

Fulfilling the Mission: Empowering the UN to Live Up to the World's Expectations

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The structure of world peace cannot be the work of one man, or one party, or one Nation. ... It must be a peace which rests on the cooperative effort of the whole world. [\[1\]](#)

These were the words with which U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt—one of the parents of the United Nations, and indeed, the man who gave the organization its name—addressed the U.S. Congress in March 1945.

Roosevelt didn't live to see the birth of the international organization dedicated to world peace of which he had dreamed. He passed away in April 1945, just one month after speaking these words and a few weeks before the United Nations Conference on International Organization convened to draft the United Nations Charter.

At the San Francisco Conference, attended by representatives of fifty nations, there was a surging sense of joy and hope that the birth of this international organization would help humankind break the vicious cycles of war and tragedy, and move the world toward peace and security. The conference was described as a "landmark" and a "milestone in the long march of man to a better future," [\[2\]](#) indicative of the world's great hope and expectation on the birth of the United Nations.

The United Nations Charter was adopted after three months of intensive debate and discussions, and was the culmination of the vow "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind..." [\[3\]](#)

These words in the Preamble of the Charter were not written merely as a reflection of the mistakes of the past, but were informed by a sense of responsibility for the generations to come.

A universal forum

Thirteen years ago, I had occasion to visit the Opera House in San Francisco where the Charter was adopted. Reflecting on the dramatic moment in world history when the United Nations was born to serve as the parliament of humanity, I could not suppress a renewed sense of the immensity of the mission with which the UN has been entrusted.

That mission, to prevent the world from experiencing the scourge of yet another world war, has subsequently been constantly challenged, and at times it seemed that the organization would fail in this most crucial task. This was certainly the case during the crises of the Cold War, when the world was split into rival blocs.

A variety of conflicts and tensions continue to plague the world, and the situation at the start of the twenty-first century has become further aggravated with the emerging crisis of international terrorism. Furthermore, global issues such as poverty, hunger, environmental degradation and refugee crises continue to pose fundamental threats to human dignity.

The difficult realities confronting the UN sixty years after its birth were expressed quite explicitly in the words of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his address to the 2005 World Summit: "...deep divisions among Member States, and the underperformance of our collective institutions, were preventing us from coming together to meet the threats we face and seize the opportunities before us." [\[4\]](#)

Given that the UN is an intergovernmental organization whose constituent members are sovereign states, innovative reform ideas and efforts will inevitably face the impediments of conflicting national interests. This is the disempowering reality that has confronted the UN for many years. People's disappointment in the UN has led to escalating criticism of the

powerlessness of the international organization.

In certain respects, the UN has failed to keep pace with the changing realities of our times, and there are certainly many major hurdles and criticisms that the UN has yet to overcome.

Nevertheless, as long as there are people in this world who suffer, who live under threats and crises, we absolutely cannot afford to dismiss the great value and mission of the UN.

With a membership of 192 states, the UN is the most universal forum available; the UN alone is capable of promoting international cooperation and conferring legitimacy to such efforts and actions. Therefore, I believe that there is no other realistic solution than to provide effective support to the UN and work for its revitalization. We must start from the recognition that the UN has, for sixty years, provided humanitarian assistance to regions in need and acted as a forum for global dialogue where international consensus could be reached on issues of importance.

As I engage in dialogue with the world's political, cultural and intellectual leaders, we often exchange thoughts on the future of the UN. If I were to distill and summarize their views, most of these leaders, while admitting the problems and challenges that the organization faces, subscribe to the view that the UN needs to be supported and empowered.

Many have pointed out that even if UN-centered initiatives are agreed on and ready to be implemented, there will always be national leaders who, to protect national interest or position, distance themselves from commitment to specific action. In my conversations with successive UN Secretaries-General, including Javier Perez de Cuellar and Boutros Boutros-Ghali, they have consistently pointed out the irony that while the world places the maximum expectations on the UN, it provides only minimal support.

The critical question, therefore, is how can this situation be resolved? First of all, we must constantly recall that a core purpose of the UN is to be the parliament of humanity, a venue where all voices can be heard and all perspectives represented. However seriously national interests clash and crises deepen, I believe that the answer lies in the commitment to a relentless process of dialogue, steadily creating the foundations for common efforts to resolve the challenges that face us.

Without dialogue, the world will continue to stumble through the confusion of darkness and division. Just as, in Greek mythology, Ariadne's thread made possible a safe exit from the Minotaur's labyrinth, dialogue can help us find our way out of the baffling maze of crises that surround us.

The continued process of dialogue fosters the ethos of coexistence and tolerance that our times demand. It is my firm belief that this will give birth to a "culture of peace"—the advent of which represents a critical transition in human history.

Today, the world faces mounting crises including the deadlock in Iraq and the Middle East as a whole, the possible development of nuclear weapons capabilities by North Korea and Iran, the deteriorating state of affairs in Afghanistan and ongoing regional conflicts in Africa and elsewhere. But the complexity of these challenging problems is precisely the reason why it is crucial to patiently and persistently seek out paths to resolution making maximum use of the channels for global dialogue that are both the UN's most particular strength and the very well-springs of soft power.

The advancing processes of globalization worldwide have been accompanied by deepening divisions and conflicts—both within and between societies. We see around us a spreading "culture of war" that justifies the use of war and violent means to realize desired ends.

