

# PART A: Global Perspectives

## A.1 Strengthening the UN and Global Governance<sup>1</sup>

*Richard Jolly and Richard Longhurst<sup>2</sup>*

### Abstract

This article reflects on the ‘unfinished business’ of the UN and other international organisations in addressing present and future challenges of the twenty-first century. It highlights the particular value and contributions of the UN to international development and to ‘ideas that changed the world’ and stresses the need for the UN to play a greater role in strengthening global governance, particularly in relation to developing countries, and in strengthening its normative functions. It commends its efforts to strengthen inter-agency linkages through enhanced coordination and collaboration at country and sectoral/thematic levels. It concludes with some reflections on the need for a shift in the UN’s focus on development, and some recommendations on how the UK can consolidate and strengthen its many positive roles in international development and in the UN.

**Keywords:** UN, global governance, norms, UN reform.

### 1 Overview

The centre of gravity of the world in the twenty-first century has been shifting – economically and politically – towards the East and the South.

At the same time, global governance is not really shifting and remains weak or even weakening, in relation to major global problems: climate change, economic imbalances and disruptions, inequalities, transmission of global diseases like Ebola, cyber-problems, trade gaps, investment deficiencies and religious/cultural conflicts, terrorism and humanitarian emergencies.

Despite increasing global connectedness, global institutions are not keeping up with the demands of global governance. Goldin (2012) has identified five key areas with substantial risks all requiring international action: climate change, cybersecurity, pandemics, migration and finance. To these, Weiss and Thakur (2010) have added peace, arms control and disarmament, collective security, technical coordination, terrorism, trade and aid, human rights and the responsibility to protect. For the UN and other international organisations, there is therefore much ‘unfinished business’ and an urgent need to strengthen institutions to face up to the present and future challenges of the twenty-first century.

Most of the efforts to strengthen global governance in the last few decades have been led by the G7 and the Bretton Woods Institutions, pursuing narrow economic objectives of free trade, sometimes free movement of capital, largely justified by neoliberal economic theory focused on increasing economic efficiency and economic growth. Progress in addressing global governance of peace and security issues, after a short period of post-USSR optimism, has been hampered by the increasing clash of interests between the permanent members of the Security Council.

The UN has been increasingly marginalised in these economic matters and also left short of funding, especially since the first half of the 1990s (ODI 1997). Notwithstanding, the UN retains global legitimacy and still commands strong support in the South, even more from

poorer and least developed countries. This is too often forgotten as the views of the governments of such countries are rarely given much publicity. For these countries, the UN is still seen as their champion.

## **2 Ideas, ideology, finance and political influence**

Though the neoliberal orthodoxy of the Bretton Woods Institutions has been internationally dominant since the 1980s, it has never fitted well with the UN. In terms of objectives and approaches, the UN funds, specialized agencies and other institutions have always been multi-disciplinary, usually more focused on country-level problems and action, and increasingly concerned with human rights. As a source of ideas in development and alternative perspectives, the UN may have had more influence than often realised (Jolly *et al.* 2004). The UN Intellectual History Project concluded that ideas might indeed have been among the UN's most important contributions (Jolly *et al.* 2009). In its concluding volume, *UN Ideas that Changed the World*, the project identified nine ideas where the UN had given global leadership, often pioneering and almost always ahead of the Bretton Woods Institutions. These nine were human rights for all, gender equality and empowerment, development goals, fairer international economic relationships, broader development strategies, social development, environmental sustainability, peace and human security and human development, as an integrated approach. The UN has also done a great deal to promote gender equality (Jain 2002, 2005).

Since 1990, UNDP's Human Development Report (HDR) has specifically developed and promoted the human development paradigm as an alternative to neoliberal economic orthodoxy. Unfortunately, the HDR has mainly been used as an international advocacy document and too rarely as a frame for policy and programming. It has attracted much attention, especially because of its Human Development Index which provides a ranking of most countries in the world alternative to gross national product (GNP) per capita.

In recent decades, flows of private investment have increasingly marginalised aid and development assistance (and UN assistance in particular) though the UN has still provided leadership and vital financial support in key areas of humanitarian action areas such as health, education, human rights and areas of human concern such as children, and disabilities. Moreover, in the last decade or two, UN assistance in these areas has often been overshadowed by the growth of private funds, notably those of the Gates Foundation, Global Alliance for Vaccinations and Immunization (GAVI) and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) but also the 100 or so much smaller non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and private funds. Though donors continue to press for closer coordination of the UN funds and specialized agencies, coordination with these many other funds is largely unchallenged, as is their lack of international legitimacy. The governance arrangements of the voluntary funds and the specialized agencies are distinctly different; the former are more narrowly single issues-focused and it is sometime claimed that the specialized agencies are better integrated into the government structures of member states.

The historian Mark Mazower, in his magisterial study, *Governing the World: The History of An Idea*, has argued that the UN has provided political cover for US interests at very little cost, with American funds being used to spread US ideas on development through the UN (Mazower 2013). However, to us it seems more likely that the Bretton Woods Institutions have been the main conduit for US influence, while the UN has been the global governance mechanism more responsive to the ideas and priorities of poorer nations. It was the structural adjustment policies of the Bretton Woods Institutions that had such a devastating impact on the welfare and growth of many poorer nations.<sup>3</sup>

### **3 Global governance**

A focus on aid is far too narrow for assessing the issues of global governance, politically and economically, let alone in terms of history and culture and the challenges of the changing context of today's world and the challenges of the future. The focus on state governance itself, whether national, regional or international, is narrow in a world increasingly influenced if not dominated by transnational corporations.

The Report of the Commission of Global Governance in 1995 and the 2009 Report of the Stiglitz Commission (Stiglitz *et al.* 2010), both neglected at the time, still set out important proposals for strengthening global governance in general and reform of the financial and monetary system in particular. The Stiglitz report included the need for stronger coordinated economic action which was central to the original purposes of the Bretton Woods Institutions. The brief recovery in 2010 showed the positive benefits of such coordinated action just as the failures to continue this afterwards showed the costs in terms of lost growth and rising debts. Coordination alone is of course not sufficient – and other changes recommended by the Stiglitz Commission are also needed if coordinated action is to be sustainable, supportive of the poorer and least developed countries and focused in support of human concerns as well as economic development.

Such further actions will require additional funding for poorer countries, more policy space for developing countries, more opening of advanced country markets to least developed country exports and notably more effective regulation of finance and the financial sector, especially in advanced countries. All these were recommended by the Stiglitz Commission which, in addition, made more fundamental recommendations for reform of the international economic and financial system such as setting up of a Global Economic Coordination Council, the Creation of a New Credit Facility, a New Global Reserve System, better and more balanced surveillance and a new approach to financial regulation to ensure that finance returns to being servant and no longer master of economic development.

Global governance needs to recognise regional trends and realities. A critical issue for the UN is how to adjust to Asia's growing place in the world, based not only on economic growth but also on its growing middle class and increasing dominance in higher education (Mahbubani 2013). China, its neighbours, and other members of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) need to be accommodated in an enhanced system of global governance. The UN's major powers need to find ways to bring the emerging powers into the leadership of the UN. This is a vital issue of strengthened global governance to which the UK government can perhaps contribute, especially if working with other countries in Europe. It was largely the West that created the UN and the Bretton Woods Institutions at the end of the Second World War. But if global institutions are to be strengthened, it will require new thinking and bolder initiatives focused on meeting long-run challenges among the emerging powers as well as those of waning influence.

### **4 The normative function of the UN and other 'unique selling points'**

The normative work of the UN, largely situated in the specialized agencies, often goes unnoticed because much of it is not designed to catch the limelight and not subject to the headlines generated by prolonged and exhausting negotiations.<sup>4</sup> But crucially it is one of the functions which only the UN with its global convening power can do.<sup>5</sup> The normative work of the UN through universal and egalitarian human rights also defines the ethical foundations of the world system. Broadly, there are three categories of normative work.

The first set is the *human rights system*, there now being some 500 human rights conventions. Their ethical nature differentiates them from the norms in the other categories such as labour standards and natural resources conventions. The UN is founded on the

principles of peace, justice, freedom and human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognised human rights as a prerequisite for achieving peace, justice and democracy. When Secretary-General Kofi Annan launched UN reform in 1997, he explicitly stated that all major UN activities should be guided by human rights principles.

A second category of normative work is also *obligatory*, in so far as when countries ratify conventions they agree to adopt various standards or laws and to take certain courses of action. The third and last category is *voluntary*. In this case the function can relate to scientific frameworks or global forums and may consist of general directions or guidelines where applications are voluntary. Within these second and third categories, seven types of normative work can be identified, being: (i) conventions, protocols and declarations, (ii) norms and standards and international codes of conduct, (iii) monitoring and reporting on implementation of conventions, (iv) advocacy such as promotion of norms, (v) global reports and surveys, (vi) statistical information, collection, updating and reporting, and (vii) knowledge production through global public goods.

The normative work extends into every corner of the lives of citizens in the rich world, and with resources properly applied will have equally strong relevance for people in poorer countries. The normative work exists because of the staying power of the UN and the support it receives from all governments.

The unique selling points ('USPs') of the UN include its normative work plus related elements of direct action (ODI 1999). These USPs are (i) research in cross-cutting issues, (ii) consensus-building, advocacy and target setting, (iii) a forum for the preparation and negotiation of international treaties or conventions, (iv) technical coordination and standard setting, (v) information collection and dissemination, (vi) coordination of action among agencies both national and international, and (vii) direct action in development and peacekeeping. These suggestions rather underplay the roles that the UN could take on, but with adequate funding the UN's normative functions could make it a powerful player in a vital area of strengthened global governance.

## **5 The UN's own coordination**

The effectiveness of the UN in global governance is to a large extent based on its internal ability to coordinate and use its resources effectively. Over the last 15–20 years the UN has given serious attention to strengthening inter-agency linkages and avoid duplication. The 'Delivering as One' initiative and the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) were central to these efforts (Longhurst 2006). Inter-agency coordinating committees such as the UN Standing Committee on Nutrition has since 1973<sup>6</sup> tried to ensure that agencies work together on the multi-factored issues that promote nutrition (Longhurst 2010). Other coordinating mechanisms such as the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC), played a major role in formulating targets for water, sanitation and hygiene, as well as UN-Water and the World Water Council. This work fed into the Millennium Development Goals (Baumgartner and Pahl-Wostl 2013).

Among the efforts for aid harmonisation and coordination, incentive systems internal to aid agencies have been identified in the development literature (de Renzio *et al.* 2005). Aligning these incentives to working together has been a slow process: some agencies have accelerated decentralisation to countries but this has often been accompanied by a disconnection between HQ and the country offices with insufficient support and guidance as to how harmonisation is to be achieved. At the individual level there has been little concrete action on proper incentives with recruitment policies, performance assessment and promotion taking little account of efforts by the individual to promote harmonisation between organisations.

The UK has already played a significant role in supporting the UN to become more effective through better coordination in several ways, including supporting the Country Coordination Fund and spear-heading donors to also improve their coordination in working with the UN. Britain has also encouraged other donor colleagues (also not well known for their achievements in coordination) to work together more effectively. Some of this can be achieved with programme approaches such as sector-wide approaches (SWAPs) and budget support which have built-in harmonisation characteristics.

## **6 Future challenges for the UN**

Although many of the ideas and proposals of the Stiglitz Commission are well beyond what is feasible and acceptable to the major powers today, they raise precisely the sort of changes in global governance which are needed and will be needed for a more balanced, more stable and more sustainable world in the future. In such a world, what will be the role for the UN?<sup>7</sup> The final part of this note raises issues and questions even more than it sets out specific proposals. For instance:

*6.1 The need to ensure better balance in UN governance between traditional and emerging powers:* a fundamental question is how to ensure better balance in the vision, leadership and management of the UN in order to reflect the growing political and economic influence of the emerging powers (currently the BRICS) and of the South more generally. Efficient and equitable global governance will increasingly require institutions with fairer democratic representation.

*6.2 The need for increased core funding for the UN:* more core financial support is certainly needed for the UN and for UN funds and specialized agencies. The lack of core funding was in part a cause of the slow response of the World Health Organization (WHO) to the Ebola crisis in 2014/5.

*6.3 The need for review of systems of appointment, promotion and retention of UN staff:* within the UN, systems of appointment, promotion and retention of staff need to be reviewed and reformed. The influence of national governments has long ago prevented the Dag Hammarskjöld vision of a truly international civil service. Is it possible to return to this vision? And if not, in the ever more complex world of cultural and national diversities, what can be done to ensure efficiency and UN loyalties among UN staff at all levels? The UN can be proud of what it does to promote diversity and national and gender representation but when the system becomes over-politicised it works against effective delivery and support to the poorer nations. More attention to regional balance of staff rather than national quotas and greater flexibility would help. There is also a need to reconsider the systems and structures for elections. Another cause of WHO's slow response to Ebola was apparently the decentralised system of appointing and promoting staff at country and regional level, which had become exceptionally politicised and often inhibits the organisation's global management from acting independently and proactively.

*6.4 The need for a better balance between the UN and the Bretton Woods Institutions:* a better balance is needed between the UN and the Bretton Woods Institutions. The UN retains global legitimacy which remains fundamental to its authority in a way which the Bretton Woods Institutions do not. By votes and actions the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are seen, and in many respects act as, instruments of the richer and more powerful countries. In contrast, the UN's universal membership and wide-ranging functions are closely related to its more universal and human focus and multi-disciplinarity which are embodied in most of its operations. So far, the BRICS have followed Bretton Woods orthodoxy in the operations of their own institutions, for instance in the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. When, how and if this can be expected to change is a crucial yet open question.

*6.5 The need for strengthened UN roles in support of both national and global governance:* as more and more countries increase in competence in all areas of professional and administrative skills, the traditional UN roles of providing support for national action in economic and social development will give way to providing international staff with expertise in issues of global governance and their conversion to national-level problems; for instance, in monitoring health, strengthening prevention and response, reporting on long-run trends, and assisting with evaluations which are objective if not fully independent. And what is true for health will also be true in different ways for other areas of global governance; for instance, climate change, cybersecurity, migration, finance and investment. More effective global governance will also be needed in other areas, for example – arms control and disarmament, collective security, technical coordination, terrorism, trade and aid, human rights, peace and the responsibility to protect.<sup>8</sup> The need for appointing and promoting professionals with the skills and abilities for managing effective international governance in these priority areas will increase.

*6.6 The need for reform of the Security Council:* UN reform also raises questions about the reform of the Security Council. Though often met with groans and reminders that proposals for such reform fill a large graveyard in the UN System, Kishore Mahbubani sets out fresh ideas which seem better judged politically than most proposed in recent years (Mahbubani 2013). He believes the UN Security Council should expand its membership to 21, with seven permanent members comprising the US, China, India, Russia, Brazil, Nigeria and the European Union. He also envisages a new category of semi-permanent members, elected from the 28 next largest or richest countries and holding office for four years. A third category covers the other smaller and poorer countries where seven representatives would be elected from the remaining countries for two years, (as at present for all elected members).

One interesting feature of these proposals is that Mahbubani gives careful attention to the reasons which different groups of countries might have in supporting or *opposing* the arrangements he outlines. For Britain and France, in particular – but also for other countries like Germany and Japan – Mahbubani argues that being eligible for election to the semi-permanent seats, in addition to having permanent representation through the European Union, might make the new arrangements more politically acceptable.

## **7 A shift in the UN's focus on development**

As regards development, what should be the objectives of the UN over the next few decades, as other countries increase their production, incomes and wealth, moving towards the middle and upper-middle groups of GNP and, hopefully, also towards human development?

The fundamental goals for the UN should be an improvement and strengthening of the international political and economic and cultural system towards a world of more security and less tension, greater openness and economic stability, improved democracy and predictability in international relations. In turn, this will require:

*7.1 Sustainable economic growth:* moves in all regions of the world towards patterns of growth which are sustainable, involving less carbon emissions, less environmental damage to land and sea, more recycling and less waste.

*7.2 More equitable growth:* through a reduction in the economic inequalities between countries and thus increased growth and development among today's poorer and least developed countries.

*7.3 More sustainable human development:* shifts towards patterns of human development in which higher standards of wellbeing are achieved with less use of economic resources.

Regionally and globally, this will require stronger systems of governance, especially to ensure financial and economic stability, avoiding crises and lowering the risks of disruptions. Achieving this will depend on stronger international support from the UN's specialized agencies and stronger UN support for country-level action in areas such as health, migration, cybersecurity, trade and finance. The UN funds will have a major role in supporting such actions in poorer countries but also some role in medium-income countries and, arguably even in more developed countries, where delivering public goods is costly and where incentives for delivering them is weak. With the greater global interconnectedness, ideas and examples of policies and projects that work have more universal applicability in both richer and poorer countries.

