



THE STATE OF THE UN 2004

A Quaker Perspective

JANUARY 2004

Prominent Issues Before the 58th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

The 58th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (GA) opened on September 22, with the general debate of the GA. During the general debate, high-level representatives from member states read their opening statements, reflecting issues of concern to the international community and the varying positions of the member states. The war in Iraq, reform of the UN system, concern for nuclear weapons proliferation, terrorism and the fair distribution of wealth all emerged as prominent issues.

The fallout of the Iraq war and the role of the UN were significant themes in the member states' opening speeches. The United States and the United Kingdom declared that military action against Iraq was undertaken in order to uphold the decisions of the Security

Council and the aims of the United Nations. As Jack Straw from the UK government put it, had the US and Britain not gone to war, "Saddam Hussein would have been emboldened by our failure to act, every dictator would have been encouraged to follow his example, and the authority of the United Nations would gravely have been weakened."

Other member states had a very different view of military action against Iraq. France maintained that "the war, embarked on without Security Council approval, has undermined the multilateral system"; Brazil expressed concern about the "worrisome signs of an attempt to discredit our Organization and even to divest the United Nations of its

political authority"; and Iran declared that "democratization can only be brought about from within [Iraq], and not imported in tandem with tank columns." Indonesia summed up the view of many UN member-states, saying: "...the war [in Iraq] created far more problems than those it intended to solve."

In perhaps the most notable address to the GA, Secretary-General Kofi Annan recognized how this debate over the Iraq war has changed the UN profoundly. "We have

come to a fork in the road," he said. "This may be a moment no less decisive than 1945 itself, when the United Nations was founded." By going to war without an unambiguous mandate from the UN Security



Secretary-General Kofi Annan Addressing the 58th Session of the General Assembly, September 16, 2003

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Council, Annan said that America and Britain's pre-emptive strategy "represents a fundamental challenge to the principles on which world peace and stability have rested for the last fifty-eight years." For Annan, the key challenge was to address the arguments being made for unilateral and pre-emptive military action. The UN must "face up squarely to the concerns that make some states feel uniquely vulnerable, since it is those concerns that drive them to take unilateral action. We must show that those concerns can, and will, be addressed effectively through collective action."

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Overview

The world, by all accounts, is in a difficult state. Hunger is on the rise, civil and international conflicts abound, small arms and light weapons pass over national borders like water in rivers, and some countries are working more and more outside of the multilateral system. It's no wonder that the UN, a place where 191 countries meet to discuss these issues, seems to be in a difficult state; it is a reflection of the relationships between the countries it serves.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan called for reform of the UN as part of a process of creating space for the UN to be a relevant organization in the world community; this is a much-needed and forward-looking objective. To begin the process of reform, Mr. Annan stated that he would appoint a High-level Panel to work during the next year on reform, and charged it to report back to the General Assembly in 2004. This panel has been named and is will meet in the near future.

However the news is not all bad. The Millennium Development Goals are being adopted by other multilateral organizations, civil society and the private sector as benchmarks for work. These potentially unifying goals provide a common foundation of understanding and outcomes for collaboration and work. This past summer, the UN held the first Biennial Review to consider the implementation of the Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons, those instruments that bring death the world over. The movement toward the prevention of violent conflict, through the voices of civil society, is being heard throughout the UN system.

The UN and other multi-lateral institutions are under severe stress. This was reflected, again, in the Secretary-General's call for UN reform. In 2003, the World Bank proposed quite modest reforms; these were vetoed by one member-state in particular. Given the movement toward bilateralism, and worse, unilateralism, the question arises as to whether these institutions can remain multi-lateral (some of them in a severely restricted multi-lateral form) or whether they will succumb to the unrelenting pressures to shape their agendas around the interests of a few powerful states. Insofar as they succumb, they will be seen as "hollow" institutions no longer serving the interests and needs of the larger global community, and providing less opportunity than ever for the voices of developing countries to be heard. ❖

Small Arms and Light Weapons: Funding a Consensus

Over the past decade, great progress has been made to combat the deadly consequences of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) around the world. Even at the United Nations, a body known for its stalemates and slow progress, real efforts to deal with this issue have moved forward. The 2001 Conference on Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons, the resulting Programme of Action (PoA) and the Biennial Meeting of States that took place this past July all represented important steps taken by the international community to address the problem. While greater measures are still needed to effectively address the human suffering caused by these weapons, the work that has been accomplished is an important beginning.

