

SIX STEPS TOWARD REVAMPING THE UNITED NATIONS

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1. Know your subject: It is not simple. We have to ask basic questions. What do we need: a transformed UN or new global institutions? Should it be reformed or transformed? What is the problem? Is it UN incompetence or do we have an institution out of step with the times? Who's to blame: the UN or the member states? This paper takes the positions (all of them arguable) that it is best to start by transforming the UN, that is, modifying its institutional structures, well beyond administrative tinkering. The stumbling blocks are the recalcitrant national governments who really don't want the UN to work better. Further, if we want to fundamentally change the UN, we must gain the support of its adherents. We can't revamp an organization no one wants. We must joyfully advocate the UN's achievements in maintaining international peace, promoting humanitarian development and human rights and making the world tick via the 14 specialized agencies (everything from civil aviation and world health to telecommunications and tourism). This includes recognizing that we need institutional reform because the world has changed since 1945. Problems now are as much global as they are national or local. Our challenges cut across state boundaries. Even sovereignty is mellowing. Globalization has made us neighbours. We are connected, like it or not. The former state-centric world is now co-managed by many other actors like civil society and multinational corporations. It is in this context that we must understand both the successes and failures of international organizations.

2. Know your objectives: The introduction to the June 2016 report of the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung New York Office entitled *Reinventing Development: Reforming the UN for People and Planet*, is called 'Beyond Tinkering' and states that "Transformational changes are needed to make the UN into a body that advances the public interest through democratic governance and commitment to its founding values... A piecemeal approach won't get us the UN we need." There is one common denominator that allows us to go rapidly to the heart of the insidious weakness of global governance. It is the issue of the incapacity of the world to develop policies and take actions to adequately deal with the global challenges that go beyond capacities of any single state (the environment, conflict, contagious diseases, global finance, inequality, terrorism, crime mafias, pollution, etc.). The acknowledged specialist of global governance, Tom Weiss, goes to the heart of the issue: "We cannot continue to ignore and to rationalize the absence of overarching authority... Humanity collectively is capable of better and more fairly governing the world (Beyond Platitudes, in *Governing the World?* Paradigm Publishers, Boulder, Colorado, 2014). As a first step in this direction, our objective must be to make the UN a more capable force for the public interest. In concrete terms this means giving the UN new institutional capacities. This cannot be achieved as long as rampant nationalism and sovereignty holds reign in the capitals of the world. So our second objective is to continue to harness sovereignty.

3. How to revamp the UN: It is quite incredible! For decades now we have had UN reform proposals on the books. They are elegant, practicable, workable – and completely unknown. The problem is the reformers. We have spent so much time analysing *what* to reform but have paid little attention to *how* to do it. We have to develop an effective strategy to get revamping on the international agenda. We need to market our reforms. Everyone else does. Business people

spend a lot more time on marketing than they do on inventing. Athletes work as hard on their game plans as they do on muscle building. Movie moguls make as much effort to attract the public as they do to producing films. We must overcome our conceit and involve specialists who can move our wares – like strategists, communicators, educators, psychologists, marketers, mobilizers and sociologists. How to revamp the UN starts with analysing the blockages to reform and learning from previous reform studies and efforts. Then we must consider the array of values and norms that will underlie a new ethical vision of the world. To counter-balance fears of a global leviathan, we must concentrate on what democracies have learnt about diffusing and controlling power through the techniques of federalism, subsidiarity, checks and balances, rights and equality, liberalism, the rule of law, participation and decentralization. Next, we must bring politicians and public opinion to desire global sustainability as much as they do national interests. This will include a judicious serialization of an ingenious sequence of those reforms that are most acceptable to governments and the public. Then we have to put together a winning coalition to bring about more workable global institutions.

