The United Nations – Values, Practices and Reform

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Let me take you back to the first half of the last century.

That half-century was marked by two World Wars, the first global wars in history. In between those wars people suffered from a severe economic crisis of global proportions. Those were the years of the rise of fascism, Nazism and communism, not only as ideologies, but as cruel dictatorships, with millions and millions of victims. It was the period of the Holocaust, the gravest genocide ever. It was also the century of global imperialism and widespread colonisation, wider than ever before, the heyday for the colonisers, and downright oppression for the colonised. And the disasters culminated in the dropping of the first nuclear bomb.

In short, the first half of that century was a catastrophe. A world-wide crisis seemed to take on permanent features of instability and insecurity, ever-increasing violence and brutal violations of human rights. During the 19th century people had had to endure major catastrophes as well, but in the 20th century the evil took on worldwide proportions.

What happened then? Around 1945 our grandparents built a new structure, with common values, joint institutions, agreed policy rules and shared policy instruments. World leaders negotiated a common framework, in order to meet common objectives on the basis of mutually shared values. For the first time in world history such values and rules were accepted, embraced and institutionalised globally, on the basis of a world consensus.

Maybe humankind could only change the course of world history after suffering from the ordeals of the years before. Awareness grew that these ordeals, if permitted to continue, could destroy civilisation. So, in the end, after the Second World War, the last catastrophe of the first half of the 20th century, a global consensus was reached: 'This must never happen again!' This conviction became the more vigorous when people became aware of potential global nuclear annihilation. It was a close call but, anyway, a clear decision was made to head in a different direction.

Perhaps this was only possible because of the new power relations in the world. A multiple power structure would probably have resulted in indecision and further deterioration. But – again – anyway, the United

President Harry S. Truman being greeted at the airport to attend The San Francisco Conference (25 April - 26 June 1945), the international meeting that established the United Nations. Photo: UN Photo/R

States of America, at that time the strongest world power (economically, technologically, politically and militarily) was willing to use its power surplus to back up a new world order, rather than pursuing its own short-term interest only. This was unprecedented in world history.

The decisions taken ushered in a new phase in globalisation: globalisation not only of economic and technological opportunities, but also of values and institutions, in order to serve common global objectives. Six objectives stood out. First, peace: avoiding new World Wars and major conflict escalations. Second, security: addressing international and domestic conflicts that would endanger world security. Third, stability: preventing and mitigating world economic, financial, trade and food security instabilities. Fourth, development: enabling progress, in order to improve the welfare of nations and the life conditions of their people: more food, more employment, higher income and more equal participation, it being understood that unequal access to welfare could result in conflict, violence and insecurity. Fifth, freedom, of both nations (decolonisation) and citizens, by fostering processes of emancipation and democratisation. And, finally, sixth: protection of human rights, initially mainly civil and political rights, for instance of minorities and people living under dictatorship, and later on also economic and social human rights.

There were more objectives, but these six were essential. They could not be accomplished separately. Right from the beginning it was understood that they were interconnected. They had to sustain each other. Violation of each individual objective would also endanger the others.

That is the reason why the new order was constructed as an integrated system. The new institutions had to belong to one and the same family: the system of the United Nations.

Establishing a world government was politically impossible, because notwithstanding their common objectives, nation states still had different interests. However, the institutions were given powers to address violations of common objectives. They had explicit mandates together with rules and procedures for decision-making. They acquired operational capacities and instruments to implement decisions. A modus operandi for review, appraisal and appeal was established in order to ensure compliance. All proceedings were based on the newly agreed principles and values of the system. All agreements (charters, treaties, covenants and resolutions), reached after long negotiations, formed together a system of world governance, a body of true international law. International law became the embodiment of the global values. Looking back, it would be fair to say that consensus-based international law was a breakthrough in international civilisation.

United Nations and united peoples

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The new world consensus was based on two main principles. First: sovereignty of the nation state. No country would have the right to intervene in other countries, invade them, impose its will on them and oppress their people. All countries were entitled to full autonomy, provided that they did not use this autonomy to violate the autonomy of other nations. Second: equal human rights for all. Within sovereign nation states all human beings, without any discrimination, would enjoy the same civil, political, social and economic rights. Individual nations, as well as the international community as a whole, would have the responsibility to uphold and protect these rights.

So, the sovereignty of the nation state was not an aim in itself. It should enable the state, in cooperation with other nations, to preserve the human rights of the citizens and improve their living conditions and welfare. This two-pillar system was meant to enable the peoples of the world to address root causes of conflict, insecurity, violence and war, and, thus, to work and live together in peace.