It is absolutely vital that we dismantle this culture of war. We must use dialogue to advance resolutely toward the creation of a truly peaceful global society in which there is genuine respect for differences of position and outlook and where there is a shared reverence for the human dignity of all.

I wish to urge again that the UN play a focal role in the grand project of constructing a civilization imbued with the spirit of dialogue.

Dag Hammarskjöld's commitment to dialogue

As we strive to envision the direction the UN should take in the twenty-first century, I believe there is much we can learn from the life and example of Dag Hammarskjöld, the second Secretary-General of the organization. His achievements shine in the annals of UN history and his moral force and integrity as the "conscience of the United Nations" command wide respect to this day.

Dag Hammarskjöld was a statesman and economist born in Sweden just over a century ago. In the midst of the mounting tensions of the Cold War, Hammarskjöld took the lead in expanding the UN's responsibilities beyond a passive role of

merely responding to crises, to a more proactive role in the promotion of peace in the world.

His talents were particularly visible in his efforts to resolve the Suez Crisis, as well as conflicts in Lebanon, Laos and elsewhere. His active pursuit of “quiet diplomacy,” as he personally led missions to different regions in order to mediate conflicts, remains as his enduring legacy.

There were voices critical of this style of proactive diplomacy on the part of the UN and its Secretary-General. Hammarskjöld’s actions were denounced, for example, by the Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, who demanded his resignation. Hammarskjöld refused to succumb to this pressure and continued to promote UN leadership for the resolution of international crises.

Hammarskjöld expressed his unwavering resolve in his book *Markings* published after his death:

“The Uncarved Block”—remain at the Center, which is yours and that of all humanity. For those goals which it gives to your life, do the utmost which, at each moment, is possible for you. Also, act without thinking of the consequences, or seeking anything for yourself. [5]

Driven by a sense of moral, even religious, mission, he continued to strive until the last moment of his life to empower the UN to respond to the world’s expectations.

In September 1961, en route to a meeting with President Moise Tshombe of Katanga in an effort to resolve the Congo Crisis, Hammarskjöld’s plane crashed in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), causing his death. He was 56. For his outstanding achievements, Hammarskjöld was posthumously awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 1961.

At the time of his death, Hammarskjöld was engaged not only in attempting to resolve the conflict in Congo, but in another important task. Hammarskjöld had profound respect for the “philosopher of dialogue,” Martin Buber (1878-1965), and was planning to translate his classic work *I and Thou* into Swedish.

Their friendship began in 1952, a year before Hammarskjöld became Secretary-General. As their exchanges and mutual respect deepened, a strong desire arose in Hammarskjöld to translate Buber’s works. When he shared that wish with the philosopher, Buber suggested he translate *I and Thou*. This exchange took place just a few weeks before Hammarskjöld’s fatal mission to Congo.

Hammarskjöld immediately contacted a publisher in Sweden and wrote a letter to Buber telling him agreement had been obtained. As he left New York for Congo, he had with him the German-language edition of *I and Thou* personally given to him by the author. He found the time amidst his demanding schedule, in flight and during his short stay in Leopoldville (now Kinshasa), to work on the translation of Buber’s book. Later, after the plane crash, the first twelve pages of the Secretary-General’s manuscript translation were found among his personal effects.

Buber received Hammarskjöld’s final letter just one hour after he heard the news of the plane crash on the radio. Buber deeply lamented the death of this man of passion and goodwill who had given everything, including his life, for his mission.

Hammarskjöld shared a deep conviction with Buber, which he fervently wished to convey through the translation of Buber’s work. This was the firm belief that no matter how dire and challenging the situation may be, humans must engage in sincere dialogue with others; that through this kind of genuine and sincere dialogue it is always possible to bridge the gaps of distrust that divide the world.

One well-known episode illustrates how Hammarskjöld put this conviction into practice.

In 1955, in an attempt to secure the release of American prisoners of war captured during the Korean War, Hammarskjöld flew to China—then without a seat at the UN—and tried to meet with Premier Zhou Enlai.

People around him strongly advised him against the visit. Face-to-face with Zhou, without an official entourage and unable to use his own interpreter, Hammarskjöld stated the following during one of their private sessions:

...[I]t does not mean that I *appeal* to you or that I *ask you* for their release. It means that—inspired also by my faith in your wisdom and in your wish to promote peace—I have considered it my duty as forcefully as I can, and with deep conviction, to draw attention to the vital importance of their fate to the cause of peace. ... Their fate may well decide the direction in which we will all be moving in the near future—towards peace, or away from peace. ...[A]gainst all odds, [this case] has

brought me around the world in order to put before you, in great frankness and trusting that we see eye to eye on the desperate need to avoid adding to existing frictions, my deep concern both as Secretary-General and as a man. [6]

I recall my own encounter with Premier Zhou Enlai in December 1974, a year before his death. Several years earlier, in September 1968, at a time when there were no official diplomatic relations between China and Japan as no formal peace had been concluded between them, I had called for the normalization of relations and urged that China be represented in the UN. Zhou Enlai was aware of my efforts, and despite ill health, insisted on meeting with me at his hospital in Beijing. With intense passion, Premier Zhou shared his thoughts with me. "In this critical period in the history of the world, all nations must stand as equals and help each other." He expressed his strong desire for enduring friendship between China and Japan.

Based on this personal experience, I can easily imagine the kind of intent dialogue, the earnest soul-to-soul exchange, that unfolded between Zhou and Hammarskjold. The meeting created a bond of trust between the two men which later led to the release of the eleven American airmen.