## **8 Recommendations for UK support for a strengthened UN in the future**

The UK has always been a strong supporter of the UN. It was one of the three nations which took the main initiatives, intellectually and politically in the UN's creation, building on its pioneering and leading experience with the League of Nations. Throughout the years of the UN's life and further developments, the UK has been a consistent supporter, often more consistent than the US and of Russia/USSR. The following positive attributes of the UK's support to the UN should be maintained and enhanced:

*8.1 As critical friend of the UN and advocate for reform and collaboration:* the UK should remain a 'critical friend' of the UN and use its influence to encourage agencies to reform, collaborate and coordinate, and to press for important issues. Over the last few years the UK has pressed for more attention in several key areas, but notably for adolescent girls, for nutrition and for ending gender violence. It also has been at the forefront of trying to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian interventions. The UK's current positive approach to funding of international development has brought it respect and professional trust among a wide range of other international donors. It should use its leverage to promote the USPs of the UN among its fellow donors.

*8.2 As provider of evaluation capacity on the effectiveness of the UN and other multilateral organisations:* The Department for International Development's (DFID's) professional evaluations of UN operations have made an important contribution to the UN and to countries more generally as well as to Britain itself (Scott 2005, 2013). Despite some issues that have been hotly debated at the time of assessment, most UN agencies and the staff directly affected believe that they have been useful and important in generating reform. In recent times there has been the Multilateral Effectiveness Framework (MEFF) in 2003-04 which examined 23 multilateral organisations (of which 15 were UN agencies) and in 2011 the Multilateral Assessment Review (MAR) which reviewed 43 multilateral organisations, of which 20 were UN agencies.

*8.3 As a leading and influential donor partner in international development:* the UK should continue with its leading and supportive international role in the future. The ring-fenced 0.7 per cent legislative commitment to international aid gives it relatively significant resources, if deployed with care. Though when acting alone, the UK is a diminishing global power, its long history of acting internationally within the UN (and in the Commonwealth) means that it can continue to bring commitment, vast experience and influence for strengthening the UN as part of more effective global governance.

*8.4 As an effective regional and global player and user of 'soft power' in the UN:* Britain's diminishing power on the global stage, strengthens the argument for the country to work regionally and internationally within these other groups; indeed diminishing global power can lead to a greater level of comfort with certain countries in some locations. Interaction with the UN is an important element in the UK's 'soft power' strategy to promote the influence of the

UK in the world, building on its long-standing traditions in many countries which are still valued in those countries themselves. This should set a frame for the UK's policy towards the UN – working closely with Europe, the Commonwealth and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

However, these international roles for Britain will also require a population which has understanding and is supportive of such external policies and initiatives, which the current balance of the UK press does not support. For several centuries, British children grew up and were educated into an understanding that Britain was an island and a maritime power with a global empire. Whatever the deceits of such colonial perspectives, many in the country had such a global perspective and were supportive of British international actions. In the twenty-first century, such perspectives seem often to have shrunk to the possibility of Britain going it alone.

## **9 Improving the perception of the UN and facilitating UK recruitments**

To those of us who have spent careers in the UN, a positive international perspective is vital. Key actions to ensure this in Britain include:

*9.1 Strengthened use of social media to enhance coverage in the education system of international and global issues:* all parts and levels of the education system and the media in Britain need to present and promote an understanding of the global world and international interdependence, using the new forms of social media. This should include a broad and balanced understanding of Britain's own roles and interdependence in economic and social development, its part in world trade and investment in the evolution of the global world as well as its leading part in the creation of global institutions, especially the UN. Sections of the press promote a vision of a 'vast bloated' UN bureaucracy which is just not borne out by the facts. The British government and the wider NGO community can do much to undermine this false view.

*9.2 Support to volunteer organisations involved in international development:* opportunities for first-hand experience in other countries should be part of education and support for volunteers programmes such as Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) (which has been functioning since 1958) and similar activities on gap years and so forth can be most positive. The US Peace Corps (modelled on the UK's VSO) is one of the most effective and supported by both main parties in the US. Linking domestic with international volunteering is important, given the many diaspora communities in the UK, and the level of global interconnectedness raised earlier in this article.

*9.3 Increased access to internships within the UN and strengthening of junior professional officers' (JPOs) programmes:* internships with the UN and other such schemes to attract the best graduates and post-graduates into JPOs' programmes of the UN should be recognised as having made a most positive contribution to the international organisations as well as to the UK itself. This and the other suggestions (such as supporting internships in the NGO community) well merit support from UK aid. Governments such as Japan, South Korea and Italy support internships within the UN and the positive impact on their young citizens is considerable.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Prepared for and presented at WS1.

<sup>2</sup> The opinions expressed here represent the views of the authors and participants in the Witness Seminars, and not necessarily those of the IDS, the UNA or BAFUNCS.

<sup>3</sup> See the evidence provided in Vreeland (2007).

<sup>4</sup> However, the UN and its member nations can react with speed as shown with the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and of the ILO Labour Standard Convention 182, Prohibition of the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

<sup>5</sup> The recent UNEG handbook on evaluating the normative function provided a succinct list of all of the aspects of the normative work (UNEG 2013).

<sup>6</sup> In fact work on nutrition was in progress during the tenure of the League of Nations with the 'Mixed Committee on the relation of nutrition to health, agriculture and economic policy' (1937).

<sup>7</sup> The UN was set up with four major functions – the maintenance of peace and the prevention of war and conflict; sovereign independence for all countries (an underlying principle of the charter); development and human rights. This article is focused on the last two.

<sup>8</sup> See Weiss and Thakur (2010).

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# A.2 A UN Career, the UN's Four Lives and the Challenges Ahead

*Mark Malloch-Brown*<sup>1,2</sup>

## Abstract

Mark Malloch-Brown reflects in his keynote speech at WS1, on his early UN career with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in South East Asia and Central America and later with the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN, in the context of the 'four lives' of the UN: the founding years; the Cold War period with its constraints and opportunities; the post-Cold War and the Millennium Declaration; and the follow-up to 9/11 and the responses of the West. He then explores certain features of the UN and international development in the twenty-first century before suggesting some solutions. These include recognition of the importance of private capital in development, particularly for infrastructure; promoting the use of new technology, social media and communications; exploiting opportunities for the UN through capitalising partnerships; adjusting to the rise of regional security arrangements; mobilising the aspirations of young people both in the UK and throughout the world; and finally connecting the UN to the world.

**Keywords:** UN career, UN history, UN reform.

## 1 Introduction – some career highlights

My UN career began a few feet from where it finished, because as a young intern I sat on the thirty-eighth floor outside the office I was decades later occupying as Deputy Secretary-General. In the meantime that office had moved from where the Under-Secretary-General kept a wary eye on the Secretary-General at the other end of the corridor, to being an office for a Deputy Secretary-General who, at least in my incarnation, spent his whole waking life trying to make the Secretary-General of the day, Kofi Annan, look good. So this was an office reinvented for an entirely new purpose.

I was extremely lucky because I have seen it all in the sense of having worked as a young man at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), having been a vice president of the World Bank, having led the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and then having come across to the UN. So I feel that I was privileged enough to have an extraordinary, bird's eye view of the whole range of our endeavours.

Going back to the beginning at UNHCR and the huge upheaval in Indo-China, I was lucky enough to have extraordinary patrons and mentors in Sir Robert Jackson (universally known as Jacko) and Brian Urquhart. Jacko fondly took me under his wings, as Margaret Anstee will recall.

## 2 The UN's four lives

I will now distil my career into the context of a theory of the UN's *four lives*, as a rather sort of simplistic organising framework for this talk, and for my work with the UN.

### 2.1 A first life – the founding years of the UN, 1945–48

The *first life* is the founding period of the UN and the founding vision of the allies coming out of the Second World War, wanting a new collaborative system for collective security but also managing what they saw as huge inequalities in the world, particularly confronting the prospect as the Americans saw it, of rapid decolonisation. This process included a plan on

behalf of President Roosevelt and perhaps more importantly Eleanor Roosevelt,<sup>3</sup> to incorporate a rights-based approach to development.

The three pillars of the later UN – *peace, security* and the *freedom from want* were all there in that initial huge founding ambition captured in the UN Charter, a charter that at the time was considered so historic that when it was flown back from San Francisco, it had its own parachute attached to it so that it would not risk being lost, and so there was a sense of people really writing history in their own minds.

## **2.2 A second life – the Cold War period, constraints and opportunities, 1948–89**

But of course that UN and the vision behind it quickly fell victim during a *second life* to the Cold War, and by the late 1940s it was a very different, already attenuated UN, which had to face attacks on its staff, and investigations of them for being secret communists. Every aspect of the Cold War conflict got imported into the UN Headquarters in New York in some way or not. But this was the period when many of us, certainly in its latter years, nevertheless had great UN careers, so how was it that despite the Cold War and the gridlock reflected in the Security Council, there was still a space for a dynamic UN?

I would just say that there were two areas where the UN was faced with particular *constraints*. It was constrained on primary conflicts between the two super powers and their allies, and it was constrained on promoting a human rights agenda. But three areas where the UN was allowed space was first, the *challenges around decolonisation*. Secondly, *development* itself, where there was a recognition that this was in some ways a politically neutral activity. And thirdly, of course, *humanitarian action* where the cleaning up of the Cold War conflicts of that time was an acknowledged space that the UN was allowed to operate in.

When I think of my own early UNHCR career in the late 1970s and early 1980s, I was blessed by many *opportunities*. We were allowed to be active in Indo-China and allowed to assist both the Vietnamese boat people fleeing and cross-border refugees from Cambodia and Laos. I was then sent to Central America to deal with the victims of similar proxy wars between East and West, and then to the war with Africa, and a little bit to, but not stationed in, Afghanistan and Pakistan where again, many of my colleagues served. So, these spaces were carved out away from the political gridlock and it is no surprise that so many of the people here made their careers in those spaces, not in the gridlocked political secretariat functions of New York.

I recall Kurt Waldheim, then the Secretary-General, coming to the refugee camps that I was running on the Thai–Cambodian border where there was a coordination mechanism of the agency led by Robert Jackson, (later Sir Robert Jackson) but where there was, in a sense, also tremendous devolvement to the UN agencies, notably UNHCR where I was. Waldheim recognised me from my earlier time on the thirty-eighth floor as an intern, and he asked me in great puzzlement why nobody had told him that there was this huge operation under a UN flag on the Thai–Cambodian border. I remember struggling for an answer because I didn't think the honest answer would go down terribly well.

The honest answer was that these operations and operations like them were formed and managed under principles of international law with no reference to the UN Security Council. This was a completely different basis for humanitarian action. It drew on UNHCR's own standards, it drew on the Geneva Conventions, it drew on some very general principles of the right of victims to support in their time of need. I cannot imagine that the High Commissioner of the day or any others would have ever dreamt of taking this to that gridlocked Security Council. They would have known that the very same countries that were blocking the Security Council, notably the Soviet Union, were also willing to let these programmes happen, but with a sort of wink and a nod, and a look the other way.

### **2.3 A third life – the post-Cold War era and the Millennium Declaration, 1989–2000**

So then we get to the extraordinary birth of opportunity – the UN's *third age* if you like, the post-1989 moment, when it seemed for a decade or more that there was an exciting consensus in the Security Council that anything was possible, and the high water mark of that era of collaboration was Kofi Annan's Millennium Report to the General Assembly of the Millennium Year 2000 and Edward Mortimer, one of its chief authors.

I just had a kind of walk-on role in the drafting of that document, one that proved quite significant subsequently. I remember being called by Kofi Annan and he said that 'There's not really much about development in this report, any ideas?' At the time the OECD-DAC<sup>4</sup> had been working on what then became the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in a sense giving them a universality that would never have been possible if they had just remained donor goals.

But the Millennium Report which is now principally remembered for the MDGs was extraordinarily, universally adopted by the General Assembly, and was much more than the MDGs. It talked eloquently of democracy, it talked of human rights, and in many ways you can draw a straight line from the language and rhetoric of President Roosevelt to the language of Kofi Annan, and indeed we borrowed that language, that talk of the four freedoms.<sup>5</sup> And so it was as though the UN was picking up from that lost beginning of its first life. It was a period of extraordinary excitement and opportunity for all of us who were there. It was again a UN based on those three legs of the stool: on *peace and security, freedom from want and broader development, and human rights*.

### **2.4 The fourth life – the follow-up to 9/11 and the responses of the West, 2000–today**

Then we moved from there to a *fourth life*. You can choose your own starting moment for it: was it 9/11? Was it the imprudence and 'unwisdom' of George Bush declaring a War on Terror? Was it the invasion of Iraq in 2003? Was it something earlier? Was it the lack of generosity in the way the West handled the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 and the sense that the lessons of 1919 and the mishandling of that peace had been replicated in the way we addressed the collapse of the Soviet Union?

In those years I was running a political consulting business, and spent a huge amount of time with President Yeltsin and those immediately around him. They were clients, and their sense of the lack of generosity from the West and the lack of imagination in how it responded to some of the most difficult economic and political adjustments that any country had been asked to go through was very striking. Of course, wherever it came from, the renewed confrontation with Russia that has become so visible in the last year or so, has been compounded by the much happier, but nevertheless more complicating event of the rise of China, and the emergence of a new equilibrium in the world with the broader rise of Asia.

This has led to the environment which we now face, of a Security Council again deadlocked, where it is impossible to use it for significant political progress on issues, where some of my pre-1989 UN concerns are starting to reappear. For example, I spent an awful lot of time in 2014 working with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to try and push the idea that the basis for humanitarian action in Syria should again bypass the Security Council, and should again rest on principles of international law.

The disastrous situation of the internally displaced as well as those who were in refugee conditions in Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon meant that we could not wait for a deadlocked Security Council to give us permission to act. I would say that we have a UN whose civil society supporters, and many middle managers on the humanitarian side fully understand

that. But regrettably this is not shared by those at the top of the house, which is a generation which grew up on seeking permission from the Security Council and who find it hard to think otherwise.

### **3 The UN and development in the twenty-first century**

When we turn to *development* after all our particular focus on political issues, I think that the Security Council gridlock has again put back a real emphasis on the key development attributes of the UN Development System, and of its universality, its convening power and its legitimacy. If you look by contrast at the World Bank, where I overstate the case, which is an institution that I am very fond of and hold very dear, I think that it has been reduced by recent events to little more than a large American NGO. The circumstances of the selection of the last president of the Bank, the overriding of a large global groundswell for the Nigerian finance minister, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, and the shoving in by the Americans with the support of British and others of an American candidate, while being an able man and gloriously more focused on public health rather than finance like his predecessors, is nevertheless not a person who has enjoyed the kind of legitimacy that is needed to lead an institution like the World Bank, and who as a result has had a very difficult management run ever since.

So, despite all the difficulties of the UN System, I think it nevertheless retains its legitimacy. But if you look at what has happened to our poor, simple MDGs where, when we agreed on the drafting of them my biggest anxiety was that we were ignoring the complexity of UNDP's own doctrine of human development that Richard Jolly, Mahbul UI Haq and others had done so much to develop, it seemed that as simple outcome measures of development success, we had to put aside our own vision of development to agree to a set of outputs that people of very different persuasions, with much more liberal economic agendas of development, could subscribe to, as much as we could try to retain our roles as champions of human development.

But my concerns about simplicity versus complexity fall into insignificance compared to what has been done to our baby since, because these new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a progeny of such promiscuous confusion. Everybody's favourite cause has been crammed into this impossible list, and it obviously represents a fragmentation of priorities and is a loss of the MDG's extraordinarily unifying narrative about development and its objectives and goals and its metrics and measurement that has been so significant in the last 15 years.

Yet in a way, while one can justly fault the international community, I think there is something a bit more profound happening as well, due to the *sheer diversity of stages of development* in the developing world. This is that in truth, the issue of development has now been stretched out across a group of countries in such different stages of development, with such different *per capita* incomes, with such different balances between urban and rural populations, with such an array of infrastructure gaps, and such a different array of environmental challenges, that what it also reflects is that development is inevitably beginning to be recognised in its full array of complexities. In a sense it is perhaps unrealistic to believe that you can go on containing it within a simple set of development goals.

In terms of development thinking, we have a number of the academics who love to write about the formula 30–100–30, made up of 30 *donors* at one end, 100 *countries* in the middle (ranging from having very successful middle classes, huge amount of domestic capital formation, but are struggling to build out the infrastructure and sustain their new city lives and lifestyles), and a further 30 *countries* which are still locked into a cycle of failing states, poverty, proneness to environmental disasters, where the core of the remaining poverty challenge remains.