The new system had a number of built-in flaws, due to the specific way it had been established, right after the Second World War. All countries would be sovereign, but the Security Council was constructed in such a way as to allocate more powers to some of them. However, at the time it was the best system attainable. And it was a sea change, unprecedented in world history. A world consensus concerning crucial values was agreed upon, power was shared, and the common interests of humankind were recognised. That is why, I repeat, it is legitimate to call this a breakthrough in civilisation.

Moreover, the new order and its institutions scored successes. A third World War was averted. Economic reconstruction after the Second World War, together with agreed new rules in international finance and trade, made sure that the economic depression of the 1930s gave way to stability and growth. Human rights were better respected after 1945. There were still many violations, but there was progress. Unmistakably, the sovereignty of new nation states was achieved through decolonisation. In no more than about three decades most former colonies became independent nations. This was a great achievement on the part of the UN, though incomplete. Formal legal independence has to be complemented by political autonomy and economic self-reliance, promoting social development and people's welfare. This took much longer. However, the gradual emancipation of nations in the new world system went hand in hand with the growing self-esteem of their citizens. As Ryszard Kapucsinski pointed out recently, people living in a world that Westerners had looked upon as not only different but also of lesser value, with an inferior culture and backward traditions, worthy of conquest, enslavement, conversion and suppression, or, at most, benevolent uplifting from outside, those 'other' people were gradually getting a sense of their own dignity.[1] That process became irreversible.

Look at China and the Chinese, 60 years ago and today. Look at the development of India, Vietnam, Chile, Brazil and South Africa. Look at the quest for autonomy by indigenous people all around the world. Look at Africa in 1950 and at present. Look at the position of Islam, then and now.

The growth of self-esteem is steadfast. The voices are becoming louder and louder. Listen to the people of Southern Sudan, Syria, Tunisia and Egypt, this very year.

Innovation

Where is the world today, 65 years after the birth of the new order in the mid-1940s? In the life of people and their institutions 65 years is a long time. Maturity has been reached, experience accumulated, wisdom collected, retirement is drawing near. Without renewal of ideas and innovation of structures, increased rigidity looms.

Innovation is a must. Six decades represents two working generations, or, perhaps, three cultural generations. This, together with ever-faster changes in technology, in particular information technology, which alter people's perceptions of society with every new decade, implies a challenge to review and renew. Half a century ago the challenges and priorities were different

1 Ryszard Kapuscinski, *The Other*, London: Verso 2008.

from today. The technological and economic means were different. The context was different, witness for instance intensified globalisation. And, last but not least, people's perceptions have changed. What at that time most people considered desirable or necessary is no longer self-evident. Regular reassessments of the aims, character and functions of institutions is essential, if we want them to live up to expectations. Otherwise changes in their technological, economic, social and political environment will render them obsolete, and beyond the capacity of renewing themselves. This also applies to the system that was established to address the causes of the catastrophes of the first half of the 20th century.

Ever-faster changes in technology, in particular information technology, which alter people's perceptions of society with every new decade, implies a challenge to review and renew.

During the second half of that century running globalisation has blurred the distinction between developed and developing countries, between North and South. There is no distinct Third World any more in terms of economic development. Many developing countries achieved the status of emerging economies. Some of them, including the large economies of India and China, have accomplished annual rates of economic growth, which could only be dreamt of 60 years ago. The economic future of Brazil has brightened as well, and quite a number of countries in Africa and South East Asia have been able to sustain higher growth rates than during the first two decades after decolonisation.

During this period, too, the ideological conflict between East and West was overcome. The Cold War came to an end. The arms race was arrested. The fear of a third World War between nations subsided. The Group of Non-Aligned Countries, which had come into existence at the Bandung conference in 1956, has also ceased to exist, because there is no longer any reason to declare alignment or non-alignment in political terms. Countries can choose their own path towards political and economic self-reliance, without risking political intervention by powers fearing that their sphere of influence will be affected. Spheres of influence are no longer territorially based or geographically determined.

The same globalisation that grew to maturity after the fading of frontiers between North and South and between East and West, has for the first time in world history resulted in a real world market, facilitated by unprecedented breakthroughs in communication and information technology, dwarfing costs of transportation of goods, services, persons, knowledge and ideas, enabling people to disregard differences in time and place. After 1989 the sky became the limit, economically and technologically, and the rest would follow. So, in 1992, at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, a new spirit of optimism prevailed. World leaders pledged to allocate the world's resources for investment in the reduction of poverty and the preservation of the

environment. A new Agenda was adopted: Agenda 21. The 21st century would be the century of sustainable development. Profit-oriented market forces would work together with public authorities in order to demonstrate a common responsibility for the planet and its people.

Challenges ahead

However, despite unprecedented world economic growth since 1990, world poverty has hardly decreased. Moreover, our carbon-based global economic growth has resulted in faster climate change than before and has become less sustainable than 20 years ago.