Despite this steady progress and

building momentum, the First Committee of the General Assembly faced a disappointing set-back in its work on SALWs this year. In the past, the principal resolution that lays out the UN's work in this area has enjoyed strong support by all member states and has always been adopted by consensus, without coming to a vote. This year's resolution, as in past years, laid out the UN's upcoming work on SALWs encompassing some new and important activities. These included plans for a conference, to be held in June-July 2006, that would review PoA implementation five years after the 2001 gathering. Before this review conference, a second Biennial Meeting for states to report on progress and lessons learned from Programme of Action implementation is planned for 2005. The resolution also

launched a process on the issue of marking and tracing—essential work in the effort to curb the proliferation of illicit SALWs. Marking and tracing had not been included in the 2001 PoA and this year's resolution calls for the creation of a working group to begin negotiations on a possible international instrument. Finally, the resolution requested that the Secretary-General hold informal broad-based consultations on further steps to enhance international cooperation. All of these measures enjoyed widespread support by member states and carved out a path for work over the coming years.

However, the activities also came with an estimated \$1.89 million price tag. After extensive consultation and efforts to identify savings, the resolution was forced to a vote
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Security Council: Focus on Iraq

The extent to which the United Nations, and in particular the Security Council, has been affected by pre- and post-war developments in Iraq remains to be seen as events unfold. While death knells are not in order, it is clear that the UN has been deeply wounded and its standing indisputably affected.

Ironically, the high regard the UN generally experiences in worldwide public opinion polls fell as a result of contradictory reactions: Public support for the UN in the US dropped in the early days of the war because the UN was seen as having failed to support “coalition” war efforts while it dropped in much of the rest of the world because the UN was seen as having failed to prevent the war from occurring in the first place. Our own sense at QUNO was that while the Council clearly failed to delay an essentially unilateral war while strongly favoring the continuation of an unfinished inspections process, it did

succeed, for over half a year, in providing a venue for debating “threats to international peace and security” that are its Charter mandate. In the end there was no more support for authorizing a war than there was the previous September when the initial request was made by the Coalition partners.

Deep questions remain whose resolution will largely determine the future viability of the Security Council to play an effective role in security issues:

- There are concerns that similar unilateral actions (what UK Prime Minister Blair now calls “muscular multi-lateralism”) could become a norm and that the SC would increasingly be bypassed when future approval appeared doubtful.
- Does the concept of “preemptory war” threaten to undermine the commitment to “collective security” enshrined in the Charter? Is there danger that war will become

the option of first resort rather than the last? Inspections were widely seen as working and in hindsight as having worked splendidly.

- Following the attack on UN Headquarters staff in Baghdad, will the UN be able to function as a “neutral” agency in future conflicts?
- How does/can the world live in a “uni-polar” world? Will the rising trend towards “regionalism” displace the UN’s central roles crisis situations in favor of “cleaning up the mess after the elephants have trodden through” as one ambassador described it.
- Finally, can the unity of the SC be restored? Current debates in the Council about international responses to crises in Liberia, the Congo, Israel-Palestine and elsewhere offer opportunities for cooperation and consensus should the major powers and countries in the regions choose to seize them. ❖

Conscientious Objection at the Quaker United Nations Office

At the request of Rachel Brett, who carries the Quaker concern for conscientious objection at the Quaker UN Office in Geneva, the Quaker UN Office in New York has asked John Randall (Scarsdale Monthly Meeting, NYYM) and Rosa Packard (Purchase Monthly Meeting, NYYM) to be associated with the Quaker UN office on issues of conscientious objection.