Whether it be intergovernmental relations or relations between the UN and member states, the most essential element is always encounter and dialogue between individual human beings.

No matter how impossible a deadlock may seem, a breakthrough can always be found if we meet face-to-face and engage in genuine dialogue: I believe this was the conviction that motivated Hammarskjold throughout his extensive travels as Secretary-General, meeting with and mediating between the parties to conflicts.

Hammarskjold's passionate and relentless efforts to advance the peace process in the world embody the principles that should guide the UN in fulfilling its mission to build a new human civilization imbued with the spirit of dialogue. His legacy is one that must be passed on to the people of the twenty-first century.

Building grassroots support

Looking at the world today, the Middle East is just one of the regions where tensions remain high, and there is a strong need for the parties involved or affected by these tensions to communicate and engage in dialogue through the UN. This is critical to finding a breakthrough to persistent conflicts and bringing stability to the region.

After violent military clashes that continued for a month, a ceasefire in Lebanon was finally realized following a UN Security Council resolution calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities. But the underlying instability remains, as does the possibility that fighting may reignite at any time. This points to the urgent need to move proactively to the next step of rebuilding a stable and peaceful order in the region. It is my sincere hope that all parties will work through the UN to develop new channels for dialogue that will substantively further this process.

As I think about the profound mission the UN bears, I recall the words of Secretary-General Kofi Annan when he addressed the 2005 World Summit on September 14, 2005, attended by the leaders of 170 states: "We must find what President Franklin Roosevelt once called 'the courage to fulfill our responsibilities in an admittedly imperfect world.'" [7]

The *raison d'être* of the UN, still entirely valid after sixty years, is encapsulated in this spirit of responsibility and courage.

It was the lifelong wish of my mentor, Josei Toda (1900-58), second president of the Soka Gakkai, to forge a global solidarity of ordinary citizens committed to support the UN.

Along with the founding president of the Soka Gakkai, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944), Josei Toda was imprisoned for nearly two years during World War II because his uncompromising convictions, rooted in his religious faith, led him to a direct confrontation with Japan's militarist fascism. He was released from prison immediately before the war ended, on July 3, 1945, just a few days after the UN Charter was adopted by the San Francisco Conference.

Toda's philosophy of peace was expressed in his call for the abolition of nuclear weapons and his ideal of "global nationalism" which in today's terms could be interpreted as a world citizenship that transcends all distinctions of nationality, ethnicity and ideology.

Toda believed that the UN represented the distillation of wisdom of twentieth-century humankind. He was convinced of the need to protect and develop this embodiment of the world's hopes into the next century.

It was Toda's deepest desire to eliminate needless suffering from this planet by expanding the global solidarity of awakened and empowered individuals.

In my own family, four of my brothers were drafted into the war. My eldest brother died in battle. The grief experienced by my elderly parents was indescribably profound.

Nothing is more cruel than war, nothing more miserable. This was the reality engraved into my youthful life and consciousness.

Soon after the war, I encountered Toda and determined that I would join my mentor in the life-long struggle to break the unending cycles of war and violence, and to contribute to the realization of a world of peace.

Immediately after my inauguration as the third president of the Soka Gakkai, as heir to my mentor's will, I took the first step in this effort when I traveled to the United States. My choice of the United States was motivated in part by my awareness that this was the country where the United Nations Headquarters, the focal point of efforts for global peace, was located.

I still recall with vivid clarity my first visit to the UN headquarters in New York in October 1960. Dag Hammarskjold was Secretary-General and the 15th General Assembly was in session with the attendance of many of the world's leaders, including U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev.

As I observed the General Assembly and committee meetings, what left an indelible impression on me was the power and vibrancy emanating from the representatives of the newly-independent African states participating in the debates. At this General Assembly, seventeen nations, including Cameroon, Togo and Madagascar, were welcomed as member states of the UN. All of these new states, with the exception of Cyprus, were from the African continent.

It was deeply inspiring to witness the passion of the African representatives brimming with fresh energy, determined to contribute to the making of a better world through the UN. Every time I think about the important mission of the UN, I cannot help but recall this scene.

Traveling to various different parts of the world, I have often sensed people's strong hopes and expectations for the UN. My efforts to engage in dialogue with political, intellectual and cultural leaders throughout the world stem from this desire to expand the network of likeminded people thinking beyond national, ethnic and religious differences, committed to supporting the UN.

While promoting dialogue among civilizations and among religions, I have at the same time felt the need to make concrete proposals for action. Every year since 1983, I have issued peace proposals in which I have set out ideas on ways to reinforce and revitalize the UN, stressing the importance of encouraging grassroots support.

Soka Gakkai International (SGI) has carried out a wide range of activities in support of the UN.

As Cold War tensions mounted, we organized the exhibition "Nuclear Arms: Threat to Our World" in 1982, in support of the UN's World Disarmament Campaign. This exhibition, which opened at the UN Headquarters in New York, toured twenty-five cities in sixteen countries, including the Soviet Union and China and other nuclear weapons states. In total it was viewed by some 1.2 million visitors.

After the end of the Cold War, the SGI organized the exhibition "War and Peace: From a Century of War to a Century of Hope" and updated the anti-nuclear exhibit, renaming it "Nuclear Arms: Threat to Humanity," in an effort to bring people together in their shared desire for peace and to generate a momentum toward realizing a world without war.

