

# The United Nations and the Twenty-First Century: The Imperative for Change

Report of the Thirty-First  
United Nations of the  
Next Decade Conference

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## **Executive Summary**

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The United Nations is currently engaged in a reform process that is more urgent than any previous one. The urgency stems from a pervasive lack of political and financial support from its members. Last year's fiftieth anniversary celebration prompted several private studies on the future of the United Nations. The General Assembly also created a series of working groups charged with developing proposals for reform of the General Assembly, the Security Council, and UN finances, and for implementation of the secretary-general's agendas for peace and development. A separate working group on the UN system as a whole is to report to the General Assembly with a summary of the other working groups.

## **The Challenge**

Is the United Nations important or not? If member states believe the United Nations can operate in ways that serve national interests, it will become a greater focus of international collaboration. If not, then the United Nations will continue to be treated poorly. The first question becomes whether the United Nations is a political priority for the international community.

About forty to sixty member states of the United Nations seem to believe it should be a priority, and they share a sense of urgency about the task for reforming the organization. Others are less enthused either because they do not think the United Nations is in bad enough shape to merit the effort, do not sense the urgency (believing the United Nations' finances are not as desperate as they are), or basically like it the way it is.

If members decide to revitalize the organization, they will need to provide four interrelated building blocks: a common vision for the future, political recommitment, a reasonable reform process, and adequate financial resources.

## **Vision**

When the UN Charter was signed in 1945 there was clear consensus on the organization's role, but the world has changed dramatically since then. Member states need to contemplate how global developments have affected the relevance of the United Nations and decide how it might be changed to better serve contemporary needs. They need to identify the kind of international organization they want and the specific agenda it should follow. Unfortunately, there is a profound lack of consensus on these most fundamental issues, with much of the breakdown occurring along North-South lines.

Participants at the United Nations of the Next Decade Conference discussed each of the United Nations' major areas of operation:

Maintenance of International Peace and Security. Most participants see the United Nations continuing its focus in this area, but they recommend that the organization pay greater attention to the rise

of intrastate conflict and complex humanitarian emergencies. Others, noting that security is increasingly thought to encompass more than military security, believe the United Nations is excessively preoccupied with traditional forms of maintaining peace and security.

**Economic Development.** The United Nations needs to continue this emphasis, and, some say, increase its efforts. In the 1970s the United Nations was a major player in development aid, but over the last two decades its role has become less important. Today the active participation of private investors, nongovernmental organizations, and the Bretton Woods institutions are profoundly changing the development assistance picture. In crafting a new vision and agenda for the United Nations, the UN development community will need to assess how to “add value” to the work of the private sector and international financial institutions.

**International Law.** Building international norms of behavior, setting standards, and negotiating international legal instruments are important functions that must be preserved and strengthened. Adding enforcement mechanisms such as ad hoc tribunals to prosecute war crimes and, possibly, a permanent international criminal court could advance the rule of law, although national sovereignty limits how far the United Nations can go.

### **Leadership—The US Role**

The importance of a solid and predictable relationship between the United States and the United Nations was frequently emphasized. At present, the situation is poor. Many at the United Nations doubt the sincerity of US intentions in the withholding of funds and demanding of reform. Though there are real federal budget pressures, most believe the US nonpayment is politically, not economically, driven.

It was suggested that the United States needs to clear the air about its intentions and take some extraordinary action that would demonstrate its commitment to the United Nations and to UN reform. One participant specifically proposed that the US secretary of state convene a conference of the forty to sixty key countries

actively engaged in the reform discussion. This could create a positive climate for reform and would signal to member states that UN reform is not business as usual for the United States.

It was also suggested that the political leaders of the middle powers take more of a leadership role by investing sufficient time and resources to revitalize the United Nations. To date, they have been relatively disengaged.

## **The Process and Substance of Reform**

Although there is an intergovernmental reform process underway through the working groups, participants discussed whether real reform could take place absent consensus on major substantive issues. Their opinions differed on that question.

Most participants believe the working groups have contributed significantly, but may be reaching the end of their utility. Some said the groups should open up to input from groups outside the United Nations. However, it was noted that while outside groups would bring in new perspectives, they would not necessarily help bring closure to the working groups' tasks. Ultimately, it is up to governments to reach agreement on reforming the United Nations' organs and operations.

**The General Assembly.** Although the General Assembly is the primary deliberative organ of the member states, it has become increasingly marginalized within the UN system in the last five to ten years. A shorter agenda and more focused debate could help revitalize it. Some participants suggested that the General Assembly take part in a broader debate on the United Nations' strategic priorities and its programmatic strengths and weaknesses. How to empower the General Assembly to do this, however, is far from clear.

**The Security Council.** In recent years the Security Council has increasingly passed resolutions that are politically expedient but cannot be enforced for lack of resources, their basic impracticality, or lack of political will. The council's work, some suggested, might benefit from a professional staff that monitors world events and alerts the Security Council when needed.

The Secretariat. The United Nations' administrative organ needs to do fewer things better with less money. Among other problems, the Secretariat is poorly organized and, absent sufficient direction from the top, tends to delegate up. The United Nations' extremely detailed budget effectively proscribes the secretary-general from transferring funds and staff into priority activities. Additionally, member states engage in micromanagement of the Secretariat, harming integrity and professionalism. Ironically, while member states tend to become involved in the minutiae of departmental management, they give inadequate or contradictory policy guidance concerning the content of UN programs. Participants also noted that reform of the Secretariat requires a commitment to the process by the secretary-general.

### **Financial Resources**

The current method of financing the United Nations is broken. Many member states are chronically late in paying their dues, or fail to pay them altogether. The United Nations is in its worst crisis to date. As of mid-1996, shortfalls in the regular and peace-keeping budgets are \$830 million and \$2.1 billion respectively, and US arrearages account for the majority of the shortfall. The organization is now being pushed to the limit of its resources and is on the verge of insolvency.

Many participants agreed that what the United Nations needs is predictable, not necessarily more, financing. Also, the General Assembly and Security Council need to stop issuing unfunded mandates.

While some urge greater reliance on voluntary contributions or innovative financing methods, most member states oppose a change from the assessments now levied to finance the United Nations' core activities.

### **Energizing Reform**

The working groups have performed a useful purpose, but their energy is sapped. Several things could breathe new life into the current reform process:

- The five principal powers, along with key leaders of the non-aligned group, need to become significantly more engaged.

- A temporary moratorium on debating issues that require reform of the UN Charter might help.
- The working groups could be consolidated and a determination made whether some packaging of issues is desirable or possible.
- The president of the General Assembly, whose term is ending, could call a meeting with the bureaus of the working groups to assess the progress, decide the next steps, and brief his successor.
- Informal processes or mechanisms parallel to the working groups could also be created to exert needed pressure from the outside.

Meaningful and lasting reform of the United Nations will require, at a minimum, a substantial investment of political will, compromise, patience, perseverance, and resources. It will also require overcoming fears of loss of power and of the unknown. Member states still differ on what the United Nations should be and what it should do. Until a political consensus is reached, no reform process will result in lasting and effective change.

# Participants

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## Conference Chair

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## Rapporteurs

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Affiliations are listed for identification purposes only. Participants attended as individuals rather than as representatives of their governments or organizations.



# Opening Remarks

Richard H. Stanley  
President, The Stanley Foundation

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Welcome to the Stanley Foundation's thirty-first conference on the United Nations of the Next Decade. We are here to explore the topic, "The United Nations and the Twenty-First Century: The Imperative for Change." Our task is daunting.

