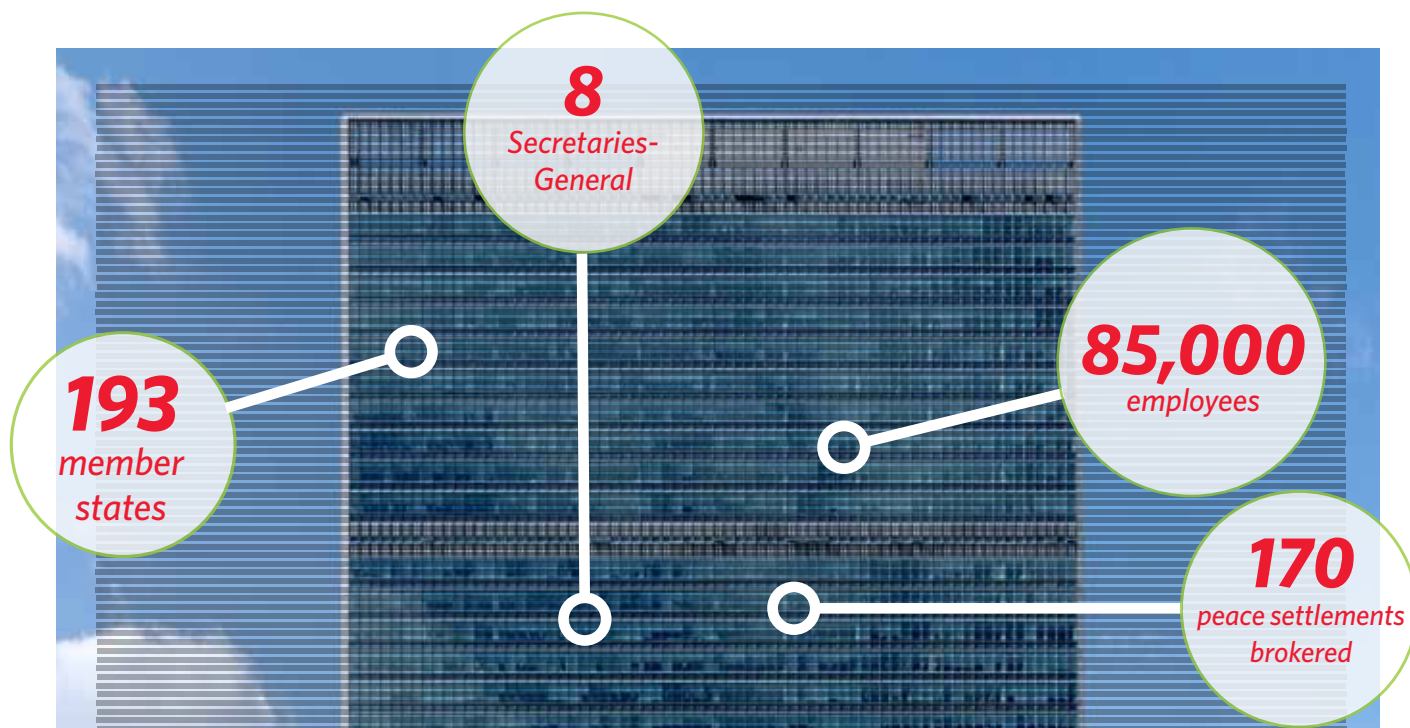


New World



News and comment on the UN & UNA-UK

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THE UN: STILL RELEVANT?



PLUS Thomas G. Weiss / Barbara Crossette / Oliver McCartney / Ravi Kumar / Carl Soderbergh



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New World online

With more news, comment and multimedia.
This issue's web exclusives include:

- » Onika Adeneye on Brazil at the UN
- » Trevor Evans on the Olympic Truce
- » Peter Greaves on the Genocide Convention
- » James Kearney on Towards Zero
- » Sangita Limbu on MDG 7
- » Sylvia Lorek on sustainability
- » Hayley Richardson on business and human rights
- » Miriam Ross on food security
- » Diana Shaw on disability and development
- » Emily Tremlett on UN peacekeeping

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At a time when the UN is facing severe challenges, including to its funding, accurate information on its work is vital

Natalie Samarasinghe

Head of Policy &
Communications at
UNA-UK

Beginning with a candid piece by UN scholar Thomas G. Weiss (page 9), this issue of *New World* looks at the UN's role in today's world. On page 10, Barbara Crossette, UN correspondent for *The Nation*, analyses the organisation's relationship with the media and, on page 13, Carl Soderbergh of Minority Rights Group International considers how well the UN's state-based structure has served those whose rights are often abused by their governments. This issue also attempts to dispel misconceptions about the UN. On page 18 we tackle 10 common – but ill-founded – criticisms of the UN.

Setting the record straight is vital at a time when UN funding is under threat. Susan Rice, US Ambassador to the UN, has blocked attempts by countries including the UK and France to cut expenditure on peacekeeping in Liberia, Haiti and Sudan. Meanwhile, in the US Congress, the House of Representatives' Foreign Affairs Committee has approved a bill calling for UN funding to be made voluntary and conditional. The US is the largest contributor to the organisation's budget and makes substantial voluntary donations to its aid agencies. However, its total contributions to the UN were about \$7.7bn this year – less than 1% of the federal budget and a little more than the country's citizens are predicted to spend on Halloween.

The proposed legislation follows a decision by Representatives to reinstate the Bush-era funding freeze on the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), which is accused of promoting abortion and China's one-child policy. It has, of course, done neither, as was borne out by a 2002 investigation by the US State Department. The agency's officials worry that the cuts might actually increase the number of abortions, especially unsafe ones, as its work to prevent unwanted pregnancies will be affected. Some 215m women worldwide want to delay or avoid pregnancy but cannot access or afford contraception. Global population, meanwhile, is expected to reach 7bn on 31 October 2011.

The bill's author, Republican Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, claims it will promote UN reform and change the organisation's undue focus

on Israel. Interestingly, half of the bill's provisions explicitly relate to Israel-Palestine. These include an end to US government funding for the UN agency that helps Palestinian refugees, and plans to withhold funds from any UN agency that "upgrades the status" of Palestine.

On page 20, Oliver McTernan of the organisation Forward Thinking writes about Palestine's bid for UN membership, which dominated coverage of the General Assembly this September (page 6). The bid has helped Palestinians to put the spotlight back on their cause, but is unlikely to further progress on the ground. As *New World* went to press, the Israeli government announced plans to build the first

Total US contributions to the UN were about \$7.7bn this year – a little more than the country's citizens are predicted to spend on Halloween

major new settlement in the occupied territories for a quarter of a century.

Following suggestions received through our readers' survey, this issue of *New World* introduces a new feature called "Talking Points", which looks at Security Council reform (page 11). We also hope that the Winter edition goes some way to addressing readers' recurring request for bite-size facts and figures on the UN.

An update on UNA-UK's work and stories from our membership can be found on pages 22–27. Ravi Kumar writes about UNA Birmingham's efforts to fight caste discrimination, Sara Traubel covers UNA Youth's activities in Aberdeen, and UNA-UK young professional Aaron Akinoyemi reports on his time at the UN NGO conference on sustainability.

Lastly, we want to hear your thoughts on the UN. Do you think it is indispensable or ineffective? How would you make it stronger? Visit *New World online* to take our poll and to read our web-exclusive articles. ●

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The deadline for submission of material for the next issue of *New World* is noon on 2 December 2011. All submissions should be typed and sent by email where possible. Photos should ideally be 300dpi resolution. The next issue will cover the period 1 January 2012 to 31 March 2012.

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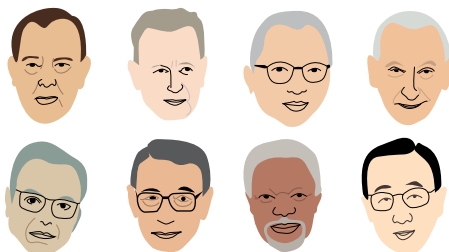
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The issue

Created in response to the second world war, is the UN still relevant or past its prime?



The United Nations: still relevant?

Surveys such as the Pew Global Attitudes Project, which regularly gauges public opinion in several countries, tend to find a positive response to this question. There are, of course, national variations. The large UN presence and successful UN-led mediation following post-election violence in Kenya in 2007-08 have engendered high levels of approval for the organisation in that country. In Israel, meanwhile, the UN's regular pronouncements on Palestine have fuelled public hostility. But there are some points on which global opinion is more united.

One is humanitarian agencies such as the World Food Programme, which are generally praised for performing lifesaving work with tangible outcomes. In contrast, failure to respond to situations like that in Rwanda in 1994, or to make progress on issues such as the Middle East peace process, can be hugely damaging to the reputation of the UN's political bodies, notably the Security Council. No wonder that its supporters are quick to differentiate between the UN's intergovernmental fora and its agencies and officials.

There is also broad international consensus on the value of the institution as a whole. For several years, polling conducted by Gallup indicates that while the majority of people in the US feel that the UN is not doing a good job, they still want it to play a major role in addressing global challenges. Nearly a third of those polled in 2009 thought it should have a "leading role in world affairs, in which all countries are required to follow its policies".

