recommendation’ on a dispute of which the Council is already seized. And the Assembly must make it clear that Article 12 does not prohibit an Assembly *debate* on such a dispute. We probably need some sort of small representative watch committee of the Assembly in all peace and security matters, under Article 22.

But none of this can happen, while Europe – which need not fear economic ruin – maintains its present subservience to one or two governments. This bears all the signs at the moment of being a part of a larger trend in which the white Northern world is pre-occupied with its own tribal affiliations, and closing its mind to the existence of most of humankind.

That will greatly help build the most dangerous frontier in the history of humanity – across the world between the rich 20 per cent minority, and the poor 80 per cent majority. And if *that* frontier – the ultimate legacy of the age of empires – does rise, no United Nations could avert the apocalyptic consequences for all our children.



Commentary by Denis J. Halliday

It was refreshing to read what my compatriot and former colleague Erskine B. Childers said on 26 May 1992 in Uppsala about the artificial creation of Kuwait, deemed by the people of Iraq to be an integral part of Basra province. The British action was illegal whilst Kuwait was a protectorate. Greed for oil and oil revenue combined with colonial arrogance won the day. Moving on to the United Nations, Erskine noted that the old and current regimes of colonialism and military arrogance had maintained their stranglehold on the UN, particularly the Security Council. Worse, they had continued to accept and work on the basis of the wrong and outdated decisions conspicuous throughout the Arab and Third World.

The Security Council in 2010 continues to treat such member states without due consideration, knowing full well that the local indigenous people had not been consulted as colonial cartographers drew their lines. As he said, the entire Arab world was carved up by France, Britain and others without any consultation.

As a result, Erskine called for a new climate of understanding within the UN. He envisaged a revitalisation and reshaping of the Trusteeship Council into machinery for new cultural and governance needs. He called for an 'early warning' system for the kind of situations he had just witnessed in 1992 – including the invasion of Kuwait, the collapse of Yugoslavia and violence in Liberia. Far from the UN not being needed in Europe, as the five permanent members states believed at that time, the UN failed to save lives as the Balkans imploded.

In the case of Kuwait in 1990, the US-driven Security Council rushed to impose the subtle violence of UN sanctions on the people of Iraq. Western governments allowed the global price of oil to increase sharply, thereby undermining Third World opposition to war. A massive military build-up in Saudi Arabia took place. This was followed by the comprehensive bombing of Iraqi civilian infrastructure, designed to lead to huge loss of civilian life, particularly among children, as Pentagon documents have revealed. Then the retreat from Kuwait began, including the slaughter of Iraqi troops and fleeing Palestinian and other civilians. The international media featured the 'crispy critter' – an Iraqi tank commander burned to death in what came to be known as the Basra Road massacre. The failure to respect the retreat, the brutality employed, and what soon happened in Iraq

itself appalled the Islamic world. Add to that the presence in Saudi Arabia of American and other foreign troops near the holy places of Islam prior to and during the ‘Western’ attack on an Arab state, and we have the background to the violent consequences still being felt worldwide to this day.

The rush into war in early 1991, encouraged, as Erskine stated, by Israel, pushed aside the Iraqi proposal for a non-violent termination of its military occupation of Kuwait, whereby Iraq would withdraw from Kuwait as and when Israel withdrew its occupying forces from Palestine.

Erskine called for machinery with mediating capacities within the UN – a panel of UN Peace Commissioners, men and women of such international calibre they could mediate and defuse explosive situations between member states. He called for the General Assembly to have ‘teeth’ for ‘fact finding missions’ in respect of dangers to peace and also for human rights violations. Clearly, one can only endorse this vision that Erskine had and acknowledge that implementation is still needed today, some 19 years later.

In the absence of major reform, particularly dramatic Security Council reform, any optimism in respect of the UN satisfying its potential, global effectiveness and the fundamentals of its Charter would be misplaced. The UN member states in control of the Security Council were then and remain now more inclined to feed warfare than show warfare to be an unthinkable option. Surely experience has shown that non-violent and peaceful solutions can be rational, moral and lasting. Peace, unfortunately, is vastly less profitable than warfare itself and the lucrative international arms trade, a trade dominated by the five permanent members of the Security Council.

My own years of interacting with the fifth and other committees of the General Assembly, and then reporting to the Security Council via the Secretary-General from Iraq under the collective punishment of UN sanctions, has made me sceptical – sceptical, that is, of powerful nation states ever subordinating their national ambitions to the word and spirit of the UN Charter. The needs of the whole international community are set aside, when, as President Clinton noted, the prime purpose and added-value of the UN was to facilitate foreign policy. And President Bush demonstrated that was not enough, when he opted to have the US military go it alone and invade a founding member state in violation of the UN Charter and other aspects of

international law. This was viable given the outdated 1945 structure of the Security Council in which the five veto powers ruled supreme and believed they were free to act in disregard of the provisions of the Charter and Geneva Conventions.

Due to the same structural design weaknesses, the Council retroactively covered up the 2003 state terrorism of ‘Shock and Awe’, the crime of invasion and the unending occupation imposed on Iraq and its people after some 13 years of genocidal UN sanctions.

With typical honesty, Erskine indicated that he ‘cannot accept that every armed struggle is wrong’. Who knows how he might have felt today? I suspect he would have seen this to be the case – not simply wrong, but unacceptably murderous towards civilians and inevitably unproductive of lasting peace and human wellbeing. The calculated use of warfare by those who consider themselves to be exceptional and civilised not only underlines failure, but a lack of interest in resolving differences without military force despite catastrophic human consequences. This tragic situation is reflected in the unwillingness of ‘Western’ democracies to dialogue and seek peaceful solutions. The forces that prevail include military and corporate profits, media hype, opportunistic ambitions for control of natural energy resources and strategic military presence. The ability and readiness of democratically elected governments to misinform the populace and propagandise the rationale for warfare is extraordinary.

Have we not seen common sense repeatedly set aside, when essential discussion and unconditional dialogue is deemed a privilege? Do the provisions of the UN Charter recognise that preconditions for an exchange have to satisfy the more militarily powerful? Is the old concept of ‘might is right’ in the spirit of the UN? I do not think so. Has President Eisenhower’s (updated) warning of 1956 – that the military-industrial-energy-media complex, if not watched carefully, would dictate to civilian authorities – not in fact materialised?

Even the terrible angst of 1930s Germany – facing total collapse when crushed by the constraints and reparations of the Versailles Treaty – might have been turned around through dialogue. Discussion and support sincerely offered by her neighbours in Europe might have saved some 70 million, including some 6 million Jewish lives. The horrible brutality of wars of aggression, civil wars and state and non-state terrorism in recent years suggests that, with the ever increasing willingness to kill millions of civilians in pursuit of victory, there

can be no ‘just war’. No cause, no end would appear to justify today’s government and non-governmental military atrocities. With these consequences, certainly no military intervention endorsed by a UN organ intended to serve all humankind – North and South, rich and poor, regardless of cultural, ethnic or religious differences – can be considered appropriate or acceptable.

To pursue the change that Erskine advocated, we must have UN member states advance to a higher level of sincerity and commitment in a ‘new climate of understanding’ in respect of all the obligations of membership. The many social, economic, energy and environmental issues of global importance on the agenda of the UN almost demand that we endorse the recommendations made for enhancing the UN by Erskine. These include the new functions of the Trusteeship Council, the Peace Commissioners, greater capacity to mediate in imminent crisis areas, a General Assembly with ‘teeth’ drawing on genuine global democratic representation.

To accomplish such enhancements requires that the Security Council be reformed. No longer can we accept the intimidation of the non-permanent members. Long overdue North–South representation and proper geographical and population balance must be established. The somewhat quaint but antediluvian and dangerous veto must go. Genuine equality of membership is overdue. Democratic representation in decision-making is essential. Prolonged demands for consensus and unanimity should be shelved if they do not arise naturally because, when forced, they may lead to ineffective compromises and decisions that are themselves incompatible with provisions of the Charter. One simple example is the genocidal consequences of UN sanctions on the people of Iraq when the Security Council tossed aside basic human rights and maintained conditions for 13 years that were responsible for civilian deaths.

Further, the reformed Security Council needs to end the application of double standards by those member states with military and economic power in respect of those smaller and often Third World states without such power. Exemptions from wars of aggression, heads of state excused from International Criminal Court or special UN tribunal prosecution, rejection of decisions of the International Court of Justice or almost total disregard for international law when protection is provided by a powerful friend cannot be allowed to continue. The credibility of the UN suffers every time double standards – be it in Central America, sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East or South Asia

– are tolerated by the UN itself, or by its current permanent members. The non-proliferation of nuclear weapons is a classic application of double standards. Nuclear weapons held by some states outside the treaty are deemed acceptable as a ‘deterrent’, but not so for others deemed external to the ‘Western’ democratic club. And these are the same democracies that place on the negotiating table the possible use of nuclear devices in respect of those same states denied the deterrent! Now that is a double standard.

If the vision of Erskine Childers is ever to be realised, the member states of both the Security Council and the General Assembly must re-commit themselves to the obligations of UN membership as set out in the Charter. They need to show sincere respect for all aspects of international law and demonstrate that national interests must be subordinated to the common global good. The UN may have been created by the victors of the Second World War and the Charter may have been drafted to serve the vested interests of those same states, but the circumstances and conditions have changed. The Third World, the South has been and is enhanced on many levels, and the balance of power in regard to economic weight, financial resources and trade is changing. The time has come, in fact it is late, for the five veto powers – the permanent members of the Security Council – to adjust and ensure that ‘We the People’ of the Preamble to the UN Charter are properly represented before the 21st century grows much older.

As the late Howard Zinn said, ‘Not to believe in the possibility of dramatic change is to forget that things have changed, not enough, but enough to show what is possible.’

In the light of Erskine Childers’s thinking in 1992 and the painful state of our world in 2011 for so many, many millions, it is time to ‘believe’ and execute change.



Female participation in the United Nations

Erskine Childers



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‘... to reaffirm faith in (the) equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small ...’

Preamble to the UN Charter

As the UN Conference on International Organisation opened in San Francisco in 1945, women of the victorious nations were about to be sent back to their traditional householding and child-raising roles after serving as front-line (or underground resistance) soldiers, doctors and nurses, ferrying combat aircraft, and (often as dangerously) as munitions factory workers. But the cumulative effect of women’s demands in the suffragist movement and of their war service made it certain that the new UN Charter must proclaim their equal rights.

So, however, did the equal rights of nations. And by editorial serendipity the drafters unwittingly adopted the above-quoted perfect though seldom-noticed juxtaposition – *large nations and men, small nations and women*. Both have been struggling against the power-claims and pathologies of their respective dominators for the honouring of those UN commitments ever since.

Within the larger issues for women, there is the obvious question: with such an opening to the Charter and with its other explicit provisions for gender equality, after fifty years how equal *is* female participation in the world organisation?

First, what exactly are the Charter’s total commitments?

Article 1

In paragraph 3 of the opening Article, one of the world body’s Purposes is ‘*to achieve international co-operation in solving international problems ... and in encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion*’. Because gender equality was

included in this first formal iteration of human rights and *fundamental* freedoms, development by the UN of Human Rights treaty and declaratory law on the equality of women could not be evaded. The same language re-appears several times in the Charter, but a key further location is in the Economic and Social chapter.

Articles 55, 56

Article 55 commits the UN to create ‘*conditions of stability and well-being which are necessary for peaceful and friendly relations among nations*’ by promoting (among other crucial economic and social conditions) ‘*universal respect for, and observance of*’ the same rights and freedoms stated in Article 1, including gender equality. Australia then led and won a struggle at San Francisco to have an even deeper commitment included in a next Article (56), which is nothing like well enough known:

‘All members pledge themselves to take joint and separate action in co-operation with the Organisation for the achievement of the purposes set forth in Article 55’.

These, then, were the first strong obligations of states to secure gender equality in their own communities, and to recognise the roles of women in the building of peace and stability. But although the founders were, of course, overwhelmingly men, in the last months of a world war in which so many women had actually fought or otherwise served, and so many had died, they were persuaded also to devote a distinct Article to this equality *in service itself in the new UN*.

Article 8

At first there was quite a debate over this proposed special Article at San Francisco. No delegation openly opposed it, but some said it was unnecessary to include in the Charter anything that was ‘self-evident’ (women have been fighting *that* all-revealing line ever since). Others said it would make other treaties that lacked such a clause inconsistent (also all too familiar). Recalcitrants were, however, over-ruled, and the delegates then debated how to say that women should be equally eligible to participate both in the UN civil service and in governments’ delegations.

Here, what can only be regarded as an anomaly in Charter law was entered. In the Charter the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Security Council, the (now defunct) Trusteeship Council, the World Court and the Secretariat are designated as ‘principal organs of the United Nations’. An innocent but intelligent observer from another planet might assume, therefore, that if member-states were making such deep commitments to this equality for the world human community as a whole, they

would accept, as their *first* obligations, to be *the exemplars* of gender equality in their own delegations to the UN as well as in the UN civil service.

But the governments at San Francisco decided that the Charter could not commit them regarding their own delegations; their composition was held to be a strict matter of their own, sovereign decision. Only the Secretariat, among the organs, could be instructed to achieve gender equality. So in classic diplomatese Article 8 was fashioned with a curious negative:

‘The United Nations shall place no restrictions on the eligibility of men and women to participate in any capacity and under conditions of equality in its principal and subsidiary organs’.

The ‘place no restrictions’ has been all too useful to men ever since.

The incredible paradox

The UN’s member-governments have indeed since distinguished themselves at the level of legislation for gender equality in the *outside* world, in a whole sequence of unprecedented instruments. The main ones alone make a resonant roll-call:

- 1948: Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- 1949: Convention on the Suppression of Traffic in Persons
- 1951: Equal Remuneration Convention
- 1952: Convention on the Political Rights of Women
- 1957: Convention on the Nationality of Married Women
- 1958: Convention on Discrimination in Employment and Occupation
- 1960: Convention against Discrimination in Education
- 1962: Convention on Consent to Marriage, Registration, Minimum Age
- 1966: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- 1967: Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
- 1969: Declaration on Social Progress and Development
- 1974: Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict
- 1979: Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women

Since 1945 a far longer list of Resolutions, Declarations, Conventions and Covenants have been adopted on other rights, but including specific sections enunciating gender equality¹. So if our extra-terrestrial scholar were visiting us during the UN System’s Fiftieth Anniversary, she could be excused for assuming that the universal institution in which all this was accomplished – and

¹ For the complete accumulation, see *A Compilation of Human Rights Instruments*, standard United Nations publication, periodically up-dated.

in so relatively short a time – must surely *by now* be *itself* the outstanding exemplar of equality between women and men at every level.

Paradise not regained ...

She would be totally shocked and bewildered. For this is what she would find:

In the UN diplomatic corps:

- Of 185 Permanent Representatives of governments to the UN, only 7 are women;
- A recent study enumerated the proportions of women in the professional-level staff of member-governments’ Missions (embassies) at the UN, and of women in their delegations.

The following table sets out the figures².

Table 1
Women in Missions to the United Nations³ and Delegations to the General Assembly⁴ (percentiles are of women in total strengths)

	Mission Staff (%)	General Assembly Delegates (%)	Assembly Committees (%)					
			I	II	III	IV	V	IV
North	10	16						
South	23	14						
Overall	21.5	15	8	15	30	17	16	13

In the Economic and Social Council in 1991 the proportions of women in delegations were 19 % North and 18 % South. The figures speak all too pathetically for themselves, but there are some interesting details.

Northern feminists tend to assume that their Southern sisters are far behind them in achieving higher status: in the staffing of Missions to the UN this is not at all the case, and within the total composition of delegations Northern women have only a very small lead.

2 Data especially researched for a study by Erskine Childers with Brian Urquhart, *Renewing The United Nations System* (Uppsala, Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 1994), page 128.
 3 Data on professional-level diplomatic staff for 1992, from *Permanent Missions To the United Nations*, UN, New York, 1992.
 4 For 1991. Data derived from Lists of Delegations, 46th Session of the General Assembly. Delegations to the Assembly are partly composed of Mission staff but augmented by officers sent from home capitals, including Advisors. Percentiles include Advisors.

In the composition of the delegations that work in the General Assembly's Committees, it is painfully obvious that, near the end of the century, women are not supposed to be competent (or some countries may still have too few qualified?) for such traditionally male territories as Political (I), Economic (II), Legal (VI), and Financial (V) affairs. The exceptional 30 per cent women in delegations to the Assembly's Third Committee (III) tells all – it deals with Social and Humanitarian affairs.

Before attempting to analyse the causes of this dismal picture, the other aspect of female participation in the UN – in its civil service – should be summarised.

In the UN civil service:

- In executive leadership there have been 6 Secretaries-General and not one of them – yet – a woman;
- Of 22 executive heads in the UN System as a whole, there has been some improvement from only a few years ago: 5 of the 22 are women, but none in the major organisations⁵.
- At the top of the UN Secretariat, in 1994 Mr. Boutros-Ghali had only 2 women among 19 Under Secretaries General, the highest post below Secretary-General⁶. The position of women in top decision-making posts has actually slid backwards from a few years ago.⁷
- In the professional-level staff as a whole, some 33% are women: Mr. Boutros-Ghali pledged to reach parity by the 50th Anniversary but has failed to do so. Only in the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) has parity been attained.

5 The 22 posts are Secretary-General, heads of the 15 Specialized Agencies, and heads of 6 voluntarily financed development and humanitarian funds. The 5 women are all in the latter group (heads of UNFPA, UNICEF [just appointed], UNHCR, UNEP and WFP). Up to 1990, of 138 incumbencies in the executive-head posts of the System since 1945, precisely one (1) woman had ever held such a post, even UNICEF being male-directed until March 1995. See Erskine Childers and Brian Urquhart, *A World In Need of Leadership: Tomorrow's United Nations* (Uppsala, Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 1990-1991).

6 The precise number of Under and Assistant Secretaries General varies quite often because Special Representatives of the Secretary-General assigned to short-term crisis countries usually carry one or other of these ranks. Joan Margaret Anstee (UK), one of the few women to work a UN civil-service career literally from the bottom to the top, ended at USG rank while Special Representative in Angola, from which she retired in 1994, telling the Security Council that she had been alternately ignored and insulted. In 1995 Gillian Sorensen (USA) holds USG rank for 50th Anniversary promotional purposes; the next highest-ranking woman is Ms. Rosario Green, Assistant Secretary-General and Political Adviser with an additional assignment to try to improve the status of women in the Secretariat.

7 By 1990 a few women had struggled upwards to the top, but by then were at retiring age. Failure consistently to promote women upwards into decision-making levels has aggravated the problem of promotion-from-within to the top "political" levels.

The following table gives the complete picture of women in the (professional-level⁸) posts of the Secretariat that are subject to ‘geographical distribution’, the formula that ensures some equity of representation in the staff from each member-country. The table compares the situation in two successive years despite Mr. Boutros-Ghali’s announced determination to improve the proportion of women.

Table 2
*Number and percentage of staff in U.N. posts
that are subject to geographical distribution*

In mid-1993

<i>Level</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>% Women</i>
USG	3	18	21	14.3
ASG	1	14	15	6.7
D-2	9	57	66	13.6
D-1	31	211	242	12.8
P-5	103	372	475	21.7
P-4	203	463	666	30.5
P-3	239	396	635	37.7
P-2	209	237	446	46.9
P-1	6	1	7	60.0
total	804	1769	2573	31.3

In mid-1994

<i>Level</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>% Women</i>
USG	2	17	19	10.5
ASG	2	16	18	12.5
D-2	14	61	75	18.7
D-1	34	198	232	14.7
P-5	122	375	497	24.5
P-4	246	481	727	33.8
P-3	240	371	611	39.2
P-2	168	201	369	45.5
P-1	2	0	2	100.0
total	830	1720	2550	32.6

Thus the incredible paradox: through its member-governments and assisted by its legal, human rights, and specific women-advancing staff, the UN System has performed with excellence at the level of international legislation and standard-setting for gender equality within member-states. But it has performed so abysmally over gender

8 As distinct from "General Service" support posts (secretarial, clerical etc.). These posts are filled by local recruitment at each UN office and, needless to say, have four times as many women as men in them.

equality in the intergovernmental organs and the civil service of the UN itself as to be in standing violation of its very own Charter and all the ensuing legislation. Why?

Women in national decision-making

The first explanation is, of course, that member-states have not met the standards for women in *national* public decision-making positions that they have collectively set for themselves through the UN. If countries do not have the perception and practice of full equality in public-service work at home, they are not likely to extend it to their UN diplomatic teams – even less to instruct (and then ensure) that it be practised in the UN civil service.

The UN has recently up-dated its recurring surveys of women in decision-making in a new report as part of the preparations for the Fourth World Women's Conference in Beijing in September 1995. The picture in parliaments shows that there have been some gains but also some setbacks.

Average percentage of women in parliament 1975–1993, by region⁹

Region	1975	1987	1993
Africa	4.6	6.7	8.0
Latin America & Caribbean	6.0	8.0	7.6
W.Europe & others	7.0	13.4	16.4
Asia & Pacific	5.2	7.6	5.8
E. Europe	19.9	21.8	6.5
World	6.8	9.7	8.8

These figures reflect the extreme vulnerability of women in decision-making to every major political change. African women have gained a little in parliamentary participation where political systems have opened up. In Eastern Europe, however, *the reverse* has happened: there were far more women parliamentarians in the communist systems than in those that have followed. It seems evident that merely *decreting* some serious approach towards gender equity in parliaments does not change the underlying prejudices of men; the moment the compulsion is removed, the reality re-surfaces.

⁹ Reproduced from UN Document E/CN.6/1995/3/Add.6, "Critical Areas of Concern: Inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels", for the Commission on The Status of Women, Thirty-Ninth Session, 1 February 1995.

On the other hand, where women voters *themselves* decide that enough is enough, and mobilise, serious gains can be made: they do, after all, command a little more than 50 per cent of all available votes, and political parties can no longer ignore them in many countries. In the 1980s various political parties in all five Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden) introduced a quota for women candidates, and by 1993 the proportion of women in parliament averaged 33 per cent – in Norway’s case the proportion increased from 15 per cent in 1975 to 39 per cent by 1993. In the Nordic countries, in turn, women now have 22 per cent of Cabinet posts¹⁰. In Germany the Greens have a minimum 50 per cent quota.

Even here, however, the negative ‘tidal effect’ into the UN System can be seen in *which* posts are occupied by women at *Cabinet* level. In the world as a whole in 1994, the highest percentage of women in governmental decision-making posts (10.8 %) were as Ministers of Social Affairs – like the highest percentage in General Assembly Committees. The number of women holding Ministries of Foreign Affairs is minuscule. Since it is these Ministries that direct Delegations to the UN, until there are more women Foreign Ministers (or fully liberated male Foreign Ministers) the only serious hope of such direct effect has been where there may be a genuinely liberated male Permanent Representative¹¹.

Obstacles in the UN itself

Against this external background it is important to look at the internal obstacles to, and the prospect for achieving gender equality in the UN civil service. The obstacles have, of course, begun with Secretaries-General themselves.

¹⁰ Table 2, and subsequent data are derived from UN Document E/CN.6/1995/3/Add. 6 of 1 February 1995, for the Commission on the Status of Women of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

¹¹ A recent Canadian Permanent Representative, Stephen Lewis, made it known that Canada would make a continuous nuisance of itself in every organ and committee by demanding proper attention to gender equity. The late Australian Permanent Representative, Peter Wilenski, was another sterling example.

The Secretary-General

Until we have a Secretary-General who takes gender equality as a prime *obligation of office*, and who sets the example in his or her own appointments of Under and Assistant Secretaries and Directors (D-2), the relative indifference of male-dominated Delegations on one hand, and of male civil-service departmental heads on the other, will continue to keep the UN in violation of the Charter.

Moreover if – as has happened more than once in recent years – a Secretary-General does not take exceptional care about every woman whom he (to date) *does* appoint to a top post, then when she fails to perform adequately, or simply was not right for the specific responsibility, this is gleefully seized upon by the increasingly nervous men. An observation made by one woman staffer, that ‘We will be equal when the UN has as many *unqualified* women as men’¹² may have justification, but it is the unqualified or mis-assigned women who are well and truly noted.

Mr. Boutros-Ghali’s pledge towards parity was a first good step: it has at least resulted in a ‘strategic plan of action’ to reach 35 per cent overall this year, and 25 per cent women in the levels D-1 and above ‘as soon as possible and not later than June 1997’¹³.

Recruitment

In addition to sheer male bias in recruitment of new UN staff, the insistence of the industrial member-countries for nearly two decades on ‘zero-growth’ UN budgets, and of the United States’ refusal to pay its full membership dues for the last decade has been disastrous. With the organisation kept at near-bankruptcy, recruitment has been practically frozen except at senior levels, so such increase in pressure for gender equality as exists in the outside world has had little effect at the lower end of the UN staff ladder. Poorly managed internal restructuring has exacerbated these difficulties: only 27 people (of whom 10 women) were recruited into the Secretariat in 1992.

At the higher end of the ladder, however, we can see the combination of indifference by Secretaries-General, of built-in male-oriented pressures below them, and of course of insufficient clamour from Delegations in their responsibilities as governors of the UN. Between 1986-1989 only 2 out of 66 staff appointed at Director-and-above

¹² Article by Karen Falconer in *The Guardian*, March 1995.

¹³ Report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on Advancement of Women, UN Document A/49/587, 1 November 1994, and Corr. 1, 18 November 1994.

levels were women; between 1990–1993 only 10 out of 63 such appointments were of women¹⁴.

Promotion

Recent promotion records show some greater attention to gender equality: over half of those promoted in the middle-professional levels in 1994 were women; but on the other hand, in the key levels towards *decision-making* only 36 per cent attaining the P-5, and only 28 per cent the D-1 level were women. Mr. Boutros-Ghali has established a special ‘pool’ of women candidates for senior posts, and a Senior Review Group on appointments at the Director (D-2) level¹⁵. It remains to be seen whether these measures change the present grimly distorted picture at the top of the UN house.

An Inspector observed last year that ‘at the present paltry pace of ‘increase’, it might well take another half-century to achieve the overall ‘equitable balance’ of men and women that the General Assembly sought for 1980’¹⁶.

Ways forward?

It will be obvious from the foregoing survey that getting to parity in the UN is an immensely complicated challenge. The chain of responsibility for failure to live up to the Charter’s pledges at the very heart of the UN itself lies with its member-states and their governments. *They* collectively determine priority policies; *they* choose their Foreign Ministers and the composition of their Delegations. These Delegations in turn are the immediate governors of the UN. They have repeatedly adopted resounding resolutions calling for gender balance, but if their very own gender-composition is so imbalanced they are hardly a shining and pressuring example on our Secretaries-General – whom they also choose for us.

In turn again, a Secretary-General will either be serious about gender equality in the UN *civil service* or not, depending on *who* he or she is, and whether member-governments are exerting real – not resolution-rhetorical – pressure for such equality. Thus, the surrounding ‘culture’ of the international community as a whole is critical in this question, and it is by no means favourable enough. Given all these factors, is the prospect simply one of inching forward, or could there be some decisive breakthrough?

¹⁴ See the extremely valuable Report of the UN Joint Inspection Unit on “Advancement of the Status of Women in the UN Secretariat” by Inspector Erica-Irene Daes, UN Document A/49/176, 17 June 1994.

¹⁵ UN Document A/49/187 op. cit.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

One specific step could ensure the maximum effort needed at least in the gender composition of the civil service – but also very likely to have a ripple-effect outwards into the composition of Delegations. This would be a groundswell of demand in 1995 and 1996 that *our next Secretary-General be a woman*.

While it is outrageous to have to say it about a public-service post so amply laden with prescriptions for equality of women and men, it is impossible to know if the international culture is ready enough for this. Delegations from some cultures might find it difficult to swallow; yet all are nominally bound by the ‘political correctness’ of the enormous weight of the Charter and the hundreds of General Assembly resolutions, declarations, conventions and covenants now ‘on the books’.

A well-designed campaign to select a small slate of really eminently qualified women (of the kind who have not become eminent from merely imitating men); the maximum mobilisation of the world NGO community; and the enlistment of all women (and liberated male) parliamentarians to exert pressure on their governments, might just achieve this breakthrough.

In one bold stroke we might thus overturn the negative in Article 8, and make decisive advances to bring the United Nations into realizing its own Charter goals.



Commentary by Eva Haxton

Gender equality is included in Article 1 of the Charter of the United Nations. The historic move to create UN Women as a new UN entity would therefore have pleased the UN visionary Erskine Childers only in part. Childers was a great advocate of women’s rights and equal participation and he diligently strove to strengthen the role of women in the UN system as well as beyond. However, since gender equality has always been part and parcel of the UN system as a whole, it should not be viewed as a distinct or separate issue. Instead, it should be embedded in the system and in fact be ‘systemic’, a phrase often used by Erskine in this context.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says in his statement welcoming the decision to create UN Women that ‘[i]t is important to boost efforts

to promote gender equality, expand opportunity and tackle discrimination around the globe.’ The General Assembly voted unanimously on 2 July 2010 to create this new entity and I am sure that Erskine would have applauded the intention to promote gender equality in general, but not to separate it from the UN system as a whole.

By bringing together four different entities in the UN that focus on gender rights – Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (INSTRAW), Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues (OSAGI) and the UN’s Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) – this new UN body will concentrate exclusively on empowering women against violence, discrimination and under-representation in decision-making processes. The issue of representation was another of those issues Erskine constantly pointed to. How can circumstances for women change and improve in this world if they are absent from the decision-making bodies? However, the composition of national delegations is the decision of each sovereign government. So change has to develop everywhere, truly ‘around the globe’ in Ban Ki-moon’s phrase above. It is thus all the more necessary to make gender equality systemic.

It is in practice that theory is tested. What is the situation in the UN system like for women? Now, just as it was when Erskine wrote ‘Female participation in the United Nations’, the importance of women in building peace and stability as well as in working and contributing to development and a better world for all is generally accepted. That recognition, however, is not the same as giving women full access to decision-making processes. In unpublished personal notes that were written by Erskine, he points to the negative impact on society as a whole and on regional and international organisations, including the UN, when women are grossly under-represented in power structures. A good start, to my mind, would be to provide schooling and education to all girls/women in the world, irrespective of where they live, in accordance with the UN’s Millennium Development Goals 2 and 3. We need to provide a basis for future options and choices by women to enable them to be recruited into and participate in societal affairs. Erskine is very outspoken on the inclusion of women in society: ‘The exclusion of their ideas and creativity undermines democracy and violates basic human rights.’ Strong words, but well intended and very true. Democracy and basic human rights are at stake here.

What is needed is a deep commitment by member states to ensure that women are well represented on all UN bodies and agencies. Erskine Childers discussed this situation on many occasions and in

this text he points out that in 1995 only seven of the 185 permanent representatives of government to the UN were women. He got this data while doing special research for the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation in 1994, when he was working with Brian Urquhart on the series on renewing the UN system.

New data from OSAGI furnished by the excellent Dag Hammarskjöld library in Uppsala indicates that matters have improved. The percentage of women in the professional and higher categories with appointments of one year or more in the UN system (December 2008) and UN secretariat (June 2009) has increased. Erskine was at the time somewhat discouraged to find, when he compared figures for mid-1993 and mid-1994, that the situation had not much improved, despite the promises made by the then Secretary-General when he announced his determination to increase the proportion of women in the UN secretariat. He had expected much more to be achieved in that year. This reaction really tells us something about Erskine Childers as a person: he wanted results and he was enthusiastic and truly committed to renewing and improving the UN system, and he never doubted that it could be done. How far have we come then in the 15 or so years since he wrote?

There is a slight difficulty in using Erskine's figures from 1993 and 1994 as a basis of comparison, since his divisions are different from those in the present OSAGI tables. However, looking at OSAGI's own statistics between 1997 and 2008 and 2009, there is a marked improvement in gender representation. The criterion of complete equality in promotions has, however, only been met at the P2 (62.8 per cent) and P3 (52.7 per cent) levels. Childers's table reflects the number and percentage of staff in UN posts and may to an extent be compared to the OSAGI table on appointments to the UN secretariat. Today, parity has been reached at the P2 level (57.2 per cent) and P3 level (50.6 per cent). Fifteen years ago those levels were lower, at 45.5 per cent and 39.2 per cent respectively. The share of women in top-level posts has also climbed significantly, from around 10 per cent to over 20 per cent. Nonetheless, we are far from gender parity in the higher posts of the UN system.

I first met Erskine Childers on a wonderfully sunny day in Uppsala in the early 1990s, when he was working on the UN renewal project and gave a speech on the need for reforming the UN system. Talking in auditoriums was something Erskine Childers was very good at. Not only was the speech excellent, so too was the ensuing dialogue with the audience. He had the knack of making listeners feel important and of including their reactions in his delivery. No question was left

unanswered and he treated each and everyone present with equal respect. For him, it was the question asked that was important, not the person putting it forward.

This kind of finely tuned behaviour brings to my mind the late Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, for whom the function was more important than the position and for whom diplomatic behaviour was central to his entire career. On many occasions, Erskine Childers mentioned Hammarskjöld as his role model and divine mentor. Hammarskjöld's thoughts and actions guided Erskine in his diligent work for the UN and his vision for its reform. To him, the UN was and should remain a people's organisation. The UN was constructed for each and every one on this earth and the Charter of Human Rights is the base for all activities within the UN system.

Erskine Childers's commitment to gender equality and recognition of its importance to renewing the UN system is well known. On many occasions when I had the privilege of listening to his lectures, he made the suggestion that, for reasons of history and global development, the next Secretary-General should be a woman. This view was also advanced in his contribution to the anthology edited by me and Claes Olsson in 1995, *Women in Development – Trade Aspects on Women in the Development Process* and published by the UN Youth and Student Association of Sweden, and as a member of the editorial board of the International Coalition for Development Action's journal. To him, gender equality was a basic human right. It is with pleasure and high expectations that I now hear the same views expressed by the present Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon. In the press release for the launch of UN Women, he states that '[g]ender equality is not only a basic human right, but its achievement has enormous socio-economic ramifications. Empowering women fuels thriving economies, spurring productivity and growth.' The basis for all development and progress is education and access to schooling and education must be on equal terms for both genders. It will be impossible to improve women's participation in and recruitment into decision-making positions in society if females are not granted the right to universal education. The facts about the important role of women in development have long been known and were put forward by Erskine not only in the text I have been asked to comment on but on innumerable occasions throughout his long career. The crucial point is not only to recognise the hard work and full participation of women in today's economies and to give 'generous' credit for that, but also to give women access to real decision-making power and top positions. Gender equality must be embedded in the global system.

An increase for women from 10 to 20 per cent in high UN posts is not enough, as I am certain Erskine would agree. Certainly there is progress, but not enough and not at really significant levels. The ministerial posts accorded women are predominantly social and cultural in character or in the health and care fields. Erskine pointed this out many decades ago and the situation persists, even though some countries are better than others and there are at present quite a number of female top politicians in the world. But this is still not enough: true gender representation reflecting the true composition of our world population would mean that half or slightly more than half of such positions would be held by women.

Erskine pointed to the need for maximum effort, and one step in that direction, at least in regard to the gender composition of the civil service, would be for our next Secretary-General to be a woman. At the time, Erskine suggested a well-crafted campaign to choose a small slate of really eminently qualified women as well as maximum mobilisation by the world NGO community and enlistment of all parliamentarians to put pressure on their governments. These were strong recommendations by Erskine, and it seems to me they are still valid.

Hopefully, UN Women, in operation from January 2011 and headed by an Undersecretary-General who will be a member of all senior decision-making bodies and report directly to the Secretary-General, will prove to be a valid and progressive step towards the realisation by the UN of its own Charter goals and will make gender equality systemic, to use Erskine's phrase.

There are many of us around the world who share Erskine Childers's hopes and expressed support for increased female participation in the UN system and in decision-making in general, and who are ready and willing to help realise these equal and basic human rights.



The United Nations and global institutions



Remarks by Erskine Childers at
Conference on 'The Fate of Democracy
In The Era of Globalisation'

Wellesley College, Massachusetts, 16 March 1996

This conference has well discussed the major characteristics of the United Nations, not least that it is at one and the same time a world organisation and an organisation of nation states. We have discussed reform, democratisation, and the role of citizens' organisations. But the UN is now under the greatest threat of extinction in its history. All the time-worn devices of juggling between accounts to keep the core budget funded have now been exhausted. Unless governments will allow the Secretary-General to borrow, the UN really will run right out of cash late this year. We also know that ideological antipathy to the United Nations is now more powerfully entrenched in the legislature of the United States than ever before.

All the hopes that peoples in ordinary, un-assuming countries around the world have invested in the United Nations, all that it alone can do for a very troubled world, is now in mortal danger.

But the financial crisis has long been with us. The ugly attitudes now out in the open have long been in the American woodwork. Equally, Europe stayed silent for years while the United States blatantly forfeited every last warrant to have the unique privilege of hosting the UN. All of this is part of a deep malaise and a pervasive threat to Northern democracy as a whole. If we do not act upon this malaise there may be less and less democracy, and there will be no UN to democratise.

The most powerful sources of this malaise are perceptions that have been induced in Northern citizens, distorting their view of the world around them in grotesque but extremely effective ways, and severely reducing their ability to make their governments accountable to them at home and abroad.

At all times human beings live in a perceptual environment. It consists of the images and words, concrete experiences and impressions, from which we assemble our understandings of life, of human society, how it

works, what institutions it needs, to do what. The *quality* of the perceptual environment is determined by the quality of education of citizens; the accuracy of the information they obtain about their institutions, their leaders, their economy; and the substance and honesty of the public discourse on these crucial factors in democratic society.

The quality of the perceptual environment in this part of the world steadily improved over centuries until about twenty years ago. Then a great paradox began to show; the paradox that the quantum multiplication and acceleration of our information by modern technology has not been enhancing the quality of political debate and representation, but seems to have had the reverse effect. Please do not misunderstand me over this: Internet may now be marvellously linking NGOs and networking information, but this has not to date prevented the deterioration.

There has been a significant lowering of the intellectual level of public discourse in the North. There has been gross falsification and distortion of much of the real world, and all of this without remotely adequate challenge from citizens, including many Northern academics who do know better. People who would once have been the first to challenge the use of meaningless ‘buzz words’, outright historical fallacies and blatantly cooked statistics in analyses of economic, social and political trends, now stay silent over them, or even parrot them ... almost as if invisible high priests of a cult were engaged in a sort of surveillance of the collective public mind and will.

Let me give some specific examples. Over the last fifteen years it has repeatedly been asserted – including by the World Bank – that the achievements of the East Asian ‘tiger’ countries are decisive evidence of the effectiveness of free-market enterprise systems without state planning. The actual history of the growth of these tigers is the very reverse – carefully planned state initiative. But this rewriting of economic history has done great damage. Among the effects has been a powerful reinforcement of the classic right-wing ideological line that the United Nations, as a ‘statist’ organisation, is redundant in face of such alleged free-enterprise successes.

The public perception of the very function of economics has been gravely debased: this was epitomised all of twenty years ago when George H. Will confidently declared to the readers of *Newsweek* magazine that (and I quote him) ‘Economics is about the cost of our appetites’. This debasement has since been greatly reinforced by propagandistic distortion of the meaning of the collapse of Soviet command economics. Today no major political figure in the Western democracies

dares to suggest that economics is supposed to be about the democratic and equitable stewardship of the public wellbeing.

The consequences of this veritable McCarthyism in economic policy were evident in an ironic event at the Copenhagen Social Summit. Northern leaders arrived at the Summit having just been terrified by the dangers to the entire international economy in the collapse of the much-touted ‘Mexican miracle’ of globalisation. Suddenly at Copenhagen a small stream of Northern presidents and prime and finance ministers endorsed the idea of an international tax on financial movements. They had discovered a possible way of restoring some *regulation* – a word not itself politically safe for them even to whisper – under the guise of alternative additional financing for international development. It would have been merely pathetic if it were not a symptom of the relentless attack on social democracy.

The Northern leadership group and its media outlets has for years kept Northern citizens opiated about the real dangers in the world economy. Meeting in their G-7 club they have perennially claimed that they watch over ‘the global economy’. This neatly diminishes any idea that the United Nations is needed as steward of the real world economy of nearly 6 billion people. Yet anyone who reads the details of their pronouncements can find that the ‘global economy’ they have been discussing has been the economy of not even a quarter of humankind, in and between Japan, North America, and Europe. The Southern 80 per cent of humanity has less than 20 per cent of world gross product and only 5 per cent of all commercial lending in the world; but does not figure in G-7 discussions unless to provide cheap, sweated labour for Northern investments.

The word ‘Globalisation’ itself is part of this massive perceptual distortion. It is used to connote a process that extends throughout the world. It does not. It extends only where people with available money have arranged for their governments to force open other countries’ economies – with the help of the IMF – so that they can make profits in them and repatriate the profits. The relentlessly positive use of this one word ‘Globalisation’ in the North by politicians, too many academicians, and almost all media commentators also conveys that there is a new, a substitute ‘system’ at work across and for the world’s peoples – and so again the perception is of less need for the United Nations.

People have also talked and written in the last twenty years in such glowing terms about ‘Free Trade’ that those two words have also acquired positive connotations in public perception. In the first place, such trade

is not ‘free’ but powerfully subsidised and by increasingly devious means; and secondly, it inexorably *reduces* the freedom of trade of the impoverished majority of humankind. Between 1978 and 1990 the share of 80 per cent of humankind in world trade *decreased*, from 28 to only 19 per cent. And again we can see the effect of such perceptions on the UN System. For ‘free trade’ is also conveyed to mean that the institutional promotion of trading opportunities for weak and impoverished countries – a basic United Nations principle – is not needed. And once again, induced perception neatly reinforces intended Northern policy.

