



The World Series 2007 – The UN Olympiad

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Here is my update on happenings at the UN. Beginning with a little historic perspective, I have touched on major issues on today's calendar. The US-led invasion of Iraq, pressures to reform the UN (inability to open up the Security Council) and the failure of the DOHA WTO round have all exacerbated the North-South, G8 NAM, divide. Urgent problems, threatening life on this planet, lie on the UN's doorstep. Nuclear bombs are poised for launch at 20 minutes alert. Climate change, speeded by the way we live, may burn or drown us. With globalization, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Poverty drives the poor to invade the rich. Most people seek peace, but the UN has documented endemic violence against women and children. Slavery persists in the sex trade. AIDs marches on. Darfur is bleeding. Is that enough?

The world needs the UN more than ever, to mine and harness our deep resources of mind and spirit. Hope and compassion, with a dose of dread, may get us going. And yes, I still get out of bed.

I used to be a long-distance runner. I had to quit at 70 when I wore down my left knee. The UN has hit 60, but it can't quit. The UN carries the world's Olympic torch. It flickers. If it went out, how dark our world would be.

You will find an overview of the UN in my book, [The Diplomacy of Hope](#), revised edition 2004. Since then I have done a series of newsletters on what is happening here at the UN. I will rewrite my book in a year or two, if the sap is still running in my family tree. What I am giving you now is an interim update of the book.

I begin this newsletter with a personal story. Years ago, my good friend Dan Jacobs spent five years researching the Nigeria-Biafra war. Biafra, a relatively enlightened state, wanted independence. Its heroic struggle was strangled with international connivance. This was near genocide. Dan wrote up his findings in a book, [The Brutality of Nations](#).

At the time, I found it hard to swallow, but now I see it as seminal for humanitarian work. The title tells the story.

Dan died not long after the publication of his book. Before his death, he had a hand in establishing Human Rights Watch. A good man never dies unless we kill him.

Hannah Arendt gave us the phrase: “the banality of evil.” As an antidote to the mythic glory of bloodshed, it is good. Whether called terrorism or gun-boat diplomacy (regime change, etc), armed violence gives us no thrill. To be in it is one thing, to have it invade your TV is another. We are sated.

Brutality, evil. The UN is the troubled conscience of the world. The worship of nation states is a vestige of tribal morality, the divine right of kings, the abdication of personal responsibility. The UN Charter and the Declaration of Universal Human Rights lift our sights, challenging us to rise to a new humanity.

Some History: How We Got Here

The UN was created in 1945 to stop war between states. The five war-time allies, the world war winners, were empowered to do that, as the permanent core of the UN Security Council. Humanity would flourish in the garden of peace. While living within a system of international law, nations would retain their autonomy, their national sovereignty. As guarantor of peace, the Security Council would preside over the family of nations in the General Assembly, the G.A. The General Assembly would advance human welfare through its subsidiary Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Citizens’ organizations, non-governmentals, might be consulted by ECOSOC. That was how the UN was launched.

Much has changed since 1945. Aside from Iraq 's invasion of Iran and the flexing of imperial muscle (the US invasion of Vietnam and Iraq), conventional wars between states seem to be a thing of the past. UN membership has risen from 51 to 193, as colonies gained their independence. Impending global disaster, the “Cold War” between nuclear-armed USA and the USSR , was off the UN stage, giving the Security Council odd jobs around the edges.

After *perestroika* in 1989, the world came to the UN, the Security Council. And with the colonial lid off, many new and fragile states collapsed into civil wars, often the legacy of colonization. Dealing with civil wars, domestic violence, was now the job of the Security Council, something in no way anticipated in 1945.

Super-power USA , having parented the UN, could not always call the shots; and didn't quite know what to make of its offspring. Terrorists (9/11/2001) fed American paranoia: strike suspects before they strike you. Go it alone.

The UN can't survive without this volatile giant, the USA ; and the giant is reluctantly finding that it needs the UN. The Cold War imposed a terrible kind of stability. Now everything seems to be in flux.