The gap between the UN's performance and its aims (or, perhaps more accurately, the expectations that attend it) has long coloured perceptions of the organisation. In 1947, just two years after it had been formally constituted, the *Wall Street Journal* spoke of the UN's "degeneration" and the *Catholic Herald* anticipated its impending death. Then, as now, the criticisms centred on whether the UN was doing enough to curb national interests or doing too much.

Supporters and detractors have fuelled the myth that the UN can act as a world government. In fact, its member states fund its work, agree its structures, provide its troops, decide its priorities and install its executives. "Blame the member states" might not be a popular answer, but it often goes to the heart of concerns about the UN's cost, composition and efficacy.

These limitations, frustrating for multilateralists, reflect UN's wartime origins. Its Charter is as much realpolitik as principle, firmly rooted in a system of nation states. Only such an organisation could avoid the fate of the League of Nations and so far, the UN has – despite constant (and often unheeded) calls for reform. This should not lead to complacency. In order to remain relevant, the UN must adapt to today's globalised and fragmented world, where a plethora of non-state actors jostle with states for influence. But at present, no other group or institution can match its reach, legitimacy and impact. ●

% responding with a favourable view of the UN

	2009	2011
▲ Kenya	76	86
▲ France	74	76
▲ Britain	67	73
▲ Germany	65	73
◆ US	61	61
▼ Russia	56	54
▼ Egypt	56	54
◆ Brazil	52	52
▼ Mexico	58	44
▼ China	55	37
▼ India	43	28
▲ Turkey	18	23
▼ Pakistan	28	21

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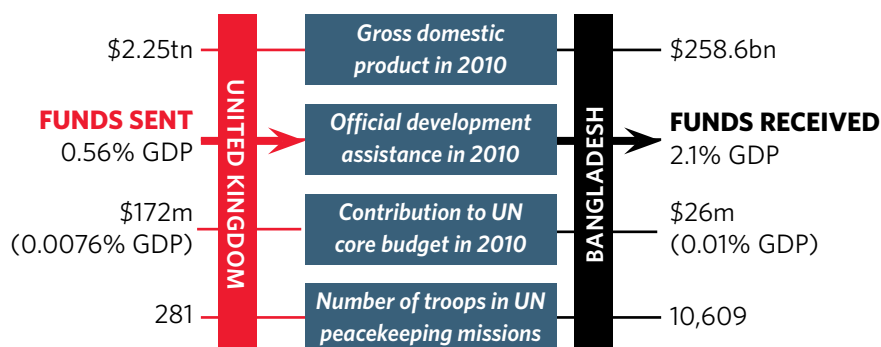
The longest speech ever made at the UN lasted 7 hours and 48 minutes. It was made in 1957 by Indian ambassador V. K. Krishna Menon in defence of his country's position on Kashmir

\$30bn

Total spend by the UN and all its funds and agencies in 2010, amounting to roughly \$4 per person (www.globalpolicy.org)

\$53bn

Net worth of Microsoft founder Bill Gates in 2010 (www.forbes.com)



Despite having to produce each official document in the six official languages, the UN uses less paper in a whole year than a single Sunday edition of The New York Times (www.un.org)

● General Assembly opens

The 66th session of UN General Assembly opened in New York on 21 September. Nearly all UN member states participated in the general debate on mediation, including its newest member, South Sudan. Referring to developments in the Middle East and North Africa, representatives of the transitional Libyan, Egyptian and Somali authorities outlined their views on the options for dealing with turmoil in the region. The debate followed July's high-level discussion on the "responsibility to protect", which focused on the role of regional organisations in protecting populations from atrocities.

"You can sign every human rights declaration in the world but if you stand by and watch people being slaughtered in their own country, when you could act, then what are those signatures really worth?"

UK Prime Minister David Cameron in his first address to the General Assembly

● Another new UN member state?

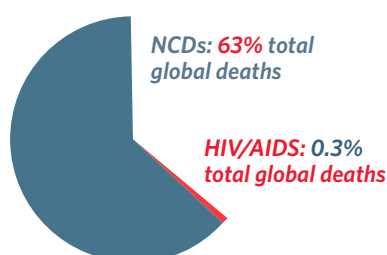
For the most part, Palestine's bid for UN membership took centre stage at the General Assembly in September. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas formally submitted an application to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. Mr Ban has forwarded it to the UN Security Council, which must recommend applications to the Assembly. At present, Palestine has "observer entity" status at the UN – similar to that of the Red Cross. The vote is on hold as the Council has forwarded the application to the committee that deals with new admissions. Meanwhile, intensive diplomatic efforts have been made to kick-start the stalled peace talks. (See page 20)



"At a time when the Arab peoples affirm their quest for democracy – the Arab Spring – the time is now for the Palestinian Spring." Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas addresses the General Assembly
© UN Photo/Mark Garten

● Leaders discuss disease, deserts ...

World leaders also put the spotlight on desertification and non-communicable diseases (NCDs). NCDs such as cancer, diabetes and heart disease kill around 63% of the 57m people who die every year. Member states backed a new UN campaign to curb factors that cause NCDs, such as obesity, alcohol and tobacco, through punitive taxation and



tighter regulation of marketing practices. Targets to avoid land degradation were raised during a debate on the impacts of desertification, which threatens a quarter of the earth's surface, putting over 1bn people in some 100 countries at risk.

● ... and "joined-up" action

Next year's "Rio+20" conference on sustainability was hailed as an opportunity for joined-up action on land management, poverty, growth and climate change. There was, however, a recognition that increasing global activity would be difficult given the economic stagnation in many parts of the world and the need for the UN to revitalise itself. But despite the perennial calls for reform it was acknowledged that the UN remains a vital tool for the international community. Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs Eamon Gilmore said: "No other organisation is as well-equipped to develop common answers to the big questions of our time."



● Deepening crisis in Horn of Africa

The crisis in the Horn of Africa shows little sign of abating, with an estimated 13m people now in need of humanitarian assistance. \$2.5bn in aid is urgently needed. Relief efforts have been hampered by a number of setbacks, including a serious outbreak of dengue fever and flash flooding in Kenya. Worsening conditions are also leading to conflict over resources, as water supplies grow scarce.

● Food insecurity to persist

In a report released on 10 October, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, International Fund for Agricultural Development and World Food Programme called for action to ensure long-term food security. In "The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2011", the three agencies warn that food prices are likely to remain high and that crises are impeding efforts to achieve Millennium Development Goal 1 (to halve the proportion of people who suffer from

hunger by 2015). Even if this target is met, an estimated 600m people would still be undernourished. The report calls for investment in agriculture, transparent price regulation, and efforts to reduce food waste.

one third

of food produced for human consumption is wasted

● New UN mission in Libya

In September, the UN Security Council created a political mission to support Libya's National Transitional Council in building democratic institutions, promoting reconciliation, and restoring public security and services in the country. Meanwhile UN humanitarian chief Baroness Amos has warned that civilians remain under high risk as fighting continues around the city of Sirte – one of the last holdouts since the fall of the Gaddafi regime.

● Syria death toll rises

Over 3,000 people are estimated to have died in Syria during the regime's crackdown on pro-democracy protestors. In late August, the UN Human Rights Council ordered an inquiry into allegations of murder, enforced disappearances and torture. However, action by the Security Council remains elusive. On 4 October, Russia and China vetoed a draft resolution condemning the violence on the grounds that it could be used as a justification for military action. Non-permanent members India, South Africa, Brazil and Lebanon abstained from the vote. Days after the outcome, the EU welcomed the formation of a Syrian opposition.

● Mental health linked to economy

Noting that the incidence of mental health problems has risen following the economic downturn, Ban Ki-moon has urged governments to commit resources to treatment and care. The UN World Health Organisation estimates that more than 75% of people with mental, neurological and substance-use disorders in developing countries – including nearly 95m people with depression – do not receive any help.

● Women activists win Nobel Prize

This year's Nobel Peace Prize was awarded jointly to Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Africa's first female elected head of state, Liberian peace activist Leymah Gbowee, and Tawakul Karman, a journalist and opposition activist from Yemen. In its announcement, the Nobel committee referred to the landmark Security Council Resolution 1325, which calls for the full participation of women in conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding. Over a decade after the resolution was adopted, just 8% of all negotiators, mediators, signatories and witnesses in peace processes are women.



© Ahmed Gharab/AFP/Getty Images

"In Yemen, women are not allowed out of the house after 7pm, now they are sleeping [in Change Square in Sana'a]. This goes beyond the wildest dream I have ever dreamt, I am so proud of our women"

Yemeni journalist and activist Tawakul

Karman, speaking to the BBC in April 2011

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Thomas G. Weiss argues member states should take their share of the blame for the UN's failings

Le machin, “the thing”, is what Charles de Gaulle famously dubbed the United Nations, thereby dismissing international co-operation as frivolous in comparison with the red meat of international affairs, *realpolitik*. He conveniently ignored that “the thing” was formally born not in 1945 when the UN Charter was signed, but in 1942 when the “Declaration by United Nations” was adopted.