There has been interesting academic work, disputed but I think broadly correct, that whereas in this first 15 years of the MDGs, or 25 years to use its real starting point, poverty was situated inside large countries and has been tackled by their economic success through a knock-on effect which has gradually reached the poorer parts of those countries. On the other hand, future poverty is going to be concentrated in an arc of weak and failing states, starting from West Africa, going all the way over to South Asia. In these countries, the combination of state building, the strengthening of governance, and economic development in situations of conflict is very much a UN task, and one that nobody else can do. Nobody else can move safely in those situations, nobody else has the field staff to do it, nobody else has the courage to do it institutionally – it's not a business for the World Bank, for example.

Let me just add a couple of key points about the new development scenery. The first is *the rise of inequality*. It's not only Ed Miliband who, in resigning his leadership of the UK Labour Party in 2015, rued the fact that inequality has not got the attention it needs. It obviously is the key issue during the coming years for development, in a strange way even more probably than the important challenge of finishing the fight against absolute poverty. The second is *the rising environmental crisis*, which I think is improperly reduced to climate change. I think one has got to look at this as a much broader set of interrelated environment challenges, which are threatening development successes achieved so far, including the continuing process of arid desertification issues in Africa and water scarcity and stress in South Asia, for example.

## 4 Some priorities for actions

And what are the *priorities* which the UN System might facilitate and promote?

**4.1 Recognise the importance of private capital.** Firstly, the extraordinary *rise of private capital* is part of the solution for development, not for ideological reasons but in terms covering the big bill for building infrastructure for an urbanising and global population. It is clearly going to be long-term private capital, not public capital, which is going to take the lead in that.

**4.2 Promote the rise of technology, social media and communications.** Secondly, the extraordinary role now of *technology*, not just the social media and communications technologies, but the breakthroughs in medicine and much else that is transforming development.

**4.3 Exploit opportunities for the UN through capitalising partnerships.** In a strange way all of these play to the UN's strengths because they're not about us commanding huge amounts of capital, they're about us capitalising partnerships, using our convening power, using our ability to be in these places to make extraordinary things happen.

**4.4 Adjust to the rise of regional security arrangements.** The other issue is that we will see somehow, if the Security Council remains gridlocked, the rise of regional security arrangements, which in a sense the UN has to adjust to.

**4.5 Mobilise the aspirations of young people.** If we are going to be successful in retaining the aspirations of a new generation the signals are mixed. I was with Natalie Samarasinghe at the 2015 University Model UN held in London. Seventeen hundred people from all over Europe attended this quite extraordinary event. I began my launch opening by saying, (as it came just before the general election), 'Eat your heart out Mr Cameron and Mr Miliband, you won't address an audience this big throughout the campaign', and I suspect that was probably true.

In that sense, the UN demands something that political parties here in the UK have and in many other places don't. But I think it's easy to be complacent around that fact because as people grow older their scepticism apparently grows rapidly; we have a reverse demography.

There may still be a UN version of the old adage that you have to be a socialist first and you're a fool if you're not a conservative by the time you're 40.

We've got to retain people's aspirational loyalty as they move into being taxpayers. I always think of Ireland, where everybody's got somebody in their family who's been a missionary, who's worked for the NGO Concern or such like, and therefore the talking radio is always full of what's going on in Ethiopia or elsewhere. I wish we could stimulate that same kind of excitement about the world in our media in the UK for young and old alike.

But the key point about youth is that however well we do here, the real question is about young people in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Here also the record is a bit mixed. In Africa the entrepreneurs I increasingly see as I'm trying to help various African businesses grow to scale and succeed, is the patient young Nigerian and South African businessmen with fantastic degrees from great universities who have absolutely no time at all for the UN, just as they have no time for their own governments and just have a ruthless private sector-oriented kind of view of development. Most of them are philanthropically generous, but their view is from their own experience of bad government in Africa, and they are from the sort of generation who really believe in the power of the private sector and the sort of Thatcherite model<sup>6</sup> that we don't have here.

In Asia and Latin America it's a bit different. And I felt that when I was with Kofi Annan at the UN and many others, we were in danger of becoming an African-centred organisation. We had lots to do in Africa and it was fantastic work and we wouldn't have done an hour less of it. But somehow, Asia and Latin America were starting to get on very well without us. This need to reinvent our relevance in those two regions seemed to me very important too.

**4.6 Connect the UN to the world.** Finally, a point about technology. I attended another wonderful session in London, one of these Hackathons where young programmers were trying to design tools for people to engage with the UN. It did bring home to me as I was on the panel of judges for this, that as you learn with technology and everything, technology doesn't solve the problem, you solve the problem and then you use technology to implement that solution. We all remember when our UN accounting systems, the first attempts to apply technology solutions, were in most cases expensive failures. You first had to simplify your financial reporting systems and then apply an IT solution to it.

It's the same in terms of connecting the UN to the world. Everybody thinks we're one app away from doing it, from engaging civil society in what goes on in the UN. The truth is, until the UN changes its whole language and method of operating and opens up its debates to a way that the global layman and woman can engage with, we're never going to revitalise that public and popular support that is the lifeblood of the organisation and which will lead it to ultimately the change it most needs, which is an organisation not just of states, but one where civil society's voice is included as well. A difficult thing to do, it may be a reach too far as our whole charter is state based.

A significant number of our members, not just the Russias or Chinas but Egypt and many other countries – Israel, most recently, in the last week (May 2015) – are introducing legislation to try and ban foreign NGOs or to at least limit foreign NGOs' operation in their country. So the idea of a global civil society as part of the UN is not just a hard one to win at the UN itself, it's under challenge across the world. So, plenty of exciting things for our children and grandchildren and their friends who go into the UN to champion, but I think a real time for reflection and reinvention as we think forward.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The opinions expressed here represent the views of the author and participants in the Witness Seminars, and not necessarily those of the IDS, the UNA or BAFUNCS.

<sup>2</sup> This article is an edited version of Mark Malloch-Brown's keynote speech at WS1, 13–14 May 2015, IDS.

<sup>3</sup> Eleanor Roosevelt chaired the UN Commission on Human Rights which drafted the Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

<sup>4</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development-Development Assistance Committee.

<sup>5</sup> President Roosevelt's famous speech to the UN Congress in January 1941 played a major role in ending US isolationism by arguing that the US needed to be concerned with four freedoms everywhere in the world: freedom of speech and free expression, of religion, from want and from fear. These fundamental concerns were brought into the US contributions to the founding of the UN.

<sup>6</sup> The conservative policies, political philosophy and leadership style of Margaret Thatcher, the former British prime minister, characterised especially by monetarism, privatisation and labour union reform ([www.dictionary.com/browse/thatcherite](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/thatcherite)).

## **A.3 The Lessons of Leadership in the UN**

*Margaret Anstee*<sup>1,2</sup>

### **Abstract**

In this contribution to WS1, Margaret Anstee draws on her long UN experience to reflect on the importance of the two concepts of 'leadership' and 'management', both at the country and headquarters level, and particularly from a woman's perspective. She describes her personal experiences and rise from Resident Representative in country offices, to that of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Assistant Administrator of the Bureau for Programme Planning and Evaluation (BPPE), Assistant Secretary-General of the Department of Technical Cooperation for Development (DTCD) and the first female Under-Secretary-General of the UN Office in Vienna (UNOV), which was also responsible for a number of UN technical organisations. She concluded her UN career as Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM II), the first woman to lead a UN military peacekeeping operation.

**Keywords:** UN, leadership, UNDP, DTCD, UNOV, peacekeeping, UNAVEM.

### **1 Introduction**

Success in large organisations requires both leadership and management. They are not the same thing and demand different qualities. They are also seldom found together in the same person.

Of the two, leadership is the harder to define. It presupposes some innate characteristics of personality with which a person is born rather than something that can be taught. Some aspects of leadership can be acquired through specialised training and, above all, experience, but the impact will be limited without the mysterious quality that enables an individual to inspire others to follow him or her. The obvious example is of a military commander leading troops into battle and convincing them that they are fighting in a just cause and will be victorious. In civil institutions, and even small units, the leader must likewise persuade people that they are working for something worthwhile and to that end paint a vision of the wider framework. Leaders usually have to be charismatic and they must also deeply believe in the cause itself if they are to convince others of its validity.

Good management means the optimum use of scarce resources. It is a logical and clear-cut process that can be taught, as well as reinforced by experience. Management and leadership are interdependent: leadership without the support of good management in the implementation phase means failure in attaining the goal, or the vision, and so can dampen the morale of the foot soldiers and undermine the authority of the leader.

In the vast programmes of the UN both qualities are vitally important. Curiously the international nature of the organisation and its work create hurdles not present in national situations. I will try to illustrate this through some personal experiences and posit some measures that might help to redress the negative impact on the UN.

### **2 Leadership at the field level**

Leadership is complicated in any large bureaucracy with many layers and is certainly true of the UN, especially at Headquarters. Work at the field level provides greater scope for providing leadership, first, because of distance from the centre of control (though that is being rapidly reduced by technology and instant communications) and, second, because it is concerned with operations producing concrete results rather than resolutions and policy papers that are more ephemeral in their impact.

The position of Resident Representative or Resident Coordinator is the key field post in countries receiving assistance from the UN System and the incumbent must demonstrate leadership as well as management skills. This quality was especially vital in the early days of the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance (EPTA) and UNDP, when there was no rapid method of communication between the Headquarters in New York and the Resident Representative in a distant developing country. In the event of a revolution or major natural or human disaster the latter had to rely on their own devices. Today communication is instant but the leader on the ground still has a significant responsibility for guiding and executing the operation.

This is also true for normal, everyday working. Nowadays the complex UN System has such a plethora of offices on the ground that the task of getting them to work together and 'speak with one voice' presents almost insuperable obstacles. The key is to try and make everyone understand that their work, even if in a minor role, is important to the achievement of the overall goal. I have found that a simple but effective technique is to hold periodic meetings of all concerned, at which the inter-dependency of their various activities can be made apparent. Individual person-person relationships are also very important and are more complicated in an international setting because of differences in culture and language. When my mother's illness obliged me to work in the UK prime minister's office for a year I had the option of returning to my home country for good but rejected it: the main reason was that I found that working exclusively with my compatriots for the rest of my life was too boring.

In my generation the challenges facing a woman occupying the key post of Resident Representative were formidable. I was the first one, as I was also to be the first female to occupy other leadership posts higher up in the UN hierarchy. A pioneer bears an onerous responsibility because success or failure will not only affect the individual's own career but also (in my case) the prospects for other women wishing to conquer domains considered to be exclusively male. Not only during my early years, but also throughout my long career, I was confronted with pockets of resistance, often of a very disagreeable, highly personalised and sometimes violent nature. No one talked about sexual harassment then and there was no mechanism to deal with such situations.

For a woman starting out you had to work harder than a man to make your name and also take risks, both of a professional and physical kind, in order to show that you possessed leadership qualities equivalent to, and, if possible, greater than those of your male colleagues. This is still the same today, although to a lesser degree than in those far-off times, more than 60 years ago.

### **3 Leadership at Headquarters**

In 1974, after 22 years in the field, I was posted to New York, first to UNDP, as Deputy Director for Latin America and then Assistant Administrator heading the Bureau for Programme Planning and Evaluation (BPPE). In December 1978 I was transferred to the UN Secretariat as Assistant Secretary-General in the Department of Technical Cooperation for Development (DTCD), the second largest executing agency for UNDP, after the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

In New York there were less opportunities for individual leadership. The upper echelons above me were mostly occupied by political appointees, not always endowed with the right qualifications and often unacquainted with the realities of development work in the field. I was lucky in the Regional Bureau for Latin America because the Assistant Administrator was the charismatic former foreign minister of Chile, Gabriel Valdes, a brilliant man full of ideas and a leader with great visions for the future, not always consistent with the possibilities. We complemented one another very well and it was a happy working relationship.

When I became an Assistant Administrator myself I reported directly to the Administrator, Bradford Morse, and was the only one of the five Bureau heads who was not a political appointee. I directed my efforts to giving a new direction to the Bureau for BPPE, emphasising the operational focus of UNDP's work, as well as its primordial role in the theory and practice of technical assistance. My main problem was Morse's desire for UNDP to be the 'world authority' in whatever development field that was the flavour of the moment. A more insidious difficulty was the hostility of the regional Bureau heads (Valdes the notable exception) who saw some of my initiatives as encroaching on their fiefdoms; I was actually threatened by one of them. Secretary-General Waldheim's insistence that I should go to the newly-created UNDTCD, although opposed by Morse and myself, meant that I never accomplished all that I set out to do in BPPE.

DTCD was a new department, created after the Department for International Economic and Social Affairs was split into two between research and operations. DTCD took over the operational functions as an Executing Agency of UNDP and became the largest department in the UN Secretariat, headed by an Under-Secretary-General. As part of the UN proper it was subjected to stricter rules of geographical distribution of posts than was the case with UNDP. Secretary-General Waldheim transferred to this post an African prince who had previously headed another department in the Secretariat and had no experience of development operations. This was the reason for his insistence that I should become the Deputy, another awkward UN compromise. It was also why Bradford Morse insisted that there should be a written agreement that all the day-to-day management should be in my hands. This was done. It was a challenge: my new boss was known to be charming and irascible but I set to work to structure the new department and after a few months was pleased to find that we were getting on well and that our delivery of technical assistance worldwide was increasing. It was a strange kind of leadership from below, ensuring that credit went to my superior.

Then UN politics intervened disastrously after only a few months. In April 1979 Waldheim asked me to represent him at a UN Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) meeting in Bolivia. He meanwhile went to China. When I returned to New York I was the last person to know that he had given the Under-Secretary-General post to China. The motive was obvious: China had almost thwarted his election to a second term, lifting their veto only at the last moment, and he wanted a third term. The Chinese were hard bargainers and there was no hope of their signing an agreement like the one I had with the previous incumbent. Ironically two years later, in 1981, the Chinese vetoed his bid for a third term as Secretary-General and this time did not relent.

Meanwhile I was to spend the most miserable eight years of my UN life. My new chief at first had no notion of the operational nature of the department, spoke little English (he certainly did not understand mine), surrounded himself with compatriots and lived in the Chinese Mission.<sup>3</sup> The only possible form of communication was in writing; decisions that were in any way complicated were referred to Beijing through the Chinese Mission, taking three weeks for a reply; if really difficult there was no reply at all. For the latter case I had a 'bring-up' system which ensured that he was constantly reminded. On one occasion my apology for 'badgering' him caused consternation in the front office. What did 'badger' mean? The Chinese Mission<sup>4</sup> consulted a dictionary and found the definition 'A voracious carnivore that goes straight for the jugular'. Small wonder that they regarded me with suspicion!

My boss also objected to my restructuring plans for the department. I had to devise a new and discreet form of leadership for all the technical and administrative units below me. Frequent meetings on specific sectors, as well as a monthly one with all the key players to review performance, proved very successful and the introduction of a competitive process inspired friendly rivalry and produced excellent results. DTCD became not only the second largest executing agency for UNDP but also the one with the best delivery rate. But it was a

difficult row to hoe and an even more bizarre form of leadership against all the odds. I felt rather like the Red Queen who told Alice in Wonderland, 'Now, *here*, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place.'

#### **4 Leadership at the UN Office at Vienna (UNOV)**

In March 1987 I became the first female Under-Secretary-General as Director-General of the UN Office in Vienna, which had been set up by Waldheim who wanted there to be a UN presence in Austria as well as Geneva – a kind of third UN headquarters covering Eastern Europe at the time when the Cold War was in full blast. Initially its function had been purely representational. Now, as part of yet another internal reform, it was given the control of several substantive programmes. I became Head of the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs (CSDHA), which was transferred from New York, and Coordinator of all UN drug-related programmes: the Narcotics Control Board, the Department of Narcotic Drugs (DND) and the UN Fund for Drug Abuse Control (UNFDAC).

I was in control of important UN programmes and reporting only to the Secretary-General. Even so, problems persisted. Powerful empire-builders in New York opposed the transfer to Vienna of a key section of social research staff; neither the Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar nor the Head of Personnel (Kofi Annan) took any action to resolve this anomalous situation. In Vienna serious clashes erupted from the start with the fiery Director of UNFDAC who resented my appointment as the Coordinator. He was a political appointee of the Italian government, a close friend of the foreign minister, Giulio Andreotti, and had engineered a resolution in the UN Commission opposing my appointment as soon as it was announced in November 1986. Simultaneously Andreotti protested to the Secretary-General and Geoffrey Howe, the UK Foreign Secretary, had to intervene with his Italian counterpart before Andreotti's grudging acquiescence was obtained – to a decision wholly within the Secretary-General's prerogative as Chief Executive. Notwithstanding, the UNFDAC Director engineered another attack on my authority in June 1987 at the UN International Conference on Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking (ICDAIT). He had the unwavering support of his government whereas for me, who had risen through the ranks, the intervention of Geoffrey Howe (unsolicited by me) was a unique event.