Everything, what is that? What is security? Is it military power? Is it the nuclear bomb? In the short run, national myopia, yes, sort of. But overwhelming power can make you even more vulnerable, as the USA discovered on September 11, 2001. Security as balance of power, a persistent fixation, is obsolete. Globalization is everywhere, not only economic (investment, trade, industry); but also in population, migration, disease, communication, travel, culture, entertainment, science, religion, and, over all, the environment/climate. Organized crime, the trade in arms and drugs, is global; and so is stateless terrorism.

The United Nations with its satellite organs, this mosaic of nation states, is the only institution where globalization in all its manifestations can be seen, analyzed, monitored, and even, sometimes, regulated. Only through the UN can the vast populations of refugees, displaced by war or poverty, be acknowledged and protected. Military power may deflect and exploit globalization, but it won't make globalization any better, nor will it help its victims.

This is my preamble to discussing current happenings at the UN.

One Day at the UN

The official UN Journal gives a daily preview of events. I happen to have the Journal for 16 April 2007. Here is what I read:

Security Council: Today, nuclear non-proliferation, North Korea . Tomorrow: Energy, security, climate.

General Assembly:

UN system coherence in development, humanitarian assistance and environment.

Disarmament Commission (three working groups).

Advisory Committee, administration and budget.

UN Commission on International Trade Laws.

Economic and Social Council:

Special High Level meeting with Bretton Woods (financial) institutions, The World Trade Organization and the UN Conference on Trade and Development — top policy officials from these organizations and governments.

UN Forum on Forests

Meeting on multilingualism

Informal, convened by France.

Workshop on negotiating treaties

Panel discussion on financing development

NGO panel discussion on “coherence”

I have cleaned up and simplified the Journal a bit. Not an extraordinary day.

The Secretary-General

December 2006, Kofi Annan's decade came to an end. January 2007, his successor Ban ki-moon took over. From a Ghanaian aristocrat, the baton went to a careful Korean diplomat. Kofi Annan had surprised us by his steady hand and dignity through the Balkans and Iraq crisis, through a barrage of hostile criticism from American red-necks, and scape-goating (SG) for oil-for-food funds (millions disappearing under the eyes of the Security Council). He came to symbolize the UN ideal of dispassionate integrity. He was well served by his Deputy, our Canadian Louise Frechette. She took her share of flack with her as she moved on in 2006 to new responsibilities in Canada.

Ban ki-moon got off to a bad start. Lacking Kofi's personal warmth, he demanded resignation of his entire top management. Key replacements, suddenly brought in, sometimes seemed mismatched to their jobs. U.S. pressure was evident as an American ambassador was put in charge of political affairs, while a British diplomat took over humanitarian operations. These two replaced superbly qualified men -- Gehenno for Peace Operations and Egeland for Humanitarian. This latest political intrusion did nothing to reassure the UN staff, already battered by pathological molesters. Belatedly, Mr. Ban spoke up to say how much he appreciates the professionalism and devotion of his people.

Outside the UN house, his first goof, in connection with Iraq (the hanging of henchmen) was to say that the death penalty was a domestic issue. The death penalty is legal in South Korea . International humanitarian law, however, is strictly opposed to the death penalty. The Secretary-General soon corrected himself. Since then he has been behaving well, going to hot spots (Africa, the Middle East) and saying the right things. Give him time.

The selection and appointment of a Secretary-General is a messy political process. The Security Council selects, the General Assembly confirms. By tradition, major regions take turns. After Africa came Asia . The candidate must not offend the P5, especially the Super Power. It is a wonder that any reasonably qualified candidate emerges. A tough job for anyone, both manager of the Secretariat and political go-between.

Reform

Governments that conceived the UN seem never to be happy with their offspring. Reform is always on their lips. It is easy to pick on the Secretariat: under-funded, overworked, and politically infiltrated. More serious for reformation is how governments behave, the processes for directing and funding the Organization. The big structural flaw, seemingly beyond fixing, is the GA versus Security Council. Pervasive also is the system of assessments, the annual dues governments must pay to join the club. The system, based on GNP/population, means that the richest countries carry the UN. The US contribution, a miniscule chip off their trillions, is around one-fourth of the UN budget. By turning off the tap, the USA can kill the UN. There is constant nitpicking in the GA's Fifth Committee (finance and administration).