Almost 70 years later, many observers – undoubtedly even readers of *New World* – forget that the 26 countries that defeated fascism anticipated the establishment of the world organisation as an essential extension of their wartime commitments. These were not pie-in-the-sky idealists. The UN system was not viewed as a liberal plaything to be tossed aside when the going got tough, but a vital necessity for postwar order and prosperity.

The Beatles once asked: “Will you still need me, will you still feed me, when I’m 64?” This UN Day, the world body turns 66, and many think it should have taken early retirement like other baby boomers.

The late Richard Holbrooke, perhaps best known as the architect of the 1995 Dayton peace accords that ended the conflict in Bosnia, had an answer to this argument. Blaming the UN for a lousy performance, he said, is like blaming the New York Knicks’ failures on Madison Square Garden, the arena where that hapless basketball team has played for years. What Holbrooke meant, of course, was that governments sometimes make quick use of the world organisation’s arena and demonstrate the political will to act. And sometimes they don’t.

This year, the UN once again proved its centrality, in Libya and, belatedly, in Côte d’Ivoire. Security Council Resolution 1973 led to prompt, robust, and effective international action that shielded Libya’s people from the kind of murderous harm that Muammar Gaddafi inflicted on unarmed civilians in March 2011, and continued to menace against his internal opponents, to whom he referred as “cockroaches” (a word that was, incidentally, also used by the genocidal

Rwandan regime in 1994 to describe its Tutsi victims).

It is too early to declare victory in Libya, but decisions in the region as well as in London, Paris, Washington, and Brussels made a huge difference. As the situations in Tripoli and across the wider Middle East evolve, acute dilemmas will remain for humanitarians and policymakers. If the Libyan intervention goes well, it will strengthen the UN and give more teeth to the fledgling “responsibility to protect” (R2P) doctrine. If the Libyan intervention turns sour, it will redouble international opposition to R2P and make future decisions more difficult. But for the moment, spoilers are on the defensive.

And the contrast with West Africa is instructive. The installation of Alassane Ouattara as Ivorian president, ousting the incumbent Laurent Gbagbo, finally occurred after half a year’s dawdling, as an unspeakable disaster unfolded in Côte d’Ivoire. Three times in March 2011 alone, the Security Council censured Gbagbo, who lost the November 2010 elections, and repeated its previous authorisation to “use all necessary means

“Reform is much needed, but even more necessary is the political will to use the UN for many of the purposes for which it was created”

to carry out its mandate to protect civilians”. But the UN Operation in Côte d’Ivoire did very little until belatedly the French Operation Licorne members of the mission intervened, signalling the end of the strongman’s tenure and shifting the local balance of power.

Until then, international unwillingness to use armed force had abetted Gbagbo’s intransigence. Was it really necessary to suffer war crimes, crimes against humanity, 1m refugees, and a ravaged



economy? No, but governments hesitated before finally doing something.

Political spinelessness aside, the UN itself – from its Secretary-General on down – could, of course, be made trimmer and more effective. After decades of calling for it, eyes now glaze over at the mention of “UN reform”. As Mark Malloch Brown quipped when stepping down as Deputy Secretary-General, the UN is the only institution where, over coffee or around water coolers, reform is a more popular topic than sex. Yes, reform is much needed, but even more necessary is the political will to use the UN for many of the purposes for which it was created.

The New York Knicks finally made the post-season tournament last year, still playing in Madison Square Garden. And Libya and Côte d’Ivoire suggest that governments can use the UN’s arena in Manhattan, reformed or not, to demonstrate that it is not quixotic to make the world organisation occasionally function the way it was intended. ●

Thomas G. Weiss is Presidential Professor of Political Science and Director of the Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies at The City University of New York’s Graduate Center and author of the books What’s Wrong with the United Nations and How to Fix It and Thinking about Global Governance: Why People and Ideas Matter



Barbara Crossette: coverage of the UN should enhance our global thinking. Sadly it does not

When world leaders converge on the United Nations headquarters every September, the locals are famously quick to complain about streets being closed for security or choked with diplomatic traffic. Few New Yorkers get to know what they are missing behind those barricades.

The wealth of opinions, cacophonous interplay of cultures and flurry of new ideas and initiatives should provide citizens everywhere with a near-exhaustive update on global thinking. Sadly, that does not happen.

Leaders who arrive for the UN General Assembly's 'general debate' – and the countless behind-the-scenes diplomatic encounters – are usually accompanied by swarms of handlers and PR experts, as well as packs of well-primed reporters from home who focus very narrowly on their president or prime minister.

The 2,000 journalists who travel to the UN solely for the high-level speeches often have little interest in the organisation itself or in member states that they consider to be unimportant. Moreover, the debate itself can be more accurately described as a well-choreographed procession of speakers with prepared texts.

Perhaps most frustrating is the fact that the 3,000-plus accredited reporters who cover the UN year-round get few chances to use their expertise as the news is dominated by one or two issues – this year the Palestinian bid for UN membership. There is no longer time or space in the media for thoughtful analyses, where resident reporters could add perspective and sweep.

Large US newspapers long ago gave up the quaint practice of excerpting or summarising remarks from around the world to suggest thematic convergences or disagreements. Online journals dealing with global issues do better, particularly in specialist areas such as arms control or climate change, but they are the exception and are not so widely read.

What gets lost in this narrowing of coverage is a global picture, an important

element in understanding fast-evolving geopolitics. There were numerous examples this year.

Brazil's president, Dilma Rousseff, was barely mentioned in the media, even though her country emerged largely unscathed from the global economic downturn and is poised to become even more of an international player. In her speech, she argued that rich nations needed an injection of new ideas and that the financial crisis was too serious to be managed by a small group of countries. She said: "All countries suffer the consequences ... all of them have the right to participate in the solutions."

The address by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey, meanwhile, ricocheted around the Middle East. He

"The 2,000 journalists who travel to the UN solely for the high-level speeches often have little interest in the organisation itself"

confirmed Turkey's intention to play a more assertive role in the region and wider Islamic world, aligning himself with the revolutionaries of the Arab Spring and warning the repressive Syrian regime that it was out of step with the times. He also took credit for prodding the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation to pledge \$350m for famine relief in Somalia. Arabs asked, only half in jest, whether this marked the return of the Ottomans.

Other speakers offered snapshots of their countries. Albania described how its once-closed society now has a public internet connection in every post office. Caribbean representatives called for help in confronting a youth crime wave. Some poorer nations chose to emphasise how, against all odds, they would meet UN's Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh, a country once derided as a "basket case", spoke of how her

Muslim-majority nation has embraced the advancement of women, with 64 female members of parliament – 18% of the total – and five female members in the country's Cabinet. The figures for the UK are 22% and four, respectively. Such details, however small, add to the ever-changing composite picture of our world and its 7bn people.

Apart from hosting the proceedings, the UN itself does not get much coverage in this season or, indeed, at any other time of the year. The organisation has never seemed comfortable explaining or defending itself, encumbered as it is by the sensitivities (and sometimes censorship) of its member states.

The UN's website is difficult to navigate and often out of date, while Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has run a virtually leak-proof administration with an almost invisible inner circle at its core.

This is unfortunate. The refusal or reluctance of UN officials to confront public criticism and accusations of wrongdoing, often misdirected at the organisation's administration rather than its member states, has had a highly negative effect on its reputation.

When the Iraqi oil-for-food story broke in 2004, the UN did not quickly move to counter some apparently deliberate distortions propagated in the US Congress (and media) of how the programme worked and the extent to which Security Council members, including the US, were ignoring abuses. Officials seemed to take the view: "Why bother; they'll never believe us."

At present, the UN is again under attack in the majority-Republican US House of Representatives. The organisation needs to work harder to make its voice heard and to convince media outlets in the US and elsewhere to expand their agendas so that coverage of the UN can better inform our perspectives as global citizens. ●

Barbara Crossette was The New York Times' UN bureau chief from 1994 to 2001 and is now UN correspondent for The Nation

Talking points

The UN Security Council

The Security Council dominates most discussions on UN reform. States, Secretaries-General and NGOs have all made powerful cases for reform, most of which centre on the question of legitimacy. As the primary international body tasked with peace and security issues, and possessing powers of enforcement, the Council's legitimacy is often linked to that of the UN as a whole, and even multilateralism more generally.

While few would disagree that it needs reforming – UNA-UK included – *New World* wanted to explore whether the Council's "legitimacy deficit" is as serious as implied and if so, whether an enlarged Council is the solution.

First Session of the United Nations Security Council, Church House, London January 1946

© United Nations



In the black:

- » The Security Council remains central to international peace and security matters. Its decisions command attention and are binding on UN member states. It is pivotal to conferring international authority and legitimacy on interventions, as exemplified by the build-up to the deployment in Libya earlier this year, compared with the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.
- » Since the end of the Cold War, the Council has functioned more efficiently: adopting twice as many resolutions as previously, significantly expanding UN peacekeeping, particularly in Africa, and widening its agenda to address issues such as women and security, climate change and civilians in armed conflict. The low incidence of inter-state war in the last 66 years is surely no coincidence.
- » The Council's five permanent members (China, France, Russia, the UK and the US) have only exercised their veto on 24 substantive occasions since 1990, compared to 193 times in the 45 years before then. They have even, on occasion, refrained from using it to block resolutions concerning situations where they have strong national interests.
- » While permanent membership of the Security Council has accorded these countries much influence at the UN, it has also encouraged them to continue to work with it and through it. An expanded Council might prove too unwieldy for timely decisions. This could encourage powerful nations to resort to unilateral action more frequently.
- » An expanded Council would not necessarily be more likely to take action. Germany and India, two possible candidates for permanent membership, abstained on the recent vote on Libya. South Africa has blocked action on Zimbabwe, and Brazil and Turkey have done so in relation to Iran.
- » Regional rivalries between potential candidates also mean there is no definitive list of future permanent or semi-permanent (e.g. 10- or 15-year terms) members.