John Randall and Rosa Packard are nongovernmental (NGO) representatives for Conscience and Peace Tax International (CPTI) which has special consultative status at the UN with the Economic and Social Council. They serve on and have helped to found the working group on conscientious objection at the UN in NY, which meets monthly at the Mennonite Central Committee UN office and occasionally at Quaker house.

The working group includes representatives from Pax Christi, Mennonite

Central Committee CPTI, War Resisters League, Fellowship Of Reconciliation, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, International Peace Research Association and Woman’s International League for Peace and Freedom.

John Randall manages the web page for CPTI and is clerk of New York Yearly Meeting’s Peace Concern Committee. He was a conscientious objector in the Vietnam era. Rosa Packard serves as recording clerk of NYYM Peace Concerns Committee, and is appointed by her Monthly Meeting to counsel those troubled in conscience by participation in war. She has organized programs at the UN on conscientious objection. Transcripts of these are on the CPTI webpage <<http://www.cpti.ws>>, which is linked to the QUNO webpage.

A program on conscientious objection was held at the UN in

Geneva on April 4, 2003 cosponsored by FWCC, CPTI, IFOR and WRI, at the time of the annual sessions of the Commission on Human Rights. Oral statements to the Commission concerning conscientious objection were made on April 9 by Rachel Brett for Friends World Committee for Consultation, Michel Monod for War Resisters International and Rosa Packard for Conscience and Peace Tax International.

Rosa and John will assist the QUNO – Geneva office by following the issue of conscientious objection on the New York side. The Geneva Representative to the United Nations for CPTI is Derek Brett. The work includes providing information for the best practices report on conscientious objection being prepared by staff of the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights’ office. ❖

Prevention Of Violent Conflict and the UN

In the face of all-consuming absorption in the lead up to war in Iraq, many supporters (QUNO included) of efforts to switch the dominant focus of the Security Council from eleventh-hour crisis management to one of longer-term efforts to “prevent” conflicts from becoming violent in the first place, struggled against heavy winds. At times it appeared that the earlier Secretary-General’s Report on the Prevention of Armed Conflict (2001) had become one of the earliest victims of the rush to war in Iraq under the banner of “preemption” rather than “prevention.” (www.un.org/depts/dpa/pre-dip/fst-prev-dip.htm)

Still, encouraging progress was made during 2003 to insure that the prevention of armed conflict remains a cross-cutting theme in the whole UN system and in its engagement with civil society. For many member states, prevention remains the most powerful antidote to the dreadful habit of waiting until emerging conflicts become so violent that all other options to military intervention appear precluded.

Within the UN Secretariat, a Resource Group was formed under the chairing of Assistant Secretary-General Danilo Turk in the Department of Political Affairs to coordinate staff follow-up to the recommendations made in the Secretary-General’s report. The Resource Group consists of the heads of major programs, departments and agencies of the UN system. In addition, a growing number of agencies have created specific offices to promote prevention themes in their own agencies. These include, for example, the UN Development Program’s Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (RCPR) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian

Assistance’s Early Warning and Contingency Planning Unit. On September 12, the Secretary-General delivered an Interim Report (A/58/365 and S/2003/888) on the Prevention of Armed Conflict that reported on UN and member state efforts to build their capacities for prevention and peaceful settlement of disputes. Indeed, in his opening address to the General Assembly, Secretary-General Kofi Annan called for ensuring “conflict prevention” as the “cornerstone of the collective security system of the United Nations in the twenty-first century.”

While the Security Council passed a resolution endorsing the Report in 2001, there was a conspicuous and worrying lack of a similar resolution in the General Assembly. Following a 15-month process of consultation, the GA passed a



H.E. Ambassador Munir Akram of Pakistan discusses the UN Security Council agenda with Jack Patterson, Quaker Representative to the UN, at a recent NGO Security Council Working Group meeting

supporting resolution (G57/337) on June 30 laying the basis for deeper GA engagement with the prevention and putting it on the GA annual agenda for continuing attention. It passed unanimously with the important support of some member states who were initially reluctant to give their support fearing it would open the door to new infringements of sovereignty by providing expanding

opportunities of intervention by the developed countries in the affairs of developing countries. On September 4, Jan Kavan, President of the 57th GA, chaired an open meeting of the GA on the “Role of Civil Society in the Prevention of Armed Conflict” attended by 88 countries at which much support was voiced both for the resolution and for the active engagement of civil society. (See QUNO website <www.quno.org> for “Annex” summary of the discussion.)