At the beginning of this century world leaders endorsed the so-called Millennium Development Goals, with the aim to cut world poverty by half, in no more than 15 years. These goals will not be met. About 2 billion people still live below or just above a decent level of subsistence. Globalisation has resulted in a sharp increase in social and economic inequality within all countries. This has created a different North-South divide, between people with adequate access to markets and technology, and people who are not only exploited or forgotten, but left out on purpose, excluded from the market, without sufficient purchasing power or resources to invest, in order to increase their productivity. They lack access to modernity or to the means of living a decent life, beyond mere survival. One-third of the world's population is deprived of adequate access to one or more of the essentials: fertile land; clean and safe water; food and nutrition; non-depletable sources of energy; primary health care, to reduce maternal death after childbirth and prevent children from dying of easily curable diseases; essential medicines, to enhance life expectancy; basic education, to secure oneself a place in a rapidly changing society; and a healthy habitat. Within all countries societies have become structurally dualistic. This has resulted in a dualistic world economy. The

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North-South divide between nations, which prevailed until the turn of the century, has changed into a worldwide divide between classes, within all countries, in India and Africa as well as in Europe and the United States. Globally, about two-thirds of the world's population belongs to the upper and middle classes, or can at least reasonably expect further economic and social emancipation. One-third is living in circumstances that can only be characterised as stagnation or decline.

In all countries those people who are better-off, and wish to cultivate their comfort, lay a heavy claim on the scarce resources of our world. Water and non-renewable energy and a number of minerals, raw materials and other resources, which are essential for material economic growth, are becoming ever scarcer. This scarcity is due not only to physical limits or astronomically high costs of exploration, but also to demographic change, increased demand in general, chosen production techniques and revealed consumption preferences. All these patterns are structural. They will result in further climate change, global warming and irreversible losses of biodiversity. These scarcities and trends, together with more dense population settlements – in megacities and in ecologically vulnerable rural areas – and greater technological vulnerability, will make countries more prone to disasters. This is bound to result in more casualties. We may expect that in many parts of the world, including those where natural disasters have been rather exceptional, these catastrophes will become more frequent and have a greater impact.

This is an alarming scenario. It is further complicated by its consequences. Scarcities and inequalities will result in more conflicts and escalating violence. In many parts of the world people will have to compete for survival. Economic and social conflicts will affect tribal, ethnic, religious and other cultural disputes, and result in violent clashes. The quest of people for greater respect, larger freedom and more welfare will not halt. Polarisation is on the rise. People who have been excluded and suppressed are no longer voiceless. They have found new possibilities to communicate and make themselves heard. Globalisation will boost the pursuit of emancipation. It will also enhance the capacity for sophisticated hard-line coercion. In short: the conflict potential is mounting.

At the same time many nation states plagued by frequent conflicts are themselves becoming weaker. In Southern Asia, the Middle East, Africa and South and Central Latin America, more and more nation states find themselves in a situation of 'half war, half peace'. In these states regimes cannot cope with the conflicts. Due to globalisation, and to an unholy alliance between the trade in drugs, arms and people, mostly women, international crime is spreading and increasing. Often the regimes in these

countries feed the conflicts, either through corruption or bad governance, or because they are themselves an offspring of the conflict and take sides.

Globalisation is also facilitating the spread of conflicts to other parts of the world. Conflicts cannot easily be contained any more within a specific region. Migration, refugee movements, diasporas, together with easy access to information, unimpeded money transfers, unchecked trade in sophisticated and small arms, lead to quick and easy escalations of conflicts, including the spread of international terrorism. Moreover, proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction can no longer be prevented. Not only regimes that seek international confrontation, but also power groups in disintegrating nation states or insurgents and rebel movements, will get access to such weapons.

These contests within and between nations can be expected to result in new divides at the world level, following the North-South divide and the East-West divide in the previous century. New confrontations between major world powers, both traditional powers and newly emerging powers, are likely. A scramble for scarce resources seems unavoidable. The competition for resources that took place during the 19th and early 20th century stimulated technological breakthroughs, which resulted in the development of new production methods and the use of substitutes for traditional raw materials. However, emerging physical scarcities and a steeply rising consumer demand will make the scramble ahead of us uncompromising. Parallel to this contest we are witnessing a new confrontation between the West and the rest, in particular the Arab world and the world of Islam. This confrontation is partly cultural and religious, but no less a threat to peace and security than the scramble for resources. Cultural and religious conflicts are more difficult to contain than economic conflicts.

