

THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS

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I am deeply honoured to have this opportunity to discuss the future of the United Nations. I could not begin, however, without paying tribute to all the sons and daughters of Ireland who have served, and are now serving, both in the United Nations System and in the many non-governmental organizations with which it must learn to work ever more effectively. Let us never forget those of our land who have fallen in this service, and send their families and loved ones our deep respect and gratitude.

The role of the United Nations in the maintenance of peace and security has indeed changed in recent years, dramatically so. Suddenly, only since 1988, the number of conflicts within a state involving UN operations has become the majority of all such operations. Suddenly, the number of disputes engaging the UN has trebled, and the number of actual peacekeeping operations has soared from 5 to a peak of 17, now back to 16 with the end of the Somalia operation; the number of military personnel deployed from 9,600 to a peak of 74,000, civilian police from a mere 35 to 2,130 in 1994; and the cost of all this has risen from 230 million to 3,600 million dollars in 1994.

But all this contains no grounds for gratification. The ethos of the United Nations, beginning with the Charter pledge to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war and to protect the human rights of all, is that every time a UN peacekeeping force must be deployed, it is a tragic expression of failure. I would define this as a graduated failure on a spectrum, from cause to consequence.

In the first one-third of the spectrum are all the cultural, ethnic, political, economic and social problems that lay frozen for centuries under empires, and then Cold War constraints and indeed exacerbations, until 1990. (It has been quickly "forgotten" by those responsible -- and with no suggestion of reparations -- that the intelligence agencies of the Cold War contestants, and overwhelmingly the agencies of the Western powers, ravaged many countries of the South with dictators they installed, financed, and armed, or deliberate destabilization that they promoted from neighbouring client or friendly regimes).

All these forces so long and so gravely neglected and aggravated are now unleashed, more and more often erupting in political upheaval and armed conflict. The failure, then, begins here, and we urgently need to see clearly its nature, and who has been responsible for it.

Contrary to much ill-informed commentary, the UN was not poorly designed as only a peace and security organization: the smaller countries at San Francisco ensured that it would have balanced mandates -- to tackle the causes of tension and conflict, not just the violent consequences of their neglect. The founders wrote into the Charter mandates to the UN to be the world leader in dynamic macro-economic and social policies to promote, and I quote, "the economic and social advancement of all peoples". The General Assembly was to adopt policies that would guide the specialized agencies, including the International Monetary Fund as the world's emergent central bank, an equitably operating International Trade Organization, and the World Bank for capital financing.

In the event, a handful of industrial powers have managed almost completely to disenfranchise the United Nations from the world economy, and to build up the IMF and the World Bank -- which they effectively control -- until these agencies are actually talked about as on a par with the UN. In 1948, the United States blocked altogether the establishment of the International Trade Organization; and unless we are alert the now-emerging World Trade Organization will have no relationship with the UN but will become the third component of a Northern-directed triad of agencies whose policies will do almost everything but tackle the real socio-economic causes of conflict in the real world of 5.7 billion people.

Look behind the facile media reports of "civil war" and "tribalism" and "fundamentalist extremism", and in every single case you will find a trade system that has actually reduced to only 18 per cent the share of world trade of 80 per cent of humankind; by itself a veritable prescription for war. Northern trade barriers and other inequities are depriving the developing countries of over 500 billion dollars of income they could be earning every year -- over ten times all the so-called "aid" they receive from the North, two-thirds of which is in any case "tied" aid, in reality subsidy of Northern exports to developing countries, but with the unique twist that they have to buy these exports.

Behind the crises that have so dramatically changed the UN's roles you will also find the ideologically driven policies of the IMF, changed by the industrial powers from anything remotely resembling an equitably operating world monetary body into the debt-collecting sheriff of Northern financial institutions, and imposing -- under threat of a developing country losing all credit standing unless it submits -- other policies that even include the dismantling of

the agrarian reforms that were the only protection of small poor farmers. (Egypt's agrarian reform is to be dismantled; Mexico's historic ejido system for the protection of small, poor farmers is being broken up to benefit large -- and often transnationally sponsored -- agglomerates ... one of the key origins of the Chiapas uprising).

Look behind the headlines about virtually every active or incipient crisis likely to engage the UN in peacekeeping, and you will find the fact that 1 in every 4 human beings alive on our planet today are living in absolute poverty; that in country after country the IMF's structural adjustment has dictated the slashing by up to 35 per cent of the health and educational services they have so painfully built up. And here it is important to note the irony that these services were thus built up with development assistance from the same Northern governments which, with the other hand, endorse IMF policies that tear down their own aid efforts and lead to upheaval that is then all too likely to cost the same governments enormous sums in humanitarian emergencies and even peacekeeping.