4. Start a global movement to revamp the UN: The highly informative study, *Confronting the Crisis of Global Governance*, by the Commission on Global Security, Justice and Governance in 2015, stated, “Reforms require a realistic strategy for Advocating Justice and Security Together, rooted in a rigorous, ideally shared analysis and harnessing the ideas, networks, resources, and most of all, leadership of multiple actors to move toward this new vision of global institutions, in other words, concrete steps on how to get from here to there” (p.104). In my 2007 study on *Modernizing the United Nations*, I already called for the creation of campaign coalitions of NGOs. Among the components of these ‘smart coalitions’ composed of governmental and non-governmental actors are ideas, leadership, expertise, skillful negotiations, mobilization of networks and resources, concrete agendas, targets and indicators, and tools to measure progress and respond to setbacks. In terms of personnel, we will require NGO experts, international practitioners, academics, retired politicians and hopefully some representatives of friendly governments. Overtime these coalitions must learn how to change narratives and reframe issues to suit the headlines of the moment. Often, the complex reforms must be organized into more manageable, issue-specific areas that can be managed by actors with specific expertise. These issues must be able to ‘speak’ to the public and the media.

We can learn from the successful coalitions mobilised by the World Federalists to fight for an International Criminal Court, the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and One for 7 Billion, a campaign to improve the selection of the Secretary-General. These campaigns came along when political conditions created momentum for the specific reform. NGOs and governments made use of each other’s relative advantages. NGOs could apply their expertise, their ability to inform and frame the discourse, and their means for embarrassing dissenting governments through naming-and-shaming campaigns. Friendly governments could use their money and resources to manage negotiations and decision-making. Campaigns were based on a strong and simple normative message. Instead of meeting opposition governments head-on (even the P-5), the coalitions moved around them through the support of a massive majority of states. But, it starts with the combination of a small number of like-minded states and numerous civil society organizations with sophisticated communications skills who can mobilize widespread support.

What specifically should we revamp first at the UN? A very powerful book for its breadth and depth is Joe Schwartzberg’s: *Transforming the United Nations System: Designs for a Workable World*. He has given considerable thought to the sequencing of UN reforms with the thought that some changes are easier to get accepted and may open the door to further reforms. His preferences are: start with improving UN funding via a new assessment system; regain legitimacy through weighted voting in all the UN organs, that is, including population and

the economic contributions of states in their voting power rather than just one-state-one-vote; create a Security Council that is universally representative with weighted regional voting and no veto; and a standing, all volunteer UN peace force that incorporates expert civilian assistance via a UN Administrative Reserve Corps of volunteers with specialized professional competence. Almost everyone is in agreement that the UN must have its own UN Emergency Peace Force (UNEPF) and its own sources of revenue, although many prefer that this should come from some sort of taxing power. There, you see we have said it: even in international organizations it eventually comes down to guns and money. But to get these two, the organization must have legitimacy. That is why weighted voting is such an important concept. The big countries have fled the cacophony of the UN towards the G-7 and G-20 in part to have their voices heard for their just value. Weighted voting has been used in the European Union and appears to work quite well. Other priority objectives for revamping the UN include an advisory UN parliamentary network, a new Peacebuilding Council and a replacement for ECOSOC to give the UN authority for economic cooperation. Finally, or even first, some think a constitutional debate is a priority.

6. Know your opposition: No one said it would be easy. Not only do we have to overcome narrow nationalism but also we must recognize that some people simply do not want peace and harmony. Others do not want to give extra powers to the United Nations. Normally in polite company we do not talk about such subjects. But maybe it is time to do a little naming-and-shaming. Surely our foremost opponents are the greedy, those who always want more for themselves. For years it has been said that the world has enough food to feed all and enough money to overcome inequality. But still one per cent of the rich has fifty percent of the world's wealth – and they want to stop any reforms that will change this egregious situation. Of course not all the rich are necessarily greedy. Many of them share, invest and develop. Among the greedy are the warmongers. They only believe in power and interests. Behind the scenes they support ultra-right wing, conservative parties and pressure groups. The annual world military spending estimated at \$1.7 trillion in 2016 could provide for a lot of sustainable development. Third on our list of opponents are the fundamentalists who are behind much of the conflict and terrorism in the world. They come in many colours. As the Pope lamented recently, all religions have had their minority of fundamentalists led by charlatans and false prophets who feed off public ignorance and credulity. They would rather fight than make peace. And finally we have the newest wave of opposition to negotiation, sharing and reform. I am talking about the right-wing neo-nationalists and populists who are trying to lead the public to fear and division. To gain power they sow hate of foreigners and blame others for their own weaknesses. We can't ignore the opponents of peace, negotiation, reform and development. But we can remember that the world has always been composed of good and evil. All the good have to do is to band together.

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