On top of all this we are in the midst of a world financial and debt crisis of alarming proportions. This too is due to the character of globalisation, which has resulted in the rise of uncontrolled supranational financial powers, propagating values squarely opposed to the principles which were agreed to half a century ago. Those principles of responsible economic behaviour, meant to ensure balanced international development, were undermined by unchecked market forces. They became liable to erosion when public responsibilities were replaced by private, capitalist greed. Not only are international banks and financial speculators to be blamed. International oil and mineral companies, chemical and pharmaceutical enterprises, and large plantations, tobacco companies, seed producers and food chains are also culpable. Most of these firms are heedlessly putting aside the people-planet-profit commitment of Agenda 21. The spirit has left the bottle and nobody seems to know how the resulting forces can be pushed back.

A diminishing capacity to address the challenges

All the threats and challenges I have touched upon are structural. They are larger than before. They last longer, not only because they are interconnected and reinforce each other, but also because they are not being addressed coherently. This is alarming. However, what should worry us most is not the dangers themselves, but the fact that we have dismantled our capacity to deal with them.

The two-pillar system that we created in the middle of the last century – a global values consensus and law-based international institutions putting those values into force – gave the international community the means to avert further man-made catastrophes. The system was perhaps no more than a clever self-help capacity in case of global threats, but as such it provided some form of common protection. The system functioned as a cover, a tent. Presently both poles are staggering. The values have been eroded and the institutions crippled.

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Principles of international law are being easily disregarded nowadays. Security Council resolutions are but pieces of paper. UN agencies are sidelined. Their position has been taken over by the Group of Twenty and by so-called coalitions of good will, by no means representative of all people who have sought cover in the tent. Agencies that were established to provide some form of protection against instabilities and backsliding have been wilfully weakened. International institutions with a mandate to deal with finance, capital, money, investment, food and agriculture, trade, environment, development, human rights, relief and refugees, have been played off against each other. Global common public institutions give way to transnational private market powers. Global common security and protection of human rights without discrimination have become subordinate to arbitrary perceptions of national security.

National security is regarded as a political precondition for attaining other objectives, including human rights. Security increasingly seems to be understood as an absolute and superior value, in no way dependent on other values, such as justice or equality. Absolute security is security getting out of proportion. It does not allow for nuances. It is biased towards end-of-pipe solutions, such as military means to impose security, rather than political and socio-economic means to address root causes of insecurity. National security, rather than being understood as an integral element of world security for all, has become a concept that excludes people: 'My security is endangered by you, or might be endangered by you. I don't trust you. This entitles me to exclude you. I may even deliver a pre-emptive strike.' So, attack before possibly being attacked.

The pre-emptive strike is back again in the international system. Once again, war has been given a chance.

Security, instead of being perceived as a common public good, has become a private commodity that can be bought and sold on the market. There is no guarantee whatsoever that commercial enterprises selling security will live up to principles such as respect for human rights and sustainability or that they have an interest in peace. The killing of bystanders in the name of national security – for instance with the help of drones – whether these people are innocent or not, is accepted as collateral damage. Collateral damage, when applied to people, is dehumanising. The priority of national security breeds a new culture, a culture of fear: other human beings are taken for possible enemies and looked upon as second-rate people.

Beautiful new concepts have been introduced, such as human security, human development, precaution, sustainability, the responsibility to protect, and other ideas. However, in practice they do not mean much. The political and market mechanisms of today have resulted in less precaution, less security, less sustainability and less protection. The new concepts are fashionable, but the gap between theory and practice has widened. Hypocrisy has crept into the propagated values. The same rights, liberties and responsibilities are believed to have a different meaning for other people than for they do for ourselves. Striving for security by violating the security of others has become legitimate again. The new world order that our grandparents carefully built after 1945, in order to put a halt to this, has become paralysed.

Grasping the opportunities

In order to reverse this trend we need a radical turn on two fronts: values and institutions. This is the challenge today: drastic reassessment of values and fundamental innovation of institutions, not because of the 60-year life cycle behind us, but because of impending world insecurities in the 60 years ahead, which threaten the sustainability of the earth and the social fabric of humankind.

We do not have to start from scratch. Innovation and renewal, preventing decay, include restoration and reform. Reform of institutions, strengthening of values and shoring up the world's social fabric.

Elsewhere I have written about values, their two-tongued interpretation, the disregard for international law, and the ambiguity of the

so-called common objectives.[2] In the second part of this article I will present some suggestions concerning the need to reform and strengthen international institutions in order to uphold global values.

The mandates of the Bretton Woods organisations, World Trade Organisation and also the UN Specialised Agencies have been defined in such a way that many crucial issues are not being approached in an integrated fashion.