In the area of human rights education, the SGI organized the exhibition "Toward a Century of Humanity: An Overview of Human Rights in Today's World" in support of the UN Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004). With the end of the Decade, the SGI collaborated with other UN agencies and NGOs to promote the creation of a new international framework to follow up the work of the Decade. These efforts culminated in the formal adoption of the World Programme for Human Rights Education.

In the area of ecological integrity and sustainability, the SGI, together with other NGOs, proposed the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. This was later adopted by the General Assembly, with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designated as the lead agency to promote the Decade, which began in 2005.

The SGI has long supported refugee relief activities through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In 1992, the SGI organized the Voice Aid campaign in response to the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia's (UNTAC) request and donated 300,000 second-hand radios to support the smooth organization and administration of free and fair elections in Cambodia.

Buddhist values and philosophy

The SGI's grassroots network of ordinary citizens in support of the UN has now expanded to include 190 countries and territories. These efforts are compelled by Buddhist values and philosophy, which uphold the inviolable dignity of life. The core principles that guide the UN are cognate with the principles of Buddhist humanism—peace, equality and compassion. Motivated by these values, it is perhaps inevitable that SGI members feel compelled to support the UN.

In this context it is relevant to introduce the example of a contemporary of Shakyamuni—a woman by the name of Srimala—which appears in the Buddhist canon. Her vow is recorded as follows:

If I see lonely people, people who have been jailed unjustly and have lost their freedom, people who are suffering from illness, disaster or poverty, I will not abandon them. I will bring them spiritual and material comfort. [8]

Srimala lived true to her vow and devoted her life to helping the suffering.

The teachings of the Buddhist reformer Nichiren (1222-1282), which constitute the philosophical basis of the SGI's activities, are deeply imbued with the spirit of Mahayana Buddhism. Our efforts to support the UN as it strives to protect human dignity in our modern world are a natural consequence of putting into practice the Bodhisattva way represented by Srimala's compassionate vow and actions.

In recent years, the UN has focused its efforts on the promotion of human rights, human security, human development, culture of peace and dialogue among civilizations. These are all undertakings that strike a chord with the philosophy of peace expounded in Buddhism.

The philosophical basis of our activities and thinking is elucidated in the treatise "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land," written by Nichiren in 1260 as he witnessed the sufferings of the ordinary people caught up in the incessant war and natural disasters that wracked thirteenth-century Japanese society.

In this treatise, instead of using either of the standard Chinese characters for "country," which have in their center elements that signify "sovereign" or "weapon," in the majority of cases Nichiren uses a character in which the element signifying "ordinary people" is central. For Nichiren, the heart of the nation is neither the authorities nor the territory, but the ordinary people who inhabit it. This same spirit animates the modern concept of human security—where the foremost aim is to realize the peace and happiness of citizens.

Throughout this treatise, Nichiren critiqued the dominant philosophies of his times; he considered that their emphasis on introverted reflection encouraged an escapist attitude and made people feel incapable of effectively engaging in or transforming society. Instead, he promoted the belief that inherent in each individual is a robust power and potential; that each individual can become the protagonist and initiator of societal transformation. This belief shares much with the contemporary concept of empowerment that constitutes the core of human development.

Nichiren's treatise contains the following passage: "If you care anything about your personal security, you should first of all pray for order and tranquility throughout the four quarters of the land..." [9] This is a powerful call for the creation of a culture of peace, which is not limited to the security of the individual but seeks the security of the entire human race.

The ultimate inspiration underlying the SGI's promotion of consciousness-raising at the grassroots level through exhibitions and seminars, as well as our support for UN activities for education in the fields of disarmament, human rights and the environment, lies in this desire to realize the security of the entire human race.

Furthermore, the treatise unfolds as a dialogue between two individuals, the host and the guest, who have completely differing perspectives and views but who are both pained by the tragic realities tormenting their society. The host tells the guest, "I have been brooding alone upon this matter, indignant in my heart, but now that you have come, we can lament together. Let us discuss the question at length." [10] An earnest dialogue takes place as the two exchange their views on the causes of people's suffering, means to alleviate this suffering, and what can be done to this end. At the conclusion of the dialogue, the host and guest vow to unite their efforts and work together toward a common goal.

Dialogue has the power to inspire inner change in people and leads to positive action to transform society. This is the approach found in the wisdom of the Buddhist tradition since the days of Shakyamuni.

In the SGI Charter adopted in 1995, this spirit is reflected thus: "SGI shall, based on the Buddhist spirit of tolerance, respect other religions, engage in dialogue and work together with them toward the resolution of fundamental issues concerning humanity." [11]

Based on this spirit, the SGI has engaged in an open dialogue with people of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds, in the hope of expanding the solidarity of awakened individuals committed to seeking ways to resolve the challenges facing our planet.

The soft-power mission of the United Nations

As mentioned at the outset, I am convinced that the mission of the UN in the twenty-first century must be to defuse tensions and generate momentum toward peaceful coexistence through the power of dialogue. By centering on the processes of global dialogue it will best fulfill its function as a body for deliberation and action. In this way, it will lay the foundation for concerted action in such critical areas as human rights, human security and human development—the absolute prerequisites for the peace and happiness of the world’s people.

In working toward these objectives, it is essential we remember that the core strength of the UN is its “soft power,” the power of dialogue and international cooperation. This is true even in the field of global peace and security. While the UN Charter clearly recognizes the possibility of the exercise of “hard power,” including military action, Chapter VI, on the pacific settlement of disputes, details those measures which are to be taken before the application of the enforcement measures set out in Chapter VII. Precedence is thus firmly placed on Chapter VI, with the use of hard power reserved for crisis situations as a means of last resort.

The Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) defined civilization as “the attempt to reduce force to being the *ultima ratio* [last resort].” [\[12\]](#) When we think how the UN came into being as a reflection of the bitter lessons of two world wars, it is clear that this principle needs to be adamantly observed. I would like to reaffirm that the UN must continue to develop and enhance its soft power capacities. It should continue to focus on confidence-building and preventive measures and not be drawn into a reactive approach that attempts to solve problems through military force or other forms of hard power.

In the Eastern tradition, the sixtieth year marks the end of a cycle and the beginning of a new one. In that sense, I believe the UN’s sixtieth anniversary, celebrated last year, provides a significant opportunity for the UN to renew its commitment to the noble mission with which it has been entrusted and make a new departure toward its fulfillment.

Here I would like to suggest that one axial theme around which the UN could develop is that of “humanitarian competition.”

The idea of humanitarian competition was proposed by the founding president of the Soka Gakkai, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, in his 1903 work *The Geography of Human Life*. Writing in an era when the forces of imperialism and colonialism were dominant throughout the world, Makiguchi criticized a state of affairs in which the crucial question of individual human happiness was being overshadowed by intense competition in the military, political and economic spheres. Reviewing the evolution of competition through its military, political and economic modes, he called for a transition from these predatory forms of competition to what he described as “humanitarian competition”—in which we strive, based on an ethos of coexistence, for the happiness of both ourselves and others.

Makiguchi described the key elements of this transformation as follows:

Traditionally, military or political power has been used to expand territory and bring more people under one’s control. Economic power, which may assume a different appearance or form, has been employed to the same effect as that realized through the exercise of military or political power. Humanitarian competition consists in using the invisible power of moral suasion to influence people. In other words, in place of submission exacted by the exercise of authority, we seek to gain the heartfelt respect [and cooperation] of others. [\[13\]](#)

This process of supplanting the exercise of authority with the earning of heartfelt respect could be expressed in contemporary terms as the transition away from the competition of hard power—where societies seek to dominate each other through military and political strength or overwhelming economic might. Rather, each country should compete in the realm of soft power—vying to accrue trust and friendship by manifesting diplomatic and cultural strengths and through contributions in the field of international cooperation that deploy the full range of human resources, technology and experience. This, I believe, is the essence of Makiguchi’s proposal.

If such humanitarian competition—a competition for extended influence based on soft power—firmly takes root, we will see the last of conventional zero-sum competition in which winners prevail through the victimization and suffering of losers. It will open a way for a win-win era where the dignity of everyone on the globe is honored, with each country competing constructively to make the greatest contribution to humanity.

Sadly, the world is still dominated by ruthless competition for advantage with no thought given to the price paid by others. Such modes of competition, played out on an ever-expanding global scale, have made for steadily growing gaps between the rich and the poor. Moreover, as threats to human dignity—the crisis of the global environment is emblematic—become borderless, we need to bear in mind that no individual state acting in isolation can mount a truly effective response. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan expressed this reality succinctly when he stated:

...I believe that in the twenty-first century [different perceptions of what is a threat] should not be allowed to lead the world's governments to pursue very different priorities or to work at cross-purposes. ... States working together can achieve things that are beyond what even the most powerful state can accomplish by itself. [\[14\]](#)

It is therefore essential that the UN function to effectively concentrate and coordinate the capacities of individual states and prevent them from becoming diluted or dispersed. It could be said that the success of efforts to develop the international organization—humanity's common asset—into a body fully and genuinely dedicated to the people of the world, depends on this process. Each state naturally desires to take an honorable position as a respected member of the international community. To tap this potential and channel competitive energies, not toward violence, but into humanitarian objectives—herein lies, I believe, the mission of the UN as the focal center of humanitarian competition. This is the course it should take in the twenty-first century.

To generate momentum in this direction and set benchmarks for firmly establishing the ideal of humanitarian competition at the core of the UN's activities, I would like to stress the importance of the following three shared elements: *a shared sense of purpose, a shared sense of responsibility and shared fields of action*. Based on this I would like to set out what I view to be the UN's core challenges and to suggest plans for reform.

Sharing purpose

As a shared sense of purpose I wish to propose the building of a culture of peace dedicated to the dignity and happiness of all people on the planet, and based on the awareness that peace is much more than the mere absence of conflict. In this respect, poverty, a daily affront to human dignity, is the foremost issue to be tackled. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in today's world as many as 2.5 billion people subsist on less than two dollars per day. [\[15\]](#)

Noting that the targets of the Millennium Development Goals, including halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015, will not be achieved at the current rate, UNDP Administrator Kemal Dervis warns:

That would be a tragedy above all for the world's poor—but rich countries would not be immune to the consequences of failure. In an interdependent world our shared prosperity and collective security depend critically on success in the war against poverty. [\[16\]](#)

In the shadow of a handful of countries that consume enormous resources and boast affluent lifestyles, a vast portion of the world's inhabitants are condemned to seemingly endless poverty; life in inhuman and degrading conditions that persist for generation after generation. It is an overriding humanitarian imperative to correct this gross distortion within the global community. Nor is this an impossible task. The cost of eradicating poverty has been estimated to be about one percent of global income. If even a portion of the resources currently allocated to military spending could be directed to poverty reduction, considerable progress could be made toward alleviating the problem.