The UN budget wrangle this year was, as usual, a shadow play for political power as frozen in the Charter, the intractable reformation of the Security Council. The political paralysis is shared across the divide. For more than ten years now, every conceivable formula has been chewed over for bringing the Council up to date (adding 8 or 10 members, permanent, rotating, with or without the veto held by the Permanent five, abolishing the veto altogether). None of the Perm-5 is ready to step down, even though it would fit political reality to give only one place to the EU, the European bloc (not the two now held by France and the UK). Their empires gone, the Security Council is their last vestige (along with their nuclear bombs, of course). Strength through weakness. And the "non-aligned", the NAM, huddling together in regional groupings, has so far been unable to agree on the select few to leaven the Council. The creaky old machine carries on.

There is more to the budget story. Last year (2006) the USA said it would withhold most of its contribution unless its demands for reform were accepted. For NAM, the US demand to give greater authority to the Secretary-General, would be a sell-out. Kofi Annan would retire in December 2006. The USA would call the shots on his successor. In the Fifth Committee there was a bitter stand-off. With the UN about to grind to a halt, the USA backed off, paid enough to keep the lights on. But the USA got its dues in top appointments, the Secretary-General, and key senior officials.

This struggle coloured the UN all through 2006. It was not just about UN dues, it was a flash-point between the USA and NAM. Feelings were inflamed by the crude arrogance of US Ambassador John Bolton, terminated without ceremony after the November 2006 US election.

But on reform, not all was lost. A new Peacebuilding Commission was created to help broken countries get back on their feet. And a Human Rights Council was established to replace the politically discredited Human Rights Commission. At ECOSOC, the High Level meeting listed in the 16 April Journal is another serious effort to put life into that body.

The Security Council

Considering the baggage it carries, the Security Council is working remarkably well. What does it do? In my hands I have the 249 page official report of the Security Council for the 12 months 1 August 2005 to 31 July 2006 (UN document A/61/2). More up to date and accessible is a 61 page summary UN "Press Release," SC/8940 dated 12 January 2007. Best of all I have the unofficial monthly Security Council Report, the current forecast for April. (The Security Report is, in effect, a free-standing private organization, funded by Canada, Norway and three private Foundations.) In a mere 20 pages, this excellent report tells me that the March 2007 Council agenda covered Kosovo, Darfur/Chad/The Central African Republic (all three involved in the Darfur tragedy), Lebanon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Western Sahara, Georgia, Somalia, Liberia, North Korea, and Burundi. Also on the March agenda were two global issues: small arms; and women, peace and security. Looking ahead, the report foresaw the recent (April) visit to Darfur of John Homs (newly installed as Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs), as well as the Secretary-General's April trip to the Middle East . In June, we are told, the Council will resume its consideration of protecting civilians in armed conflict. (The major UN report on violence against children went to the General Assembly and will eventually feed into the Security Council, though it goes far beyond armed conflict.)

What about Iraq, Chechnya , Israel/Palestine? As for Iraq, the Security Council has been deeply involved since 1991 (read David Malone's brilliant book, The International Struggle over Iraq). For Israel/Palestine, the UN is in the "Quartet" with major players ready to broker peace if ever sanity breaks out. And it is the UN Blue Helmets who are keeping the peace in Lebanon , after the Israel-Hamas devastation. Russia doesn't want the UN in Chechnya any more than Canada wants the UN in Baffinland.

Peacebuilding

There are now 18 UN peace operations deploying 100,000 personnel. Beginning in 1956 with the Suez crisis (France/Britain/Israel versus Egypt/USSR), the first UN Peacekeepers served as buffers for cooling off. A political anomaly, the first Peacekeepers were launched by the General Assembly, rather than the Security Council. Some things have changed. Nations may snarl at each other now, without taking up arms.