Violating the Charter requirements of Article 57, Northern governments insist that the new World Trade Organisation should not become a part of the allegedly out-dated UN System, but should be linked with the Northern-controlled IMF and World Bank. The more representative UNCTAD is written off as unnecessary. Yet Western media did not report that, while the IMF and World Bank were praising ‘the Mexican miracle’, UNCTAD and the regional commissions of the UN were warning against precisely the short-term investments that blew that miracle apart.

The erosion of public alertness to these daily doses of mendacity mixed with economic incompetence is very subtle. If a word or a phrase can be given a positive ‘aura’, who will question how prominent people use it? ‘Globalisation’ is the wave of the future, only old-fashioned people would oppose it. ‘Free trade’ is good, only the evil UN opposes it. More and more euphemisms have been injected into our language of public policy-discourse, euphemisms designed to make the brutal seem benign. No one is thrown out of work any longer by corporate heads who promptly increase their own salaries; work forces are only ‘downsized’. It sounds so much nicer.

Above all, ‘market forces’ have been given the connotative power of religious tenets. To question whether these forces are beneficial, leave alone to suggest that they impoverish, create homelessness, destroy health protection, and *kill*, has been made tantamount to religious heresy. And as if to complete the turning of truth on its head, as if to consolidate this pervasive sapping of the quality of public discourse, a President of the United States repeatedly mouths another phrase – ‘market democracy’.

If I may ask in an Irish way, what in the name of God is ‘market democracy’? Thirty years ago the phrase would have been strongly challenged as the intellectual rubbish that it is, or the insidiously undemocratic trickery that it also is. Yet today most minds simply nod; it sounds all right because the word ‘market’ has become a biblical sound-bite.

But what of the ‘democratic process’ itself? Those who would get rid of the UN claim that its General Assembly cannot be respected as the forum of the world because too many of its member-governments are not democratically elected. Indeed some are not, yet. They are countries in which the CIA and other Western intelligence agencies implanted venal dictators during the Cold War, financed and armed them, trained their secret police and torture squads – or other countries in which a siege authoritarianism was induced by unending efforts to subvert them too. But as a grim example of how Northern policy deserves treatment in a Kafka novel, all are now supposed to become models of Westminster and Washington overnight, and not only without any reparations for these crimes committed against their peoples; they are not to get any aid at all unless they recover quickly enough from those crimes.

But even this is not all; for we are witness to an endless erosion of the meaning of terms that are precious, fundamental to the public discourse in national and international democracy. It was asked in a workshop whether the current Iranian election is a democratic process. In the 1994 Congressional elections that brought in a Republican majority, *more than half of the electorate did not even bother to vote*. The Republicans were elected by about 19.5 per cent of the American electorate. Yet that same electorate was uniformly told the next day in media headlines that there had been ‘a tidal wave of change demanded by the American people’. *That* was a ‘democratic process’?

The degradation of our perceptual environment and public debate involves far more blunt instruments, of deliberate demagoguery, about the United Nations. Here is one example. In 1994 there was an airborne raid into Mogadishu by the United States Rangers, intending to capture General Aidid. The raid was not part of or even coordinated with the United Nations peace force in Somalia; neither the UN Commander nor even his American deputy even learned of it until after the Rangers had landed, had managed to capture some UN staff instead of General Aidid, and had then got themselves into a bloody firefight. UN troops were then despatched, but before they could reach them one dead Ranger was dragged through the streets by enraged Mogadishans, filmed by US television. In no time at all this was converted by Washington spin doctors into (and I quote) ‘another *United Nations* fiasco’; Mr. Clinton reversed his support for UN peace-keeping; and the right wing has used the incident ever since as part of its attack on the UN. Yet the fact that it was an entirely *American* fiasco was not any secret; American NGOs, academics, other members of the foreign

policy elite could have shouted protest at this flagrant lying to American citizens. But the silence has been deafening.

Finally there is the immensely powerful use of the word ‘reform’ by those who would in fact weaken, if not outright destroy the United Nations. The UN does most certainly need overhauling, because it has been picked at and ignorantly micro-managed or illegally pressured by governments, and for the most part indifferently led, by leaders irresponsibly chosen by the veto-wielding Permanent Members. But the real enemies of the UN have managed to conjure in the public perception a wholly different picture of what needs reform; a picture of, and I quote the standard set of epithets, ‘a vast, swollen and extravagant bureaucracy’. This makes it easy to demand a 10 per cent or larger cut in a Secretariat that has not yet recovered from being slashed by 13 per cent only six years ago, while the Bretton Woods agencies were doubled. But few know this, or that the entire staff of the UN System, world-wide of all grades, to serve nearly 6 billion people in 185 countries in every field of human endeavour and need, numbers less than the civil servants in the State of Wyoming, population half a million. Again, these are publicly available facts. Why have Americans who do care not obtained and used them? The campaign of distortion has had so powerful an effect in public perception that many NGOs have been induced to accept the untruths and epithets. In turn, they have been induced to accept the outrageous proposition that the UN must be ‘reformed’ *in order* to persuade their government to meet its treaty obligations to pay its membership dues. This has resulted in the American NGO community expending enormous amounts of dedicated energy on proposals to reform a United Nations which may very well not be there – or not in New York and no longer with American membership – *to* reform. This is perhaps the ultimate trick in the insidious process of warping a perceptual environment in what purports to be a democracy.

There are grave implications in all this, both for democracy in this country and for all American citizens who care about the world organisation which they have been hosting (*hosting?*) for the last fifty years. All the most respected opinion polls show that their representatives are following policies towards the United Nations that would be decisively rejected if American citizens could vote on them. But it *is* American citizens who have allowed this state of affairs to continue for so long that it may be too late to reverse. The particularly noxious American diplomat at the UN who a few years ago said that he would happily be on the banks of the East River to wave the UN goodbye and good riddance may very well have his opportunity – either by the government’s decision to throw us out, or by the decision of the other 95 per cent of humankind that they have had enough. Certain it is that American

citizens – and the American scholarly community so much of which long ago abdicated from the caring that I witnessed in the UN's early years – are running out of time to take remedial action.

This remedial action can now only be a massive, well-orchestrated campaign to demand that their government stop shaming the American people before the world and dishonouring the memory of all those Americans who so greatly contributed to the building of the UN. The European corollary, of course, is that European citizens demand that their governments cease behaving like colonies and shoulder their share of responsibility for the survival and future of the UN.

I remain optimistic. I like to hope that American citizens could still make this difference. But if not, the UN can survive in the care of the other 95 per cent of humankind. It would probably be removed to Geneva, to more gracious hosting, and to a decent chance for the strengthening that it does very badly need, with the essentials of which I conclude these remarks.

As the founders intended and the first General Assembly adopted as a principle, the UN's agencies' headquarters should be assembled at one common Seat with the UN itself; a move that would at once transform our problems of achieving synergy, coherence of strategy, and inter-disciplinary programming.

To address the root causes of so much conflict and upheaval we must campaign for a very carefully negotiated UN world conference on trade, money, finance, sustainable development, and for the restructuring of the UN System including the Bretton Woods institutions to equip the System to implement the all-win and truly global policies that such a conference should adopt.

The Security Council is not worth trying to save if the price is the neat trickery of breaking solidarity in the South by seducing a few of its largest countries to join Germany and Japan in an expansion of the present reliquary cabal of so-called 'Permanent Members'. Let the present little club of emperors without clothes or competence wither away. The General Assembly has the full power in international treaty law to deny funds for any peace mission they may concoct that is not according to the Purposes and Principles of the Charter. The Assembly can also close down the Council simply by refusing to elect any more non-permanent members. Such a strategy would, however, require the protection of the economically weak majority of members; but this can be done if the NGO community mounts a continuous Blackmail

Watch at the UN, to expose any threat of economic extortion against member-governments such as is now practised with total impunity by the Permanent Three. As well, legal specialists should examine the implications at international law of such extortion being a criminal felony in the laws of the countries that practise it at the UN. Those who want more democracy in the UN might also make a start with opposing these un-democratic acts of state terrorism.

The most important moves needed towards democratisation are first, to bring to life the opening words of the Charter, ‘We, the Peoples of the United Nations’. We need a world-wide campaign to get our governments to establish, alongside the General Assembly of executive branches, a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly elected by the peoples. This is not sheer utopianism: it is the equivalent of running some seven Indian parliamentary elections.

The second vital step towards democratisation concerns the Secretary-General. It is disgraceful that any small college in the world employs more orderly procedure and expends more energy in choosing a new president or chancellor than do the governments of the world in choosing its chief public servant. The Secretary-General should be appointed from a year-long search based on suggestions from all governments, the NGO community, and individual citizens. It is time to find an outstanding woman.

These are only the key, among many measures I hope we can discuss to release the United Nations from the grip of an archaic little club of essentially 3 out of 185 member countries, and bring it under the healthy scrutiny of its member citizens. Many more concrete steps can be realised *if* we all begin to resist the relentless programming of our minds and debasement of our public discourse that I have tried to outline.

We need to *unite* our popular forces to resist and overcome the sordid mess we have allowed tired and cynical elites to make of a world whose human spirit yet holds so much promise, on a planet of breath-taking beauty. We could usefully heed the message of a mantra conceived unknown centuries ago yet so apt that it could have been written for us and our United Nations. It is called, quite simply, ‘Unification’.

The sons and daughters of men and women
 are one, and I am one with them.
 I seek to love, not hate.
 I seek to serve and not exact due service;
 I seek to heal, not hurt.
 Let pain bring due reward of light and love.
 Let the soul control the outer form
 and life and all events,
 And bring to light the love which underlies
 the happenings of the time.
 Let vision come, and insight.
 Let the future stand revealed.
 Let inner union demonstrate and
 outer cleavages be gone.
 Let love prevail.
 Let all people love.



Commentary by Sir Richard Jolly

It is some 15 years since Erskine Childers roused the students at Wellesley College with his passionate denunciation of the fate of democracy in the era of globalisation. This was in 1996, and the early hopes of renewing the United Nations following the end of the Cold War had already faded. The United States was withholding its contributions to the UN and simultaneously objecting to any arrangement that would allow the UN to borrow. As Childers said in his opening remarks:

...the UN is now under the greatest threat of extinction in its history. All the time-worn devices of juggling between accounts to keep the core budget funded have now been exhausted. Unless governments will allow the Secretary-General to borrow, the UN really will run out of cash...

In the end, the UN was allowed to borrow – and the UN was saved, as part of a deal that reduced the US contribution to the UN's regular budget from 25 to 22 per cent. With the appointment of Kofi Annan as Secretary-General less than a year later, relations with the US improved, due in no small part to Kofi Annan's creative efforts to establish UN-US relations on a new footing. Kofi Annan took many other initiatives: hosting the Millennium Summit, setting the Millennium Development Goals, creating the Global Compact with the private sector and

embarking on many efforts for UN reform, including proposals for an enlarged and more representative Security Council – the latter, unfortunately, failing to achieve the necessary consensus support from governments. Although no one could claim that the UN today is in great shape, the reforms of Kofi Annan showed that the UN has not been lacking in vision or initiative and that its failures have more often been the result of its member governments being unwilling to act than of the Secretary-General or his staff being unwilling to implement. When, today, the UN is said to be lacking in authority and effectiveness, which so often it is, the blame must frequently be laid on the failures of governments rather than on its staff or supporters.

Many of Childers's pessimistic comments about the UN's standing, especially in the US, ring true today. Most serious and relevant is his diagnosis of the source of malaise about the UN, which, as he said, lies in 'perceptions that have been induced in Northern citizens, distorting their view of the world around them in grotesque but extremely effective ways, and severely reducing their ability to make their governments accountable to them at home and abroad'. Fox News is today's obvious example – and has gained in influence since Childers was writing. But there are many other negative influences in many Western countries, not merely in the US. One less emphasised example is the dominance by Anglo-Saxons of so much academic writing about the UN in the political and economic sciences. Even when broadly sympathetic to the importance of global governance, much of this analysis is framed by preoccupations with the US and developed country interests and issues. This has led to a cloud of pessimism and created a reluctance to set out a strong vision of international actions to tackle issues of the global environment, inequalities and human security. How different from the early days of the UN – and from the needs of the present century.

At the end of his presentation, Childers argued for five changes needed in the global system.

- one common headquarters for the UN, as a basis for achieving synergy, coherence of strategy and interdisciplinary programming;
- a carefully negotiated UN world conference as the basis for identifying and setting in motion win-win global policies on trade, money, finance, sustainable development, and leading to the restructuring of the UN system;
- serious reform of the Security Council, including leadership by the General Assembly to control the more egregious behaviour of the permanent members;

- creating a UN parliamentary assembly elected by the peoples of all countries; and
- adopting a new and more professional system for selecting and electing a truly outstanding person as UN Secretary-General, involving a year-long search and a more open process. (Childers with Brian Urquhart had earlier set out specific proposals for how this could be done.) It was also time, Childers argued, for the UN to elect a woman.

In fact, a number of changes along these lines have occurred since Childers gave his presentation. While even a confirmed UN optimist could in no way argue that they add up to all that Childers hoped for, various reforms have been made and some new UN proposals for policies have been adopted. The UN has inched forward and wider political changes in the global world economy raise hopes that the future is not quite as bleak as when Childers was writing.

What are these changes? As mentioned, Kofi Annan as Secretary-General initiated a wide-ranging review of the UN's structure and operations. In 2004, a high level panel he had appointed set out proposals in *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*, a report that skilfully combined a broad-ranging international conception of a new security consensus – covering collective security, prevention and the use of force – with specific proposals for making the UN more effective, including proposals for reform of the Security Council and very much more. Many of these proposals were incorporated the following year in the Secretary-General's own document, *In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All*. Many of these proposals were not accepted by UN member governments, but some have been. When governments show clear support, the UN can act.

Childers's proposals for coherence of strategy and interdisciplinary programming have advanced. The most notable example is the adoption and widespread implementation of action towards the MDGs. Though the UN has formulated some 50 goals over the last half century, none has achieved anything comparable to the public recognition and national and international support of the MDGs. This is not to deny the debates and controversies, but the adoption of the MDGs by all in the UN system, including by the World Bank and the IMF, is unprecedented.

Something similar, though with much less strength, can be said of the UN meetings and debates on climate change. By the test of *international* agreement on action, the various meetings on climate change must be declared a failure, as they generally have been. But by the test of rais-

ing global awareness, presenting international evidence and stimulating many national governments to embark on national action, the UN has played a significant role. This role has been sustained and professional – dating from 1988, when the International Panel on Climate Change was created, reinforced in 1992 at the Earth Summit in Rio and continued through many subsequent meetings and negotiations.

Coherence has also been furthered institutionally in the last five years by the various initiatives and pilots adopted to promote ‘One UN’ at country level. This has embodied the system of four ones – one resident coordinator to provide leadership, one common programme, one budget framework, one UN House.

Progress can also be identified in other areas where the UN has been active in the last decade or two: in the promotion of human rights, gender equality, peacekeeping and human development. The record is inevitably mixed, with egregious failures, gross hypocrisies and usually weak implementation. In spite of all this, there is clear evidence that in some areas the UN has inched forward.

In making this case for the recognition of slow but often clear advance by the UN, the diagnosis by Childers of the sources of much of the UN’s malaise is only too relevant. Many in the media and in governments, especially but not only in the major powers, have little incentive to recognise such progress, small as it is. Nor have they been eager to present weakness or total lack of government support as the frequent cause of failure. Most governments present issues from their own points of view. A strong UN, or even UN success, has little to offer to the major powers, except when, as with the Scandinavians and the Dutch and Korea at present, they wish to emphasise that their own leadership is making a difference.

It is in the area of global economic policy, Childers’s second area of action, that the UN has been most clearly and deliberately marginalised. Largely in response to the global economic crisis, the G20 has been moved to centre stage as a forum for the major economic powers. In principle, the UN could have been given a clear role in its meetings, which would even have helped to achieve a measure of global legitimacy, something the G20 has noticeably lacked. Instead, it is the IMF that has been the chosen channel for implementation and which, with the World Bank, has been formally represented at its meetings. When the UN itself took some action by holding a meeting of the General Assembly in 2009 on the crisis and by setting

up an international panel under the Nobel-prize winning economist Joe Stiglitz to make proposals, the UN was effectively marginalised.

Is the UN condemned to continue with nothing but weak support and often marginalised on crucial issues? I end with two points where I believe the rapidly evolving global situation could bring changes. The first comes with the rise of China and India and Asia more generally. These countries are economic power houses, with ever more weight and influence in the global economy. They have weathered the current global crisis, especially because of their accumulated savings and because of their experiences during the Asian financial crisis of 1998–2000, when they directly experienced the inadequacies of the current global economic system. In response to the stringencies imposed on them by the IMF, they strengthened regional institutions in Asia and set up some new ones and said ‘Never Again’ to the global system. If inspired by this experience – and by the evident weakness of the developed country economies in tackling the current crisis – the emerging countries could in principle use their new economic weight to insist on a rethinking of the global economic system, while also bringing in lessons from their own experience of rapid development. Such initiatives from Asia are far from certain, but they are certainly possible.

The second source of possible change relates to the fourth proposal by Childers: that there be created a UN parliamentary assembly, elected by the peoples, alongside the General Assembly. This at present seems even less likely than the progressive use of newfound economic influence by the emerging nations, but something on the lines of a ‘We the Peoples’ assembly should not be forgotten or sidelined. The record of the UN, over the 65 years of its existence shows that often it has been committed citizens and non-government organisations – the third UN, as we have called it in the UN intellectual history – that have provided the pressure and influence for global change. This was true of action on the forgiveness of debt for the poorer countries, on the adoption of goals for the reduction of poverty, for more serious action on gender equality and empowerment, as well as in many areas of human rights. There are many ways in which the role of non-government groups or elected parliamentarians could be a force for change in the future.



The future of the United Nations - Europe's responsibility



A Lecture before an invited audience of the World Federalist Movement in the Netherlands (WFBN) and The United Nations Association in the Netherlands (NVVN)

The Hague, 6 March, 1995

I am honoured to speak about the future of the United Nations here in one of its founding countries, and at the site of one of its most vital but under-used Principal Organs, the International Court of Justice. I will speak frankly, because the UN is in an ambiguous and paradoxical transition, and Europe holds in the balance much of its future ability to serve humankind, possibly even its future at all.

Let me at once pose the paradox. At its fiftieth anniversary our world organisation ought to be at its most vibrant moment of service and international support, but it plainly is not.

With virtually universal membership, the United Nations is now the echo-chamber of the whole of life on this planet. Moreover, the planet is now free of many artificial constraints. For the first time in 45 years the members of the UN are not distracted by an East-West ideological confrontation, or any great-power contest. For the first time in some 500 years the world is now at least politically free of the constraints of any Northern colonial empire. And for the first time in all the thousands of years of our existence, through the work of the UN we now know the entire human and ecological condition on this planet, and so we have lost the last excuse – the excuse of ignorance – for failing to co-operate urgently to improve that condition. Some quick indicators of what we know about humankind dramatise the need for such world co-operation.

We are 5.7 billion people, with over 90 million more to feed every year. But high-technology agriculture is not the miracle solution to our food needs that was announced twenty years ago: under so much chemical fertiliser, yields are tapering off and production is no longer keeping up with world demand; we are already down to only 59 days'

of grain supplies in reserve for the entire world, half what we had a decade ago. And all 17 great ocean fishing areas are now being fished at or even beyond replenishment limits. Humankind is also consuming 4 times more water than only 40 years ago, more than the clouds can give us; we are irreplaceably depleting water tables in every continent. Our need for a dynamic institution of world community is also all too clear in the continuous deterioration of conditions of life for the vast majority of our sisters and brothers in the South. Ever since the North rejected the more equitable new international economic relationships which the South proposed in 1974, every indicator has worsened. Where 80 per cent of humankind at least had 28 per cent of world trade in 1970, today their share is down to only 18 per cent; let me repeat that, 80 per cent of humankind have only 18 per cent of world trade. Wars have started over far less trade deprivation.

Having to borrow more and more to try to compensate for this deprivation, the South's indebtedness has increased 17 times since 1970, to 1.7 thousand billion dollars. Every year developing countries have to pay debt-servicing charges back to the North amounting to nearly three times all the official 'aid' they receive *from* the North. Yet UNDP calculates that barriers to trade, and other inequities, are now depriving the developing countries of over 500 billion dollars of income they could be *earning* every year.

The utter absurdity of this situation, in anyone's interests, cries out for dynamic leadership to forge new, all-gain macro-economic strategies for the full world of 5.7 billion. But to date the industrial countries refuse to allow the United Nations to exercise such leadership. They insist that such policies belong with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank – which they then make sure do not develop any such policies. The high priests of the world's most dangerous fundamentalist religion, that which worships the magic of the unregulated market, recurringly announce new 'miracles' which are supposed to prove that no regulation is needed and that developing countries will benefit from the same magic. Mexicos explode in their faces, but the economic leaders of the North seem unable as yet to come out of their trance and return to reality.

Meanwhile, more and more people across our planet become poorer. In 1960 the poorest one-fifth of humankind was earning only one-thirtieth what the richest one-fifth could earn; today they can earn only one-sixtieth. Already 1 in every 4 of us are living in absolute poverty, only existing on the margins of daily survival; and if present

Northern policies continue, early in the next century one in every three human beings alive will be trapped in such misery.

The Cold War constrained attention to the poverty, political, ethnic and colonial-boundary problems accumulated in the age of empires, and in many cases the Cold War exacerbated them under the dictatorships which the intelligence agencies of the powers installed in so many countries. These factors are now unleashed, and in turn are combining with adverse trade, and economic conditionalities imposed by the IMF, to produce more and more mass unrest and upheaval, more and more angry and desperate groups prepared to take to arms. At the same time, Northern governments that constantly criticise Third World military expenditures have for the most part *increased* their efforts to sell more weapons everywhere in a world already littered with their abandoned Cold War weapons.

Some 34 major wars are active tonight, and another 30 minor conflicts. The number of UN peacekeeping operations has escalated from 5 in 1988 to 17 last year, with over 7 times as many troops deployed (currently some 70,000), and 60 times more police. The cost of such peacekeeping has rocketed from 230 million dollars in 1988 to 3,600 million in 1994. The cost in human misery follows the same pattern. In 1950 there were some 1 million refugees; tonight some 45 million people are uprooted from their homes and means of livelihood – 1 in every 125 of us are displaced persons.

Never, then, has it been so obvious that we need the very maximum in international co-operation. This should be the moment when the United Nations and its system of specialized agencies enjoys stronger collective support than perhaps since its founding. Yet even in its 50th anniversary we cannot say this is so.

In Europe the UN at 50 is getting a distinctly mixed reception. Each further result of the powers delaying or denying the UN minimal and timely resources in crises – in Somalia, in former Yugoslavia, in Rwanda – is neatly labelled ‘another UN fiasco’. Media commentators who ignored the UN during the Cold War, and thus know little of its deliberate weakening by the powers, now emphasise those weaknesses in gloomy, sarcastic descriptions, implying that it got that way all by itself.

In North America the UN is now under even greater threat from an ignorant, xenophobic new Republican majority. The very country to which the rest of the membership accorded the unique privilege and responsibility of Host has instead held the UN to political ransom for much of its life, and for over ten years has deliberately kept it on the edge of bankruptcy by refusing to pay treaty-obligated membership dues. West European members, the only ones the American foreign policy elite *might* listen to, have remained as meek as colonial subjects about this disgraceful behaviour.

In face of these two Northern manifestations of attitudes towards the UN, there is serious doubt in the South about the value of a UN which the vast majority of humankind more and more perceive as the captive of a small minority of the membership. Across the South the UN is perceived as a place where developing countries, driven to their knees by a deliberately maintained inequitable economic system, can be subjected to a form of state terrorism – the economic extortion of their votes and silencing of their voices in the Security Council, even in the General Assembly, by threatening to cut ‘aid’ or debt relief, or credit standing through the IMF. Over this, too, Western Europe remains as docile as a lamb, and thus fully complicit in such criminal behaviour (yes, it is criminal: in the very democracies that are practising it at the UN or those that stay silent while watching it, the extortion of vote or political expression by economic menaces is a criminal felony).

When such things can happen, and when Europe says nothing, how can we expect the South to continue indefinitely reposing confidence in the United Nations? If there is no evidence of united nations, people will ask, why be in it, spending such money and subjecting themselves to such constant bullying by a small minority that preaches democracy but is not willing to practise it?

This picture may seem over-dramatic. For many decent, caring people the UN seems to have survived so far; it is difficult to imagine that it might not be with us one day. But in the very perception of ‘survived’ there lies the kernel of its possible collapse. A public institution that merely survives – that limps along, bankrupted and bullied by its very host, left undefended by those who have nothing to fear if they did stand up for it – is a public institution that *could* disappear. If we are to be realistic, the anniversary oratory of many Northern leaders about the UN will be profoundly hypocritical. The oratory of the South will be tinged with awareness of this hypocrisy, and some scepticism about the future of an institution in which they

have invested not only great hope but, for them, very considerable funds simply to participate.

All this does not make for a very honourable tribute to the memory of the founders. The Van Kleffens and Van Roijens whose noble work at San Francisco we commemorate this year did not envisage such a fate for what they were creating. But if it is already too late for the anniversary to be what it should have been, it is not too late to make it a turning-point, in real anger and determination that we will not allow our leaders to go on wrecking this noble enterprise, whether by deliberate intent, indifference, or subservience.

What, then, needs to be done to assure the UN's future, to protect it from those who would pull it down, and to build upon its accumulated experience and capabilities? I would list the following essentials:

- the UN must be placed on a more firm financial footing, and must be removed by the rest of the membership from its long condition of sheer political ransom to one member-state;
- it must be given strong, courageous, independent leadership that can motivate citizens, parliamentarians, and executives to build a working world community;
- the original macro-economic mandates assigned to the UN in the Charter but blocked by the powers must now be properly implemented, especially to address the socio-economic causes of upheaval and conflict, not only the consequences of their neglect when they explode;
- this will involve accepting the commitment of every member-state to the Charter goal to 'promote the economic and social advancement of *all* peoples' through making the UN the leader in *all*-gain macro-economic policies;
- the thoroughly undemocratic features in the Charter on which the major powers insisted in 1945 must be removed; there should be no dirty compromises that would expand the unelected unaccountability of some countries in the Security Council. And all veto powers must be abolished;
- the UN System must be made more efficient, able to make far better use of its capacities now scattered among over a dozen agencies, so that it works in a far more cohesive and effective interdisciplinary manner;

- all of us must learn to know the Charter, which is our constitution for Planet Earth, and learn how to use the many democratic powers that it does contain, and which the constant intimidation of the Permanent Members' veto powers has for far too long obscured from our consciousness;
- the function of international law in our common society, and the specific international law of the United Nations Charter, must be made far more clear to citizens, and all member-states must be brought to respect and uphold such law;
- the voice and the vigilance of 'We, the Peoples' must be installed on a regular basis in the UN alongside executive government representation.

I will try at least to touch upon some key measures we need to ensure are now taken to realise these essentials. Let me begin with the most material issue of financing, because no public-service institution treated financially the way the UN has been can have any assured future.

The Charter provides that the costs of the organisation shall be apportioned among its members. The Charter does not allow any member to put any political conditionalities on these financial obligations. No member-state is entitled to withhold its dues because it dislikes one or another UN policy or administrative system that has been decided upon by the overall membership – any more than is any taxpayer allowed to withhold his or her taxes in a democracy because of dislike of some government policy.

At the end of January, however, the United Nations was owed a total of some \$3.6 billion in the combined regular and peacekeeping accounts; that is nearly a whole year's regular and peacekeeping costs. An entire two-thirds of this – \$2.4 billion – is owed by just five members: the United States, Russia, Japan, France, and Ukraine; the other third in smaller amounts by a large number of countries, most of which are prevented by the adverse trade system from earning hard currency to pay their dues (which all members must pay in US Dollars). In addition, countries contributing troops to UN operations are not getting reimbursed for up to three years; so, in a vicious circle, those countries find it harder and harder to pay their regular membership dues and, inevitably, to go on contributing troops.

Russia's and Ukraine's economies, already bankrupted by the Cold War, have now been further wrecked by the magic of the market; so they are scarcely in any better position to keep up their contributions than the trade-deprived developing countries. But the United States,

owing over \$1 billion, does not even try to suggest that it cannot afford to pay: its huge delinquency is a deliberate act of political blackmail, withholding contributions that are obligations at international treaty law in order to force the rest of the membership to accept various conditions. The Republican majority's new proposal to deduct peace-keeping costs from the US share of the UN's regular budget – which the United States in any case refuses to pay in full – could finally turn off the lights over the heads of all delegations at the UN in New York, Geneva, Vienna, everywhere. Remember that governments will not allow the Secretary-General to borrow even the cost of the electricity bill for even a month: either there is just enough liquid money coming in, chiefly from Europe, or the lights one day will go out.

Assuming that the United States remains a member of the UN, there are three key issues in this disgraceful state of affairs, and they concern Europe above all. The first is whether European leaders will at last get the courage – or be given it by their citizens – to tell Washington loudly and clearly that enough is enough, and that if the United States does not promptly begin to behave like any other Charter-abiding member, it will be taken to court, here in The Hague, by Europe.

The second issue is indeed one of international treaty law. It is not expressed in the Charter itself, and needs to be tested right here at the World Court: is it or is it not a violation of the international law of the Charter for any member-state to refuse to pay-in its assessed contribution on grounds of explicitly stated demands for changed policies? I cannot myself see how the Court could rule other than against the United States. A suit brought by Europe with such a result would be very embarrassing in Washington. It might provoke a petulant decision to withdraw from the UN, but a point has to be reached where all the rest of us who are 95 per cent of humankind need to choose between living under political ransom with a financially delinquent bully-power, or for a time sustaining and strengthening the UN without it. After all, we would not lose the American financial contribution; we haven't had it to lose for many years.

The third financial issue takes us back to 1985. In that year, as the chorus of demagoguery in Washington became more and more shrill against the allegedly horrendous costs of the UN to the US, the late Olof Palme, Prime Minister of Sweden, proposed in the General Assembly that a ceiling be placed on the proportion of the total UN budget which any one member-state should pay, and it was generally understood that this should be around 10 or 12 per cent. His basic idea was that, even if, by the assessment formula of relative capacity to pay,

the United States should be contributing more than its 25 per cent of the total budget, it is just not politically advisable for the UN to be so financially dependent upon any one member (I emphasise, any one member because tomorrow it could be Germany or Japan; in the next century, unless we improve our behaviour, it could be the country with largest amount of pure water available for export, if water by then becomes a measure of wealth ...).

Now anyone might have expected the US Ambassador to be on his feet at once welcoming Mr. Palme's proposal. Instead there was a resounding silence from the United States. Washington was very annoyed over Mr. Palme's proposal, because they did not want at all to lose their 25 per cent political stranglehold over the UN, they wanted to use it to dictate to the rest of the membership. And because Europe did not want the United States to be forgiven the arrears it had already withheld, Europe too remained silent; so the Palme proposal dropped out of sight. It must now be resurrected, and I would urge that Europe this time table it in the General Assembly whether the United States likes it or not, but stipulating that the US will be held to full payment-in of all its arrears, at compound interest. An additional measure that would put considerable pressure on Washington from American business firms would be a General Assembly decision that any member owing more than a stated percentage of its assessed dues will cease to be eligible for UN procurement contracts – from which the United States currently earns about a quarter of a billion dollars a year.

My fourth recommendation about financing is that we must move urgently, but expertly, to develop means to raise additional funds for the UN System – not to replace or compensate for delinquency in the core assessment system, but to supplement it. A good deal of work has already been done on various possibilities of automatic taxation, or levies, on such transactions as international air tickets, or financial flows, or on petroleum sales, some urging a tax on arms sales which I personally do not favour. Governments are not likely to be enthusiastic about any scheme that would qualify their revenue-raising authority, but we must generate sufficient people-power to overcome their reluctance.

In all of this, once again I cannot over-emphasise Europe's responsibility, at last to stand up to the United States, develop specific proposals to absorb the relatively small amount from reducing the US contribution, and take imaginative initiative over alternative financing.

I turn next to leadership, and first a new kind of collective leadership among citizens. The building of a just and stable world simply cannot be left to men as they have been operating for almost all of our time on this planet to date. The record of men in governance at any level, where they have been ignoring the wisdom, energy, sensitivity and skills of women in policy-formulation and decision-making, is something between indifferent and deplorable. We will not get to the working world community that we need except by a genuine partnership of women and men, everywhere, in all political, economic and social decision-making.

Secondly, the chief public servant of the world, the Secretary-General, is ultimately the servant of all of 'We, the Peoples'. The way in which the position is filled needs radical improvement from the present half-secret, veto-filtered fumbling about almost entirely within a diplomatic 'old-boy network'. The smallest college in Holland conducts a more orderly and responsible search process for a new head than do our governments for the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Citizens, and more immediately their legislative representatives, must demand that this crucial global post be filled with only the best, carefully selected from an organised search throughout the world. Since the record of men hewing to themselves key responsibility for international affairs is particularly deficient, I firmly believe that our next United Nations Secretary-General should be an eminently qualified woman.

Our governments must make it clear to the five that hold the power of veto against candidates, that they only hold veto power against candidates, they cannot themselves elect anyone they may favour. It is the majority in the General Assembly that has that ultimate power, and we must insist that it is used.

Next, I want to suggest that we put greater discipline and method into how we see the conditions of our world. We urgently need to begin perceiving these conditions as on a *spectrum of cause and consequence*. At the cause end of the spectrum are all the cultural, ethnic, political, economic and social problems that lay suppressed and unable to be dealt with for centuries under empires and then during the Cold War. These problems were then made worse by the refusal of the industrial powers, during the lifetime of the UN so far, to accept that a world where 1 in every 4 lives in absolute poverty is a world in which their policies to date have simply failed.

We don't have any choice or any time left to tackle this blind, short-sighted lack of truly all-gain, genuinely global policies that will begin

to fulfil the International Bill of Rights for all peoples. We have to begin tackling these *root causes* of upheaval, conflict, and mass misery.

We must demand that the mandates in the Charter to make the United Nations and its General Assembly the centrepiece for such all-gain economic policies be implemented before the world divides irrevocably and violently between a Northern minority and a huge, angry and despairing Southern majority. To gear up the UN for its originally intended – and today no less needed – economic leadership role, its economic staff capacities, deliberately weakened in favour of the World Bank, must be restored. Each of us must take responsibility for correcting every repetition of the damaging disinformation that the UN System is ‘a vast, swollen bureaucracy’. The grim truth is that it is perilously under-staffed for the challenges the world hurls at it. The staff of the entire UN System, of the UN and all the agencies world-wide excluding only the differently managed IMF and World Bank, is only 51,400 – equal to the present civil services of Amsterdam and Rotterdam.

The top of the Secretariat must be re-organised, with Deputy Secretaries-General, of rank higher than any other executive head in the System. One should be for International Economic Co-operation and Sustainable Development, to help the Secretary-General to present coherent macro-policy proposals towards global equity.

The governance of the International Monetary Fund must be overhauled: an agency 74 per cent of whose membership has only 34 per cent voting power has no place in the United Nations System. It must be re-directed back to what it was supposed to be, an equitably operating central bank for the world. And we must get a proper, genuinely global organisation for fair trade, because no amount of ‘aid’ could enable three-quarters of humankind to earn their way, and a rigged trading regime makes it impossible for them to do so.

The economic agencies – at least the IMF and the new World Trade Organisation (WTO) – must be brought into proper, working relationship with the UN as two of its specialized agencies. The current intention of industrial countries to keep the WTO out of even nominal specialized-agency relationship with the UN is, in my view, an outright violation of the Charter, which stipulates (Article 57.1) that any agency with ‘wide international responsibilities’ in economic fields ‘shall’ (imperatively) be brought into such relationship. If the industrial countries persist in their current approach, they should be brought to Court – here at The Hague.

Governments have down the years created no less than five distinct, separately administered development assistance funds in the UN System; but they together dispense only 65 cents per human being in developing countries per year; and they overlap in their programmes in many respects, without anything approaching serious co-ordination and rationalisation. It is overtime to end this jungle and, except possibly retaining separate fund-raising identities, consolidate the UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP and IFAD in a single UN Development Authority. Their regional and country-support programme staff, presently working in the headquarters in Northern cities, should be decentralised into the respective regions and based in re-organised UN Regional Commissions.

To address the ethnic and cultural causes of conflict I believe we need a new UN body, converting the now unused Trusteeship Council into a Council on Diversity, Representation, and Governance. This should be a quite different type of UN organ: not trying to fashion universal policy, but serving as the world's open think-tank and source of wise counsel on the enormous problems of the obsolescent nation-state, and the aspirations of hundreds of millions for greater expression of their ancestral identity, but not necessarily in traditionally conceived nation-state sovereignty. (It is little known that 1 in every 18 of us on this planet is a member of an indigenous people). This Council should command the respect and actively draw upon the knowledge and insights of social scientists throughout the world. Traditionally trained diplomats more and more readily admit that they are not equipped to deal with this range of problems. Far more than a 'preventive diplomacy', we need a resolving sociology.

In the middle part of the spectrum that I suggest can provide a more disciplined approach to world needs, there is the volatile period during which these old and newer legacies, now without any of the restraints of the Cold War, are boiling towards the surface. Where they have not yet erupted, they might yet be averted by wise action in time.

In our new world of instant real-time global communication we have no excuses about this. There simply is no such thing as an Iraq-Kuwait crisis or a Rwanda upheaval that is a real surprise. We must radically improve our abilities to anticipate crisis, by building up *early-warning networks* at three levels – among governments, in their regional organisations like the Organisation of American States or the Organisation of African Unity; among non-governmental institutions where peace and social research institutes of North and South should work together; and in the Secretariat of the United Nations.

It takes but a moment to realise how appallingly neglected is this middle area on the spectrum I have described. I repeat: there is no excuse today for any major political and violent crisis to ‘burst’ upon us, already beyond conciliation, anywhere in the world.

Then, to act on better early warning, we must get the whole array of tools we can use greatly improved – prompt Fact-Finding Missions despatched by either a regional organisation or, if it can’t agree to do so, by the United Nations; missions in either case made up of distinguished women and men of unquestionable repute and disinterestedness, who can go to the site of an impending crisis, determine its real roots and dimensions, and quickly set in motion steps to de-fuse it and start genuine search to resolve the causes.

If we now move along the spectrum past its middle section, we arrive among the *consequences* of neglecting both the root causes and the chances of early warning, or when even better early warning steps may still fail. Our political leaders have so severely neglected the whole first two-thirds of the spectrum that upheaval, violence, armed conflict, possibly the collapse of organised governance and administration itself in a country, will still erupt in years ahead.

Here, we have to have far more rapid, more sensitive, and more democratic response in peace-restoring and humanitarian protection. The Security Council must be totally overhauled, and the absurdly archaic permanent memberships and veto powers of Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States abolished once and for all. We must get a Security Council that genuinely represents and acts upon the collective wisdom and views of the full membership of the United Nations, which now means humankind.

On this, I think it may be useful to imagine the reaction of an intelligent visitor from another planet seeing these powers still holding these totally undemocratic privileges. This is without doubt what she or he would say to the four who most behave this way (China isn’t really a member of this anachronistic clique):

‘Who on earth do you think you are? What grounds can you possibly offer for having the power to hold up even a Security Council attempt to peacefully settle a dispute, leave alone to decide for the whole world whether its United Nations can act to restore peace and protect the human rights of huge numbers of innocent children, women and men?’

Why do you call yourselves “great powers”? You are all huge debtors. You in the United States represent only 1 in every 22 human beings on this planet; India represents nearly 1 in every 6.

You have no monopoly on wisdom, indeed you are far behind many other countries in important criteria for wisely organised society, for example you imprison more of your citizens per thousand than any other country in the world, and you have over 200 million guns in private hands. I have learned that many people in other lands admire your original constitutional principles, and your people are decent and hospitable if well-informed. But so far as I, coming from my planet, can see, your only claim to this great powerdom is that you have abused science to acquire and build the capacity to incinerate, or inflict the most hideous pain and dismemberment upon, the largest number of your fellow human-beings in the shortest possible time. Is that a justification for all this arrogance and dictatorial behaviour towards the huge majority of your fellow human beings on your planet?.

And I believe that such a visitor from another planet would say to the other nations of Europe, ‘Above all, why do you in Europe constantly defer to these so-called powers? In 1945 at San Francisco, when your countries lay in ruins, you courageously stood up to them and at least secured in the Charter all its most noble and democratic social provisions; why now, when you are economically strong, are you so silent? Where is your pride? Where is your sense of responsibility in the world as a whole? If nothing else, in your very own self-interests, why are you allowing these countries to dictate economic policies that will fail so disastrously that when you need new markets and look to the hundreds of millions of people in the South, you will find them either still without purchasing power, or so alienated from you that they are trading effectively among themselves?’.

Next, we must equip the UN with a truly rapid response force for those situations where the full-scale ‘blue helmets’ – a UN military peace-restoring force – simply are needed. It is still taking anything up to five months before the Secretary-General can cajole and wheedle together a new deployment from member-countries; that is simply irresponsible. The Netherlands is pioneering in study of how to organise for more rapid response; this is a marvellous contribution. But there must be basic principles, groundrules, that make such intervention justified; and these should be adopted by the whole membership in the General Assembly, not left to the Security Council. Ultimately, these criteria for intervention should carry the full force of inter-

national law by being incorporated in the Charter (with potential advisory opinions on their use by the World Court).

But I am convinced that even this is only part of the answer. We must enable the UN to *differentiate* far more clearly and assuredly, what kind of response is needed. Again and again in recent years the first real need was to protect the essentials of life for civilians while mediation was effectively attempted. UN military forces weren't necessarily needed for such protection, and if they are the only response available, and they then also have to start peace-keeping between rival forces, they cannot do either job effectively.

