



The UN: Which Reforms for What Future?

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INTRODUCTION

The UN is currently under a lot of criticism. Upbraided and disparaged, the body that conveyed so much hope is now being berated. There is abundant literature on its subject, not to praise it but to point out its weaknesses, to the point of challenging its very existence.

How did this come to happen? Is such reproach warranted? How should the UN be reformed? What is its future? Should it really be abolished? This file contains info sheets organized according to a number of different themes, intended to provide parts of the answer.

First, a brief overview addresses the right-of-intervention issue and its evolution by reviewing the history of peacekeeping and its present situation, as well as by completing a mid-term assessment of the UN's Millennium Development Goals.

This is followed by a look at the obstacles the UN has met. The organization's road is fraught with pitfalls, and many of the flaws weakening it are induced by the Member States themselves as they fail to pay their full dues or adopt an extremely defensive attitude when their sovereignty is at stake.

A third part presents reform proposals put forth and upheld by a number of different players and thinkers. The proposals involve the Security Council and peacekeeping, and also the question of instituting an Economic and Social Security Council.

A last section considers the future of the UN and the role that it might be led to play, particularly in environmental matters. The basic question nonetheless remains: does the United Nations actually have a future?

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Please note: This file is quite substantial and only the table of contents has been translated. Volunteer translations of individual info sheets will be appreciated and published. Send to info@world-governance.org

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I. Taking stock of the UN vessel

Info Sheet N° 1: Does the criticism directed at the League of Nations yesterday apply to the UN today?

As a descendant of the League of Nations, was the UN able to correct the latter's dysfunctions or did it inherit its weaknesses too?

Info Sheet N° 2: Right of Intervention, origins and theory

State sovereignty is a basic concept rooted in public international law. It is challenged by the Right of Intervention, which is invoked for exceptional situations where the population of a state is in such danger that outside intervention would be justified to assist it even in violation of state sovereignty. The history of this concept is briefly reviewed here.

Info Sheet N° 3: From Right of Intervention to Responsibility to Protect

The info sheet "Right of Intervention, origins and theory" presents the principles underlying the concept as well as arguments in favor of it. Nonetheless, the Right of Intervention has been much contested, not only from the political but also from the legal standpoint.

Info Sheet N° 4: The UN's peacekeeping operations

Peacekeeping operations have undergone considerable change since the first one was deployed 60 years ago. Such operations have not always been successful, as testified by the Rwanda and the Srebrenica dramas. What reforms, then, are needed for the noble Blue Helmet institution to be more efficient and for its reputation to stop being tarnished?

Info Sheet N° 5: Millennium Development Goals

Member States adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in September 2000 on the occasion of the Millennium Declaration. There are eight Millennium Development Goals to be reached by 2015. Mid-term assessment.

II. The UN through thick and thin

Info Sheet N° 6: Financing the UN

The UN is abundantly criticized, but does it even have enough resources to match its ambitions? How is the UN financed and how much do Member States dues amount to? What influence does the United States wield in this critical area?

Info Sheet N° 7: Relations between the UN and the United States

The country most involved in making the UN a reality was the United States, a consequence of the visionary thinking of its president Franklin D. Roosevelt. Relations between the UN and the US would then become turbulent, with the US setting the tune and the UN being patterned by the country's conduct.

Info Sheet N° 8: Can the UN transcend the states that constitute it?

With globalization in full expansion and the question of global governance increasingly raised, it is legitimate to question whether the United Nations, the only universal organization to date, is capable of transcending the power of the states that constitute it.

Info Sheet N° 9: The UN disputed: example of the Commission on Human Rights

In 1946, two years before the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN set up the Commission on Human Rights through its Economic and Social Council. Highly disputed, it was replaced in 2006 by the Human Rights Council.

III. Should the UN change its course? A few proposals for reform

Info Sheet N° 10: Reform of the Security Council

With responsibility for peacekeeping and international security, the Security Council is at the core of the UN system. Reforming it around the questions of its representativeness and its veto power has crystallized all the debates on UN reform.

Info Sheet N° 11: An Economic and Social Security Council

The UN's meager role in the economic field has prompted voices to rise in favor of its setting up an Economic and Social Security Council. Its role would be to provide impetus and consistency to the existing set of economic, financial, and cultural institutions.

Info Sheet N° 12: The need of a quick reaction force

The UN has no own armed forces. Such forces would nonetheless be useful; limited but operational, they would allow the UN to act quickly and efficiently in a crisis.

Info Sheet N° 13: Universal Declaration of Interdependence

Ever more links are being interwoven worldwide, among the peoples and among the states. It is difficult today to be isolated and the need for global cooperation is perpetually growing. This is what is acknowledged in the Universal Declaration of Interdependence, which proposes to guide the world to "global intersolidarity."

Info Sheet N° 14: Suppose we started by applying the Charter?

The word "reform" comes up spontaneously whenever the UN is mentioned. And yet ... does the solution really lie in endless reforms? Could it be enough to just go back to the founding text and seriously apply the Charter of the United Nations?

IV. Moving toward new horizons

Info Sheet N° 15: Maurice Bertrand – The future of the UN and setting a global consensus

The UN has failed in its duty and the problem is not to reform it. The real objective is to improve global consensus.

Info Sheet N° 16: What is the future of the UN?

Debilitated by tedious reform attempts, a complex machinery, and much criticism, the UN is facing an uncertain future. Does the United Nations actually have a future? If so, what role will it be led to play in the coming years?

Info Sheet N° 17: Should the UN be abolished?

When there is talk about the UN, it is rarely to praise it. Criticized and upbraided, it is also known for its scandals: corruption or abuse by its Blue Helmets, for instance ... There has also been controversy over its Commission on Human Rights, and it has been accused of inertia. Is this reason enough to cast stones at it and even to abolish it?

Interview with General Jean Cot

General Jean Cot was UNPROFOR commander in former Yugoslavia from July 1993 to March 1994.

Interview with Stéphane Hessel

A World War II Resistance fighter, Stéphane Hessel was deported to Buchenwald then to Dora, from where he escaped. He participated in the drafting of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Interview with Olivier Ray

Olivier Ray is special assistant to Jean-Michel Severino, head of France's international development agency, the Agence Française pour le Développement (www.afd.fr).