Although the UNFDAC Director had acted in flagrant violation of his oath as an international civil servant no action or sanctions were ever taken against him. To offend a powerful member state could have serious repercussions on a bid for election to a further period as Secretary-General. The matter was never settled and I had to live with the difficult situation. In the event we had some significant achievements despite the drawbacks. The end of the Cold War led to the Soviet Union presenting unprecedented appeals for assistance from the UN and UNOV, conveniently near Moscow, played an important leadership role in helping the Gorbachev government to tackle hitherto undeclared problems of crime and drugs and in opening up channels of dialogue with western countries. Advice was also given on more gradualist economic and social policies designed to cushion the social impact of switching to a market economy and capitalism. Unfortunately all this was brought to an abrupt end by the attempted coup against Gorbachev in August 1991 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union at the end of that year.

#### **5 Leadership in peacekeeping**

Early in 1992 Secretary-General Boutros Ghali appointed me as his Special Representative (SRSG) in Angola and Head of the Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM II). This was the first time for a woman to lead a military peacekeeping operation. It was a typical example of UN compromise: the organisation was to verify the implementation of a peace agreement negotiated by the US, the Soviet Union and Portugal, without UN involvement, and even then given an inadequate mandate and inadequate resources. Given 24 hours to decide whether to accept the appointment, I hesitated, realising that it was probably an impossible mission.

On the one hand failure would be attributed to the fact that it had been headed by a woman. On the other, refusal to accept the challenge would be interpreted by the sceptics as proof that women were not ready to lead such operations. The clinching argument that led to my acceptance was that, by coincidence, I had recently written a chapter for a book published by an American University, and entitled *Women Leaders Speak*,<sup>5</sup> in which I had pointed out that peacekeeping was the one male-dominated bastion in the UN that women had still to conquer. I had also regretted the fact that women were all too often reluctant to take risks, whether professional or physical, and so had to apply these precepts to my own life.

The situation I found in Luanda was not propitious. For eight months before my arrival UNAVEM II had been a purely military observer mission, headed by a Chief Military Observer (CMO). It was only in December 1991 that the Security Council had decided that civilian and electoral components should be added, as well as a political head. Two more months passed before I was parachuted in as SRSG in March 1992, barely seven months before the date fixed for the elections. It is hard for anyone to accept the appointment of a new chief over their head but must have been especially so for an in-country general, when the newcomer was not only white and British but female to boot!

As if that were not enough I had been warned by Headquarters that he was a difficult and sometimes violent man, who had beaten his Angolan driver. He should have been fired, I was told, but that was impossible because he was from an important African member state and I would just have to make this potentially untenable situation work. For the first few months I managed to establish a relatively cordial relationship. We had frequent meetings, he came to dinner with me and we went together to visit the far-flung outposts of the mission all over Angola. Things became more difficult as the elections approached and when conflict erupted again afterwards. The CMO refused to attend the weekly meetings I had with all the heads of the different components to coordinate our efforts, claiming that his superior status entitled him to meet with me alone; women were being brought regularly into the camp; and after war resumed he refused to accompany me to critical mediation meetings, including the one immediately preceding the sanguinary battle for Luanda at the end of October 1992. I could do nothing about these challenges to my authority in view of my instructions that no action could be taken against him.

During the battle of Luanda, when I was caught in the centre of the town, my chief military adviser disappeared off the radio network and neither I nor Headquarters was able to contact him. Then at last New York took action and he was fired. There was one advantage in this regrettable situation: because of his arrogant behaviour the general was thoroughly disliked by the military contingents under his command, including that from his own country. As a result, although they initially did not welcome the idea of a female SRSG, they found me more congenial than their CMO and came to accept me.

In order for that to happen I once again had to show that I was ready and able to take on the same tasks and the same risks as a man would do. I travelled to our most remote field posts in the bush and to the cantonment areas where the combatants were held, in my Beechcraft aircraft and in rickety helicopters rented from bankrupt former communist countries in Eastern Europe and I conducted negotiations to stop the battle of Luanda from the centre of the fighting. An important early decision was to live in the rather primitive camp with the rest of the mission, rather than in a residence in the city; this meant that everyone could see me daily and I kept abreast of what was going on. In addition I used my usual techniques of regular meetings with staff. My Monday morning meeting with all the heads of both civilian and military components was especially important: I was able to inform everyone of the overall situation and of my political negotiations while both they and I learned what everyone else was doing and decided on the urgent actions needing to be taken. The aim was to ensure that each member of the mission, however low they were in the pecking order, could

appreciate the relevance of their work to the achievement of the overall goal of bringing peace to war-torn Angola.

Sadly we did not achieve that goal. In May 1993 I had very nearly reached agreement on the part of the two sides to a new ceasefire and peace agreement but needed to field a token contingent of 1,000 Blue Helmets<sup>6</sup> in order to meet the conditions laid down by the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). My request was turned down in New York. Thus the main cause of failure was the lack of political will of the international community to dedicate resources to resolving conflict in a distant African country, preferring instead to give priority to former Yugoslavia. The leadership problems of command and control in the mission and the insubordination of the military commander played no part in the negative outcome but they certainly did not make it any easier to deal with a 'mission impossible'.

A general lesson to be taken from this experience, and applicable to others like it, is that leadership at the field level cannot be successful without effective political and material support from Headquarters, the Security Council and member states.

## **6 General conclusions and recommendations**

The leadership problems posed in any large national organisation are multiplied in the case of the UN by many factors, of which the following are shown to be the most significant from the examples given above:

- a. The concept of UN officials answering only to the Secretary-General and the UN Charter, as defined by Dag Hammarskjöld in his Oxford lecture in 1948<sup>7</sup> has become seriously eroded;
- b. There is too much interference by member states with the inner workings of the UN and in the appointment and promotion of their nationals;
- c. While geographical distribution is essential in a multilateral institution, too many staff regard themselves as servants of their own nations and turn to their embassies and capitals for support;
- d. Political appointees to Assistant and Under-Secretary-General posts often lack the qualifications and experience required in the field of responsibility to which they have been assigned;
- e. No punishment is meted out or sanctions applied when basic UN principles are transgressed;
- f. Offending a prominent member state may prejudice a Secretary-General's prospects for a further term of office;
- g. While leadership must be exercised at appropriate levels throughout the system, it will only be fully effective if the example is set at the very top by the Secretary-General. At present many limitations are imposed on his authority. Member states do not want a strong Secretary-General and the tortuous 'horse trading' process of electing the Secretary-General can lead to the 'least common denominator' being chosen.

These are not new findings but have been evident truths for decades. Some improvements have been introduced – for example, candidates for senior political and military posts are now more closely reviewed and governments must produce more than one candidate – but the most basic reforms still have to be done. The reason that they have never been acted upon stems from the paradox that, in an age of rapid globalisation and diminishing national power, the pursuit of narrow national interests, often mistaken, and the tendency to 'go it alone' are on the increase. Ironical as this is, these counterproductive factors represent the political reality of today's world. We must realise that 'realpolitik' will not allow some of the most obvious changes to take place, but it is imperative that we find some way of strengthening the UN, which is more needed than ever in our conflict-ridden world.

Some ideas have been circulating that, if implemented, would have a multiplier effect:

- h. Changing the procedure for electing the Secretary-General by introducing a pre-selection process. The final decision will of course be political but this approach would at least ensure that the choice would be made from a list of well-qualified and experienced candidates.
- i. Limiting the Secretary-General's term of office to a single period slightly longer than the present five years. This would increase the incumbent's authority and protect him or her from undue pressure from member states.

The United Nations Association (UNA)-UK is conducting a campaign to introduce changes of this kind in the run-up to the appointment of the next new Secretary-General in 2016. It is very much to be hoped that the UK will support and promote this initiative.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The opinions expressed here represent the views of the author and participants in the Witness Seminars, and not necessarily those of the IDS, the UNA or BAFUNCS.

<sup>2</sup> Dame Margaret Anstee's paper was presented at WS1.

<sup>3</sup> The Chinese Mission is a separate building in New York for Chinese staff working in the UN.

<sup>4</sup> The diplomatic representatives of the Chinese government (who were housed in the Chinese Mission building).

<sup>5</sup> Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York, 1991.

<sup>6</sup> UN troops, the so-called Blue Helmets.

<sup>7</sup> Dag Hammarskjöld famous lecture, 'The International Civil Servant in Law and Fact', given in Oxford University in May 1961.



# A.4 A Personal Reflection on Managing Crises

*Alan Doss*<sup>1,2</sup>

## Abstract

This article focuses on aspects of Alan Doss's later UN career, with particular reference to his experience in crisis situations, and their humanitarian, political and security implications. These complement his earlier career experience, starting as a UNA volunteer, which was focused more on development-related matters in Africa and Asia. He draws out a number of lessons, mainly from experience gained in his later assignments as Deputy or Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

**Keywords:** UN, UNDP, development cooperation, humanitarian support, crisis management, peace and security.

## 1 In the beginning

Growing up in South Wales, my early life was marked by the weekday routine of a local grammar school, with weekends spent on the rugby pitch. Even my student days at the London School of Economics were quite pacific – the war in Vietnam was only just beginning to seep into public consciousness, and mass protest had not yet erupted on the streets. Violent conflict was a world away in distant places, viewed largely through television reports and newspaper accounts.

A relatively quiet life did not mean that I and my contemporaries were politically deaf. Like many others of my student generation, I demonstrated against white supremacy in Rhodesia and joined marches calling for the end of apartheid in South Africa and the release of Nelson Mandela. But those were generally well-mannered and non-violent events, followed by a visit to the nearest pub to restore throats raw from yelling denunciations of Hendrik Verwoerd and Ian Smith.

## 2 A world of troubles

### 2.1 Contention and crisis

So not much had prepared me for a professional life spent in the United Nations, dealing with a world full of troubles. For many years, I worked on economic development and humanitarian programmes in developing countries,<sup>3</sup> but natural disasters and other emergencies often intruded, demanding urgent attention and action. My own catalogue included famine and drought in *Niger*, floods in *Benin*, earthquakes in *China*, mudslides in *Thailand* and cyclones in the Indian Ocean. To that list, I could add health crises caused by virulent outbreaks of cholera and yellow fever, Ebola and Lassa fever, not to mention tragic accidents that took the lives of many UN colleagues.

In fact, nature threatened a destructive crisis just before I retired from the UN. A large and boisterous volcano in the North Kivu province of the *Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)*, where I headed the UN peacekeeping mission, began to act up. Several years earlier, an eruption of a sister volcano close by had destroyed much of the provincial capital, Goma. So we were on alert for a potential humanitarian disaster, which would also have caused a major disruption of UN peacekeeping operations in the troubled eastern Congo.

As it turned out, the volcano – Nyamuragira – proved to be quite well behaved. For a while, however, I had a front-row seat at a very spectacular, if ultimately harmless, fireworks display. I was offered an unforgettable trip on board a UN observation helicopter flown by

Indian peacekeepers, which hovered a few hundred metres over the volcano and afforded me an extraordinary, but rather nervous, glimpse directly into Nyamuragira's inferno.

Looking back, however, it was the political and humanitarian crises – and the two are almost invariably linked – that proved to be the most intractable, complex and wrenching. Sometimes these were extended, unseen crises that had simmered for long periods before erupting into bursts of intense violence, destruction and death. But violence is usually symptomatic of a deeper malaise, often signalling the failure of the state itself.

One politico-security crisis that I remember vividly, probably because it was relatively early on in my career, occurred in Niger 35 years ago when I was caught up in the middle of a nasty coup attempt. It followed an earlier, successful coup that had brought the military to power during the great drought that devastated the Sahelian region in the early 1970s.

I was woken at about 4.30 in the morning to the sound of gunfire very close by. A group of dissident army officers were trying to overthrow the military regime that had seized power a few months before. My next-door neighbour was already on his terrace and sardonically remarked that there must have been a change of government. In fact that had not happened. The government held on.

At the time the crisis appeared to have been resolved. Niger did not collapse and the world's attention moved on from the Sahel. It moved on to the crises in Central America, Cambodia, the Balkans, Somalia, Angola, the Congo and Rwanda and then, at the end of the 1990s, West Africa, which began to implode. But three decades after the failed coup attempt, in 2009 Niger found itself again in the throes of a severe drought, and the mishandling of this disaster led to the country once more experiencing political instability and a military coup.

I cite the Niger story because it leads me to a larger truth about crisis: do not judge a crisis by the outcome of the day. What happened in Niger was the result not just of personal feuds and ambitions in the military (although these played a part). The crisis arose from the civilian government's earlier failure to manage the catastrophic consequences of the drought, due to the ineptitude and corruption that characterised the regime.

## **2.2 From peacekeeping to peace-building**

So too the crises in *Sierra Leone*, *Côte d'Ivoire*, *Liberia* and the *DRC*,<sup>4</sup> where I worked in peacekeeping missions for the first ten years of this century; they did not suddenly erupt without warning. Each was a mix of proximate and profound causes. The roots of these crises reach back in time; each one was different in its own way, and yet in some ways alike. None of them was amenable to a quick fix; each one has produced (and is still producing in the case of the DRC) a long-running humanitarian crisis.

Making the distinction between the proximate and the profound is a critical challenge for all would-be peace-makers and crisis responders.

The fall of the Berlin Wall, for example, had acute but very different consequences for crisis-prone countries. For *Cambodia*, a country that had suffered massacres of genocidal proportions and then an invasion from neighbouring Vietnam, it opened the way to successful peace negotiations. The shift in the geo-political parameters at the end of the Cold War, and the reforms that had begun to reshape Chinese policy, greatly contributed to halting the war in Cambodia, thereby ending a cycle of conflict which had scarred South East Asia for over half a century.

At the time, I was directing the *UN's border relief operations in Thailand*,<sup>5</sup> which were caring for hundreds of thousands of Cambodians who had been displaced by the fighting in Cambodia. That job brought me into frequent contact with Khmer Rouge commanders and soldiers who had been involved in the genocide. They were still in command and

held sway over many of the people we were aiding in a string of refugee camps along the Thai–Cambodian border. I remember them as thin, chain-smoking hollow-eyed men, most of them quite young, who did not say very much but watched everything.

During those days on the Thai–Cambodian border, as subsequently in Africa, I found myself shaking hands with people who had blood on their hands. There was not much else that could be done until the political pieces began to fall into place; within a matter of months, the crisis in Cambodia, which had lasted for more than a decade, was essentially resolved. A peace agreement was signed in Paris, followed by the deployment of a UN peacekeeping mission, allowing the Khmer refugees to return home.

Sadly, for other countries the profound change in the geo-political landscape was a prelude to conflict, not to peace. This was the case of the Congo, Somalia, Liberia and several other African countries. They fell into the abyss as their value as Cold War partners depreciated and their political leadership failed to adapt to the new global dispensation.

Poor governance, economic stagnation, demographic pressures and misguided aid policies have all played their part in creating the ‘perfect storm’ that has spread violence and crisis across much of Africa. We have not always fully recognised these deeper, structural dimensions, which are partly the reason why conflict and crisis persist.

### **2.3 The learning curve**

*1. Choices, compromises, leadership:* I have learned that a crisis is not solved, and peace does not come about, because the UN Security Council passes a resolution, establishes a peacekeeping operation and sets a calendar for elections. UN peacekeepers can provide the time and space for countries to begin addressing their problems but their presence cannot substitute for the hard *choices*, difficult *compromises*, and the enlightened and determined *leadership* that make enduring peace possible.

In many ways the *Congo* was the epitome of crisis, with the country lurching from one disaster to another. For me, the worst case was the hostilities that ignited in August 2008 between government forces and rebel militias in the eastern region of the Congo, which threatened to again engulf the Great Lakes region in violent conflict. The government’s army collapsed and UN peacekeepers were forced to intervene to protect civilians and prevent the rebels from overrunning the whole province, which would have had devastating consequences for the Congo and neighbouring Rwanda.

Graphic television reports showed hundreds of thousands of people uprooted by the conflict, which was characterised by horrific violence against civilians, including the rape and abuse of women and girls. UN peacekeepers were widely criticised for not doing enough to stop the violence and then for supporting the ill-disciplined government forces in their efforts to end the rebellion and dismantle the militias and the insurgent groups that had fled from Rwanda after committing genocide a decade earlier. Massacres did occur and our seeming inability to stop them was roundly condemned, even though our resources were stretched to breaking point as we sought to contain multiple security threats.

