

MILESTONES ON THE ROAD TO UN REFORM

Kofi Annan

Reforming the United Nations is as important a task today as it has ever been in the past. We need ideas and sustained commitment, not only from governments but also from educational institutions, think tanks, and talented individuals dedicated to the continued improvement of our global community. In my report, *In Larger Freedom*, issued in March 2005, I identified several areas of policy where I believe a global response to global challenges is badly needed, and also proposed ways to make the UN itself more effective—both as a forum for, and as an instrument of, international diplomacy and cooperation. Many of my suggestions were endorsed in principle by world leaders at the UN Summit in September, but we now face the challenge of implementing them in practice.

Looking back over the past year, what I find most encouraging is the progress we have made in our approach to economic and social development—the issues that matter most to a large majority of the world's people. The build-up to last year's Summit stimulated both donor and developing nations to make commitments which, if fully implemented, should greatly improve the world's chances of reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. These commitments represent important initial steps aimed at eliminating poverty and disease, enabling women to play their essential role in development, and protecting the environment. At the Summit, all member states clearly endorsed the MDGs, and donor countries have promised a doubling of aid to Africa over the next five years. Many of them have also committed themselves to concrete timetables for

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increasing their overall development assistance to 0.7 percent of annual Gross National Product.

During the Summit, President Bush made a potentially historic offer to give poor countries the opportunity to trade their way out of poverty. I too consider trading opportunities no less important as enablers of development than are financial assistance or debt relief. In fact, I believe that so long as developing countries are denied the chance to compete fairly in the international market, our fight against poverty will be ineffectual. Thus, the Doha Round of trade negotiations at the World Trade Organization (WTO) takes on crucial importance. If they succeed in eliminating unfair tariffs and agricultural subsidies, and the other commitments made last year are fulfilled, there is a real hope that future generations will remember this as the moment in which mankind finally liberated itself from the vicious cycle of global poverty.

In other areas where change is needed, I would say that we got our foot in the door, but that only with a lot more pushing will we actually get through it, and convert the general statements in the Summit's outcome document into specific, tangible improvements in the performance of the United Nations—improvements that make a real difference in the lives of people around the world.

The pushing and shoving between governments and their representatives is now going on—and will continue to go on—in the General Assembly. But governments generally move forward best when they are under pressure from behind, from domestic constituencies who care profoundly about the issues involved—in this case, people who care about international security, about human rights, and about successful nation-building in war-torn countries.

Let me illustrate this point by looking more closely at four areas: terrorism, human rights, peacebuilding, and management reform.

TERRORISM

At the Summit, UN member states agreed on a clear, unqualified condemnation of “terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, committed by whomever, wherever and for whatever purposes.” However, it is now up to the General Assembly to turn this condemnation into a comprehensive convention against international terrorism, together with a comprehensive strategy for fighting terrorism at the global level. The Summit agreed that this strategy should be developed from the “five Ds” that I had identified in my March 2005 speech in Madrid: *Dissuading* disaffected groups from choosing terrorism as a tactic to achieve their goals, *Denying* terrorists the means to carry out their attacks, *Deterring* States from supporting terrorists, *Developing* State capacity to prevent terrorism, and *Defending* human rights in the struggle against terrorism. By developing these individual components into a comprehensive global counterterrorist strategy, we can provide nations and regional bodies with the resources to respond to terrorist threats in a consistent and coordinated fashion.

HUMAN RIGHTS

At last, sixty years after the liberation of the Nazi death camps, thirty years after the massacres in the Cambodian killing fields, and ten years after the horrors of Rwanda and Srebrenica, all member states of the United Nations have now accepted their responsibility to protect their own populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. Moreover, they have expressed their readiness to take collective action through the Security Council in a timely, decisive manner, when peaceful means are inadequate, and national authorities manifestly fail to protect their own populations.

Taken together with the decision to create a new Human Rights Council and to double the regular budget of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, this is an historic break-

through. But abstract commitments will never be a substitute for the political will that governments and civil society must muster if the human rights of people around the world are to be effectively upheld. The Security Council already faces a moment of truth in its handling of the crisis in Darfur. And whether the Human Rights Council marks a real improvement over the old Commission on Human Rights will depend in large part upon the countries elected to it by the General Assembly on May 9. It will be some time before we know whether we have really succeeded in putting human rights where they belong—on par with development and security as the UN's primary areas of responsibility.