The present UN system is no longer able to address the main challenges for humankind. UN bodies no longer represent global economic and political power relations. Decision-making procedures are inefficient and cumbersome. There are too many bodies within the system with overlapping responsibilities. The system has been plagued by turf fights and delaying tactics. The mandates of the Bretton Woods organisations, World Trade Organisation and also the UN Specialised Agencies have been defined in such a way that many crucial issues are not being approached in an integrated fashion.

The UN General Assembly, which has a comprehensive mandate, has been paralysed. It is a forum for deliberation, not intended to result in implementable decisions. The UN Security Council does take decisions, but its composition has deprived this body of credibility. The Secretary-General has no power, either to set the agenda, or to ensure implementation in those cases where decisions have been made. The UN system as a whole lacks the necessary resources to act.

The failures of the system have been documented extensively. Authors such as Erskine Childers have tirelessly pointed to the gap between Charter and practice.[3] Many studies have documented the intellectual merits of the system and its capacity to bring new ideas to the public.[4] The same studies have also exposed the failures of the system to live up to principles and expectations. Important proposals have been made to reform the system, but to no avail.[5] Already since the early 1970s within the system the need for reform has been discussed. However, these debates have not resulted in anything meaningful, so far. Too often the blame has been put on the UN secretariat, which has to operate within the boundary conditions set by nation states, rather than on the – intentionally (?) – ineffective consultative machinery of the countries themselves.

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2 See, for instance, 'Globalization, Poverty and Security', in Felix Dodds and Tim Pippard (eds), *Human and Environmental Security. An Agenda for Change*, London: Earthscan 2005, pp. 71-91; and 'Sustainable Development and Peace', in Erwin Bulte and Ruerd Ruben (eds), *Development Economics Between Markets and Institutions*, Wageningen: Wageningen Academic Publishers 2007, pp. 87-102.

3 See, for instance, Marjolijn Snippe, Vijay Mehta and Henning Melber (eds), *Erskine Barton Childers. For a Democratic United Nations and the Rule of Law, Development Dialogue* No. 56, June 2011.

4 See, for instance, Thomas G. Weiss and Ramesh Thakur, *Global Governance and the UN: An Unfinished Journey*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2010.

5 See, for instance, *Our Global Neighbourhood: The Report of the Commission on Global Governance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1995.

UN reform

In my view the following reforms would be essential:

First: Security Council reform. This is a well-known issue, much desired, much debated, but, so far, a dead end. In my view Security Council reform is a must, but it would be a mistake to believe that on its own it would be sufficient. Without complementary reforms of the UN system as a whole, some of which I will indicate below, it would not result in structures that can effectively address future global challenges.

Many proposals for Security Council reform have been made. I will refrain from detail. In my opinion an ideal system does not exist. Given the political reality that members of the Security Council can veto any proposal for reform of the Council, negotiations to this end should be guided by a combination of wisdom, pragmatism and enlightened self-interest. I would like to recall the proposal by the Commission on Global Governance, put forward in its report 'Our Global Neighbourhood': a somewhat larger Security Council, rendering this body more representative of the majority of the world population, with the major emerging economies such as India, Brazil and South Africa, as new permanent members without a veto, while the present permanent members, while keeping the right to veto, agree to use this under well-defined, very special conditions only, with a view to abolition of the veto in a decade or two. A proposal like this, though presented already more than 15 years ago, still reflects that much required combination of political pragmatism and forethought.

Second: The virtue of the Security Council is that, in principle, this body can deal with threats to international security effectively, which means (1) in a relatively small group of countries, (2) with a mandate given by all other countries together, (3) working on the basis of a body of consensus-based international law: the Charter, (4) being able to take enforceable decisions, (5) with sanctions in case of non-compliance. However, because the Security Council is essentially dealing with threats to international security of a political character, other security threats are not being dealt with as effectively: economic and environmental security threats in particular. Such threats are dealt with by other bodies, in a rather technocratic fashion, not comprehensively, and without a clear mandate to enforce the outcome of the deliberations. So, a second reform proposal would be to establish an Economic Security Council, dealing with security risks other than basically political ones. These could include threats to international security resulting from climate change, deterioration of natural conditions, environmental pollution, energy, food and water scarcities, financial speculation, amongst others. The same combination of

wise foresight and pragmatism could imply that such a council would be established as a separate chamber of the Security Council itself: with the same composition in terms of countries, similar procedures, meeting not at the level of ministers of foreign affairs or their proxies, but at the level of ministers of finance, agriculture, environment or otherwise, according to the character of the security threat concerned. A comprehensive approach would further be guaranteed by meetings of the Council at the level of prime minister or head of state. Such Charter-based summits would be the best way to get rid of the self-elected G20 meetings of today, which have no legitimacy in consensus-based international law.