In the red:

- » The Security Council no longer reflects the balance of power in the world. At least two of its five permanent members can no longer claim to be "major powers".
- » The Council has failed to bring effective action to bear on the most difficult issues, such as the Middle East peace process, Iraq and Kashmir. It has struggled to agree on situations strongly linked to the interests of its five permanent members, and it did not respond adequately to events in Rwanda, Sri Lanka or the former Yugoslavia.
- » The Council's 10 elected members only serve two-year terms. This means its membership often excludes big economic players such as Germany and Japan; emerging powers like India and Brazil; and smaller countries that provide many of the UN's peacekeeping troops, such as Bangladesh.
- » Widening the membership could lead to more engagement by regional organisations and emerging powers. This would help to spread the risks and burden of tackling threats and encourage active participation within a rules-based system.
- » The Council does not give adequate representation to African countries, although the continent is the focus of much of the Council's work.
- » The longer the Council's composition is seen as outdated, the more likely it is to be bypassed.
- » Calls for reform are unlikely to abate now that the issue has taken on such a high profile. It cannot remain unresolved.

On balance

- » UNA-UK should continue to support Security Council reform but its position should not focus solely on composition; it must also consider the functioning of the Council and its place within the international system.

THINKING ABOUT GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

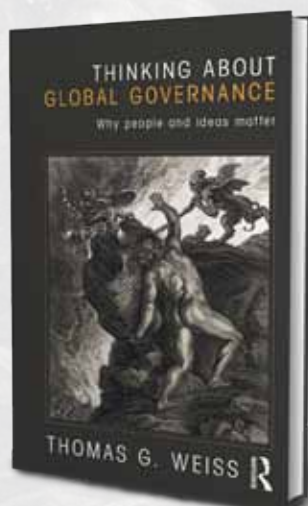
From renowned UN scholar

THOMAS G. WEISS

Foreword by **Kofi Annan**

The pressing issues facing the United Nations, global governance, and humanitarian action.

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UNA-UK General Meeting

Thursday 24 November 2011

3:00-5:00pm

Room G79, Franklin-Wilkins Building, King's College London (Waterloo campus),
Stamford Street, London SE1 8WA

A General Meeting of the United Nations Association of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UNA-UK) will include the following business of the company:

1. Adoption of the UNA-UK Strategic Plan 2011-15
2. Approval of the merger of UNA-UK and The UNA Trust into a new charitable company limited by guarantee at a future date agreed by the UNA-UK Board of Directors
3. Approval of the proposed Articles of Association for the new charity

The formal notice of the meeting and full details of the business to be conducted will be sent to all paid-up members of UNA-UK. All paid-up members of UNA-UK have the right to attend and vote or, if they are unable to attend, to appoint a person as their proxy.

All relevant documentation for the meeting, including the notice, proxy voting form, draft strategic plan and draft Articles of Association, will be available from www.una.org.uk/generalmeeting from 1 November 2011. Hard copies can be requested from Hayley Richardson on richardson@una.org.uk or +44 (0)20 7766 3454.



Carl Soderbergh: minority rights are a work in progress at the UN

Notwithstanding its opening words, “We the peoples”, the UN Charter sets out a state-based blueprint for co-operation and, despite the rise of a plethora of new actors, national governments remain at the core of international institutions. What then of minorities whose governments may not be willing to represent their needs or protect their rights?

Given its second world war origins, it is not surprising that the UN set up a body to address minority issues two years into its existence. In 1947, the Commission on Human Rights (which has since been replaced by the Human Rights Council (HRC)), created a “Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities”. However, over the years, the mandate of the Sub-Commission expanded, gradually reducing its focus on minorities.

This was indicative of the low priority accorded to minority rights at the UN level, in comparison with other issues. Strong alliances of NGOs and governments have driven progress in areas such as children’s and women’s rights, and over the past 25 years the indigenous movement has successfully worked for the creation of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Thanks to a dedicated UN voluntary fund, indigenous representatives have been supported to attend UN meetings and a large number of activists do so, gaining experience of the UN system and becoming a powerful collective voice on behalf of their communities.

In contrast, minority representation at the UN is weak. Few international NGOs focus on minorities and even fewer local minority organisations have consultative status with the UN, which would enable them to participate regularly in meetings. There is no voluntary fund for minorities and finding the financial resources to travel to Geneva remains an obstacle for many organisations, particularly from the developing world.

Minority Rights Group International (MRG) works on behalf of minorities and indigenous peoples but at the UN we focus primarily on the former, as so few organisations do. A key part of our work is to facilitate the active participation of minority groups so that they can present their own views.

As is so often the case, it was the horror of war – in this instance the conflict in the Balkans – that brought the need for minority protection sharply into focus. In 1992, the Declaration on Minorities was adopted unanimously and, in 1995, a Working Group on Minorities (WGM) was established to monitor its implementation. The WGM provided a forum for minorities to present their concerns, giving them an entry point into an otherwise inaccessible system. Crucially, the WGM decided that participation would be open to all civil society actors, not just those with UN consultative status.

But the mandate of the WGM was weak and its status within the UN

“As is so often the case, it was the horror of war – in this instance the conflict in the Balkans – that brought the need for minority protection sharply into focus”

hierarchy low. It could forward concerns to states but could not, for example, require a response. A coalition of NGOs, including MRG, therefore launched a campaign to improve the ways in which the UN addresses minority issues. Over the past decade, this campaign has fuelled two important developments.

The first was the creation of the Independent Expert on Minority Issues in 2005. Gay McDougall, the inaugural postholder, was an African-American human rights lawyer who grew up during the civil rights period. Unafraid

of confronting governments, McDougall visited several countries where minorities face significant challenges, including France, Greece, the Dominican Republic and Ethiopia, until stepping down earlier this year. Her successor is Rita Izsák, a Roma rights campaigner from Hungary.

The second development was the establishment, in 2007, of the Forum on Minority Issues, which reports to the HRC. The Forum has contributed greatly to the visibility of minority issues. Despite resistance from member states, it was able to retain the WGM’s key feature: the participation of non-accredited civil society representatives.

MRG staff who had attended WGM meetings with 50 or so people were amazed to see over ten times that number at the Forum’s first session. Participation by governments and other parts of the UN system has also increased, as has follow-up during HRC debates, where concrete recommendations have been made.

Given its success, it is disappointing that the Forum only meets for two days a year, severely curtailing speaking time – especially galling for those who have travelled to Geneva at great cost. It also sends the wrong message about the importance of minority issues. But in other ways, the Forum quite literally puts minorities centre stage.

Its most striking feature is, perhaps, its seating arrangement. Unlike most UN meetings, where state delegations occupy the seats in the middle, minorities do so at the Forum, while diplomats sit in the periphery. For many minority activists coming to Geneva for the first time, this must be a welcome change to the exclusion their communities face at home. ●

Carl Soderbergh is Director of Policy & Communications at Minority Rights Group International. This article draws on a paper prepared by MRG staff Chris Chapman and Katbryn Ramsay for publication in the International Journal on Minority and Group Rights 18 (2011). To find out more about MRG’s work, visit www.minorityrights.org

Is the United Nations fit for purpose?

The next four years will be crucial for the international community. The target date for achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals is looming and many are still off track. Population growth and climate change will put more strain on natural resources, while a global approach to sustainability continues to elude us. Complex humanitarian emergencies look set to increase and human rights violations persist in all corners of the globe. Dozens of armed conflicts remain unresolved while military spending rises.

We live in an increasingly interdependent world, where new institutions, companies and civil society movements jostle for influence with governments. Globalisation has precipitated advances in economics and communications, but it has also led to political fragmentation and increased vulnerabilities, powerfully demonstrated by the financial crisis. From cyber-security to piracy, nuclear weapons to pandemics, technological revolutions to popular uprisings, the world faces a multiplicity of challenges old and new.

UNA-UK believes that the need for the UN has never been greater. The challenges facing the world cannot be tackled in isolation and the UN is the only organisation that has the reach and remit to address them. As a peacekeeper and mediator, convenor and advocate, facilitator and frontline agency, the UN remains indispensable.

But to be effective, the organisation must ensure that it responds to developments. It must build stronger partnerships with NGOs, businesses, media and individuals as well as regional and multilateral groupings such as the G20. It must demonstrate, as it has by establishing UN Women, that it is capable of reform, and it must ensure that the Security Council becomes more representative. Crucially, it must better publicise its successes and prove that it can continue to deliver results and value for money. In order to achieve this, it will need strong support, political and financial, from governments and civil society.