I strongly urge each country to seriously reconsider its spending priorities and to actively support international cooperation for human development focused on the empowerment of all individuals afflicted with poverty—UNESCO's Education for All campaign in particular.

Together with poverty alleviation, disarmament, specifically nuclear disarmament, is vital if we are to put paid to the culture of war.

If the ideal of humanitarian competition is to take root in the international community, we must firmly establish the awareness that no society can found its security and well-being upon the terror and misery of another; we must create a new set of global ethics.

The theory of nuclear deterrence, in seeking to ensure the security of one state by threatening others with overwhelming destructive power, is diametrically opposed to the global ethics the new era demands.

The UN hosts an associated forum for multilateral talks on disarmament, the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament. It is distressing, however, that disagreement among parties has kept it virtually nonfunctional for almost ten years since its last achievement, the adoption of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in 1996.

The stalemate persisted through last year, the sixtieth anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, whose symbolic significance could have been expected to provide impetus to disarmament efforts. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference in May closed without producing any concrete results. Then in September the World Summit at the UN General Assembly issued an outcome document from which all mention of nuclear weapons had been deleted, to the great disappointment of all those who seek global peace.

It was against this backdrop that, in June 2005, the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, an independent group of international experts chaired by Hans Blix, the former chief UN arms inspector for Iraq, submitted a proposal on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation to Secretary-General Annan.

This document calls for a world summit to be held at the UN to address the issues of disarmament, non-proliferation and terrorist use of weapons of mass destruction. To break the present deadlock at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, it proposes that only a two-thirds majority, instead of unanimity, be required to place issues on the agenda. "All states possessing nuclear weapons," it also recommends, "should commence planning for security without nuclear weapons. They should start preparing for the outlawing of nuclear weapons..." [\[17\]](#)

These proposals are in line with the direction I have consistently asserted and it is thus very easy for me to support them. I earnestly hope that all states will take the Commission's carefully considered recommendations seriously and promptly launch diplomatic efforts to break the impasse that is blocking progress toward disarmament.

Ten years have passed since in 1996 the International Court of Justice issued an advisory opinion on the legality of nuclear weapons. In that opinion, the Court stated that "the threat or use of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to international law" and "that there exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control." [\[18\]](#) I think we should once again urge governments to recall the gravity of this opinion as we continue to build a committed international consensus for nuclear disarmament.

As the report of the Blix Commission points out, "Over the past decade, there has been a serious, and dangerous, loss of momentum and direction in disarmament and non-proliferation efforts." What is required is the political will for nuclear abolition. "And with that will, even the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons is not beyond the world's reach." [\[19\]](#) It is thus all the more important now that the people of the world raise their voices.

Toward this end I would like to propose a UN decade of action by the world's people for nuclear abolition. With nuclear weapons proliferation continuing unabated, the first step in challenging the harsh reality must be to bring more people to the awareness that the nuclear threat is both relevant to their lives and something they can take action about. Such a decade of action, jointly promoted by the UN and NGOs, would be vital in promoting this awareness. I likewise support the early convening of a World Summit as called for by the Blix Commission or, alternatively, a Special Session of the UN General Assembly dedicated to intensive deliberation of disarmament issues. Such actions on the part of states would both reflect and support an emerging international consensus for disarmament.

The importance of working progressively toward the creation of a world without war through relentlessly pressing for nuclear disarmament and, ultimately, abolition: This was one of the points on which the late Sir Joseph Rotblat, emeritus president of the Pugwash conferences on Science and World Affairs, who passed away last year, and I deeply agreed.

If we are to bring down the curtain, once and for all, on an era lived under the threat of nuclear destruction, we must rethink the understanding of national interest that would justify nuclear weapons as a "necessary evil" essential for deterrence. Both the Russell-Einstein Manifesto (1955), co-signed by Dr. Rotblat, and my mentor Josei Toda's Declaration for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons (1957) refuted the theory of deterrence and adamantly refused to acknowledge the use of nuclear arms under any circumstances.

As Toda strikingly phrased it, nuclear weapons threaten humanity's right to existence and are therefore an absolute evil; their abolition is humanity's common duty. The central goal of the decade of action by the world's people for nuclear abolition that I am proposing would be to elevate this concept into one of the central tenets of our age.

Here I have examined the challenges of poverty alleviation and disarmament from the perspective of a shared sense of purpose. There are, of course, many other issues that weigh heavily upon humankind. Among these is the global environmental crisis, the particular complexity of which lies in the fact that its resolution requires a fundamental reexamination of human civilization. My own sense of crisis has prompted me to call, in my annual peace proposals, for accelerated efforts to create an institutional framework that will bring together the wisdom of humankind toward the resolution of environmental challenges, including giving them dramatically greater centrality at the UN.

The issues of poverty, disarmament and the environment all demand the concerted efforts of international society based on a sense of belonging to humanity and a sense of responsibility toward the future. It is for these reasons that it is absolutely essential to establish a shared sense of purpose through the United Nations.

Sharing responsibility

I next wish to focus on the need to foster a *shared sense of responsibility*, specifically by establishing frameworks that encourage the youthful members of the rising generations to actively engage in various deliberations at the UN and in its agencies' local activities.