Finally, QUNO, along with several partner NGOs working at UN headquarters and the European Center for Conflict Prevention in Utrecht, Netherlands, have been working since Fall 2001 to implement Recommendation #27 of the Secretary-General’s Report on Conflict Prevention. Numerous meetings with NGOs, government foreign ministries and UN diplomats and staff encouraged us to proceed with a plan to organize an international conference on “The Role of Civil Society in the Prevention of Violent Conflict” at UN Headquarters in mid-2005. The conference, and the lead-up to it, has the potential to be a significant strategic event, capable of transforming the way global conflict is addressed.

Between now and 2005, 14-15 sub-regional consultations will be held to provide input for recommendations to the Secretary-General for presentation to the international conference in 2005. The regional consultations will become the basis for on-going collaboration in each sub-region. In other words, the international conference becomes an opportunity to build long-term networks and relationships to actually undertake the work needed in each sub-region. More information about the process and how to engage with it can be found at www.conflict-prevention.net. ❖

The UN Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP)

Each year the United Nations humanitarian agencies combine fundraising efforts into one Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) to maximize the UN's ability to help those countries with the most need around the world. The CAP list pinpoints and describes the most serious humanitarian crises and articulates the extent of financial support needed to bring relief to those affected. In 2003, there were 20 countries on the list, with a total need of \$5.1 billion.

Last year's fund raising effort yielded mixed results and raised concerns about a growing disparity between need-based planning for humanitarian crises and the reality of donor discretion. In 2003, the UN raised 66 percent (\$3.3 billion) of the total \$5.1 billion needed. The UN compiled the list of emergency situations based primarily on need, yet donors to the appeal had the option to choose where and what they funded. There are indications that, as a consequence, crises which received media and political spotlight and engaged the interests of donor countries received more support. For example, Iraq received 91 percent of the total amount needed (\$2.2 billion), whereas only 24 percent of the funding needed for Liberia (\$25 million) was raised despite the amount required being significantly smaller. Although there

is little doubt that the war in Iraq must be categorized as an acute emergency, so much financial support went toward this crisis (over \$70 per individual) that a comparatively small amount needed in a country like Liberia (about \$19 per individual) was not raised.

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In 2004, the UN will seek a total of \$3 billion to cover crises in 21 countries, affecting 45 million people. As the UN attempts to fundraise

for these crises, the challenge will be to reconcile need with donor discretion. Indeed, each country that makes this dreaded crisis list deserves full support. However, a special effort must be made to highlight those crises which fall so sharply below their targets. Liberia is once again among the 17 African countries on the list. The amount requested this year is \$137 million, more than five times last year's amount. This begs the questions: if more had

been raised last year against a significantly smaller goal, could much of the strife that occurred this past summer have been averted and would so much be needed this year? As the UN makes every effort to raise the total amount

needed for these 21 countries, it must also address the issues of donor discretion and the disparity between the amounts collected for individual crises.

For a complete list of the UN Consolidated Humanitarian Appeals, please visit: <http://www.un.org/depts/ocha/cap/index.html>. ❖

Quaker United Nations Office

The Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO), located in Geneva and New York, represents Quakers through Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC), an international non-governmental organization with consultative status at the UN. QUNO works to promote the peace and justice concerns of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) from around the world at the United Nations and other global institutions. It is supported by the American Friends Service Committee, Britain Yearly Meeting, the worldwide community of Friends, other groups and individuals.