Unfortunately, the international community can sometimes complicate the search for durable solutions to crisis. A crisis with a graphic humanitarian impact such as that in the Congo quickly draws the attention of the global media. Public demands for action – especially in the Western world – are likely to follow. Would-be mediators multiply, aid efforts proliferate and local actors exploit their momentary access to a global audience to gain support for their causes, justified or not. Undoubtedly, these pressures, and the outpouring of humanitarian concern and goodwill, can make a difference. But they can also spur institutional rivalries and competing agendas. Keeping all the actors on board, including neighbouring countries, is one of the central challenges of complex crises.

*2. Know your protagonists:* Another lesson I draw from experience of dealing with crises, especially the prolonged ones, is the importance of knowing the protagonists, their ambitions, fears, vanities and motivations. They have political and personal capital vested in the conflict. Sometimes they actually thrive on conflict because it bolsters their value as protectors and providers. Outsiders – UN officials, diplomats, non-governmental organisations, academics – come and go, rush in and out, but local actors must live with the consequences of any political deal they make. They have to justify it to their supporters and communities, knowing that if they make the wrong move the outcome could be fatal.

Some but not all leaders are able to make the changes needed to build peace. I worked closely with Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first woman in Africa to be elected as a head of state, when I led the UN peacekeeping operation in *Liberia*. With her election, Liberia began to emerge from two decades of dreadful, mindless brutality that had killed tens of thousands of people, displaced many more and made the country a byword for child soldiers and sexual violence. Her personal commitment to human rights and to good governance has been pivotal to the progress the country has made since she took office.

Liberia has not escaped crises but President Johnson Sirleaf has generally found the right response to them. Most recently she has had to cope with the Ebola epidemic, which has again tested her leadership, as well as that of key international actors such as the World Health Organization. During my days in the country, we faced other challenges as we worked to restore peace and security: demobilised and disgruntled ex-servicemen; communal tensions arising from ritual killings; the resurgence of militias trying to gain control of natural resources; and even piracy.

Other crises erupted, closer to home. On the day that Mrs Johnson Sirleaf's electoral victory was officially pronounced, the presidential mansion went up in flames (investigations later revealed that an electrical fault was the cause, not sabotage as originally feared). This happened just as the dignitaries, including heads of state of neighbouring countries, were about to sit down to a celebratory luncheon. They were hastily evacuated but in the absence of any functioning fire engines in Monrovia (or, for that matter, anywhere else in Liberia), UN peacekeepers hastily mobilised their fire-fighting equipment to help put out the blaze. Present at the mansion luncheon, I found myself acting as the UN's Chief Fire Marshal, until our professional fire fighters could arrive. I had previous experience in dousing political fires but this was a whole new experience in crisis management.

*3. The need for flexibility, adaptability and risk-taking:* I cite this incident because it underlines another verity about crisis management: crises come in many shapes and sizes, often unanticipated. Crisis managers need to be flexible and able to adapt quickly when things go wrong. This involves risk, something that large bureaucracies (in the public or private sector) like to avoid. But the man or woman on the front line of a crisis cannot function effectively in a risk-aversion mode. I think that Jawaharlal Nehru got it right when he said that 'a leader or a man of action in a crisis almost always acts subconsciously and then thinks of the reasons for his action'.

*4. The need for perseverance – balancing the immediate and the important:* Crisis is a draining experience. Fatigue is the inevitable corollary of crisis, clouding judgement and diminishing energy. If you are running a large peace operation, you find yourself confronting a crisis just about every day, sometimes with neither the means nor the authority to deal with it, which can be immensely frustrating.

In crisis situations, there is a great danger of trying to do everything at once because everything needs to be done. Priorities have to be established. Identifying and focusing on the big problems – those that form the main barrier to a durable solution – is a must. This can be a delicate balancing act when the media is on your back, demanding to know why you haven't yet solved all the problems of the day. The crisis responders in Haiti faced those

pressures until the country was no longer in the headlines. I had similar experiences in the Congo. In a crisis, both the immediate and the important have to be kept in focus – this is probably the greatest challenge for crisis managers.

*5. Grasping opportunities out of dangers:* I have written about violent crises around the world. But a few months after I left UN service, I was reminded that crisis is sometimes not so far from home. When riots erupted in London and other major cities in the UK in 2011, I watched with sympathy as exhausted police and emergency workers struggled to cope and respond. Irate questions were asked in parliament; the media went into overdrive. Memories came back of Kinshasa, Freetown, Monrovia and Abidjan, where people had also taken to the streets in an angry orgy of violence and vandalism, attacking UN peacekeepers as they did so.

The UK riots showed that a crisis makes for ready headlines, often to the detriment of dispassionate analysis and sound policy choices. The attentions of the media, advocacy groups and celebrities can amplify the sense of crisis and in doing so inadvertently deflect focus from cause to consequence. So, we should try to heed what John F. Kennedy advised when he recalled that the Chinese use two brush strokes to write the word 'crisis'. One brush stroke stands for danger; the other for opportunity. In a crisis, be aware of the danger – but recognise the opportunity. That is the real challenge in troubled times – grasping an opportunity out of danger.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The opinions expressed here represent the views of the authors and participants in the Witness Seminars, and not necessarily those of the IDS, the UNA or BAFUNCS.

<sup>2</sup> This article is based on Alan Doss's presentation at the Witness Seminar on 'The UN and Crisis Situations – Some Personal Perspectives', Rothschild Archive Trust, London on 22 October 2010. It was subsequently published in 2012 in the *Historical Journal of The British Scholar Society* (Doss 2012). He participated in WS1 at the IDS.

<sup>3</sup> After initial assignments as a United Nations Association (UNA) volunteer Junior Professional Officer (JPO) in Kenya, followed by Niger, and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Headquarters, he was reassigned in 1977 to the new UNDP office in Vietnam to develop the first UNDP cooperation programme for Vietnam. In 1979, he was appointed Deputy Resident Representative of UNDP in China, opening the first international development cooperation programme and office in that country. He then returned to Africa as Resident Representative in Benin and Zaire (later the Democratic Republic of the Congo) responsible for UN operational activities in those countries.

<sup>4</sup> Alan Doss's assignments in these countries were as follows:

*Sierra Leone:* Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG) responsible for the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), UN Humanitarian Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative;

*Côte d'Ivoire:* Principal Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (PDSRSG), responsible for the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission (ONUCI);

*Liberia:* Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), Head of the UN peacekeeping mission (UNMIL), with the rank of Under-Secretary-General (USG);

*Democratic Republic of the Congo:* Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) and Head of the UN peacekeeping mission (MONUC).

<sup>5</sup> Alan Doss was UN Resident Coordinator and Regional Representative of the UNDP in Bangkok, Thailand, as well as Director of the United Nations Border Relief Operation (UNBRO), in charge of UN assistance to hundreds of thousands of displaced Cambodians on the Thai–Cambodian border. He was also the UN Representative to the Mekong River Committee.

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Doss, A. (2012) 'A Life in Trouble: A Personal Reflection on Managing Crises', *Britain and the World* (Historical Journal of The British Scholar Society) 5.2, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press: 287–93

# A.5 The Role of Human Rights – The UN’s Elusive Third Pillar

*David Whaley*<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

In this article, David Whaley focuses on the lessons of his experience in relation to human rights. Starting with a reminder of the place of human rights in the UN – the third pillar of the UN’s basic purposes (with development, and peace and security) – he examines why it has tended to receive less attention than the UN’s other core mandates. He discusses the obstacles to implementation of human rights conventions and instruments in the past, but notes the more recent progress made since 2006 through the establishment of the Human Rights Council, and agreement on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and the Human Rights up Front (HRuF) initiatives. He concludes with suggestions on possible remedial measures to strengthen the UN’s human rights pillar.

**Keywords:** UN, human rights, Human Rights Council, R2P, HRuF.

## 1 Introduction: Human rights at the UN – 70 years after the adoption of the UN Charter

In our connected world, the links between the three pillars of the United Nations – peace and security, development and human rights – have never been clearer or more relevant. Long-term peace and security cannot exist without human rights for all. Sustainable development is impossible without peace and security. Human rights are the very foundation of our common humanity.<sup>2</sup>

*United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, UN Human Rights Council, Geneva, 29 February 2016*

### 1.1 Human rights in the UN – some important features, perceptions and results

In his opening remarks to the annual high-level panel discussion of the Human Rights Council on human rights mainstreaming, the UN Secretary-General addressed a timely reminder to his audience of government delegations; UN officials; representatives of national, regional and international civil societies; the media and, by webcast, peoples across the globe, that *human rights have always been a cornerstone of the United Nations*. They constitute one of its three core mandated responsibilities *and represent the most important characteristic that sets the organisation apart from other international organisations*, including both the League of Nations<sup>3</sup> and the Bretton Woods Institutions.<sup>4</sup>

Human rights are also perceived as one of the areas in which the United Nations can claim credit for some significant results, for instance through the development of international norms for the behaviour of states, that have improved the lives and aspirations of peoples. The 2012 survey of the Future UN Development System (FUNDS) found that the UN was considered by respondents to have its greatest impact in functions other than development. They ranked the world organisation highest in its humanitarian and peacekeeping roles, followed by its efforts to formulate global development conventions, human rights and crisis recovery, all ahead of most of the functions associated with the development system. Within the development domain, the two areas of UN operational work judged most effective were: health (28 per cent) and human rights (26 per cent). When asked about the shape of the

UN's future agenda, respondents gave the **highest priority to promoting human rights** (62 per cent strongly in favour) (FUNDS 2012).

Human rights have been a major source of institutional innovation within the UN System, with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948, the formulation and adoption of the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 1966, their entry into force in 1976, the establishment of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in 1993, the introduction of rights-based approaches – including the right to development – in the 1990s, the establishment of the Human Rights Council in 2006, and the adoption of pioneering inter-governmental processes and procedures for the work of the Council over the past decade.<sup>5</sup>

## **1.2 Human rights in practice – less than priority**

Yet the place of human rights within the UN System and the attention that their promotion and protection receive within inter-governmental bodies and secretariats alike has never adequately matched the lofty principles of the founding members, the extraordinary development of international standards and instruments and the priorities and expectations of the global public.

The human rights function of the organisation has been marginalised. Even after relatively rapid expansion in recent years, mainly thanks to the availability of extra-budgetary resources, less than 3 per cent of the regular budget of the UN and some 1,200 of the 85,000 staff of the organisation are assigned to OHCHR. As recently as 2006 it received only 1.8 per cent of total resources; in 1997 it disposed of only 190 staff. As part of the UN Secretariat, OHCHR has been unable to follow the example of the major funds and programmes of the system (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], UN High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], UN Children's Fund [UNICEF], World Food Programme [WFP]) in adapting administrative procedures to operational imperatives. This has inevitably resulted in the over-reliance of the UN for its operational human rights activities on entities designed for other purposes that are not directly accountable to inter-governmental human rights mechanisms and processes.

As a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly, reporting through its Third Committee,<sup>6</sup> the Human Rights Council is relegated to a secondary position in the UN's own organogram, not even meriting the bolding accorded to Funds and Programmes, Regional Commissions, specialized agencies and related organizations. Unlike other key functions, including peace and security, economic and social development, environment, sustainable development and peacekeeping, human rights is not even mentioned in the UN website description of the functions of the main organs of the organisation.

Similarly, in the FUNDS 2012 survey, having recognised human rights as an area of significant achievement and even greater expectation, OHCHR was not included in the list of the operational entities of the UN Development System. Its technical, advisory, and capacity strengthening roles thus received no attention in the review of relative performance. In the series of Witness Seminars of senior UN officials from the UK, organised in the context of the UN at 70, the three original pillars of the UN morphed into development cooperation, humanitarian action, and peace and security. Human rights was added to a list of a dozen global, regional and thematic issues covered by a single two-hour session at the development cooperation seminar. Despite some remedial action, it remained relatively marginal in the two other seminars.

## **1.3 Purpose of this article**

This article examines why the human rights pillar has so often received less attention than the UN's other core mandates. It suggests that this is in part a reflection of an unfavourable

international environment, at least over the first 50 years of the UN's existence; in part continued reluctance of member states to accept that full respect for all human rights is a legitimate concern of the international community, not exclusively an internal matter of individual states, and that each government can be held to account internationally for the fulfilment of its responsibility to promote and protect human rights; in part the relative neglect of human rights by the operational actors of the UN System (developmentalists, humanitarians and peace-keepers alike); and, in part, failure to recognise the fact that the international community comprises not only states and secretariats but also individuals and civil society organisations.

## **2 The UN and human rights: obstacles to implementation**

### **2.1 International environment for the promotion and protection of human rights**

Having adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with its vision, standards, and commitments of states to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms of all their people, states proved remarkably disinclined to translate these into operational processes; for the entire period of decolonisation and the Cold War, governments seem to have considered that respect for the rights of individuals, communities and peoples could only be addressed once enabling political, security and economic conditions had been created; all sides tacitly accepted that criticism of mass human rights violations by authoritarian regimes would depend on political expediency rather than on an objective assessment of behaviours against agreed obligations.

Even after the adoption of the two Covenants and despite the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, there was little agreement on the relative priority to be accorded to the two main categories of rights. Many developing countries, through the G77<sup>7</sup>/Non-Aligned Movement<sup>8</sup> emphasised economic, social and cultural rights (and, from 1986, the international dimensions of the Right to Development). Members of the Western Europe and Others Group (WEOG)<sup>9</sup> and the European Union members of the Eastern Europe Group<sup>10</sup> focused mainly on political and civil rights. Recognition of the inevitably progressive nature of the realisation of economic and social rights was increasingly mirrored in demands for 'cultural sensitivity' and acceptance of progressive implementation of civil and political rights.

### **2.2 Approach adopted by states and the UN Secretariats to human rights implementation**

In his reflection on the failure of the UN to protect the Tutsi population of Rwanda and Muslim youth at Srebrenica in the two tragedies of the 1990s, in *Interventions: A Life in War and Peace* former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan underlined the limits to state sovereignty when faced with the challenge of protecting human rights. 'A UN for the 21st century', he concluded, 'would have to create new partnerships, respond to the needs of individuals, and stand for the principle that national sovereignty could never be used as a shield for genocide or gross violation of human rights' (Annan 2012).

Tensions and disagreements over the role of the UN in monitoring performance and compliance with obligations entered into by states, through the signature and ratification of internationally binding agreements, have been a constant feature of the international debate on human rights, with arguments being advanced by many governments that recognising such a role for the UN would infringe upon state sovereignty.

Even when states have agreed on core principles that limit absolute sovereignty (e.g. the right to development and the responsibility to protect) it has proven extremely difficult to translate broad commitments into meaningful action.



The UN bureaucracy has generally relied on indirect methods such as mainstreaming and capacity development to promote human rights without recognising that neither can be expected to achieve significant results in the absence of political will, strong independent institutions and democratic accountability; indeed, some suggest that the application of these blunt instruments may even be counter-productive – and do great harm – if they legitimise institutions of governance that fail to meet basic standards in terms of their mandates, independence, impartiality and access to resources.

### **2.3 Ambivalence of the UN System on human rights**

The *Compendium of Working Papers* produced by former senior managers of the UN Development System for the UN at 70 Witness Seminar on Development Cooperation (WS1)<sup>11</sup> contains many references to the serious difficulties they encountered when they tried to address the human rights aspects of their mandated responsibilities.<sup>12</sup>

This general observation is reflected in Robert England's article on 50 years of UN development cooperation (B.1.2). With reference to 'normative values, i.e. those relating to human rights as well as development priorities', Robert notes that:

In the early days, promoting and supporting national implementation of such values was not a major preoccupation of country offices, but this has progressively changed over the years as the breadth of this normative agenda has evolved. Unsurprisingly, it is in this area that the 'fault line' is most apparent, as individual member states are held to account for their compliance with international norms. As with in-country situation analyses, however, the normal approach of the UN has been to offer assistance to the host government in improving its compliance, rather than to amplify external criticism – [an approach which] fails to satisfy some observers but nonetheless represents a realistic positioning for the UN country teams.

Some parts of the UN System – e.g. UNICEF for the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and UN Women for the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW),<sup>13</sup> UNHCR for the Rights of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons, and OHCHR itself with respect to all rights covered by the UDHR, the Covenants and subsequent international instruments – have made advocacy for adherence to human rights obligations a central element in their country-level work. Others, notably UNDP, have been constrained by their commitment to government ownership/execution and their privileged relationship with state partners, often to the exclusion of other national stakeholders.