To give the UN far greater flexibility of response, I am urging everywhere the creation of a quite distinct United Nations Humanitarian Security Police; a force of specially trained volunteer policewomen and men whose governments allow them to be on immediate standby. They should have phase-authorised use of arms, like national Police. They should operate under a General Assembly enabling Declaration making it clear that once a UN Humanitarian Security Police force is deployed it will be a crime against humanity under international law to attack protected civilians or their sources of food and medicine; and that if the UN Humanitarian Police are prevented from carrying out their mission, then military forces will be deployed.

To make the distinction clear throughout the UN machinery, the Security Council should have one standing Military Forces Committee and one standing Humanitarian Security Committee, each composed to be fully representative of the membership as a whole, but with stated provision for representatives of humanitarian NGOs to have access to the Humanitarian Committee.

For humanitarian assistance we must now insist that governments end their perennial tinkering with the jungle of UN agencies that they have proliferated, and consolidate it into one top-quality Operations Branch of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs.

Now I have tried to outline key, priority steps we have to get taken along this spectrum of cause over to consequence, if we are to build a genuine world community through our United Nations. But you may well be saying to yourselves, what chances are there for any of these reforms and improvements, given how our governments have behaved so far?

As to this, we have achieved incredible advances through the UN System; if we had not, our world would already be in total chaos and upheaval, rampant with disease, without the remotest prospect of feeding itself, and without having even begun to halt and correct the damage so far done by degradation of the environment. The problem is that all these good advances have not been enough, and some key policies still being pursued by the North could nullify most of them.

But building the sort of world we need also cannot be left to the executive branch of governments alone. The drafters of the Charter made it begin with ‘We, the Peoples of the United Nations’ enunciating its *raison d’être* and its noble goals and commitments. But unlike the Constitution of this country from which the language was drawn, and in which the People directly establish the Government, in the Charter the Peoples abruptly delegate all authority to ‘our Governments’ to establish the organisation, and are never heard from again in the ensuing document.

I urge that we at last heed Britain’s Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin, whom no one ever called a utopian dreamer. In the House of Commons debate on the Charter in London 49 years ago, he called for the ‘completion’ of the UN design with ‘a world assembly elected directly from the people (to) whom the governments who form the United Nations are responsible’.

To be sure, this will be a gigantic task, to organise free elections of people’s representatives to the UN in every country. But if India for over 40 years has run a pluralistically elected parliament among rising 900 million in no way homogeneous citizens, electing one among some 7 times that number from around Planet Earth is not beyond the wit and will of caring world democrats. Canada is ready to host a preparatory meeting; the European Parliament has endorsed the idea; let us act to get this moving.

In conclusion, then, I want to emphasise that what the founders of the United Nations gave us was so remarkably sound – if our governments had only followed their full design – that if we were to start again today we could scarcely do better at this stage of our social evolution on this planet. We must, however, be impatient with our progress because in the meantime all that has been neglected, and all that has been exacerbated by the monstrous distraction of the Cold war, has made our world a more, not less dangerous place.

But for the first time in the human story we do have an echo-chamber of all of us on Planet Earth. In the standards of behaviour the UN has enabled us to agree, we have a moral mirror to hold up before ourselves in every land. We cannot say that we do not know the ugly face of cultural, racist, religious or sexist prejudice, and the extent of abject economic and social misery on our planet. We know what needs to be done. We have all the guidelines we need for building a better world. Now at last, let us get on with it.

The other day a friend sent me a Mantra written unknown times ago, but it could have been written as the ethos of the United Nations and what it must call forth from all of us.

Unification

The sons and daughters of men and women
are one, and I am one with them.
I seek to love, not hate.
I seek to serve and not exact due service;
I seek to heal, not hurt.

Let pain bring due reward of light and love.
Let the soul control the outer form
and life and all events,
And bring to light the love which underlies
the happenings of the time.

Let vision come and insight.
Let the future stand revealed.
Let inner union demonstrate and
outer cleavages be gone.
Let love prevail.
Let all people love.



Commentary by Bruce Kent

As I looked again at some of Erskine Childers's many speeches and articles about the past and future of the United Nations I was filled with sadness. What a lost opportunity. We had a prophet of international stature living amongst us and too few knew it. He had so much to teach us all about global governance. We have no voice of such inspiration today.

I knew Erskine all too briefly a few years before his untimely death in 1996. Pax Christi and the Catholic Institute for International Relations (now Progressio) jointly invited him to come to London to give a public lecture in January 1993. He was charming and entirely lacking in self-importance, accepting a far from elegant Earls Court hotel and much less than 5-star meals. His talk opened my eyes wide. It was an electrifying defence of the UN against its detractors, with chapter and verse for every claim made. It was later published as 'In a Time Beyond Warnings – Strengthening the United Nations System' and is still available and well worth reading. The early 1990s was a time when there might have been hope of a post-Cold War peace dividend and before terrorism replaced the Soviet Union as the demon threat – the justification for more wars and weapons and even less respect for the UN Charter. A Time Beyond Warnings! Today he might well have called his talk 'A Time Way Past the Warnings'.

It is now 15 years since Erskine's completely unexpected death at the age of 67, when he had been interim Secretary-General of the World United Nations Associations for only five months. But he has left us an archive of written material. Together with Brian Urquhart, another outstanding UN civil servant, he produced three separate volumes – in 1990, 1992 and 1994 – about every aspect of UN reform. More than that, I have the texts of some 15 speeches that he gave in various parts of the world in the last years of his life.

This article is about one of them, delivered in March 1995 with the title 'The Future of the United Nations – Europe's Responsibility'. It runs to 7,000 waffle-free words. Some of it is addressed to Europe specifically, but much of it is concerned with the responsibilities of all of us – global citizens as well as governments. It was given in The Hague to members of the World Federalist Movement and of the United Nations Association of the Netherlands. The event marked the 50th anniversary of the foundation of UN, whose Charter was signed on 26 June 1945 in San Francisco.

‘The UN’, said Childers, ‘ought to be at its most vibrant moment of service and international support but plainly it is not.’ This gap between what could be and what actually exists was an ongoing cause of pain and frustration to Childers. He, who had served the UN for so long and so well, knew what it ought to be and still could be.

In 1995, the opportunities were all there in front of us.

The Cold War was over and there were still hopes of a peace dividend. The great separate territorial empires of the past were on their way out – sadly to be replaced in turn by economic empires and the NATO military empire.

By 1995 we all knew what the global problems, human and ecological were. Ignorance was no excuse. But the powerful did not respond.

Ours is still a world of economic injustice and North-South division. We are still in the grip of what Erskine called a primitive religion – ‘the fundamentalist religion which worships the magic of the unregulated market’. Wars rage around the world, but attract little attention unless they impact directly on Western interests. Even after the end of the Cold War, at least 25,000 nuclear weapons disfigure and threaten our planet, but the major nuclear-weapon powers, including Britain and France, vote against even starting negotiations to eliminate nuclear weapons.

Well before 9/11, Erskine forecast the dangers of the future. He predicted that there would be ‘more and more angry and desperate groups prepared to take up arms’.

Europe’s responsibility, the theme of the speech, is to stand up for and promote the UN as the one global structure capable of dealing with global problems. His view, passionately expressed, is that Europe has failed to challenge the negative forces, especially powerful in the United States, which are bent on the marginalisation or even the destruction of the UN.

He would have been outraged that we have had, in the last 20 years, three major NATO wars, initiated by the US without the agreement of the UN Security Council. Not that the Council can authorise any military action if the requirements of Article 42 of the Charter have not been met.

The themes of this Hague lecture Erskine repeated many times in other talks before other audiences. Many of them are there in that final speech he made to the World United Nations Association in August 1996, only hours before his sudden death.

They could well be repeated today. Childers was desperate to see the development of a ‘dynamic institution of world community’ and his sense of urgency is palpable:

‘We will not allow our leaders to go on wrecking this noble enterprise.’ He clearly thought that European leaders were especially at fault: ‘Western Europe members, the only ones the American Foreign Policy elite might listen to, have remained as meek as colonial subjects..’

But all was not simply denunciation. In this speech in The Hague in 1995 he began with nine specific suggestions still practical and possible today.

1. The financial base of the UN must be changed. It can no longer be so massively dependent on one country and therefore vulnerable to its pressure.
2. The UN must have courageous and independent leadership able to motivate the rest of us.
3. The financial institutions of the world, especially the IMF and the World Bank, must be brought under the umbrella of the UN, as was clearly envisaged in Article 57 of the Charter. (This point is vital in Erskine’s thinking.)
4. Every member state must make a commitment to promoting the economic and social advancement of all peoples by making the UN the leader ‘in all-gain macro-economic policies’.
5. Undemocratic veto powers in the Security Council should be abolished.
6. The UN system itself must be made more efficient so that it works in a ‘much more cohesive and effective interdisciplinary manner’.
7. There should be much more public knowledge of the Charter and the opportunities it offers. (‘Our Constitution for Planet Earth,’ Erskine called it).
8. International law must be respected by all and made clear to citizens everywhere. (I am sure Erskine would have wanted it to be the ultimate source of law in all domestic courts.)
9. Citizens’ groups should have their place in UN consultation and decision-making alongside ‘executive government representation’.

But this was not the end of his suggestions. He went on to propose a democratic and transparent system for electing the UN Secretary-

General, with the final decision in the hands of the General Assembly. He also suggested that the next one to be chosen should be a woman. He was well in advance of the famous equality resolution, Security Council resolution 1325 of 2000.

Another original suggestion came out of his understanding and experience of the ethnic and cultural causes of conflict. He knew that most wars today are civil wars, not wars between states, and are caused by such differences. One of the great success stories of the UN, little appreciated by its detractors, was the Trusteeship Council which brought colonial rule to an end in so many places without violence after the Second World War.

In this Hague speech, Erskine proposed the establishment of a ‘Council on Diversity Representation and Governance’ as a global think-tank, responsible for looking at the problems that arise as the dominance of nation state thinking diminishes.

He concluded with an old, radical but perfectly possible proposal. No one, he said, would ever call Britain’s post-war Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin a utopian dreamer. Yet when the new Charter was being discussed in the House of Commons, Bevin called for ‘a world assembly elected directly from the people to whom the governments who form the United Nations are responsible’. Bevin-type suggestions have frequently been rejected by the UN, which is so strongly based on the notion of the sovereign nation state.

It is not always noticed, however, that a certain flexibility is nevertheless there in the Charter itself. Article 2.7 says of sovereignty that there shall be no intervention in matters ‘essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state’. But what is ‘domestic’? And could there not be room for direct non-government participation in General Assembly decision-making? Erskine even went on to envisage global elections to a directly elected citizens’ organ parallel to the General Assembly.

All this is, however, pie in a distant sky unless ‘We the Peoples’ of the Preamble to the Charter, so frequently invoked by Erskine, have a consciousness of ourselves as global citizens, each with individual responsibility. That is probably why Erskine accepted the onerous and undervalued job as interim Secretary-General of the World Federation of United Nations Associations. He knew that most of ‘the Peoples’ of the Charter’s Preamble have little knowledge or interest in the workings of the UN, the vision of its founders, or its reform.

The Plan of Action adopted in August 1996 at the meeting where he died must have been drafted by him. It ends with a call to '[r]evitalise WFUNA as a genuine peoples' movement for the United Nation'.

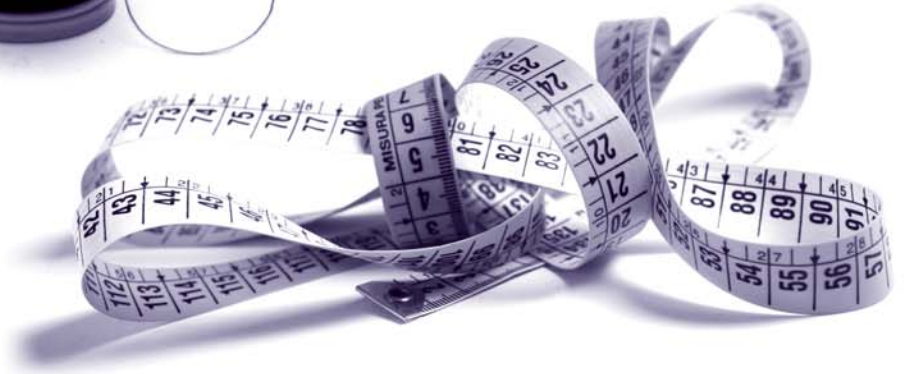
To do that, as he well knew, requires active independent United Nations Associations in most, if not all, countries. That is far from today's reality since many United Nations Associations are under the discreet or obvious thumb of their various foreign offices. Too often it is the paid piper who also calls the tune. Foreign offices are not on the whole much in favour of radical reform suggestions, still less of proposals which go contrary to national policy.

The UN administrators themselves do not help. A disastrous 2003 decision, which came from New York UN headquarters, was to economise by centralising the major European UN information offices in one Brussels office. Those who think that electronic communication is a substitute for personal contact and available printed material are not living on the same planet as most of us.

It might well be asked if, at least in his 1995 Hague speech, Erskine spelt out in any more detail what Europe's responsibility might involve. The answer is no.

This was just a repeated and passionate call for Europe to throw off its docility and to challenge all those, especially in the US, who work actively to diminish the role of the UN.

His Hague speech was a call to action and not just European action. His concluding words were clear and powerful: 'We know what needs to be done. We have all the guidelines we need for building a better world. Now at last, let us get on with it.' That was 1995. His call is even more urgent in 2011.



Who is the tailor of peace-keeping?

Erskine B. Childers



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'We cannot afford, or usefully have, a wardrobe sufficiently rich and varied to be able to pick out just the right suit as the situation arises. It is much better to have the cloth and go into action as a good tailor quickly when the need arises'.

Dag Hammarskjöld on
Peace-keeping, April 1959¹

I. Introduction

In the aftermath of the Suez Crisis of 1956, none other than US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles supported building on the experience of the UN Emergency Force (UNEF) and of UNOGIL in Lebanon to create a standing UN peace-keeping force, and the United States Congress even passed a resolution calling for such a force.

Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, however, was more cautious. He sensed that to try for a standing force was wholly premature. In a special report to the General Assembly² analysing the UNEF experience he adduced general principles from peace-keeping so far – ‘the cloth’ that he later described to UN correspondents. He proposed that if the membership could agree on these, then each new peace-keeping operation (henceforth herein, PKO) could be cut to its specific situation. The ‘good tailor’ would be the Secretary-General, obtaining approval of a detailed proposal for a PKO from the Security Council.

UN peace-keeping has undergone huge changes since then, in ‘complex emergencies’, involving death, misery, and financial cost that few would have believed possible even a decade ago. An average of 25 complex

¹ Report of the Secretary-General (to the Special Political Committee of the General Assembly), UN Document SG/742, 5 November 1958

² Ibid.

emergencies each year has threatened the lives of 25 million refugees, 25 million internally displaced persons, and some 10 million people in their local areas, an annual total equalling all refugees generated by crises between 1946 and 1990³.

The conflicts are mostly fought by para-military groups with highly destructive weapons, but in populated areas. Some groups use civilian death, starvation, torture and rape as psychological instruments. In 1994 alone over 4.5 million people were killed. In 1993 in Angola 1,000 people died every day⁴.

The toll in uprooting people has also reached huge numbers hitherto only associated with full-scale international wars. Sudden exoduses, sometimes in millions, put unprecedented strains on international response machinery. In 1994 in only a few weeks some 2 million Rwandese fled into Zaire. By 1994 in former Yugoslavia a total of 4 million refugees and other displaced and war-affected people needed humanitarian assistance⁵. Despite repatriation, uprooted people worldwide now amount to 1 in every 115 human beings alive, a proportion wholly new in human history.

In less than a decade, United Nations peace and humanitarian activities have been transformed by the responses made to these new kinds of emergencies and by new kinds of assistance elsewhere, for example in election and human rights monitoring.

The sharp decline in readiness to undertake further PKOs has led to a widespread assumption that these PKOs have mostly been so disastrous as to have virtually ended UN peace-keeping as such. Some of this reaction is genuine: the financial costs of recent PKOs, though in reality minuscule⁶, are indeed daunting to many governments. The adverse reactions have also been deliberately exacerbated by elements hostile to the United Nations itself. But a significant part of the problem has been because the good-tailor role has been coming apart at the seams.

It is essential to raise the question, who is today's peace-keeping tailor? Recommendations will be briefly made throughout this summary essay.

3 Data from UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

4 Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Angola Margaret J. Anstee, Geneva, 3 June 1993; she later reported that the death toll was even higher.

5 UNHCR Report, UN Document GA Supplement 12 A/50/12, paragraph 167.

6 The 1994 total peace-keeping costs of \$3.3 billion may be compared with that year's estimated \$800 billion in world military expenditure, cf. SIPRI and other estimates.

II. *The Secretary-General*

Needs assessments

As with any military operation, the very groundings of a UN peace mission lie in the validity of initial estimates of what it will require. In today's complex emergencies, involving armed conflict among factions with or without overt or covert state assistance and amidst massive humanitarian crises, the Secretary-General's assessment of PKO needs entails high risks if the initial specifications are inadequate.

These assessments, however, cannot, be military alone. The political situation in complex emergencies is usually volatile; indeed it can deteriorate even before the Council considers the Secretary-General's report from a preparatory mission. Socio-economic factors are usually in strong play. The assessment must, in essence, be of *the sociology* of the situation in order to define its military and policing requirements as carefully as possible. Military officers should not be expected to make such analyses (intelligence staff could do so but this could be mis-understood). A combined civilian-military team effort is thus almost always needed. The political side of this work has by no means always been adequate, not even where the Secretary-General has already deployed a Special Representative. As Mr. Boutros-Ghali has affirmed more than once, the UN has lacked a top-calibre roster of eminently respected civilians for such missions⁷. They must be highly experienced in political and socio-economic analysis, culturally sensitive, and familiar with at least the region of the trouble-zone. Diplomats, classically trained in inter-state relations and disputes, are not necessarily capable of such work at the requisite standards, and the tendency to rely on such diplomats has been part of the problem. Member-governments, especially those whose contributed troops will bear the direct brunt of faulty assessments, should lean hard on the Secretariat to build this roster and, needless to say, do all possible to suggest well-qualified and willing people among their own nationals.

'Peace processes'

Not infrequently, the assessment is undertaken while there is already an attempted negotiation between the antagonists. A UN peace mission may even be an essential element in the terms being negotiated. But as former Yugoslavia all too tragically illustrates, if peace negotiators are not working directly under UN auspices lack of co-ordination with an assessment team can result in a chaos of confused anticipations, not only between the negotiators and the assessors but among the antagonists.

7 i.e. in his 'Supplement to an Agenda for Peace', UN Document A/50/60-S/1995/1, 3 January 1995, paragraphs 30-31.

Member-governments should insist on such co-ordination – optimally, on the negotiation also being under direct UN auspices.

A further danger in this area lies in abuse of a proposed UN PKO for leverage in a peace negotiation. Troop-contributor military establishments know all too well that mounting a UN PKO from world-wide contributions is never an overnight exercise. Its timetable cannot be constantly halted, deferred, re-started but again postponed. Yet the threat to delay sending in a UN PKO has been used in more than one crisis to try to persuade the parties to a conflict to complete the negotiation – inevitably making a nonsense of military officers' carefully planned timetables to get the PKO onto the ground on the date which the draft peace accord stipulates.

The dangers of such involvement of PKOs in the politics of negotiation are very real. Delaying a PKO deployment may give recalcitrant antagonists time to try to 'change the facts on the ground' – in turn changing most of the premises on which the PKO's military specifications (possibly its very mandate) were based in the first place. Minimally it deprives the PKO of its vital image of urgency and seriousness among ambitious local groups only waiting to test it. The danger of being too clever by half with a PKO was deeply involved in the fatal year before the launching of genocide and politicide in Rwanda.

Specifying to the Security Council

With the assessment in hand, a Secretary-General's precise recommendation to the Security Council on the mandate and size of a PKO engages the full meaning of the Secretariat's status as an independent, Principal Organ of the United Nations under the Charter⁸. The membership as a whole, and most particularly all governments making troop contributions, depend totally on the Secretary-General to give best judgement of what a crisis will require in an operation. The lives of blue berets and their civilian support staff, the very credibility of the UN as such, may depend on that presentation, its authenticity and its appropriateness to the unfolding crisis. Over any impending PKO decision, however, the role and responsibility of the Secretary-General in this recommendation is up against the primordial power of Permanent Members of the Security Council – in their ability to veto a proposed PKO, and in their collective (53.5 per cent) financial contribution to a PKO budget⁹. And it

8 The Secretariat is explicitly named in Charter Article 7 as such a Principal Organ, alongside the General Assembly, Security Council, Economic and Social Council, Trusteeship Council, and World Court.

9 The percentages of the total budget of any UN PKO that are assessed against the Permanent Members are: China 0.893 %; France 7.878 %; Russian Federation 7.072 %; United Kingdom 6.563 %; United States 31.129 % (assessment rate of 1995, cf. i.a. UN Document ST/ADM/SER.B/475 of 11 August 1995).

is regrettable that advance knowledge of their attitudes has, on occasion, influenced what a Secretary-General recommends. This, for example, happened over the recommendation for the ill-fated PKO in Rwanda in 1993 (UNAMIR), when General Dallaire (Canada) had reported from his assessment mission a minimum requirement of 4,500 troops and Mr. Boutros-Ghali proposed only 2,500 to the Council. It was common corridor knowledge that the recommendation had been halved because Permanent Members would not approve more than 2,500 troops.

The nature of a PKO in a complex emergency does not allow for under-estimation. The world has to rely on the Secretary-General of the United Nations affirming, not ‘what the traffic will bear’ in the Security Council, but *what a given crisis will require* of the UN. Apart from the inherent immorality of playing with the public trust, it were far better that one or more Permanent Members refuse to approve what the Secretary-General believes to be the minimum deployment, with the responsibility thus clearly identified, than that the strength of a UN peace-keeping force needed for a given situation is falsified and an under-strength PKO is despatched amid false public expectations. Needless to say, as the reluctance of Permanent Members to authorise UN peace missions has increased, the Secretary-General has more and more been impelled towards the ultimate wrong stance – not even to try to secure approval of a needed PKO (Burundi is a recent case in point). This entire trend has grave implications for all member-governments. It involves allowing the normally mandated organ of the UN for peace-keeping to be rendered impotent because of the political stances of 1 or 3 out of 185 members (pleas of inability to meet their share of the financial costs are window-dressing; when these states so decide in the interests of their own realpolitik they readily expend billions on military operations).

III. *Ambiguity Of Mandates*

No mandate to a PKO can necessarily ‘hold’ merely because it was promulgated by the Security Council. Since 1989, however, the Security Council has involved the UN and troop-contributing countries in an ever-deeper quagmire of inadequate, ineffective and ambiguous mandates *from their outset*. In some single-state interventions (Cambodia, El Salvador, Mozambique) the UN has been confronted by new responsibilities, but the essential consent of internal parties had been obtained and largely held; and where troops were involved, traditional peace-keeping mandates were sufficient. However, UN peace missions amid active conflict (e.g. Angola, Somalia, former Yugoslavia), or amid manifestly impending upheaval (Rwanda), have not been adequately mandated by the Security Council from the outset to meet identified

needs¹⁰. UN peace missions have found themselves supposed to guard relief warehouses against marauding bands, supposed to escort relief convoys between actively belligerent para-military forces, supposed to try to prevent ‘ethnic cleansing’ or neutralize warring clans, and even supposed to protect whole cities blithely declared by the Security Council to be ‘safe havens’ for their inhabitants, but never with the actual authority to do so (leave alone the resources). The original principle of UN use of weapons only in self-defence has continued to be the starting-mandate for these UN forces, but in situations of active conflict often between groups lacking state-military discipline and training. Their leaders may feel none of the constraints of a member-government towards UN *moral* authority. If the small and scattered UN units use their light weapons they can quickly be annihilated by more heavily-armed as well as far larger groups, to no useful purpose.

There is no more vulnerable interposition from outside than a military force that does not behave like a military force. The PKO has not only been without a mandate for peace-enforcement; it has been unable to convert itself for peace-enforcement or call in the necessary resources. For although their own forces always have ready-reinforcement poised nearby, Permanent Members have never allowed UN-commanded forces such reserves.

Such UN forces have therefore often provided no deterrence whatever against a warring party blocking a relief convoy or totally ignoring a Security Council designation of a ‘safe haven’. Journalists seeking action-stories, and often imbued with traditional concepts of the use of military, report scornfully on this. The Permanent Members refuse to do anything in the Council except issue frowning statements. The local factions take due notice of this and are emboldened.

Moreover, because initial mandates are so carefully restricted, for a UN mission to move into any even limited kind of peace-enforcement also requires formal change by the Council. Permanent Members have repeatedly refused such mandate changes and their corollary military reinforcement needs unless a situation has acquired two characteristics, and the cynicism inherent in them should be underlined:

- the situation must not only have become desperate for a threatened populace and for the UN mission – that has not been enough by itself;

¹⁰ For a particularly telling reconstruction of ambiguous mandates see the UN resume of all Security Council resolutions on former Yugoslavia: Reference Paper, *The United Nations and the situation in Former Yugoslavia*, UN Document DPI/1312/Rev. 2 (Reprint) and Add. 1, January 1995.

- it must also have become desperate enough to be politically embarrassing for Permanent Members.

In Rwanda, this behaviour by Permanent Members debased the good name of the UN as never before. Despite already mounting evidence of plans for massacres, in 1993 as noted above Permanent Members authorized only half the UN force recommended by the UN's military experts – and on top of this virtually advertised UN weakness to the planners of massacre by instructing the Secretary-General to try to 'reduce the total maximum strength' of UNAMIR¹¹.

In 1994, even as the UN force was surrounded by raging genocide and politicide that would claim the lives of at least 500,000 people, the Council *reduced* UNAMIR to 200 troops¹². A month later, confronted by outrage across the world from the news of the massacres, the Council reversed itself and authorised a reinforcement of 5,500, but still with a mandate wholly inadequate for the situation. The entire administration of the country had disappeared; there were no police whom UNAMIR could help. Yet UNAMIR was now 'to contribute [sic] to the security and protection of displaced persons (and) civilians at risk [sic], including through the establishment and maintenance, where feasible [sic] of secure humanitarian areas'¹³. This renewed UNAMIR was then severely delayed in deployment due to failure of Northern countries to offer vital logistics. In June, however, France sought UN blessing for its deployment into a self-selected part of Rwanda of a unilateral French force five times larger than the reinforced UNAMIR the UN was trying to assemble. The other Permanent Members promptly granted France *a full Chapter VII mandate ('using all necessary means'), for exactly the same humanitarian-protection roles the Council had assigned without any such powers to UN-AMIR*¹⁴. By the time the UNAMIR reinforcements finally arrived, the genocide had been carried out. The French force had departed on its self-stipulated short timetable. But there was critical need for proper security in the vast camps of Hutu refugees. They were being intimidated by the leaders of the genocide who had fled with them, and who were re-grouping and re-arming. Once again, the Security Council refused to authorise response.

11 Security Council resolution 872 (1993) of 5 October 1993, paragraph 9. A report of the Fédération Internationale des Droits Humains had already warned of genocide, with supporting evidence.

12 Security Council resolution 912 (1994) of 21 April 1994.

13 Security Council resolution 918 (1994) of 17 May 1994, paragraph 3.

14 Security Council resolution 929 of 22 June 1994, paragraph 3. The text literally back-referred to paragraph number of the previous resolution that had detailed the mandate to UNAMIR without so much as a suggestion of Chapter VII authority.

How ‘multilateral’?

A further danger in the manner in which military forces are used in these emergencies must be noted. If there is finally a decision to use more forceful measures, it becomes more difficult to keep the UN operation genuinely multilateral and on behalf of the membership as a whole.

Major-power mentalities and concepts of overwhelming force arrive with the heavier resources. They have involved some shocking departures from the UN ethos, such as a major power’s high-tech gunships strafing a capital city filled with civilians as well as gunmen, amid hitherto unheard of language from ‘UN’ officials, speaking of ‘retaliation’.

The Somalia crisis also provided a vivid example of two other syndromes in the new complex emergencies. First, ‘the CNN factor’ may mobilise public attention to humanitarian needs; but it may nearly destroy the UN if a UN military operation is distorted in media reports. Secondly, with the UN already the target of hostile political forces in the North, one successful distortion can have repercussions for it everywhere.

On 3 October 1993, United States Rangers made an airborne raid into Mogadishu to capture General Aidid. The raid had not been coordinated with the UNOSOM Command, who did not even know the Rangers had landed until the trouble had begun. Instead of General Aidid the Rangers captured some civilian UN personnel. They then got into a firefight with Somalis. Only now learning that the Rangers were in the city, UNOSOM could not relieve them in time, and they sustained casualties. The body of a dead Ranger being dragged in the street by enraged Mogadishans was shown on television throughout the US the same night. Quickly converted into ‘another UN fiasco’, the incident immediately prompted US Congressional leaders to ask ‘Why are we there?’¹⁵. The alleged ‘UN fiasco’ in Somalia led to a policy paper sharply restricting US participation in or support for *any* UN operations¹⁶. The paper had already been reported in US media when, in April 1994, the genocide in Rwanda was launched. A senior US official remarked off the record that ‘It is almost as if the Hutus had read it’¹⁷.

¹⁵ For an authoritative evaluation see, i.a. Chopra, Eknes, Nordbo, *Peacekeeping and Multinational Operations, Study No. 6* (Oslo, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 1995).

¹⁶ US Presidential Directive 25.

¹⁷ Reported by Thomas G. Weiss in ‘Overcoming the Somalia Syndrome’, page 172, in *Global Governance*, Volume 1 No. 2, May-August 1995.

Sub-contracting ‘UN peace-keeping’

Another major and ominous trend must be singled out – the trend of ‘sub-contracting’, which began with the notorious force-authorizing resolution in the Gulf Crisis¹⁸. At opportune stages in Somalia (the US ‘Operation Restore Hope’), in Rwanda (the French ‘Operation Turquoise’), in Haiti (again, the US), and in former Yugoslavia (the 1996 NATO force), Permanent Members have had the Security Council give UN approval for a non-UN-commanded intervention by one or more of themselves.

Such a seemingly UN-blessed intervention is invariably made with far larger resources, and in most instances has been given far stronger mandates, than the Permanent Members have been willing to allow the UN itself in the very same crisis. In every case Northern media are then prompted to make comparisons (e.g. ‘taking over from the failed UN operation ...’). If, however, the major-power intervention encounters difficulty, the blame is quickly heaped by power-worshipping journalists on the UN (‘problems in picking up the pieces of UN incompetence’). In every case, as well, the Permanent Members are careful to set tight time-limits on their separate-but-‘UN’ operation. In these stratagems the UN is also ordered to take responsibility – but again not properly resourced – for any pocket of a crisis that the powers consider too intricate to enter (as in Eastern Slavonia). Finally, the UN is expected to resume responsibility after the major power has triumphantly exited (Somalia, Rwanda, Haiti etc), and the whole cycle of alleged ‘UN fiascoes’ can be resumed with ease.

The ability of the UN to respond in United Nations terms and genuinely on behalf of the full international community has thus been eroded. Major powers have dominated decisions as to the nature and extent of the mandate, and the size of the forces, of every UN peace mission since the Cold War. Governments need actively to develop alternative modalities, equipping the General Assembly with far more extensive – and if necessary operational – responsibility for the maintenance of peace and security, the preservation of mass human rights, and the succour of large segments of populations brought to humanitarian desperation by the tides of war.

¹⁸ Security Council resolution 678 of 29 November 1990 authorised literally un-named states (only ‘states co-operating with the State of Kuwait’) to use ‘all necessary means’. The resolution did not even provide for a meeting of the Security Council before force was used. It did not even mention the Secretary-General of the United Nations.



Commentary by June Lambert

Introduction

The United Nations had few more loyal supporters than Erskine Childers.

Erskine's sudden and untimely death took place almost immediately after he had addressed a World Federation of United Nations Associations Assembly in Luxembourg in August 1996, where the majority of UN member states were represented. Our last brief conversation, early on his final day, was our mutual interest in support of equality in the UN, including more women in positions of highest authority, in what statistics reveal is a male-dominated organisation. I was to be one of the last people to see him alive.

I knew Erskine both as a friend and professionally for many years. Older members of his family and mine were close friends in Ireland, and I remain close to one or two members of his beloved family. He was the son of the president of Ireland. The lives of Erskine's father and grandfather were deeply entwined with Irish history.

Erskine was Secretary-General of the World Federation of United Nations Associations at the Palais des Nations when I was a vice president of the federation. He carried out the responsibilities of his post – building on the strengths of his predecessors – with energy, steely determination, intellectual commitment and administrative skill. His loss was a huge blow to the organisation.

The World Federation of United Nations Associations, the umbrella body for all UN Associations, representing many thousands of members, is known as the people's movement, supporting the UN. It presents the findings and recommendations of its members to the UN on a regular basis on issues of UN concern.

Background

The UN, in existence since 1945 and thus still relatively young, was founded with the noblest of aims and ideals, as enshrined in its Charter, to save succeeding generations from 'the scourge of war'. But because its architecture is still not fully formed, there are obvious structural and systemic weaknesses, which should have been corrected over the years, but have not been, for political reasons – in particular, the Security Council. The UN has detractors, and those

who would like to weaken and marginalise it, not least in the area of peacekeeping. But the fact remains, no other organisation in the history of humankind has done more to reduce and prevent death and suffering, prevent the outbreak of wars, keep the peace and protect the world, through its organs, organisations, bodies, agencies, declarations, charters, treaties, conventions and contributions to the development of international law, as well as its work on the ground.

One of the UN's primary responsibilities is to maintain international peace and security, and the UN Charter places the principal responsibility for this on the Security Council. A large part of UN expenditure goes on peacekeeping, so the UN needs to be successful, and be seen to be successful, in respect of this mandate.

Since the first peacekeeping mission in 1948, between Israel and its Arab neighbours, the role of UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding has become increasingly complex. The UN has had to depart in many cases from traditional peacekeeping operations, Chapter VI of the Charter, and complex situations have involved regional organisations such as NATO, which were not really designed to be in the peacekeeping business. Today, there are more than three times the number of UN peacekeepers than there were a decade ago, but there are still not enough well trained and equipped readily available troops.

There are many successful UN peacekeeping operations, including those in El Salvador, Guatemala, Mozambique and Namibia. There have also been 'fiascos', and it is important to examine the reasons and responsibilities for these, as Erskine has touched upon in his text.

'Tailoring' UN peacekeeping

The title of Erskine's final paper on UN peacekeeping before he died in 1996 was based on a quote by Dag Hammarskjöld in 1959: 'We cannot afford, or usefully have, a wardrobe sufficiently rich and varied to be able to pick out just the right suit as the situation arises. It is much better to have the cloth and go into action as a "good tailor" quickly when the need arises.'

My question is, does the UN does have enough 'cloth', and can it move quickly enough as the 'good tailor'?

The overall peacekeeping budget for 2010 was a mere US\$7.9 billion. This represents about 0.5 per cent of global military spending, a fact which in itself speaks volumes.

The UN can accomplish missions at a fraction of the cost of regular armies. However, it cannot function without the dues of UN member states to the main and peacekeeping budgets. Examination of the top 15 payers to the UN peacekeeping budget in 2009 shows a trend: those contributing most of the funding are behind in their payments. Does this constrain or demoralise UN peacekeeping, I ask? Are the budgets sufficient for optimal UN peacekeeping outcomes?

For the UN to have consistently successful outcomes in peacekeeping the Security Council must give the UN all the resources it needs to carry out this most important mandate. Erskine said that pleas of inability to meet costs were just ‘window-dressing’ (my word would be ‘hypocrisy’), because when these states so decide in their own strategic interests, they readily spend billions on military operations.

Calculations of dues assessments have been reformed in an effort to ensure that there is less domination of the peacekeeping budget by one or more member states, but the situation is still far from ideal.

Erskine made some valuable points, summarised below.

Needs assessments

If the initial civilian-military assessments are inadequate, the whole mission can be doomed. He said there were not enough highly experienced, respected civilians and peace commissioners for such assessment missions. He recommended stronger fact-finding missions, and building on a roster of such well-qualified and willing people.

The Secretary-General has to rely on adequate assessments. With an assessment in hand, a Secretary-General makes precise recommendations to the Security Council on the mandate and size of a peacekeeping operation. Member states, and most particularly all governments making troop contributions, depend totally on the Secretary-General’s judgment of the scale of operation required in response to a crisis. The lives of the blue berets and their civilian support staff, the very credibility of the UN, may depend on that representation.

The Secretary-General, in making his recommendation, is up against what Erskine referred to as the ‘primordial power’ of the permanent members of the Security Council – their ability to veto a proposed peacekeeping operation and the collective financial contribution to the peacekeeping budget. Herein lies the problem, which, if it remains unaddressed, may continue to compromise UN peacekeeping operations.

Erskine said that it is regrettable that advance knowledge of the permanent members' attitudes has, on occasion, influenced what a Secretary-General recommends. This, for example, happened with the peacekeeping operation in Rwanda (UNAMIR), where it was common corridor knowledge, according to Erskine, that the recommended troop deployment had been halved because permanent members would not approve more than 2,500 troops.

The increased reluctance of permanent members to authorise UN peacekeeping missions could lead to the ultimate wrong stance – for the Secretary-General not even to try to secure approval for a needed peacekeeping operation (as in the case of Burundi).

I agree with Erskine that it would be far better that one or more permanent members 'refuse' to accept what the UN Secretary-General believes to be the minimum deployment, with the responsibility thus clearly identified, than having an under-strength peacekeeping operation despatched.

UN auspices

The political side of peacekeeping operations has by no means always been adequate. Erskine said that as former Yugoslavia tragically illustrates, if peace negotiators are not working directly under the auspices of the UN, lack of coordination with an assessment team can result in a chaotic situation of confused expectations, not only between the negotiators and the assessors, but among the antagonists.

Delays

Delaying a peacekeeping operation deployment to allow for negotiations, in some cases a legitimate tactic, may also give antagonists time to try to change the facts on the ground – in turn changing most of the premises on which the peacekeeping operation's military specifications were based in the first place. For example, for a year there was mounting evidence of plans for massacres in Rwanda. Only half the UN forces recommended by UN military experts were allowed by the permanent members. By the time reinforcements arrived, in response to public outrage, the genocide had been carried out.

Ambiguity of mandates

Erskine stated that the Security Council has involved the UN and troop-contributing countries in 'a quagmire of inadequate, ineffective and ambiguous mandates from their outset'. He said that in some single-state interventions (Cambodia, El Salvador, Mozambique) the

UN has been confronted by new responsibilities, but the essential consent of internal parties had been obtained and traditional mandates were sufficient. However, UN missions approved amid active conflict (for example, Angola, Somalia and former Yugoslavia), or in the face of impending upheaval (Rwanda), had not been adequately mandated by the Security Council from the outset to meet identified needs.

‘Sub-contracting UN peacekeeping,’ Erskine said, was another ‘ominous trend’. Examples were the US operation in Somalia, the French operation in Rwanda, the US in Haiti, the NATO forces in the former Yugoslavia. Erskine referred to the permanent members giving approval for a non-UN-commanded intervention by one or more of their number. And such a seemingly UN-based intervention is invariably made with far larger resources and far stronger mandates than the permanent members have been willing to allow the UN itself in the very same crisis. I agree with Erskine that if, however, the major-power intervention encounters difficulties, the blame is often quickly placed on the UN.

Conclusion

Erskine was concerned that the UN Secretary-General was up against the ‘primordial power’ of the permanent members of the Security Council, and that the major powers had dominated every peacekeeping mandate since the Cold War and determined the size of the forces.

We know the reasons for the reluctance to address and eliminate known structural and systemic weaknesses within the UN and the Security Council, and their impact on UN peacekeeping, the lives of the blue berets who have come to symbolise peace and security around the world and the lives of millions affected by wars.