Originally tasked with resolving conflicts between nations, the Security Council is now entangled in domestic violence, civil wars, broken states. It is useless just to stop the fighting. Something has to be done to affect whatever has led to violent conflict. Call this human security. And so, ad hoc, bit by bit, the Security Council is into nation building; not as a mandate for the whole world, but for nations in crisis. Peace keeping has become nation building. Peacebuilding operations are now under civilian direction with an array of specialists (judicial, police and more). Military force is subsumed, integrated. This is the UN in action, in Cambodia (mixed success) and ongoing in Kosovo , Sierra Leone , Liberia , the Democratic Republic of Congo and Timor Leste.

This is where the new Peacebuilding Commission comes in. While it is not formally tied to the Security Council, it will back up the Council in peace operations, more often than

not in collapsed countries. Burundi and Sierra Leone are its first trials. The UN staffer in charge is Canada's Carolyn McAskie.

Terrorism

Terrorism was on the UN agenda long before a handful of terrorists woke up the USA on September 11, 2001. (They woke me up, too.) The Bush Administration took terror to the Security Council on September 12. Although there were already 12 international treaties on specific forms of terrorism (now 13, a new one on nuclear terror), the Council went ahead at once and created a Counter Terrorism Committee. First steps were to share information (e.g. Interpol) and identify the most wanted. But getting to a more comprehensive approach was hung up over defining terrorism. The hang up is political: freedom fighters or terrorists? It took five years for the General Assembly, in 2006, to agree on a strategy and plan of action to strengthen international and national counter measures. The strategic plan confronts the (assumed) causes of terrorism; as well as what can be done to catch terrorists and squeeze terror networks. There is still no catch-all treaty on terrorism. Stateless terrorists are bad. War is war, terror and all.

Disarmament

Article 26 of the UN Charter is clear and explicit in making the Security Council responsible for arms control. It says: "The Security Council shall be responsible for formulating... plans to be submitted to the Members of the United Nations for the establishment of a system for the regulation of armaments." Except for sanctions on troublemakers (peacekeeping/peacemaking): and peripherally, small arms, the Security Council shows no interest in disarmament. Why? There is big money in this hot potato. The PERM-5 are leading producers and exporters of killing machines. Annual arms trade world-wide topped \$1 trillion in 2006. (Grant aid for development was around \$100 billion.)

There is no overall UN plan for arms control. The Security Council has been happy to turn the whole thing over to the General Assembly (operating through its First Committee and the subsidiary Disarmament Commission). Off in Geneva, there is also the free-standing Conference on Disarmament, charged with hammering out specific regulations and treaties. Impending Armageddon and ongoing mayhem seem to paralyze. Rome is burning.

There are two categories of weapons: mass killers (weapons of mass destruction) and cozy killers (conventional). Mass killers so far are nuclear, chemical and biological. Nannotech is in the offing. (We don't mention starvation.)

For nukes, the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) was a bargain between nuclear powers and everyone else: no more nukes while we (who have nukes) proceed to get rid of them. NPT has not worked. Instead of the original five, there are now eight nuclear nations (besides the PERM 5, Israel, India and Pakistan). In the wings are North Korea and Iran. North Korea is playing its nuclear card to extract whatever it can from the international

market. It will probably be bought off. Iran is more threatening as it goes ahead with enriching uranium, creating the means to make more and faster. Is this really for civilian use? If Iran goes nuclear, why not Saudi Arabia and Egypt ? Isn't this region already unstable enough?

So far, the USA and Russia dominate, with enough nuclear weapons (thousands poised at 20 minutes alert) to wipe all humanity off the map. But there is absolutely no move in Washington toward nuclear disarmament. Quite the contrary, the USA won't even let the UN talk about it, and is even exhuming "tactical" nukes for actual use. A bargain for suicide.

Treaties to ward off chemical and biological weapons are in place, not perfect, but working toward control and elimination. Serious work here.

All other killers are called conventional, although they include new sophisticated machines to kill more and faster. The science of death. There is some progress (e.g. laser weapons prohibited). Supplementing the Ottawa land mines treaty, a new treaty to clear up unexploded "remnants of war" (cluster bombs) came into force in November 2006.

"Conventional" airplanes, drones, battle tanks and subs still go to war.