UNDP, through its pioneering series of global, national and regional Human Development Reports (HDR) has contributed significantly to the development debate since 1990; in HDR 2000 on Human Rights and Human Development, UNDP Administrator, Mark Malloch-Brown, and the report's Chief Architect, Richard Jolly, underlined that 'human rights are not a reward for development; rather they are critical to achieving it'. 'A broad vision of human rights must be entrenched to achieve sustainable human development. When adhered to in practice as well as in principle, the two concepts make up a self-reinforcing virtuous circle' (UNDP 2000: iii). Yet there are still reports from local civil society representatives that some managers of UN's development cooperation still do not perceive advocacy for the promotion and protection of human rights as a priority.

### **2.4 Under-reported role of the Third UN in the promotion and protection of human rights**

In their review of 'UN Ideas that Changed the World' under the UN Intellectual History Project (UNIHP), Richard Jolly, Louis Emmerij and Thomas Weiss made a distinction between the First UN (governments), the Second UN (staff members) and the Third UN, defined as 'comprising NGOs, academics, consultants, experts, independent commissions and other groups of individuals' who routinely engage with governments and staff members and

'thereby influence UN thinking, policies, priorities and actions. The key characteristic of this third sphere is its independence from governments and UN secretariats' (Jolly, Emmerij and Weiss 2009).

Recognising Human Rights for All as the first and most pervasive of UN ideas that truly changed the course of humankind, Roger Normand and Sarah Zaidi comment 'The speed with which human rights has penetrated every corner of the globe is astounding. Compared to human rights, no other system of universal values has spread so far so fast' (Normand and Zaidi 2007). The authors underline that from the very outset, the driving force behind the human rights work of the UN has been pressure from thousands of activists across the globe representing the Third UN. As former Acting High Commissioner for Human Rights, Bertrand Ramcharan, points out in his review of the UN Human Rights Council for the Routledge Global Institutions Series 'to put it simply and summarily, without human rights NGOs, the UN would not be able to discharge its mission for the protection and promotion of human rights'.

The lack of recognition of the remarkable and often courageous role of these actors on behalf of communities and individuals both within states and in the international arena has unfortunately been reflected in many UN at 70 events. Had UK members of the Third UN been included, for example, in the search for participants for the UK Witness Seminars, the human rights pillar of the UN would certainly have been more adequately addressed.

Some of the leading organisations and figures from the Third UN in the UK who have made significant contribution to the development of the human rights mandate and work of the UN, highlight some of the Third UN sources that could usefully enrich the UN Career Records Project. Based on an *ad hoc* preliminary survey, and brought together in a separate document *The Role of UK Nationals and Institutions in UN Human Rights Work*, by David Whaley,<sup>14</sup> these cover the following main categories:

- (i) **UK founded and/or based international non-governmental institutions:** Amnesty International, Oxfam, Save the Children International, Minority Rights Group International, and Article 19;
- (ii) **Eminent individuals:** Four UK Presidents of the International Court of Justice; founders and co-founders of leading international NGOs: Amnesty International, the International Commission of Jurists, Article 19; and the Universal Rights Group;
- (iii) **Contributors to the UN's human rights work from civil society:** the first Special Rapporteur (SR) on Torture and Chairperson of the Human Rights Committee that monitors the ICCPR; the former Associate Representative of the Quaker UN Office in Geneva; and the current SRs on human rights and counter terrorism and on Cambodia;
- (iv) **Contributors both as leaders in political/diplomatic/academic/civil society spheres and as senior UN officials:** a former British government Minister and UNDP Administrator/Deputy Secretary-General, a former Director of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF; a former Secretary-General of Amnesty International and Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG). The external team leader for the Internal Review of the UN role in Sri Lanka (SL-IRP); the independent leader of the task force entrusted with advising the Secretary-General on SL-IRP follow-up;
- (v) **UN Volunteers:** UN System leaders have long recognised the role of qualified and motivated volunteers in complementing and supplementing the efforts of UN officials in the promotion of human rights and democracy, working with local civil society organisations.

## 3 A decade of progress: 2006–2016

### 3.1 Responsibility to Protect (R2P)

UN member states, at the World Summit of 2005, recognised their individual and collective responsibility to protect civilian populations against war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and genocide. Together with the establishment of the Human Rights Council, it was a key element in the efforts of the UN under Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, to ensure that never again would the UN stand aside when faced with challenges such as the Rwandan genocide and Srebrenica massacres.

Less than five years later, the appalling events that characterised the closing phase of over 25 years of armed conflict in Sri Lanka (1983–2009), following the removal of international witnesses including the media, with some 40,000 civilian casualties according to UN estimates, were the first major new challenge of the twenty-first century to the role of the international community in the protection of civilian populations caught up in war. Despite the adoption of the declaration on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), the UN allowed itself to be ordered out of the conflict zone. It then withheld critical information on civilian casualties and alleged war crimes committed by the Sri Lankan armed forces and accepted gross under-counting of the number of civilians in government-declared ‘no-fire zones’ with devastating humanitarian consequences. As Sir John Holmes, then UN Emergency Relief Coordinator stated in a Channel 4 interview ‘it was decided that in the case of Sri Lanka R2P would simply not apply’.<sup>15</sup>

### 3.2 Human Rights up Front (HRuF)

An internal review of the role of the UN in Sri Lanka in 2008/2009 concluded that the failure of the UN was systemic – the responsibility of the whole range of inter-governmental bodies and UN actors involved, at Headquarters and in-country, none of whom (with the notable exception of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay) had placed the protection of the most basic of rights of civilians – to life – at the centre of their efforts. Such systemic failure necessitated urgent attention and radical responses to avoid recurrence in a deteriorating global context.<sup>16</sup>

The HRuF Action Plan, launched by the Secretary-General in late 2013, was the central element in the response. It aims at a system-wide UN commitment to engage in timely and effective preventive action in order to ensure both the protection of civilians and the protection of human rights. *It recognises that preventing serious human rights violations is central to the purposes of the UN and must always be a priority.*

It introduces mechanisms for collecting and analysing information on serious violations, a process to translate information into action and a reminder to all staff of the UN System, particularly those with policy and strategy responsibilities at Headquarters and country level, of their human rights responsibilities. It strengthens human rights training for all staff, the incorporation of human rights objectives into the appraisal compacts of senior managers and aims to ensure accountability at all stages of UN action and decision-making through a human rights evaluation framework.<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, from March 2012, the Human Rights Council, in an unprecedented reversal of its initial stand, with strong leadership from the governments of the US and UK, and support from all regions, passed a series of increasingly critical resolutions on reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka, culminating in the establishment of an OHCHR Investigation (OISL) in March 2014. The OISL report, presented to the HRC in September 2015, led to the adoption of a consensus resolution, co-sponsored by the new coalition government of Sri Lanka and laying the basis for international support for a far-reaching process of transitional justice.<sup>18</sup>

Whether the transitional justice process and other commitments to its peers through the HRC, willingly entered into by the Government of Sri Lanka, will be fully implemented will depend on a combination of political will, enabling conditions within Sri Lanka and sustained international support and encouragement - and principled pressure. Above all, there will be a need for continued independent monitoring and reporting – reflecting the accountability of the Sri Lankan authorities and institutions and their external partners, including the UN System to all Sri Lankan communities and to the global community through the HRC. Renewed cooperation between Sri Lanka and the UN has opened a window of opportunity that offers reasonable prospects for the island to address the ills that have plagued it for over half a century.

### **3.3 A common purpose**

R2P, HRuF and the Human Rights Council resolution on Sri Lanka all recognise the collective responsibility, beyond discretionary rights, for all states to act in the face of serious human rights violations and the imperative to protect through prevention, helping states to fulfil their human rights obligations.

All three initiatives aim to reduce the risks of mass atrocity crimes through ensuring respect for basic human rights principles including access to economic and social opportunities, freedom to participate directly in political activities, to practise religious and other beliefs, to associate with others and to express agreement – or dissent.

### **3.4 Sustainable Development Goals – the need for clearer articulation of human rights**

The official view on the place of human rights in the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is summarised by OHCHR as follows: ‘It is increasingly recognized that human rights are essential to achieve sustainable development... human rights principles and standards are now strongly reflected in an ambitious new global development framework, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’. ‘Grounded in international human rights law, the agenda offers critical opportunities to further advance the realization of human rights for all people everywhere, without discrimination’.<sup>19</sup>

Yet there remains great scepticism. As former UN Acting High Commissioner for Human Rights, Bertrand Ramcharan pointed out in a briefing note for FUNDS in July 2015, entitled *Human Rights and the SDGs: A Side-lined Priority?* ‘The hard reality is that sustainable development cannot be achieved without universal realization and protection of human rights... The high-sounding rhetoric about human rights is not mirrored in the content of the SDGs, nor in the methods indicated for their implementation and monitoring’.<sup>20</sup>

There is even greater scepticism among the guardians of the UN’s human rights principles – local, regional and international civil society. On the eve of the adoption of the SDGs, Neil Hicks, International Policy Adviser for Human Rights First, noted:

One obvious objection is that the term ‘human rights’ is not mentioned anywhere at all in the 17 proposed goals. Many of the goals have intrinsic or implicit human-rights content, but the omission of the actual term is notable and is indicative of a global climate where more and more states are assertively pushing back against universal human-rights standards and labelling international pressure to encourage compliance as unacceptable interference in their sovereignty.<sup>21</sup>

With the disappearance of the term ‘human rights’, we are left with vague promises of mainstreaming, widely recognised as the bluntest of instruments in the toolkit of the Human Rights Council. Based on decades of observation of the limited impact of mainstreaming, and recent experience at the Human Rights Council, the author is inclined to join the sceptics.

Mainstreaming without rigorous accountability has more often than not resulted in agreed principles being lost in delivery, distorted through inappropriate action or simply forgotten.

## **4 Strengthening the UN's human rights pillar: some possible remedial measures**

*4.1 Strengthened UN mindset in favour of human rights, combined with structural changes:* In commenting on prospects for full implementation of the HRuF Plan of Action, Andrew Gilmour, Director in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General for Political, Peacekeeping, Humanitarian and Human Rights affairs, underlines the magnitude of the challenge: 'only through an evolution of the UN mindset, combined with various structural changes can the spirit of this initiative hope to survive'... It is an 'ambitious goal – to commit an entire bureaucracy to an ideal – even if it is an ideal that is contained in the organisation's founding documents' (Gilmour 2014).

*4.2 Increased accountability for human rights:* As voices from the Third UN – from all regions – have insistently reminded us, whether with respect to the protection of civilians under HRuF and R2P, the application of human rights principles in the implementation of the SDGs or indeed in the promotion and protection of human rights in general, the key to success is **accountability**. It is precisely here that structural reforms are needed. In line with its mandated responsibilities for the coordination of the human rights promotion and protection activities throughout the UN System, OHCHR should be invited to monitor and report on the manner in which development and humanitarian bodies contribute to the implementation of relevant decisions of the Human Rights Council.

*4.3 Fuller use of human rights mechanisms:* The bulk of UN human rights activities are undertaken outside the purview of the UN's dedicated inter-governmental human rights structures. The human rights mechanisms of the UN offer several possibilities for the introduction of much-needed accountability. Reports on the human rights promotion and capacity-building work of the UN System could be incorporated into the Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process. Treaty Bodies committees and Special Procedures mandate-holders could be invited to comment on the role of the UN System in the implementation of their recommendations. Where country-specific situations have been brought to the attention of the Human Rights Council, consideration could be given to direct interaction between members of the UN Country Team and the Human Rights Council.

*4.4 Increased recognition of the role of the Third UN and civil society actors in human rights monitoring:* One of the indirect advantages of such reporting and monitoring, and eventually of human rights audits of all activities of the UN System in a particular country, would be to ensure greater recognition of the essential role of the Third UN, local, regional and international civil society actors, than has been customary in the past, helping to redress serious imbalances that have generally characterised the UN's operational activities.

*4.5 Strengthened role of Human Rights Council and OHCHR:* Ideally, a far greater proportion of the UN System's human rights promotion and protection work should be brought under the direct responsibility of the Human Rights Council and OHCHR. This would require a significant increase in the allocation of core resources, greater access to extra-budgetary resources and the adoption of the kind of flexible processes and procedures that have long characterised the operational funds and programmes of the UN System and provided them with inappropriate advantage in the competition for mandates, programmes and responsibilities.

*4.6 Increased accountability of UN Country Teams and RCs in promotion of human rights mandates:* At the same time, recognition of the human rights mandates of the members of UN Country Teams and of the UN Resident Coordinators would be reflected in more

appropriate supervisory arrangements – possibly restoring the arrangements that applied between 1979 and 1994 under which the management of the UN RC system was the responsibility of the UN Secretariat, more adequately reflecting the *de facto* responsibilities of the Resident Coordinator system for all aspects of the UN mandate, capacities and operational activities.

*4.7 Establishing the Human Rights Council as a primary organ of the UN instead of a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly:* Ideally these measures would be accompanied by more radical action to enhance the overall place of human rights within the UN through the next institutional review of the UN in 2021, mandated by the General Assembly. The President of the Human Rights Council for 2015, Ambassador Joachim Ruecker, proposed in his end of term statement that member states should make the Council a primary organ of the UN. ‘Politically,’ he underlined, ‘it has somewhat “outgrown” its current role of a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly.’ ‘This way,’ he added, ‘all three pillars of the UN, namely Peace and Security, Development and Human Rights would be on an equal footing.’<sup>22</sup>

*4.8 Assumption of full responsibilities for UN’s third pillar:* Such moves would have far-reaching implications. However, they are surely justified if the UN is to prepare itself for the new challenges of the twenty-first century and beyond – and finally to meet the provisions of its Charter – and the expectations of its peoples – by fully assuming its mandated responsibilities under its long-neglected third pillar.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The opinions expressed here represent the views of the author and participants in the Witness Seminars, and not necessarily those of the IDS, the UNA or BAFUNCS.

<sup>2</sup> Statement by Ban Ki-moon to the UN Human Rights Council, 29 February 2016 (see OHCHR website: [www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session31/Pages/31RegularSession.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session31/Pages/31RegularSession.aspx)).

<sup>3</sup> Founded in 1920, the League of Nations, with some 58 members in 1934/5, was the first international organisation with a principal mission to maintain world peace, aiming to prevent wars through collective security, disarmament and settling international disputes through negotiation and arbitration. Although its mandate covered some social issues such as labour conditions, just treatment of native inhabitants, human and drug trafficking, arms trade, global health, prisoners of war and protection of minorities in Europe, it was not entrusted with a comprehensive human rights mandate.

<sup>4</sup> The Bretton Woods Institutions – the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) (or World Bank) current part of the World Bank Group – were established in the context of the agreement on a system of rules, institutions, and procedures designed to regulate the international monetary system, adopted by 44 nations at the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference in July 1944.

<sup>5</sup> For further analysis of the UN’s human rights achievements see the acceptance speech by former Secretary-General of Amnesty International and UN SRSG, Ian Martin on receipt of the Sir Brian Urquhart Award for Distinguished Service to the UN: UNA-UK, 24 October 2013.

<sup>6</sup> The ‘Third Committee’ ‘Social, Humanitarian and Cultural’ of the General Assembly (GA) figures under the general heading ‘Main and other Sessional Committees’ in the UN organisational chart. NB Although the term ‘human rights’ does not figure in the title of the Committee, over 50 per cent of its work deals with human rights. The Committee interacts directly with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the President and members of the Human Rights Council (also in ‘Subsidiary Organs’ box), as well as with the Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures mandate holders appointed by the HRC. The Council’s report is examined by the Third Committee before its submission for formal adoption by the General Assembly.

<sup>7</sup> The Group of 77 (G77) is a loose coalition of developing nations, designed to promote its members’ collective economic interests and to provide them with an enhanced joint negotiating capacity in the UN. The group was founded by 77 states in June 1964; by November 2013 the organisation had expanded to 134 member countries.

<sup>8</sup> The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) is an informal grouping of some 120 countries (and 15 observers) who participate in the conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries and act together at the UN on issues of common concern. Founded in 1961 as a gathering of states not formally aligned with or against any major power bloc, NAM’s core principles include mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in domestic affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful co-existence.

<sup>9</sup> The Western European and Others Group (WEOG) is one of five unofficial Regional Groups in the UN that act as voting blocs and negotiation forums. Initially formed in 1961, WEOG currently has 28 members. In addition to the states of Western Europe, the group includes Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Israel; the USA participates in an observer capacity.

<sup>10</sup> The Eastern Europe Group (EEG) consists of countries in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, which together form the area of the former Eastern Bloc. The group currently has 23 members.