Significant change in the United Nations is indeed an imperative, something that the international community dare not avoid or evade. The shrinking world cries out for effective global institutions.

At the same time, we perceive that the United Nations is today in grave difficulty, in real danger of declining into irrelevancy as did the old League of Nations. This drives the imperative for change. Yet the UN reform process is moving slowly and erratically. There is no certainty that it will yield positive results.

Our goal this week at Salishan Lodge is constructive dialogue that will add impetus to UN revitalization and give focus and energy to the reform process. We will discuss both the process and the substance of revitalization. Thus far in the UN reform debate, the process of change has received little attention. Yet the process selected for airing difficult issues and developing consensus will have a major influence on who is involved, the level of attention, and the ultimate outcome. And clearly, consensus on substance is a necessary precondition for actual change.

## **Need for Global Institutions**

Effective global institutions are essential as we approach the twenty-first century. The world has changed, becoming much more interconnected and interdependent. The role of the nation-state is changed and changing. Many of its historical roles are being assumed by transnational enterprises, organizations, and associations. Even the most powerful nation-states no longer control their

own destiny. They, too, must collaborate internationally and cede authority and responsibility to global institutions.

The survival issues of the future are global, not national, in character. Problems associated with environmental degradation, population growth, migration, poverty, economic and social development, and depletion of natural resources are not defined by national boundaries. They must be addressed globally.

Similarly, economic, financial, and monetary issues have become global rather than national. Business enterprises are increasingly globalized. “National economy” has become an oxymoron. The need for global institutions in this area is well recognized, although most of the institutional development is outside the central United Nations. Recently, the new World Trade Organization has been created independent of the United Nations, supplanting the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. The Group of Seven and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development have been significant economic institutions for many years. The remaining Bretton Woods organizations—the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund—were established before the United Nations and continue to carry on their significant work in economic, financial, and monetary matters. Although they are, technically, specialized agencies of the United Nations, they operate very independently and their linkage to the United Nations is remote at best.

On the critical issue of international security, the United Nations has been more heavily involved and has had numerous successes. The work of the United Nations has helped delegitimize international aggression. Today any nation attacking another can reasonably expect international intervention, perhaps including military action. The United Nations has also contributed greatly to strengthening concepts of human rights and is moving toward machinery and norms to deal with those who perpetrate crimes against humanity. While the United Nations deserves much credit for this progress, it cannot be sustained or advanced by a United Nations weakened by lack of support or considered irrelevant.

The competence of individual nation-states to address these and other global issues is low and declining, underscoring the need for

effective global institutions. And the United Nations remains the only institution with the universality and breadth to address global problems. Like anything else, if we don't support and strengthen it, it will wither and die.

## **The United Nations in Difficulty**

As we all know, the United Nations is experiencing tremendous difficulties. First, it must rely on adequate member support. When the members agree, the organization is effective. When they disagree or fail to provide legitimacy and support, it falters.

Today the United Nations' member nations do not speak with one voice on the role and priorities of the United Nations. They disregard the fact that the United Nations is a weak treaty organization that is no stronger nor more effective than the resolve and support of its members. They give the United Nations impossible tasks, micromanage its operations, and ignore the need for support equal to the tasks assigned.

One obvious symptom of the lack of member support is the United Nations' increasingly serious financial crisis. The organization has proven to be creative in response to chronic late payments of dues from member states and in bridging cash flow shortages. It may have been too adept for its own good, because in some quarters, the Secretary-General's admonitions to pay past dues have fallen on deaf ears. Today, however, arrearages genuinely threaten the United Nations' viability as an organization. As of mid-May, member states owed over \$2.8 billion to the United Nations—\$1.1 billion to the regular budget and an additional \$1.7 billion for UN peacekeeping operations. This has led to depleted cash reserves, raids on peacekeeping accounts, ballooning accounts payable, and great uncertainty about the extent to which the United Nations can fulfill its responsibilities.

At the same time, demands on the United Nations have increased. With the end of the Cold War, the United Nations was finally in a position to fulfill its mission as originally intended, and the success of the United Nations in the gulf war further raised those expectations. A new sense of cooperation emerged between former Cold War adversaries resulting in a string of UN successes from El Salvador to Namibia. More recently, however, member states have

abused the United Nations; it has been used as a convenient dumping ground for intractable conflicts which member states themselves were unable to solve. Members hand these crises to the United Nations, but do not provide necessary resources or authority to address them adequately. The United Nations becomes a convenient scapegoat for the failed policies of nations and, in the end, loses credibility and erodes member nation support.

The United Nations is not well managed. Some argue that complaints about mismanagement and waste are based more on antipathy toward the United Nations than on any real problems in the organization. While there may be some truth to that, it should not be used to deflect legitimate concern about UN mismanagement. Today even ardent supporters of the United Nations are calling for new management practices. They see a selection process for professional posts that is overly political, member nation micro-management of the Secretariat, intergovernmental bodies that are unproductive or redundant, a Secretariat that is inefficient and overly bureaucratic, and inadequate coordination between the United Nations and its specialized agencies, where lines of authority overlap and lines of communication are weak.

Finally, the world is in the midst of fundamental change, rendering the UN structure increasingly obsolete. The United Nations is based on the principle of sovereign equality of all nations. It was developed in a time when nation-states ceded little control over what they considered their internal affairs and sought to inject their national agendas into and maintain their influence over the United Nations. The founders based the structure on the assumption that threats to international peace and security would arise primarily between nation-states and that the victors of World War II would continue as world powers. Today it is an organization noted for its insufficient transparency and unrepresentative, redundant, and extraneous organs. In the United Nations' defense, it has often, as in the case of peacekeeping, acted creatively despite its organizational limitations. However, if the United Nations is to fulfill the founders' intentions, its structure must be updated.

This problem is particularly severe given the fundamental changes occurring in the world. It is almost a mantra of the international community to talk of globalization of trade and finance, of how we

have become a knowledge society where communications and information flow freely, of how nonstate actors and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) increasingly influence global decisions. The problem is that the United Nations and its members seem not to be listening. The United Nations has not responded to these changes—at least not adequately. In a world where most conflicts are now intrastate in nature, the United Nations remains organized to deal with interstate conflicts. In a world where economic globalization has created a host of influential nonstate economic actors, the United Nations remains state-centered. In a world where NGOs and civil society are becoming more influential, the United Nations has found no place for them.

With lack of member support, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and the fact that the United Nations was designed for a world which no longer exists, it is no surprise that the United Nations often fails when called on to perform in today's crises. The confluence of these trends makes this effort at revitalization different and more urgent. A failure to change the United Nations *now* means the organization may slowly slip further into inaction, inefficiency, and irrelevance.

### **The Reform Process**

Today nearly everyone agrees that something must be done to improve the United Nations. National governments, NGOs, and individuals are spending time and money to seriously examine UN improvement. Unfortunately, while there is near unanimity among these groups that the United Nations should be revitalized, there is little shared understanding of what this means and even less agreement about what should be done and how to build support for revitalization by the public and at the highest levels of national governments.

UN reform is not a new topic. Almost from the day the Charter was signed, there have been calls for reform and Charter changes. In fact, this conference series began with a focus on strengthening the United Nations. In 1965, immediately following the United Nations' twentieth anniversary ceremonies in San Francisco, the Stanley Foundation convened the first United Nations of the Next Decade Conference. Participants then, as now, were asked to move beyond the short term and consider what kind of United Nations would be necessary in ten years.