In February of 2006, the Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research which I founded ten years ago held an international conference in Los Angeles on the theme of reforming and strengthening the UN. I was particularly struck by the vision statement presented by UN Under-Secretary-General Anwarul K. Chowdhury, which included these words:

In future, the United Nations should be an organization that interacts more closely and substantially with the young people to benefit from their ideas and enthusiasm in shaping the future of the world. [\[20\]](#)

Gaining the understanding and unwavering support of as many of the world's citizens as possible is essential if the UN is to fully realize its potential. At the same time, the prerequisite for solving global problems is to supplant the prevailing mindset, which places highest priority upon national interest, with a broad, shared sense of responsibility for the best interests of humankind and of the entire planet. Young people must be the protagonists in this endeavor.

I believe that the UN, having entered its sixty-first year, should make promoting young people's active engagement the central focus of its new departure. Archimedes is quoted as saying, "Give me a place to stand and with a lever I will move the whole world," and it is in this spirit that we must ensure that young people have "a place to stand" within the UN process.

It is said that about half of the countries emerging from conflict find themselves enmeshed in it again within five years. In societies that have experienced conflict and the tragedy of cycles of recurring violence, it is extremely difficult for members of the generation in power to disentangle themselves from the cycle of hatred and violence. Thus, it is important to focus on the next generation, who are less bound up in the past, and to find ways to enable youth to explore new ideas, avenues and approaches to establishing peace and shared prosperity.

The same formula applies to the challenges of poverty alleviation, disarmament and environmental degradation. Significant breakthroughs will only come about as the seeds of change planted in the hearts of the next generation through persistent, untiring efforts in the fields of education and awareness-raising come to fruition. My mentor's declaration against nuclear weapons, in entrusting the abolition of nuclear arms to young people, was based on just this kind of far-reaching future vision.

Along these lines, it would be worth considering holding a gathering of youth representatives from around the world every year prior to the annual UN General Assembly, giving world leaders an opportunity to listen to the views of the next generation. It would also be desirable to create means for students and young people to participate in local activities of UN agencies for a period of one or two years, positioning them to gain firsthand experience of the significance of the UN's activities as well as the challenges it faces. This would enable them to learn directly about the impact of global issues on people's lives, as well as participate in the search for solutions.

About five thousand people are currently dispatched to different parts of the world every year through the United Nations Volunteer (UNV) program. However, the average age of participants is 39 years old and they are recruited principally from among experts with professional experience in specialized areas. [\[21\]](#) I believe it would be helpful to enhance these activities with an additional framework providing hands-on experience for students and young people in their twenties.

Another area worth examining is improving the system of UN internship programs. These should accept not only graduate students but also undergraduates and young NGO staff members, providing them with the opportunity to support actual policy-making by preparing briefing papers for UN deliberations. Such a system would strengthen the framework by which young people can be involved in various aspects of the international organization. Graduates of Soka University of America are already active participants in the UN internship program.

Here I am reminded of a dialogue I conducted with the peace scholar Dr. Elise Boulding in which she maintained the importance of providing future generations with arenas where they can fully express their abilities, stressing that we need to create more opportunities for young people to grow into their role as global citizens. She told me she used to recommend the students in her international peace studies class to spend a semester working as interns at a local chapter of an international NGO and actually experience its activities.

By implementing ideas such as these, I would hope that the structure of the UN as a whole could develop a sharper focus upon youth, actively planning for greater participation of young people. In that sense, I would like to suggest that consideration be given to the creation of an agency dedicated to activities for the youth of the world or a department of youth within the UN administration.

Such efforts would parallel the growing calls among NGOs for the establishment of an agency dedicated to developing more effective and coordinated policies for empowering women, who are, after all, half the world's population. The UN must strive to promote the empowerment of young people and women living in difficult conditions in various parts of the world. If the UN can at the same time ensure the active participation of young people and women in its activities, reflecting an ever greater diversity of opinions in the full range of its policy initiatives, this would go far toward bringing about a more promising era for all.

I would also like to call on the world's universities and institutions of higher learning to actively support the work of the UN as an integral part of their social mission. Some universities already have systems in place whereby researchers and research institutes provide academic support to various UN activities. While expanding this type of program, universities should take the initiative in actively offering classes on UN activities with the aim of becoming consistent centers for awareness-raising among students and the general public.

At the same time, I would like to emphasize the key importance of building a student-centered network to support the UN.

I have in the past proposed the creation of a global network of citizens to protect and support the UN. I believe that fostering a new generation of people of talent and capacity, people whose commitment is to the whole of humankind rather than the interest of a specific state or ethnicity, is the only way to provide the UN with the long-term infusion of support it so seriously requires.

Students are the key to this. There are already NGOs dedicated to developing the network of UN support among students around the world. Further strengthening these, it should be possible to move toward a scenario in which individual students and universities connect with one another to form a web of networks supporting the UN, eventually permeating the entire globe. This is the future I envisage for renewed linkages between the UN, students and universities.

With respect to developing a shared sense of responsibility I would like to make one other proposal: To help resolve the UN's long-term challenge of securing stable sources of funding, a separate framework, parallel to the contributions of member states, might be initiated to solicit direct support from the world's citizens.

Securing a stable budget is essential if the UN is to fulfill its responsibilities to effectively respond to global issues. Delayed and overdue payment of assessed and pledged contributions undermines the UN's capacities. Financial restrictions often prevent it from engaging in urgent projects and important activities. To overcome these challenges, I would like to repeat my call that a people's fund for the UN be created to accept broad-based donations from civil society, making this an additional funding source to sustain the UN.