Generally the Security Council deals with domestic instabilities and conflicts only if and when these are considered a risk to international security. Photo: UN Photo/JC McIlwaine

Third: generally the Security Council deals with domestic instabilities and conflicts only if and when these are considered a risk to international security. Members may decide themselves whether this is the case. In practice this means that national conflicts will be put on the international agenda at a rather late stage only. Such conflicts have then often escalated into violence or even wars. In such situations the Security Council will no longer be in the position to try a variety of political instruments in order to address the conflict. The Council will soon have to discuss whether or not to use a UN Peace Force, which is basically a military tool.

In order to deal with national conflicts in a timely way, applying a variety of diplomatic and political instruments a Pre-Chamber of the Security Council could be established. This Chamber would have to be given a general mandate by the Security Council itself. It could have a different composition. It could be requested by the Council to consider a specific situation, but it should also have the mandate to take the initiative itself, on the basis of a majority vote, not restricted by veto rights. Such a Chamber should, for instance, have the mandate to listen to appeals made by minority groups within a country, directed to the UN outside official diplomatic channels. The Chamber should have the duty to respond to such appeals. It should have the right to send missions, including fact-finding, review and appraisal missions The Chamber should have a mandate to advise parties in a country, and to mediate between them. The Chamber should have the mandate to carry out such tasks without advance consent from the Council. The Chamber should report to the Security Council and make recommendations to the Council if it wishes to do so. The Security Council, could, of course, decide at a certain point to put the issue on its own agenda.

In my view a new instrument of this kind would enhance the capacity of the UN to deal with conflicts at an early stage, without risking being carried towards a choice between intervention and not acting at all. This

is so often the situation today, leaving room for individual countries to intervene themselves, thereby enlarging the international security risk involved. Such a Pre-Chamber or 'porch' could be seen as a mirror of the Peace Building Committee, which was established some years ago to deal with so-called post-conflict peacebuilding and which functions more or less as a 'Post-Chamber'. Moreover, because of a rather thin line between pre- and post-conflict situations, the UN security system could benefit from cooperation between the two chambers.

However, UN peacebuilding is still falling short. This is not only a matter of time and experience. It is also a matter of resources. Peacebuilding in post-conflict situations requires a holistic approach: demobilisation and disarmament of soldiers, demining, security sector reform, capacity building for new administrations, physical reconstruction of infrastructure (roads, houses, power stations, sanitation and water supply systems) damaged by the war, return and resettlement of internally displaced people, start-up of primary health care facilities and schools, state- and nation-building. All this can be considered reconstruction, rebuilding or recovery of physical and social structures that have been destroyed or severely damaged. Such reconstruction should precede development and requires a different timescale and approach. Development is a gradual process, home-grown and bottom-up. Sustainable development of a society presupposes a basic endogenous capacity which can guide the process. When that capacity has broken down it has to be rebuilt before development can take its course. Reconstruction should be fast, and requires, much more than subsequent development, action from outside and top-down. If reconstruction after violence does not start quickly, people become disappointed and frustrated: former soldiers, farmers, urban dwellers, war victims, widows and orphans, youth in general. When people no longer expect that peace will really make a difference, violence can easily return: looting, crime and insurgency. Development means that people take their own destiny in their own hands, but to be able to do so, they will need some elementary tools and some basic structure. When such things have been taken away they have to be restored. Restoration can start off being given by a strong hand from outside and should gradually, but surely, pass into the hands of the people within.

If reconstruction after violence does not start quickly, people become disappointed and frustrated: former soldiers, farmers, urban dwellers, war victims, widows and orphans, youth in general.

There is no well-functioning international structure with a mandate and resources to assist reconstruction. The World Bank, which initially, after the Second World War, was established as the Bank for International Reconstruction and Development, after its first 10 years of existence renounced its reconstruction mandate. UN agencies have focused on either relief or development, sector by sector, but not on reconstruction.

The UN organisation, which is supposed to act as an umbrella, which should ensure cohesion, has become utterly weak. So, strengthening and reform of the United Nations would require also the establishment of a UN agency with a mandate to assist reconstruction of countries in post-war situations. This agency should be given adequate resources and should be able to act quickly. It should not be constrained by procedures that are essential for endogenous development policymaking – local ownership, people's participation, and tendering of transactions – but which impede timely reconstruction. The UN Peace Building Committee could be transformed into an agency with adequate powers and resources. This is my *fourth* proposal for reform.