Similarly, it is up to member states to ensure that the new Democracy Fund is properly resourced. On this, I am very grateful to the U.S. for the leadership it has shown, and seventeen countries have already pledged over \$49 million.

PEACEBUILDING

During the past fifteen years, the world has been shocked by the grim spectacle played out in countries that appear to have emerged from bitter, destructive conflict only to slip back into chaos and ruin because the international community has been too quickly distracted by other crises. One reason for this unfocused behavior has been the absence of an international institution specifically devoted to peacebuilding, as opposed to peacemaking or peacekeeping. I am therefore greatly encouraged by the decision to fill this institutional void by establishing a Peacebuilding Commission, backed by a small support office within the Secretariat, a voluntary Peacebuilding Fund.

The 2005 Summit's outcome document called for the Peacebuilding Commission to be operational by 31 December 2005, but as it happened the General Assembly did not adopt a resolution establishing it until 20 December, and we are still negotiating with member states on the budget for the Peacebuilding Support Office. The tangible results we hope for depend, once again, on

governments being prepared to follow up their decisions with sustained political attention and adequate financial resources.

MANAGEMENT REFORM

The Summit also asked me for proposals on the conditions and measures necessary to enable me to carry out my managerial responsibilities effectively, and for an assessment and recommendations to help ensure that the UN's budgetary, financial and human resource policies, regulations and rules respond to the current needs of the Organization and enable it to conduct its work efficiently and effectively. This gave me a long overdue opportunity to propose, in a report delivered to the General Assembly on March 7, a radical overhaul of the Secretariat, which—if implemented—will adapt it to the needs of today's UN. That UN is no longer simply a place where meetings and conferences are held, but has become a worldwide operational organization, with not only peacekeeping soldiers but police and judicial advisers, humanitarian relief workers, election organizers, human rights monitors, and many other kinds of specialists bringing help to war-torn or disaster-stricken countries on almost every continent.

Meanwhile the Assembly itself is embarking on a review of all mandates more than five years old, which should enable member states to decide on their priorities, condense and rationalize their instructions, and ensure that the UN's resources—both human and financial—are deployed to carry out the tasks most urgently needed now, rather than delivering routine and often overlapping reports in response to requests issued long ago. My staff and I have supplied them with an electronic data-base from which to work, and in which—for the first time—they can actually identify the nearly ten thousand mandates, stretching back over sixty years, that we are currently supposed to fulfill.

In short, I believe we now have the opportunity to transform the UN into a competent and transparent instrument in the hands of its members. But these measures will not implement

themselves. They require further decisions by the General Assembly—decisions that will be made only if we can convince a broad majority of member states that a more efficient UN will better serve the peoples of all its member states, and be more accountable to them.

While this past year's achievements represent a great step forward for the UN, the outcome on some issues is undoubtedly a disappointment. It was a disgrace that our leaders could not agree to a means with which to tackle one of the most urgent challenges of our time: the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction. Persistent efforts to make progress in this area are absolutely essential. I am working with a group of countries, led by Norway, to make some headway on this issue. It was also disappointing that world leaders could not agree on Security Council reform. They have made a commitment to continue trying for a decision on this. They must show that they take that commitment seriously.

To summarize, we have achieved some significant changes in the way the nations of the world confront issues of development, peace and security, and human rights, and in the way the UN itself operates. Yet, many decisions taken in principle have yet to be implemented in detail, and in some key areas, the essential consensus has still not been found. It is now up to all of us—the Secretariat, the representatives of governments, and members of civil society who are in a position to influence governments—to build upon and complete the decisions that our leaders have taken. We must have what President Franklin D. Roosevelt, whose vision was so central to the founding of the United Nations, called “the courage to fulfill our responsibilities in an admittedly imperfect world.” From pragmatic beginnings, there can emerge a visionary change of direction. That is our opportunity and our challenge.