Do something

Do you think the UN is fit for purpose? How do you think it could be strengthened? Visit www.una.org.uk/dosomething to take our poll



Do something update: No women, no peace

Along with our partners in Gender Action for Peace & Security (GAPS), we asked our supporters to call on the UK government to ensure women's rights are central to peace and transition talks in Afghanistan. We would like to thank everyone who took action via the "No women, no peace" campaign website from July to September.

As members of GAPS, we have also been busy supporting the development of a "No women, no peace" campaign pack, writing to *The Times* and helping to promote a petition to the Foreign Secretary ahead of the December 2011 conference on Afghanistan. There is still time to take action: visit www.nowomennopeace.org

The enduring myth of the UN

Natalie Samarasinghe argues that the organisation is about global governance, not global government

*To save succeeding generations from the scourge of war
To reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights
To promote social progress and better standards of life*

To a world exhausted by war, the promise of the United Nations inspired hope of a secure and long-lasting peace. Its early years raised those expectations further: not only did its establishment mark the end of a conflict, the full horrors of which were then only just emerging, but it also seemed to herald a new era of global co-operation, in which it seemed competing ideologies and interests could be reconciled for the greater good.

Those heady days saw the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on Genocide (see Peter Greaves' article in *New World on-line*) as well as the beginnings of the UN's humanitarian agencies, such as the children's fund and refugee agency. A decade on from its establishment, the UN had won a Nobel Peace Prize (awarded to the High Commissioner for Refugees), helped to negotiate a ceasefire between the new state of Israel and the Arab countries in the Middle East, and authorised the use of force in Korea.

But the UN's limitations had also become apparent. During the Cold War, the UN Security Council too often seemed frozen when action was needed (it has adopted more resolutions since the 1990s than in the previous 45 years). Korea was in many ways the exception: agreement to act was secured in the absence of the Soviet Union, which was boycotting proceedings to protest against the occupation of the Chinese seat by a delegation from the Nationalist Republic of China.

Then, as now, a tendency to view the Security Council as emblematic of the UN as a whole fuelled perceptions of the latter's impotence. "The United Nations is dead", the *Catholic Herald* confidently

declared in 1947. But to claim that the UN did nothing throughout the Cold War years does great disservice to its achievements. In fact, during this time, the organisation presided over significant developments in international law – notably in human rights and arms control treaties – and its agenda expanded to include issues such as the environment and the life-saving work of its agencies (the eradication of smallpox for example).

The General Assembly also demonstrated that it could take action without Security Council support, calling for a boycott and sanctions against apartheid South Africa. And the UN supported the transition to independence of scores of new post-colonial states, offering them a seat at the global table. To this day, one of the UN's most important roles is as a forum to compel equitable discussion before hasty action – the low incidence of inter-state war since 1945 is no coincidence.

So why the perennial calls for reform? That depends largely on who is doing the calling. Muscular multilateralists invariably want the UN to take robust action. Pacific UN supporters find the use of force and messy on-the-ground activities difficult to stomach. Too many member states, meanwhile, place top priority on resisting encroachment on their sovereignty rather than on effective action to solve shared problems.

Criticism of the UN is often couched in terms of cost or effectiveness. But the sums involved are so small and its effectiveness so reliant on states that these arguments are better understood as resulting from a myth shared by supporters and sceptics. Both are prone to seeing the UN as a "global government", albeit an ineffective one; a thought that is either disappointing or alarming.

The UN was not, of course, conceived as a supra-national government. Its Charter reflects realpolitik as much it does principle, firmly rooted in a system based on the primacy and sovereignty of states. The UN is made up of states and depends on them for its resourcing, leadership

UN helicopters deliver electoral materials to remote parts of Sudan
© UN Photo/Tim McKulka





and policy direction. It is more plausible to argue that the rise of other actors – regional organisations with stricter membership conditions; corporations and individuals with fortunes bigger than the GDP of certain countries; NGOs; and media with large popular followings – has done more to erode state sovereignty. Any perceived transfer of power that has taken place within the UN system, as a result of treaties, for example, or of the Charter itself, has occurred with the consent of states.

How, then, should we see the UN? The answer depends on which part of the UN one is referring to: member states, officials, intergovernmental bodies like the Security Council, field operations or agencies. On the ground, the UN can be a peacekeeper, aid-giver or institution-builder. In terms of development, it can be a co-ordinator, funder or advisor. At the political level, it can act as a platform for states, a guide to world opinion or an arbiter of military force. Where human rights and justice are concerned, it can be a court, a standard-setter or a forum for holding states to account. Its leadership can, within its many constraints, act as a voice of moral authority. And even this long list ignores the UN's many other roles, such as coordinating postal and telecommunications systems, undertaking research and thought leadership, and producing authoritative statistics.

The sum of these parts is better described as “global governance” than “global government”. While the UN's effectiveness rests on how useful it is perceived to be and how much it is used (or ignored) by states, it remains the only international organisation to enjoy such high participation and such robust legitimacy. Even the Security Council, so often criticised for flunking the task, remains pivotal and unique in conferring international authority and pronouncements that are binding on states.

By combining universal membership with privileges for the most powerful, by acting so consistently for the smaller and poorer nations, by increasing access points

"The UN's effectiveness rests on how useful it is perceived to be and how much it is used (or ignored) by states"

for other actors such as parliaments, NGOs, and businesses, the UN has for the past 66 years pushed back against the relentless march of national interests. The League of Nations crumbled because it was neither forceful nor attractive enough to keep powerful states at bay. The G20, while (possibly) superior to the Security Council in representativeness, has not yet shown the consistency or effectiveness to make a difference. The European Union, more sophisticated and deeply integrated than the UN, now looks weaker and less coherent.

The fact that the UN has survived should not, of course, lead to complacency. We live in a world of narrowing identities. Regional organisations have shown they can act more swiftly and decisively, and groups of like-minded nations have stepped in where wider consensus has proved elusive. The media – which former UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali referred to as the 16th member of the Security Council – play an important role in generating public support for international action, and this year social media were said to have facilitated political uprisings. Today, companies can have wider spheres of influence than countries and powerful civil society movements are able to mobilise millions of supporters. Avaaz, the web-based campaigning movement that just reported its 10-millionth member, has been described by the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* as “a transnational community that is more democratic, and could be more effective, than the United Nations”. While the impact and endurance of these actors remain uncertain, it is clear that the UN will need to engage them and, where appropriate, harness their support.

Ultimately, though, none of these actors have been able to surpass the UN for its comprehensive membership, its wide-reaching authority or its broad-ranging set of functions. Without it, the world would be a much more dangerous and disorganised place. ●

10

myths about the United Nations

There are plenty of misapprehensions about – and deliberate distortions of – the role played by the UN. Here we tackle some of the more tenacious fallacies



1 Myth: The UN is expensive

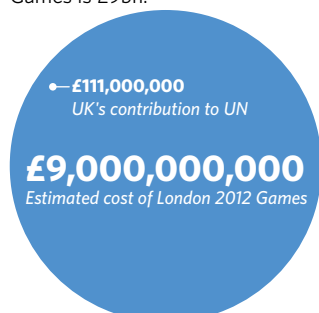
In fact: For about \$30bn a year – the equivalent of Wall Street bonuses in 2008 – the UN runs humanitarian, development and peacekeeping operations around the world.

2 Myth: The UN doesn't really do anything

In fact: The UN feeds, shelters, vaccinates and educates millions of people every day. The World Food Programme alone reaches 90m people a year. UN efforts have led to the eradication of smallpox, protected civilians around the world and provided billions in development assistance.

3 Myth: The UK spends too much money on the UN

In fact: Although the UK is the fourth-largest contributor to the UN's core budget, this amounted to just £111m or 0.0076% of gross domestic product in 2010. The estimated cost of the London 2012 Games is £9bn.



4 Myth: Wealthy countries do not need the UN

In fact: The world's most pressing challenges – from climate change to terrorism – cannot be tackled in isolation. The UN enables states to forge global solutions. By working through it, no country – rich or poor – need shoulder the burden or cost of tackling them alone.

5 Myth: The UN doesn't directly benefit people in rich countries

In fact: An effective UN is in the interests of all the world's people. It has a profound impact on our daily lives, from labour rights to aviation standards, telecommunications to heritage sites, and fish stocks to agriculture.

6 Myth: The UN is a world government

In fact: The UN is a voluntary association of 193 sovereign states. These member states determine the organisation's priorities, programmes and budget. They do not surrender their sovereignty at the UN. Indeed, the UN Charter is one of the strongest safeguards of member states' sovereignty.



= the number of people employed by the UN and its affiliated programmes and agencies

= the number of full-time positions at HM Revenue & Customs

7 Myth: The UN employs too many people

In fact: The UN system employs just under 85,000 people, about the same as the UK's Revenue & Customs department, and far fewer than global companies such as McDonald's.

8 Myth: The UN is full of despots. Democratic countries should form their own body

In fact: One of the UN's key roles is to facilitate dialogue between all states. The idea of a "league of democracies" might seem enticing but it has major shortcomings, not least that being a democracy is no guarantee of "decent" behaviour.