Small arms come home. Millions of mothers and children die civil deaths. An angry coalition, NGOs shaming the UN system, sparked the 2001 UN Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms. (Illicit, a euphemism to deflect the gun lobby. Everything illicit was originally licit.) The Conference agreed on general principles, a good start, to be elaborated at a review Conference in 2006. But 2006 was a flop. Guns prevailed. Nevertheless, at the regional level, there are specific trade controls (Europe, the Americas). West Africa (ECOWAS) is exemplary.

Most encouraging is the prospect for a comprehensive arms trade treaty, a preparatory process launched by the UK. Preliminary but official. (This month I attended a one-day UN workshop for delegates and others on a possible treaty.)

On all significant disarmament issues at the current GA, the USA was spectacularly negative (twelve NO votes). This makes the disarmament lobby a bit queasy over Secretary-General Ban's plans to put disarmament under his wing, as an "Office," not a Department. Mr. Ban had first proposed to put disarmament under political affairs (headed by an American) but was stopped by a powerful NAM delegation. Since then he has been saying the right things, that he will push disarmament. Actions speak. To head the "Office" will he appoint a committed advocate or some pliable namby-pamby?

Human Rights: Norms, Treaties, Enforcement

If humanity has a moral conscience, that conscience is manifested in what we call Human Rights. Even at the onset of the Cold War, in 1948 the UN proclaimed Human Rights in an historic Declaration. Since then, the Declaration has been translated into international

law in an array of treaties embracing political, civil, economic and social rights; as well, more and more, the specially vulnerable (women, children, migrant workers). Genocide, racial discrimination and torture have been outlawed as well. The treaty system was further extended in 2006 with a treaty for Rights of the Disabled and a treaty against “Disappearances” (that sinister form of political murder). The right to “development,” as it is called, identifies extreme poverty as radical crime.

Since the 2005 UN Summit , Human Rights have been recognized as basic for everything the UN does. The GA even went so far as to assert, in 2005, that the UN has the responsibility and authority to step in whenever a national government fails to protect its own people from gross violations of their rights— the responsibility to protect . Treaties translate norms into law; and ratifying a treaty means domesticating international law.

No nation has a perfect record on human rights. Atrocities persist. What can be done through the UN to make things better, to make rights real? If you sign up, you must report what you have done. There is a system for reviewing these reports. Findings from this review process may go public at the newly established Human Rights Council; and from there to the GA. Governments are extremely sensitive to public exposure. This is a first step toward enforcement, a good psychological war.

Political sensitivity is good, it means that rights are taken seriously. It is bad because it gets in the way of exposure. The Human rights Commission, a Charter body, got stifled by a clique of miscreant governments, members of the Commission. The new Human Rights Council is meant to get out of that impasse, a fresh start. Its first sessions in 2006 were none too promising, preoccupied with Israel-Palestine, but eventually the Council moved on to a wider agenda (e.g. poverty, religious discrimination, violence against children, the Darfur tragedy). This Council will have more time to do its work: the old Commission met only once a year, the Council will meet three times. To deflect politics, the Council must review the performance of all 193 states, not just a selected few as in the past. Taking on the whole UN membership is an enormous task. The Council is trying to figure out how it can do that. Just a beginning.

There is more to the Rights system. The High Commissioner for Human Rights, our Canadian Louise Arbour, takes with her the insights she gained from having served as prosecutor for the War Crimes Tribunal for Yugoslavia . She is supported by a group of inspectors (the official euphemism is “special procedures mechanisms”) who have visited more than 40 countries. Human Rights has been chronically under-funded at the UN. So it is good to know that Louise Arbour's office will benefit from doubling its budget over 5 years, adding 91 to her staff. She has developed a comprehensive plan of action, a first.

Besides public exposure (at the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly) and sanctions (The Security Council), what is happening to enforce, to realize human rights? Public exposure is mightily exploited by such NGOs as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. And don't underestimate the influence of such sterling people as Mia Farrow. Formal judicial action was initiated by the Security Council in its ad hoc War Crimes Tribunals for Yugoslavia and Rwanda . The Tribunals prosecute individuals,

especially leaders, with the intent to deter as much as punish. Trials are given maximum publicity. The Tribunals have pioneered in showing that objective law and procedures can be applied even in politically charged situations. Monsters have been convicted and jailed.