Fifth: In addition to this the UN needs to reconsider its mandate in the field of relief and humanitarian assistance. We may expect more violent conflicts within individual nation states. Due to their complex character (environmental, economic, political and cultural at the same time) they may be lengthy and will make result in large numbers of victims over long periods of time. More nations will lose their capacity to address such conflicts. More states will fail. It is also reasonable to assume that the world will be plagued by more natural disasters than in the past. This is partly due to climate change or other natural processes, such as earthquakes, drought, desertification, storms and floods. Partly these natural disasters are manmade: overgrazing, deforestation followed by erosion and landslides, pollution, and nuclear disasters. Together, such disasters will claim more victims, due to patterns of demographic change and human settlement. So, there will be an increased and lasting need for delivery of relief and humanitarian assistance. In most cases this cannot be left to individual countries alone. Within the United Nations, agencies such as the World Food Program, OCHA and UNHCR do have a mandate to provide humanitarian and refugee and food assistance, but they lack resources. Moreover, increasingly they have become accustomed to acting in this field as brokers: they collect finance and channel this to non-governmental agencies, which carry out the relief work in the field. These agencies do a terrific job, but together they are not able to cover the terrain. They lack equipment, for instance transportation equipment and engineering facilities, which have to be collected from elsewhere, sometimes commercially, as the case of road trucks, sometimes from the military, and always come too late or without proper coordination. There is an urgent need to build up a relief capacity that is well coordinated, directly available for use, adequate in terms of size and financial resources, which can be spent directly, instead of having to wait for responses from donors to a new appeal. Most victims fall in the first days of a disaster and this requires direct action, more so than in the field of development or reconstruction.

Of the course it will not be feasible for the UN to establish such a capacity by procuring and storing all possibly necessary equipment in advance. For the UN to posses and renew such a capacity itself would be unrealistic. It would also be inefficient. However, a UN agency could plan the need for such a capacity, available for use world-wide, in a flexible manner, ensuring direct access, allocation, use and disposal as soon as this becomes necessary. It is essential that this agency, though not owning all the necessary means for relief in case of disasters, should have these under its own control, for instance on the basis of legal agreements with countries and enterprises, which can be invoked directly should the need arise.

Sixth: Behind this there is a general problem: the UN has mandates and procedures of consultation and decision-making, but hardly any capacity to implement decisions. This applies both to humanitarian assistance and to peacekeeping. So, for instance, after the Security Council has decided to send a UN Peace Force to a country in conflict, the UN Secretary-General has to go around the world requesting countries to put troops at his disposal as Blue Helmets. Sometimes this takes months or even more than a year, which renders the whole operation ineffective. The UN should have a police and peacekeeping military force of its own, not a large one, but a core force, which can begin operations as soon as necessary. There should be not only be staff officers in the field but also 'boots on the ground'. The force could then be complemented with additional troops from UN member countries, in order to bring it up to the strength required, as determined by the UN Security Council in the resolution concerned. In order to establish such a standing UN force it should be possible for citizens of individual countries to apply for a military or police job in the UN, in the same way as they can at present apply for a position as an international civil servant.

Seventh: A common feature of the three previous proposals is that the United Nations should have adequate capacity to implement decisions made by countries that meet in the governing bodies of the system. A logical consequence of this requirement is that the United Nations should also be able to raise its own resources, in addition to mandatory and voluntary contributions from member states. It is an old proposal, which has not been welcomed by member states, because members prefer to keep the system under some form of control and they can do so easily by limiting the budget. However, a global system able to respond effectively to global challenges needs to have its own global resources, rather than depend entirely on the goodwill or the whims of individual governments. The present international financial crisis offers a unique opportunity to reconsider the proposal by James Tobin to tax short-term

international financial transactions. An alternative would be to enable the global UN system to levy a tax on the use of global public goods. The financial means raised in this way could be considered general resources, to be spent without restriction, in order to strengthen the capacity of the system as a whole. Alternatively, these resources could be dedicated to programmes that will demand even greater attention in the future than in the earlier decades of the system: reconstruction, humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping and the preservation of global public goods.

The Secretary-General position has weakened since the untimely death of Dag Hammarskjöld. The Secretary-General is as strong as the system permits him to be.

Seen above on the presidential rostrum of the UN General Assembly are U Thant and Dag Hammarskjöld, the second and third Secretary-General. Photo: UN Photo/MB

Eighth: All this would imply a stronger position for the Secretary-General of the United Nations. That position has weakened since the untimely death of Dag Hammarskjöld. It is partly due to the wish of the major powers to limit the executive powers of the Secretary-General. Partly, too, it is the result of the erosion of the capacity of the UN system itself: the Secretary-General is as strong as the system permits him to be. A strong personality can try to rise to the occasion, but the selection of candidates for this position does tend to result in personalities less strong than Dag Hammarskjöld. Those who make an effort, and who try to be independent from the major powers, risk not getting a second term. So, the system could be strengthened by giving the Secretary-General one term only, but longer than at present, say seven years.