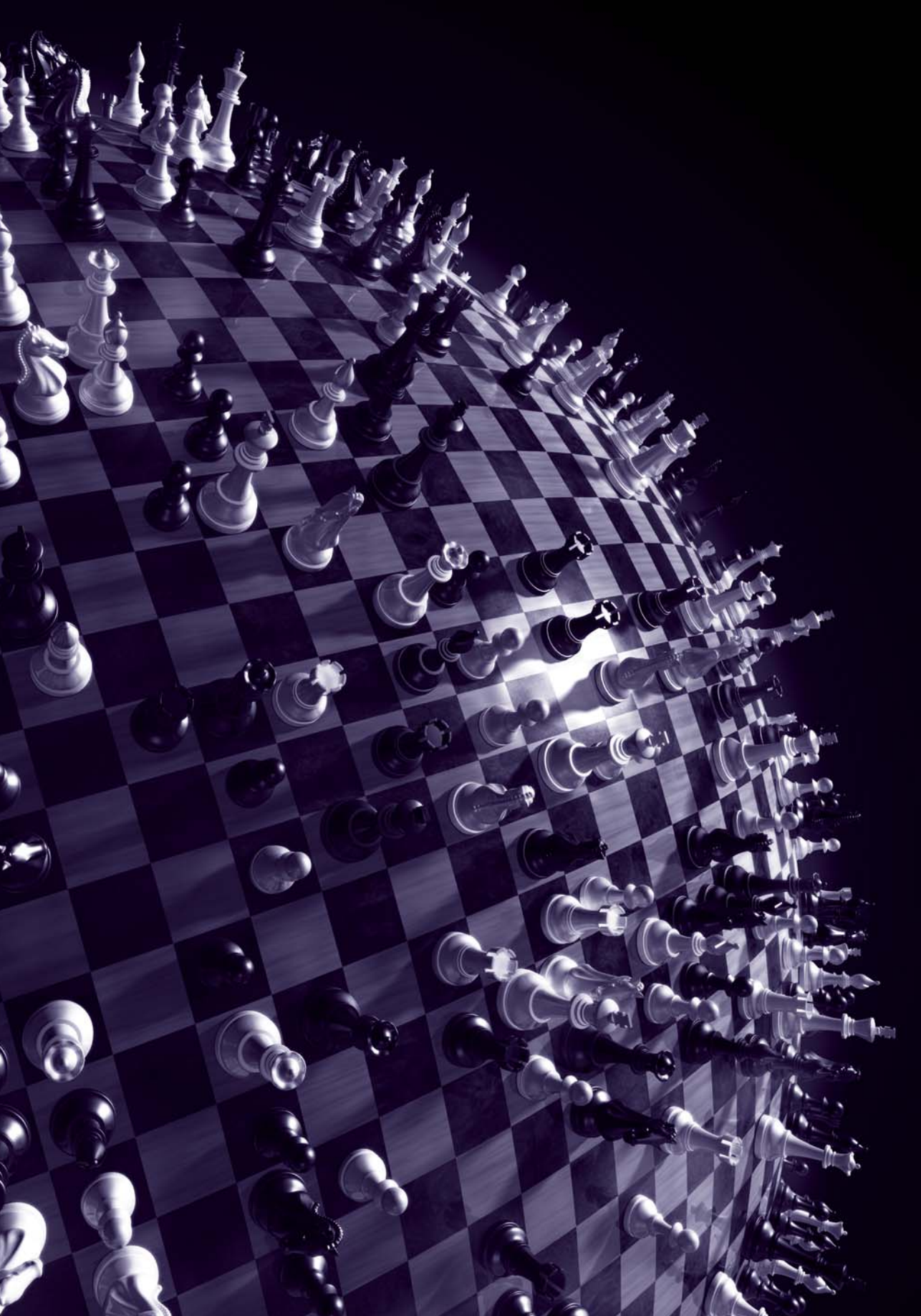
The ability of the UN to respond with peacekeeping under the Charter and on behalf of the full international community has been eroded. Instead, it needs to be strengthened, so that UN peacekeeping can become more efficient and effective. Both UN peacekeeping budgets and capability need significant expansion at this stage. Any disconnect between those making decisions and those carrying them out on the ground needs correcting. The need is acknowledged for genuine global representation and democracy in terms of systems, procedures and protocols on the Security Council. Improved early warning systems, better systems for political negotiation, improved initial assessments on the ground, genuine global representation of

UN troops, locating and recruiting suitably qualified troops, and rapid reaction forces are all needed.

Global representation and gender balance must be sought in UN peacekeeping operations. Security Council resolution 1325 calls for progress on gender mainstreaming throughout UN peacekeeping missions. Empirical information states that women peacekeepers can bring a calming effect and a reduction in sexual violence in war zones.

UN peacekeeping, still relatively young, is growing, and must be allowed to grow fully, easily and systematically into this mandate. From a systems perspective, those in positions of highest authority in the UN, and ultimately member governments, have a pressing responsibility to rid the UN of already identified systemic and structural problems at macro and micro levels, which may actually compromise much of what the UN stands for – democracy, equality and the rule of law. The imperative and the multiplier effect of improving these systems, structures and procedures are enormous.

Erskine Childers, with his vision and integrity, rightly asked that all governments give the General Assembly far more extensive power and resources for the maintenance of peace and security, the preservation of human rights and the humanitarian support of those brought to desperation by the tides of war.



The United Nations in the 'New World Order'



Erskine Childers Closing Address at
International Conference on
Rethinking Human Rights¹

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 7 December 1994

In the title of my remarks the phrase 'New World Order' is advisedly in quotation. It was coined by Northern hegemonists at a moment when they thought there was going to be such a new order following the evaporation of the Cold War and the hijacking of the UN for the Gulf Massacre. There have indeed been immense changes in the fabric of international relations in only the past five years, but they have not resulted in any new 'order'. On the contrary, I would submit that both the South and the North, and therefore the United Nations, are in a period of enormous fluidity under newly released forces. Some of these forces have been in gestation for centuries, some for decades; some were frozen during the Cold War, some created or exacerbated by it; all have been unleashed by the apparent end of that insane North-North contest.

When the UN was born in 1945 the world was weighed down with the legacies of the age of Northern empires. Europe had raced forward in progress over some four hundred years using the philosophy, social and physical science and technology which it had had to import from the South for the very foundations of its knowledge in every discipline; but it placed that same South in total stasis. The empires closed down all endogenous evolution of political thought and institutions; imposed totally arbitrary frontiers that ripped apart whole peoples and kinship groups; and implanted within these alien boundaries the structures of an equally alien European centrist state. And while Europe evolved its neighbour-relationships in centuries of tribal war, Europe prevented the South from even that form of evolution of neighbouring relationships, so that ancient disputes and antagonisms were merely frozen under Northern rule. Across the whole of the South an imperial economic system also replaced vibrant indigenous production systems with distortive extractionist economies and infrastructure.

¹ Subsequently published in Just World Trust (1996), *Human Wrongs. Reflections on Western Global Dominance and its Impact upon Human Rights*. Penang: Just World Trust 1996

When the grassfire sweep of Asian, Arab and African liberation movements compelled the European empires to allow legal independencies, these had to be established within the same exogenous frontiers, or last-minute new partitions. And in an enormous new irony, these alien borders then became sacrosanct under the Charter on accession to membership in the UN, thus again perpetuating their social and economic distortions. One consequence of this was the Iraq-Kuwait crisis.

Inside those boundaries the great majority of humankind were, however, still not left free to resume their own endogenous intellectual, political and institutional evolution. The rival Northern powers, but overwhelmingly the Western powers in their paranoid fear of the USSR gaining too many friends, thrust their Cold War contest down into this ostensibly liberated South, installing and arming dictator after dictator, training their secret police and death squads, and seeing to the pervasive corruption of new urban elites by corporations and arms merchants. Any and every promising popular representative leadership that declared for non-alignment was regarded as a danger to be destabilised and if possible overthrown, directly or from neighbouring client dictatorships or colonial settler regimes; and where such countries were not actually ravaged in internal conflict by these means, as for example were Angola and Mozambique, the constant covert attacks generated an inevitable authoritarian siege mentality.

Only now, with the end of at least the Cold War form of Northern subversion and suppression, is the South able to try to resume its own evolutionary processes. But it now confronts these gigantic challenges in the worst possible economic circumstances for most of humankind, and with the United Nations gravely weakened in its economic roles and capacities.

The history of this weakening needs brief recapitulation. It was not accidental. It began when the industrial powers realised that, once made universal in membership, the UN System could apply its Charter mandates to replace the imperial economic order with a socially democratic and equitably managed real-world economy. So they set out to block and weaken that System. They refused, and still refuse in every most crucial factor, to accept that a new world economic framework exists, with nearly four times as many states seeking their fair share of world product and trade as when the UN was created.

A specialised agency of the UN that was intended to play a critical role in this, the International Trade Organisation, was opposed by the United States and replaced by the General Agreement on Tariffs and

Trade, which should have been called the Specific Agreement to Maintain the Imperial Trading System, and which never addressed the trading concerns of the majority of humankind. The proposal for SUNFED, which would have been a soft-loan window of the UN, governed by the General Assembly, was also deliberately killed by creating the IDA soft-loan window of the World Bank which the industrial powers could control. The International Monetary Fund, which was supposed to become the world's central bank, equitably intervening in both surplus and deficit countries, was converted into an external dictatorship over the economic policies of most of humankind, using the single most powerful form of intimidation – the threat of denying a country credit rating anywhere in the world. The UN Secretariat's macro-economic policy analysis and formulation capabilities were steadily weakened, while the powers built up such staff capacities in the World Bank and the IMF. All proposals from the South for a new international economic order were scorned even if adopted by the General Assembly, and UNCTAD's structural analyses and proposals were equally ignored.

This relentless attrition of the originally designed UN System has had devastating effects. Where thirty years ago 80 per cent of humankind at least had a 28 per cent share of world trade, today they have only 18 per cent. The North's protectionist barriers against attempted Southern exports to the North, combined with manipulated interest rates and other imposed inequities, are depriving the countries of the South of more than 500 billion dollars of income that they could be *earning* every year; ten times all the North's 'aid' to the South.

Astonishingly mendacious invocations of growth inside a handful of countries are purveyed to suggest that Northern economic policies imposed through the IMF and the Bank are working for the South. The North-South disparity has in fact widened enormously. In 1960 the richest one-fifth of humankind was already earning thirty times what the poorest one-fifth could earn; now it earns over *sixty* times what the poorest one-fifth can. The indebtedness of the South has increased 14 times since 1970, to now some 1.4 trillion dollars. The number of people barely surviving in absolute poverty has increased by 40 per cent in only the last 15 years, to some 1.4 billion.

Northern political and economic policies include eroding the very products of historic social revolutions; for example, the IMF has instructed that Egypt's agrarian reform should be dismantled, and Washington's price for Mexico's accession to the North American Free Trade Agreement included undoing the ejido system of protection of land for small farmers.

The present policies of the Northern powers guarantee that *soon, 1 in every 3 human beings alive on this planet will be only existing on the very margins of daily survival*. When comparable conditions existed in Europe there was bloody revolution.

The mandates placed in the UN Charter for the General Assembly to set macro-economic policy for ‘the economic and social advancement of all peoples’ have to date been nullified. The Northern industrial powers refuse to accept the UN as the economic policy-centrepiece, insisting that monetary and finance policy issues belong in the IMF and the World Bank, which they control and which they then make sure do not address such issues. Conservative media regularly report that the annual G-7 summits deal with the ‘the global economy’. This is also outright fiction. Their ‘global economy’ is only the North-North economy – Japan, North America, and Europe, less than a quarter of humankind. So we have no macro-policies that address the needs of *all* humankind on an *all-gain* basis; and again, the certainty of conflict and upheaval increases.

Thus, most of humankind, in the South, has emerged from the Cold War era economically prostrated; politically ravaged; artificially divided by imperial frontiers imposed without any consultation with people on either side of them; filled with long-suppressed movements of ancient identity, aspiration and socio-economic anger; and strewn with the abandoned weaponry of a meaningless North-North ideological contest. And in one crisis after another resulting from the unfreezing of all these legacies of empire and cold war, something called ‘the UN’ is supposed to respond. But the euphoric prospect enunciated across the North, that in the Cold War’s apparent end the UN would be ‘re-discovered’, with the powers now fulfilling their originally claimed role as ‘the world’s policemen’, has not materialised. For the North is also in gigantic flux.

Although seldom acknowledged, the Western powers bankrupted themselves in the Cold War no less than the Soviet Union; their more resilient economies have only managed to handle unprecedented levels of indebtedness by mutual support and by mortgaging their children’s futures. But the strain, combined with the social stresses brought on by the current thralldom of Northern elites to the single most dangerous fundamentalist religion in the world – that which worships the magic of the unregulated market – is now clearly producing an epochal change in world power politics. For the elites in the major powers are now acknowledging that they do not have the money, and their citizens that they do not have the stomach, to be ‘the world’s policemen’.

Where only yesterday we were informed that we had entered ‘the era of a single superpower’, President Clinton has now retracted his early support for multilateralism; there will be no advance commitment of US forces for UN operations and none under UN command; he is now seeking a reduction in the US assessed share of UN peacekeeping costs (which means a reduction in US leverage); and the new Republican-controlled Congress will be far more hostile to the UN. Nor is even a Northern regional power bloc such as the European Union free of this flux and uncertainty: its scandalous failure to protect the human rights of hundreds of thousands of Europeans in former Yugoslavia is witness to the same faltering, combined, of course, with the centuries-old Western antagonism towards Moslems.

In all of this we can see a certain recurring pattern. The powers prevent the UN from trying to defuse a conflict early enough to have a chance; then, when they finally agree to its involvement they will not commit their share of the troops that by then will alone stand a chance of protecting masses of civilians. In most cases they also do not agree to other countries putting in enough troops, which is how they made the delineation by the UN of ‘safe havens’ in Yugoslavia an abjectly unworkable mockery. Or they refuse to provide the logistical support for large-scale troop airlift which they alone possess, as when African countries were ready to send troops under the UN into Rwanda to prevent genocide, but did not have the long-range troop transport aircraft to get them there. When the UN inevitably falters or fails in such operations, this is conveniently described as a UN fiasco.

These elites, however, still feel they must appear to be all-powerful. We therefore also see that in this terminal thrashing about of great-powerdom they wish to use the UN to legitimate unilateral or joint actions abroad before their citizens, but without any control by the UN membership over what they do. This outright abuse of the Charter was, of course, given credence in the Gulf Massacre; it has essentially continued with operations supposedly ‘under the UN’ by Russia in Georgia, France in Rwanda, and by the United States in Somalia in Operation Restore the Image of George Bush Before He Leaves Office, and most recently in Haiti. And once again, if these ventures under the cloak of the UN fail, they are instantly converted into ‘another UN fiasco’.

How, then, can we draw all these trends and fluidities into some sort of conceptual frame to see where we have to go? I would suggest a frame of four critically important elements.

- The first is that we are now in a world of exploding imperial legacies and neglected socio-economic root causes of upheaval, without the external restraint that the Cold War protagonists imposed on them as a continuum from the empires.
- Secondly, the UN must now address these *causes* of conflict and upheaval, both because they condemn millions of our sisters and brothers to intolerable injustice, and because if they are not tackled, even the most perfect UN peace-restoring machinery will be simply overwhelmed by the rage and violence that they are generating.
- Yet thirdly, since the first waves of their consequences in conflict and upheaval are already crashing in upon the UN every week, we now have no choice but to tackle both ends of this spectrum – cause and consequence.
- Fourthly, however, we must do everything possible to ensure that in its responses to erupting consequence, the UN is not used by the powers for their familiar practice of allowing an aggressor to ‘create facts on the ground’, and then telling the victims that they must be ‘realistic’ and accept fundamental losses of their rights in so-called ‘peace processes’.

Looking first at the causal end of the spectrum, it needs to be repeated that there is nothing lacking in the UN System’s constitutional mandates or indeed its intended architecture, for such work; the Charter very strongly addresses socio-economic causes of conflict, not just the maintenance and enforcement of peace and security. The problem has been the deliberate weakening of this balance of mandates.

We must demand that the mandates in the Charter to make the UN the centrepiece for genuinely global, *all-gain* economic policies are now implemented before the world divides irrevocably and violently. To gear up the UN for its originally *intended* economic leadership role the Secretariat’s economic staff capacities must be restored, under a Deputy Secretary-General for International Economic Co-operation and Sustainable Development to help the Secretary-General present coherent macro-policy proposals towards global equity. The governance of the IMF must be overhauled: an agency 74 per cent of whose membership has only 34 per cent voting power has no place in a democratic UN System. We must get a proper, genuinely global organisation for fair trade, because no amount of ‘aid’ could enable three-quarters of humankind to earn their way, and a rigged trading regime makes it impossible for them to do so.

To address the ethnic and cultural causes of conflict, I believe we need to convert the unused Trusteeship Council into the United Nations Council on Diversity, Representation, and Governance. This should be a quite different type of UN organ: not trying to fashion universal policy, but serving as the world's open 'think-tank' and source of wise counsel on the enormous problems of the obsolescent nation-state, the aspirations of tens of millions for greater expression of their ancestral identity, and the problems of re-constituting collapsed states. This Council just commands the respect and actively draws upon the knowledge and insights of social scientists throughout the world. Traditionally trained diplomats more and more readily admit that they are not equipped to deal with this range of problems.

Moving along the spectrum again, from cause towards the eruption of consequence, I would urge that here again we must restore a balance that was originally intended, in the use of conciliation and mediation to de-fuse a crisis in time. The smaller countries involved in drafting the Charter spent great amounts of time writing Chapter VI on peaceful settlement, in the conviction that resort to Chapter VII, on peace enforcement, should be a *last* resort, an admission of tragic failure, and would always involve the danger of great-power special interests. This requires recovering the UN from a weakness persistently maintained by the powers during the Cold War – its weakness in crisis research and fact-finding. Not one of the recent conflicts was unpredictable. Northern peace research institutes should actively support Southern regional ones, which should vigorously encourage regional intergovernmental organisations to be alert to take initiative before an impending crisis explodes. Where regional initiative may fail, the South should not even await Security Council action if there is the smallest evidence that one or more powers will delay it; the South should use its General Assembly majority to establish and send – from the Assembly – the impartial high-level UN Fact-Finding Missions which it recently called for.

The current debate at the UN on reform of the Security Council is proof that the majority in the UN can exert itself; it is taking place under the General Assembly, not the Council. The worldwide demand for reform away from permanent and veto-wielding memberships, however, is coming head to head with the demands of Germany and Japan now to be given the very same status. There is some danger that, in the 50th anniversary momentum for reform, the powers will economically intimidate the general membership into a quick-fix solution, whereby Germany and Japan are accommodated in return for a few large Third World countries being corrupted into joining this reliquary cabal and thus extending its sordid existence.

We should oppose Security Council reform being rushed into any dirty compromises. Let there be deadlock and stalemate, until a formula is evolved for a moderately enlarged, veto-free Council, with all members to be elected by the General Assembly based on regional representation that will always include most of these powers. If one or two are suffering excruciating agony in temporary rotation out of an elected seat, they can use Articles 31 and 32, which all the mere ordinary rest of the world has to use; namely that a country not on the Council but with a clear special interest in a crisis can attend and exert its persuasive influence. It is high time these power-elites got off their high horses and tried working their way in the real world solely by argument. *That* is the democracy they so constantly preach to the rest of the world.

At the full-scale crisis end of the spectrum I urge that the single most crucial improvement needed is to differentiate the kind of UN response at the outset. It is dangerous and, for the reasons already noted it is usually unworkable, that the only response is a UN military force. We need a distinct, separately organised United Nations Humanitarian Security Police, created by the General Assembly and composed of specially trained volunteer policewomen and men ready and authorised by their national Police authorities to form into such UN units and move within one week outright. Again and again in the recent crises, if we had had such a Humanitarian Security Police sent in quickly to protect the human rights of civilians and their relief supplies, the need for military forces might have been averted altogether. The Security Council should have a separate, and properly representative standing committee on Humanitarian Security. Every UN operation should be monitored by an independent Human Rights Ombudsman.

But it may be asked, what chance do any of these proposals along the spectrum from cause to consequence have unless the powers will agree to them? I am firmly convinced that we in the ordinary world community do not realise what power we have, if we will but mobilise it, in solidarity. We have all been heavily conditioned to something close to resignation before these fading giants.

First, with very few exceptions, Southern governments are far too polite. I will cite one of the outstanding exceptions, not because we are meeting here but because it simply is the case – Malaysia and its Prime Minister and fellow-Cabinet members. Most diplomats at the UN are schooled in soft voices, measured phrases, and other traditional niceties that are supposed to lead to congenial negotiation. The trouble is that they don't; all that happens is that the South is again and again kicked in the teeth. Officials in the North who receive such politeness do not respect it; they take it as evidence of the subservi-

ence and submissiveness they expect from developing countries now that their former supporter, the USSR is gone. This politeness also ensures that most decent Northerners do not even learn what really is happening to the South at the hands of the North, because Northern media do not report politeness.

This brings me to a crucial illustration of this syndrome. The bribing or brutal intimidation of economically prostrate member-countries into surrendering their voting rights is an almost totally hidden example of the legacies of impoverishment at work in the South, used like a dagger in the heart of a United Nations that can only survive on the principle of the equal rights of nations large and small.

Again and again in recent years, on any issue judged by the powers to require the obedience of the rest of the world, carefully selected Southern governments are informed that if they do not vote the right way in the Security Council, or if they do not at least abstain or stay silent, they will lose aid, not get debt relief, not get sound credit-rating through the IMF, even not get emergency IMF credit to pay last month's oil bill.

In the Northern school of 'realism' this is called 'hard ball diplomacy'. Its real name is of course extortion; it is a criminal offence in democracies, and it is a criminal violation of the UN Charter.

In 1991, in the immediate aftermath of the particularly vicious use of this disguised form of state terrorism to create the facade of United Nations support for the Gulf War 'coalition', the South tabled a resolution in the General Assembly condemning the economic coercion of developing countries for political purposes. It was one of the most ominous indications of the North-South divide, that the entire North voted against this resolution. But both its tabling, and the resultant vote, were treated so softly by the South that to this day not one in a hundred thousand decent Northerners even knows of it.

The South should become far more vocally combative on all fronts. The postures of the Northern powers and their Northern worshippers are arrogant but they are also inconsistent and often racist, and can be shown to be. Let me quickly give an example.

Again and again the South lets the North get away with claiming a right to special influence in the UN on the grounds of who 'contributes most' to the budget. This was one of the demands behind the treaty-violating refusal of the US Congress to pay full dues, keeping the organisation on the brink of bankruptcy, until today the United

States owes the UN – and thus all other members – \$1.5 billion, equivalent to half the UN's entire operating costs for a year, or some two-thirds its current peace-keeping costs.

The system of assessed contributions to the budget of the UN (and the main Agencies) was fully accepted by all the founding members including the United States. It is grounded in the democratic principle of *relative capacity to pay*. This fundamental precept of democratic revenue-raising and governance holds that, since it is as difficult for the poorer citizen to find his or her smaller money amount of tax as it is for the wealthier citizen or corporation to find larger money amounts, the wealthier should not have any special voice or voting strength in government.

In the United Nations System, it is at least as difficult for Jamaica, or my country Ireland, or Tanzania to find their smaller money amount of assessed dues as it is for, say, Germany or the United States to find their larger money amount. The whole original idea was thus that *everyone* 'pays most' to the UN, and no one should have special influence, just as the wealthier citizens and corporations in democracies do not have extra votes, or reserved cabinet posts, or the right to withhold their taxes for political reasons. When I recently reminded a Northern audience of this democratic principle behind UN financing and governance, afterwards a Northern Ambassador present came up to me and said, 'You know, I have never realised that point; it needs to be said more often'.

Above all we should use majority power in the General Assembly and restore its original function as the prime policy-making organ of the UN. We need an alert solidarity, so that any weak country threatened with economic damage if it does not comply with an instruction from one of the powers can feel safe to expose the threatened blackmail because the majority will publicly expose and loudly denounce it, if necessary closing down the Assembly until the threat is withdrawn.

We must overcome the debilitating psychological effect of the veto and remember that it does not exist in the Assembly and is in any case only a power against something. For example, the powers can indeed veto a nomination for Secretary-General, but they cannot get their candidate appointed without the majority in the Assembly. The South should put the powers on notice that they will reject and reject again any candidate for Secretary-General who does not have the full and carefully considered confidence of the real representatives of humankind, whose chief public servant she or he will be. I did say 'she or he', because it is time for an eminently qualified woman to lead us.

In conclusion, then, the United Nations is indispensable to the future of world peace and justice, and to the avoidance of an apocalyptic confrontation between the North and South; but we could lose it to gradual decline and eventual collapse, unless we really make it our own and fight for it.

Imperialism has always been 95 per cent psychological bluff and 5 percent periodic massacre. We have nothing to lose but our chains of psychological intimidation, what Chandra Muzaffar has called ‘the captive mind’, dominance. Let us begin shouting from this day forward until the tired and myopic elites are deafened into final retirement from their pompous strutting upon a world stage they have already set burning under their very feet.

Lenin remarked on hearing of the 1916 Proclamation of the Republic in Ireland that it was the first crack in the walls of empire. If that was so, the second crack was the proclamation of the UN Charter.

The third and final one will be made by our proclamation that the vast, vast majority of humankind have had enough, and that we are going to use what is *our* United Nations at last to implement its noble goals of world community, of the equal rights of nations large and small and the human rights – *all* the human rights, collective as well as individual – of all our sisters and brothers, everywhere.



Commentary by Chandra Muzaffar

Erskine Childers’s ‘The United Nations in the “New World Order”’ was the closing address at an international conference themed Re-thinking Human Rights, which my colleagues and I in Just World Trust, now known as the International Movement for a Just World (JUST), had organised in Kuala Lumpur in December 1994. Delivered with his usual clarity, vigour and eloquence, the lecture struck a chord with the 200 odd multinational participants at the conference. It is one of the chapters in the book that grew out of the conference entitled *Human Wrongs: Reflections on Western Global Dominance and its Impact upon Human Rights*, and published by Just World Trust in Penang in 1996.

The following year, I invited Erskine to participate in yet another international workshop in Malaysia, this time in the northern state of Penang. The theme of the workshop, Images of Islam: Terrorising the Truth, was

close to Erskine's heart since he had written and spoken extensively about the images of Islam in the West. Unfortunately, at the last minute he could not make it to the meeting because he had received an urgent call to work on a UN project in connection with the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Though he was not present, his paper entitled 'Amnesia and Antagonism', which analyses how the West has ignored the vast contributions of Islamic civilisation to its own growth and why the former is antagonistic towards the latter, was circulated at the workshop. Later, when the proceedings of the workshop were transformed into another book published in Penang by Just World Trust, *Terrorising the Truth* (1997), Erskine's paper was included, together with my tribute to him (Erskine died in August 1996) entitled 'A Servant of Justice'. In that tribute, I observed that 'fighting for justice was in the very genes of the man', which is why he often emphasised the importance of the Global South mobilising forces to combat global injustices.

Unipolar world

This is one of the explicit messages in his 1994 Kuala Lumpur lecture. He was convinced – as some of us were – that the 'New World Order' that President George Bush senior had proclaimed in 1991 in the wake of the US-led triumph in the first Gulf War or Kuwait War, was a clumsy camouflage for the perpetuation of US and Western hegemony. It was an attempt to provide moral legitimacy to a unipolar world, which would ensure continued US and Western dominance over global politics and security, the global economy and finance, global culture and the global media.

Erskine Childers did all he could to expose the injustices inherent in this hegemonic unipolar world, which was at its pinnacle in 1994. He often condemned – as he did in his Kuala Lumpur lecture – the terrible massacre of tens of thousands of innocent Iraqis in the Kuwait War by the US and its allies. The death of thousands of children – 650,000 is the oft quoted figure – in Iraq as a result of the unjust sanctions imposed on that country by a UN Security Council that was doing the bidding of the US and Britain, wrenched his heart. Hegemony and big power politics and the emasculation of the UN, were, in Childer's view, directly or indirectly responsible for the slaughter in Yugoslavia, the carnage in Rwanda and the debacle in Somalia.

Economic justice – Speaking up

Global politics was not Childers's only concern. In his Kuala Lumpur address he spoke at length about one of his great passions, the economic plight of the world's poor and marginalised. In that address, he

pointed out that in 1994 the richest one-fifth of humankind earned 60 times what the poorest one-fifth did. The ‘indebtedness of the South has increased 14 times since 1970, to now some 1.4 trillion dollars. The number of people barely surviving in absolute poverty has increased by 40 per cent in only the last 15 years, to some 1.4 billion.’ What has exacerbated the situation of the global poor are the policies of the powerful in the Global North, such as their ‘protectionist barriers against attempted Southern exports to the North, combined with manipulated interest rates and other imposed inequities’, which ‘are depriving the countries of the South of more than 500 billion of income that they could be earning every year; ten times all the North’s “aid” to the South’.

In overcoming both global economic and political injustices, Childers regarded the role of the UN as pivotal. In his 1994 lecture he made a number of proposals aimed at strengthening and reinforcing the UN’s peacekeeping role. Of these proposals, the most significant is perhaps in relation to the UN General Assembly. He believed that the Global South should use its majority in the Assembly to make it a much more effective body than it is. Southern governments should speak up with bold courage and firm conviction. They would gain nothing by being ‘polite’ to the Northern powers, who would just ride roughshod over them. Only by standing up would it be possible to restore the General Assembly to its original function ‘as the prime policy-making organ of the UN’.

Decline

Needless to say, more than 14 years after Erskine’s death, the General Assembly and the UN as a whole remain largely ineffective vis-à-vis the organisation’s principal role as custodian of global peace. Erskine’s hope remains an unfulfilled ideal. And yet there have been momentous changes in the global landscape since 1996. These changes have brought us a couple of baby steps closer to Childers’s vision of a just, equitable world. It is to these changes that we now turn. They are bound to impact upon the role of the UN in the unfolding present and the unborn future.

Very few commentators and analysts in the mid-90s could have predicted the dramatic decline of the US as a global hegemon and as a global superpower. If there is a single factor that explains this decline it would be the US’s military adventures in the first decade of the 21st century. In the wake of the alleged Al-Qaeda-inspired terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington DC, the US elite launched a ‘war on terror’, starting with the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan on 7 October 2001, the country which was

purportedly sheltering Al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden. Osama has still not been caught or killed; Al-Qaeda cells and operatives are proliferating not only in Afghanistan and Pakistan but also in Iraq, Somalia and Yemen in the Middle East, in parts of Southeast Asia, and even in Europe and North America; and most of all, military casualties among US and NATO forces in Afghanistan are mounting on a weekly basis. The atavistic and ultra-reactionary Taliban, some of whose leaders are ostensibly linked to Al-Qaeda, and which was ousted by US-led forces in 2001, have become much stronger, and, according to certain sources, are in control of most of Afghanistan. It is not just this military quagmire that has sapped the energies of the US: the 10-year Afghan adventure has also been a financial albatross around the neck of the nation.

In 2003, the US embarked upon a second military adventure, the conquest of oil-rich Iraq. Apart from the huge loss of lives – perhaps a million Iraqis have perished directly or indirectly as a result of the occupation and 4,743 US and allied military personnel have been killed – the invasion has brought to the fore latent sectarian divisions that are partly responsible for the chaos and mayhem in Iraqi society today. That conquest has created a dysfunctional society is obvious from another angle. Seven months after a general election, there is still no government in Baghdad. In the history of parliamentary democracy, this is the longest time that a nation has been without a government after an election. Like Afghanistan, the Iraqi conquest – profits for US and other oil companies notwithstanding – has increased America's debt burden. More than anything else, the invasion of Iraq, which everyone knew was driven by the greed for oil and by Israeli determination to get rid of a formidable opponent in the region in the person of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, was such an unpopular war that it destroyed US credibility totally.

Afghanistan and Iraq reveal two fundamental flaws in the exercise of hegemonic power – flaws that Childers would have highlighted at once. One, both episodes prove that it is not possible for the greatest military power in the history of humankind to impose its will upon a people. Military might has its limits and the US debacle in the two countries testifies to this truth. Two, occupation invariably erodes one's credibility. When the motive for the conquest of someone else's land is suspect, any attempt to endow occupation with moral legitimacy is bound to fail.

It is more than the US military adventures that have led to the country's decline as a hegemonic power. As we have pointed out, the US's military adventures have weakened its economy. The US, it is well known, is the world's biggest debtor-nation. Part of its debt is trade

related. Unemployment remains high. Income and economic disparities between the top 10 per cent and the rest of society are widening at an alarming rate. One of the reasons for this is the increasingly dominant role of speculative capital in the economy, which concentrates wealth in the hands of a coterie of financial elites.

Diffusion of power

While the US is embroiled in serious economic difficulties, China has emerged as one of the world's most important economic powers. It is China, with its trade and investments, that is propelling the global economy. Russia is reasserting its political authority over parts of Eastern Europe. Turkey and Iran are defining roles for themselves as regional powers in the Middle East. Even more significant, a number of Latin American states, from Venezuela to Bolivia to Brazil, are no longer content to toe the US line in regional and global economic and political matters. To put it differently, the US elite is no longer in a position to exercise total hegemony over even Latin America, once regarded as 'its backyard'. Erskine would have cheered these trends.

There is another trend that would have warmed the cockles of his heart. Since the mid-90s, segments of civil society have also been challenging US-helmed global hegemony. The climax of that challenge was the mass protest against the 2003 Iraq War. Millions and millions of people participated in what was the biggest anti-war movement in history. They failed to stop the invasion, but it was partly because of global public opinion, it was because of 'We the Peoples', that the UN refrained from legitimising the unjust, immoral war.

What all this means is that there will much greater diffusion of global power in the near future. There is no need to reiterate that this will lead inevitably to the further decline of US hegemony. But the critical question is: will all these changes in the global pattern of power also result in a more balanced, democratic UN, which is no longer dominated by a single superpower and its allies?

This is unlikely to happen soon. For the US and its allies will go all-out to try to maintain their dominant position in the face of a changing global scenario. Their continuing grip on the UN Security Council in particular will be critical to their political hegemony. But it will not last long. The power structure within the UN will also change to reflect the new global pattern of power – a pattern that hopefully will see 'We the Peoples' take charge of the UN.

That was a vision that Erskine Childers lived – and died – for.



Seizing the day for United Nations reform



Remarks by Erskine Childers at
The National Conference of the
World Federalists of Canada:
'Preparing for the 21st Century'

University of Victoria, BC, 14 May, 1994

There are fair-weather UN reformers, and then there are the sloggers. It is always good to be among World Federalists because you comprise an unusually high percentage of people who think, talk and act about improvement of the United Nations System whether in good times or bad. And this *might* just turn out to be one of the good times. I say *might*, because in everything about our United Nations there's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip; and twice as much likelihood of that while a handful of governments are allowed to wield grossly undemocratic influence in the UN, with unflagging incompetence. But let me begin with a brief survey of the more positive elements that we can and must intensively work on.

A major anniversary is always a potentially good time for reform of a public-service institution. Its incumbent executive head will want to go down in posterity as the reformer, and this alone is compelling governments to respond to Mr. Boutros-Ghali's numerous reform attempts.

Next: all waves of reformism concerning a public-service institution heavily depend on whether its *public* constituency cares enough, relentlessly to pressure the institution's governors to care more. And on the eve of the 50th Anniversary of the UN System, we do have a quite unprecedented volume of interest and action from among 'We, the Peoples', who have only delegated the running of *our* United Nations to our governments.

Although their trust in the UN was nearly destroyed when it was hijacked for the Gulf Massacre, the vast majority of humankind in the member-countries of the South continue to support and be concerned about the UN. But for any long-time veteran of UN civil service it is immensely heartening to see how in the minority of humankind, in Northern countries, NGO groups that only a few years ago would not give the UN System the time of day have now realised that it is vital to

the advancement of their goals. In a growing convergent stream we have seen this new engagement from the environmental, women's, human rights and humanitarian relief NGOs. The UN's very machinery for NGO relationships is currently overwhelmed by the thousands of new groups now demanding access and services. The Secretary-General's paper on this, now being issued, is of vital interest to all of us.

In addition, as you know, we now have two more blue-riband international commissions: the Commission on Global Governance created by the Stockholm Initiative, which will issue its report in January including proposals on the UN System; and a newer panel requested by the Secretary-General and based at Yale University, which is concentrating entirely on the future United Nations and will issue its report in June next year.

Then, too, as the UN reaches 50 the legacies of the age of empires, the consequences of neglecting centuries-accumulating economic, social, political and cultural forces, are exploding in more and more mass unrest, killings and organized conflict. The world has been making such huge peace-keeping and humanitarian demands of the UN, and so *visibly*, that governments have in any case no choice but to examine those capacities at least. I will come back to the peace and humanitarian questions later, and what positive factors for reform we may have going for us even there.

But what does such reform of the UN really require?

A public-service institution is the sum of the attitudes and behavioural patterns of its members; the suitability of its organisational architecture; and the quality and size of its civil service. Many of the improvements we need in the UN System are *restorative* and *corrective* – restoring elements deliberately weakened, and ending decades of violation of the Charter. These changes depend on basic changes in the attitudes and behaviour of some member-governments. But I would submit to you that this must not deter us from campaigning for re-organisation and managerial improvement until we *see* those behavioural patterns change; because the right structure and managerial quality of the institution can themselves act as catalysts for behavioural change. Moreover, if the UN's needed capacities are not in place, opponents of strengthening it will also argue (as they do now) that it could not assume such stronger roles in any case.

Nor should we be intimidated by thoughts that major reform may require constitutional change, Charter amendment. I do not myself

believe that governments are ready for much constitutional change at this time. But if we cease to allow a few bully-powers to intimidate all the rest of us we can use, for very significant improvement, the many elements in the Charter where *the rest of us* – not those powers – do *already* hold the decisive leverage.

Let me illustrate this totally obvious yet incredibly ignored point by beginning with the reforms that are needed in choosing the UN's executive leadership. I cannot over-emphasise this because it is central to all other reforms; you could make the most ideal reforms, and they can be nullified if our governments choose a poor Secretary-General. Guarding against this does not require Charter amendment.

It is true that the so-called Permanent Members of the Security Council can *veto* nominations for Secretary-General; but they cannot *impose* any candidate upon the world community. The Security Council *majority* has to recommend a candidate to the General Assembly, and the General Assembly's *majority* has to approve and in fact appoint the Secretary-General. Even if the whole Security Council is bullied, blackmailed and bribed into recommending some candidate of the powers, the General Assembly has the constitutional power to reject and tell the Council to go back to the drawing-boards.

But to date the General Assembly has never done this. And it is a disgraceful fact that the governors of a small university or charitable institution devote more serious time, energy, and even funds, to the search for a new head than do our governments for the Secretary-General of the United Nations. There is no organised search procedure whatsoever. The influence of the diplomatic 'old boy network' (and I do mean 'old boy') predominates. And with submissiveness to one or another kind of intimidation, we could again have 180 other governments merely waiting for a Vatican-like puff of smoke from 4 self-appointed cardinals closeted together (I say four because China is not really a part of this cabal; I should also mention that even Russia's participation in it is increasingly problematic).

But here is an important illustration of the real factors in UN reform that I have suggested. We do not have to wait for amendment of the Charter (which any of the 5 can also veto); we have the powers we need, because the Charter says nothing about the selection process, or by the way the term of office. The General Assembly can adopt new rules for a proper process of search, selection, and recommendation that it can accept – and it can adopt a much-needed single seven-year term of office – for the next Secretary-General.

Our governments in the General Assembly must make it clear that *they* will choose her; and they should make it crystal-clear to the Gang of Four that they will not make a new appointment if they are not satisfied. Our parliaments should express their views on the next term, and ask sharp questions of their executive governments. ‘We, the peoples’ must insist to our governments that we expect them to exercise their full constitutional responsibilities in this seriously, *on our behalf*.

Now let me locate this UN leadership factor, and the lessons it points to about the real possibilities of reform, on the *cause* part of the spectrum of world problems facing our United Nations. I will emphasise reforms in this area because if we do not now urgently tackle causes there will never be enough blue helmets to cope with the consequences.

When the Charter was being drafted the smaller and middle countries at San Francisco fought hard to make the UN not merely a ‘peace and order’ body but a world organisation also mandated to tackle the root economic and social causes of conflict; as the Charter says, ‘to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples ... (and of) conditions of stability and well-being which are necessary for peaceful and friendly relations among nations’.

The smaller countries insisted that the UN itself must be the commanding centrepiece where macro-monetary, macro-trade and macro-finance policy for ‘all peoples’ would be formulated in high-calibre commissions of the Economic and Social Council, serviced by outstanding intellectual capacities in the Secretariat. The General Assembly was to adopt and coordinate these macro policies, and the Council was to co-ordinate their implementation by the specialised agencies. These would include an International Monetary Fund as the emergent central bank of the world community, working closely with an International Trade Organisation to intervene equitably against either surplus or deficit countries, and to promote open but *fair* trade.

The founders placed such emphasis on keeping this new United Nations System together that they stipulated that the UN and the specialised agencies should be located together at a single headquarters.

Governments have done some marvellous things at the UN – our 70 Human Rights instruments, for example – but the wrecking of its originally much stronger architecture is shameful. Not one specialised-agency headquarters has been located at the UN. The United States smashed all hope of an equitable world trade system – the key to advancement of all peoples – by blocking the creation of the

International Trade Organisation. All we got instead was the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which should have been called the *Specific* Agreement to continue the Imperial Trading System. It has never covered trade vital to the poor countries. The instrument signed at the end of seven years of wrangling among the industrial minority was kindly given to the South for one weekend to consider on behalf of 77 per cent of humankind; and by the way even now only two-thirds of the states members of the UN are signatories.

The Northern industrial powers have also insisted that monetary and finance policy issues belong in the IMF and the World Bank, which they control and which they then make sure do not address such issues. The World Bank deals with debt only on a country-by-country basis, and so well that the total indebtedness of the developing countries has *increased* fourteen-fold since 1970, to some 1.4 trillion dollars. The IMF long ago gave up any pretence of acting as an equitable global agency. Under threat of denying developing countries credit-standing anywhere in the world it imposes its 'structural adjustment' policies on them, and only on them. Despite all the evidence, the governments that presently control the IMF have continued to endorse these policies. The rise of one or another kind of so-called 'fundamentalism', mass unrest, and often open conflict have quickly followed in every victim country, most recently in Senegal and Mexico; and we should not think for a moment that Rwanda has escaped this either.

Conservative media, however, regularly report that the G-7 deal with the 'the global economy' at their annual summits, and this has helped to keep decent Northern citizens quiet. It is more outright fiction. In the G-7 summit communiqués 'the global economy' is only the North-North economy – Japan, North America, and Europe; yes, powerful, but comprising only 23 per cent of humanity. So we have no discussion anywhere of macro-policies that could address the needs of 'all peoples' on an all-win basis.

The third key element in the dismantling of the original UN socio-economic design was to divert attention from North-South structural, macro-policy issues by the offer of development assistance, so-called 'aid'. As this diversionary strategy built up, in the 1960s the South tried to maintain a UN programme addressing the structural issues through UNCTAD – *trade* and development; but the powers largely ignored UNCTAD and have now eviscerated it. In the 1970s the South tabled all the structural issues together in the Programme of Action for a New International Economic Order; the powers scorned it. The 1980s were a totally lost 'decade for development'.

The economic consequences of those sabotaged majority efforts, and of the deliberate evisceration of much of the UN's economic and social mandate, are visible today as warning signals of massively more conflict to come, with every likelihood of it coalescing in a truly apocalyptic North-South confrontation.

