

The United Nations and the Agendas for its Reform

By

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Introduction: The Imperative for Reform

For decades now, there have been persistent calls from several quarters for the reform of the United Nations. Such calls have taken varied forms. For example, in 1973, Japanese government officials mounted pressure on the President Nixon Administration in the United States to support an amendment of the UN Charter to allow Japan's entry into the Security Council as a permanent member²[3]. In 1995, a colloquium assembled by the European Parliament in Brussels to discuss the future of the UN was canvassed to recommend a reform of the Social and Economic Council to enable it deal more effectively with poverty, unemployment, disease and other "root-causes of upheaval and conflict" in the world³[4]. More recently, fierce debates have arisen over the composition of the Security Council and the right of veto, with many states calling for a thoroughgoing reform to bring the Council into the 21st century. Specifically, many have expressed the wish to see an expanded, more representative and accountable, body.⁴[5]

In the light of these persistent demands, Secretary General Kofi Annan, soon after taking office in 1997, announced a plan for a thorough overhaul of the management and operations of the United Nations system⁵[6]. Shortly after, in

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²[3] Laurenti, Jeffrey, "Reforming the United Nations Security Council: Will its Time Ever Come"? in *United States of America – United Nations Association Bulletin*, March 17, 2003, p.1, published at *Global Policy Forum*, globalpolicy@globalpolicy.org.

³[4] Childers, Erskine, "An Agenda for peace and an Agenda for Development: the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council in the UN reform process", Colloquium on the United Nations at Fifty: Wither the next Fifty Years?, in *Global Policy Forum*, globalpolicy@globalpolicy.org.

⁴[5] "Reform Debates", in *Global Policy Reform*, globalpolicy@globalpolicy.org

⁵[6] See, "Secretary General Kofi Annan Reform Agenda, 1997 to Present", in *Global Policy Forum*, globalpolicy@globalpolicy.org. See also, www.un.org/archives.

September 2000, the Secretary General presented a proposal for more far-reaching systemic reforms, which the General Assembly adopted as the *Millennium Declaration*. That declaration outlined eight Millennium Development Goals for the UN, which were to be either completely, or substantially, achieved by 2015⁶[7]. In a March 2005 report to the 59th General Assembly taking place at New York in September, 2005, titled: *In Larger Freedom*, Kofi Annan made an assessment of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and concluded that more serious and far-reaching reforms were necessary if the goals were to be achieved⁷[8]. The purpose of this paper is to examine aspects of this latest, and most comprehensive, Kofi Annan agenda for UN reform in the light of the United State's unilateralist and other associated, global agendas, and from the point of view of the interests of Nigeria and Africa.

The Millennium Goals

Kofi Annan emphasized in his report that the most important objective of his agenda for what he termed, "the most far-reaching reforms in the history of the United Nations", was to attempt to restore global public confidence in the organisation through the making of "measurable progress towards peace, security, disarmament, human rights, democracy and good governance"⁸[9]. Such progress involved, among other things, the implementation of the following eight concrete, time-bound, goals:

- *Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger* by halving between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of those earning less than a dollar a day and also reducing by 50% the number of people suffering from hunger;
- *Achieving universal primary education* by ensuring that *all* children, all over the world, were able to receive full primary education by 2015;
- *Promoting gender equality and empowering women* through the elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and to all levels of education not beyond 2015;
- *Reducing child (under-five) mortality rate* by two-thirds between 1990 and 2015;
- *Improving maternal health* by reducing the maternal mortality ratio by three quarters by 2015;
- *Combating HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases* by halving, by 2015, and beginning to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS and also by halting, and

6[7] *In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All*, Report of the Secretary General (Mr Kofi Annan), 21st March, 2005, p.3.

7[8] *Ibid*.