<sup>11</sup> **The Compendium of Working Papers and Career Summaries was produced as a complementary document to the Report of the first Witness Seminar (WS1) on Development Cooperation, held at IDS on 13–14 May 2015. It contains a rich collection of articles, memoirs and other contributions by 42 WS1 participants or invitees. This includes an article by the author on *The Human Rights Dimension of Development Cooperation and the UN’s Core Mandate* (section 40.5).**

<sup>12</sup> *Human Rights* in WS1 Compendium: see among others the papers submitted by former UN Resident Coordinators Terence Jones, Matthew Kahane, Frederick Lyons, Paul Matthews, Peter Witham and David Whaley.

<sup>13</sup> Steve Woodhouse (2015) *Reflections on a Career with UNICEF*. See WS1 Compendium of Working Papers and Career Summaries 'The normative underpinning of the UN and the CRC together with UNICEF's strong advocacy capabilities have, I believe, been enormously important assets facilitating progress at national level to promote national political will to adhere to human rights requirements'.

<sup>14</sup> See *The Role of UK Nationals and Institutions in UN Human Rights Work*, by David Whaley. Originally included in early drafts of the present article but excluded from the final version due to space constraints, this has been added for the record to the WS1 Compendium of Working Papers, among the contributions submitted by the author.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Sir John Holmes, former UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs/Emergency Relief Coordinator, in Channel 4 award-winning documentary *No Fire Zone: In the Killing Fields of Sri Lanka*. Produced by Outsider Films, with Channel 4 and ITV, and directed by Callum Macrae, the film was originally released in 2013 (with a showing at a side-event of the UN Human Rights Council), the updated version (2015) can be viewed on Vimeo on demand and Distrify; the access details are available at: [nofirezone.org](http://nofirezone.org); see also chapter on Sri Lanka in *The Politics of Humanity, The Reality of Relief Aid*. John Holmes (Head of Zeus 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Secretary-General's Internal Review on United Nations Actions in Sri Lanka, November 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Human Rights up Front: see [www.un.org/sg/humanrightsupfront/doc/RuFAP-summary-General-Assembly.shtml](http://www.un.org/sg/humanrightsupfront/doc/RuFAP-summary-General-Assembly.shtml).

<sup>18</sup> UN Human Rights Council resolution 30/1 of 1 October 2015 on *Reconciliation, Accountability and Human Rights in Sri Lanka*.

<sup>19</sup> OHCHR Statement on 'Human Rights and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development'. OHCHR website, March 2016, [www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/MDG/Pages/The2030Agenda.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/MDG/Pages/The2030Agenda.aspx).

<sup>20</sup> Bertrand Ramcharan: FUNDS Briefing Note of July 2015: *Human Rights and the SDGs: A Side-lined Priority?*

<sup>21</sup> Neil Hicks, International Policy Adviser of Human Rights First in Huffington Post, 23 September 2015: *The SDGs' Missed Opportunity on Human Rights*, [www.huffingtonpost.com/neil-hicks/the-sdgs-missed-opportunity-on-human-rights\\_b\\_8164384.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/neil-hicks/the-sdgs-missed-opportunity-on-human-rights_b_8164384.html).

<sup>22</sup> Statement by Ambassador Joachim Ruecker of Germany, President of the UN Human Rights Council for its 9<sup>th</sup> Cycle (2015), 21 December 2015 – available on the UN Human Rights Council website).

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# A.6 UK Representation Within the United Nations System

*Natalie Samarasinghe*<sup>1,2</sup>

## Abstract

This article discusses the important role played by UK nationals in the UN since its inception in 1945. It argues for the need for a strategy to maintain and strengthen this representation, both for the good of the UN as well as to maintain the UK's 'soft power' in a context where the UK's global influence cannot be taken for granted. The article provides valuable statistics on UK representation (to December 2012) *vis-à-vis* that of other countries and summaries of initiatives taken by other UN member states to increase their representation. It concludes with some recommendations for future UK action relating to developing strategic approaches to increase representation, build a strong and diverse pool of candidates and support future applicants, as well as those already working in the UN System.

**Keywords:** UN, UK representation, UN staffing.

## 1 Introduction

The United Kingdom has a long and rich tradition of engagement with international organisations and was a key architect of the League of Nations and its successor, the United Nations. The structures in place today owe much to British design, including the very concept of an independent international secretariat to administer them.<sup>3</sup>

While the UK's economic and military clout is considerably less in today's multipolar world, it remains an important actor at the UN. In part, this is because its Security Council status is unlikely to change, even if agreement on an expanded membership is reached. The state's financial contributions to the UN, voluntary and assessed, are also factors. But the UK's influence within the System – including in terms of representation both as a member state on various bodies and in terms of personnel – remains significant.

The UK is perceived as a power whose advice, cooperation and skills – notably in the areas of drafting and problem-solving – are highly valued.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, British individuals within the System, from Margaret Anstee to Ian Martin, have contributed much to the UN's effectiveness, and to the reputation of British international civil servants. Since the UN's inception, the UK has – more or less – been well represented in terms of personnel within the UN System, comparing favourably with states that have larger populations and greater resources. Currently, the UK is the fifth-ranked member state by total number of staff at all grades, and third-ranked for professionals. At the senior level (defined in this report as D1 and above), the UK scores even higher, coming second behind the United States.

## 2 Suggested strategy for maintaining UK representation within the UN System

Nonetheless, it is important for the UK to have in place an effective strategy for maintaining its representation within the UN System, and to seek to enhance it at particular levels within particular bodies. There are a number of reasons for this.

1. *First, the need to strengthen the rules-based international order and its institutions:* a systematic approach to representation has the potential to support British national security and prosperity. The UK's 2015 National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review (NSS/SDSR) identified the need to 'strengthen the



rules-based international order and its institutions' as a key priority, stating that the erosion of this order is one of four 'particular challenges' likely to drive UK security priorities over the next decade.<sup>5</sup>

The NSS/SDSR goes on to recognise the UK's place 'at the heart of the rules-based international order', listing the UK's membership of the UN as a means to 'shape a secure, prosperous future for the UK and to build wider security, stability and prosperity'. It further describes the UN and other multilateral organisations as instruments that 'amplify our nation's power' and through which 'we play a central role in strengthening international norms and promoting our values'. Ensuring the effectiveness of the UN, which is recognised as being 'the world's leading multilateral institution', is listed as a UK objective.<sup>6</sup>

Effective individuals within the UN System contribute to the effectiveness of the organisation as a whole – a long-standing objective of the UK. Capable leaders in strategic senior-level posts could serve to move forward agendas in the short to medium term. A solid cadre of junior personnel, meanwhile, can have a positive long-term impact, whether retained and developed within the UN System to form part of the future pool of senior leaders, or absorbed into other institutions, including the UK diplomatic service.<sup>7</sup>

2. *Second, the value of UK 'soft power':* representation is a form of soft power, linked to influence, visibility and reputation. A strong cohort of British individuals with experience in international organisations will strengthen the UK's current and future role on the world stage, particularly if links are maintained with them and if efforts are made to integrate them into domestic postings on their return.
3. *Third, the UK's representation is not assured:* the UK's current levels of representation within the UN System should not be taken for granted. It is vulnerable in this regard precisely because its privileged Security Council status is secure for the foreseeable future. Larger UN contributors and emerging powers seeking greater influence continue to push for diversification of UN staff. G77 states are especially keen for more posts to be subject to geographic representation. The tacit 'ownership' of certain senior-level posts, in particular by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (China, France, Russia, the UK and the US), is resented, as is the link between contribution and representation, by which the majority of UN member states lose out unless other criteria are applied. Meanwhile the UN System is increasingly under pressure to cut jobs, especially at the senior level, shrinking the pool and increasing competition.
4. *Fourth, there is room for improvement in UK UN representation:* while the UK's overall representation is good, there is considerable room for improvement within certain entities. There are funds, programmes and agencies, as well as certain Secretariat departments, that have never had a UK national at Assistant Secretary-General (ASG) or Under-Secretary-General (USG) level. The UK's level of representation is also relatively low (under 4 per cent) in bodies such as the UN Refugee Agency and UN Population Fund.<sup>8</sup>  
Both categories include entities to which the UK is a significant contributor of funds, and which the UK Department for International Development (DFID) has identified as partners in the achievement of UK priorities.  
Within the Secretariat, the UK has seen a decline in its senior representation in recent years.
5. *Fifth, vacancy opportunities should be explored:* although the age profile of UN System staff has shifted slightly in recent years, it remains the case that around 20 per cent of staff will reach the mandatory retirement age in the next five to seven years.<sup>9</sup> This means that more than 6,600 positions could become vacant, barring changes to the posts themselves. Of these, more than 1,000 are at the level of D1 or above – representing more than half the total number of personnel in these positions (1,829).

6. *Sixth, the UK could benefit from the example of other UN member states:* the UK should take account of the emphasis placed by other UN member states on increasing representation within international organisations. Several states have had dedicated programmes and strategies in place for a number of years. The US, for instance, has accorded increasing priority and resources towards maintaining and expanding its representation, particularly in key UN posts and entities. Other states, notably Germany and France, which arguably have the most comprehensive programmes in place, already outrank the UK in some categories, and are in a position to overtake it at the senior end of the scale. Meanwhile states like Australia, Canada, the Netherlands and Switzerland have a higher proportion of personnel, including at the professional and senior levels, than might be expected given their population sizes.

Any strategy to increase UK representation within the UN System must be framed in the context of improving recruitment and retention of quality staff more generally. As such, the UK should look in parallel to support the appointment of qualified senior individuals regardless of nationality, and find ways to strengthen junior professional recruitment from all regions. This could include, for example, the sponsoring of Junior Professional Officers from Commonwealth countries, as well as from the UK.

### 3 UK representation to 31 December 2012

In terms of overall representation within the UN System, the UK is the fifth-ranked member state by total numbers of personnel (at all grades) and the third-ranked for professional grade staff.<sup>10</sup>

Table 1 shows the top 10 member states by overall personnel, number of professional (P) grade staff and the proportion of total staff who are professionals.<sup>11</sup> General service (G) grade staff numbers are influenced by the location of major UN offices, in terms of local and diaspora populations.

**Table 1 Top 10 UN member states by overall and professional (P) grade staff**

Top 10 for overall personnel		Top 10 for number of P staff		Top ten for % of staff who are P staff	
USA	5,127	USA	3,012	Norway	88.98
France	4,174	France	1,878	Japan	87.22
Italy	2,795	UK	1,650	Netherlands	86.46
Kenya	2,585	Italy	1,381	Sweden	84.39
UK	2,456	Canada	1,248	Belgium	82.66
India	1,890	Germany	1,182	Germany	82.03
Canada	1,854	India	838	Australia	80.73
Ethiopia	1,779	Spain	833	Spain	73.26
Philippines	1,616	Japan	805	Canada	67.31
Germany	1,441	Kenya	586	UK	67.18

The UK contributes 5.2 per cent of the UN's regular budget. Regular budget contributions are often cited by UN member states when considering what they deem to be an appropriate level of representation, although the formula used to determine 'desirable ranges' for member states is more complex and only applies to a certain number of posts.<sup>12</sup>

Table 2 presents the data for UK professionals in the same set of UN entities used for Table 1.<sup>13</sup> The percentage of professionals who are UK nationals is included.

**Table 2 UK professional grade staff in the UN System**

UN entity	UK P staff	Total P staff	UK as % of total
UN Secretariat and related posts	529	10,421	5.08
UN Development Programme (UNDP)	110	2,637	4.17
UN Population Fund (UNFPA)	16	589	2.72
UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS)	42	501	8.38
Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)	57	1,634	3.49
UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)	187	2,918	6.41
UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)	15	324	4.63
UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)	2	50	4.00
UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)	18	184	9.78
International Trade Centre (ITC – UNCTAD/WTO)	7	160	4.38
International Civil Service Commission (ICSC)	1	21	4.76
International Court of Justice (ICJ)	5	57	8.77
UN Joint Staff Pension Fund (JSPF)	1	86	1.16
UN University (UNU)	7	69	10.14
International Labour Organization (ILO)	60	1,026	5.85
International Training Centre of the ILO (ITCILO)	1	68	1.47
Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)	90	1,621	5.55
World Food Programme (WFP)	70	1,415	4.95
UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)	29	974	2.98
World Health Organization (WHO)	120	2,039	5.89
Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)	6	484	1.24
Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)	23	359	6.41
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)	15	380	3.95
Universal Postal Union (UPU)	6	98	6.12
International Telecommunication Union (ITU)	29	361	8.03
World Meteorological Organization (WMO)	4	147	2.72
International Maritime Organization (IMO)	22	162	13.58
World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)	47	511	9.20
International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)	20	309	6.47
UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)	10	285	3.51
International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)	82	1,245	6.59
UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)	1	43	2.33
UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)	14	281	4.98
UN International Computing Centre (UNICC)	3	104	2.88
UN System Staff College (UNSSC)	1	20	5.00

Table 3 arranges the data in Table 2 to show the top 10 UN entities by number of UK nationals working at the professional grade level, as well as the top 10 entities by the percentage of professional grade staff who are from the UK.

**Table 3 Top 10 UN entities by UK profession (P) grade staff**

Top 10 by number of UK Ps		Top 10 by % of UK Ps	
UN Secretariat	529	IMO	13.58
UNICEF	187	UNU	10.14
WHO	120	UNRWA	9.78
UNDP	110	WIPO	9.20
FAO	90	ICJ	8.77
IAEA	82	UNOPS	8.38
WFP	70	ITU	8.03
ILO	60	IAEA	6.59
UNHCR	57	IFAD	6.47
WIPO	47	UNICEF	6.41

At senior levels (D1 and above), the UK is ranked second, with its nationals occupying 4.41 per cent of the highest positions (ASG and above). The US, in first place, accounts for 13.24 per cent. It should be noted that a significant number of UN member states do not have, and have never had, representation at this level. Within the Secretariat, which has by far the most posts at this level, the UK was ranked either second or third from 2008 to 2012, which corresponds to historical trends.<sup>14</sup>

Table 4 presents the total personnel numbers by grade for selected UN member states across the UN System, using the same list of entities as the Chief Executives Board (CEB) report.<sup>15</sup>

**Table 4 2009 country comparisons for senior UN System personnel**

	USG	ASG	D2	D1	Total
Australia	1	5	10	41	57
Brazil	1	2	3	26	32
Canada (4)	0	4	26	67	97
China	2	1	7	26	36
Denmark	0	2	8	25	35
France (3)	3	3	23	88	117
Germany (5)	1	5	23	59	88
India	1	3	14	50	68
Italy	1	4	25	66	96
Japan	3	5	15	35	58
Kenya	0	0	5	8	13
Netherlands	0	1	12	44	57
Russia	2	2	8	23	35
Sweden	1	3	13	22	39
Switzerland	1	0	5	8	14
UK (2)	2	5	37	103	147
US (1)	5	12	65	183	265

Note: Top five countries marked with rank in brackets.

**Table 5 Total personnel at USG level and UK personnel at USG level**

	Total USG	UK	Female
Secretariat and affiliated	31	1	23
Special Envoys	39	2	11
Funds and programmes	12	0	3
Specialized agencies	16	1	3

**Table 6 Top 32 UN member states for G, P and overall personnel**

UN member state	G	P	Total	% prof
Argentina	180	269	449	59.91
Australia	137	574	711	80.73
Austria	909	271	1,180	22.97
Belgium	107	510	617	82.66
Brazil	273	314	587	53.49
Canada	606	1,248	1,854	67.31
China	348	540	888	60.81
Denmark	243	329	572	57.52
Ethiopia	1,471	308	1,779	17.31
France	2,296	1,878	4,174	44.99
Germany	259	1,182	1,441	82.03
Ghana	452	276	728	37.91
India	1,052	838	1,890	44.34
Ireland	174	282	456	61.84
Italy	1,414	1,381	2,795	49.41
Japan	118	805	923	87.22
Kenya	1,999	586	2,585	22.67
Netherlands	86	549	635	86.46
Nigeria	601	318	919	34.60
Norway	27	218	245	88.98
Pakistan	632	312	944	33.05
Philippines	1,245	371	1,616	22.96
ROK	254	295	549	53.73
Russia	354	508	862	58.93
Senegal	342	313	655	47.79
South Africa	258	216	474	45.57
Spain	304	833	1,137	73.26
Sweden	64	346	410	84.39
Switzerland	470	319	789	40.43
Uganda	669	330	999	33.03
UK	806	1,650	2,456	67.18
USA	2,115	3,012	5,127	58.75

Table 5 shows the total number of personnel, female personnel and UK nationals at USG and equivalent rank within the UN Secretariat and affiliated bodies, funds, programmes and specialized agencies.

It should be noted that Special Envoys (used here to mean Special Advisers, Special Representatives and similar) are included in the figures.