In 1965 conference participants called for a greatly strengthened United Nations and a revised Charter. They recommended giving greater powers to the General Assembly with a revised voting system appropriate to the strengthened United Nations, a strengthened international court of justice empowered to interpret the UN Charter and decide all international disputes, a world development program, a permanent UN peace force and an effective UN inspection system to supervise general and complete disarmament, a reliable and adequate revenue system, universal UN membership, and safeguards to prevent abuse of power by the United Nations which included reserving to member states and their peoples those powers not granted to the United Nations. Participants called for a Charter review conference to implement these changes.

Needless to say, the calls for revitalizing, strengthening, reforming, or changing the United Nations have continued over the years. Countless papers have been written, meetings have been convened, and various working groups have considered many familiar proposals regarding financing the United Nations, changing the composition of the Security Council, streamlining the Secretariat, finding an effective role for the Trusteeship Council, reenergizing the General Assembly, and other matters. While much of this work has been creative and thoughtful, with few relatively minor exceptions these calls have gone unheeded and the United Nations has muddled through from year to year.

The current reform efforts began with a high level of expectation. Leadership and support by influential members, combined with a recognition of the critical need for revitalization, promised real change. It was anticipated that consensus reform proposals would be tabled, perhaps implemented, by the time of the United Nations' fiftieth anniversary. The pace of the current working groups is uneven. There is no assurance that significant consensus proposals will be presented this fall at the fifty-first General Assembly. There is scant evidence of involvement of the highest levels of national leadership in the reform process. It seems to be lagging.

Why is this? There is no lack of ideas. Many revitalization proposals have been advanced and discussed. While nearly everyone talks about it, is there real commitment for revitalization? Are the

highest levels of national government sufficiently involved in and leading the revitalization process? Let us recall that the United Nations was originally conceived at the highest level with people like Roosevelt and Churchill intimately involved. Is there a common vision of what reform means? Or are there fundamental differences in philosophy and approach which are not being addressed? Is there sufficient political will to address these issues?

My biggest concern is that the commitment to the current UN reform effort has not yet reached a critical mass and level of attention that will propel a successful outcome. I fear that, as the months go by, the United Nations will continue to be left to muddle through, becoming increasingly irrelevant.

### **Energizing the Process**

How can the reform and revitalization process be energized? I hope that this can be done without a major crisis or collapse.

At this stage, there is no common vision on what should be done. Questions regarding what should be the core functions of the United Nations, what should be the role of principal organs, what powers and authority should be ceded to the United Nations, the extent to which the United Nations should have financial support independent of voluntary national contributions, what should be the United Nations' decision processes including voting and transparency, and what should be the authority of the secretary-general and the structure of the Secretariat are all involved in this discussion. Ideas on these and similar subjects are divergent.

We might start by asking in broad terms what kinds of duties a global organization should perform and what criteria we should use to measure a successful reform. Should an international organization serve people or nation-states? What authority and autonomy are we prepared to give it? To what extent should it focus on international peace and security? On environmental protection and economic development? On human rights and humanitarian matters? On building and strengthening international norms?

How will we know whether or not we have been successful? When the organization is more democratic or its operations more transparent? When it is more efficient and less expensive, or when more

reliable financing mechanisms are established? When programmatic redundancies have been identified and removed, or when certain organs are entirely eliminated? Once we have reached a common understanding, we will be able to discuss more effectively the range of specific proposals to strengthen the United Nations.

What process is needed to develop a common vision? Is the present working-group process sufficient or does it need to be augmented or modified? Can change be agreed and implemented through the existing structure of the United Nations or should it be bypassed with a United Nations Charter review conference called in accordance with Article 109 of the Charter? If member nations are unable to develop a common vision for radical change, to what extent can change be implemented by the Secretariat and will member states support or permit this? How can leadership be generated for the revitalization process?

## **Conclusion**

When we reach a common vision for the United Nations, agree on proposals to strengthen the United Nations, and establish a process for achieving these, we will be able to create a more vital United Nations. We will go nowhere, however, if we skip over the fundamental, and probably most challenging, task of building a common vision for the United Nations. If we do, the United Nations will continue to be a dumping ground and scapegoat for the failures of nation-states. It will continue its trajectory toward irrelevance and collapse.

The world today differs greatly from that of the past. Yet the challenge to reform and revitalize the United Nations remains. Let us, during the next five days, set out together on a new ambitious path. Let us strive not merely to tinker with the United Nations, but to create a new vision for the organization, one unconstrained by past limitations, equal to the challenges of the twenty-first century, and embraced by a common understanding of the future. I look forward to our discussions.



# **The United Nations and the Twenty-First Century: The Imperative for Change**

Over the years scholars, experts, and policymakers have repeatedly studied and analyzed how to make the United Nations function more effectively. Six major reform efforts have been mounted since the organization was created more than fifty years ago. Some were clearly more successful than others. The current reform effort is imbued with a greater sense of urgency, primarily because it has emerged in the wake of difficulties of a substantially more serious nature than what the United Nations has confronted in the past. The United Nations now suffers from a pervasive lack of political and financial support by member states. Some member states regret the organization's seemingly inadequate responses to international crises. The United Nations' effectiveness is hampered by organizational mismanagement and an institutional structure designed for another era. Perhaps most debilitating to the United Nations is the sheer magnitude of its financial crisis—it has already significantly compromised the United Nations' ability to deliver services traditionally provided to the world community. Altogether, these systemic problems have placed reform high on the United Nations' agenda.

The fifty-year anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, celebrated in 1995, provided an impetus to assess the performance of the organization by groups outside the United Nations. Various task forces and commissions, from both the public and private sectors, evaluated the health of the United Nations and produced a plethora of studies and recommendations regarding how to improve the organization. Within the United Nations, however, the current reform effort came about with less fanfare. With the end of the Cold War, there was growing optimism that the United Nations could fulfill its original purposes. At the same time, several countries began to lobby openly for a change in the composition and voting power in the Security Council. Then in 1995 the United States unilaterally decided to reduce its share of peacekeeping costs. In response to these developments, the General Assembly

established a series of open-ended working groups charged with developing detailed proposals for reform of the General Assembly, the Security Council, and UN finances, and for better implementation of the secretary-general's agendas for peace and development. The General Assembly also created a special working group on strengthening the UN system as a whole whose task is to prepare a report for the General Assembly summarizing the proposals made by all the working groups. The report is to be presented to the General Assembly in the fall of 1996.

Against this background, in June of 1996 the Stanley Foundation convened the thirty-first conference on the United Nations of the Next Decade at Salishan Lodge on the Oregon coast, bringing together a mix of high-level international policymakers and experts to discuss UN reform and revitalization. In attendance were various permanent representatives to the United Nations including several who lead some of the General Assembly high-level, open-ended working groups on reform. The goal of the meeting was to assess the current reform effort and to consider how to achieve meaningful progress toward UN revitalization in both the short and long terms.

## **The Revitalization Challenge**

As one participant commented, either the "UN is important or it isn't." If member states believe the United Nations can operate in ways that serve national interests, it will become a greater focus of international collaboration. If not, then the United Nations will continue to be treated, another participant colorfully noted, as "a stray cat to throw bricks at." Thus the first question becomes



*Rapporteurs Marti Rabinowitch and  
Mary C. Theisen*

The rapporteurs prepared this report following the conference. It contains their interpretation of the proceedings and is not merely a descriptive, chronological account. Participants neither reviewed nor approved the report. Therefore, it should not be assumed that every participant subscribes to all recommendations, observations, and conclusions.