8[9] *Ibid*, p.4

beginning to reverse the incidence of Malaria and other major diseases by 2015;

- *Ensuring environmental sustainability* through:
 - (a) integrating the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reversing the loss of environmental resources;
 - (b) halving, by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation, and
 - (c) achieving a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020, and
- *developing a global partnership for development* through:
 - (a) the entrenching of an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system which was also committed to good governance, development and poverty reduction—both nationally and internationally;
 - (b) the addressing of the special needs of the least developed countries, including tariff—and quota-free access for least developed countries' exports; enhanced programme of debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries and cancellation of official bilateral debt and more generous ODA for countries committed to poverty reduction;
 - (c) addressing the special needs of landlocked countries and small island developing states;
 - (d) dealing comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in order to make debts sustainable in the long term;
 - (e) developing and implementing strategies for decent and productive work for youth;
 - (f) providing access, in cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, to affordable, essential drugs in developing countries and
 - (g) making available, in cooperation with the private sector, the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications.^{9[10]}

^{9[10]} *Ibid*, pp.8-10.

It is, however, quite instructive to note that the Secretary General's own assessment of the first five years of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals had indicated that the progress achieved had been generally below expectation. For instance, while he claimed that "the greatest improvements" had been achieved in East and South Asia, where over 200 million people had been "lifted out of poverty since 1990 alone", nearly 700 million Asians (about two thirds of the world's poor) still lived on less than \$1 a day and maternal mortality and environmental degradation were worsening in even some of the fastest growing countries.¹⁰[11]

In the case of sub-Saharan Africa, which Kofi Annan had referred to as "the epicenter of the crisis" of under-achievement, the record was dismal. According to him, the region had fallen

*seriously short on most goals, with continuing food insecurity, disturbingly high child and maternal mortality, growing numbers of people living in slums and an overall rise of extreme poverty, despite some important progress in individual countries.*¹¹[12]

The situation in Latin America, the Middle East and North Africa was no different, being generally characterised by growing inequality and disappointing trends in progress towards the 2015 target. The Secretary General further noted that, on the whole,

*despite dramatic progress in some countries, overall access to sanitation is off track, particularly in Africa and Asia, where the number of slum-dwellers is also increasing rapidly. Maternal mortality remains unacceptably high throughout the developing world, as is the incidence and prevalence of HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Gender equality remains unfulfilled; the 2005 education parity target was missed in many countries.*¹²[13]

Although the Secretary General has attributed the general lack of progress towards the 2015 deadline of the Millennium Development Goals to "poverty traps" which "leave many of the poorest countries languishing in a vicious circle of destitution even when they have the benefit of honest, committed governments", he still believed that solution was to be found in the adoption of national, poverty-

¹⁰[11] *Ibid*, p.11.

¹¹[12] *Ibid*.

¹²[13] *Ibid*.

reduction strategies designed to fit “frameworks agreed with the World Bank and other international development partners”.13[14]

This is the crux of the matter: the Kofi Annan reforms agenda, at least, as it pertains economic and social policy, is set in a fundamental contradiction. The “poverty traps” he referred to—lack of basic infrastructure, savings, human capital and public administration and the burden of disease, conflict and environmental degradation, etc—were either created, reinforced, or both created and reinforced, in the pursuit of national “development” strategies dictated by the same, powerful, but apparently untouchable United Nations “development Partners”—the world Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation. Nigeria’s National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) is a good case in point.

It is the same, inherent, contradiction, which would constitute a permanent road block on the way to achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, or any other, similarly programmed, target date. For, how is it possible to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality and combat killer diseases, when at the same time, you are committed to developing “an open,...non-discriminatory trading and financial system”, the repayment of non-official bilateral debt and “putting in place the policies and investments to drive private-sector-led growth”?14[15]

The answer is simple: it is not possible. This is because, while on the one hand you claim to be pursuing an almost egalitarian social agenda, you are, on the other hand, committed to an economic policy which thrives on taking resources from the poor to the rich, and from the weak to the strong, both between and within countries.

Reform of the Security Council

Side by side with the Millennium Development proposals, the Secretary General put forward certain suggestions to the 59th General Assembly for the reform of the intergovernmental organs of the United Nations, namely, the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council and the Trusteeship Council. Of these organs, however, it was the Security Council which Kofi Annan singled out for more concrete treatment. It is therefore the Security Council to which we shall devote the rest of this discussion.

