



THE STATE OF THE UN 2000

A Quaker Perspective

Quaker United Nations Office
777 UN Plaza, NY, NY 10017
www.quno.org

Note: Beginning with this issue, each Fall at this time QUNO staff will seek to provide a reflective overview of the "state of the UN" from our perspectives as we undertake the work of Friends at UN headquarters. This will come shortly after the convening of each new General Assembly in September of each year and with the issuance of the Secretary-General's "Annual Report on the Work of the Organization" (DPI/2153)

The View From the Fifth Floor

When QUNO staff gathered in January 2000 to consider the impact of shifting issues and structures on our common work, we identified several trends. Many of these, listed below, are further addressed in the articles that follow:

- Issues at the UN that were new or developing in the early 90's are now more mature and better articulated; yet capacity and political will are lagging or diminished. Capacity for follow-up is lacking.
- With this growing gap, the danger has grown that the UN itself will be seen to have failed.
- A new emphasis on Security Council intervention in humanitarian situations, including military intervention and economic sanctions, has emerged, yet little evidence of concrete support from member states exists.
- The UN-requested Rwanda and Srebrenica Reports (www.un.org/News/ossgrwanda_report), followed by the recent comprehensive report on peace operations (known as the Brahimi Report), show a need to redevelop the concept of UN peacekeeping and to strengthen the capacity for implementation, but in fact there are shrinking staff and resources to do so.
- Africa is receiving growing thematic attention, yet action on the ground still falls short.
- Greater focus on "prevention" is pushing the UN to apply what it already knows about maintaining and promoting sustainable peace, but is not yet practicing. There is a growing recognition that civil society is needed to effect prevention, but there is a reluctance to fund such efforts.
- Gaps in communication persist among and between the UN, International Financial Institutions (IFI's), and other multi-lateral institutions. In addition, both private enterprise and civil society are inadequately represented at the table.
- "Prevention" and "governance" have emerged as operative themes making new connections and crossovers possible, e.g., economic development and pre/post-conflict situations.
- Peacekeeping missions in East Timor and Kosovo focusing greater attention on post-conflict institution-building offer one example of this "bundled security."

The UN in the Aftermath of the Millennium Summit

The Secretary-General of the UN was not alone in using phrases like "defining moment for the UN" when he opened the Millennium Summit of world leaders the first week of September. Countries large and small described the current moment as one of great challenge, fluidity, and shifting roles and missions in the face of "globalization" in nearly every sector of life within and between nations. It has taken a decade since the end of the Cold War to sort out the major challenges and tasks for global governance. Major shifts are occurring in one area of work after another: peacekeeping, human rights, finance and development. The United Nations has changed, or has been obliged to change, its method of operation in the areas it considers for work, the way in which that work is carried out, and the follow-up to the results of that work.

The Millennium Summit, held in early September, was the largest gathering of heads of state in history, literally stopping traffic in New York City. While few would describe the results as pivotal, the Summit did exceed the low expectations of many by producing a series of commitments from the General Assembly and the Security Council, with specific goals and targets for achieving those goals (see box on [page 6](#)). These included a pledge to enhance the effectiveness of the UN in addressing conflict at all stages, from prevention of conflict to settlement to post-conflict peacebuilding; a call for effective international action to prevent the illegal flow of small arms into areas of conflict; halving the number of people in poverty and providing all children, boys and girls alike, with complete primary education by 2015; to halt and begin reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS and malaria by 2015; and to make efforts to ensure that the outcomes of the Kyoto Protocol are in force by the end of the UN Conference on Environment and Development in 2002.

The Summit served to reemphasize the egalitarian nature of the UN as a multilateral institution with "one country, one vote" in policy decisions, even as it reminded everyone of the power held and wielded by the Permanent Members of the Security Council.

The Changing Roles of the UN and the Bretton Woods Institutions

In the last year, there have been dramatic protests against the power and influence of international financial institutions (IFIs), at their management of the global economy the dominance of industrialized countries, and the marginalization of the poorest. Questions about how to govern "globalization" equitably are intimately connected to questions of development in the world's poorest countries. There is agreement that progress on these issues is impossible without reference to the IFIs, whose roles are central to the debate.

In the last 20 or 30 years, and particularly since the end of the Cold War, the political economy of global trade, finance and development has changed. Although the IMF, the World Bank and the UN were established at the same time, the UN has struggled to play as full a role as it might in the international financial system.