UNDP calculates that the North's protectionist barriers against attempted Southern exports to the North, combined with manipulated interest rates and other imposed inequities, are depriving the countries of the South of at least 500 billion dollars that they could be earning every year. Thus, Northern refusal to address all-win structural solutions and the attempt to divert attention into development 'aid' is now preventing the South from earning nearly ten times all the North's development 'aid' to it. That is simply stupid, as well as dangerous.

In 1960 the richest one-fifth of humankind was earning thirty times the income of the poorest one-fifth; the richest one-fifth now earns sixty times what the poorest one-fifth of humankind can earn. The number of people barely surviving in absolute poverty has increased by 40 per cent in only the last 15 years, to some 1.4 billion. The present policies of the Northern powers guarantee that *soon, 1 in every 3 human beings alive on this planet will be only existing on the very margins of daily survival*. When such conditions existed in Europe there was bloody revolution, and masses of the poor marched on the centres of wealth and exploitation. The South Commission expressed this perfectly four years ago:

Were all humanity a single nation-state, the present North-South divide would make it an unviable, semi-feudal entity, split by internal conflicts. Its small part is advanced, prosperous, powerful; its much bigger part is underdeveloped, poor, powerless. A nation so divided within itself would be recognized as unstable. A world so divided should likewise be recognized as inherently unstable.

I come back to the inter-related function of the different types of reform, and the importance of leadership. In 1977 the Southern majority voted to establish a strong new UN Director-General for Development *and* International Economic Co-operation, to formulate macro-policy options for the Secretary-General to present to governments. But the resolution paid traditional obeisance to the Secretary-General and left him to specify the rank, lines of managerial responsibility, and staffing needs for this new post and office.

The Western powers disliked the new post, so Secretaries-General they had chosen for their timidity kept it hopelessly weak. Mr. Boutros-Ghali

has now abolished it. In this we can see neglect of both the opportunities for improvement short of constitutional change that I have mentioned. If we had *had* a courageous Secretary-General who understood the primacy of addressing root causes, we might have had the strong leadership on the *causes* of the conflicts that we so desperately needed ever since decolonisation. Equally, if governments had realised what powers they *do have*, and in that resolution had categorically stipulated the vital details for the post, even a weak Secretary-General could not have ignored them.

We must now demand the restoration of the UN's Chartered mandates to be the centrepiece for genuinely global, democratically formulated macro-economic strategies – all-win strategies, for 'all the peoples'. We must demand a carefully selected set of specific reforms to support this restored mandate.

Let me summarise some key ones.

Nearly fifty years have proven the wisdom of the founders in stipulating a common headquarters location for the UN and the Agencies; it should be considered for the next fifty years, enabling each member-government to have a single integrated, multi-disciplinary Permanent Mission to the United Nations *System*, instead of the present separate and widely scattered Ambassadors to the UN, to FAO in Rome, UNESCO in Paris, and so on.

To ensure that the UN can now act as that catalyst of change in the attitude and behaviour of governments that I emphasise, we must get a reorganisation of the Secretariat with four Deputy Secretaries-General. One should be for International Economic Co-operation, with top-calibre staff, a joint staff of the UN and specialised agencies. This Deputy Secretary-General should also be responsible for a single UN Development Authority which will consolidate the scattered UN funds. The staff and functions of UN development co-operation activities, and the governance of country and regional programmes, should be decentralised from their hopelessly remote New York headquarters into each region, around fully re-organised UN Regional Commissions.

It is also immensely important that in 1992 the Southern majority quickly demanded that the 'Agenda for Peace' report be complemented by 'An Agenda for Development'. In the huge vacuum of UN leadership in strategic, truly global socio-economic problems created by the manoeuvres of the Northern powers the world organisation is in distinct danger of being converted into little more than a peace-keeping and relief agency – and one kept ineffective even in this if we don't watch out. General Assembly President Insanally is going to

hold unprecedented public hearings on this second Agenda in June. I believe you will see the South insisting that this Agenda be strongly structural; indeed, I wish they called it what is needed: An Agenda for Economic Equity and Development, in that order.

Let me now move along the spectrum a bit, to other causes of present and future conflicts.

Media and others are becoming too quick to use words like ‘ethnic’ and ‘tribal’ and ‘fundamentalist’ to explain current upheavals, without seeing and describing the hand of abject poverty and frustration, the devastations of the IMF, and Northern powers in their hidden roles as weapons merchants. But it is beyond doubt that history is also now making long-delayed political claims.

For centuries under colonialism all indigenous evolution of political institutions and social relationships among kinship and religious groups was frozen in a new, exogenous conceptual framework, the European post-Westphalian nation-state. The powers further imposed wholly artificial frontiers among a majority of humankind; it can never be said often enough that most of the frontiers that are now automatically sacrosanct under the UN Charter are wholly exogenous and artificial, lines simply drawn by Europeans without any consultation with the people on either side of them.

Decolonisation did not release all these peoples to find their own forms of governance and neighbour relationships. The colonially imposed frontiers had to be accepted. The Cold War then largely continued to freeze political evolution, with a further external addition in the form of the dictatorships which were installed, financed, and armed by Northern intelligence agencies – mostly Western. Only in the last few years, with the evaporation of at least the Cold War as we had known it, have all these long-pent-up historical forces been unleashed – and now with the armaments of the Cold War contestants strewn across the world. Somalia is a poignant kind of set-piece warning example of all of this. History is indeed making its overdue, tragically long-neglected claims.

The nation-state model, is of course also showing signs of obsolescence in its source-lands. Indeed, surrounding this entire minefield of explosive problems is one universal phenomenon – that for 300 years all political minds, everywhere, have been completely wrapped in the intellectual cocoon of the nation-state. There has been virtually no thought, anywhere, of any other models of governance, social cohesion, and representation.

The United Nations has been very good at making widely common problems respectable to discuss. I am convinced that we need a new kind of body in the UN where this can happen – and *not* the Security Council. I am therefore urging the conversion of the scarcely used Trusteeship Council into the United Nations Council on Diversity, Representation and Governance – *not* to adumbrate new universal models, but on the contrary as the world’s open forum on this crucial set of problems. It would, of course, require Charter amendment. I will be happy to explain it further if anyone wishes.

Now let me quickly move along the spectrum to what we witness all around us today in the consequences of neglected causes, and first, in the UN’s humanitarian relief machinery.

If you were to put together a representative group of good minds among the UN’s member-governments, and task them to recommend the machinery the UN should have to respond effectively to the vast humanitarian emergencies now erupting everywhere, they would have to have been drinking alcohol continuously for a week at least to contrive the jungle of separate UN agencies that governments have in fact created in this field. This has not been done in malevolence, simply in a long disconnected sequence of fits and starts (and sometimes of what I call ‘avoidance proliferation’, where for example governments know that a new function should be assigned to an existing organisation, but do not ‘like’ it because they installed the wrong executive head in it, so they just create another organisation altogether). It is time to stop the footless tinkering and consolidate all these emergency functions. The World Food Programme’s excellent emergency people should form the logistics core staff of a proper operations branch of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and WFP should be dissolved; UNHCR should be relieved of running truck convoys and be restored to its mandated responsibilities for legal protection, for now over 40 million displaced persons (1 in 135 of all of us); UNICEF’s emergency work should also be taken over by the DHA.

I believe it is absolutely essential that, to the maximum extent possible, we keep the necessary *protection* of humanitarian response by the UN and the NGOs *separate* from UN *military* operations to restore or keep the peace. Again and again we see that the delay in mounting military operations to protect humanitarian work allows a crisis to escalate to the point where both humanitarian protection and the restoration of peace have to be undertaken, with dangerous confusion and the loss of countless civilian lives. We need a distinct, separate, United Nations Human Security Police, of specially trained volunteer women and men

on continuous standby in their countries, quickly sent in to protect humanitarian operations, with rules of graduated engagement and arms. The combatants would be formally and very clearly warned that if these UN Police are prevented from carrying out their tasks, then military intervention may follow.

I come now to the extreme end of the spectrum, with the threat of armed conflict which the international community has to judge intolerable, and when UN military intervention is needed, and thus to the future of the Security Council.

It is marvellous to see how the ‘Agenda for Peace’, which the powers had hoped to keep tightly under their control in the Security Council is now out of their control, because the South moved with alacrity to make sure it was submitted to the General Assembly. We now have an open-ended working group of the Assembly provided with every member-government’s views on the size and composition of the Security Council, the question of permanent membership and the veto, and the Council’s working relations with the Assembly. And it is also marvellous that NGOs, spearheaded by the feisty Student and Youth Movement for the United Nations, ISMUN, are now demanding that the Assembly working group receive the views of the public.

And although often brutalised into acquiescence by the powers’ use of economic extortion and bribery at the UN, the Southern majority are showing considerable courage. The smaller and middle-level governments of the North, which don’t have to fear such state-terrorism but which nonetheless have been sunk in submissive inertia, have taken some of this Southern courage.

A factor of enormous importance if we will but realise and use it is that for the first time since the founding of the UN the major Northern powers stand revealed as the emperors without clothes which they really always have been except in ability to incinerate all of us and to protract the imperial economic system. Russia has had its post-communist economy virtually wrecked by the hectoring missionaries from Western temples of the most dangerous fundamentalist religion in our world – that which worships the magic of the unregulated marketplace. The United States, which has discharged its unique privileges as Host to our United Nations by nearly bankrupting it, is now clearly demonstrating that it hasn’t a clue how to be, and is openly saying that it cannot afford to be, the world’s policeman. And Britain and France are half-submerged in a European Union whose collective diplomatic incompetence has also been tragically evident, especially in former Yugoslavia.

The era of constant brainwashing of the rest of us into inert submissiveness to the claimed superiority of so-called ‘great powers’ is over – and this is nothing but healthy. We need them, of course, but we need them as partners of size, with the same respect due all member-countries, but not more.

First and above all, we must restore to the working of the Security Council the Charter’s *sequence*, which is Chapter VI – peaceful redress – *first*, and invoked *early* through proper contingency analysis and early warning, use of Fact-Finding Missions, and worked and worked and worked again; with Chapter VII, enforcement, used as it was supposed to be used, only a last resort, in sadness over failure of peaceful redress. The powers so successfully leapfrogged over Chapter VI in the Gulf Crisis and then Massacre that the world was given a dangerously wrong perception of how the UN is supposed to maintain peace and security.

For those situations where we have to move to Chapter VII, we must achieve three things: rapidity of action; no governments separately intervening once the UN is engaged; and assurance of funding. I myself support Sir Brian Urquhart’s call for a small, expert and highly-equipped standing UN rapid-response force, under transparent and sole United Nations command. We plainly need ground rules that will include a standing undertaking that, once the UN is seized of a crisis, there will not be the kind of separate diplomatic intervention we have so often seen, with such chaos, in former Yugoslavia. And we must reduce the UN’s financial dependence on the major powers, above all the United States, by putting a ceiling on the percentage any one state can contribute to both the regular and the peace-keeping budget. We should get a sharp increase in the standby peacekeeping contingency fund at the instant disposal of the Secretary-General, by contributions from the defence budgets of member-states. And we should drive hard for the introduction of additional, alternative financing by a selected form of automaticity.

Next: in Security Council reform we must not be lured into a new round of devices to coddle those who are afflicted with superiority complexes by adding yet more single-state permanencies, with or without veto powers. We must now, and resolutely, insist on an end to all single-state permanency on the Council. We should demand a new, entirely elected Council built largely around regional representation. However, to give the self-claimed ‘greats’ a reasonable time to get over their complexes the formula should allow for what will in effect mean the *election* to the Council of most of them in rotation; but not by singling them out as having some special privilege, simply by making enough seats available.

We must, equally, demand an end here and now to *all* veto powers. The Council should reach decisions by a graduated system of voting in majorities, up to consensus requirements according to the nature and the size of the proposed action. Consensus on severe action will mean that all members will, in effect, have a veto. I do not think we shall get the foregoing, or any other set of Charter-amending reforms of the Security Council, neatly next year. But we should strenuously resist any attempt to cook up some sort of consensus within the status quo merely for cosmetic anniversary appearances. It were far better to leave things as they are, with reality unravelling the egos of elites and enabling them to discover how to work with the ordinary rest of us. In conclusion, and for *all* aspects of reform of the United Nations, the single most important requirement is an end to the Orwellian atmosphere of submissiveness, the slave-like reiteration that ‘nothing is possible without the Permanent Five’, uttered almost like an incantation about deities. It has been downright bad for egos that have been swelling ever since the 15th century; it has been nearly disastrous for an institution that belongs to all of us.

Perhaps the single most powerful antidote to this nonsense would be the addition as a Principal Organ of a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly, the voices of ‘We, the Peoples’ alongside the representatives of executive government. I congratulate the World Federalists for their powerful role in advancing this vital reform in which I have believed ever since I read Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin’s call for it even while the British House of Commons was debating the new Charter in 1945.

And we must overcome the poisonous lack of trust. Every caring citizen in the North must realise that, year after year after year, the behaviour of the powers – usually with the shameful acquiescence of other Northern countries – has given the majority every ground for believing that the minority wish to keep effective total control of the world organisation. We will not get good reform – for example, it is quite pointless to talk of reforming the voting system – unless and until that quality of mutual trust and respect among nations large and small upon which the whole edifice is premised has been restored. The 50th Anniversary is most certainly an historic moment, a day to be seized by the smaller and middle countries of the world to take back our United Nations, democratise it, and re-invigorate it for its real, desperately needed work.

It is very, very late, in a world that is spinning towards chaos and gigantic conflagration.

Let us get on with it.



Commentary by William R. Pace

In conclusion, and for all aspects of reform of the United Nations, the single most important requirement is an end to the Orwellian atmosphere of submissiveness, the slave-like reiteration that ‘nothing is possible without the Permanent Five’, uttered almost like an incantation about deities. It has been downright bad for the egos that have been swelling ever since the 15th century; it has been nearly disastrous for an institution that belongs to all of us. Perhaps the single most powerful antidote to this nonsense would be the addition as a Principal Organ of a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly, the voices of ‘We, the Peoples’ alongside the representatives of executive government.

(Childers, ‘Seizing the Day for the United Nations Reform’: 9)

In his wonderful speech ‘Seizing the Day for United Nations Reform’ to the World Federalists of Canada in May 1994, Erskine Childers reminded his audience of his great love for, and torment over, the United Nations as the world moved towards a new century. The depth and breadth of the issues he covered in a 30 minute address are staggering. In addition to the two main issues in the epigraph above, he:

- called on the General Assembly to implement significant reform in the selection of the Secretary-General;
- reiterated his decades-long fight against the ‘dismantling of the original UN socio-economic design’ and mandates and lamented the suppression of structural, macroeconomic policy debate in ECOSOC and the General Assembly;
- called for the conversion of the Trusteeship Council into a Council on Diversity, Representation and Governance;
- proposed major reform of the UN’s humanitarian relief machinery;
- addressed Chapter VII intervention and the need for a UN rapid-response force for peacekeeping and for the protection of humanitarian workers;
- critiqued developments at the end of the Cold War, including: ‘Russia has had its post-communist economy virtually wrecked by the hectoring missionaries from Western temples of the most dangerous fundamentalist religion in our world – that which worships the magic of the unregulated marketplace’;
- called on the Security Council to restore the Charter’s sequence in the maintenance of international peace – that is, first Chapter VI measures and only rarely Chapter VII, but with major improvements;

- supported the expansion and reform of the Security Council, but with no more permanent seats and with the veto ended; and
- many, many more.

I am honoured to contribute to this number of *Development Dialogue* in honour of Erskine B. Childers. I have admired the *Development Dialogues* series for many years. Indeed, in *Development Dialogue*, No. 1, issued in the same month as this Canadian address, and in others, Erskine and Brian Urquhart submitted excellent proposals for reforms to the UN system (Erskine and Urquhart 1994: 1).¹ I look forward to reading the commentaries of the other more qualified experts who are contributing to this edition. But, as Erskine notes in his Victoria address, the NGO I have served as international general secretary for 16 years, the World Federalist Movement, has been dedicated to serious UN reform since 1947.

This article has been a bittersweet assignment. Too many good and sad memories are stirred. Among the strongest is sadness over Erskine's death. I was probably one of the very few who was excited at his effort to reform or convert the World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA) into a forceful 'people's movement for a more democratic UN'. He was only in the first months of a struggle that would require years of effort. Reforming and redirecting an international NGO – or in today's parlance, a global civil society campaign – is very, very difficult. Taking on this goal demonstrated a political side to Erskine that many of his closest colleagues did not understand.² It was a reflection of the fact that, unlike most intellectuals and elites, Erskine actually believed in what he said about the need to harness the power of 'We the Peoples' for achieving fundamental reform of the Charter and UN. It also demonstrated his belief that youth movements could be the vanguard.³ As one who believes that we need political organisers much more than theoreticians in our pursuit of international democracy, I had looked forward with great enthusiasm to working with Erskine.

It would require a book to comment on all the issues Erskine raised in his address, so I will discuss only a few. But first, I would like to address three aspects of the political framework for achieving important and democratic reform of the UN and the Charter.

1 See also Urquhart and Childers (1990) and the second edition, *A Fresh Appraisal*, issued in 1996.

2 I believe, for example, Sir Brian was very doubtful about this effort by Erskine.

3 As I write this paper, youth in countries throughout North Africa and the Middle East are demonstrating, I believe, this exact point!

First, in his address in Canada, and in *Development Dialogue*, No. 1, ‘Renewing the UN System’, Childers and Urquhart began with two assumptions. One was that ‘what will ultimately be needed – major constitutional transformation [of the UN system] is not attainable now’ (Childers and Urquhart 1994: 8). Second, therefore, most of their proposals are for incremental, step-by-step reforms that could prepare the way for major ones. Almost all high-level UN reform initiatives and reports in the last three decades open with these political assumptions.

This point of departure is unfortunate for several reasons. In the first place, for most of these studies or commission reports, it is not true. Most include recommendations that *would* require major UN Charter reforms or amendments. For example, the Commission on Global Governance report *Our Global Neighbourhood* proposed converting ECOSOC into an Economic Security Council, transforming the Trusteeship Council into a Council of the Global Commons and a host of other crucial proposals. The transformative proposals in these reports allowed or even propelled governments to quickly not so much dismiss as ignore them. This was true, I believe, of the *Dialogue* and other studies, and many other commission initiatives. My argument is that the authors of these reform commissions and reports often undermined their own proposals by making the ‘incremental’ argument, especially when the authors or studies proceeded to make major reform proposals.

Further, as Einstein⁴ once observed, the problem with the step-by-step approach to fundamental reform is that the step-by-step forces protecting the ‘status quo’ are much stronger and proceed much faster.⁵

A key issue here is whether the small, incremental steps actually prepare the way for the needed ‘constitutional transformation’, or are indeed easier to achieve? Or is important reform progress achieved in larger steps, often in response or reaction to crises or ‘tipping points’. I believe the high-level UN reform initiatives would have been much more effective in acknowledging that the international community needs *both* constitutional and non-constitutional changes.⁶

4 Einstein’s struggle over 40 years with the issues of controlling war, having a League or UN that could work, and international democracy have had the most profound influence on my thinking.

5 Einstein, to be accurate, was discussing the issue of disarmament, but it was a view he applied more generally later in life.

6 My organisation, the World Federalist Movement, is just one of many that for decades have been marginalised and accused of being ‘utopian’ by elite establishment researchers and initiatives for recognising in their founding mandates the need for fundamental constitutional or Charter transformations.

Second, a key constructive criticism of Erskine's address and of high-level UN reform commissions generally, is the almost complete concentration on *what* reforms are needed, and too little on *how* to achieve the reforms. When one considers, for example, the incredible assemblage of leaders in the Commission on Global Governance, it is astounding how ineffective they were and how rapidly the report disappeared into oblivion (Commission for Global Governance 1995: 359ff).⁷ I will return to the all-important issue of *how* later.

The third observation challenges one of the most prevalent 'conventional wisdom' myths at the UN. I believe the most fertile and effective of all forums for achieving major reform of the UN and the international legal order is...the UN General Assembly, the most universal and universally maligned of the principal organs. In my experience, the General Assembly has been, by far, the forum with the greatest potential for reform.⁸ I come back to this point throughout my commentary, but it is significant that the General Assembly would be the main forum that would need to adopt or propel most of the reforms Erskine calls for in his speech.

In preparing this essay, I was inspired to reread Einstein's 'Open Letter to the UN General Assembly' from 1947 and the extraordinary exchange with Russian scientists that followed (Nathan and Norden 1960: 440-55). I was struck by the similarities in this historic debate – reported widely at the time and monitored closely at the General Assembly – to the points Erskine made in 1994. Most of the key issues raised by Erskine were already there in 1947 at the second meeting of the UN General Assembly! In 2010-11 we are in the 65th General Assembly.

There is another major distinction in context between these two outstanding UN reform thinkers that is very important. Erskine, I believe, saw poverty and economic inequity as key root-cause of human misery – thus he argues that the priority of UN reform should be the achievement of structural, macroeconomic reforms. For Einstein, *peace* reforms were paramount – preventing the Third World War. For Einstein, Bertrand Russell and me and most great persons concerned with peace in the UN's first decade, the key test was whether the UN could subdue war, prevent the Third World War, prevent an atomic weapons war that would likely destroy all or most of human civilisation (Russell-Einstein 1955).

7 One almost falls off one's chair considering the annex describing the members, papers and consultations involved.

8 ECOSOC, too, is universally maligned, but has produced indispensable treaties and bodies of great importance in the international legal order.

After experiencing two world wars within 30 years, the issue of the survival of civilisation and humankind was paramount. Most believed that ‘outlawing war’ or achieving an unprecedented mechanism of international disarmament was the most important challenge facing humanity. I believe Einstein, Russell and the others would be flat-out amazed that we have made it to 2011 without a nuclear war. Even with this astounding development, Einstein and Russell would be shocked and concerned that we have become so blasé about nuclear war. Despite other enormous dangers, such as climate change and global warming, they would be correct.⁹

My own peace movement was split into many factions at our founding in August 1947 over the same issues being discussed here (Baratta 2004). Should the UN concentrate on peace or development? Or both? In what order or priority? Should political and economic unification (what we currently call ‘global governance’) occur at the regional or global levels first? (see Nathan and Norden 1960: 441–3).

One further contextual issue follows this consideration – the issues of national democracy and international democracy. Simply stated, Einstein, Russell and others believed that the world community had only one or two decades in which to prevent the Third World War, and this trumped all else. Using the benchmarks widely accepted today by such groups as Freedom House in Washington DC, in 1945 there were very, very few governments that would qualify as democracies. Democracy – national, regional, global – would have to wait.

What is interesting, however, is that Einstein in his famous letter to the General Assembly concentrated on reform of that body, as Erskine did five decades later, including the crucial need for it to be more democratic. Briefly, Einstein proposed that the UN General Assembly be given power and authority equal to that of UN Security Council; he called for the representatives to be ultimately directly elected rather than representing the executive branches of governments; and he argued that the General Assembly, which initially met only a few weeks annually, should stay in session all year. Essentially, he argued that until the General Assembly had the democratic power to legislate and enforce law, it could not properly address the threat of the Third World War.

Thus, the argument that democratic global governance could be pursued from both the ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ has existed since 1947. This political point is rarely acknowledged.

9 It is significant that one of the most alarmed groups today is the former US secretaries of state and of defence George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger and Sam Nunn (*Wall Street Journal* 2011).

As I was preparing this commentary in late 2010, an important, high-level General Assembly gathering was convened by major US NGOs and donors (Connect US Fund, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Ford Foundation, Ploughshares Fund and UN Foundation). The programme addressed three topics: climate change, non-proliferation and human rights.

Before the current Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, spoke, one of the most eminent speakers, Louise Arbour, raised in her talk the need for a second, more democratic assembly at the UN. Here was a world leader who had been prosecutor in the International Criminal Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, High Commissioner for Human Rights and was now President of the International Crisis Group coming to the same constitutional conclusion, 16 years after Erskine's address and 63 years since Einstein's letter to the General Assembly!

There are scores of important initiatives and books promoting the establishment of a second, peoples, or UN parliamentary assembly. The most successful is the current Campaign for a UN Parliamentary Assembly (Bummel 2005; Mendlovitz and Walker 2003).¹⁰ The General Assembly has extended special status to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). But, it would be an exaggeration to claim there is strong political leadership in favour of this 'most powerful antidote'.

One last note on the UN. Strategic political support for this initiative will not likely be found in national capitals, and definitely not at UN headquarters, which is the province of the executive branches of governments. The primary political support for a parliamentary assembly, aside from its civil society advocates, will likely come from a relatively new political species – the parliamentarians of regional and sub-regional international organisations.

I want now to comment briefly on several other of the very important issues raised by Erskine in Victoria in 1994.

Choosing the UN's executive leadership

One of his first proposals was for change in the selection procedures for the UN Secretary-General. Here we are 16 years later and the issue is as relevant as ever. Two years after Erskine's speech, Boutros-Ghali was re-nominated for the post by a vote in the Security Council of 14 yes, 1 no – therefore he *lost*. The US government vetoed his re-nomination essentially because he was not lackey enough. The stories about Kofi

¹⁰ The campaign for UN Parliamentary Assembly websites of the World Federalist Movement and the Committee for a Democratic UN (KDUN) have proposals by Falk, Strauss and Soros.

Annan's election (Boutros-Ghali 1999: 317–18) in December 1996 and Ban Ki-moon's in 2006 only reinforce the validity of Erskine's proposal that the General Assembly adopt new rules for the search and selection of the Secretary-General.

A number of international organisations – the World Health Organisation, World Trade Organisation, International Atomic Energy Authority, etc. – have significantly improved the process for selecting their CEOs and top managers. The UN still suffers from the practice and culture of crass political appointment of its top leaders. The five permanent members and major donor governments believe they are *entitled* to the top positions and often put forward poorly qualified individuals who do not care about the job and are also terrible managers. As websites such as ReformtheUN.org; UNElections.org; International Democratic Governance make clear, the sooner the General Assembly is pressured into changing these rules the better. A major step could be the General Assembly's asking the Security Council to send three names for consideration. As Erskine stated, the General Assembly has the power to marginalise the veto and the cult of entitlement and exceptionalism if only it would.

Dismantling the original UN socioeconomic design and mandates

Tragically, 16 years later the situation on these important reforms so dear to Erskine is much worse than in 1994. There was a brief hope in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial recession that the UN General Assembly could take a new leadership role, but this was squandered by the inept leadership of the president of the General Assembly and his supporters. The major powers are instead creating a G20 to replace the G8. And donor governments are attempting to bury the G77 by pitting the Least Developed Countries against the developing countries (Swart and Lund 2010).¹¹

UN headquarters as the location of the headquarters of specialised agencies

This long-lost political goal has retreated further. One might imagine that only if the increasingly self-destructive and reactionary US Congress decides to expel or propel the UN from the US, and the world community relocates and fundamentally strengthens the UN headquarters in the process, would Erskine's hope for this centralised global governance capital be achieved.

¹¹ See also the websites of Global Policy Forum and Center for Concern.

Conversion of the Trusteeship Council into a Council on Diversity, Representation and Governance

Erskine's Trusteeship Council proposal – reforming the Charter and setting up the new principal organ – could be very good, but very hard and long.¹² The disaster of the imposition of borders and Westphalian nation-state structures he describes is absolutely true, but renegotiating these could be almost impossible politically. How would the new council resolve the centuries of fractured governance and tribal borders in Nigeria, Uganda, Sudan and scores of states throughout the world?¹³

Is not the route of regional and sub-regional political and economic unification not more hopeful? And one in which autonomy and diversity could be 'integrated'? Indeed, would not a more regional approach to a new kind of trusteeship as envisioned by Erskine perhaps not be a better strategy?

Major reform of UN humanitarian relief machinery

One can only treasure the following description by Erskine:

If you were to put together a representative group of good minds among the UN's member-governments, and task them to recommend the machinery the UN should have to respond effectively to the vast humanitarian emergencies now erupting everywhere, they would have to have been drinking alcohol continuously for a week at least to contrive the jungle of separate UN agencies that governments have in fact created in this field.

His explanation of how this occurred is irrefutable and deserves to be publicised.

In his address, Erskine stated how important it is to separate the protection of the UN's humanitarian response – the UN and NGOs – from the UN's military peacekeeping operations. He called for a UN security force for the single purpose of protecting humanitarian operations. In the last 15 years, hundreds of thousands of civilians in UN peacekeeping countries, especially women, would have avoided rape and other abuses if this proposal had been achieved.

¹² In addition to Erskine's proposal, the Commission on Global Governance, Maurice Strong and others proposed a variety of new roles for the Trusteeship Council, each arguably competing or detracting from the others.

¹³ It is surprising that Erskine did not mention the Rwanda genocide, occurring at the time of this speech.

Chapter VII intervention need for UN rapid-response force

Erskine endorsed the establishment of a standing, UN rapid-response force. Again, important research and work has since been conducted on this proposal (Langille 2002; World Federalist Movement/Institute for Global Policy 2006). I helped chair the development of an important World Federalist Movement book on creating a UN Emergency Peace Service (UNEPS), the first occasion a large number of civil society organisations worked together on key elements for a standing UN peace force. However, there is at present very little government endorsement of this idea.

Security Council reform, ending the veto and permanent membership

As he mentions in his address, the General Assembly took Boutros-Ghali's agendas and created working groups on the reform of the Security Council and the General Assembly, work that continues to this day. Erskine, I fear, would be depressed at the status of the debate. Germany, Japan, Brazil, India, South Africa and others are demanding *more* permanent seats and vetoes. These governments are actually preventing reform of the Security Council's dysfunctional working methods until they secure the expansion most believe they will never achieve.

Since 1994, however, the development of stronger regional alliances and international organisations (like the African Union and Union of South American Nations – UNASUR) and also sub-regional organisations (like the Economic Community of West African States) in the area of maintaining international peace is significantly changing the geopolitical environment.

Restoring the Charter's sequence in the maintenance of international peace

It is my wish that Erskine would find hope in the development since the late 1990s of more effective sanctions processes by the Security Council; in the establishment of the Human Rights Council (General Assembly); and in the creation of the Peacebuilding Commission. Many organisations believe one of the most important achievements was the 2005 General Assembly summit endorsement of a new norm – the Responsibility to Protect. We hope this new norm will severely curtail the ability of governments to hide behind the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs in order to allow or perpetrate crimes against humanity on their own populations. Developing country ambassadors

were successful in framing the new norm in ways that re-enforce prevention and the Chapter VI and VII sequence in the maintenance of international peace (ICRtoP – the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect – ResponsibilitytoProtect.org; *passim*).

HOW vs. WHAT

I come back to the all-important issue of *how* to achieve major UN reform. As noted above, it has been intellectually inconsistent and counterproductive to state such reforms are not possible and that the international community should concentrate only on small achievable steps. Not only have eminent commissions often violated their caveat, they have also undermined their own effectiveness as well as a main constituency they need – peace and justice and international democracy movements, ‘We the Peoples’ movements.

When one reviews the elite UN reform commissions, such as on the Commission on Global Governance, it is astounding how ineffective most have been. Let me mention some extraordinary exceptions.

First, there is ample evidence that the most successful model for achieving global governance reform was the Brundtland Commission – Our Common Future – and the subsequent ‘Earth Summit’ process, which encompassed and ignited one of the most progressive treaty and normative world conference processes ever. Climate, bio-diversity, desertification treaties were achieved. The preparatory commissions, treaties, Agenda 21 formulation, and the Rio Summit entailed the largest ever participation by global civil society in international and intergovernmental negotiations.

Indeed, the world conference process of the 1990s – the UN Conference on Environment and Development, human rights, social development, Beijing women’s – was historic, progressive and driven by the General Assembly. Many powerful governments, and almost all the foreign, military and intelligence policy elites were in shock over the way the majority of small and middle-power and democratic nations were exercising political and legislative power in the post-Cold War UN.

The most effective strategy has the following elements. First, ideally secure a General Assembly resolution creating a major commission; produce the major report; establish a multi-year, multi-pronged preparatory commission and summit process to negotiate international laws, treaties, institutions to implement the recommendations of the General Assembly commission

Second. A few weeks after Erskine's speech in Canada, the International Law Commission of the General Assembly, considered a certain burial ground for good ideas, issued the Draft Statute for an International Criminal Court (ICC). The document, little more than a proposal for a permanent 'ad hoc' tribunal for the Security Council, evolved into one of the most extraordinary advances ever in international law, including a new, independent, supranational world court and a new system of international criminal justice. Virtually every 'expert' predicted the treaty process would never succeed, or would take decades.

When the treaty was concluded in only *one* five-week conference three and half years after the General Assembly began ICC meetings, experts then predicted it would take at least 20 years to secure ratification of the Rome Statute by 60 states. Three years and eight months later, in April 2002, the General Assembly convened a special session at which 11 governments deposited their instruments of ratification at the same time, bringing the ICC treaty into force on 1 July 2002. Major powers like the US, China, India and almost all the dictatorships opposed the new treaty and the new international system of justice it creates.

The Bush administration was so upset that in June 2002 it began vetoing the renewal of peacekeeping operations until the Security Council adopted an illegal anti-ICC treaty resolution (to this day I find it incredible the General Assembly did not censure the US government for this outrageous, illegal use of the veto). Fortunately, the terrible Security Council resolution adopted was based on the strategically conceived anti-veto provisions of the Rome Statute, and required positive renewal every year (Coalition for the International Criminal Court 2004). After the scenes of torture by US troops of Iraqi prisoners were released worldwide, the renewal of the resolution was defeated two years later.¹⁴

Thus, major reforms – global governance – can be achieved even when the five permanent members and other powerful governments, like India, Pakistan, Egypt, Sudan, Iraq and others were opposed.

For the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (negotiated inside the UN General Assembly) and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (outside the UN), a crucial political strategy was

¹⁴ In March of 2011, the Security Council *unanimously* approved a resolution referring the crimes being committed in Libya to the ICC. Perhaps this move is hypocritical, but it is nevertheless a continuation of the Security Council's use of international justice instead of armed force against a vicious dictator accused of committing crimes against humanity.

developed. We, civil society, organised a global NGO campaign linking partners from the South and the North and many sectors. Next, we worked for years to create a parallel group of like-minded governments from the North and South to work together and to adopt the same principles as the civil society campaign. By creating such a multi-region ‘like-minded group of governments’, we were able to largely neutralise the traditional government groupings – the G77, European Union, Non-Aligned Movement, permanent members of the Security Council, the US, regional blocs, etc. These groupings, central in the vast majority of UN negotiations, are thus prevented by the members of the like-minded group of governments from adopting resolutions opposing the goal, but can only adopt strategies endorsing the treaty.

What, in retrospect, happened with the ICC and landmine treaties was the development of a ‘new diplomacy’, coalitions of small and middle-power democracies running over the big powers and dictatorships.

Unfortunately by 2000, the US, UK, Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Egypt and others, reeling in horror at the new politics, shut the process down. Sadly, they convinced most middle-power governments and NGOs to go along with ending the world conference and so-called ‘Plus 5’ review processes. Ten years and several summits later, the world conference process of the 1990s is almost completely dormant.

Two last comments on the two major reform process models just described:

A key principle in both has been the demand for substance over consensus. It was important for the like-minded group of governments to insist on a treaty or new international organisation that could actually work and achieve its goals, rather than agree to lowest-common denominator provisions that could achieve consensus. If reactionary governments threatened to wreck the treaty by misuse of consensus, go to a vote or create an independent treaty body.

The General Assembly’s Brundtland-ICC models have, I believe, the greatest strategic potential for transformative amendment of the international legal order – that is, of helping transform the ‘second generation’ UN into the ‘third generation’ UN by surrounding war with the just rule of law and achieving democratic global governance.

They represent the political approaches I believe are the most strategic in achieving the reforms Erskine so eloquently called for in Canada in May 1994. Democracy is still breaking out around the world. I

have just returned from Tunisia where the citizens waged a non-violent revolution, expelling a terrible dictatorial regime. Dictators, monarchs, autocratic governments throughout the world – including their financial and military supporters – are reeling in anxiety.

Strategic partnerships between global civil society and coalitions of small and middle-power democracies are the key to achieving democratic global governance.

The global governance visions of leaders like Erskine Childers offer humanity crucial reflections and guidance. I hope this publication will awaken many to the extraordinary political and humanitarian wisdom of Erskine Childers. If we can find the political strategies to implement these proposals, perhaps we can avoid the horrors of the 20th century, the bloodiest, most violent and war-ridden in all recorded history.

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The financial arrangement of the United Nations

An assessment



Remarks by Erskine Childers at
The Conference on
*Finance for Development and Peace:
The Future of the United Nations System*

The Tinbergen Institute, Rotterdam, 29 September, 1995

The issues we face in this conference are by no means only technical. The financing of the United Nations System involves cultural, legal, political, and economic factors, and running through of all these are complex influences of information, *disinformation*, and resultant perception. As I hope I can illustrate in the course of these remarks we are, then, involved in a ‘sociology’ of financing the UN, at two dimensions – financing the core activities of the United Nations System, and mobilising the vastly larger finances needed to enable the UN to lead in building a peaceable and just world community.

I will speak to the main problems of core financing, and I will speak frankly, as a private citizen of the United Nations who believes that Europe’s soft-spoken deference to so-called major powers, one in particular, is a whole part of our financing problems. The time is long past for polite talk; and the calculations we need to make are not merely intriguing academic problems or flights of imagination. Our United Nations is under an active threat of slow extinction, and the world community is in turn under active threat of escalating convulsion. I hope this conference will proceed in an atmosphere of impatience, even anger, and a determination to demand that our governments properly assume their responsibilities.

By the core financing of the System I mean the financing of the United Nations itself, and of the main Specialized Agencies (like UNESCO, FAO, ILO, WHO, UNIDO) by the mechanism of assessed dues levied on each member-state. The first and underlying need here is full and accurate perception of two outrageous absurdities.

The first absurdity is the prevailing perception of size; the charge flung about the Northern world that the UN System’s budgets are huge,

extravagant drains on our countries' treasuries. The impact of this propaganda can be illustrated through a true anecdote. When the eminent international financiers convened by the Secretary-General to review UN financing problems first met in late 1992 under the co-chairing of Shijuro Ogata and Paul Volcker, they expressed bewilderment about the data prepared for them on UN budgets. Were there not misprints in the tables? When they were assured that the figures were accurate they expressed astonishment: had they really been asked to look at the problems of mobilising such very small annual sums? Even such eminent financiers, with access to the best information, had believed the propaganda.

A major feature of this problem is deliberate disinformation facilitated by lazy journalism. The UN's budget figures are open matters of public record. The UN's presentation of the figures can be improved, but any serious and honest enquirer can work with them. However, right-wing politicians and foundations, and other groups intent on crippling the UN have for decades grossly misrepresented the real size of the finances of the UN. And Northern media editors who have an ingrained dislike of all bureaucracies and a worship of the major powers have readily accepted every epithet offered them about this. And as a result, not only have some of the world's most eminent financiers been successfully disinformed, but ordinary citizens are made confused and apathetic by the propaganda, and many parliamentarians are hesitant to get involved. Meanwhile, the UN sinks closer and closer to outright bankruptcy. There was serious official discussion even two weeks ago in New York about the possibility of having to cancel the 50th Anniversary celebrations.

Let me re-state this first gross absurdity. Our only universal public-service organisation is confronted with a huge range of needs across the world, which the vast majority of its member-citizens want, and depend on it to tackle. The Northern industrial powers have not allowed the UN to tackle the root causes of conflict and upheaval that were postponed, concealed, and in many respects exacerbated by the Cold War. As a direct result our world organisation is now facing large new bills for peacekeeping and relief – to try to cope with the violent consequences of neglect of the causes, and the resultant mass human misery which has seen the number of displaced persons in the world increase 45 times in 45 years. Even so, the total expenditure of the whole assessed and voluntarily funded UN System – for everything done by the UN and the Agencies and Funds in every field of human need, and including grant development, peacekeeping, and humanitarian relief – aggregates to only some 11 billion dollars, or some 17.6 billion guilders, per year.

That is less than 2 dollars, or 3 guilders 20 cents per human being alive on Earth per year. Dutch colleagues can undoubtedly find some astonishing Dutch consumer comparisons, but I can mention that this total expenditure of the UN System for a year would only keep British citizens in alcoholic beverages for 15 weeks. It would only provide Western teenagers half the accessories they buy for their clothing (half the belts and trinkets, not the clothing) in a year. Yet even the UN's own proportion of this total – 1 billion dollars for its regular budget and 1.4 billion for peacekeeping – was not fully paid by its members. The arrears have steadily increased.

As of the end of August this year, the total arrears owed to the UN alone stood at \$2.5 billion. Of this, \$851 million was owed for the regular budget, and \$1.67 billions for peace-keeping. An additional assessment for peacekeeping has just been issued totalling another \$1.3 billion; we have to wait at least for the statutory 30-day payment period before we can begin to know how much higher the UN deficit may grow in coming months, but it will undoubtedly go beyond \$3 billion.

This brings me to Absurdity Number Two, which is an outrage upon every other member-government and upon all the citizens of the UN, including the citizens of the United States who continue to show, in repeated polling, not less than 65 per cent support for it, despite the conduct of their elected representatives. It is the outrage that the very country to which the rest of us have for forty-nine years entrusted the unique and highly privileged responsibility of being Host to our United Nations is keeping it in a state of political siege and imminent financial bankruptcy.

For of the \$851 million arrears now outstanding against the regular budget, the United States of America – I repeat, *the Host Country to the United Nations* – owes \$315 million or 37 per cent; and of the peacekeeping arrears of \$1.6 billion it owes \$648 million, another 40 per cent. And it is delinquent to this massive extent, in violation of international treaty law, not for reasons of economic difficulty but because it is with-holding its due contributions until every other member country accepts its unilateral demands about UN policies, decision-making, and management.