Current staff at QUNO New York: Jack Patterson (conflict prevention and peacemaking); Lori Heninger (financing for development and racism/human rights); Sarah Clarke (small arms and fundraising); Jessica Huber (emerging conflicts); Hala Hasan (administrator); Eliza Kretzmann and Tom Smith (program assistants).

Issues before the 58th GA (continued from page 1)

In light of this, reform of the United Nations was high on the agenda. For some this meant making the Security Council larger and more representative: "It is essential to its legitimacy that its membership reflects the state of the world," France's statement read. For others, this meant empowering the Council to intervene and protect human lives: "No entity is more appropriate than the UN Security Council to authorize military action to protect the innocent," emphasized the Canadian Prime Minister.

However, it is important to highlight that UN reform has been on the agenda for many years, often without fruitful results. The South African representative expressed frustration, stating that "for more than a decade, this organization has been involved in discussions about its transformation...the truth is that our discussion has gone nowhere."

The proliferation of nuclear weapons was touched upon in many statements. The European Union (EU) sent "a firm appeal to North Korea to completely dismantle its nuclear program," asking India and Pakistan to do the same. Japan agreed, emphasizing that "the horror and devastation caused by nuclear weapons should not be repeated" and claimed that we are at a "crossroads...with regard to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty regime." Many statements also denounced the proliferation of conventional

weapons and biological weapons.

Concerns about terrorism appeared in many of the statements, especially in light of the August bombing of the UN headquarters for operations in Baghdad. Most statements opened with respects and condolences for the lives of UN staff lost

Secretary-General Kofi Annan brought attention to the links of the broad issues before the General Assembly. While he maintained that some consider security issues such as terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction the main challenge to world peace, issues such as "small arms employed in civil conflict" and "extreme poverty, the disparity of income...the spread of infectious diseases, or climate change and environment" are issues that others feel most immediately menaced by.

in that event. President Bush's speech rallied for a continued focus on eradicating terrorism, while other governments delved into the deeper issues and root causes of terrorism. Indonesia's statement read: "The absence of a just attitude, exacerbated by a feeling of being sidelined and ignored, in addition to the deficiency of formal means to channel aspiration, has cultivated a climate of violence to grow." The EU advocated that "Efforts to combat terrorism must respect human rights and the fundamental freedoms, rule-of-law and humanitarian law."

Opening statements highlighted the fair distribution of wealth, as it relates to globalization and international trade reflected concerns raised at the World Trade Organization (WTO) conference earlier this year. "The protectionism practiced by rich countries unfairly penalizes efficient

producers in developing countries. Today this is the greatest obstacle to launching a new era of economic and social progress," emphasized Brazil. Guatemala expressed disappointment at the lack of progress at the Cancun meeting, and called for "an international trade regime that is

open, transparent and with greater opportunities for developing countries."

Thabo Mbeki, President of South Africa, stated, "Left to its internal and autonomous impulses, the process of globalization will inevitably result in the further enhancement of the domination of the dominant and the entrenchment of the [subservient]," and said "the hopes of the poor of the world died" in Cancun.

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General Assembly. While he maintained that some consider security issues such as terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction the main challenge to world peace, issues such as "small arms employed in civil conflict" and "extreme poverty, the disparity of income...the spread of infectious diseases, or climate change and environment" are issues that others feel most immediately menaced by. He stated: **"In truth, we do not have to choose. The United Nations must confront all these threats and challenges— new and old...in fact all these struggles are linked. We now see, with chilling clarity, that a world where many millions of people endure brutal oppression and extreme misery will never be fully secure, even for its most privileged inhabitants."** ❖

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict at the UN, 2003

The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians continues to be an issue in which the United Nations is deeply engaged. Each year around twenty resolutions come before the General Assembly dealing with all aspects of the conflict, from the humanitarian needs of the refugee population and the human rights record in the Occupied Territories, to the status of Jerusalem. The consistent adoption of these resolutions in the General Assembly (GA) is the source of much political sensitivity within the United Nations, particularly among Israeli and American officials who feel, in the words of the Israeli foreign minister Silvan Shalom, that “no other country has suffered such unjustified attack and consistent discrimination within the UN system.”