*The UNND conference features informal, round-table discussion sessions and ample opportunity for individual conversations and social events in a relaxed setting.*

whether the United Nations is even a political priority of the international community. Does anyone care? Do a sufficient number of people perceive the United Nations as an institution worth the political and capital required to reshape it? Is it merely a dumping ground for problems the international community refuses to confront? Are states now inwardly focussed to a degree that they no longer recognize common interests? Are the current political and administrative problems of the United Nations temporary? If not, can they be corrected or are they beyond repair? Is the current debate on management reforms concealing a deeper skepticism over the utility of multilateral cooperation?

Enthusiasm for reform is mixed. On the one hand, revitalizing the United Nations appears not be a priority for some member states because, quite simply, the organization may not be viewed as “bad enough” to merit the investment. Had member states felt a compelling need to reform the institution, one participant asserted, “they would have done so by now.” Some member states may also feel no urgency because they fail to recognize the full extent of the current crisis; they believe the United Nations can muddle through its cash flow

problems and political setbacks as it has in the past. Finally, there are some member states so attached to the power, perks, and money they currently derive from UN membership that they wish to preserve the system as it is; for such states, reform will not be a priority until it promises alternative rewards.

On the other hand, there is a core group of forty to sixty member states who do, in fact, share a sense of urgency. The United Nations cannot solve all of the world's problems, but, for these member states, the United Nations is worth preserving for what it has accomplished and what it could accomplish in the future. The United Nations has aided the international community through its programs and diplomacy. It has served and can continue to serve serious geopolitical and socioeconomic purposes. It has built constituencies for global problems and has provided a vehicle for ameliorating global rivalries as power relationships among nations shift. It is a convenient arena to address issues that nations cannot, or will not, confront on their own and is the only established forum where the governments of the world can interact on an equal footing. With the demise of the Cold War, there was a sense of optimism that member states would be able to improve and strengthen multilateral collaboration and cooperation. Some believed it would be possible to achieve at last the original goals of the Charter; i.e., to advance the cause of international peace and to improve the human condition.

However, should member states decide to save the United Nations and to craft an organization which is responsive to today's global problems, they will need to provide the necessary and interrelated building blocks. They will need to work cooperatively to develop a common vision for the future of the organization and to adopt an agenda that reflects that new vision, to generate both leadership and solid political recommitment to the United Nations, to agree on a reform process that is reasonable and doable, and to secure and maintain adequate financial resources. Without vision, leadership, a plan, and funding, the current UN reform effort will not deliver the changes needed for the survival of the organization.

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***The United Nations...has served...serious geopolitical and socioeconomic purposes.***

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## **A Common Vision**

The first building block of reform is to reach consensus on the basic purpose and goals of the organization. The need to rally around a common vision and clear agenda was addressed repeatedly throughout the conference. When the UN Charter was signed in San Francisco in 1945, a clear consensus existed. The nations of the world were committed to creating an organization that would help prevent another world war and avoid another global depression. The language of the Charter reflected this consensus, identifying the purpose of the organization as “to maintain international peace and security” and “achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian nature.” The Cold War, however, thwarted the realization of these goals.

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***The first building block: consensus on the basic purpose and goals of the organization.***

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Moreover, the world has changed enormously since 1945. Colonialism and bipolarity are no longer part of the geopolitical landscape. The enduring threat of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and the growing trade in conventional arms represent enormous dangers. Causes of conflict are increasingly intrastate, rooted in ethnic and religious differences and in economic inequalities and political injustices. World population has skyrocketed; an estimated eight billion people will inhabit the planet by 2025 and more than 95 percent of that increase will occur in the poorest communities. The globalization of production, trade, and investment has dramatically increased the extent to which national economies are integrated. National boundaries have become increasingly porous with ideas, technology, and people as well as drugs, crime, terrorism, and disease. The mix of players on the global stage now includes global corporations, nongovernmental and citizen organizations, state and local governments, regional organizations, and the media. And advances in communications and transportation have revolutionized the way people interact. Each new development has created its own set of problems, rendering the fulfillment of the Charter’s lofty purposes much more difficult.

Member states need to contemplate how these global developments have affected the relevance of the United Nations and

decide how the organization might be changed to better serve contemporary needs. The governments of the world need to identify the kind of international organization they want and the specific agenda it should follow. Unfortunately, there is a profound lack of consensus on these most fundamental issues plaguing the current debate over UN reform and revitalization. Serious differences of opinion exist regarding the role of the United Nations in today's world. Much of the problem is rooted in a lack of meaningful dialogue among member states, particularly between the North and South. This veritable breakdown in communication between North and South is rooted in a deep sense of mistrust and a keen awareness of the growing disparity between rich and poor. It is a divide that runs deeper than the East-West conflict. If a meaningful dialogue were possible on the purposes of the United Nations, it might, some participants speculated, build bridges that would be important beyond the United Nations.

**Maintenance of International Peace and Security.** Traditionally the United Nations has played a role in the maintenance of international peace and security, and most participants agreed it should continue to serve this function. At the same time, they recommend that the organization pay greater attention to the rise of intrastate conflict and complex humanitarian emergencies. Moreover, in the absence of meaningful military capability, the United Nations needs to decide whether to significantly enhance its conflict prevention and conflict resolution capability. Member states might resist this, fearing unwarranted intrusion into their internal affairs.

It was also cautioned that, even if there is general agreement that a significant problem exists, it does not follow that the nations of the world would be willing or able to do anything about it. Other participants believed the United Nations was excessively preoccupied with the role of maintaining international peace and security to the detriment of other goals established in the Charter. One participant even argued that overly ambitious notions of the United Nations as world policeman, preserving peace and security, are not realistic and should be cast aside altogether.

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*Serious differences of opinion exist regarding the role of the United Nations in today's world.*

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It was noted as well that security is increasingly thought to encompass more than military securi-

ty; it has become grounded in a concern for the security of *people* as well as the security of states. Nonmilitary threats to human security are those that affect whole populations, cross national borders, cannot be defeated by military means, and require international cooperation in order to be solved. Any list of these global issues includes environmental and population problems, infectious diseases, refugee migrations, narcotics, and international terrorism and crime. If the United Nations is to be effective in fostering peace and security, as security is now understood, it will necessarily need to address these new dimensions.

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*...security  
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**Economic Development.** Almost all participants agreed that the United Nations should continue to emphasize economic development among its members. Many of today's conflicts are caused by inequality and poverty which are persistent destabilizing forces. As disparities increase between those who prosper and those who barely survive, the Charter's goals to ensure "social progress and better standards of life" remain elusive. In this vein, some participants strongly advocated the primacy of development over traditional peace and security issues. In the 1970s the United Nations was a major player in development aid but over the last two decades its role has become less important. Today the active participation of private investors, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the Bretton Woods institutions is profoundly changing the development assistance picture. In crafting a new vision and agenda for the United Nations, the UN development community will need to assess how to "add value" to the work of the private sector and international financial institutions. Traditional notions of development assistance are inadequate in a world where private investment and other nongovernmental economic involvement have become increasingly influential. As one participant commented, the United Nations should be setting ground rules for the process of globalization and for the economic management of development.

Concern was also expressed about the practice of conditioning development aid on the achievement of the United Nations' goals

of promoting democracy, protecting human rights, and establishing good governance. According to one participant, aid is an issue of survival and as such should not be conditioned on whether a country is democratic. Others disagreed, arguing that a central purpose of the United Nations is to encourage democratic, social, and political development as well as economic development. The challenge is to devise ways to improve people's lives while preserving their freedom.