Our Host-Country to the UN is engaged in political blackmail on all the rest of us; let us call it what it is.

But there is a further absurdity in this outrageous situation: the United States is not the only source of blame for it. Can any of us think of a

single other public-service institution whose other members or constituents have allowed its host to behave this way, year after year? I will return to this issue.

From these two gross absurdities I want to suggest a number of principles and premisses for the core financing of the UN System. The first and paramount principle is implicit in Article 17 of the Charter – that ‘the expenses of the Organisation shall be borne by its members’ – and was made explicit in the first scheme of assessment adopted by the General Assembly in 1946. Here again we are confronted by induced counter-perception.

The General Assembly formula for each member’s assessed share of the UN regular and peacekeeping budgets is based on the principle of relative capacity-to-pay, calculated from a 10-year average of each country’s gross domestic product, with downward adjustments for low per capita income and high foreign debt. The same principle underlies the assessment mechanisms of major Specialized Agencies of the UN System like UNESCO and FAO. It is the root principle of democratic revenue-raising and governance – and in the very countries that demand special influence in the UN on grounds of their contributing the largest money amounts.

It is the principle that it is as great a burden for the poorer citizen to find his or her smaller money amount of taxes as it is for the richer to find their larger money amount. Accordingly, since there is equity of burden, no one should have special influence in governance; no rich person and no corporation is entitled to special posts in or influence on the policies – or reforms – of public-service institutions. The citizens of Europe had to struggle over centuries to overcome precisely this undemocratic premise in their own countries; if they now accepted it at home they would abandon democratic national governance to plutocrats and corporations.

And it is most certainly as great a burden for Jamaica, or Nepal or Tanzania to find their smaller money amounts of contribution to the UN budgets as it is for the United States or the other so-called ‘major contributors’ to find theirs. Thus, and as within every democratic country, in the United Nations *everyone ‘pays most’*.

The justification persistently used in the United States for with-holding part of its dues is that it ‘pays most’ to the UN’s revenues because its assessment is the largest amount, and it is therefore entitled to over-riding influence in every facet of the organisation. But here again the

blame is wider. For the same totally undemocratic talk is constantly heard in and from the European countries that, in effect are subsidising the US delinquency. The so-called ‘donor countries’ as a group are guilty of such argument in every organisation and agency and fund of the UN System, constantly demanding special influence, undemocratic representation in governing bodies, and automatic assignment of senior posts to their nationals. The very name they have long given themselves – ‘donors’ – reflects this. It is a living lie, directly asserting that some 164 other member-countries are not ‘donors’ to UN budgets.

The use of this term is an act of disinformation to their own citizens about the very nature of the United Nations community and its most fundamental ethical and legal principles. Using it in development assistance is just as outrageous, conveying to taxpayers in the North that the developing countries do not make the contributions of land, buildings, staff and their salaries, and often cash as well that they do make to their programmes and projects assisted by Northern countries; that they are only inert ‘recipients’. These terms have palpable undertones of cultural and racial prejudice – and help to reinforce it.

A quick illustration of these ugly underlying facets was unconsciously provided in a television interview some years ago of the then President of the General Assembly. The American commentator asked as his last question, ‘Finally, Mr. President, don’t you agree that there is something wrong in so many small, weak countries that also contribute so little to the UN’s costs having the same one vote as the major powers and contributors?’

The President of the General Assembly looked at him for a moment and then replied, slowly, ‘I am not sure I understand your question: I am the Prime Minister of Luxembourg’.

Here I make first recommendations. These terms and phrases have seriously poisoned relations within the UN family. They have confused decent citizens and taxpayers and enabled Northern authoritarians and neo-imperialists to attempt to compromise the democratic foundations of the UN while bringing it close to financial extinction. It would be a signal contribution towards a stronger United Nations if everyone here could pledge never again to stay silent when someone invokes the utterly undemocratic ‘pays most’ argument, in spoken word or in print. And it would be another signal contribution to lessening the dangerously strained relationship across the North–South divide if everyone here resolved not again to use, and not to allow to go unchallenged anyone else using, the term ‘donor country’ or ‘donor government’.

I must next, however, urge what amounts to a deliberate qualification of the principle of relative capacity to pay. I recommend that we accept as a premise of reform in UN financing that, even if capacity-to-pay calculation assigns a large percentage of the total dues to one or a few countries, it is not politically safe, it has been proven too dangerous. It has made the UN far more dependent upon the respect for law and democratic behaviour of such members than the founders envisaged.

When the founders adopted the principle of capacity-to-pay, they were influenced by three forward perceptions, or forecasts.

The first was that this principle would result in the United States – emerging more wealthy from World War II – paying a very large share of the budget, until war-devastated Europe got back on its feet.

The second forecast was that the United States would behave decently and in a restrained way, as indeed President Truman was expressing, and not use its special budgetary role to dictate to other countries.

The third forward perception of the founders was that decolonisation was many decades away, possibly not even in this century; therefore the number of very poor member-countries would be quite limited. Everyone here knows, I am sure, that the founders had so limited a forecast of increase in the membership that they instructed the architects of the new UN buildings in New York to allow for an expansion to only ‘some 70 members’, and most of the additional 20 or so were to come from Europe.

Thus, the United States was assessed 49 per cent of the UN budget at the beginning. And the minimum, the ‘floor’ assessment against the relatively few low-income member-countries was set at 0.04 per cent. As Europe recovered, its assessments increased and the US assessment could be decreased: from 49 to 33 per cent by 1952; down to 30 per cent in 1957; and to the present 25 per cent in 1972. 25 per cent is generally calculated to be about 5 per cent less than a strict application of the assessment formula to the US economy would yield.

When national liberation swept so unexpectedly early across the South, and the UN’s membership exploded far beyond the envisaged 70, the early presumption was not unlike that for post-war Europe: that initially there would be small assessments for the Third World (the minimum ‘floor’ was lowered to 0.01 per cent), but that these assessments would gradually be raised as the developing countries would climb out of their colonial impoverishment. It was assumed

that this in turn would enable the US share to be further lowered, and thus a healthy ‘spread’ of assessments would be achieved across the whole universal membership.

This has not happened. The industrial North has refused to adjust the basic terms of the world economy, offering instead only the marginal palliative of so-called ‘aid’ (two-thirds of which is in fact disguised export subsidy). Far from climbing out of the impoverishment imposed upon them by the Northern empires, the developing countries as a whole have slipped backwards.

In 1960, as decolonisation swelled towards its historic transformation of the UN, the poorest one-fifth of humankind could at least earn one-thirtieth what the richest one-fifth was earning. Today the poorest one-fifth cannot even earn one-sixtieth what the richest one-fifth is earning.

In 1972 when the universalisation of the UN was virtually complete and the US assessment percentile was lowered to 25 per cent, the 80 per cent majority of humankind in the South did at least have a 28 per cent share of world trade. Twenty three years later, the 80 per cent have only 19 per cent of world trade, and according to UNDP they are deprived by North-South structural inequities of over \$500 billion a year that they could be *earning*.

In direct correlation, 88 UN member-countries still remain assessable at only the floor of 0.01 per cent, and another 71 members are assessable at only between 0.02 and 0.5 per cent, of the total UN regular budget.

The overall resultant spread of assessments is not at all what was hoped:

- 25 members assessed at 0.5% and above contribute 89 per cent of the UN budget (including the American 25%, if it were ever paid);
- 71 members assessed from 0.02 to 0.5% contribute 9.5 per cent; and
- 88 states at the floor rate of 0.01% contribute the remaining 1.5 per cent of the budget.

And the United States, frequently supported by other so-called ‘donor countries’ either overtly or by their meek acquiescence, is able to exert grossly undemocratic and profoundly unhealthy pressure throughout the UN System. Not only are weak countries subjected to extortion of their UN votes by economic menaces – a criminal felony in democratic countries – but the United States practices direct blackmail against the entire edifice and all its other members by its with-holding of dues.

I hope I have made clear the problematique we thus face. On one hand, the deepening impoverishment of most of humankind by an inequitable economic non-system is now compounded in more and more countries by internal unrest that is usually triggered by IMF structural adjustments. We must vigorously struggle to relieve the policy-elites in a handful of industrial countries, who dictate all this, of their short-sighted arrogance and their trance to the ‘magic of the market’, and make them realise where they are plunging all of us. But in the foreseeable future the great majority of members of the UN will not be able to contribute more than the lowest, or gradually the lower assessment percentages to UN budgets.

And on the other hand, we now have far more proof than we could ever have wished, that the United States cannot be trusted to honour its legal financial obligations and pay its 25 per cent share assessed by the capacity-to-pay formula; and that it was also never safe to trust it to honour the Charter and refrain from exploiting the leverage its large share offers it for political ransom and blackmail.

In these circumstances and projections, I urge that we must qualify the capacity-to-pay principle by an imperative-to-protect principle. The late Prime Minister of Sweden, Olof Palme, formally proposed ten years ago that the ceiling should be lowered, so that no member-country is assessed more than 10 to 12 per cent of the total budget, and the difference should be re-apportioned across the assessment scale. We must now drive for this. The United States should be informed by the rest of the membership that its lower assessment will begin when it has made good all its arrears.

How would this be received? Ten years ago Olof Palme’s proposal prompted a thundering silence from Washington; the US was annoyed by his proposal; although American citizens were being lied to that the UN was impossibly expensive, the Administration did not want to have its assessment lowered and thus lose its political leverage. Europe also remained silent, determined not to approve anything that might allow the United States to default on its arrears altogether. This time things might be different: President Clinton has already told the General Assembly that he wants the US peacekeeping assessment rate lowered from its present 32 per cent, and indeed the US Congress has unilaterally – without any permission from the rest of the membership – lowered its peacekeeping assessment to 25 per cent (another violation of international law). But we should not count on anything; the majority of members should not try to negotiate the Palme proposal; they should simply adopt it as a *fait accompli*.

Suppose, then, that the US refuses to accept this and simply continues to with-hold the maximum proportion of its dues that it dares? As everyone knows, under Article 19 of the Charter a member must be in arrears for the equivalent of two full years of its assessment before it can lose its General Assembly vote. What if the US Congress under its present Neanderthal Republican leadership simply keeps with-holding under that threshold? Or does not even bother to do that, counting on Europe remaining as meek as if it were one giant American colony?

Here, I believe, we must adopt some further clear and firm principles by some testing at law. The Charter makes no stipulation about refusal to pay dues for unilateral political reasons. There is partial precedent at the World Court. In the 1960s the General Assembly requested an advisory opinion on the refusal of the Soviet bloc and France to pay peacekeeping assessments because they opposed the relevant peacekeeping operations. The Court ruled that all peacekeeping operations duly authorised are ‘expenses of the Organisation’ under Article 17. We must get a further General Assembly request for an advisory opinion from the Court whether it is a violation of international law for a member to refuse to pay its dues for the regular budget on political grounds.

Will Europe at last, and late, have the courage to support such a move? France’s statement in the Assembly yesterday suggests that irritation against the US may at last overcome all the trans-Atlantic politesse. If enough of the rest of Europe gets equivalent courage, the request to The Hague can be obtained.

But, some will already be thinking, the United States ignores World Court judgements whenever it wishes; so how can the rest of the membership impose any real pressure on this member? Here I would propose a new principle that the United States could not block.

It is a principle of international law that states parties to a treaty are entitled to enjoy the fruitful products of the collective commitment they make in it. It should follow that they are entitled to penalise any party to a treaty who wilfully denies them such products. My colleague drs. Marjolijn Snippe and I have launched a project to assess and review neglected elements of the international law of the Charter, including the law of financing the UN. We hope to find sponsors for a substantive review of these and other aspects, but let me summarise what we believe would be found fully consonant.

The General Assembly can adopt as a basic principle under Article 17 a decision that any member-state that with-holds its apportioned dues for any reason other than accepted economic difficulty is denying other members their share of the fruits of their UN membership, and will accordingly cease to be eligible for benefits from its membership. Specifically, the General Assembly could decide that these should include UN procurement awards. The United States currently gains about 400 million dollars a year from UN purchases.

A more drastic measure – and one which some European delegates have already privately warned their American counterparts might yet happen if they continue their present behaviour – would be to propose the withdrawal of the Seat of the UN from New York and the United States if the arrears are not paid fully in one year. The grounds for this would be plain and simple: the Host Country to the United Nations cannot behave this way. The American economy currently gains something like a billion dollars a year from its presence in New York, which would go into uproar and panic.

Some will be alarmed at such a prospect, lest the US Congress retaliate by withdrawing from the UN itself. This is possible. It does not alarm me. The UN would retain its membership among 95 per cent of humankind, and indeed faith in the organisation among the many who now regard it as the captive of the United States might increase. The UN would not lose much financially because it hasn't had the full US contribution to lose. It would not lose US peacekeeping contributions because the Congress is determined not to make any in any case. All that the rest of us would lose would be our present incredible subservience to the myth of American power, and the wonderful dedication of individual Americans in UN service. We might gain after a while an awakening of decent American citizens to the shameful behaviour of their government, behaviour that they have never demanded and have never been asked to approve.

Let me now quickly recall what is left among our core financing problems. After the United States' 37 per cent of arrears against the regular budget and 40 per cent against peacekeeping assessments, all others in arrears are for reasons of economic difficulty. One distinct group is Russia, and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The Russian Federation and Ukraine alone are in arrears to a total of \$73 million against the regular budget, or 8 per cent of total arrears; but they account for no less than 45 per cent of peacekeeping arrears. Most east European members, and every new Central Asian member, are in arrears. The high priests of the most dangerous fundamentalist religion in the world, that which

worships the magic of the market, have ensured that the devastations of Cold War expenditures have been compounded by their magic.

This ironically counters another nastily racist piece of propaganda, that the developing countries of the South account for a huge proportion of the UN's deficits. They don't. If we exclude the long-accumulating South African arrears of \$57 million under apartheid, the South's share of the problem is only 12 per cent, with a very close correlation with the 90-plus countries that have been devastated by the IMF's imposed prescriptions. All the rest of the arrears are from the North, West and East.

What can be done about the arrears of those of North and South who genuinely plead extreme economic difficulty in finding their assessed share of the costs? The problem would at least be eased by departing from the 49-year rule that all assessment contributions must be paid in US Dollars. Victims of the IMF and its market-magic partners find it very difficult to come up with such hard currency. There has been a proposal for many years for a United Nations Currency based on the Special Drawing Rights concept of value derived from a representative basket of currencies, and this should be energetically re-examined, however the powers-that-be huff and puff against it. But until the Pied Pipers of market magic are sent whistling off on their own to their mythical wonderland, and we are thus enabled to regain some sane management of the world economy, the only way to liquidate these arrears is by a straight one-time assessment weighted towards the more affluent Northern countries – or by the issuance of United Nations Bonds with long-term dividends.

Late payments-in is another part of the problem, especially as long as governments adamantly refuse to allow the Secretary-General authority to borrow even for a week to cope with short-term liquidity difficulties. That this is a blatantly political denial is proven by the fact that the same governments allow the Director-General of UNESCO to borrow. However, the Ogata-Volcker group have also recommended against such borrowing authority, but suggested that arrears caused by late payments-in could be reduced by three measures: dividing the UN payments calendar into four quarters; applying interest to late payments per quarter; and getting members whose parliaments have a later appropriation calendar to adjust their UN appropriations timing to fit the UN's calendar.

The concept of interest penalties seems entirely valid, provided that it is carefully administered against those member-governments whose

late payments are for reasons other than real economic difficulty. And there certainly are some unacceptable anomalies: to cite but one example concerning my own country, Ireland has the same per capita Gross Domestic Product as Brunei Darussalam, but is assessed six times the amount of that immensely wealthy member-state.

The peacekeeping arrears are, of course, now overwhelmingly larger than those for the regular budget, and the tragedy of the UN having to undertake so many responses to neglected causes has circular effects. Troop-contributing countries are not reimbursed for anything up to five years. For developing countries, which contribute over half the troops, this causes reluctance to contribute more to new operations, and equally naturally makes more difficult finding the hard currency for their regular budget assessments. One proposal from some delegations is for peacekeeping redeemable certificates which member-states could purchase for a stated amount. They could be sold at a discount and be redeemable against future peace-keeping assessments. The only *ultimate* answer is for a substantial UN Peacekeeping Endowment, capitalised by new and alternative sources of financing such as will be so valuably and thoroughly discussed here in these two days.

In conclusion, then, I hope that I have managed to make clear that the danger of the lights going out at UN offices across the world is very real; that this is scandalously unnecessary; and that it is largely because of the sheer lack of courage of Europe to stand up to the United States. Europe does not have to fear the economic menaces and retaliation visited upon developing countries that dare to stand tall against this feckless bully who has trampled on the Charter that so many noble Americans of a more convivial generation helped to draft. And the part of the problem that is not caused by the United States alone is overwhelmingly caused by the refusal of the industrial powers as a whole to face up to a different world, and to allow the UN to lead in the formulation of macro-economic policies for – and I quote the Charter obligation – ‘the economic and social advancement of all peoples’.

I would therefore urge three further principles for alternative and additional financing.

First, they must not in any way become substitutes for the fulfilment of the obligations upon all member-governments to make their apportioned contributions to the core costs of the UN System.

Secondly, the funds that may be mobilised from the various schemes we will be discussing must deepen the solemn commitments of our

governments to the purposes and principles of the United Nations. If alternative funds were not very carefully and democratically governed, they could easily become assets for the fundamentalists of market magic, whose record vis-à-vis the poor of our human family is one of driving ever more of them into absolute poverty. Such funds must be democratically governed on behalf of the *whole* membership of the UN, otherwise they will merely further the blind and stupid efforts of elites within a minority of the membership to continue to control the UN, ensuring its early demise and leaving the world ever more violently sundered by economic apartheid.

Finally, let us be very careful not to be overwhelmed by the natural urge to provide new funds for the consequences of the long neglect of the causes of conflict and upheaval. For if the most perfectly designed early-warning, pre-emptive diplomacy, peacekeeping and humanitarian protection machinery were now both created and adequately funded, it will be totally overwhelmed within twenty years by the tidal waves of mass convulsion across the world which are now gathering as a result of neglecting their causes.

The only ultimately productive financing of the United Nations System will be that which at last enables it to get on with its primary mission as so clearly stated in the Charter – to establish ‘the conditions of wellbeing and stability which are necessary for peaceful and friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples’.

It is time, it is overtime, for the *peoples* of the United Nations to demand that our governments so resource and so govern the UN as to enable it at last to get on with this job. A part of any programme emerging from this conference should be the establishment at the UN of a Parliamentary Assembly, alongside the General Assembly of executive government. This new United Nations Parliamentary Assembly must be given clearly stated roles of oversight of the distribution and spending of additional and alternative funds.

Let me close with a moment of tribute to two people who should be here with us today. How richly we would be nourished in our deliberations by the giant mind and soaring, fearless vision of Jan Tinbergen. And how appropriate it would be if that brave and tireless American who chaired the negotiation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Eleanor Roosevelt, could also be among us.

Let us do the best we can in their spirit.



Commentary by James A. Paul

The Childers lecture on the financing of the United Nations has a vividly contemporary feel. As always, he addressed himself to a deep, structural and persistent problem in the global order. In this case, his analysis and concerns apply well to the UN's current financial tribulations. Indeed, his message is more important now than ever, because the global crises have grown much more serious and the need for UN action has grown proportionately greater, but the UN still lacks the financial resources and capacity to respond.

I was present at the conference in Rotterdam where Erskine delivered the speech and I remember it vividly. He was a master orator who knew how to combine passionate language with clear argument to make his case. Erskine was always especially passionate about the financing of the UN, which he thought to be a scandal and an unacceptable reflection of the priorities of those in power. 'Outrageous absurdities' is the phrase he uses to introduce his analysis – absurdity that the UN is believed to be terribly expensive – and outrageous that a lazy press and right-wing lobbyists perpetuate this myth and prevent the public from understanding that the entire UN system was then funded in an amount of just \$2 per citizen per year.

Erskine was adept at giving meaning to the pittance that rich countries were willing to spend on the UN's financing. In this speech, he mentions that UN dues amount to only *half* the amount spent annually by Western teenagers on clothing accessories like belts and decorative pins. On another occasion, he mentioned that the sum was less than the amount spent annually on cut flowers in England and Wales. My favourite, though, was his calculation that the UN's regular budget was less than the annual budget of the Tokyo fire department. This comical calculus is still true today. Erskine's oratorical genius was to combine such humorous touches with utterly serious issues in a way that made his message unforgettable.

Erskine goes on to talk about the matter of arrears – that is, the dues (assessments) not paid in a timely way by member states to the UN's budget. Since the UN is unable to borrow money to cover its receivables but must pay its bills on time, such late payments are a very serious matter, perpetually threatening the UN with financial ruin. Erskine mentions as an 'absurdity' that \$2.5 billion was overdue to the UN in August 1995 and that the host country – the United States – owed nearly 40 per cent of the total. US arrears were (and are) not

due to US financial difficulties, of course, but rather to a scheme to put political pressure on the world body – what Erskine correctly calls ‘blackmail’. This was a strategy devised by the right-wing Heritage Foundation and its corporate funders and adopted enthusiastically by the Reagan administration in the 1980s. By 1995, the debt had become so large that the UN came close to financial insolvency, as Undersecretary-General Joseph Connor warned repeatedly. Sadly, the total arrears are still very large (\$5.76 billion as of 31 August 2010). Of this, the US owed \$2.39 billion or 41 per cent. The UN remains poised on the financial precipice and the US Congress is threatening to make matters even worse.

Erskine rightly denounces the claims of countries paying large dues – first of all the US – to special influence over UN policies and priorities, claims that have only increased in recent years. He notes how these governments propagandise the public with false ideas, sanctimoniously calling themselves ‘donor countries’. They claim repeatedly that the UN is too expensive, too inefficient, a mere ‘talk shop’ that gets nothing done, and so on. Never do they indulge in a comparison with their own state’s military spending that rises globally to 80 times the level of the entire UN system budget.

At the time of the speech, one of the strongest voices on UN finance in the US Congress was Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina, who regularly denounced the UN and suggested that the US should reduce its support even further, or even withdraw completely from the world body. Presidents generally took positions less hostile to the UN, but their efforts to obtain UN financing from Congress were tepid. UN ambassadors, appointed by the presidents, typically lacked enthusiasm for the world body and some were outright hostile. John Bolton, a Bush Junior appointee, was only the most extreme case of this general tendency.

Erskine points out that part of the dues crisis is closely related to the extremely skewed distribution of wealth and income among the world’s nations. It was assumed at the UN’s foundation, he informs us, that progressive global income equalisation would result in a wide distribution of UN dues. But that did not happen. If anything, income distribution became more unequal and, as a result, only 25 countries came to pay most of the organisation’s dues. Today, in spite of the rise of new economic powers, the global income distribution remains starkly unequal and the UN dues picture has scarcely improved. Poor countries are exposed to economic pressures, notes Erskine, and this means that their UN votes are often not freely and democratically cast.

Surprisingly, Erskine does not mention the role of transnational corporations and global financial companies in shaping the anti-UN environment and keeping the organisation financially weak. The economic order of neoliberal capitalism has given rise to a rightward drift in national politics, structural adjustment policies imposed on the world by the World Bank and the IMF, the rise of conservative policy centres such as the Heritage Foundation and a rising crescendo of attacks on the UN. Several times Erskine refers negatively to those who believe in the ‘magic of the market’, but he remains vague about the specifics. In the interim, these forces have gained ground and given the anti-UN movement even more strength. Erskine might have called them the ‘terrorists’ of our time.

One important detail Erskine fails to mention is the budget cap imposed by Washington on UN budgets. The US also withheld funds for specific programmes that it opposed and insisted on consensus voting on budgets so that it could exercise a veto. Taken together, these tactics destroyed the UN’s capacity to carry out its mandates with good results. Though the methods have changed somewhat since then, the result remains clear – an institution financially crippled and unable to live up to public expectations.

Erskine accuses the ‘meek’ Europeans of being complicit with the US in the ruin of the UN. This remains an accurate assessment and, indeed, some European governments have recently taken the lead in proposing that the UN be ‘more efficient’ and that it adopt ‘programme budgeting’, ‘budgeting by objective’ and other techniques drawn from corporate practice that are of doubtful appropriateness to a public body of such complexity, with such difficult and often intractable tasks. Erskine would be shocked at how far rich countries have now gone in providing off-budget funds for the UN, a method that enables them to escape the multilateral budget-setting process and to promote UN programmes on an unaccountable, purely bilateral basis.

Of course, Erskine was speaking in a period before the emergence of the new powers and the decline of US hegemony. The rise of China, Brazil, South Africa, India, South Korea and others has deeply shaken the old global order and diminished the relative standing of Europe as well as the US. But the new powers have been all-too-happy to join the power-club of the G20 and quite unready to see their interests in terms of strengthening the UN, financially or otherwise.

Erskine was skilled at fiery oratorical denunciation, but he was also a shrewd and highly tactical reformer. Towards the end of his speech, he talks of practical ways to strengthen the UN’s finances. Those ideas remain

of interest today. Of particular note is his reference to ‘new and alternative sources of funding’, by which he means new global taxes to finance global policy priorities. He was an early proponent of the Tobin Tax, the carbon tax and other means to raise funds on a global scale to underwrite the great projects that were so urgently needed. There is growing interest worldwide in these initiatives. More narrowly, Erskine also mentions UN bonds, interest imposed on countries that pay their dues late and accepting dues in currencies other than the dollar. All these steps could and should be taken to make the UN dues system more viable.

Shortly after the Rotterdam conference where this speech was made, I contacted Erskine to ask his advice on how to avert the impending bankruptcy of the UN. It was just two years after we had collaborated on the foundation of Global Policy Forum, and we both believed that only citizen pressure could overcome the egotism of states and corporations and only citizen action could rescue the UN and make it a democratic institution. He came up with a wonderful strategy: a global ‘vigil’ to be held on the eve of UN Day to press governments to respect the UN and pay for it. Using the new powers of the internet, we embarked on this project together, gaining the backing of Archbishop Tutu, Ted Turner and a host of others. Thanks to a partnership with the World Federation of United Nations Associations and the World Federalist Movement, we had a wonderful vigil in 1996, with actions in over 50 cities worldwide. There was even a vigil outside the offices of Jesse Helms in Raleigh, North Carolina. Political pressure began to have results and eventually governments were forced to improve their support for the UN. It was an exhilarating process that was repeated in vigils for three more years and in worldwide people’s movements of many kinds in that era.

But the dangerous underfunding of the UN was not permanently overcome. Lately, it has again taken a turn for the worse, amid a new round of raucous anti-UN propaganda and a new onslaught of ‘reforms’ from those who are scarcely friendly. The financial crisis is a new excuse to put the UN and its agencies on the cutting board. In response, we must redouble our efforts and insist that states take seriously the funding of our organisation.

As Erskine mentioned at the end of his talk, it would be great to have Jan Tinbergen and Eleanor Roosevelt around to join in this effort. But in particular, I wish Erskine were still among us – to denounce the malefactors and to speak with his characteristic clarity and passion about the people’s UN and the steps we must take to shape it and fund it for all the world’s citizens!



The United Nations in a world of conflict

Assuming our responsibilities



Remarks by Erskine Childers at
The NCO Conference on Development and Conflict
The Hague, The Netherlands, 28 February 1994

Some eighty years ago a French Government Minister remarked that ‘war is far too serious a matter to be left to Generals’. This morning there are over 120 conflicts simmering or raging across the world. One in every 130 human beings alive is a displaced person. Governments are investing in the United Nations System for all purposes, including peace-keeping and humanitarian relief, a total amount per year that represents about one dollar and ninety cents per human being alive; they are investing in military expenditure over one hundred and twenty dollars per human being every year. Clearly, if war is too serious a matter to be left to generals, it is also too serious a matter to be left to governments alone.

But when the Cold War apparently ended there was a rush of optimism that now, at last, there could be peace in our time. The major powers declared that now they would do what they had claimed in 1945 they alone could do when insisting on their special privileges in the new United Nations – now they really would be ‘the policemen of the world’ for all of us inferior, ordinary people. What has gone wrong, so quickly? Let me first offer my own basic answer to this question.

There should not have been any surprise. The Cold War was a massive distraction from, but also a new framework for suppressing, peoples’ discontent over the cultural, ethnic, political and economic legacies of the age of Northern empires. These conditions have been further aggravated by the conduct of the powers over the last forty years. Yes, of course, since the three-quarters of humankind in the South are human, their leaders have made mistakes in the same period. But the peoples of the South have never to this day been free to make their own mistakes. The acts of independence thirty years ago were, in reality, little more than the surface legalisms of a decolonisation that has never yet been completed. Suddenly, for the first time in centuries the framework of suppression is weak, and one society after another is unravelling and exploding in conflict.

We must act now to re-direct the attention of our governments to the whole spectrum of human conflict – from its root causes, to the earliest signs that those causal conditions are turning into the consequence of mass unrest, on along the spectrum to the necessity of trying to prevent actual conflict, and further along it, when prevention fails, trying to protect human rights, alleviate mass suffering, restore peace and re-build better society.

The non-governmental community must mobilise to respond, and to get governments in the United Nations to respond better, to the active conflictual part of the spectrum. But the *causes* – the legacies – are so widespread that we *must* also address them. If we do not do this, we will never be able to organise sufficient resources for prevention, peacekeeping, humanitarian relief, and peace-restoring in the coming truly massive unrest and upheaval that the policies of Northern elites are making more certain every day. And for this, too, we have got to reform and strengthen the United Nations.

When the Charter was being drafted 49 years ago the then independent smaller and middle countries – including the Netherlands – fought hard to make the UN not merely a ‘peace and order’ body but a world organisation also mandated to tackle *the root economic and social causes of conflict*; as the Charter says, ‘to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples’. The smaller countries insisted that the UN itself must be the commanding centrepiece where macro-monetary, macro-trade and macro-finance policy for ‘all peoples’ would be formulated. The General Assembly was to adopt and coordinate these macro policies, and the Economic and Social Council to co-ordinate their implementation by specialised agencies. These would include an International Monetary Fund as the emergent central bank of the world community, working closely with an International Trade Organisation to intervene equitably against either surplus or deficit countries, and to promote open but *fair* trade. The founders placed such emphasis on keeping this new United Nations System together that they stipulated that the UN and the economic and social agencies should be located together at a single headquarters.

Governments have done some marvellous things at the UN – our 70 Human Rights instruments, for example; but the wrecking of the originally much stronger architecture is shameful. Not one specialised-agency headquarters has been located at the UN. The United States smashed all hope of an equitable world trade system – the key to advancement of all peoples – by blocking the creation of the International Trade Organisation. All we got instead was the General

Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which should have been called the Specific Agreement to continue the Imperial Trading System. It has never covered trade vital to the poor countries. In the Uruguay Round key Northern countries negotiated virtually among themselves for seven years, then gave the South *one weekend* to consider their draft document. The North-South gap is significantly wider and deeper as a result, and increasing conflict is that much more certain.

The Northern industrial powers have also refused to accept the UN as the centrepiece for any macro-economic policy formation. They insist that monetary and finance policy issues belong in the IMF and the World Bank, which they control and which they then make sure do *not* address such issues. The World Bank deals with debt only on a country-by-country basis. In the twenty years of repeated Northern refusal to take part in serious discussion of a debt strategy in the General Assembly, the indebtedness of the South has increased 14 times, to now some 1.4 trillion dollars. The IMF long ago gave up any pretence of acting as an equitable global agency. Under threat of denying developing countries credit-standing anywhere in the world it imposes its 'structural adjustment' policies on them, and only on them. Mass unrest and conflict have quickly followed in every victim country, most recently in Senegal and Mexico.

Conservative media regularly report that the G-7 deal with the issues of 'the global economy'. This is outright fiction. In their annual summit communiqués 'the global economy' is only the North-North economy – Japan, North America, and Europe. So we have no macro-policies that address the needs of all humankind on an all-win basis; and again, the certainty of conflict increases.

The third key element in the wrecking of the original UN socio-economic design was to divert attention from North-South structural, macro-policy issues with the panacea of development assistance, so-called 'aid'. As this built up, the South tried to maintain a UN programme addressing the structural and policy issues through UNCTAD – *trade* and development; the powers largely ignored UNCTAD and have now eviscerated it. The South tabled all the structural issues together in the Programme of Action for a New International Economic Order; the North ignored it. The South tried to get a strong new UN Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation; the Western powers disliked the new post, so the Secretaries-General they had chosen for their timidity kept it hopelessly weak. Mr. Boutros-Ghali has now abolished it.

The arithmetic of the consequences of these policies today provides clear evidence of the scale of conflict yet to come.

Official Northern Development Assistance is running at between 55 and 60 billion dollars a year. Two-thirds of all this so-called ‘aid’ is tied; the receiving country must use that ‘aid’ to buy the expertise or equipment of the ‘donor’ country whether it is suitable or not. Most of the ‘aid’ which so many NGOs spend energy to mobilise and for which so many decent Northern citizens pay taxes thinking they really are ‘giving’, is therefore a 40 billion dollar disguised subsidy of one-way Northern exports to the South, by a sort of compulsory sale.

UNDP calculates that the North’s protectionist barriers against attempted Southern exports to the North, combined with manipulated interest rates and other imposed inequities, are depriving the countries of the South of at least 500 billion dollars that they could be *earning* every year. Thus, Northern refusal to address all-win structural solutions is preventing the South from earning every year nearly ten times all the North’s development ‘aid’ to it. That is simply stupid as well as dangerous.

In 1960 the richest one-fifth of humankind was earning thirty times the income of the poorest one-fifth; the richest one-fifth now earns *sixty* times what the poorest one-fifth of humankind can earn. Some 15 million people die needlessly every year from starvation and malnutrition-associated illness. The number of people barely surviving in absolute poverty has increased by 40 per cent in only the last 15 years, to some 1.4 billion. The present policies of the Northern powers guarantee that *soon, 1 in every 3 human beings alive on this planet will be only existing on the very margins of daily survival*. When such conditions existed in Europe there was bloody revolution, and masses of the poor marched on the centres of wealth and exploitation.

And there are yet more roots of conflict. The imperial powers kept most of humankind in the straitjacket of colonialism during which no endogenous evolution of political institutions comparable with what was happening in the North was possible. They then imposed their centralist nation-state structure on those totally different cultures. Moreover, this model was imposed within frontiers which themselves were imposed by the powers without any consultation with people on either side of them. Virtually every frontier in the South is artificial, divisive, explosive. And having put most of humankind in these triple-layered straitjackets, within a few years of abandoning their direct imperialism the Northern powers installed, financed and armed almost every one of the dictatorships of the last three decades.

Thus, most of the South has emerged from the Cold War economically prostrated, politically ravaged, filled with long-suppressed movements of aspiration and anger and the abandoned weaponry of an alien North-North ideological contest gratuitously thrust into their lands. The South is thus the arena of political and economic policies dictated by the North that are prescriptions for mass unrest, the rise of so-called fundamentalist movements, and more and more open conflict. The powers are virtually guaranteeing that these conflicts will coalesce into massive North-South confrontation early in the next century.

With some hesitancy beside so distinguished an expert as Minister Pronk, these are only some of my own recommendations for at last tackling the full spectrum of such conflict.

We must demand that the mandates in the Charter to make the UN the centrepiece for genuinely global, all-win macro policies are now implemented before the world divides irrevocably and violently. NGOs in each country should form a national consortium to work, each according to its special field, along the whole conflict-spectrum (trade, food, environment, peace and disarmament, human rights, humanitarian relief, and so on). Each group would then bring its reports and proposals to a national council of the consortium whose purpose should be to carry out multi-disciplinary monitoring and lobbying for key policies and reforms.

To gear up the UN for its originally intended role the top of the Secretariat must be re-organised, with Deputy Secretaries-General, of rank higher than any other executive head in the System. One should be for International Economic Co-operation and Sustainable Development, to help the Secretary-General co-ordinate and to assemble coherent macro-economic policy proposals to present to governments.

NGOs should challenge each government to explain how the Bretton Woods institutions have handled global macro-monetary and finance issues. The governance of the IMF must be overhauled: an agency 74 per cent of whose membership has only 34 per cent voting power has no place in the United Nations System. NGOs should also urge members of parliament to demand an accounting by government of the gross inconsistencies between their policies in the UN development system and those the same governments endorse at the IMF. These inconsistencies include funding UN programmes (and bilateral projects) to help build up education and health services in developing countries, but endorsing IMF 'conditionalities' requiring the same countries to tear down the very same services by as much as 35 per cent.

The work of the International Coalition for Development Action (ICDA) in monitoring trade issues should be supported and built upon by NGOs, towards an all-out campaign to expose the ‘free-trade’ sham of the GATT and to get a proper, genuinely global organisation for fair trade. NGOs have a tremendously important job to do to explain to Northern citizens that no amount of ‘aid’ will enable three-quarters of humankind to earn their way in a world dominated by a rigged trading regime, and that this is ultimately against the North’s own interests.

To address the ethnic and cultural causes of conflict I believe we need a new UN body, converting the now scarcely used Trusteeship Council into the UN Council on Culture, Representation, and Governance. This should be a quite different type of UN organ: not trying to fashion universal policy, but serving as the world’s open think-tank on the enormous problems of the obsolescent nation-state, and the aspirations of hundreds of millions for greater expression of their ancestral identity but not necessarily in traditionally conceived nation-state sovereignty. In this regard it is worth recalling that 1 in every 18 of us on this planet is a member of an indigenous people. This Council should command the respect and draw upon the knowledge and insights of social scientists from throughout the world. Traditionally trained diplomats openly admit that they are not equipped to deal with this range of problems. We need, not so much more preventive diplomacy as a new preventive sociology.

Moving along the spectrum, the relevant NGOs in the consortia I have suggested should seek the co-operation of specialists in their countries to support and network with social and political scientists in conflict-prone countries as agents both of conflict-prevention and source of early warning. Peace NGOs should become really expert in the entire spectrum of United Nations peaceful settlement processes and instruments, like the 1991 General Assembly Declaration on Fact-Finding Missions. Above all, they should insist that the Security Council return to the Charter, which clearly instructs the Council that it should *begin with and work through Chapter VI*, in Peaceful Settlement, and turn to Chapter VII, enforcement, only in last resort.

For humanitarian assistance we must now insist that governments consolidate the jungle of UN-System agencies they have proliferated. The World Food Programme’s emergency food aid work and first-class staff, and the relief capacities and functions of UNICEF and UNHCR must be consolidated in a single UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs also headed by a Deputy Secretary-General. Humanitarian operations should have their own United Nations Humanitarian Security Police,

especially trained women and men who should be separate from any peacekeeping forces and, I am convinced, would often be able to avert the need for them.

NGOs must, however, also be far more alert to challenge the behaviour of tired elites that are still trying to strut the world stage while piling up explosives under it. In 1945 the smaller countries did not foresee the use of state bribery and state terrorism to get the votes for, or silence opposition to, whatever move the powers want to make using the name of the UN. So the Charter is silent about such behaviour. Yes, I did say ‘state terrorism’. When any government threatens a country already deeply impoverished with loss of aid, or no debt relief, or no loan from the World Bank or no credits from the IMF unless it votes or speaks in the UN the way that government demands, then as brutally as by fleets of bombers it does threaten the very lives of millions who are already barely surviving; and that is a form of state terrorism.

The NGOs of Europe in particular must insist that their governments cease to be so acquiescent in this flagrantly undemocratic behaviour of powers that claim to be the exemplars of democracy. NGOs should organise a ‘Blackmail Watch’ at the UN to expose every instance of bribery and economic threat. Unlike the beaten-down and blackmailed South, Europe has nothing to lose but its shame in staying silent about such behaviour.

I have given you a grim picture because unless we know what we are up against we will get nowhere. But I remain very hopeful. Why? First, simply because the South has not yet given up the UN. The Southern three-quarters of all of us on this planet, despite all their agonies, do care about our one universal public-service institution. The UN’s problems lie overwhelmingly among the other quarter of us, who have not cared enough to oppose the wrecking behaviour of the powers, and have only recently suddenly realised that the UN might just be very important.

Secondly I have hope because, just possibly, and if now pushed, the powers may abandon their arrogant pretensions. Once again they cannot agree among themselves, and we are seeing real evidence that they have too many problems at home to have the energy for, and do not want to spend the money to be, the ‘policemen of the world’. In my view that is all to the good. We need the powers as partners of size and no more than that; we must ensure that the membership of the UN as a whole contributes the resources in funds, personnel of all

needed kinds, and especially logistics, to mount conflict-preventing or -halting operations. The funds exist, in defence budgets.

But thirdly I have hope because of the tremendous new surge of concern by NGOs and citizens, to see a reformed and strengthened United Nations for its next fifty years. We must demand that our governments do a far better job in their selection, *on our behalf*, of the leadership of the United Nations; and it is time that they find us a woman Secretary-General of outstanding calibre, for a salutary change. We need a strong surge of demand next year for the first steps towards a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly, to give new and real meaning to the fact that the Charter's opening words are, 'We, the Peoples of the United Nations'.

It was never safe, and it is not now safe, to leave solely to governments the world's first universal social contract, which explicitly called for tackling the root causes of conflict – for (and I am quoting Article 55 of *our* Charter) 'the creation of conditions of stability and well-being which are necessary for peaceful and friendly relations among nations based upon respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples'.

We have left the assumption of our right and responsibility in this, as the peoples of the United Nations, dangerously late. Let us get on with it – at and after conferences like this one. Our children and their children will not forgive us if we leave them a world in the flames of multiple conflicts, a world at the same time in massive, apocalyptic confrontation between North and South; the most shameful bequest we could make to our children: a world we would not ourselves wish to live in.