These Tribunals will soon be coming to an end, packing up. Their experience accelerated action by the permanent UN International Criminal Court (ICC), which became operational in 2002. Despite aggressive US sabotage, 104 nations have joined the ICC. (There are signs that the USA may be beginning to realize that it needs the ICC.) The ICC mandate follows the ad hoc Tribunals: war crimes, genocide, crimes against humanity. (Aggression may be added some day if governments can decide what “aggression” is, and if the ICC and the Security Council find a way to collaborate.) Like the Tribunals, the ICC may prosecute individuals, but only if their home governments can't or won't do it. As its first operations, the ICC has taken on Uganda (the head of the Lords Resistance Army), the DR Congo (a notorious warlord) and the Sudan (five officials responsible for the Darfur massacre). It was the Security Council that steered the ICC to Darfur . The USA did not veto the Council's decision. ICC has stepped into three of the most dreadful and difficult cases. Another distinguished Canadian, Philippe Kirsch, is President of the Court. A global coalition of NGOs has played a major role in the life of the ICC and, accordingly, has a unique standing at the Court.

Under the Human Rights umbrella, women and children get special attention through two specific treaties. This year two exhaustive reports, on violence against women and on violence against children, call all people to make amends, to end this social disease. The Commission on the Status of Women and the UNICEF Executive Board have taken this issue to the General Assembly. The Security Council also comes in with its concern for the protection of civilians. Women cradle our future.

Humanitarian Assistance: Survival

Human Rights begin with the right to survive, hence the humanitarian focus on poverty. Does the right to vote mean anything if you are starving? Disasters coming from nature's brutality (drought, flood, wind, quakes) are compounded by human violence. Climate change tells us that people are complicit in natural disasters. People are more than complicit in the civil and uncivil conflicts that have ravaged, displaced and killed millions in our time. Helping people in natural and unnatural disasters is called humanitarian. The Charter did not foresee any significant role for the UN in disaster relief. But nowadays, the UN is in the eye of the storm.

Pragmatically, we distinguish between raw nature and human nature. Raw disasters tripled the number affected in the past 30 years. At least 100 million have been killed by Mother Nature. The UN is giving food aid to about 100 million in more than 80 countries. As one of several partners in the UN humanitarian system, UNICEF is now extending emergency aid to 32 countries.

Overall, UN humanitarian aid calls for around \$5 billion a year. To facilitate quick action, an emergency reserve fund of \$500 million is in place.

Refugees have been a special UN concern from the start, when the UNHCR (High Commissioner for Refugees) shielded castoffs from World War II. For the UNHCR, as originally established, refugees were people fleeing from their own countries, living abroad. With the proliferation of civil wars, that refugee flood reached over 20 million. This year, when many have been able to go back home, the number has dropped to about 9 million. But that is a fragment of displacement. Within their own national borders, 25 million are now uprooted. Yielding to reality, the UNHCR now can take the “internally displaced,” the homeless at home, under its wing — a major humanitarian responsibility. Don't forget that the UN continues to shelter Palestinian refugees.

Gone are the days when humanitarian aid was privileged as neutral, above politics. In civil war, your enemy is the people on the other side. Helping everybody includes helping enemies. In war-time chaos, delivering aid is risky, and aid workers may be targeted. Courage and professional skill maintain UN integrity.

Human Development

The Charter says that the UN should help make everyone's lives better — economic and social advance throughout the world. This is called “development,” a word that implies some kind of organic process where things mature and ripen. But it turns out that there is nothing automatic or inevitable in “human development.” At the UN, we have moved on to separating economic development (things) from human development (the way people live). Moving on in this way had a sort of culmination in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set up by UN heads of state in the year 2000, subsequently reaffirmed at the 2005 UN Summit (heads of state again). This set of goals for the first time established overall priorities for UN aid, bringing strands together. The MDGs were to show that there is more to the UN than talk. Converging at the UN, the UN family of nations would be working toward a better world. MDGs are both comprehensive (cut extreme poverty by 50%) and particular (reduce maternal and child mortality; curb epidemic disease including HIV/AIDS; provide primary education to all, especially girls). Goals are to be reached by the year 2015. MDGs consolidated a lot that was already in the works. Reaching goals meant tidying up the development system, a more coherent strategy.