The nexus of these insane policies with the future of UN peacekeeping is thus remorseless. Unless we now demand that the original design for UN economic leadership for "the advancement of all peoples" be restored, the crises we have seen in the last five years will become only the mere first tremors in a progressive international convulsion that will overwhelm any and every improvement now made in the UN's peacekeeping capabilities.

Economic factors almost invariably aggravate ethnic and cultural causes of conflict that require their own resolution. For this 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 or inappropriate post-Westphalian 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. Far more than a "preventive diplomacy", we need a resolving sociology. Such a Council should also be

the advisory body on UN responses to collapsed states, which should be kept as far away from the Security Council as possible.

The middle third of the spectrum is the volatile period during which these old legacies, now without any of the restraints of the Cold War and so gravely intensified by economic inequities, are boiling towards the surface. Where they have not yet erupted, they might yet be averted by effective early warning and peaceful settlement. Otherwise they will quickly move into the third, consequence part of the spectrum where we are reduced to costly peacekeeping and mass humanitarian emergency responses.

It takes but a moment to realise how appallingly neglected is this middle area on the spectrum I have described. In our new world of instant global communication there is no excuse today for any major political and violent crisis to "burst" upon us, already beyond conciliation, anywhere in the world; 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 organizations like the Organization of American States, the Organization of African Unity or the OSCE; among non-governmental institutions, including peace and social research institutes of North and South working together; and in the UN Secretariat.

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 organization or, if it cannot agree to do so, by the United Nations; missions in either case made up of distinguished women and men of unquestionable repute and disinterestedness, willing to be available at short notice, 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, using the insights and sensitivities of the social scientist.

If we now move along the spectrum past its middle section, we arrive among the consequences of neglecting the root causes, or when even better early warning steps may still fail. A handful of governments have so constrained the UN that it has severely neglected the whole first two-thirds of the spectrum. Upheaval, violence, armed conflict, possibly the collapse of organised governance and administration itself in

a country, simply will now erupt in years ahead. Thus, we no longer have any choice: we must act, urgently, along the whole spectrum, and we are tragically compelled to devote excessive effort at the consequence end of it.

Here, we must 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.

Recent use of economic extortion and bribery of weak member-countries for their votes or their silence must be made a criminal violation of the Charter. It is a criminal felony within the democracies that use these outrageous methods at the UN.

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 all humankind. We should oppose any dirty compromises that would merely expand the number of Permanent Members and seduce some Southern countries into this reliquary cabal in the guise of urgency or anniversary celebrations: let there be no reform unless and until it is genuinely democratic.

Next, we must equip the UN with a truly rapid response force for those situations where the full-scale "blue helmets" 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. Current studies of how to organise for more rapid response must have high priority among member-states. In this, we must get far more attention to logistical requirements, for example troop carrier aircraft. Again and again -- Rwanda is one especially shameful example -- countries have been ready to contribute troops but have not possessed such long-distance airlift equipment; and the countries that do have such planes have not provided them.

There must, however, be basic principles, groundrules, that justify such intervention; 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 international 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 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-authorized 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. The mandate of this Security Police should be evolved in substantive, serious consultation with representatives of humanitarian NGOs.

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

In this limited time, I have been able to offer only the foregoing perhaps elementary observations, in an ever more complex field. I should like to conclude with some basic tenets that may sound very idealistic; but in every facet of the work of the United Nations today's idealism is tomorrow's hard realism.

We must ensure that United Nations leadership and work along the spectrum from cause to consequence be imbued with far stronger ethics, and with the international law of the Charter. We need strong, clear, courageous and independent leadership from the Secretary-General. From 1997 on she should be someone who will at all times be seen to be the servant of the membership as a whole, not the Security Council. She

should inspire the confidence of "We, the Peoples of the United Nations".

The United Nations flag must never again be hijacked. The Charter is not for rent as theatrical costume to any power that wishes to undertake some foreign venture under the UN mantle. All interventions under UN imprimatur must be under the direct authority and command of the Secretary-General. And when the United Nations is seized of any crisis, all member-states must cease their own bilateral or joint diplomatic activities in that crisis.

Finally, the weapon that may have to be held by a UN soldier or security policewoman is supposed to be an instrument of compassion and protection, disciplined by the International Bill of Human Rights. Our sons and daughters should go forth for this noble and dangerous service both monitored and protected by an independent UN Human Rights Ombudsman for every operation. Clothed in the common love of humanity, they must be sure in the knowledge that their homelands will support them in this work, which expresses the most precious ethos of the United Nations.

Unknown ages ago somewhere in the world someone composed a mantra that could well have been written for the United Nations.

#### 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.