In point of fact, UNICEF's operating budget comes both from governmental contributions and private fundraising, with approximately one third of funds coming from the private sector. [22] This example demonstrates the potential for creating a new system whereby funds raised from individuals, organizations and globally active transnational corporations are used to support UN activities, primarily in humanitarian areas.

Sharing action

Finally, I would like to discuss the importance of *shared fields of action*. To this end, I would like to propose the establishment of regional UN offices, whose role would be to further deepen relationships between member states and the UN, and coordinate various agencies' activities in each region.

It takes considerable time and effort to set UN activities in motion. In particular, when a society has fallen into crisis, the understanding and continuous support of the surrounding countries is essential.

Global issues are complex and inextricably intertwined in a way that makes separate, isolated efforts to resolve them unlikely to succeed. This is symbolized by the "PPE spiral" in which cycles of poverty, population growth and environmental degradation have set up a negative synergy. Global issues differ from area to area, demanding responses that are truly appropriate to the individual circumstances.

In light of these factors, I am convinced that establishing coordinating UN centers in each region could enhance responsiveness to the exigencies of *continuity, complexity and regionality*. Such centers could be of great importance in the more comprehensive promotion of human rights, human security and human development through approaches focused on individual people's peace and happiness.

Having said that, I do not think it is necessary to restructure existing agencies. The thrust of my proposal is to bring the UN and member states closer and to build a positive synergy among UN agencies in each region. This would enable them to establish shared fields of action and tackle regional issues in a more coordinated manner.

Specifically, existing bodies that might assume the functions of UN regional centers would include the five commissions under the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC): the Economic and Social Commissions for Asia and the Pacific, for West Asia, for Africa, for Europe and for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Currently, as exemplified by the European Union and the African Union, regional integration and cooperation are progressing in different parts of the world. I believe there would be value in establishing UN regional centers that could act as a bridge between these organizations and the UN headquarters, as well as providing pivotal points to sustain UN-centered global governance.

Lastly, I would like to emphasize, in addition to this plan, the need to strengthen partnership between the UN and civil society as the essential key to developing shared fields of action.

Civil society's participation in the UN dramatically increased through the series of UN conferences held in the 1990s. Partnerships of likeminded governments and NGOs brought about epoch-making achievements such as the conclusion of the Anti-Personnel Mines Convention and the adoption of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

The Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations-Civil Society Relations was set up in 2003 and issued its report, *We the Peoples: Civil Society, the United Nations and Global Governance* (the Cardoso Report), the following year. The work of the panel has been important in raising the awareness of civil society's role in supporting the work of the UN.

The Committee of Religious NGOs at the UN, whose president is currently the SGI's representative to the UN, together with UN organizations and agencies and governments, organized the Conference on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace in June 2005. That these three parties—civil society, governments and the UN—collaborated in this way to hold an interfaith conference at the UN was seen as a truly groundbreaking event.

For the UN's revitalization and to ensure that it fulfills the expectations of the world's peoples, it is indispensable that the UN, member states and NGOs and other representatives of civil society appreciate one another's unique qualities and roles, and deepen their partnership. I earnestly hope that the three parties will continue to sit at the same table to discuss the challenges facing humanity and develop creative new modalities of joint action in the spirit of dialogue and cooperation.

It is my sincere belief that these themes—a shared sense of purpose, a shared sense of responsibility, and shared fields of action—are key to the development of the UN of the twenty-first century.

The League of Nations was created as a response to World War I; the United Nations was born out of the determination never to repeat the horrors of World War II. As members of the human race, we must put into action our determination to save our planet from the repetition of this kind of tragedy. We must further strengthen the UN in order to enhance global governance for the sake of all the planet's inhabitants.

We are compelled to take the courageous first step toward this goal. To this end, it is essential to build momentum for reform from the bottom up, bringing together the voices of the people in support of the UN. We cannot afford to wait passively for top-down reform to emerge from intergovernmental deliberations.

If we truly heed the warnings of the twentieth century, so plagued by tragedy, we can see that action and solidarity hold the keys to the twenty-first century. To the degree that people grasp this spirit and determine to forge widespread solidarity for change, we will be able to build a culture of peace throughout the globe. This, I am convinced, is the central challenge facing humanity in the twenty-first century.

The protagonists in this endeavor are none other than individual human beings—citizens, and above all, young people.

The motivating vision of the SGI is a world of peace and mutual flourishing in humanity's new millennium. To this end we will continue to join our efforts with those of people of goodwill the world over, striving to enable the UN to fulfill the noble mission with which it has been entrusted.

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Notes

- 1 Roosevelt 1945.
- 2 Lauren 1996, p. 161.
- 3 UN 1945.
- 4 Annan 2005a.
- 5 Hammarskjold 1964, p. 159.
- 6 Qtd. in Urquhart 1972, p. 106.
- 7 Annan 2005a.
- 8 cf. Wayman 1974, p. 65.
- 9 Nichiren 1999, p. 24.
- 10 Ibid., p. 7.
- 11 SGI 1995.
- 12 Ortega y Gasset 1932, p. 75.
- 13 Makiguchi 1996, p. 399.
- 14 Annan 2005b.
- 15 UNDP 2006, p. 8.
- 16 UNDP 2005.
- 17 WMDC 2006, p. 109.
- 18 ICJ 1996.
- 19 WMDC 2006, p. 17.
- 20 Chowdhury 2006.
- 21 UNV 2006.
- 22 UNICEF 2002.