Commentary by Jan Pronk

Erskine Childers delivered this speech in 1994, in The Hague, to a conference of non-governmental organisations. At that time he had given many speeches on the role and position of the United Nations in different areas of world governance. It was a new era in the 20th century, five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, with new opportunities opening up for countries to meet global challenges.

Until 1989, countries had been politically and economically constrained by the Cold War. It had been politically difficult to define common interests and to endeavour to bring about changes, because these might be perceived as threatening the status quo with regard to international spheres of influence. As a result, the big powers of East and West consistently resisted such changes. This situation also constrained the possibilities to reform North-South relations. Economic, social, cultural, religious and political conflicts between groups within countries had been frozen or suppressed, because they would endanger the status quo. Economically it was difficult to meet new global challenges, because many of the financial resources in the richer world were spent on an ever-increasing arms race.

By the 1990s, these considerations no longer constrained international options. Now there were possibilities to find ways and means to bridge the North-South divide, to lift poor people out of deprivation, to preserve the world's natural environment and ecology and to mitigate climate change. In 1992, this led to the adoption of Agenda 2000 by world leaders convened at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. This action implied a commitment to change and to setting new priorities in global governance.

However, a few years later this new spirit had dimmed. The prospects for sustainable peace, development and action on the environment were no longer as bright. Political optimism was fading, and economic dualism increased: while a large part of the world's population, in particular in the North, did indeed benefit from renewed economic growth and technological breakthroughs, many others were left aside. The divide between rich and poor grew wider, not narrower. The UN was as ineffective as before, despite the multiplication of meetings, conferences, reports and reviews.

It was during this period that Erskine Childers addressed many audiences around the world on issues of world governance. In all his

speeches he confessed himself a staunch defender of the values that half a century earlier had been enshrined in international law and had led to the establishment of the UN. Among those speeches, his Hague address on ‘The United Nations in a World of Conflict’ stands out for its comprehensiveness and firmness.

That address delivered more than 15 years ago is still pertinent, and is so for seven reasons.

First, in this speech Childers takes us back to the very roots of the UN system. These tend to be forgotten. The first meeting of the General Assembly of the UN took place many years ago (in 1946) and the world has since changed. People are inclined to read the principles and mandate of the UN in light of present practices. However, as Childers tirelessly argued on many occasions (Childers 1992), the founding fathers of the UN system had something else in mind. The system was established to maintain international peace and security, not only through peacekeeping operations and through political talks, but also by addressing the root causes of conflict. This would entail promoting higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development and addressing international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character. In order to do this effectively, the UN would have to be able to play a central role in international social and economic affairs. In the reports of the UN Conference on International Organisation (San Francisco, 1945) and of the preparatory commission of the UN, these affairs were defined as including international trade, finance, communications and transport, economic reconstruction, prevention of economic instability, economic development of underdeveloped areas, access to raw materials and capital goods and also health. In these reports, the founders defined a commanding role for the General Assembly, the Secretary-General and the Economic and Social Council in coordinating the policies and practices of the Bretton Woods institutions and the specialised agencies (UN 1945).

Second, in his Hague speech Childers presented a persuasive and convincing argument in favour of an integrated global approach to the challenges that were then threatening the countries and peoples of the world. The reasoning of the founding fathers of the UN implied that this system should become the commanding centrepiece in the formulation of macroeconomic, macro-trade and macro-financial policies for all peoples. In another address delivered three years earlier (Childers 1991), Childers quoted Aneurin Bevan, who in 1952 had argued that ‘the division of labour into which man is born weaves his own life into a series of interdependencies involving not only his own personal surroundings, but moving in ever-widening circles

until they encompass most parts of the earth.’ In Bevan’s view, the modern world was:

...no longer a multiplication of a number of simple self-sufficient social groupings, each able to detach itself without damage to itself...., so that the separation is now a mutilation. It is similar to a physical organism but with this difference: that it has no head, and therefore no mechanism with which to receive and co-ordinate its vibrations. (Bevan 1952: 49)

Bevan here presented an enlightening perspective on the character of globalisation, which after the Second World War had been given new impetus. If the vibrations at the global level were not guided by reason, they might plague the world.

Hypocrisy

The drafters of the UN Charter demonstrated they were aware of this risk. They opted for a system that could ensure reason in combination with ethics. However, world leaders soon renounced the principles and rules they had endorsed. This is the third theme of Childers’s speech. In words that cannot be misunderstood, he chastises the powers from the North for their hypocrisy. In another of his speeches from this period, Childers reprimands them because they ‘refused to discuss any macro-economic policy formulation in UN organs on the totally false claim that such policy issues belong in the Bretton Woods institutions – which they then make sure do not discuss them’ (Childers 1994a). The World Bank, IMF and GATT were indeed allowed to drift far from what had been concluded in San Francisco and even to abandon any pretence of acting as equitable global agencies. These specialised agencies were allowed to withdraw from any meaningful central coordination. Developing countries were confronted with uncoordinated and counterproductive international policies. The imposition of structural adjustment measures undermined development investments in education, health and agriculture. Trade protectionism by Northern countries, together with low and fluctuating commodity prices, volatile interest rates and mounting debts nullified the macroeconomic effects of development aid. Far from decreasing, poverty and inequality grew.

The countries that established the UN system have clearly been shying away from the consequences of their own bold initiative. In various speeches, Childers supposed that this unprincipled attitude arose from the fact that these countries had not expected decolonisation to take place so fast. Decolonisation resulted in a large number of newly independent nation states, all of whom applied for membership of the UN.

According to Childers, the inaugural members refused to grant to new members the rights they had created for themselves. In formal terms this had to be done, because of the one-country one-vote principle, but in reality such measures do not mean much if major decisions are being taken elsewhere. Decolonisation was indeed one of the first and major successes of the UN system. With the benefit of hindsight, this could have been expected from the very outset. Be that as it may, the founding members were clearly afraid of being outvoted by a large majority of Southern countries, their former colonies.

Are Northern powers the only ones to blame? In neither of the two addresses mentioned above did Childers discuss at length the wrongdoings of regimes in developing countries. He refers to corruption, mismanagement and defaults, but does not dwell on them. Childers shows himself to be a *Tiers Mondiste*. He argues that the peoples of the South, having long suffered oppression through colonisation, have the right to make their own mistakes. This is Childers's fourth general theme: though developing countries are independent and sovereign and responsible for the quality of the governance in their nations, the Northern former colonial powers still bear a historic responsibility. The argument is quite convincing. Until recently, as Childers argues,

...the entire Southern majority of humankind was held in intellectual and institutional stasis – in suspended animation – by Northern colonial empires. For [centuries] the South was not allowed to evolve its own institutions of governance, administration, and public accountability, or to develop science and technology and advance its economies, or to develop the very education of citizens. The proposition that societies only even legally allowed to begin to try to resume their own indigenous evolution some...decades ago bear no continuous wounds from the previous centuries is...insupportable. (Childers 1994a: 2-3)

Right over might

As a matter of fact, this would reinforce the developing countries' claim to justice within the new international legal order established after 1945. To reinforce their claim, they could quote the leader of one of the then big powers, British Prime Minister Clement Attlee, in the first-ever speech made in a UN Assembly: 'Let us be clear what is our ultimate aim. It is not just the negation of war, but the creation of a world of security and freedom, of a world which is governed by justice and moral law. We desire to assert the pre-eminence of right over might and the general good against selfish and sectional aims' (quoted in Childers 1991).

Right over might it had to be. If not, both international justice and international security would be at risk. This is Erskine's fifth theme. In his addresses at the beginning of the 1990s he issued clear warnings about the possible consequences for peace and security of injustice and neglect. In his statements, he went beyond the prediction that greater poverty would lead to more violence. Such an analysis would have been too simple. According to Childers, there is more than poverty:

Most of the South has emerged from the Cold War economically prostrated, politically ravaged, filled with long-suppressed movements of aspiration and anger and the abandoned weaponry of an alien North-North ideological contest gratuitously thrust into their lands. The South is thus the arena of political and economic policies dictated by the North that are prescriptions for mass unrest, the rise of so-called fundamentalist movements and more and more open conflict. The powers are virtually guaranteeing that these conflicts will coalesce into massive North-South confrontation early in the next century.

This long quote contains thoughts that are also pivotal in Childers's other speeches of the early 1990s. Today we are early into that next century Childers spoke of. He delivered his speech at a time of war in Bosnia, shortly after the tragedy in Somalia, shortly before the genocide in Rwanda. Since then, many 'frozen' conflicts have been unleashed, wars have been fought and people killed in Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, Congo, Gaza, Liberia, to name just a few. They could not be contained, because, as Childers foresaw in his speech in Geneva delivered half a year after his Hague address, 'present structural policies inexorably intensify the causes of conflicts that make more and more likely an apocalyptic convulsion across the North-South divide which neither they nor any imaginable UN peacekeeping capacity would contain' (Childers 1994a). It should be noted that Childers no longer referred to a possible North-South confrontation, but explicitly to a 'convulsion across the North-South divide'. This is exactly what has happened at the turn of the century.

North-South stands for a divide between haves and have nots in terms of welfare and power. That divide has economic, social, cultural and political dimensions, which reinforce each other. The possible consequences of the widening of these gaps, as foreseen by Childers, have become the grim realities of today or have come close to realisation. Presently the situation is even grimmer. Witness, for instance, climate change, more rapid than envisaged at that time. Witness the global financial crisis due to the 'vibrations' orchestrated by transnational banks and not constrained by rational, reasonable and responsible action – in Bevan's terms, a 'head'. Witness the weakening of many nation states,

many fragile, some failing or even breaking down. Witness also threats to security from international terrorism, the general recourse to defending national interests through so-called pre-emptive strikes and the resulting violations of human security, human rights and democracy.

These developments were foreseen not only by Erskine Childers. Others – intellectuals, civil servants, politicians and citizens – spoke along similar lines. Erskine Childers, however, did not confine himself to criticising prevailing policies and practices, issuing warnings or preaching doom, he also made a number of concrete proposals for UN reform. He did so on many occasions, and I consider this – the sixth theme in his speech in The Hague – one of his strengths. Childers always came forward with constructive ideas. They were not dreams, but options for change within reach, both desirable and feasible. The general principles underlying the proposed reforms were that the institutions had to be truly global, equally representative, fully integrating all dimensions of development and conflict and that they should have authority, in other words become some form of democratic central power at the international level. I will not repeat the proposals made by Childers in this and other addresses. They can be studied together with proposals made elsewhere, for instance in the *Report Our Global Neighbourhood* by the Commission of Global Governance (Carlsson and Ramphal 1995) and *Renewing the United Nations System* (Childers and Urquhart 1994). Not all these proposals have been rejected or neglected and a few have been brought to some form of implementation. Currently, an ongoing debate on UN reform continues. However, reform has always been marginal and piecemeal, never substantial, leaving the central powers unchallenged. The present discussion within the UN does not offer much prospect of anything different.

Childers does not blame the UN itself for this. He has made it clear that the UN administration is at the mercy of governments. For this reason, he recommended against devoting much time to amending the UN Charter. Such an enterprise might even be counterproductive, because it could strengthen the hand of those governments aiming to further weaken Attlee's principle of 'right over might' (Childers 1991). Instead, he pleaded for the mobilisation of world public opinion in order 'to use every possible comparative advantage of the system as it is' (Childers 1991). So, use what is available, fight for this and confront the powers that try to conceal their actions in violation of once-agreed principles.

Hope

Will such mobilisation be successful? Here we come to the seventh element in Childers's Hague speech. The speaker, addressing an audi-

ence of young citizens rather than experienced bureaucrats and politicians, not only offered theoretical alternatives but also made clear that these alternatives had a chance to be turned into reality. It was a heartening message of hope.

Childers gave three reasons for being hopeful. Despite everything, the South had not yet given up on the UN. Moreover, Northern powers had to confront so many problems at home they would have fewer resources to rule the world by themselves without regard for their partners in the South. And, finally, the world's public, growing increasingly concerned about global problems, might become involved in a surge for responsible leadership by an effective and truly representative UN.

More than 15 years have passed and the world has changed a great deal since Erskine Childers delivered his speeches. It is too early to conclude that the three reasons for hope have faded. However, in the North and in the South choices are being made that are different from what he hoped for or expected. The US has spent huge resources on invading Iraq, waging a war in Afghanistan and fighting international terrorism. Other powers in the current multi-polar world support or, at least, allow these endeavours to dominate world affairs, without any meaningful UN involvement. In the South, many no longer believe the UN can play an effective non-partisan role. Many governments and people see the UN as a Western construction. Moreover, today the South is even less a common entity than it was shortly after decolonisation. At that time, resource-rich countries and emerging economies in the South attempted within the UN to define common positions together with the poor and economically less developed countries. Together they saw themselves as the so-called Third World. Since the end of the Cold War, there is no longer any reason to define common positions and join forces. Increasingly, the larger and stronger Southern countries such as Brazil, China, India and South Africa work together with Russia in the BRICS coalition to negotiate with the bigger and more powerful Northern counterparts outside the framework of the UN. The G20 and special so-called 'Coalitions of the Willing' talk and work on economic, financial, political and environmental issues, without involving the smaller, weaker and poorer countries of the world. The interests of the latter hardly feature in frameworks that are self-elective and self-contained. The UN is a principled system, values-based, rules-based and rooted in international law. These principles and values, the procedures of decision-making and the rules of implementation are the result of consensus. All these considerations can be arbitrarily laid aside in the new gatherings where so-called global deals are made. Peoples and nations excluded from the deals have no right of appeal.

There is no Third World anymore in terms of a clearly defined group of nations. The concept of North-South has also lost its meaning as a distinction between two groups of countries. The present North-South divide is not between nations, but between classes. Globalisation has resulted in a convergence of economic interests of the upper and middle classes in all countries, North and South, East and West. This may help us to avoid new international wars, until countries become involved in a scramble for scarce resources. However, in all countries the middle and upper classes strive for greater economic welfare by neglecting, exploiting and excluding people who are poor, weak and voiceless, and do not have adequate access to land, water, energy, capital, credit, technology, education, health, public services – in short, the means necessary to improve their own lot and to benefit from economic growth in general. Indeed, the present North-South can be observed within all the countries of the world, leading to a global North-South divide that no longer follows national frontiers.

In his speeches and writing, Erskine Childers dealt in particular with discord between nation states. However, as noted above, he also referred to more complex conflicts, including reverse aspirations within countries, which could lead to an ‘apocalyptic convulsion across the North-South divide’. In the last 20 years, economic and political conflicts within countries have become ever sharper, more complicated and less manageable because of cultural, religious and ethnic divisions. The escalation of such conflicts, and the resulting violence, has spread across national frontiers and sometimes taken on global proportions. So far, the UN’s capacity to deal with these increasingly complicated conflicts has not kept pace with events. Root causes are hardly addressed. Governments of individual nation states, to guard their national security, increasingly look to their military, police, special forces, intelligence and secret services, rather than seeking political solutions within the framework of values-based international consultations and negotiations.

So, Childers’s first two reasons for hope for a better UN have become even more fragile than they were 20 years ago. However, the very international developments that have nearly made these hopes illusory provide strong reason to revitalise the UN. Violations of peace, threats to security and challenges to sustainability demand a greater capacity in international society to address the root causes of these dangers. Will new generations be aware of these risks and of the need to address them in a rights-based and equitable way? Childers’s third reason to be hopeful did not lie with states, governments and regimes, but with peoples. An increased public awareness and concern about global problems might mobilise people in favour of UN global leader-

ship. Such awareness and concern has indeed increased, for instance, with regard to terrorism or climate change. This, however, has not yet led to a broad popular movement in favour of equitable provisions to meet the needs of all the peoples of the world and create a sustainable future for all of humankind. Concern and fear seem to foster self-centredness and the apportionment of blame on other people of different backgrounds, cultures and beliefs.

However, Childers was right to base his hope on people rather than regimes. Perhaps this is even truer now than 20 years ago. The broadening and deepening of globalisation after the end of the Cold War has resulted in rapid and widely shared technological progress and in unprecedented opportunities for people all over the world to gain access to information and to communicate with one another. At the beginning of this new century, generations of young people are using these opportunities freely and intensively. They do not easily accept the suppression of information and ideas by authorities, governments and other powers. They know how to get around restrictions on information and freedom of opinion and expression. The audience of Erskine Childers's speeches 15 or so years ago did not have such opportunities to the extent that people do today. Nowadays, many young people in countries all around the world communicate with each other in unprecedented ways. They are less prejudiced than their predecessors, have more in common, and share information, ideas, expectations and hopes.

So, Erskine Childers's three reasons for hope can be turned into a threefold appeal: believe in the opportunities that present themselves, get mobilised and confront selfish powers. That is what the founding fathers of the UN had in mind. It is still worth a try.

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Far too serious a matter to be left to governments

Time to assert Citizens' Rights in the UN

Erskine Childers



Original text sent to 'Development' journal
Society for International Development
Printed in an abridged version

*'Everything will be all right when people
stop seeing the United Nations as a weird
Picasso drawing, and see it as a drawing
they made themselves.'*

Dag Hammarskjöld

If, thirty-five years ago, Secretary-General Hammarskjöld felt that people found it difficult to see the UN clearly, and to see themselves involved in it, what would he say today? This year the drawing is festooned with jubilee decorations, but under these ephemera it is if anything more bizarre, daubed in even heavier contradictions.

The basic contradiction, of course, concerns the numerous, first-ever strides the UN has in fact made despite the attacks on it. Some quick examples:

- The General Assembly has been scorned by Northern democrats (of all people) as 'a useless talking shop' ever since it achieved virtually universal membership; but its 'irresponsible majority' has by now created humanity's first-ever magna carta, comprising some 70 legal instruments of human rights¹.
- The UN's founders did not predict decolonisation even within this century; they directed the architects of the new Seat at New York to allow for a possible maximum of some 70 member-states. The buildings with these essentially North-centred space assumptions were

¹ cf., *ia, Human Rights - A Compilation of International Instruments*, United Nations, recurrently up-dated.

hardly opened when the UN's own Charter and first human rights declarations motivated a grassfire sweep of liberation movements that have by now ended – at least legally – the age of Northern empires.

- With virtually universal access to humankind for the first time, a breathtaking succession of UN world Conferences began in the 1970s, preceded by well-organized national research, regional analyses, and then global assessments. For the first time in its history, humankind took inventory of itself, and of its planetary environment. (For the first time, too, governments lost the last excuse for inertia, that of ignorance).
- Those conference processes themselves required and generated hitherto unimagined exercises in co-operation between governments. An illustration of what can be achieved in such co-operation through the UN System – and down to the smallest health clinic in every country on the planet, day in and day out, year after year for one specific goal – was the total eradication of smallpox, from 1967 with some 15 million known cases, to only 1980 when the World Health Organisation could announce the whole planet free of that ancient scourge.
- As but one illustration of the progressive products of UN human rights legislation combined with the results of UN mega-conferences, in only a quarter of a century the UN Population Fund has implanted everywhere the concept of social responsibility for human fertility rates, and of the right of every woman to control her fertility.
- From the first (Stockholm) Conference on the Environment in 1972, a relentless mobilisation of public concern and a progressive development of public policy culminated at the UN Rio conference in 'Agenda 21', to chart our way back from the brink of destroying this planet.
- After 300 years and four conferences between 1958 and 1982, the UN intergovernmental community has made the conduct of nations on and under the seas and oceans far more responsible with the giant Law of the Sea.

A full listing of all the solid achievements of our universal public-service institution in only half a century would consume many pages of this journal.

And yet ... what people 'see' from day to day is so very contradictory, so filled with evidence of indifference to the Charter and UN goals, as to raise in question whether the same governments could possibly be responsible. Consider the following Picasso-like slashes of nonsensical, regressive and undemocratic behaviour on our UN canvas in 1995:

- The UN is kept on the brink of bankruptcy by the refusal of its very Host Government to pay its full membership dues unless all other members accept its unilateral policy and managerial demands. The Host Country is with-holding some \$1.2 billion, but is still allowed to profit from the UN by about \$1.2 billion of UN procurement awards and income from the headquarters being in New York². European governments not only accept the US political blackmail but meekly subsidise the delinquency, and many developing countries, providing about half the UN's peace-keeping forces, are not reimbursed for their costs;
- Fifty years after they were already archaisms, the power of veto and the claim to permanent, un-elected seats in the Security Council are still insisted upon by 5 out of 185 member-countries. In the so-called Age of Democracy, another two industrial states are demanding to join this unseemly club, and to try to secure this efforts are being made to seduce several large Southern countries into it, and thus to prolong these fascist flaws in the Charter³ ;
- Running their special cabal within the Five, the three Western 'Permanent Members' have brilliantly demonstrated their superior diplomatic wisdom and military power in former Yugoslavia. In a brutal conflict on its own continent that Europe not only failed to avert but has by unilateral diplomacy actually exacerbated, the Three have involved the UN in a miasma of ambiguous mandates with a protection force which the Secretary-General warned would be utterly inadequate – while their spokesmen have seized every possible opportunity to call the resultant tragic shambles and destruction of a people's human rights and homeland 'a UN fiasco'⁴ ;
- Through all the years of their Cold War, the nuclear powers insisted to all who demanded that they eliminate such weapons that

2 The United States was the largest debtor to the UN for \$1.2 billion as of 12 July 1995, UN Press Statement of that date. The next-largest debtor was the Russian Federation, owing \$559 million; but only the United States was a deliberate debtor, with-holding dues to the regular and peacekeeping budgets for stated political reasons. UN public documents for 1994 record that the US earned \$377.5 million from procurement awards; the City of New York's UN Commission's last estimate, now undoubtedly lower than current benefits, recorded over \$800 million in income flowing into the greater-New York area from the presence of the UN.

3 By any definition, provisions in a constitution whereby an unelected small minority have permanent seats on a key decision-making body; can veto all police actions and all peaceful settlement actions in the community; can veto any candidacy for the community's elected chief public servant; and can veto any amendment to the constitution entrenching these privileges, are fascist flaws in even an otherwise beautiful document.

4 For a complete recounting of the ambiguous mandates, see the *Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to Security Council Resolutions 982 (1995) and 987 (1995)*, 30 May 1995, New York.

their contest required such ‘mutual deterrence’. Their Cold War has evaporated, but they have now forced through the General Assembly an indefinite extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) which is to allow them to keep their filthy weapons as long as they wish. The methods they used in the Assembly to secure this decision constitute one of the most disgraceful displays of brute power in the UN’s annals.

- When asked about this pressure and intimidation, however, Indonesia’s Foreign Minister responded, ‘So what else is new? It happens every day’⁵. In the Security Council routinely, and in the General Assembly whenever they deem it also important, the major powers, despite that they have national laws making the extortion of votes a criminal felony, use precisely such methods at the UN against any recalcitrant weak member-country. Their Ambassadors are quite likely the next day to pontificate on the virtues of their democratic systems⁶. The practice is so consistent that at least one poorer country withdrew its candidacy for a Security Council seat rather than face the special intimidation and menaces to its economy that membership in the Council entails. The head of one Latin American delegation to the NPT Conference resigned rather than implement his government’s instructions after it had been successfully coerced into accepting the nuclear powers’ demands.
- Through the UN’s development funds and agencies as well as by bilateral aid, Northern ‘donor’ governments have for decades assisted developing countries in building their health and education services. The same ‘donor’ governments have, however, authorised the International Monetary Fund and World Bank to require the same developing countries to dismantle up to 35 percent of the health and educational services thus built. Meanwhile, numerous Northern authorities complain that the UN Economic and Social Council has ‘failed to coordinate’!

5 Reported in ed. B. K. Menon, *International Documents Review*, Vol. 6 No. 27, 17-21 July 1995, New Jersey.

6 The extortion of votes is carried out by the ambassador(s) of one (or more) of the powers informing the developing country government(s) that there will be less or no aid, less or no debt relief, less or no credit rating by the IMF, less or no capital financing from the World Bank, unless the government instructs its delegation at the UN to vote the way the power(s) wish. Alternatively, outright bribery with debt relief or financial transfers or most-favoured nation trade treatment may be used. The victim government, as with the individual victim of extortion, blackmail, dare not publicly expose this coercion. The semblance of ‘unanimity’ in the Security Council during the Gulf Crisis, over its cease-fire resolution, and over sanctions against Libya, was obtained by these methods. In addition to the NPT decision delegations in the General Assembly have been similarly coerced over votes on Palestine, referral of the threat of nuclear weapons to the World Court, and many other critical issues.

- The Charter commits all member-governments to work for ‘the economic and social advancement of all peoples’. But as the UN turned 50, the richest one-fifth of humankind was earning over 60 times what the poorest one-fifth could earn – twice as wide a gap as in 1960. Yet amid donor complaints of ‘aid fatigue’, Northern trade barriers and other Northern-imposed structural inequities are depriving the South of over \$500 billion a year that it could be earning ... about ten times all the ‘aid’ the donor North says it is fatigued about providing⁷.
- The UN is virtually powerless to remedy such nonsensical behaviour because the industrial powers refuse to discuss global macro-economic policy in any UN forum, claiming that the Bretton Woods institutions are so mandated. This claim is totally false, and in any case the Bretton Woods institutions do not discuss, leave alone formulate any kind of macro-economic policy for the full world of 5.7 billion people⁸. Nor do the G-7 industrial powers’ club; their ‘global economy’ in their summit communiqués is only the Japan-North America-Europe economy (less than a quarter of humankind). With the UN denied its Charter mandates to exert global economic leadership, humankind is thus totally bereft of strategic policy to bring it through the increasing dangers of a North-South convulsion.
- This gigantic problem and danger is well-illustrated in basic facts about world trade. Where the South did at least have 28 percent of world trade in the early 1970s, today the majority of humankind have only 19 per cent of world trade⁹, a prescription for global conflict. Yet major industrial powers are determined to prevent the new World Trade Organisation from being made a specialized agency in the UN System lest the majority might be able to exert some serious influence over this increasingly dangerous trade gap. The WTO is bidden by its Northern controllers instead to work closely with the IMF and World Bank, whose track record on behalf of the poor is of course well known. Meanwhile, efforts are being exerted finally to close down UNCTAD, such stratagems even penetrating into the supposedly ‘representative’ report of the Global Governance Commission¹⁰.

7 *Human Development Report*, 1992 et seq., UNDP, New York.

8 The actual stature and operational power of the Bretton Woods institutions has been grossly inflated as part of the G-7 strategy. The IMF is not allowed by its controllers to have responsibility for more than about 10 per cent of total world liquidity. The World Bank has so little command over surplus financial resources that in 1990, when there was a global surplus of \$180 billion, the Bank was only able to recycle \$1.7 billion to developing countries. Data from SID Roundtable Papers by Dr. Mahbub ul Haq.

9 *ibid.*

10 Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighbourhood* (Oxford, University Press, 1995), pages 280-281 and *passim*.

Riddles on the canvas

How can such behaviour, ranging from the inefficient to the stupid and on to the criminal and brutal, come from within the same inter-governmental community responsible for so many genuinely global and history-making UN achievements? The question is not rhetorical; it strikes to the heart of the UN's problems at 50.

There is not one answer but several, and they may guide us to needed action. They concern the long-gathering potency of mere psychological intimidation of the weak by the strong; the noxious mutuality of 'hardball diplomacy' and the mental disease of 'realism'; the ease with which these influences have to date been able to bury the actual powers the majority possess in the Charter; the fragility of national government when extended into multilateral structures; a grievous lack of public knowledge of international law; and underlying all these factors, the inertia of 'We, the Peoples of the United Nations'.

Programmed subservience of the mind

The first and most important key to these riddles is intimidation. The international community as a whole is still partly caught in the programmed mentality of imperialism and colonialism which was, at all times and everywhere, 95 per cent outright bluff about 'power', punctuated by 5 per cent periodic massacres. The difference between then and now ought to be that the world was then a far less open and transparent place, where today it ought to be very easy to call the bluff. Why it has so seldom been called needs exploration.

The two words 'great powers' still have a kind of automatic reflex impact. Northern journalism as a whole still worships this kind of power, does not question its premisses or the realities of its claims, and constantly regenerates an unhealthy respect for these powers by its choice of topics and its language. From officialdom through decision-influencers to citizens, most people do not stop to question the proposition in the phrases; do not stop to ask, who said they are 'great powers?'; in what are they so 'powerful'?

The moment such questions are asked the bluff is useless. Even the 'single superpower' (a post-Cold War media term within the same worship-syndrome) does not withstand serious examination of its credentials. Like any other country, the United States has many good qualities. But its physical infrastructure is stated by its own authorities to be in advanced decay; its surface economic superiority can be destroyed overnight by decisions in Berlin and Tokyo; the majority of its citizens

have steadily lost real income in the last two decades; homelessness, urban violence, and even child malnutrition have increased; the US has over 200 million guns in private hands, and the highest rate of imprisonment in the world; and in its last major foreign military adventure in the Gulf War it had to go hat in hand among its ever-dubious allies and unsavoury clients to finance the operation.

An intelligent visitor from another planet would be extremely puzzled about all this worshipful respect and semi-fear of a handful of countries, and would check through their credentials to ascertain what lay behind this. She would almost certainly report back that their only serious claim to such ‘power’ is that they have abused science to refine weapons expressly designed to incinerate, irradiate, flay alive, and otherwise hideously maim and disfigure the largest number of human beings in the shortest possible time.

But this kind of examination seldom happens among the terrestrial beings who are imbued with all this intimidation.

‘Hardball diplomacy’

Sustaining the myths has been made easier by a less purely imagined kind of intimidation, and never more so than at the United Nations. The practice of extortion and subornation of votes and voices in United Nations organs comes sufficiently closer to reality to be more difficult to overcome. For, just as the individual victim of blackmail is required to stay silent and not seek support in the community, so the individual member-government of the United Nations, ordered to vote a certain way by Washington and/or London and/or Paris feels helpless.

The Ambassador at the UN who receives cabled instructions from his home capital to do the bidding of ‘the powers’ over some coming vote in the Security Council or the General Assembly cannot call in the Press Corps and announce this to the world as the blatant violation of the Charter and international law that it is¹¹. Nor can he count on the Press somehow independently finding out what is being threatened and forthrightly reporting it; the most that happens is that a news item about the results of the resolution may say, ‘after particularly intensive diplomatic pressure, the Western powers succeeded ...’.

11 It is not worth using the term ‘he or she’ about Ambassadors to the UN, because out of 185 there are only some 7 who are women; but that is yet another story about the world organisation at 50 ...

The nearest a media report may come to the truth is the occasional use of a colloquialism which, itself, is part of the intimidation and the worship – ‘hardball diplomacy’. It sounds tough, masculine, above all effective ... a short distance from ‘just the way things are done’ ... only another short mental span from ‘the way things always will be’.

The Ambassador receiving the cabled instruction to suborn his Charter-protected vote for his country to the wishes of one or three Northern regimes knows that the threat delivered to his government may be very real indeed. These, the realities often just below the surface of UN deliberative processes, are threats beyond mere imagination or long-conditioned psychology, because they have actually been carried out against weak developing countries. For example, for opposing the force-authorizing Security Council resolution in the Gulf Crisis, Yemen’s ‘aid’ was immediately halted and 800,000 of its remittance workers expelled overnight from Saudi Arabia.

These are threats to the very lives, health, education and all other elements of even only sustained life, for from tens of thousands to millions of human beings, depending on the size of the targeted country. They are in very real terms a form of state terrorism, carried out by the very governments that have invoked that charge most often and loudly against others.

The extortion technique invariably involves the ‘targeting’ of a number of developing countries carefully selected for maximum psychological effect among all other Southern governments. By this device Southern solidarity at the UN is already half-broken before anyone may begin to gather the courage to suggest a united stand. Every one of up to a hundred or so governments knows that ‘we may be next’.

The two kinds of intimidation – the inherited-psychological and the current-real – play enormous roles inside the United Nations, both among delegations and in the calculations of any Secretary-General lacking the straightforward courage to defend the Charter and dare the ‘powers’ to have him removed. Simply because it is repeated often enough in the corridors and coffee-breaks, UN processes are often virtually timetabled by the syndrome of ‘waiting for the Permanent Members’ to indicate of what they approve or disapprove, how they

will react to a draft resolution¹². There are times when the ambiance of an institution whose Charter proclaims ‘the equal rights of nations large and small’ is more like that of a mediaeval Court where everyone waited breathlessly upon the next pronouncement from the Inner Chamber before daring to speak.

Thus, the weaknesses of the United Nations are by no means only those recognisable controversies of the size and quality of its staff, the relevance or not of all agenda items, the usefulness or not of one or another organ. Few citizens of the United Nations can ever know that it is an organisation under constant cynical domination by the elites of a mere handful of countries – whose own citizens do not know this because it is quite as thoroughly concealed from them, usually in the din of demagogic disinformation purveyed to them about the UN by their own elected representatives.

The role of ‘realism’

The profound disjunctures between the noble goals and the actual achievements of the UN on the one hand, and the kinds of behaviour sketched earlier, are strengthened by another influence of our times, the school of ‘realism’ in international affairs. This, too, is profoundly anti-democratic but it, too, is strongest within precisely those countries whose leaders continually pontificate that they are the exemplars of democracy in the world.

The ‘realists’ have it that economic and military power are now and always will be the over-riding forces governing the conduct of world affairs, the condition of the international community, and of course the continuation or decline of the United Nations. The ‘realist’ is an academic intellectual, an editor, a politician, an international lawyer, or a diplomat who stands comfortably behind this nostrum. A minuscule fraction are women who have advanced by imitating men; the overwhelming majority of ‘realists’ are men, and it is a very macho perspective on our world and its public-service institutions.

The ‘realist’ tells anyone who invokes something called ethics, or ideals, that these are almost entirely irrelevant unless they are espoused by the mighty for some specific and probably short-term realpolitik.

¹² Of the five Permanent Members, of course, China makes all possible efforts to stay detached from this cabal, and now accepts designation with the Group of 77 of the developing countries under the formula, ‘the G-77 and China’. The Russian Federation, its already Cold-War bankrupted economy further wrecked by the hectoring incompetence of Western ‘market magic’ experts, is a sometime partner in what is really a bluff of three – the ‘PermThree’, Britain, France, and the United States.

The real reforms needed in the UN have always been nonchalantly dismissed by the adherents of this amoral and cynical school as ‘starry-eyed’ and ‘utopianist’ – code-language for, ‘Not acceptable to the powers, therefore silly’.

Above all in this anniversary year when many more minds than usual turn to strengthening our United Nations, the ‘realists’ are ever-present to advise with that all-knowing smile that the only reforms that will ever be adopted are those that will suit the powerful. This poisonous construct has exerted powerful influence on some of the specially commissioned reform studies, but so subtly that it requires re-reading to detect it.

The key to these hidden roles of ‘realism’ in such reform papers is to see where the reason for the alleged ‘failure’ of a part of the UN that is to be turned over to the tender mercies of the minority is not given. It is simply fudged in a sudden turn of grammar – like, ‘For reasons of realism attention has switched [from the UN] to the Bretton Woods institutions’¹³.

Concealed in this single innocent-looking sentence are such important facts as that the Bretton Woods institutions were deliberately built up by the industrial powers, while the economic staff of the UN were deliberately cut down¹⁴. But as if an Act of the gods, the ‘switching of attention’ is described as having no known source, no deliberate provenance; it just happened. And so, once having happened, ‘realism’ would argue that it must continue to be so ...

A majority not using the powers it has

If the deadly mutualities of ‘hardball diplomacy’ and ‘realism’ have wrought havoc with the citizen’s dream for the United Nations, they have also helped to disable the majority of the world’s nations in powers which the majority actually does possess. This may seem almost a contradiction in terms at first sight, but not when the insidious influences of intimidation and ‘realism’ are taken fully into consideration.

13 Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighbourhood* (Oxford, University Press, 1995), page 155.

14 The staff of the World Bank, for example, was doubled between the late 1970s and 1990, while in one single exertion of pressure in 1986 the industrial powers had the entire UN Secretariat staff slashed by 13 percent (cf. World Bank Annual Reports).. The powers have repeatedly claimed that UN salaries are too high (while many Northern governments subsidised their nationals in UN posts because the salaries were too low for them!); there have seldom even been murmurs out of the same governments about the 35 per cent higher Bretton Woods salaries, leave alone such Bretton Woods prerequisites as First Class air travel.

The sheer psychological effect of the presence of the power of veto in the hands of five ‘Permanent Members’ has had the effect of putting out of sight and out of mind numerous defensive and assertive powers and authorities the majority could readily invoke in the present Charter. There has been down the years the constant, drumming effect of the dictum that ‘the Security Council takes binding decisions, the General Assembly only passes recommendations’. In a very real sense, intimidation and ‘realism’ have nearly defeated all the strenuous efforts made by the smaller countries fifty years ago to write into the Charter untouchable powers for the General Assembly. Three quick examples must suffice:

- In the Gulf Crisis the General Assembly was virtually inert because Article 12.1 states that if the Security Council is already seized of a dispute, the Assembly cannot make a recommendation on it unless the Council so requests. Yet this does not bar the Assembly from debating such a crisis – which would have enabled the great majority of the world’s governments to make clear their profound disagreement with what was being contrived, towards war, in the Security Council;
- Through the elections of all six Secretaries-General to date, there has been the same pernicious ‘waiting upon the Permanent Members’ to see which candidates might survive their veto powers over the post. The result has been that the General Assembly which, in the Charter, alone has the actual power of appointment of the Secretary-General, has played little more than a rubber-stamping role. Yet because it has the sole power to appoint, nothing and no one could stop the General Assembly majority from rejecting any recommendation from the Council, and indeed rejecting its candidate as often as necessary. If the General Assembly were to make this crystal-clear to the Council at the very onset of the ‘selection’ process – better still, to send the Council instructions as to how the Assembly expected the recommendation stage to be conducted by the Council – the Permanent Members might take their self-arrogated role more seriously as long as they are allowed to retain it.
- The Security Council is presumed to have sole authority to mount a UN peacekeeping operation, and to have this decision binding on all members. But the Security Council cannot appropriate a single Dollar of UN funds; under the Charter, only the General Assembly has budgetary powers. The General Assembly must approve the actual funds that alone give effect to a ‘binding’ Council deployment decision. Nothing except intimidation could bar the Assembly from using this power to nullify a Security Council decision which the majority of members could not support.

Many other examples of the written yet, in effect, buried real powers of the majority of members in the United Nations could be cited. It is very human, it is all too understandable, but it is tragic and it must become intolerable any longer, that half the game in the struggle to democratise the UN is given away at the outset by the sheer force of intimidation.

Governments disuniting themselves at the UN

Another contribution to the bizarre drawing has been the fragility of national government when extending itself into the UN System. An example was cited earlier, of the same ‘donor’ governments helping to build health services with one hand while having the IMF order them torn down with the other.

When the UN was being founded, professional and technical ‘sectoralism’ and ‘functionalism’ were strong¹⁵. Several of today’s Specialized Agencies were already in gestation as entirely separate international organisations before the UN founders even assembled at San Francisco. Yet it was well appreciated at San Francisco that if the new UN was to address the causes of conflict, and to succeed in promoting ‘the economic and social advancement of all peoples’, the emergent very loose ‘system’ of UN and Agencies must be held together and be well co-ordinated by the UN.

The founders adopted many carefully debated and constructed measures to achieve this – including adopting the principle, never implemented to this day, that the headquarters of all specialised agencies should be located at the Seat of the United Nations¹⁶. They also wrote into the Charter what they intended to be the powerful Article 58, mandating the General Assembly to co-ordinate the policies of all such agencies (including the policies of the IMF, World Bank, and the later US-blocked International Trade Organisation); and Article 17.3 under which the General Assembly should have been reviewing the budgets of the Agencies, the ultimate hope of the founders being a single consolidated budget of the whole UN System.

¹⁵ ‘Functionalism’, a term usually attributed to David Mitrany, held that international collaboration in technical fields like agronomy and public health, education and telecommunications merited their own institutions, and in any case must not be put at risk in an integrated United Nations – lest such co-operation be destroyed if the politicians failed again as they had in the League of Nations.

¹⁶ These and other such measures are discussed in detail in Erskine Childers with Brian Urquhart, *Renewing The United Nations System* (Uppsala, Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 1994).

However, so apprehensive were the founders of the ultimate Achilles Heel of this entire architecture to bring the UN and agencies together, that they ended their recommendations to the first, 1946 General Assembly on implementing the new Charter with a warning. They warned that if individual member-governments did not co-ordinate their own policies – in their own capitals where their delegations to each separate entity would be instructed – then the whole design might falter.

Their warning was all too prophetic; for among the greatest single causes of the weakness of the UN System – and of the bewilderment of ‘people’ before Hammarskjöld’s drawing – is the kind of failure to co-ordinate national policies within the UN System exemplified by the IMF syndrome cited above. Equally, this has afforded one of the special advantages the Northern minority has had in ensuring that it retains much majority-like control of the UN. The full strength of developing-country governments is dissipated in their separate delegations at the tragically scattered headquarters of the System in nine cities in seven countries on two continents and across one ocean.

The Cinderella of International Law

Running through all the foregoing causes of the numerous contradictions to which we are witness in the UN at 50, there is one other in particular – the lack of public knowledge of international law.

The UN has in fact an astonishing body of achievement in this field in its half-century record: more international law has been developed under the auspices of the General Assembly in the last fifty years than in all previous history. But not only is this breath-taking accomplishment of well over 20,000 new legal instruments deposited at the UN very little known; the international law of the Charter itself is very little known. This massive subject can only be touched upon here. But the part of it that needs to be addressed above all, as we try to strengthen our UN, concerns ‘We, the Peoples’.

Again, at first sight this may seem as bizarre a proposition as perceptions of ‘the UN’ itself: how can the citizen of the United Nations possibly relate to, leave alone invoke, so abstruse and complex a thing as International Law? The first answer is that this is precisely part of the problem – the perception of international law as impossibly remote, mysterious. And, of course, the ‘realists’ constantly tell us that international law is of very little ‘operational relevance’.