**International Law.** There was also considerable support around the table for continuing the UN role in the advancement of international law. Building international norms of behavior, setting standards, and negotiating legal treaties and other agreements among nations are important functions that must be preserved and strengthened. Institutions that seek to enforce compliance, such as the International Court of Justice and the ad hoc tribunals created to prosecute war crimes committed in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia—as well as the proposed permanent international criminal court, should it become a reality—were all viewed as important means of enhancing the rule of law globally. Some argued that adherence to the principle of sovereignty limits what the United Nations can do, particularly in the face of political disagreements. At the same time, however, it was noted that nations continue to cede sovereignty to international institutions on particular issues or problems in order to share in the resulting good and with the understanding that all will be treated fairly and equally.

### **Leadership and Commitment**

Developing a common vision regarding the basic purpose and goals of the organization, and actually realizing those goals, clearly will not be easy. Accordingly, the UN reform and revitalization effort will also be dependent on strong leadership from member states and the secretary-general, as well as solid political recommitment by member states to the organization. A political commitment to multilateralism—a commitment that moves beyond words to encompass deeds—was seen as critical. As participants noted, however, political commitment to the United Nations is soft. A number of middle powers and developing countries have cooled toward the organization; but it is the lack

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***UN reform  
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dependent  
on strong  
leadership....***

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of support from the United States that is the most serious problem at the moment.

**US Leadership.** The importance of a solid and predictable relationship between the United States and the United Nations was frequently emphasized. Some argued that change in the system will simply not be possible without US leadership and US commitment. The long period over which the United States has withheld funds from the organization has created a deep sense of frustration throughout the United Nations, and there is much suspicion about US intentions. The United States' refusal to pay its dues is also viewed as hampering the reform effort. Despite the United States' promise to pay \$1 billion in past dues to the organization this year and the US Mission's detailed proposals for UN reform, questions remain about the true nature of US intentions. In short, are they honorable or not?

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*The United States' refusal to pay its dues is viewed as hampering the reform effort.*

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Several other circumstances complicate the US picture. The country is presently in the midst of a divisive internal debate over political purposes and the kind of global leadership role it will exercise in the years ahead. In reassessing its place among nations, US involvement in the United Nations has been subjected to increasing scrutiny. The US presidential election has both intensified this internal debate and polarized the dialogue between the administration and the US Congress, plunging most issues, including US support for the United Nations, into the maelstrom of partisan politics. In light of the US domestic political environment, tense US-UN relations may be attributable not so much to US frustration over the United Nations' performance in recent years as to the highly politicized and frequently hostile interplay within the executive and legislative branches of the government. The US-UN relationship is also on shaky ground because of the serious budgetary crisis that has preoccupied the administration and Congress. It was noted that the United States' foreign affairs budget, from which the United States funds the UN regular budget and peacekeeping activities as well as other international organizations, is slated for a one-third reduction in funding over five years—from \$21 billion to \$14 billion. Partly because there is no consensus on political objectives, these budgetary pressures have shaped and will continue to shape the US

government's choices with respect to the United Nations in the foreseeable future. What is certain, according to one participant, is that these numbers will make it impossible for the United States to fund the United Nations at the levels it has in the past.

Notwithstanding US federal budget pressures, most participants perceive US arrearages as a political problem, not economic. The continuing nonpayment of past dues is viewed not as a consequence of budget cutting in Washington, DC, but a reflection of a pervasive lack of support for the United Nations and its programs. By mid-1996, 74 percent of the budgetary shortfalls of the UN regular budget and 50 percent of the peacekeeping budget were attributable to US arrearages. Several participants variously characterized this refusal to pay—which, ostensibly, is designed to compel the United Nations to reform itself—as “negative leadership” and “assertive unilateralism,” irritating friends and foes alike. Altogether, the shortfalls have sparked a budget crisis within the UN system unsurpassed in its severity, obliging the United Nations to borrow extensively from the peacekeeping account to prop up the Secretariat and a myriad of UN programs and agencies. Many participants agreed that this failure to pay may have serious consequences for the world leadership position of the United States. It was suggested that the United States needs to clear the air about its intentions and take some extraordinary action that would demonstrate its commitment to the United Nations and to UN reform. One participant specifically proposed that the US secretary of state convene a conference of the forty to sixty key countries actively engaged in the reform discussion. This has the potential of creating a positive climate for reform and it would signal to member states that UN

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reform, is not business as usual for the United States and that the United States intends to play a leadership role.

Given the current political stalemate within the United States and its apparent inability to lead, the immediate question becomes how to generate leadership in the short term and rekindle the needed commitment to the United Nations. As several participants commented, the United Nations was created at a time when governments were looking for ways to prevent world wars and the best and

the brightest were actively involved. There was strong, high-level leadership behind the initiative. That level of leadership unfortunately does not exist today, and yet it will be crucial to save the organization. It was suggested that the middle powers assume a greater leadership role—if not permanently, then at least in the short run. It was also suggested that principals from member states' national governments invest sufficient time and resources to UN revitalization. Thus far, they have been relatively unengaged in the process. Others hoped that through the process of focussing attention on ways and means of solving today's concrete global problems, the international community may be able to generate new leadership and commitment.

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*...principals from member states...[should] invest sufficient time and resources to UN revitalization.*

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### **The Process and Substance of Reform**

Participants then turned their attention to the process and substance of reform. They assessed the current reform effort, particularly the progress of the open-ended working groups, and explored specific problems and issues concerning the General Assembly itself, the Security Council, the Secretariat, and the office of the secretary-general. There was considerable agreement that the process of reform was as important as the substance. Participants also discussed what could be reasonably expected with respect to the pace of reform. The United Nations' reform initiative needs a road map with a clear, easily recognized destination. The working groups, which represent the only existing intergovernmental process, must come to closure on what is doable and demonstrate that progress is being made in addressing functional inadequacies throughout the UN system.

There was disagreement whether concrete steps to reform the organization could be taken without prior agreement on a common vision of the purposes of the United Nations. Some participants felt it would be impossible to reform the United Nations without achieving political consensus on substantive issues first. What the United Nations is attempting to do now, one participant observed, is define its purpose *through* the reform process. This was seen as misguided; in the absence of consensus, negotiations on the details of reform will continue to have the potential to slip

into doctrinal debates. Instead, if the agenda is right and leading member states are committed, the Secretariat and other UN organs will more readily submit to reforms.

Others disagreed, asserting that the absence of an organizing vision need not prevent change from being made where it can in the short term. The recommendation to solve substantive issues before launching reform assumes that the United Nations is capable of reforming itself through one comprehensive reform plan, as though reform were an event, not an evolutionary process. In fact, through the long history of UN reform, only incremental structural changes have been possible and none occurred in the context of a grand design. To the extent notions of sovereignty have not evolved quickly enough to allow member states to radically change the nature of their international commitments, incremental change is preferable. In the end, regardless of the energy put into it, each wave of reform activity resulted in only a few changes in the operations and structure of the organization. Given this perspective on UN reform, member states should not view modest, incremental reforms as insuffi-



*The format of the conference stimulates thinking and helps develop relationships that enhance understanding.*

cient; nor should incremental reforms be viewed as an indication that the United Nations lacks a common vision.

**The Working Groups.** Participants assessed the progress of the high-level working-groups. They agreed on the need to open the process to the outside and discussed whether the working-group process should be supplemented with additional informal mechanisms to energize the groups and serve as a catalyst for closure.