The original mandates of these institutions charged the World Bank with promoting the flow of international capital for development purposes, the IMF with maintaining a stable monetary system by predicting and helping to avert financial crises, the World Trade Organization with multilateral trade policy and the settlement of trade disputes, and the UN with the responsibility for development paradigms and assistance.

The international financial crises of the late 1990s precipitated some major policy and planning changes of focus by the Bretton Woods institutions (BWIs). James Wolfensohn sought to increase the "development effectiveness" of the Bank's operations, including expansion into the non-traditional area of social sectors and national institution-building. The IMF has moved from its tradition of using only economic formulas in its planning to embracing poverty reduction and "good governance." The United Nations Development Program

(UNDP) has shifted from a focus on grassroots development programs to a focus on development capacity-building with partner governments and "good governance." Member states within the UN have also, for the first time, set a High-Level Meeting to discuss Financing for Development. Finally, the UN has joined with NGOs and private enterprise around the Secretary-General's "Global Compact."



"For preventative initiatives to succeed in reducing tension and averting conflict, the Secretary-General needs clear, strong and sustained political support from member states." *Executive Summary, Report of the Pannel on UN Peace Operations, 21 August, 2000.*
© UN/DPI Photo by Susan B. Markisz

In 1966, the fiftieth session of the General Assembly passed a resolution calling for greater consultation between the UN and the BWIs (A/50/227) as a part of wider efforts to revitalize the UN in the economic and social fields. Since then, there has been an unprecedented degree of contact between UN agencies and the BWIs, particularly the World Bank. There have been special sessions of ECOSOC after the BWI semi-annual meetings, and meetings between ECOSOC ambassadors and the Executive Boards of the World Bank and the IMF. The GA resolution calling for the High-Level event on Financing for Development called for participation by "all relevant stakeholders"; this includes governments, non-governmental organizations, the BWIs, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and private enterprise. The resolution called for help from stakeholders throughout the process, from agenda creation to the final event and beyond.

Collaboration among the three institutions moved to another level in June 2000 with the joint publication of "A Better World for All" (www.paris21.org/betterworld). Together, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the United Nations, the World Bank and the IMF launched the report on the opening day of the review session of the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen + 5). The organizations promote the report as a joint assessment of progress towards poverty reduction goals and as an "outline of a common vision for the way forward." The OECD sees this as a convergence in views on development. Critics of the report and the collaboration that produced it argue that the document has been presented as a new consensus between the UN, the OECD, the IMF and the World Bank. This is seen by many civil society organizations as a reinforcement of Northern perspectives of development and a disempowerment of the South. It was felt that it undermined the very concept of political inclusiveness that defines the UN (www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/jpc/ngo-state.html).

It is not clear, at least not from outside the UN, where this process of convergence is leading, or indeed who is driving it, although there seem to be many factors underlying the changes. The damaging IMF structural adjustment policies instituted in response to the Asian financial crisis, as well as public and governmental criticism, have helped move the World Bank. Given that all of the multi-lateral institutions mentioned are working on global economic issues, communication and cooperation seem mandatory. However, as long as the UN remains semi-paralyzed by underfunding and conditionality from its member states, it cannot hope to engage in a balanced dialogue or partnership with the BWIs or the WTO. The General Assembly can adopt resolutions every year calling for a greater role for the UN in the economic and social spheres, but at present it has little means to persuade the powerful that this should happen. Moreover, some see the process as representing a retreat from true multi-lateralism-i.e., the democratic structure of the UN. Member states grounded in democratic principles should take notice and back their principles with their pocketbooks.

Importantly, there have been significant changes in the inter-relationships of the UN with other multilateral institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Indeed, at times it seems that "economics" have replaced "politics" in UN debate. In addition, new networks of governments and NGOs have

been created to tackle global problems, as exemplified by the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) and the recently formed Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (QUNOs are active in both). The previously clear role-divisions between multilateral organizations, governments, non-governmental organizations and private enterprise are becoming increasingly blurred, some would say compromised. There are potential positive and negative ramifications of these new associations.

"Bundled" Security

Just as a software providers now consider it normal to bundle together groups of programs to address different tasks, so too the UN system expects to bundle together the different elements of security into programs that provide for varied peacemaking needs.