In addition to these proposals with regard to the UN system proper, I would like to make two reform proposals related to present global economic issues: unemployment and international finance. To avoid any misunderstanding: the main world economic problem of today is the persistent poverty in which about a third of the world's population lives. This is to a large extent due to bad and unjust policies on the part of individual countries. It is also due to the workings of the global capitalist system. For many years questions of poverty have been very high on the agenda of the United Nations. This has resulted in dedicated programmes of the UN's specialised agencies, in new concepts such as human development, in the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals, meant to reduce world poverty by half over a period of 15 years. The challenge is a matter of implementation and it is difficult to see how further reform of the UN system itself could bring this implementation any nearer.

However, there are two new issues that would require institutional reform. In many parts of the world during the last two decades economic growth has been higher than expected. Poverty persists, which means that inequality is growing. One of the consequences of the present pattern of economic growth and inequality is that in many countries a huge and ever-growing army of young boys and girls is unemployed, without

any prospects of finding a job. This applies to equally to unskilled, lower skilled and educated youth. The phenomenon will have dramatic economic, social and political consequences: people falling back into poverty, social decline instead of emancipation, a strong propulsion to migrate, political frustration and radicalisation, increased instabilities among nations, including emerging economies. The establishment of a Global Employment Facility – reform proposal number *nine* – could help steer things in a better direction: job creation through programmes combining labour-intensive public works with investment in small-scale private enterprise, vocational (re-)training, the provision of credit without collateral, protection of small-scale local ownership of land, forests, fishing grounds and other natural resources, support for local enterprise at risks of being driven out of the market by transnational capital, and South-South cooperation. In many emerging countries, particularly in Asia, the introduction of new technologies is offering promising opportunities for younger people to get jobs. Other developing countries, for instance in North and West Africa, Latin America and the Middle East lag behind in this respect. A new international facility, with large funds for a multitude and a variety of small national programmes, decentralised and attuned to local circumstances, could help these countries modify the increasingly dualistic nature of their economy. Such a facility could be allocated a time horizon of a few decades only, assisting countries in a transition from skewed economic growth towards robust employment opportunities for the majority of their people.

Finally, reform proposal number *ten*: broadening the powers of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The international financial crisis of recent years is twofold. First: irresponsible speculative behaviour on the part of large transnational private banks and financial institutions, aiming to make money with money, rather than financing investment, production and trade in the real sphere of the economy. This has resulted in insurmountable debts and an inextricable network of pure financial relations, footloose, and risking the stability of the global financial system as a whole. In order to cover these deficits, to save the system, and to avoid negative consequences in the real sphere, public resources had to be withdrawn from the same real sphere. This led to a second financial crisis: the large budgetary deficits of many countries, and public debt, which could only be addressed by cutting expenditures. This was bound to have further negative consequences in the real economy: reduction of investment and growth, high unemployment and a deterioration of social welfare. Moreover, the same financial sector that had been saved by public money turned against countries, governments and citizens, by speculating against the weakest, and further weakening them by

demanding an ever-higher price for the financing of public debt, which had been made to carry the consequences of boundless private greed.

A true world public institution with a mandate to correct both governments and transnational commercial banks when they act in conflict with internationally agreed rules and principles could help avoid crises and reduce irresponsible behaviour. So far, the IMF has carried out this function only vis-à-vis nation states, if and when these were plagued by structural deficits in their balance of payments. IMF credits, and as a sequel, World Bank loans and international development assistance, would only be given on the condition that the country concerned changed its detrimental policy. The IMF has been criticised – rightly so – because of the specific conditions it has imposed on countries – developing countries only, and always more or less the same straightjacket adjustment conditions, forcing these countries to cut both development investments and social expenditure. However, this criticism would not justify dismantling the institution. On the contrary, an independent supranational institution with powers to correct behaviour that may destabilise the world economy is an asset. Such an institution should, however, have these powers vis-à-vis all countries: countries with sustained and large structural balance-of-payments surpluses as well as countries in deficit, including those with a key currency, such as the United States. All these categories of countries risk destabilising the world financial markets. The IMF should, moreover, have similar powers vis-à-vis transnational banks. Private commercial banks have grown too large to be controllable by national governments and national central banks alone. The global economy needs a global bank of banks.

An expanded IMF in the present chaotic circumstances would be a great step forward in the effect it could have on world financial markets, provided that the institution was really independent and impartial. However, by itself it would not be able to avoid world economic crises. World financial markets have increasingly been intertwined with markets where investment and production decisions are made regarding scarce commodities: energy, food and raw materials. International financial instability has direct consequences for trade and employment, and thus also for poverty, inequality, political unrest and security. Sustained stability in all domains of the global economy would require strengthening global institutions and international law, and a combination of reforms, such as those proposed above.