9 Myth: The UN is paralysed by the Security Council veto

In fact: Few would disagree that the Security Council needs reform. But since the end of the Cold War, it has agreed more than 1,300 resolutions, overseen an expansion in peacekeeping and made progress in areas such as women and security. The veto has been used on just 15 occasions since 2000, including 10 times by the US, nine of which related to Israel-Palestine.

The UN has helped broker over 170 peace settlements and has run 66 peacekeeping missions

10 Myth: The UN's army is too big and it can't control its troops

In fact: The UN has no army. Peacekeepers are supplied by states and the Security Council – not the Secretary-General – decides if, when and where to deploy a force, as well as what its mandate will be. While the UN can be criticised for taking too long to respond to misconduct, its scope for action is limited because troops fall beyond its disciplinary jurisdiction.



2,255
UN Volunteers

19,577
civilian personnel

97,614
uniformed personnel
(contributed by 114 countries)

ICC an effective deterrent for despots

As I write, there are reports of brutal acts of oppression taking place in Yemen, as yet another regime shows that it will go to any lengths to remain in power. The UN must closely monitor this situation and warn the Yemeni government that it will be brought to account for its actions.

On a cautiously optimistic note, it appears that the Security Council is making better use of the International Criminal Court and that the Court itself is being more proactive. Key actors in the Bosnian-Serb conflict are now before the Court, and Gaddafi and his cohorts will also have to appear before international judges when they are eventually caught and arrested.

We can only hope that these developments will send a clear message to despotic regimes in Syria, Zimbabwe, Burma, North Korea, Yemen and elsewhere that the international community is willing to bring wrongdoers to justice and that the rule of law must transcend politics. It is imperative that there be no hiding places or immunity from prosecution so that heads of state are reminded that they, too, are not above the law.

David J Thomas, Porthcawl

War metaphor rang true

In your previous editorial (*New World*, Autumn 2011) you take issue with the likening of August's UK riots to war zones. As someone who lives very close to one of the worst-hit areas of London, I can tell you that it felt every bit as though the town had become a war zone. I was afraid to approach my window, let alone leave my house.

The images on my television set of youths roving the streets looked every bit like the images beamed in from war-torn areas of the world. While I accept the comparison between war zones and riots is not an elegant one, to downplay the severity of these riots is to overlook a pernicious and insidious trend in our society.

Patricia Whiskin
London

Welcome source of news

I am pleased that *New World* now features some very good and readable articles and news not readily available in the mainstream media, such as the piece in the Autumn 2011 issue on violence in Malawi and the possible return to autocracy in that country.

I was also pleased to see in that issue the interview with Zoya Phan on Burma,

which, as she says, has one of the most brutal dictatorships in the world but gets little publicity. I heard her give a very moving and inspiring talk at a meeting earlier this year and have her book, *Little Daughter*. I look forward to receiving more stimulating and thought-provoking issues of *New World* in the future.

Michael Benison
Taunton

Nuke-free zone unlikely

Jo Adamson's piece in the Autumn issue of *New World* focuses on a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the Middle East. Why the Middle East? Why not Western Europe, or Northern America for that matter?

Is this not just another example of double standards? I would have thought Middle Eastern countries, with rationality on their side, will see the political capital and preferential treatment given to those existing nuclear states, and aspire to a similar state of privilege for themselves.

The article also fails to mention the elephant in the room: Israel is the only state in the Middle East with nuclear weapons capabilities, and is a non-signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to boot!

Israel has no political interest in disarming, so it seems like the very

suggestion of a Middle East nuclear-weapons-free zone is every bit as preposterous as the idea of a nuke-free Western Europe.

Ernesto Palazzo
Paris

Cavil over gavel

At risk of appearing pedantic, please can you inform your cartoonist (Hagen, I think, although his signature is awfully untidy) that he is mistaken in his graphical depiction of the apparatus of what I assume to be the Security Council (since it is sanctions that are being voted on). While I appreciate the humour of the piece – namely sanctions being decided by the popular game scissors-paper-stone – I take umbrage with the President of the Security Council's use of the auctioneer's gavel.

The gavel has never been a feature of United Nations proceedings. What I can only assume is that Mr Hagen is getting his wires crossed with the famous unique gavel of the US Senate. This gavel, presented to the US by India, was used for the first time in 1954 after then Vice President Richard Nixon broke the previous one during a heated debate on nuclear energy.

Frank Barton
Chester



Nawaf Salam, Lebanon's ambassador to the UN sitting as president of the Security Council in September 2011
© UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

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Palestine's quest for recognition

Oliver McTernan argues that the Palestinian UN bid is a symptom of the failure of the Oslo accords



Oliver McTernan is Co-Founder and Director of Forward Thinking, an organisation that works to promote a more inclusive peace process in the Middle East



Earlier this year I met with a politically diverse group of 30 young professionals and university students in Gaza who were discussing the timing of the Palestinian Authority's bid for membership of the United Nations. It was an impressive group, well able to articulate the case for and against seeking UN recognition. I found myself in agreement with those who argued that the timing of the bid was wrong.

The UN debate, they feared, would distract attention from the serious dysfunctional state of Palestinian life under occupation and UN recognition would, in effect, be a tacit endorsement of the present reality in the West Bank – a one-party securocrat state with an economy entirely dependent on the good will of donors and easy access to credit – and a Hamas-run Gaza that survives on the literally underground economy of the tunnels beneath the Egyptian frontier. The urgent need to promote Palestinian unity and to form an effective government capable of rising above factional interests risked being overlooked.

It was the Arab Spring and the opportunity to engage directly with some of the young people on the streets of Tunis and Cairo that forced me to review this position and to realise that the Palestinian people cannot be expected to endure for much longer the humiliation of being an occupied, stateless nation. In recent months, we have witnessed the impact on Palestinian youth of developments in the wider region. They, too, have expressed a desire for dignity and self-determination as they took to the streets calling for national unity.

There is a risk, of course, that international recognition of Palestine could give rise to immediate and unrealistic

expectations. Many fear that if recognition is granted but people see little change in the realities of their daily life as the structures of occupation remain intact, it could spark a new intifada. The risk of violence is even greater, I fear, if the Palestinian call for UN recognition is rejected.

One does not have to spend much time in the region to appreciate the deep frustration at the failure of past negotiations to effect any real change in people's lives. Even those who have benefited from the recent upsurge in economic activity in the West Bank are under no illusion of the fragility of the current situation. They are well aware

"The risk of violence is even greater, I fear, if the Palestinian call for UN recognition is rejected"

that the economy is built on "donor consumerism" and that overnight they could easily lose their job, their car or their home. Recent polls assert that up to 70% of Palestinians predict a new intifada unless the deadlock is broken and the situation on the ground changes soon.

In a recent article in *The New York Times*, Prince Turki Al-Faisal, a former Saudi ambassador to London and Washington, warned that if the US were to block the Palestinian bid for UN membership it would "risk losing the little credibility it has in the Arab world". He also warned that Israeli security would be seriously undermined, Iran potentially empowered, and the chances of

Palestinians demonstrate near a chair symbolising their seat at the UN during a protest in the West Bank.

© Abbas Momani/AFP/Getty Images



STATUS BAROMETER

STATEHOOD: UN membership in itself does not confer “legal” statehood, which rests on recognition by other states.

UN MEMBERSHIP: Membership is open to states whose application has been approved by the UN General Assembly. They can then take part in the General Assembly, apply for membership of UN agencies, sign international treaties and bring cases to the International Court of Justice.

PALESTINE: Technically a permanent observer “entity”, its rights of participation currently fall somewhere between that of member states and observers.

PERMANENT OBSERVERS: Open to states that have not applied for UN membership (e.g. the Holy See), intergovernmental organisations (e.g. the African Union); and “entities”, e.g. the International Committee of the Red Cross. Observers have a standing invitation to participate in the work of the General Assembly and can maintain permanent offices at UN Headquarters.

CONSULTATIVE STATUS: Open to NGOs and voluntary organisations (e.g. UNA-UK). Holders can attend and contribute to open meetings and conferences.

another war in the region increased. Despite this warning, the US seems determined to oppose the bid.

In his speech to the General Assembly, US President Obama declared that “peace will not come through statements and resolutions at the UN” and that, ultimately, it is the Israelis and the Palestinians who must reach agreement on the issues that divide them: on borders, security, refugees and Jerusalem. Few people, I suspect, would disagree with this. What Obama failed to acknowledge is the simple fact that the process that the US has pursued over the past two decades has failed to deliver a just and durable agreement. The Palestinian bid for UN membership is a symptom of the failure of the Oslo accords to meet their aspirations and the deep frustration that is felt throughout the occupied territories as a consequence.

A durable peace, I believe, is possible, but it can only be achieved if there is a real paradigm shift that recognises the necessity of working at multiple levels and engaging people who have real constituency on both sides of the conflict. The fact that Dennis Ross is now Obama's key troubleshooter in the region does not inspire much confidence that the US approach will change in the foreseeable future. His book *The Missing Peace: The Inside Story of the Fight for Middle East Peace* describes a top-down approach that works on the supposition that by excluding the awkward or unwilling, a handpicked elite can produce an acceptable agreement. This illusion is blocking any chance of real progress. And it illustrates the serious US underestimation of the new power of the Arab voice, which will not tolerate for much longer the languishing of the peace process in a cul-de-sac. ●

PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATION AT THE UN

1964: UN formally notified of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO).