At a recent briefing an ambassador to the UN announced that the Security Council was about to put in place new arrangements to control the diamond trade in war-torn Sierra Leone. What's more, he said proudly, a colleague was pressing ahead in drafting a resolution that would create a special new court in Sierra Leone to try war criminals. The links between gems, human rights abuses and endless civil war may seem common enough now, but that has not always been the case.

If you had told a member of the UN Security Council in 1985 that his successors would be dealing with diamond marketing, freight forwarders, abused children and contagious diseases, he would have laughed in disbelief. Yet these are subjects addressed by the Council in the past year. In contrast, security during the Cold War meant big weapons, border protection and the seemingly permanent enmity of ideological opponents. All this changed during the 1990s. The continuous eruption of warfare-most of it within the borders of member states and almost all of it targeting civilians-has fractured governments and unleashed anarchy in southern and northern countries alike. In the wake of this destruction, it is clear that international security must take into account humanitarian, human rights, economic and even health issues-not to mention climatic and environmental changes that loom larger at the turn of the century.

This change would not have been completely surprising to the UN's founders. The UN Charter linked the eventual control of the war system to improvements in economic development and human rights. Throughout its history the UN and its member states have invested in non-military forms of "human security," but they could apply these tools only on a piecemeal basis. As long as there were two opposing blocs with very different theories on how the world worked, the UN was unable to create an integrated security system.

The end of the Cold War reopened the subject. As early as 1992, then-Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's Agenda for Peace was beginning to articulate a comprehensive peace system. At the same time, through a decade-long string of world conferences, the whole UN apparatus began to review the nature of security through social and economic perspectives. Meanwhile, outside the walls of the UN, the triumphal success of market economics and the spread of financial investment, production and communications technology-in a word, globalization-made the reality of broad planetary integration apparent to everyone.

Just as software providers now consider it normal to bundle together groups of programs to address many different tasks, so too the UN system and its members now expect to bundle together the different elements of security into programs that provide for varied peacemaking needs. A clear expression of this is seen in the mandates for UN peace operations, which ever since UNTAG in Namibia in 1989-90 have included tasks such as election support, refugee repatriation, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants. More recent peace operations have added civilian policing, economic management, disarmament, economic development, the creation of new judicial and security institutions, and even the rebuilding of local government to the list.

Another expression of "bundled security" is the phenomenon of thematic meetings in the Security Council. While much Council time is taken up, rightly, with urgent crises, the longer-term, more integrated nature of security is reflected in other sessions in which the Council adopts broad summaries of current policy. These documents cover such issues as the protection of civilians, children and armed conflict, HIV/AIDS, women and peacebuilding, the trade in "blood" diamonds, and the demobilization and reintegration of combatants. Many of these discussions identify overlaps and interrelationships between issues. In effect, the Security Council is creating a library of best practices in the complex fields of war prevention and post-war peacebuilding.

Of course, if peacemaking were as straightforward a process as software design, we could have had a world without war long ago. The trick for the UN is to apply reasonable and effective remedies to war that are politically viable. This is where the trend toward more comprehensive peacemaking meets an apparently immovable rock: national sovereignty. Indeed, the more the world leans toward globalized, multi-dimensional solutions, the harder many states resist in an effort to retain control over their own societies.

The challenge for the UN is to craft peace operations which address as many root causes as possible, without so threatening the "host" state that it refuses to cooperate. In practice this can result in UN operations that are too small, too short and too narrow in focus. Often the UN must wait until situations are so dire that public opinion overwhelms the objections of those states who fear more comprehensive peacemaking.

It's not a pretty picture, but it is a marked improvement on the Cold War model.

Preventing Conflict, Responding to Crises

As the UN continues its struggle to create effective, integrated response systems for humanitarian crises, intrastate violence, and repressive regimes, recognition is growing that it must move from what Secretary-General Kofi Annan has termed a "culture of reaction" to a "culture of prevention." Member states, however, have yet to muster the political will, coordination, and necessary resources to turn promising words into practical action.

UN Peacekeeping Today

The UN currently maintains 14 peacekeeping operations and 14 political/peace-building missions around the world, centered mostly in Africa, the Middle East, eastern Europe, and parts of Asia. Resources are stretched well beyond capacity, and the demand for international action in areas of crisis continues to rise. Missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, and East Timor—all still fraught with violence and instability—have recently been extended. At the same time, emphasis on holistic human security, coupled with the success of post-conflict peacebuilding missions in places like Haiti, Mozambique, and El Salvador, have led to more integrated peacekeeping operations that include attention to human rights, justice systems, and social development.



A UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) peacekeeper plays with a young child in Hera. © UN/DPI Photo by Eskinder Debebe

Unfortunately, the UN's role as an intervening agent in today's conflicts has been considerably tarnished over the past decade. Experiences in Somalia, Bosnia, Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia, and most recently Sierra Leone have undermined the UN's legitimacy, raised serious questions about the operation and mandate of UN peacekeeping, and challenged the international community to rethink the "dilemma of intervention."

In fact, according to a new report on UN peace operations, "Without renewed commitment on the part of member states, significant institutional change and increased financial support, the United Nations will not be capable of executing the critical peacekeeping and peace-building tasks that member states assign to it in the coming months and years" (S/2000/809). The report, issued this past August and known as the Brahimi Report (after its chair, Under-Secretary-General Lakhdar Brahimi), calls for more "robust" forces and mandates for future peacekeeping missions; increased availability and use of police and legal experts; integration of civilian, military and political planning; strengthening the rule of law and providing electoral assistance; protecting human rights; ensuring demobilization and reintegration of former combatants; and support for more preventive and post-conflict peacebuilding activities.

The Brahimi Report is a welcome addition to the ongoing dialogue around the prevention of deadly conflict that began in earnest with the publication of *An Agenda for Peace* in 1992. However, its recommendations also reflect the heightened emphasis on peace enforcement that has emerged in recent years.

The Potential of Prevention

Since the end of the cold war, the case for preventive action over last-minute, eleventh-hour response to predictable crises has grown. In the past two years Secretary-General Kofi Annan has issued numerous prevention statements and reports, worked to strengthen early warning capacity, designated the Department of Political Affairs as the focal point for prevention efforts, and created a Trust Fund for Preventive Action. The Security Council has also held two debates on conflict prevention, and is currently holding closed sessions on the Brahimi Report. On July 20, the Security Council debate on prevention lasted for a full day and included 29 country statements and a call from Secretary-General Kofi Annan to "make conflict prevention the cornerstone of collective security in the twenty-first century" (see S/PRST/2000/25 and SC/6892). While prevention is fast becoming a new buzzword, however, "peace enforcement" is becoming the action of choice.

The most prominent recommendation of the Brahimi Report stresses the need for bigger and better peacekeeping forces, mandated with rules of engagement "sufficiently robust" to protect civilians, halt attacks, and defend missions. It emphasizes the need for the UN to distinguish clearly "between victim and aggressor."

Rather than building on the prevention dialogue by committing to greater investment in preventive diplomacy and long-term peacebuilding, much of the international community remains focused on ensuring the strongest possible armed response once a conflict has erupted into violence. (The Secretary-General's Trust Fund for Preventive Action has managed to raise only \$7.4 million from seven governments in three years.)

The UN does need to ensure that peacekeeping missions are deployed wisely and into situations where they can function effectively to save lives, maintain fragile ceasefires, and promote a durable peace. In the search for more effective peacekeeping, however, a deepened commitment to robust military action may be taking hold. What was intended as the last resort has become the first priority. Consequently, the lines between peacemaking,

peacekeeping, and peace enforcement have begun to blur and Chapter VI operations are being beefed up to "Chapter VI 1/2."

How the UN can balance its stated commitment to prevention and long-term peacebuilding with its active efforts to enhance the use of force as a means to peace remains a difficult question. Although the international community is in agreement that prevention is less costly and more desirable than responding at the eleventh hour, deliberations continue among member states over thorny issues of sovereignty, Security Council reform, and a general lack of political will, human and financial resources.

In an encouraging development, the Security Council did adopt a resolution during the Millennium Summit pledging "to enhance the effectiveness of the United Nations in addressing conflict at all stages from prevention to settlement to post-conflict peace-building" (S/Res/1318), and a report on conflict prevention is expected from the Secretary-General in 2001 as part of the implementation process for the Brahimi Report. Still, reaching consensus on just how to accomplish the UN's pledges to maintain peace-including the implementation of practical prevention mechanisms-will require the full imagination and cooperation of all member states, as well as the support and partnership of civil society.

This year, QUNO is also developing a new project on preventive alternatives and peaceful interventions. In cooperation with Quaker colleagues in Geneva, London, Washington, DC, and other parts of the world, we will be working to foster greater dialogue and coordinated activity within the international system to help prevent the outbreak of violence and promote peaceful, sustainable responses to humanitarian and conflict crises.