Only one part of a more full answer can be outlined here. The citizen of any member-country of the UN has, at international law, the right to benefit from the ‘useful effects’ of the treaty obligations which her or his government has ratified in accepting the Charter.

In a generally cautious and conservative profession, the concept of ‘useful effect’ in a treaty is not yet granted enthusiastic endorsement by every international lawyer; but it exists, and support for it is growing, and it is being used in actual litigation¹⁷.

In essence, it is possible for any one of ‘We, the Peoples of the United Nations’ to demand, at law that his or her government properly account for its efforts to secure the fullest implementation of the promises in the United Nations Charter.

And it is possible for us to organise to sue one or more governments for violating our UN Charter. A strikingly successful illustration of this has already been the World Court Project. An increasingly powerful number of professionals’ and citizens’ organisations around the world have managed to provide sufficient support for a majority of governments, first in the World Health Assembly and last December in the UN General Assembly, to have the threat of use of nuclear weapons referred to the World Court under the Charter for an Advisory Opinion whether such threat violates international laws.

‘We, the Peoples’ coming out of our long sleep

In this and in a thousand far more well-known and more dramatically reported ways, the single most encouraging phenomenon as the United Nations enters its second half-century is the awakening of its citizens to its vital roles. In ever growing numbers, they are perceiving how the UN is indispensable, even in their particular ‘issues’ which only yesterday they assumed should be held at wary distance from ‘it’. In turn, they are becoming more and more concerned about their governments’ inadequate discharge of their duties in the UN.

The NGO movement is in turns exhilarating and scaring the pants off the UN diplomatic and civil-service community. The spectacle of ‘intergovernmental’ UN world Conferences being transformed into world citizens’ meetings of thousands is acknowledged by more and more officials to be at least as much a help, an energy-charging

¹⁷ cf., i.a., Olivier Russbach, *ONU contre ONU* (Paris, Editions La Decouverte, 1994), *passim*.

phenomenon, as by other officials a blasted nuisance. The former need more of it; the latter need to be even more bothered by it.

Mahatma Gandhi proved that people power – unarmed, impoverished people power – was the one certain means of bursting the giant bubble of bluff that imperial ‘power’ really was.

The entire ground upon which the ‘realists’ feel safe to tread and purvey their shabby projections of our children’s future is the hallowed ground of ‘power’ that has not been challenged by people power. At last, there is an ‘other’ power that can expose ‘realism’ as nothing more than dangerous nihilism. It is the power of an alert, impatient, and when necessary very angry citizenry.

Citizens in countries whose governments – as in Europe – acquiesce in the incompetent and undemocratic grip of the ‘powers’ over the UN can now effectively demand that their governments have nothing to lose but their shame. For no government in Europe needs to fear economic retaliation as the price of insisting on its right to un-suborned and un-terrorised voting in United Nations organs.

The directly menaced citizens in weak developing countries can do more to support their governments in principled stands against such state terrorism; but as the potential further victims, so often already destitute, they need and deserve the help of their Northern sisters and brothers. It is incredible to have to suggest it, but it is time for the NGO movement to establish a ‘Blackmail Watch’ at the United Nations.

All NGOs that have by now discovered how vital is the United Nations to the issues they work on also need to form effective consortia to watch over the behaviour of their governments in the forthcoming UN-reform processes. Plenty of dirty compromises are being hatched – like extending the archaic privileges of the ‘Permanent Members’ by luring a few more from both North and South into their reliquary cabal.

Decently un-assuming citizens in the countries still calling themselves ‘Permanent Members’ must be supported in realizing how shameful it is that they have never in fifty years had the courage to stand for election to the Security Council like all others. The international NGO movement needs to generate an incessant chorus of demand that the entire veto system be abolished forthwith. A simple start can be made by mobilising a campaign now, publicly to invite even one Permanent Member to show that it does wish to enter the modern world by

simply relinquishing its veto power over the next appointment of our universally responsible chief public servant, the Secretary-General.

It should also be a watchword of invigilating NGOs that they will not allow their governments to be rushed into any reforms of any part of the UN, if the result is either an incompetent change or a disguised protraction of the status quo.

The agenda for real, genuinely improving reform of the United Nations is considerable. Amid the many solid achievements of our governments through it, their obeisance to ‘the powers’ combined with their recurring fragility in their own home structures has left our world organisation perilously weak at the very moment when neglect of the causes of conflict is coming home to roost with a vengeance. We have no time to lose in organising – to support government when it is doing well by us, to challenge and demand that it do better when it is failing us at the UN.

For the United Nations is ours, not theirs. ‘We, the Peoples’ must resolve in this anniversary year never again to leave our United Nations to governments; for it is indeed far too important a matter to be safely entrusted to them alone.



Commentary by Sir Brian Urquhart

Erskine Childers’s grandfather, Robert Erskine Childers, was a renowned British soldier and also a passionate Irish nationalist. After selfless service to the cause, he was, by a terrible irony, executed on a trumped-up charge by the first government of the Irish Free State in the Irish Civil War of 1922. In 1903 he had written the first great spy thriller, *The Riddle of the Sands*, which has been in print ever since. Erskine’s father, Erskine Hamilton Childers, was the fourth president of Ireland. Like Erskine, he died much too young of a heart attack after making a speech. Through his Irish ancestry, Erskine knew intimately both the evils of unlimited power, as evidenced in imperialism and colonialism, and the pointlessness of violence. He spent his life fighting both.

I only got to know Erskine well after we had both retired from the UN. I greatly enjoyed the years we spent producing several brief books on UN reform. Erskine was always the one who stated the case

with the maximum brio. I was, I regret to say, the one who usually urged the softer voice of persuasion. We had a wonderful time.

I had not seen the present manifesto before, although I am familiar with all the issues and the arguments and agree with Erskine on most of them. The language – even rhetoric – in this piece may sometimes seem excessive,¹⁸ but it represents Erskine in his outraged, damn-the-torpedoes mood, a deep indignation that made him such a rare and valuable international civil servant. The piece was written in 1995, the UN's 50th anniversary, and Erskine may have felt the need to prick the balloon of self-congratulation that tends to be inflated on such occasions. I sometimes tried to persuade Erskine that in the UN Secretariat we had to assume that governments behaved badly much of the time and that this was one of our major challenges. He considered this to be far too lenient a position and felt strongly that governments needed to be brought to book in no uncertain terms for their shortcomings.

Erskine was a faithful and eloquent spokesman for the less powerful countries who form the large majority of the UN's members, and particularly for those who had recently gained independence from the colonial powers. He felt strongly that they were not taken seriously enough on serious UN matters. In this piece, his fury is particularly directed at a 'North-centred cabal' – the United States, Britain and France. According to Erskine, this criminal group, armed with the veto in the Security Council, bullies, short-changes and holds to ransom the majority of the UN membership. Personally, I think it is a mistake to demonise the US and some of its allies to the extent of denying their decisive pioneering efforts on human rights, on decolonisation and in their practical support of the series of historic global conferences that started with the 1972 Conference on the Environment. Unfortunately, powerful countries do not always behave well. That is one of the reasons why an organisation like the UN is necessary.

Erskine was always a canny tactician, and in this article he has taken care to dynamite the obvious route for a counterattack on his ideas by a devastating assault on 'realism' and 'realists'. I, too, have frequently railed against self-styled 'realists' who block action with the argument that any original idea or course of action is 'unrealistic' and, therefore, unwise. However, it is also possible to go too far in the

18 Personally, I regret that Dag Hammarskjöld referred, in the quotation that Erskine has used as his epigraph, to a public notion of the UN as 'a weird Picasso drawing', leading Erskine to write of 'Picasso-like slashes of nonsensical, regressive and undemocratic behaviour'. Both of them would have done better to leave Picasso, one of the greatest master-draftsmen and artists of the 20th century, out of it.

other direction. Erskine goes on to champion ‘We the Peoples’ – the opening words of the Charter, but never mentioned again in that document – as the democratic force that must dethrone the ‘Northern abal’ and take control of the UN away from governments, as if this is some relatively routine item of UN reform. In this piece, he provides no hint as to how this extremely radical change to a very specifically *intergovernmental* organisation might be brought about.

In 1994, Erskine wrote lucidly and forcefully on this subject in the last pages of *Renewing the United Nations System*, a volume, incidentally, that remains both relevant and highly readable. Declaring the necessity of ‘citizen involvement’ at the international level if the UN is to make serious progress, he acknowledges that ‘achieving this will be difficult’. He goes on to suggest the steps by which a UN parliamentary assembly representing the peoples of the world might come into being. This well thought-out proposal deserves a great deal more attention than it has so far received. Indeed, the whole question of revitalising, and to some extent democratising, the international system is studiously ignored by governments. At the UN itself there seems, at present, to be little or no interest in revitalising the organisation so that it may play a more effective role in a globalised but thoroughly confused world.

The veto power of the five permanent members of the Security Council, which Erskine designates as a main source of evil, has been under attack since the San Francisco conference in the spring of 1945, when Australia and the Netherlands led a determined but unsuccessful campaign to suppress it. Without the veto, the US and the Soviet Union would almost certainly have refused to join the UN, and the world would have been treated to a replay of the League of Nations story – good intentions but no political clout. The veto presented the majority at San Francisco with a brutal dilemma, but after much emotional debate the conference accepted it as the lesser of two evils.

The veto played a major part in creating the paralysis of the Security Council during the Cold War. On the other hand, for 40 postwar years the most dangerous quarrel in history was between the two most powerful, and nuclear-armed, members of the Security Council. If the Council could have declared war on one or the other superpower by a simple majority vote, world peace would have been even more dangerously jeopardised than it actually was. In the event, the Cold War remained frozen, and the Security Council provided an important safety net and meeting place for the superpowers in times of acute crisis. The new technique of peacekeeping was also developed

to deal with so-called ‘brushfire’ regional conflicts that might otherwise trigger the dreaded nuclear confrontation of the superpowers. In the post-Cold War years the use of the veto has declined, but it is still profoundly unlikely that countries that now have the veto will voluntarily give it up. At least two of the veto-holders, France and the United Kingdom, are no longer world-class powers, but attempts to make the Security Council more representative of the contemporary world have so far foundered on the rocks of regional politics.

Erskine characterises the whole concept of veto-holding permanent members of the Security Council as ‘this unseemly club’ and ‘these fascist flaws in the Charter’. In principle, it would indeed be very desirable to get rid of an inherently discriminatory arrangement, particularly one that is now also an anachronism. In practice, it will be very hard to expunge this original sin of the Charter, but that is certainly no excuse for ignoring the problem.

On specific charges of irresponsibility and abuse of power, Erskine certainly hits the nail on the head. The performance of the three Western permanent members of the Security Council in the early years of the Yugoslav collapse, when they dumped a European problem on a UN peacekeeping operation to which they refused to give the necessary mandate, strength or support and then treated as a scapegoat, was a sad display of political cowardice and hypocrisy.

On the practice of great power ‘hardball diplomacy’, Erskine gives the example of the fate of the government Yemen, which was the only member of the Security Council to oppose the forceful measures taken against Saddam Hussein after he overran Kuwait. US aid to Yemen was immediately halted and 800,000 of its remittance workers were expelled from Saudi Arabia. Erskine refers to such actions as ‘state terrorism’. Whatever the political or other reason in a particular case, the intimidation or victimisation of weak states by strong ones is deplorable. On the other hand, I could never understand the rationale for Erskine’s strong disapproval of the Security Council action which freed Kuwait from the Iraqi occupation, an action supported by a vast majority of the members of the UN.

The first subject Erskine and I worked on together was the ridiculously irresponsible way in which the Security Council approaches the task of finding a new Secretary-General, a haphazard performance that displays the curse of the veto at its worst. The idea that the selection of the Secretary-General is primarily, if not exclusively, a matter for the permanent members and their interests is a flagrant violation of

the intentions of the UN Charter and has limited the selection of the most important international official in the world to a lottery in which the vast majority of UN members can play little or no part. It is a miracle that such a distorted system of selection has, in practice, been relatively harmless, but the search for the best possible man or woman for the job needs desperately to be strengthened. There may now be some initial interest among the 187 *non*-permanent members in working for a better search and selection process, with far earlier and more serious involvement of the General Assembly. The effective leadership and much of the vitality and status of the UN depend on the selection of the Secretary-General, a matter of the highest importance to all the members and to the future of the organisation itself.

Erskine is perfectly right in stating that much of the disarray and mutual lack of coordination and solidarity that afflicts the so-called ‘UN system’ of programmes and specialised agencies derives from a failure of the member governments. UN members have never heeded the original principle that the headquarters of all the specialised agencies should be located at the seat of the UN, and that the General Assembly should coordinate the policies of these agencies and review their budgets. The scattering of the agency headquarters to nine cities in seven different countries has created a ‘system’ that is expensive for member governments and virtually impossible to coordinate properly, while the centrality and original importance of the Economic and Social Council have been vastly diluted in favour of the primacy of the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, both located in Washington DC and inspired by working principles and objectives that are often at odds with those of the other members of the UN system. Erskine’s example of governments in the UN helping to build health services in developing countries that are then torn down on the order of the IMF is a poignant example of confusion and lack of coordination, not only in the UN system but also between the various ministries of governments in their home countries.

Erskine concludes that ‘We the Peoples’ must ‘come out of our long sleep’ to fight the villainous conspiracies of the privileged cabal of the three Western permanent members. Further, he calls on the peoples no longer to entrust their world organisation to governments alone, but to challenge their governments when they are violating or short-changing the UN Charter. He also suggests that non-governmental organisations establish a ‘Blackmail Watch’ at the UN, demand that the veto system be abolished forthwith and establish ‘consortia’ to watch over the behaviour of governments in the ongoing process of

UN reform. He concludes, “‘We the Peoples’ must resolve...never again to leave our United Nations to governments; for it is indeed a far too important matter to be safely entrusted to them alone.’

At the risk of being accused of the mortal sin of ‘realism’, I have some reservations about this splendid peroration. For better or for worse, the peoples of the world are now organised into nations run by governments. Regional efforts to go a step beyond this stage, like the European Union and the European parliament, are still in the experimental phase. The UN is the only universal political organisation, and it is very specifically an organisation of independent sovereign governments. All governments are jealous of their sovereignty and are extremely wary of giving the UN any powers that might infringe that sovereignty. (I acquired an acute awareness of this dominant phenomenon in my years of organising and trying to develop UN peacekeeping.) The idea that in some way the ‘peoples of the world’ could now take over control of the UN and maintain its functions in any useful form is, to put it mildly, premature.

What ‘We the Peoples’ *could* do, but so far have shown little interest in doing, is to pressure our own governments to respect the principles of the UN Charter and to urge them to make the UN a far more effective organisation – on global warming, for instance, or on nuclear proliferation – than it now is. Before there is any chance of doing this, the peoples of the world need to be far better informed and far more squarely behind the principles, the reality and the potential of the UN – one of the many labours, incidentally, that Erskine himself devoted his great energy to.

I wish I agreed with Erskine that ‘the single most encouraging phenomenon as the UN enters its second half-century is the awakening of its citizens to its vital roles.’ It is true that the non-governmental organisation world has vastly expanded both in scope and in strength, but in most countries there seems to be remarkably little popular interest or support for the UN except when some crisis makes the organisation vital to the interests of the country concerned. On many important issues, popular opinion is even more chauvinistic than government policy. This is an area where Erskine’s special talents will be especially missed.

Somehow we have to revive the 1945 spirit in which people understood that international principles and organisation were their best hope of avoiding another historic catastrophe. The global problems now looming were mostly unheard of in 1945, but they are quite ominous

enough to justify and to evoke the ardent collective spirit of those postwar days. The world's reaction to global problems, however, is still fragmented, weak, uncertain, controlled by short-term national interests and badly informed. Its one universal political organisation, the UN, is at the present time in some danger of becoming beached in a political backwater. Erskine gave much thought to this problem and had excellent ideas about how it might be resolved. Those ideas, and many others as well, need to be promulgated worldwide and followed up in practice. Otherwise, we shall once again be overwhelmed by disasters that could have been avoided through serious and visionary international cooperation. There is no time at all to be lost.

An Epilogue

Marjolijn Snippe

*Some work of noble note may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.*

Alfred Tennyson, *Ulysses*

Erskine would have been delighted, and most probably at the same time very humbled by this publication. He was full of admiration for Dag Hammarskjöld, and very honoured that the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation facilitated the publication of the studies on United Nations reform that he co-authored with Sir Brian Urquhart. He would have been equally humbled to learn that since his death an Erskine Childers Lecture is organised annually by Vijay Mehta in London. Erskine was a very modest person. I well remember him joking with Phyllis Bennis about being 'the least distinguished analyst'. But I think that deep in his heart he also - very humanly - hoped for the recognition he deserved.

Both professionally and personally it has been a sheer joy to work and live with Erskine during the last years of his life. He was (and still is) a great inspiration to all who seek a more democratic, transparent, just and fair UN. Personally, I will always remember the kind and caring gentleman Erskine was. He made me happy and he knew how to make me smile. Our son David Barton Childers, who is now 15 years old, reminds me of him every day.

After Erskine's sudden death on 25 August 1996, I knew something had to be done with the large volume of valuable texts (on some 20 floppies and a hard disk) that he had left behind, but it took 12 years before concrete steps towards their publication were taken. Through Erskine's friend Bruce Kent, I met Vijay Mehta, who helped me give further effect to my plans. When Henning Melber joined us by offering to publish the present volume as a special issue of *Development Dialogue*, the key elements were in place. The collaboration has been a wonderful and rewarding experience.

Getting back in touch with Erskine's old friends and colleagues, each of whom agreed to contribute a commentary on a selected text, was a source of great fulfilment for me. Through their shared memories of Erskine and their comments, they brought a little bit of Erskine back. I thank them all for this.

In this volume, coinciding with the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of Dag Hammarskjöld's death (18 September 1961), a part of Erskine's wide range of work is reproduced. It was not easy to make a selection among the many texts, but I trust this collection provides a representative panorama of Erskine's visions and ideas. The publication documents his basic reasoning about how to improve the UN by furthering its democratisation, both in the field of maintaining peace and security but also, and particularly, in the economic and social advancement of all peoples.

The reader will note that in most texts Erskine, although he adopts different wording, repeats his analysis of the status quo and his subsequent recommendations for constructive change. He told me that he deliberately did so in order to get the construct clear. However, he would never simply cut and paste: each new lecture or paper got his full and undivided attention. He thought carefully about *which* words to use to reach *that* particular public with whom he was going to share his thoughts. He told me he did this out of respect for his audience and his readers and that his father had taught him to do so.

What Erskine wanted to promote is:

- The concept of the interdependence of all peoples, their economies and their natural environments, and the necessity of ethical and equitable sharing;
- The ethos and practice of the rule of law, between and within nations, and the full observance of all rights enunciated in the UN's Bill of Rights;
- That democratic management of those factors in the life of human society cannot be left to chance, speculation or unbridled competition, and is beyond the purview of any one nation or group of nations;
- Democratically governed international cooperation through a properly resourced, led and structured UN;

- Improved representation of and participation by people in their governance and the protection of their rights at local, national and global levels.

He wanted to encourage:

- Full observance of the obligations under international law inscribed in the UN Charter, not only the punitive and enforcement provisions, but especially the creative and peacebuilding obligations;
- Enhanced public education and information on the concepts and practices set out above;
- Greater awareness by citizens and their elected representatives about the leadership, programming and management of the UN, also as *its* citizens;
- Greater vigilance by citizens and their elected representatives over the leadership, programming and management of the UN through concrete, practical forms of organisation, advocacy, monitoring;
- Mutual respect for the spiritual values and cultures of all of humankind, including of unrepresented peoples.

Erskine referred often to the noble intentions of the founding fathers that are still enshrined in the Preamble of the UN Charter. He had great admiration for Eleanor Roosevelt, who was his champion for human rights. He often emphasised the important achievements of the UN in the development of human rights. At the same time, he warned us against the worldwide threat to democracy. He pointed to the urgency of remedial action, and the need to manage our planetary household through a democratic and properly led and structured UN.

Erskine issued a wake-up call to ‘We the Peoples’ to stand up for our rights and to hold governments accountable, and not to be blinded through the systematic erosion of public alertness. He helped to open our eyes to all the wrongs that presently pervade our planet and need to be redressed.

At certain times, he got support from an imaginary planetary visitor who would point out from an extraterrestrial perspective how ridiculously humanity is *not* managing the only planet it has. On one of Erskine's floppies I found an account about such a planetary visitor, which, as a final touch, I would like to share with you:

The visitor from another planet, where he was a Professor of Domestic Planetary Institutions, became increasingly perplexed as he surveyed the United Nations of Earth. Against various headings he made summary notes in his diary, which he allowed his friend Mara to copy before he abandoned his quest for understanding and flew home.

United Nations System

Equivalent of our early planetary administration, with UN supposedly the centrepiece linked to 'specialized agencies'; but far weaker, despite huge economic and ecological problems here obviously needing planetary management on democratic basis. UN Charter says all the right things about this ('save succeeding generations from the scourge of war'... 'economic and social advancement of all peoples'... 'a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations'); but neither Secretary-General nor Delegations able to coordinate this System. Each Agency is 'sovereign'.

Have discovered one astonishing fact: original plan, even adopted in first UN General Assembly in London in Earth - 1946, was to have the headquarters of all the agencies located at the UN's headquarters. Would have made whole idea of 'System' much more feasible, but never happened.

Seems that in 'United' Nations governments in fact dis-unite themselves... unable to coordinate their own policies in all the System's bodies. Really rather primitive but of course am careful not to say so.

Mis-information

Extremely difficult to make proper survey because of lack of basic information about UN and System. Kept reading press reports about 'vast, sprawling bureaucracy' but no one in editorial offices knew how many staff UN has, just said it is 'vast'. Finally got data from UN records. Incredible, it is dangerously under-staffed. Has only 51,500 civil servants, all grades, world-wide, for everything it does, whether civil aviation or agriculture, or health or human rights. In London at Government bookshop happened to find data on British civil services. For whole of Earth to work in all fields, UN System has fewer staff than the District Health staff in a Principality of Wales.

Have had same problem over expenditures. Kept reading about 'huge, extravagant budgets' of UN System. Finally worked out figures. In Earth-1992 whole System – excluding only capital of World Bank – spent total of US 10.5 billion dollars Earth-wide. That was only 2 dollars for each citizen of Earth. In same year governments spent 150 dollars per Earth-citizen on their military.

Madness.

Now the richest governments here say they cannot afford costs of conflicts breaking out from so much neglect of the social and economic needs of huge majority of Human-kind.

But another madness: how can a planetary institution be properly supported when such mis-information is circulated?

Coercion for votes

Learn that Big Three (USA, UK, France, the most 'democratic' countries) practice bribery and economic threat (no debt relief, no credit to pay oil bills, no development aid etc.) against economically weak members to get votes they need at UN. Enables Big Three to use UN for their special purposes but claim the action is 'under UN resolutions'. Many recent examples, especially so-called 'Gulf War' in Earth – 1991-2.

Do not understand how this is 'democratic' either.

Permanent Five

After Earth War II these countries insisted on special privileges including unelected seats and vetoes on Security Council, saying they would be 'world's policemen'. Never were during ensuing North-North ideological contest under mutual nuclear terrorisation. Since this evaporated (circa Earth-1990), four seem to have shown they do not know how, cannot afford, and will not risk their troops to be, 'world's policemen'. Yet still want to keep privileges (fifth, China, seems uncomfortable in role).

Whole membership now reviewing these questions; very healthy. But two more economically powerful countries, Germany and Japan, want to join this (surely very unseemly?) club; one tactic may be to try to co-opt (corrupt?) bigger Southern countries also to join but as inferior members. Since 'PermFive' can veto changes in UN Charter, likely very long review...

Host Country

Refuses to pay its legally owed membership dues; keeps UN in near-bankruptcy. Most of its 'foreign policy' elite has shown aggressive antagonism towards UN ever since majority of Human-kind got representation (during Earth-1960s). Wants to dictate all UN policy and action on peace-keeping, but not to contribute any troops.

Host country? Am I missing something?

Secretary-General

In UN Charter, the only public servant appointed by and responsible to all Human-kind, and heads a Principal Organ. But here again, these 'PermFive' can veto nominations. Went to visit Harvard University and learned it conducts far more responsible search for new head than these (or any other) governments do for UN head. UN Secretary-General seems to 'emerge' more like big religious leader here called 'Pope'. Secret meetings... much manoeuvring behind scenes in what is called here 'old-boy network' (women not even considered to date)...suddenly puff of smoke from chimney announces choice.

Citizens of Earth not involved in this election. Seems essential that they watch what their governments do at UN. In this connection, interesting new move to promote a UN Parliamentary Assembly. Like the one British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin advocated in 1945. Future of UN clearly depends on 'We, the Peoples' (first words in its Charter) ceasing to trust governments alone with such serious matters.

And here suddenly, the professor of domestic planetary institutions stops his reporting. Does this perhaps mean that he did not fly home? Is he still dwelling on planet Earth, making notes and reporting on how the human race is progressing in managing its planetary household?...

Notes on contributors

Phyllis Bennis is a fellow of the Institute for Policy Studies and of the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam. Her work on Middle Eastern and UN issues focuses on ending the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, ending US support for Israeli occupation and apartheid, as well as challenging US domination of the UN and working to strengthen the UN's role in the global struggle against empire. While working as a journalist at the UN during the run-up to the 1990-91 Gulf War, she began analysing US domination of the UN and worked against sanctions on Iraq and later the US war in Iraq. In 1999, Bennis accompanied a group of congressional staff to Iraq to examine the humanitarian impact of US-led economic sanctions, and later joined former UN Assistant Secretary-General Denis Halliday, who resigned his position as humanitarian coordinator in Iraq to protest the impact of sanctions, on a 22-city speaking tour. In 2001, she helped create the US Campaign to End Israeli Occupation and remains part of its steering committee. She helped build the huge United for Peace and Justice anti-war coalition, and since 2002 has played an active role in the global peace movement. She also serves as an informal adviser to several UN officials on Middle Eastern and UN democratisation issues. Bennis is published widely in US and global outlets, and appears regularly on US and international media, including Democracy Now!, National Public Radio, Pacifica Radio, BBC, al-Jazeera and CNN International. Her books include *Calling the Shots: How Washington Dominates Today's UN* (foreword by Erskine Childers) and *Challenging Empire: How People, Governments and the UN Defy US Power*, as well as several primers: *Ending the US War in Afghanistan*; *Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict*; *Ending the Iraq War: A Primer*, and more.

Hanne Christensen, regional representative in the Nordic Countries of the Independent Bureau for Humanitarian Issues, is a sociologist specialising in humanitarian responses to massive emergency situations, man-made and natural. She has done fieldwork in Botswana, Mexico, Pakistan, Somalia, Tanzania and Zambia. She worked as project leader at the UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) from 1981 to 1990 and as project coordinator for human rights and development issues at the Danish Centre for Human Rights, Copenhagen, in 1990-91. She served as consultant to various UN agencies in the 1990s and the first decade of this century and is the author of several publications and articles on humanitarian response issues.

Muchkund Dubey obtained a master's degree in economics before joining the Indian foreign service, rising to the highest post of foreign secretary to the government of India. Before that, he was India's high commissioner to Bangladesh and the permanent representative to the UN organisations in Geneva. He was on secondment as principal officer in UN/UNDP for five years. After retirement, he was a professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University's School of International Studies, Indian member of the UNESCO executive board and deputy chairman of the planning commission of Sikkim. He is presently the president of the Council for Social Development, New Delhi. He has written many articles, papers and book chapters on international security and disarmament matters, international development cooperation and economic relations.

Richard Falk is Albert G. Milbank Professor of International Law emeritus at Princeton University, where he was a member of the faculty for 40 years (1961–2001). Since 2002, he has been associated with global and international studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where he is currently a research professor. Professor Falk has been the special rapporteur on occupied Palestine for the UN Human Rights Council since 2008. He is also chair of the board, Nuclear Age Peace Foundation. He serves on the editorial boards of *The Nation* and *The Progressive* magazines, is an honorary editor of the *American Journal of International Law* and a member of the international advisory editorial boards of *Third World Quarterly* and *Globalisations*. Over the years, Falk has published many books, including *Legal Order in a Violent World* (1968); *This Endangered Planet: Prospects and Proposals for Human Survival* (1971); *A Study of Future Worlds* (1975); *Predatory Globalisation: A Critique* (1999); *Religion and Humane Global Governance* (2001). His most recent book is *Achieving Human Rights* (2009). An edited volume entitled *Legality and Legitimacy in World Affairs* is scheduled for publication in 2011.

Denis J. Halliday, UN Assistant Secretary-General (1994–98), began his career as a VSO/Quaker volunteer in 1962 on assignment to Kenya. His UN working life began in Teheran in 1964 as an officer of UNDP. Thereafter, for over some 30 years he served UNDP in New York, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, Samoa and the South Pacific and the former Indo-China countries, when stationed briefly in Bangkok, Thailand. In mid-1994, Secretary-General Boutros-Boutros Ghali appointed Halliday head of human resources management for the global UN. In mid-1997, Halliday was appointed by Kofi Annan as head of the UN Humanitarian/Oil-for-Food programme in Baghdad, when Iraq was subject to sanctions imposed by the Security

Council. Since resigning at the end of 1998 in protest at the genocidal nature of these sanctions, Halliday has served as a visiting professor at Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania (1999–2000); lecturer at Trinity College, Dublin and as an international speaker and activist. He has spoken to parliamentarians and to public, NGO and university audiences worldwide. He has worked with TV, radio and the print media. He has written for, among others, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, the *Journal of Palestinian Studies*, *Al Haram Weekly*, the *Guardian* and the *Independent* of London. Halliday has a master's degree from Trinity College, Dublin and an honorary PhD from Swarthmore. In 2000, he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. In 2003, he received the UK Gandhi International Peace award in London. In mid-2010, Halliday was imprisoned briefly by Israel after the *MV Rachel Corrie* was hijacked en route to Gaza with humanitarian supplies.

Sven Hamrell (born 1928) was the longest serving executive director of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation (1967–95). He was chair of the Rural Advancement Foundation International and member of the Swedish government's Commission on Humanitarian Aid, and Commission on Aid to African Refugees. He was educated at Bowdoin College and the New School for Social Research in the US and at Uppsala University.

Eva Haxton is an international economist with an additional journalist qualification and a PhLic in English literature. She has been involved in the NGO movement since the 1970s and in the UN since the end of the 1980s as an active board member and sometime chair of the UN chapter of Uppsala. She was board member (1988–99) and treasurer of the Brussels-based NGO, ICDA International Coalition for Development Action, where she also edited publications and coordinated conferences on trade and development. She participated on behalf of ICDA as part of the NGO delegations in many UN conferences during the 1990s. Eva worked as an economist, journalist and project and communication coordinator in Uppsala, Stockholm and Brussels. Since 2003, she has worked as a coordinator at Uppsala University hospital in the department of clinical microbiology. Since 2008, she has been a member of Health Care Without Harm Europe members' council, of which she is co-chair as well as being active on biocides regulations. She is active in the Infection Ecology and Epidemiology Network based in Uppsala. The important issues of human rights and human responsibilities, international solidarity and cooperation have always been and are still central to her work and personal life.

Sir Richard Jolly has been a leading figure in human development since the 1970s, notably within the UN system. He has an outstanding academic record in development studies as director of IDS Sussex (1972–81) and currently as honorary professor and research associate. He is a trustee of OXFAM, a council member of the Overseas Development Institute and chairman of the UN Association of the United Kingdom. He was made a Knight of the Order of St Michael and St George for his contributions to international development. He was deputy executive director of UNICEF (1981–95), supporting the child survival revolution and the strategies of ‘structural adjustment with a human face’, which led to the conception of human development. From 1996–2000, Jolly was chief architect of the UNDP Human Development Reports. Currently, he co-directs the UN Intellectual History Project. Dr Jolly received his initial degree in economics from Cambridge in 1956 and subsequently earned his doctorate at Yale.

Bruce Kent, born 1929, went to school in Canada during the Second World War. He is former president of the International Peace Bureau. After his military service, he spent 30 years as a Catholic priest working in London. He has been involved in numerous peace and human rights organisations for over 50 years. These include CND, Pax Christi, the Movement for the Abolition of War and Action for UN Renewal. He is a regular speaker and writer on peace and war issues.

June Lambert was vice president of the World Federation of United Nations Associations, president of the Irish United Nations Association and registrar of the United Nations University programme in Ireland in the 1990s. A former public servant, justice of the peace and district officer in Australia, she was for many years responsible for her region’s welfare, migrants and refugees and child protection. She has a BA, MA and MSc in systems development from Trinity College, Dublin. Her thesis was on human resource planning in the public sector. Whilst lecturing at Trinity, she devised and implemented the systems approach to organisational equality, the Equality Audit, in numerous large public and private sector bodies, and drew up annual reporting systems. Lambert has actively participated on the boards of charities and companies and has had responsibility on the ground for many UN projects in Ireland, including the 50th anniversary of the UN. She was a founding member of UNIFEM, has also been involved in UN election monitoring, and has had contact with former UN peacekeepers and generals in the field and at home. She co-sponsored with Irish UN veterans a study into post-stress trauma among UN troops. In addition, she has written about the UN, organised and hosted numerous conferences, seminars and

public meetings in Ireland and abroad on all aspects of the UN, regions of conflict, including Northern Ireland, and the reform of the UN.

Vijay Mehta is president of VM Centre for Peace www.vmpeace.org, founding trustee of Fortune Forum Charity www.fortuneforum.org and chair of Uniting for Peace (Action for UN Renewal and World Disarmament Campaign). He is an author and global activist for peace, development, human rights and the environment. Some of his notable books are *The Fortune Forum Summit: For a Sustainable Future; Arms No More*; and *The United Nations and Its Future in the 21st Century*. He, along with his daughter Renu Mehta, founder of Fortune Forum charity, held two summits in London in 2006 and 2007, which summits raised over a £1 million for charity and attracted a worldwide audience of 1.3 billion people (one fifth of humanity) including print and media coverage. The keynote speakers for the first and second summit were Bill Clinton, former US president and Al Gore, former US vice-president and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize 2007. Vijay Mehta has appeared in various TV programmes, including BBC World, Press TV, Aftak-24 hour Indian news channel and Think Peace documentary, Canada. The *Sunday Times*, *Independent*, *Observer* and *Guardian* newspapers, among others, have written about him. His life is devoted to the service of peace, humanity and our planet. At present, Vijay Mehta is writing a book to be published in 2011. The subject is wars, military expenditure and its relation to poverty reduction.

Henning Melber is executive director of The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation and a research fellow in the Department of Political Sciences at the University of Pretoria. He graduated in political science at the Freie Universität Berlin and received a PhD in the same discipline at the University of Bremen, where he also obtained a *venia legendi* ('the right to teach') in Development Studies. He has been director of the Namibian Economic Policy Research Unit (NEPRU) in Windhoek (1992-2000) and research director at the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala (2000-06). He has published widely in African Studies, on racism and on solidarity as well as on liberation movements, in particular in Southern Africa and especially Namibia. He is member of the executive committee of the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI), vice-president of the International Network of Genocide Scholars (INOGS), co-editor of the *Africa Yearbook* and managing co-editor of the scholarly journal *Africa Spectrum*.

Chandra Muzaffar is both an academic and a social activist. Chandra is the Noordin Sopiee Professor of Global Studies at the Science University of Malaysia (USM) in Penang. He is also the president of the International Movement for a Just World (JUST), an international NGO based in Malaysia that seeks to critique global injustice and to develop an alternative vision of a just and compassionate civilisation guided by universal spiritual and moral values. Chandra is the chairman of the board of trustees of the Malaysia Foundation. He has published extensively on civilisational dialogue, international politics, religion, human rights and Malaysian society. The author and editor of 25 books in English and Malay, many of his writings have been translated into other languages. Among Chandra's major publications are *Protector* (1979), *Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia* (1987), *Human Rights and the New World Order* (1993), *Rights, Religion and Reform* (2002), *Global Ethic or Global Hegemony?* (2005), *Hegemony: Justice; Peace* (2008), *Religion & Governance* (2009), *A Plea for Empathy, The Quest for Malaysian Unity* (2010), *Religion Seeking Justice and Peace* (2010) and *Exploring Religion in Our Time* (2010). In 1977, he founded a multi-ethnic social reform group called Aliran Kesedaran Negara (ALIRAN), which he led for 14 years. Today, apart from his role in JUST, Chandra sits on the board of a number of international NGOs concerned with social justice and civilisational dialogue. Chandra also travels abroad frequently, giving lectures and speaking at seminars and conferences. He is also a regular speaker at meetings at home in Malaysia. Chandra is a recipient of a number of academic and community awards from overseas.

William R. Pace is the convener of the Coalition for the International Criminal Court, a global NGO network comprising more than 2,500 civil society organisations in 150 countries. He helped lead a group of other major organisations in forming a global NGO Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect in 2009. He served as the Secretary-General of the Hague Appeal for Peace 1999 global conference involving more than 8,000 NGOs and representatives of government and international organisations on the occasion of the centenary of the First Hague Peace Conference. Bill has been the general secretary for the World Federalist Movement-Institute for Global Policy since 1994, and a founder of the NGO steering committee for the Commission on Sustainable Development and the NGO working group on the Security Council. He is on the advisory committee of the Campaign for a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly. He has served as director of the Center for the Development of International Law (1989-present), president of the Center for UN Reform Education and previously as a director of the Human Rights Now Campaign

and a global concert tour for Amnesty International (1987-89). Bill taught history and astronomy at the high school and college levels in Colorado before taking up his work at the international level.

James A. Paul is executive director of Global Policy Forum, based in New York. He is an editor of the *Oxford Companion to Politics of the World* and author of *Humanity Comes of Age*; *Syria Unmasked*; *War and Occupation in Iraq*, and dozens of policy papers and journal articles. He is the founder and long-time chair of the NGO working group on the Security Council and convener of the NGO working group on food and hunger. Paul has degrees from Harvard, Oxford and New York University. He has served as executive director and member of the editorial committee of the Middle East Research and Information Project and as assistant professor at the State University of New York. Paul is the co-convener of the working group on NGO access at the UN. He has written a number of papers on NGOs generally and the NGO role at the UN in particular. He has participated in key consultations with UN officials and security officers on NGO access, met twice with the UN Secretary-General to discuss NGO access, consulted with the Cardoso panel, given a lecture at the invitation of the General Assembly president on NGO access, addressed the Congress of NGOs in Consultative Status on several occasions and participated in conferences of the UN non-governmental liaison service.

Jan Pronk served three terms as Dutch minister of development cooperation and one term as minister of the environment. He has played an important role in promoting sustainable economic and environmental development and was member of several international commissions such as the Brandt Commission (1979-83) and the Commission on Global Governance (Carlsson/Ramphal Commission 1991-95). He served as the UN Secretary-General's special envoy for the world summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg in 2002. In the 1980s, he was Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD and assistant Secretary-General of the UN. From mid-2004 until the end of 2006 he lived in Khartoum as the special representative in Sudan of the UN Secretary-General, where he led the UN peacekeeping operation (UNMIS). He has published several books and numerous articles on his main professional interests, sustainable development and international relations. He travels abroad frequently giving lectures and speaking at conferences. Presently he is emeritus professor of theory and practice of international development at the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague, chairman of the Interchurch Peace Council of the Netherlands, president of the Society for International Development (SID) and visiting professor at the University for Peace in Costa Rica.

Marjolijn Snippe was Erskine Childers's research assistant, including for the revised edition of *A World in Need of Leadership – Tomorrow's United Nations*. Just before she started working with Erskine Childers, she published an article for the Royal Academy of Science in Brussels on global democracy through the UN. Erskine and Marjolijn wrote a paper together on the Agenda for Peace and the Law of the Sea. From 1990–2000 she was a board member of the Dutch chapter of the World Federalist Movement. In 1995, she published a booklet on the UN's Decade of International Law. She has a master's degree in international law from the University of Amsterdam.

Sir Brian Urquhart was the second person to be recruited into the UN Secretariat in 1945, after six years of wartime service in the British army. He was personal assistant to Trygve Lie, the first UN Secretary-General, and from 1954–71 worked with Ralph Bunche in various capacities, including the organisation and direction of peacekeeping operations in the Middle East, Kashmir, Cyprus, Lebanon, the Congo and elsewhere; conflict control negotiations; the organisation of the first and second international conferences on the peaceful uses of atomic energy, and the establishment of the International Atomic Energy Agency. In 1972, Urquhart succeeded Ralph Bunche as UN Undersecretary-General for special political affairs. He retired from the UN in 1986 and until 1995 was scholar-in-residence in the International Affairs Program of the Ford Foundation. His books include: *Hammarskjöld* (a biography of the second Secretary-General); *Ralph Bunche: An American Odyssey*; and *A Life in Peace and War* (a memoir).

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Erskine Barton Childers devoted his career as an international civil servant and his too short life thereafter to the tireless promotion of ideals and visions that both acknowledged and were animated by the spirit of Dag Hammarskjöld. His writings testify to his convictions and commitments, and thereby translate the legacy of the second Secretary-General of the United Nations into political discourse and practice in our times. Like Hammarskjöld, he relentlessly promoted the ideal of and belief in the relevance of a truly united family of nations. So do all of those, who have provided their reflections on the selected texts by Childers in this publication. Their statements are striking evidence of the continuing relevance of the positions taken by Childers, who was a friend to all of them.

Erskine Childers's thought-provoking and pioneering ideas on reform of the UN system were also published earlier on in the very same Development Dialogue series. The current volume, presented 15 years after the death of Childers as a kind of comprehensive homage, keeps alive not only his thoughts in their relevance for today, but also the spirit of Hammarskjöld, whose untimely death occurred half a century ago this year.

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