1965: The Special Political Committee of the UN General Assembly (GA) allows PLO to attend meetings.

1974: The GA recognises the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and grants the organisation “observer entity” status.

1975: The Security Council approves a request for the PLO to attend proceedings as a non-voting participant.

1982: The UN Office of Legal Affairs acknowledges that most states formally recognise the PLO.

1986: The Asian Group of countries at the UN accepts the PLO as a member.

1988: The GA decides the PLO and the South West Africa People's Organisation are entitled to have communications issued as official documentation. To date, no other observer enjoys that right. “Palestine” replaces “PLO” in UN documents.

1988: The GA calls on the US to cease its attempts to close down Permanent Observer Mission of the PLO to the UN.

1998: The GA confers additional rights on Palestine, including the ability to participate in its general debate and co-sponsor resolutions. Palestine gains six places for delegates at the GA (four more than other observers).

1998: Yasser Arafat speaks during the GA's general debate – the first non-member state representative to do so. Palestine co-sponsors 21 GA resolutions.

2009: Palestine applies for membership of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), normally reserved for states.

2011: In April the UN Special Co-ordinator for the Middle East reports the Palestinian Authority has succeeded in laying the institutional foundations for realising a state. In September, Palestine submits a membership application, which is forwarded to the Security Council. The Council defers its vote and sends the application to a committee. In October, the UNESCO Executive Board approves Palestine's application for membership in principle.

PROCESS FOR UN MEMBERSHIP

1. An application is submitted to the Secretary-General

2. The Secretary-General sends the application to the Security Council

4. A two-thirds majority in the General Assembly approves the application.

3. The Security Council recommends the application to the General Assembly. This requires at least nine out of 15 votes in favour, with no veto by any of the five permanent members.

The UN & the UK

*This section features an update on **UNA-UK's** work with the UK government and Parliament, including our presence at the Labour Party Conference*



UNA-UK is strictly non-partisan and works closely with all the main political parties in the UK to promote support for the UN. As part of this work, we were present at this year's Labour Party Conference in Liverpool from 24 to 29 September.

Our stall at the conference offered us the opportunity to raise the profile of UNA-UK and engage with MPs, peers, activists and students – some 11,000 in all – and post the question: is the United Nations indispensable or irrelevant?

UNA-UK staff and interns made the case for an effective UN to the Labour Party leader, Ed Miliband, and several members of the shadow cabinet, including Hilary Benn and Peter Hain.

The highlight of UNA-UK's conference programme was a fringe event entitled "The Real Big Society: putting the UK at the heart of the UN". The event, which was chaired by UNA-UK Chairman Sir Jeremy Greenstock, served as the launch of our latest "Towards Zero" report.

Former Defence Secretary Lord Browne of Ladyton, former Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett and UNICEF UK, Deputy Director of UNICEF UK, addressed a packed hall of delegates on issues including nuclear disarmament, climate change and poverty eradication.

Lord Browne focused on the need for the UK to be at the forefront of multilateral disarmament initiatives, while Ms Beckett argued that the UK must continue to push for the revitalisation of international institutions. Ms Tiessen, meanwhile, outlined the vital role that the UK plays in international development in general and, in particular, the efforts by UN agencies to become more effective on the ground.

UNA-UK's conference activities were rounded off with two other events.

From left to right: Lord Browne, Sir Jeremy Greenstock, Margaret Beckett and Anita Tiessen at UNA-UK's Labour Party Conference fringe event.
© UNA-UK/James Kearney

Our Peace and Security Programme Coordinator James Kearney spoke on UN peacekeeping at the Centre for Foreign Policy's fringe event, alongside Stephen Twigg MP, then the Shadow Minister for Africa (before his appointment as Shadow Education Secretary).

Meanwhile, Executive Director Phil Mulligan joined UNA Youth's new President, Tyna Vayalilkollattu, and James Kearney in making presentations to students from Liverpool University on the work of UNA-UK and its youth wing, and the aims of the Towards Zero programme.

Is the NPT fit for purpose?

UNA-UK has published the first in a series of reports on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. The series will consider institutional and political developments in the run-up to the 2015 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference. Authored by Professor John Simpson and entitled "Is the Non-Proliferation Treaty fit for purpose?", the report assesses the health of the international disarmament and non-proliferation machinery, and asks what, if anything, might replace it.



Party conference quotes

"In the coming months, British diplomacy will be needed more than ever, for we are living through what is already one of the three most important events of the early 21st century, alongside the financial crisis of 2008 and 9/11: a tidal wave of change in the Middle East."

William Hague, UK Foreign Secretary

"The European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act are not, as some would have you believe, foreign impositions. These are British rights, drafted by British lawyers. Forged in the aftermath of the atrocities of the second world war. Fought for by Winston Churchill."

Nick Clegg, UK Deputy Prime Minister

"With power and money moving east, no country has an alternative but to work in partnership with other countries ... That means working to find shared solutions to shared problems, from global climate change to global trade."

Douglas Alexander, UK Shadow Foreign Secretary

Cameron at the General Assembly

UK Prime Minister David Cameron made his first speech to the opening of the UN General Assembly on 22 September. Calling for the UN to be “not just united in condemnation, but united in action”, he described recent developments in the Middle East as a “massive opportunity” for peace, prosperity, democracy and security. He praised Libya’s National Transitional Council and the coalition of Western and Arab states that had “stopped Benghazi from joining Srebrenica and Rwanda in history’s painful roll call of massacres the world failed to prevent”, and said that the international community must now help Libyans to build the future they fought for. Mr Cameron expressed pride that the UK would meet its commitment to spend 0.7% of GNI on aid from 2013 and urged other donor nations to do the same.

In defence of Afghan women’s rights

October 2011 marked the 10th anniversary of the US-led intervention in Afghanistan. “No women, no peace” – a campaign by the Gender Action for Peace and Security coalition, of which UNA-UK is a member – has been calling on the UK government to ensure that hard-won women’s rights do not become a bargaining chip to be traded away in the name of peace. Violence against women, child marriage and maternal mortality remain high in the country, and women continue to be sidelined in peace

UNA Youth members watch a video message from FCO Minister Alistair Burt

© Foreign & Commonwealth Office

talks. At the London Conference in January 2010, an important marker on the route to peace, women were all but excluded. No women, no peace is pushing for the meaningful participation of Afghan women at the Bonn conference in December.

Ten years after 9/11

On 10 September, UNA-UK Chairman Sir Jeremy Greenstock participated in an Intelligence Squared debate on whether the “war on terror” was the right response

UN ASSISTANCE MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN

MANDATE: political mission established at the request of the Afghan government to assist progress on peace and development

CREATED: 28 March 2002
Staff: 1,600 civilians (of whom 80% are Afghan)

LEADERSHIP: Staffan de Mistura, UN Special Representative for Afghanistan

LOCATION: Kabul, with 18 regional and provincial offices

BUDGET: \$168m

to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Along with former French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, he argued that military action was not the most appropriate way to tackle a “threat that for all its use of violence, was

not military”. Former Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf and Colleen Graffy, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State under George W. Bush, spoke in favour of the motion. Visit www.intelligencesquared.com to listen to the debate.

On 12 September, a joint meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Groups on the UN and on Global Security and Non-Proliferation was addressed by Jason Burke, a Middle East and Asia expert who has recently published the book *The 9/11 Wars*.

UNA Youth: ideas for a nuclear-free Middle East

On 7 October, UNA-UK and the Foreign & Commonwealth Office co-organised a student conference on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation issues. About 30 students from around the UK heard from Foreign Minister Alistair Burt, former UNA-UK Chair Lord Hannay and Mark Fitzpatrick from the International Institute for Strategic Studies, before producing a 10-point plan to facilitate a nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East. Visit www.una.org.uk/towardszero for details.

UN/NGO conference on sustainability

At the beginning of September, over 2,100 NGOs convened in Bonn for the 64th annual UN/NGO conference. Under title “Sustainable societies, responsive citizens”, the conference was seen as one of the major feed-in events on the road to the “Rio+20” world summit scheduled for June 2012. Communications & Campaigns Officer Ben Donaldson led UNA-UK’s delegation to the conference (see page 25).



UNA-UK Members



Ravi Kumar on UNA Birmingham's efforts to fight caste discrimination in India and the UK

Combating caste-based discrimination is one of the UN's human rights priorities in 2010-11. High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay has called on world leaders to end caste discrimination – a statement echoed by Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who has likened his country's caste system to the South African apartheid regime.

Over the past year, UNA Birmingham branch has been exploring issues around caste and human rights in India and the UK. Our members have organised talks, attended debates and participated in international lobbying campaigns.

Caste might not make headlines in the UK, but it is a pressing issue in India. Despite great strides forward in developmental terms, half of the country's children are undernourished and 38% suffer from chronic malnutrition. The majority of those affected are Dalits (marginalised castes) and Adivasis (indigenous/tribal peoples).