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*Most felt the working groups have already accomplished what they could.*

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Most felt the working groups have already accomplished what they could. While their effectiveness at defining the issues and narrowing differences should not be minimized, consensus, for the most part, has eluded them. Many substantive issues inhibiting closure can only be solved at the highest levels of governments. Further complicating the process is the fact that some member states have adopted positions described as nonnegotiable, particularly with respect to the United Nations' role in development, the expansion of membership of the Security Council, and the scale of assessments. Most agreed that the group working on the financial situation of the United Nations will remain at an impasse until the United States either pays or commits to paying its arrearages. Similarly, consensus in the working group on equitable representation on the Security Council may not be achieved until certain political decisions are made at higher levels. The progress of the working group on strengthening the UN system (or, as one participant named it, the "mother of all working groups") received mixed reviews. One participant viewed the deliberations of this last group as duplicative of the proceedings of the Fifth Committee (administrative and budgetary) of the General Assembly and suggested that the Fifth Committee take over its responsibilities. A clear majority was reluctant to rely on the Fifth Committee for such an undertaking. Most participants agreed that this reform is not routine; the issues are exceedingly sensitive, and reform cannot be treated as business as usual.

Some participants questioned whether the open-ended nature of the working-group process has impeded consensus-building. Working groups of 185 countries might be democratic to the point

of being inefficient. The inclusive nature has made it cumbersome and has led to an “enormous amount of repetition” in debate. There is also the tendency of groups of member states to focus on their “common denominator” positions, not unlike what occurs in General Assembly debates. This proclivity for “groupism,” some participants believed, has regrettably caused blocks of member states to talk past one another all too frequently. One participant suggested that the working groups be replaced by smaller representative committees whose membership would be appointed by the General Assembly. Others opposed this proposal, maintaining that, although the inclusive nature of the working groups has not facilitated consensus-building, there is no other politically feasible approach. In this view, smaller groups are no substitute for open-ended ones. The openness may be difficult to manage, but it is the only politically legitimate way to talk about UN reform.

While the working groups have, on balance, contributed to the UN reform process, most agreed the process has become wearisome and closure is doubtful. However important they are to the reform process, the working groups are not sufficient. Most agreed it would be beneficial to supplement the working-group process with input from groups outside the United Nations. A few participants suggested holding hearings for the public where interested NGOs would have formal input to the deliberations. Exposure to outside observation could discourage posturing within working groups and limit the use of unhelpful negotiating tactics and even place

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***However important they are...the working groups are not sufficient.***

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needed pressure on groups to work more cooperatively. An added benefit, one participant noted, would be a much greater awareness and even legitimization in the eyes of the public of what the reform groups are doing.

Some participants cautioned that opening the working-group process to the public could backfire; people might become even more disenchanted by what they see, further undermining public

support for the United Nations. Others argued that it is unrealistic to expect that by opening up the process, the working groups will be better able to arrive at consensus; only governments can make the necessary decisions, and the extent to which the civil society can influence those decisions varies from country to country. In the

end, the true test of the working-group process will be whether they can come to closure. Most agreed that outside pressure will be critical.

**The General Assembly.** Although the General Assembly is the primary deliberative organ of the member states, it has become increasingly marginalized within the UN system in the last five to ten years, especially with respect to the United Nations' peacekeeping activities. This marginalization has occurred largely to the benefit of the Security Council. The member states, the secretary-general, and the Secretariat tend not to engage the General Assembly in constructive ways and, as a result, the General Assembly's impact on policy decisions has diminished. Participants suggested ways the General Assembly could be resuscitated and regain its relevance. To bring the secretary-general in closer contact with the General Assembly, one participant recommended that the parliamentary tradition of "question time" be introduced allowing the General Assembly regular opportunities to question the secretary-general about his or her policies and activities. The General Assembly might also open its annual sessions with a "State of the Union" address by the secretary-general, followed by a response from the permanent representatives. Hopefully, this would generate some meaningful debate and provide useful policy guidance to the secretary-general.

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*...only governments can make the necessary decisions....*

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Most participants also agreed that General Assembly agendas are too crowded. Certain issues are discussed in plenary sessions year after year with little or no resolution. One participant expressed amazement that the General Assembly was able to accomplish anything given this "blizzard of words." It was suggested that such topics be dropped from the General Assembly's agenda to conserve time and resources and to enhance both its credibility and influence on policy. Instead of "free-for-all" agendas, the General Assembly might schedule a limited number of thematic debates. For example, in the fall of 1996 the General Assembly might hold a structured debate on UN reform. The topic obviously would be timely and the importance to the organization unquestionable. If the idea of thematic debates is adopted, a few participants suggested that the General Assembly could become an alternative to the seemingly endless array of UN-sponsored international conferences. This would

enhance the visibility of the General Assembly while demonstrating to the public a concern for cost savings. Others resisted this idea, arguing that international conferences serve a number of important educational and consensus-building objectives and that an improved process for selecting topics and sites needs to be established.

Some participants suggested that the General Assembly take part in the broader debate on the United Nations' strategic priorities and its programmatic strengths and weaknesses. Ideally, the General Assembly should be involved in evaluating the mandates of the programs which it has created over the years, prioritizing those that are important and identifying those that merit termination or change. How to empower the General Assembly to do this, however, is far from clear. One participant suggested the creation of an independent "clearinghouse" or commission to assist with the evaluations and to make suggestions for consideration by member states.

**The Security Council.** Participants discussed needed changes in the operations of the Security Council. In recent years the Security Council has increasingly passed resolutions that are politically expedient but cannot be enforced for lack of resources or because

of their impracticality. A fair number of Security Council resolutions concern matters that many believe do not merit the attention. Perhaps more important, the Security Council often neglects to seek compliance with its resolutions. In earlier days, Security Council resolutions carried great political weight, now they are greeted by member states with considerably less interest. Altogether, these practices undermine the impact and credibility of Security Council activities. Participants attributed part of the problem to the fact that the Security Council lacks a professional staff that consistently monitors world events and alerts the Security Council when needed. With adequate staffing, the Security Council should be able to pass resolutions that are better informed and thereby more compelling. It was suggested that the now defunct Military Staff Committee assume

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*Some suggested that the General Assembly take part in the broader debate on the United Nations' strategic priorities....*

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the duties of a professional advisory staff to the Security Council as a whole. Others suggested that the secretary-general's military staff publicly provide military information and advice to the Security Council prior to the council's taking decisions on military matters.

Participants also discussed the need for a mechanism to coordinate activities throughout the UN system for a strategic plan for the organization and for minimizing duplication of efforts. The United Nations is a vast structure with many organs, agencies, programs, committees, and research groups. No single entity monitors the activities of all. Currently, the Fifth Committee has oversight authority, but its influence has been minimal at best. The greatest risk associated with creating a new UN coordinating body is that system-wide coordination would become an end in itself. Member states must be vigilant that any coordinating body is established for better management, not micromanagement.

**The Secretariat.** In this time of financial constraints and soft political support, participants believed it urgent that the Secretariat focus on doing fewer things better and with less money. Currently, the Secretariat's effectiveness is stymied by poor management and "too much structure."

*Organization and Management of the Secretariat.* Departments and their personnel need to be rationalized and reorganized along strategic lines to rid the organization of duplication and waste and to improve the Secretariat's efficiency. The Secretariat staff's tendency to delegate everything upward inhibits timely action and would be unnecessary if direction from the top were clearer. It was believed that most of the staff would be eager to accept greater direction from the top manager. Without a clear expression by the secretary-general of his or her managerial intent for the Secretariat, any agenda for reform will be incomplete.