This year American officials have lobbied diplomats from UN member states in order to cut down support for, and reduce the number of, General Assembly resolutions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This campaign by the US has yielded only limited success, however, because most member states continue to insist Israel has obligations as an occupying power under international law. Given the deteriorating situation in the Occupied Territories: the continuing curfews, restrictions on movement, house demolitions and the construction of the separation wall deep into Palestinian territory, the resolutions adopted by the GA are seen by many as more relevant than ever before.

Resolutions passed by the

General Assembly, however, are restricted to making recommendations to member states, and they need to be adopted in the UN Security Council in order to be legally binding. Since the Council is subject to the veto power of the five permanent members, its activities on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during 2003 have been marked by significant paralysis and an inability to reach consensus. The United States vetoed two draft Security Council resolutions during 2003, one of

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which demanded that Israel halt threats to expel the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat from the Occupied Territories, and the other which condemned the construction of the separation wall in the West Bank. Having been vetoed in the Security Council, both of these resolutions were then passed on to the General Assembly under the “Uniting for Peace” formula of 1950, which allows the Assembly to make decisions when the Security Council fails to reach agreement. Both of the draft resolutions were then accepted with

an overwhelming majority, and now exist as GA resolutions.

The Security Council itself, as a result of the US veto, did not pass anything on Israel-Palestine until 19th November, when resolution 1515 was adopted unanimously. This resolution gave formal Security Council endorsement to the Roadmap, the latest government-level peace initiative, which was unveiled at the end of April 2003. The adoption of resolution 1515, nearly six months after the Roadmap

was launched and well after many in the region regarded it as all but dead, illustrates the disconnect between the activities of the Security Council and the situation on the ground. The progress of the Roadmap has since been eclipsed by growing enthusiasm for the track-two diplomatic success of the Geneva Accord, negotiated by prominent opposition figures on both sides. However, the Accord has yet to penetrate the UN system because it is not a governmental agreement, despite hope that it could re-ignite track-one

diplomacy and help end the paralysis in the UN. ❖

Video

The Quaker United Nations Office would like to announce the release of its new video, “Quiet Diplomacy.” “Quiet Diplomacy” tells the story of QUNO in New York and Geneva, its history, methods and foci. The videos are available from the Quaker UN Office in New York for the cost of shipping.

Small Arms...

(continued from page 2)

in the First Committee with 162 countries in favor, 1 against, and no abstentions. Citing the need for fiduciary discipline, the United States was responsible for the lone negative vote. In a statement following the vote, the United States indicated its strong support for the substantive measures and activities outlined in the resolution, but also highlighted its long-standing concern about overspending at the UN. The US concluded by saying that “in a world of competing priorities and limited resources, hard choices must be made.”

Co-sponsors of the resolution and other member states expressed their great dismay that, despite efforts to find a workable solution,

many years of unity and consensus decision-making had been abandoned. Work continues on the resolution to try and find greater savings and funds from elsewhere – either from other parts of the already meagre disarmament budget, or from contributions by individual member states. At the time this article was written, it remained unclear how the funding issue would be resolved, but the co-sponsors hoped it would be brought to the plenary of the General Assembly and adopted unanimously.

This set-back in such a promising area of UN work points to some very real challenges facing the institution in all its areas of work. Time and again, the issue of setting priorities and finding the financial support for these priorities has dogged one issue or another. SALWs pose a

severe threat to all of our communities whether we come from Central Africa, Iraq, Eastern Europe or the United States. However, in a post-September 11 world, the issue has fallen to the bottom of the list for the United States, behind the war on terror and regime change. In fact, many feel that US foreign policy has ignored and perhaps exacerbated the deadly effects of SALWs in certain parts of the world.

SALWs will continue to threaten lives every day and there is a need to seek out further innovative and bold measures to address this problem. However, the first challenge will be to recognize that this is one of the many priorities that deserve full and adequate funding so that the international community can continue its work. ❖

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