However, there are a number of UN Secretariat departments and funds, programmes and agencies where the UK was not, as of 2012, represented ASG and above levels.

Table 6 presents figures for general service (G) staff, professional (P) grade staff and overall personnel by state, including the percentage of professional grade staff for 32 member states.<sup>16</sup> These states have been selected for inclusion as they represent the highest-ranking states for each of these sets of figures.

## **4 Comparison with other member states**

The US performs the best across the System. At certain levels and within certain entities, Germany and France outrank the UK, but not overall. Other significant contributors to the UN, such as Japan, generally fare less well than the UK.

Of the permanent members of the Security Council, the UK, US and France perform much better than China and Russia. Other states performing well in terms of senior-level representation are emerging and middle-ranking powers, such as Australia, Canada and India. This could be a result of the lobbying processes that they have in place for contesting, for example, non-permanent Security Council seats. The predominance of the English language is likely to be relevant.

A handful of smaller states – notably Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland – have higher numbers of staff, overall and at the senior level. This could be due to a number of factors, including levels of voluntary contributions, locations of UN entities (particularly in Geneva) and language competencies. The fact that all four countries have a range of programmes in place to support representation could also be significant.

## **5 Initiatives taken by other UN member states to increase representation**

Four states that do well in terms of representation are presented here as case studies.

### **5.1 France**

Support to French nationals interested in working for the UN is provided by the D el egation des Fonctionnaires Internationaux (DFI). Under the auspices of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, DFI promotes French representation in international organisations. Its work includes:

- analysis of French representation and multilateral influence, including through an annual survey of French nationals working in international organisations
- information on opportunities, primarily through a web portal featuring vacancy notices and advice on applications
- matching candidates to positions: DFI maintains a database of hundreds of candidates who have at least three years of professional experience and relevant skills
- information on the various job families and grades within the UN System, as well as entry points such as the Junior Professional Officer (JPO) programme and Associate Expert Programme (AEP) – France sponsors its nationals in both programmes

- partnerships with other organisations, for example, France Expertise Internationale – a public agency under the supervision of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Pôle Emploi International – an international recruitment agency. These organisations offer extensive information on international vacancies (including CV and job postings), as well as training, advice and events.

## 5.2 Germany

Since the late 1990s, the German government has held regular meetings to discuss increasing senior-level representation in international organisations. In 2008, the Bundestag called for regular reports on this issue. These reports provide analysis of German nationals within various parts of the UN System, taking into account their grade, age and gender, identifying gaps by type of post/body and using financial contributions (among other factors) as a basic measure for desirable representation. The data is used to compile a target list of posts, reviewed twice a year.

The Foreign Ministry provides significant support to candidates, including through:

- a database of vacancies that allows users to create a personal profile
- extensive information on UN applications, recruitment processes and available support
- links to partner organisations that provide advice and training to candidates, such as the Zentrum für International Friedenseinsätze and the Büro Führungskräfte zu Internationalen Organisationen
- outreach to schools and universities through events and careers fairs
- a partnership with the Diplomatic College, which provides a range of courses covering policy issues as well as diplomatic training, language tuition and study trips.

Like France, Germany sponsors its nationals for JPO and AEP places. It also offers financial support for internships, a mentoring programme to connect young, mid-level, senior and former professionals, and opportunities for Germans working in international organisations to network, for example, through the web platform [www.commio.de](http://www.commio.de)

## 5.3 Switzerland

Since joining the UN in 2002, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) has supported Swiss representation, particularly in the UN agencies that receive significant funding from the government: UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNAIDS, UN Women and WFP. To this end, the SDC has partnered with the Centre for Information, Counselling and Training for Professionals – a specialist service provider – on a comprehensive support package for Swiss nationals interested in working for the UN. The Centre maintains and releases detailed information on the skill set required by the priority agencies and offers the following:

- information on vacancies in these organisations
- information on the work of the organisations, including access to representatives
- one-to-one (1:1) consultations on job prospects and skills assessments
- tailored advice on CVs, the UN application process, personal profile writing and interviews – this includes individual support throughout the process
- career change workshops aimed at professionals from other sectors
- networking opportunities, such as a specialised careers fair and an annual one-day information and networking ‘mission’ where pre-selected candidates are invited to meet UN human resources officers from the six agencies to present their competencies and interests
- advice on UN-run initiatives, such as UNDP’s Leadership Development Programme.

Switzerland also sponsors its nationals under the JPO and AEP programmes.

## **5.4 United States**

Since 1991, the US Government Accountability Office (GAO) has released reports on representation, following a request from Congress. These reports have enabled the State Department to adopt a strategic approach, for example, by targeting departments and agencies within which it is underrepresented, and by seeking to understand the barriers facing its citizens. These included a lack of languages, difficulties in obtaining spousal employment, lengthy recruitment processes, and limited opportunities for professional growth. The State Department also found that many US nationals seeking employment at the UN reported that they had not sought assistance from the Department or a US mission.

The 2010 report of the GAO outlined steps taken by the State Department's Bureau of International Organization Affairs to address some of the above. They include:

- releasing a list of UN vacancies on a bi-weekly basis
- maintaining a database of interested applicants – this gives prospective candidates the opportunity to upload relevant information about themselves and receive automated emails on relevant UN vacancies
- attending outreach events on UN employment such as career fairs
- answering queries from prospective applicants and those shortlisted for positions
- providing extensive information on UN jobs on relevant government websites, including on compensation, benefits, job categories and spousal employment
- liaising with UN agencies, including through an annual inter-agency meeting
- working on tailored initiatives with US missions in the locations of the UN bodies identified as priorities for increasing US representation.

The 2010 report also recommended the US increase its junior-level support. It argued that the US did not collect information on which bodies had few or no US JPOs (or equivalent), nor did it provide adequate support to these schemes. Since then, the US has sponsored nationals under the AEP and JPO programmes.

## **6 Recommendations for UK action**

### **6.1 Strategic approaches to increasing representation**

1. The UK, and indeed all countries, should consider producing or commissioning regular reports with analysis and recommendations on its representation in the UN System. States like Germany and the US present such reports to the Bundestag and Congress, respectively, which debate the findings. In France, an annual survey of French international civil servants is conducted by a dedicated section of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs to provide quantitative and qualitative data. These initiatives have helped these countries to adopt a systematic approach to increasing representation, with objectives and activities reviewed and adjusted to reflect changing priorities and figures.
2. The UK, and other countries, should also consider setting general and specific targets for representation on the basis of annual reports. There are several approaches that could be taken. The UK could produce a target list of priority UN entities and positions to reflect government policy and spending priorities. It could also set a system-wide goal of, for example, increasing the proportion of UK nationals within a certain grade of post. This would ideally include junior and mid-level representation, as well as representation at D1 and above levels. The reinstatement of support for the JPO programme on a pilot basis in 2014 is a promising development.



3. In addition, the UK should continue to work to improve the UN's human resources policies and procedures, particularly the lengthy recruitment period (now lasting more than 200 days for some posts). It could also look for ways to strengthen the UN's talent pool, not only by supporting UK nationals but, for example, JPOs from Commonwealth countries.

## **6.2 Building a strong, diverse pool of candidates**

1. The UK, and all countries, should seek to improve and devise efficient methods for anticipating and identifying vacancies arising over the next years in target posts and bodies. This could include the following elements: a schedule of term limits, intelligence on likely movements (including retirement), and a forecast of positions that may be created as a result of agreed resolutions or funding. It could also plan ahead for changes to the Senior Management Group that could arise when the term of the current UN Secretary-General ends.
2. The UK should seek to encourage and facilitate applications from individuals from the broadest possible range of sectors, for example through:
  - i. Raising awareness of the UN and opportunities for UK citizens through outreach activities, including careers fairs and networking opportunities targeted at the private or third sectors for example.
  - ii. Increasing opportunities for exposure to the UN System, including through maintaining and increasing participation in the JPO programme and AEP.
  - iii. Supporting and promoting UN internships and volunteering. Some states, such as Japan, have created innovative programmes like the UNITAR Youth Ambassador programme to give young people some experience of the System, as well as training opportunities. Others have found institutions willing to give interns and volunteers financial, logistical and personal support.
  - iv. Supporting mid-level and senior career placements, consultancies, advisory roles or secondments.
  - v. Providing training to prospective candidates in line with required skills.
  - vi. Supporting female candidates. Women are under-represented at senior level across the UN System, with particular posts (such as country-specific Special Representatives) significantly under-performing in terms of gender balance.
3. The UK should seek to improve its systems for identifying candidates and matching them to vacancies. This could include creating a roster of candidates by skills / experience, as well as a roster of contacts to call on for suggestions of names. The UK could also consider processes in place in other states. In Germany, for instance, a selection group is convened jointly by the Chancellor's office and Foreign Ministry, which includes a 'Coordinator for International Representation', as well as relevant government department representatives and external advisors. This group conducts appointment forecasting and makes decisions on selections for particular vacancies.

## **6.3 Supporting applicants and those working in the UN System**

1. The UK should consider providing individual support to prospective applicants. States such as France, Germany and Switzerland have dedicated partner organisations (such as recruitment and training bodies) that provide one-to-one support for applicants, from scoping UN career opportunities to writing applications, from interview preparation to identifying and addressing skills gaps.
2. The UK should also consider how it could give prospective candidates access to relevant current and former UN staff, including appropriate human resources contacts. This could include a simple list of contacts, a register of individuals interested in sharing their experiences, or informal online networks or web events.
3. To facilitate this, the UK could consider increasing initiatives with those already in the UN System, for example, through networking events or an online portal. The German

web platform [www.commio.de](http://www.commio.de) enables their civil servants to exchange information, connect with others and access development opportunities and support (for example, for those working in hardship locations).

## **Box 2 Former UNA volunteers – a good training ground for UN careers<sup>17</sup>**

During the 1960s and 1970s, the United Nations Association (UNA)-UK's 'International Service' programme (now a separate entity) was one of the four sending agencies of the British Volunteer Programme, specialising in sending volunteers to work with UN funds, programmes and agencies. A total of 52 volunteers were recruited between 1965 and 1975, all funded by the UK Overseas Development Administration, the forerunner of the Department for International Development (DFID).

Volunteers fell into two categories. Some served in a technical capacity, as educators or agriculturalists. Others, about six per year, became Junior Professional Officers (JPOs) in UN country offices or projects, mainly run by UNDP, UNICEF and FAO.

Career assignments in the UN were by no means guaranteed on completion of their two-year assignments. But half (25) of UNA's volunteers subsequently became UN staff members. Thereafter, each pursued his or her career, often moving from field to head office positions and back into the field at a senior level. Of the former volunteers who pursued UN careers, 17 assumed positions as Head of Mission (resident coordinator/resident representative/country director, the equivalent of ambassadorships). Those who carried out the most head of mission assignments were Alan Doss (7), Frederick Lyons (7), John Murray (6), Tim Painter (5), Matthew Kahane (5), Peter Metcalf (4), David Whaley (4), Peter Witham (4), Robert England (3), Terry Jones (3) and Michael Askwith (3), David Lockwood (2) and Paul Matthews (2). In addition, many of the above also carried out Headquarters assignments as directors or deputy directors of departments.

Former UNA volunteers carried out a total of 58 head of mission assignments in 45 countries, of which 23 in Africa, 22 in Asia and the Pacific, seven in Latin America and the Caribbean, four in Eastern Europe and the former Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and two in the Arab States. They include: two Special Representatives of the UN Secretary-General, two Deputy Special Representatives of the SG, one Assistant Secretary-General and 20 who have served as head of mission (country/regional director, representative or coordinator) in one or more countries.

Together, they have served in the UN for more than 1,000 years and completed 178 assignments in 81 countries for 16 UN funds, programmes or agencies. In the course of their careers, they were involved in a large number of significant events and operations. Alan Doss headed missions in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Michael Askwith opened a first integrated office and supported the referendum in Eritrea. David Whaley worked on peace and reconciliation in South Africa and Sri Lanka, and Matthew Kahane opened up the UNDP country office in post-communist Belarus.

It can be assumed that through these former volunteers, UNA-UK has had considerable impact on the work of the UN and the countries in which they served. It is satisfactory to note that DFID decided in 2013 to resume its support of the recruitment of UN JPOs under a programme that has proved beneficial to the UN, to the countries in which they served, and to the individuals concerned.

*Michael Askwith, British Association of Former UN Civil Servants (BAFUNCS), Coordinator of the UN Career Records Project (UNCRP)*

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> The opinions expressed here represent the views of the authors and participants in the Witness Seminars, and not necessarily those of the IDS, the UNA or BAFUNCS.

<sup>2</sup> This article draws on discussions held during the Witness Seminar on 'The UK and the UN in Development Cooperation', organised by the United Nations Association-UK (UNA-UK), the British Association of Former UN Civil Servants and the Institute of Development Studies on 13–14 May 2015. It is based on research conducted by UNA-UK for a report on UK representation in the UN System produced for the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office in July 2013. The human resources statistics reflect the most recent data available at that time and sources have been dated accordingly.

<sup>3</sup> 'The United Kingdom and the United Nations', A.J.R. Groom and P. Taylor in C.F. Alger, G.M. Lyons and J.E. Trent (eds), *The United Nations System: the Policies of Member States* (UNU Press, Tokyo: 1995), p.369.

<sup>4</sup> See various witness statements in 'The Role of the FCO in UK Government', House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, Seventh Report of Session 2010–12, Volume I (27 April 2011), [www.parliament.uk/facom](http://www.parliament.uk/facom)

<sup>5</sup> HM Government, *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom*, November 2015, p.10 and p.15

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, pp.13–14, and p.60.

<sup>7</sup> See recommendation in 'The Role of the FCO in UK Government' on overseas opportunities for junior staff, p.4.

<sup>8</sup> See UN System Human Resources by Nationality – United Kingdom, on the Chief Executives Board for Coordination website: [www.unsceb.org/content/hr-nationality](http://www.unsceb.org/content/hr-nationality)

<sup>9</sup> Chief Executives Board report (CEB/2015/HLCM/HR/19), released 30 December 2015 and showing statistics as at 31 December 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Recruitment policies and practices vary across the UN System, including in relation to the principle of equitable geographical distribution. The Secretariat, funds, programmes and agencies have separate application procedures. They collect and release employment data in different formats and to different time cycles. Practices vary within these bodies too, depending on the level of appointment and how the post is classified and funded.

The Chief Executives Board (CEB) releases annual statistical tables on the staff of the organisations within the UN common system with appointments for a period of one year or more. The tables include information on the spread of posts (by grade, classification, entity etc.), as well as data pertaining to gender, age and length of service. The statistics are compiled based on information provided to the CEB by the entities in question. It may be possible that differences in data collection and post classification between UN entities may not have been fully taken into account.

<sup>11</sup> Chief Executives Board report (CEB/2015/HLCM/HR/12), showing statistics as at 31 December 2012. This article reflects research conducted by UNA-UK in 2013, using CEB statistics pertaining to staffing as at 31 December 2012. UNA-UK also used other sources, where possible, to verify data in the CEB report. The figures in this article represent UNA-UK's best attempt, with advice from the UN Office of Human Resources Management, to provide analysis.

<sup>12</sup> Information provided by the UN Office of Human Resources Management. The UK was classified as 'under-represented' within the UN until the 2012 UN regular budget negotiations produced a new scale of assessments from January 2013. Under this new scale, the desirable range for UK candidates in geographic positions is now 87 to 188, with the UK on 106 (as at October 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Chief Executives Board report (CEB/2012/HLCM/HR/12), released 29 May 2013 showing statistics as at 31 December 2012. The figures are provided to the CEB by the human resources departments of the entities. They exclude information on National Professional Officers, which may be found in CEB/2012/HLCM/HR/16/Add.1.

<sup>14</sup> In 2009, the UK had two fewer staff than Germany, pushing the latter into second, mostly due to the number of German nationals at D2 level (seven, compared to the UK's two). In 2011, when the UK's D1-USG posts dropped from 25 to 17, mainly as a result of fewer D1s, Germany again pipped it. However, the UK regained its position as number two in 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Special Adviser on Gender Issues, now part of UN Women ([www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/fpwomenbynation.htm](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/fpwomenbynation.htm)).

<sup>16</sup> Chief Executives Board report (CEB/2012/HLCM/HR/12), released 29 May 2013 showing statistics as at 31 December 2012.

<sup>17</sup> First printed in the Special issue of UNA-UK's *New World on the UN at 70 (2015)* with a longer version available on [www.una.org.uk/UN70](http://www.una.org.uk/UN70). Expanded version to be submitted by King's College London for publication in *Britain and the World* (Edinburgh University Press) (May 2016).