Several participants urged that the secretary-general's flexibility to manage Secretariat personnel and the budget be expanded. Presently, the secretary-general does not have the authority to transfer per-

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*Participants discussed the need for a mechanism to coordinate activities throughout the UN system....*

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sonnel or funds into priority activities. The regular budget is extremely detailed, precluding the transfer of funds between salaries (which now consume 70 percent of the UN budget) and nonsalary expenditures. The regular budget should have fewer line items and each should relate to overall funding of programs, not the details of the expenditures. Inflexibility in the use of resources ties the hands of the secretary-general and, ultimately, undermines the work of the United Nations.

Participants also discussed the merits of creating a deputy secretary-general post to serve as second-in-command with overall management responsibility. The deputy secretary-general would act as the resource manager of the UN system, freeing the secretary-general to concentrate on international diplomacy. While some fully supported the idea and saw in it many possibilities, others expressed strong reservations. Some were concerned that creating the post could spawn more political infighting at the United Nations. It was cautioned that, were the deputy secretary-general to work exclusively on management and administration, some states would most likely insist on the creation of an additional deputy secretary-general post for economic and social issues as

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***Several participants urged that the secretary-general's flexibility to manage Secretariat personnel and the budget be expanded.***

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well, since economic development is their priority. Eventually, some speculated, pressures could mount for the creation of *three* deputy secretaries-general—one each for administrative, economic and social, and political issues—and for a system of equivalencies in their appointments. Additionally, it was feared that the creation of one or more deputy secretaries-general could harm the operations of current UN agencies because the directors general of such agencies would be tempted to focus their energies on lobbying for the deputy secretary-general positions. Others were concerned that a deputy secretary-general for management would undermine the authority of the secretary-general and relieve him or her of accountability, or simply would be ineffective in improving the United Nations' management.

*Relations Between the Secretariat and Member States.* Good relations between the Secretariat and member states are crucial for the reform process. Until these intergovernmental relations are improved, efforts to reform the structure and operation of the UN system, including the Secretariat itself, will be futile. Unfortunately, their relations continue to be dominated by a mentality of us vs. them. Lack of accountability on the part of Secretariat staff and member states' penchant for micromanagement are the most significant problems. During the Cold War the Secretariat was "horribly manipulated" by member states and marked by a system of vast patronage. One participant characterized their relationship as that between "master and servant" where the Secretariat would let itself "get bullied." Whatever the cause, it is clear that a culture has developed where integrity and professionalism are in short supply and member-state micromanagement has increased. The only solution is to demand greater professionalism and to institute a system of genuine accountability. The challenge between the member states and Secretariat would be to return to a better balance in their relations. The Secretariat should not be treated as an extension of governments' national policies; member states should respect the fact that the Secretariat reflects the interests of the UN system as a whole. The secretary-general, it was noted, could play a significant role in setting the appropriate tone to the relations between the Secretariat and the secretary-general.

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***Good relations between the Secretariat and member states are crucial for the reform process.***

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The Secretariat also lacks sufficient policy guidance. Theoretically, the Secretariat is charged with implementing policies created through dialogue between the member states and the secretary-general. Ironically, while member states tend to get involved in the minutiae of departmental management, they give inadequate or contradictory policy guidance with respect to the content of UN programs. As a result, the Secretariat does not have a clear direction on what the member states hope to achieve from the various programs, and the current review process has little impact on the content of UN programs. Member states need to clarify their policy direction to the Secretariat.

*The Secretary-General.* It is axiomatic that the UN system cannot be revitalized and reformed without the active leadership and solid commitment of the secretary-general. As the United Nations' chief operating officer, the secretary-general is in a position to shape the agenda of the organization; foster consensus-building; and garner the support from member states, the General Assembly, and his or her own Secretariat staff. Some participants were of the opinion that, with respect to UN reform issues, the current secretary-general has remained relatively aloof, noting that, to date, he has had little meaningful interaction with the working groups despite the fact that his presence has been greeted with "anticipation and enthusiasm."

It was pointed out that the secretary-general does possess the authority to institute certain reforms of—indeed, even vastly reorganize—the Secretariat without the involvement of member states. Changes which do not require revisions of the UN Charter technically can be made by the secretary-general. The secretary-general has already instituted some changes which the General Assembly has accepted, such as slimming departments. But much more could be done.

### **Financial Resources**

The last building block for UN reform and revitalization is to secure reliable and adequate financing. The United Nations today relies on both assessed and voluntary contributions by its member states. While the UN regular budget and peacekeeping activities are funded through member-state assessments, which are based on each state's ability to pay, UN specialized agencies receive a significant portion of their funds through voluntary contributions. Under the current financing system, fifteen major donor countries supply 85 percent of UN funds. There is little disagreement that the system is inadequate and rife with problems. Many member states are chronically late in paying their dues, or fail to pay them altogether, which has subjected the United Nations to frequent financial crises through the years. The United Nations is in its worst crisis to date. As of mid-1996, shortfalls in the regular and peacekeeping budgets are \$830 million and \$2.1 billion

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respectively, and US arrearages account for the majority of the shortfall. The organization is now being pushed to the limit of its resources and is on the verge of insolvency.



Many participants agreed that what the United Nations needs is predictable, not necessarily more, financing. As one participant stated, "There must be a better way for the member states to influence the United Nations other than through money." In this connection, participants discussed the close links between the planning and budget processes. One participant observed that there are two models of securing political controls over the executive: first, the corporate model, where appointees are given a plan and a budget and are held accountable for the performance; and, second, the socialist model, where there exists a parallel political entity functioning alongside the executive monitoring the executive throughout implementation. The United Nations' current budget process resembles the socialist model with member states scrutinizing the budget decisions of the Secretariat, often intervening late in the budget planning process. Although the corporate model might be preferable, it would be difficult to institute in the political environment of the United Nations. In any



event, ways must be found to reasonably integrate the planning and budget processes. For example, member states might provide the Secretariat with more guidance at the preliminary stages of the budget process to minimize misunderstandings and disagreements later.

The financial problems of the United Nations, particularly of the Secretariat, are also exacerbated by the tendency of the General Assembly and the Security Council to issue unfunded mandates. The General Assembly approves, on a regular basis, mandates which the Secretariat is unable to fulfill without additional funding. (The mandates are so numerous that the Secretariat has had difficulty merely counting them!) The Security Council also issues unfunded mandates, primarily calling for UN involvement in expanded or additional peacekeeping activities, without ensuring that additional resources are made available to implement them. This unfortunate practice puts financial pressure on other parts of the UN system and, ultimately, undermines the credibility of the organization.

There was also some discussion of greater reliance on voluntary contributions as distinguished from assessments. While some program activities benefit from significant voluntary contributions, in the end it is assessed contributions which provide the essential base for ongoing financial stability. Suggestions have been made regarding alternative sources of funding, but most member states are strongly opposed to such schemes. Thus financing remains a problem, and the situation is unlikely to improve in the absence of political commitment by member states to the organization.

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### **Energizing the Reform Process**

As noted, the open-ended working groups have performed a useful purpose: they have engaged a number of countries in serious debate on reform, identified the major problems, and helped clarify national priorities. But it is also clear that the reform process has bogged down and fatigue has set in. Several participants expressed concern that the groups might give up and settle for too little. The work of the groups is taking much time away

from normal business, and there will be a temptation to declare victory prematurely. Pressure is building for them to come to closure to demonstrate that something has been accomplished.