Presently, the Security Council is made up of 15 members, of which the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France and China, hold permanent seats.

13[14] *Ibid*, p.12

14[15] *Ibid*, pp.9-12.

The ten other members are non-permanent, and are elected by the General Assembly to two-year terms that may not be renewed. The non-permanent seats rotate on a geographical basis, with five elected from Asia, Africa and Middle East; two from Western Europe and one from Eastern Europe. The presidency of the council is occupied for one month at a time by each of the members, in English alphabetical order by country.

For a resolution to pass, nine affirmative votes must be cast. However, this is the case only in procedural decisions. On substantive matters—such as those concerning deployment of forces, and breaches of peace—the negative vote of any of the five permanent members would prevent the adoption of any resolution, irrespective of whether or not nine votes had been cast in favour. This negative vote is what is known as the *right of veto* of the great powers, which has been a matter of great controversy since the establishment of the UN.^{15[16]}

According to the UN Secretary General, his proposal for “a comprehensive reform of the Security Council” was predicated on the belief held by a majority of the members of the General Assembly, that

a change in the Council’s composition is needed to make it more broadly representative of the international community as a whole, as well as the geopolitical realities of today, and thereby more legitimate in the eyes of the world. Its working methods also need to be made more efficient and transparent. The Council must be not only more representative but also more able and willing to take action when action is needed.

Kofi Annan also reported that he had accepted the recommendations of the *High-Level-Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change*, which he had set up concerning the reforms of the Security Council, to the effect that the changes to be made should:

- (a) increase the involvement in decision-making of those who contribute most to the United Nations financially, militarily and diplomatically, specifically in terms of contributions to United Nations assessed budgets, participation in mandated peace operations, contributions to voluntary activities of the United Nations objectives and mandates. Among developed countries, achieving or making substantial progress towards the internationally agreed level of 0.7 per cent of GNP for ODA should be considered an important criterion of contribution;
- (b) bring into the decision-making process countries more representative of the broader membership, especially of the developing world;
- (c) not impair the effectiveness of the Security Council, and

^{15[16]} “Security Council, United Nations”, in *Microsoft ® Encarta ® Premium Suite*, 2004, p.1.

- (d) increase the democratic and accountable nature of the body.

Based on these broad criteria, the Secretary General went ahead to propose two models, A & B, for the enlargement of the Security Council. Both models suggest an enlargement of the Council to 24 members. Under model 'A', there would be an addition of six permanent seats, with no veto, and three new two-year term, non-permanent seats, divided among the world's regions as represented in the table below:

Table I: Security Council Reform: Secretary General's Proposed Model 'A'

Regional Area	No. of States	Permanent Seats (Continuing)	Proposed New Permanent Seats	Proposed Two-Year Seats (Non-Renewable)	Total
Africa	53	0	2	4	6
Asia and Pacific	56	1	2	3	6
Europe	47	3	1	2	6
Americas	35	1	1	4	6
Totals	191	5	6	13	24

Source: *In Larger Freedom....* Report of the Secretary General (Mr. Kofi Annan), 21st March, 2005, p.43.

Model B, on the other hand, makes no provision for permanent seats or veto rights, but creates a new category of eight, four-year renewable seats and one new two-year, non-permanent and non renewable seat, divided among the regions as follows:

Table II: Security Council Reform: Secretary General's Proposed Model B.

Regional Area	No. of States	Permanent Seats (Continuing)	Proposed New Permanent Seats	Proposed Two-Year Seats (Non-Renewable)	Total
Africa	53	0	2	4	6
Asia and Pacific	56	1	2	3	6
Europe	47	3	2	1	6
Americas	35	1	2	3	6
Totals	191	5	8	11	24

Source: *In Larger Freedom....* Report of the Secretary General (Mr. Kofi Annan), 21st March, 2005, p.43.