Denial of the right to work, including free choice of employment, is at the heart

of this progress gap and, indeed, the caste system itself. Dalits are forced to perform tasks that are deemed too "polluting" or degrading for non-Dalits. According to unofficial estimates, more than 1.3m Dalits, mostly women, are employed as scavengers to clear human waste from dry pit latrines. Dalits also form the majority of agricultural, bonded and child labourers in India. Many survive on less than a dollar a day. Although India's constitution was intended to protect the rights of its poorest citizens, there has been very little improvement in their situation since it was adopted 62 years ago.

In May 2011, members of the branch went to London to hear activist and Booker Prize winner Arundhati Roy speak about her experiences of working with Adivasis in central India. She focused on the ongoing Indian government campaign against Maoist insurgents in the region – recently labelled the "biggest threat" to security by Manmohan Singh – claiming that the real objective behind the operation was to gain control of the rich natural resources in the Adivasis' land in order to hand them over to foreign corporations.

The branch followed this up by inviting Tari Atwal from the Asian Rationalist Society (Britain) to Birmingham in July to discuss the impact that India's economic success has had on its poor. He spoke about

"If the tribals have taken up arms, they have done so because a government which has given them nothing but violence and neglect now wants to snatch away the last thing they have – their land"
Arundhati Roy

a World Bank study that showed over 35m people – the vast majority of whom were Dalits and Adivasis – have been displaced to make room for mining, industrial and infrastructure projects. A lively debate ensued on how international trade rules and regulations are implemented and whether there are adequate protection frameworks in place to prevent forced displacement.

One issue that shocked members was the recreation of caste hierarchies by immigrant communities. Caste continues to exert a strong influence on the lives of a significant proportion of the nearly 2m Britons of Indian origin. Discrimination, both subtle and extreme, takes place in schools, workplaces, shops and places of worship.

Much work has been done by organisations that represent Dalits in the UK, especially in relation to protection under the Equality Act 2010. Following a government-commissioned report on caste-based discrimination in the UK, I travelled to Geneva in August to provide evidence to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). CERD has now recommended that the UK brings into force the provision under section 9(5)(a) of the Equality Act 2010 to provide for caste to be an aspect of race in terms of legal protection.

In the meantime, UNA Birmingham will continue to monitor caste issues and campaign against discrimination in the UK and elsewhere. ●

Ravi Kumar is Chair of the UNA Birmingham branch

Members of the Gulabi ("pink") Gang – an organisation founded by Sampat Pal Devi to help rural women in India belonging to the Dalit caste fight for their rights

© Joerg Boethling/Alamy



UNA-UK Young Professionals



UNA-UK young professional Aaron Akinyemi reports on the UN NGO conference in Bonn

The issue of sustainability has never been more pressing: harrowing images of natural disasters are ever-present on our television screens, small island states call for global action to stem the effects of climate change, and the world's population is expected to breach the 7bn mark this year. Therefore, the theme of the 64th annual UN DPI/NGO conference – "Sustainable societies, responsive citizens" – could not have been more apt.

Held in Bonn from 3 to 5 September, the conference attracted more than 2,100 NGO representatives from all over the world. Its aim was to galvanise action to address the developmental, economic and social challenges posed by climate change. Particular emphasis was placed on preparations for next year's "Rio+20" conference, which will mark the 20th anniversary of the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development.

I travelled to Bonn as a member of UNA-UK's delegation. Led by

Conference soundbites:

"There is no Planet B"

Flavia Pansieri, UN Volunteers

"Quoted in one of the workshops I attended, Albert Einstein's words still ring true: 'We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.'"

Helen Franzen, UNA-UK YPN

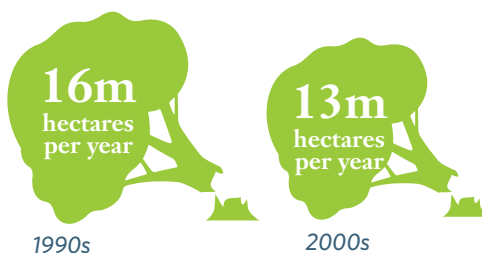
"[Countries that ignore climate change] risk being the dinosaur economies of the 21st Century"

Nick Nuttall, UN Environment Programme

"Feeling thoroughly inspired, I spent the rest of the weekend dashing between talks and speaking to delegates from organisations such as Aegee Europe and Peace Child International."

Ruth Whateley, UNA Youth

Global rate of deforestation:



2008 CO₂ emissions:

38%
above 1990 level

CO₂ per capita emissions (metric tonnes):



Communications & Campaigns Officer Ben Donaldson, the delegation included representatives of the Young Professionals Network and UNA Youth. Our mission was to forge relationships and gather ideas for UNA-UK on the two Rio+20 themes: a green economy in the context of poverty eradication and the institutional framework for sustainable development.

After an opening address by Ban Ki-moon, we heard from a host of speakers. Achim Steiner, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme, spoke about the dangers of viewing ecological and economic concerns as mutually exclusive, underlining the need to address these issues under a single "developmental umbrella". Felix Dodds, one of the conference co-chairs and head of the NGO Stakeholder Forum, stressed the importance of holding leaders to account.

Throughout the conference, the sub-theme of indigenous communities caught my attention. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz of Tebtebba, the Indigenous Peoples' International Centre for Policy Research and Education, stressed how much we have to learn from these communities, which have been living sustainably since time immemorial. This tied in with

a workshop run by Aram Ziai of the University of Bonn, who outlined the differences in North-South perceptions of development.

But in my opinion, it was campaigner Vandana Shiva who stole the show. Shiva, who founded Navdanya International – a network of seed keepers and organic producers in India – made an impassioned plea on behalf of the world's most marginalised people. She castigated global leaders for spending \$16tn on bank bailouts instead of using it to protect our planet and its poorest inhabitants. Her unapologetic denunciation of corruption and corporate greed met with rapturous applause.

As the world prepares for Rio+20, Shiva's words gave me the most hope: "Alternatives have become an imperative. And alternatives will be created by society. They won't come from the top – they will come from the bottom." ●

Aaron Akinyemi is a freelance journalist and member of the UNA-UK Young Professionals Network. For more information on the 64th UN DPI/NGO conference, including the conference statement, visit www.un.org/dpingoconference



Sara Traubel, President of Aberdeen UNA Youth branch, asks: "Where will the UN take you?"

The freshers' fair is one of the biggest events in the calendar for any university society. It's the first occasion on which to reach out to all of the new students and capture their unbounded enthusiasm and smiling faces before the hard work sets in!

The University of Aberdeen freshers' fair is held in a grand marquee on the university lawns. Societies represented ranged from the Electronic Music Appreciation Society to our own wonderful UNA Youth branch. With over 130 stalls at this one-day event, competition for the hearts and minds of the 3,000 new freshers is always stiff.

However, we were confident that our stall would do the business this year thanks to the support we got from UNA-UK. We normally receive materials for our stall from UNA-UK but this year was extra special as it launched a new freshers' fair competition, "Where will the UN take you?"

Not only did we get a 2m-high sign that immediately caught people's attention, but we also had something exciting to offer new members. If students filled in our postcard, they would receive monthly insider career tips from UNA-UK and have the chance to win an iPad 2 or a trip to New York – an opportunity not to be missed! These resources, combined

with the fact that many new students have an interest in the UN, made our stall a storming success.

As President of the Aberdeen UNA Youth branch, I am proud to be part of a new generation of UN enthusiasts. I am also delighted that our branch can have such a positive impact on so many people. It gives students who get involved with us the chance to educate themselves about the UN, engage with others, and enhance skills which will serve them well in their professional careers.

Overall, the freshers' fair was a real success for our branch and we were able to greatly increase our membership base. This will allow us to put on some great events in the upcoming academic year, building, for example, on the successful Model UN conference we held for the first time last year. This semester will also see our annual series of events for UN Week, which will be filled with campaigning and awareness-raising activities around campus and beyond. Finally, the event that I am personally most excited about is a brand new initiative: a conference on the Millennium Development Goals, which will give our members the chance to hear from experts in the field as well as contribute their own ideas.

As you can see, we have a very exciting year ahead of us and with the help of UNA-UK we've got off to a brilliant start. ●

Branch members staff the freshers' fair stall

© UNA Youth Aberdeen



Your chance to win a trip to New York or an iPad 2

Are you aged between 18 and 26 years? Do you want to receive our UN careers tips, **and get the chance to win an iPad 2 or a trip to New York?**

Sign up at www.una.org.uk/freshers before 31 December 2011.

Full terms and conditions are available on the website.

Model UN Symposium

King's College London, 19 November 2011

A chance for MUN experts, practitioners and enthusiasts to swap ideas and share best practice

Model UN is an inspiring tool for developing knowledge of global affairs, promoting tolerance and understanding, and building key skills such as public speaking, negotiation and research.

This one-day symposium is aimed at teachers, practitioners and enthusiasts who want to develop their MUN expertise by sharing experiences and tips with their peers.

You will:

- Learn about different types of MUNs
- Hear from experts what works and what doesn't
- Meet school, university and community practitioners
- Discuss potential MUN funding sources
- Gain tips on how to market your MUN

Whether you are a seasoned MUN facilitator or thinking of organising one for the first time, you cannot afford to miss this event.



To find out more and to register, please visit
www.una.org.uk/munsymposium

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