Nearly everyone around the table agreed that the working groups, and the reform process generally, must be energized. There is a strong sense that, if only for the short term, a catalyst is needed to regenerate enthusiasm for change and to reach an agreement on some package of reforms. Making it clear that this particular reform effort is more than business as usual will be extremely important. Linkages are needed between the working groups, and serious dialogue is required to determine if there are trade-offs that can be made. It is time to begin the negotiating process.

The five principal powers, along with key leaders of the non-aligned group, need to become significantly more engaged. A first step, one participant proposed, is for states to declare a temporary moratorium on debating issues that require reform of the UN Charter, such as reform of the Security Council; Charter revisions would be far too difficult at this stage. Instead, states should focus on areas where there is agreement and identify what specific action is possible. In this regard, it was suggested that the working groups be consolidated and a determination made whether some packaging of issues was desirable or possible.

The General Assembly, the secretary-general, and member states can make considerable progress in the short run in assessing which UN programs are effective and which are not. This assessment will require developing a better understanding of the limitations of international institutions and identify which global problems most appropriately lend themselves to international solutions. This question is best answered before programs are consolidated and tasks assigned to the various UN programs. Given the broad range of activities the United Nations is involved in, this dialogue will take time and money.

Participants generally agreed that, even in the absence of a new political compact or vision for the organization, actions can be taken in the short run to jump-start the reform process. For exam-

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*The five principal powers...need to become significantly more engaged.*

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ple, it was suggested that the president of the General Assembly, whose term is ending, call a meeting with the bureaus of the working groups to assess the progress, to decide on the next steps, and to brief his successor. The primary benefit would be to draw the groups together in a new format without creating problems of legitimacy and transparency. A consolidated working group might then work toward crafting preliminary reform packages that would integrate compromises made among the groups. Working groups where consensus-building is no longer possible might be brought to closure.

Informal processes or mechanisms parallel to the working groups could also be created to exert needed pressure from the outside as well. What such alternative processes might be and how they might relate to the intergovernmental working-group process need development. Some suggested that the working groups hold public hearings where interested parties would have formal input into the process. Others advocated televising working-group discussion to the public at large. Whether such hearings or televised debates would generate greater pressure for reform is arguable, but most participants seemed to agree that opening the process up to outsider deliberation would be highly beneficial to the reform process.

In the long term, the real challenge will be to achieve consensus on the substantive agenda of the organization. Without a discussion of fundamentals and the development of a new political compact among member states, true revitalization of the organization will be impossible. Steps could be taken to begin to lay the groundwork for full-scale discussions of basic UN goals and objectives. Most participants agreed that a lasting and meaningful reform of the institution depends on the resolution of four key issues: the composition of the Security Council and its relations with the General Assembly, the scale of assessments, the role of the Economic and Social Council and of development concerns broadly within the United Nations, and the functioning of the Secretariat. Ultimately, the UN system might be restructured in ways that ensure its continuing relevance to the world it serves. In the well-functioning United Nations of the future, there would be the means to permit ongoing self-evaluation by existing UN entities and ongoing oversight and evaluation of programs by member states. Member states would be encouraged to give more and better policy direction to



the United Nations. They might also routinely publicize the many success stories of the United Nations, informing home constituencies of the specific ways that UN programs and forums have advanced the security of people as well as states. Member states might encourage public debate of complex global issues and creative thinking about the legitimate role of intergovernmental processes in fostering collaborative solutions to global problems. As one participant noted, the United Nations is an evolving organization not subject to categorical judgements. The United Nations is not an exercise in world government, but it does represent the only means that states have to encourage the development of a world community based on the rule of law and practical accommodation among global powers.

## **Conclusion**

Meaningful and lasting reform of the United Nations will require, at a minimum, a substantial investment of political will, compromise, patience, perseverance, and resources. It will also require overcoming fears of loss of power and of the unknown. Member states still differ on what the United Nations should be and what it should do. Until a political consensus is reached, no reform process will result in lasting and effective change. Member states will need to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the United Nations. They should identify its comparative advantages vis-à-vis other institutions and concentrate its resources where it can be successful. The current UN situation is, in the words of one participant, “serious, but not yet fatal.” It is in the doldrums and the trajectory is perilous, but most agreed there is indeed hope. Only with a serious, thoughtful political dialogue among states regarding the appropriate role of the organization can the organization be truly revitalized.

## Chairman's Observations

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Lively Salishan discussions confirmed that substantive UN change remains elusive. To date, the capitals of member states most interested in reform are not sufficiently engaged. Impetus from outside the United Nations is needed to energize the process to a successful conclusion.

The General Assembly working groups are making useful contributions toward reform. They have defined issues, explored alternatives, and clarified differences. Yet they are having great difficulty coming to closure, particularly on vexing intergovernmental matters. The 1996 General Assembly should extend the working-group effort one additional year, instructing them to come to closure and submit final recommendations to the 1997 General Assembly. The additional time is needed to generate external impetus, including engagement of the capitals of major member states.

The United States has largely failed to provide leadership to the reform process. It is conflicted about its post-Cold War world role. Should the United States use its superpower status to deal unilaterally for the most part with the rest of the world, imposing its will from time to time, or should it emphasize collaboration with others, seeking to strengthen the rule of law through effective global institutions? Because of this internal conflict, the United States is largely abdicating leadership on UN change, antagonizing friends and allies in other countries, and jeopardizing its credibility.

In order to provide reform leadership, the United States will first have to satisfy the international community on its financial support of the United Nations. Having done this, the United States could convene major donors and other interested parties to encourage resolution of the most difficult intergovernmental issues and work to broker a reform consensus.

Failing such US engagement, a coalition of interested middle-power countries is the best hope for UN reform leadership. Effective international institutions are essential in today's interconnect-

ed and interdependent world. No nation's abdication of leadership should be allowed to be a permanent impediment to needed UN change.

Current prospects for meaningful UN change do not match the beauty of the Oregon coast. Yet a secure peace with freedom and justice demands effective global institutions. This warrants continuing efforts and attention.

# The Stanley Foundation

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The Stanley Foundation is a private operating foundation that conducts varied programs and activities designed to provoke thought and encourage dialogue on world affairs and directed toward achieving a secure peace with freedom and justice.

Programs engage policymakers, opinion leaders, and citizens interested in solving problems and finding opportunities that present themselves in an increasingly interdependent world. Areas of particular interest are: global peace and security, US international relations, sustainable development, human rights, the United Nations, and the expansion of policy deliberations to include wider public representation.

## Activities include:

- Round-table, off-the-record conferences and meetings for policymakers and other experts.
- Congressional programs.
- Citizen programs for educators, young people, churches, professional associations, civic groups, and educational institutions. These activities are often held in collaboration with other nonprofit organizations.
- Production of *Common Ground*, a weekly public radio program on world affairs.
- Publication of the monthly magazine *World Press Review*.
- Publication of conference reports.

The Stanley Foundation welcomes gifts from supportive friends. The foundation is not a grant-making institution.

## Related Publications

**Making Peace With the Future: The United Nations and World Security**, Report of the Thirtieth United Nations of the Next Decade Conference, June 1995, 40pp.

**US-UN Relations**, Report of a Vantage Conference, September 1995, 32pp.

Single copies are available free. There is a small postage and handling charge for multiple copies or bulk orders. For more information contact the publications manager.

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