It goes without saying — so why should I say it? — that war, conflict, can stop social progress, wasting wealth and turning back the clock. **Human security** (the Security Council) requires **human development** (the whole UN system). That is the UN package.

Halfway on the road to 2015, what are the prospects for getting there? World averages tell us something, but they gloss over huge disparities between and within countries. Because of economic growth in China and India, it will look as though poverty reduction world-wide will be achieved, but even in China and India millions will be left behind. The poorest of all, in Africa, will probably be worse off. Apart from AIDS, the other

goals may well be reached. Fifteen years, 2000 to 2015, is a tight squeeze. We need a longer look.

The UN brings partners, facts and plans together. That was what the High Level ECOSOC meeting on 16 April was about. Many things bear on development: global trade, investment, enhanced production, technology. Grant aid, from rich nation to poor, is a small part of the picture, running at around \$100 billion a year. Up to one-fifth of that goes through the UN. Grant aid (not a loan) is critical for social development (health, education, etc). The UN has set 0.7% of GNP as the minimum contribution that advanced nations should make as grant aid. Only five European countries are contributing at that level. Canada is creeping up but is still delinquent. Measured by the UN norm, the USA comes last among donor nations.

Why the shortfall in aid? Donors may blame the poor, the least developed, citing incompetence, waste, corruption. Some of that goes with underdevelopment, but donors themselves may need to put their houses in order. What we put into development aid is an index of how much we care. Help our neighbors to help themselves.

Is nature corrupt? Disease knows no borders. In most regions — Africa, Eastern Europe, the Caribbean — HIV/AIDS is threatening whole societies. It is spreading in China and India. The UN leads and coordinates the global attack on AIDS. Alongside the UN, a Global Health Fund is targeting three big killers: HIV, tuberculosis and malaria. Some countries have shown that AIDS can be held back by massive and determined action: investment in education, information with community involvement, along with contraception and antiretroviral treatment. Women, organized and aware, have been crucial, as shown when Uganda took on AIDS.

Civil Society — NGOs

National governments assembled at the UN are an odd lot. The process of gaining political power, whether democratic or not, does not necessarily produce far-sighted statesmen (or stateswomen). What all heads of state have in common is a taste for power. Coming to the UN, even as a PR ritual, is something of a leveler. Politicos try to look good. Back home it's business as usual.

Viewing this spectacle, citizens may be dismayed. Can't we do better? There is the dream of a world parliament, directly elected by the people, alongside the General Assembly. Even if it was feasible, how would it work? The International Crisis Group is a hybrid animal, inside and outside governments. Parliamentarians already have their global association, meeting and taking enlightened positions alongside the U.N. Maybe some sharing of energies; but their real power is back home. You could say the same for many NGOs.

Some NGOs have the stature and skill that is needed and recognized internationally. Foremost among them is the International Committee of the Red Cross, the ICRC. For human rights, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are a formidable

presence. NGO networks, coalitions, have sometimes been able to get into the act, notably for the ICC and land mines. A continuing NGO coalition is struggling to get international regulation of small arms. These examples come to mind. There are many more. Certainly NGOs played a major role at the big UN policy conferences in the 1990s. Even though off-stage and volatile, the voice of NGOs is needed even more today.

Farewell to Arms?

Darfur is the scandal, the test.

The responsibility to protect. Sacred savagery, the free hand of a government, this time Khartoum, to kill. As I write, Khartoum's duplicity keeps the massacre going. Beijing has been cozy with Khartoum (oil from the Sudan). Will China be hosting the Genocide Olympics? Will the UN be able protect? The brutality of nations.

Farewell, Kofi Annan. His last major speech, on December 11, 2006, lays out much better than I have the state of affairs at the UN. (You can get it from the UN.) Winding down, he said:

My friends, our challenge today is not to save Western civilization—or Eastern, for that matter. All civilization is at risk, and we can save it only if all peoples join together in the task.