The most striking thing about the two Kofi Annan models is that they are both intended to keep the power structure in the Security Council essentially as it was in 1945, while giving the misleading appearance of representation, legitimacy and greater participation. This is because, even under the current arrangement, the five World War II victors constitute a privileged class, which often employs its powerful vetoes to torpedo widely accepted, General Assembly, decisions, in furtherance of its own interests. Furthermore, despite the geographical spread of the ten other members, the Security Council remains imbalanced in favour of Europe and North America. Were any of the two Kofi Annan models to be approved for implementation, this imbalance would only become more pronounced.

The U.S. Agenda and the UN Reforms

Even more glaring, however, is the failure of the Secretary General's proposals to deal with what Mr. Robin Cook, Britain's former Foreign Secretary, called, "the solid concrete roadblock in the path of [UN] reform"—the United States of America. According to Mr. Cook,

The world is confronted with a choice between two competing models of global governance. The direction signposted by Kofi Annan is to a regenerated UN with new authority for its collective decisions. However, collective decision-making is only possible if there is broad equivalence among those taking part. And there is the rub. The neocons who run the US administration want supremacy, not equality, for America and hanker after an alternative model of global governance in which the world is put right not by tedious process of building international consensus, but by the straightforward exercise of US puissance.^{16[17]}

In recent time, this U.S. hankering for imperialist supremacy and its concomitant disregard for the authority of the UN has manifested in many ways. For instance, when, in 2003 the U.S. failed to arm-twist the Security Council and get a resolution authorizing the illegal invasion of Iraq- a fellow member state- it damned the UN and took unilateral action.

Similarly, in 1973, the U.S. and other world nuclear powers- the Soviet Union, China, Britain and France- agreed with non-weapon states to stop nuclear proliferation. Now, 32 years after, the U.S. has refused to sign global treaties on nuclear test bans and anti-ballistic missiles and has even publicly subscribed to pre-emptive nuclear strikes.^{17[18]} Even more brazenly, it shields Israel, a fellow violator of the bans, but threatens to take military action against North Korea and Iran, for refusing to also subscribe to the same treaties!

In the same vein, although President Clinton signed the Kyoto Protocol on climate change, mandating a reduction in carbon emissions to below 1990 levels by 2012, a 2001 US State Department memo rejected the protocol on the argument that it

^{16[17]} Robin Cook, "Why America Neocons Are Out for Kofi Annan's Blood", in the Guardian, April 1, 2005, p.2, reproduced in Global Policy Forum, at globalpolicy@globalpolicy.org

^{17[18]} "US, UN and International Law, General Articles", in *Global Policy Forum*, at globalpolicy@globalpolicy.org

would harm the US economy and exempt developing countries from reduction requirements. Of the industrialized countries, only the US, Australia and Israel have not ratified the protocol, or have refused to comply with it.¹⁸[19]

More recently, the appointment of neoconservative John Bolton as the US Ambassador to the UN has once again demonstrated that President George Bush's administration will continue to embrace unilateralism and disregard the world body. Bolton is known to have "often discussed international law and openly attacked the UN—not just its policy changes but rather the very principles on which it stands".¹⁹[20]

Given this openly proclaimed unilateralist and imperialist agenda, the least the Secretary General could have done was to have proposed appropriate sanctions for such behaviour to the General Assembly and the Security Council. For, if the US is not willing to abide by collective decisions, and also subject itself to international treaties and obligations, it should be asked to leave the United Nations and go its own way.

Conclusion: Towards a Nigeria and African Agenda for UN Reform

What are the implications of all this for us in Africa? I believe that the choice before Nigeria and Africa is a straightforward one. We are a part of the global community and have made, and continued to make our fair share of financial, military and diplomatic contributions to the collective UN efforts in the fields of global security and development. However, while we fully support the bold initiative taken by the Secretary General to reform the UN, we should demand a reformulation of the reform agenda to ensure the following:

- (a) that the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organisation, being UN institutions which have assumed leadership in the field of global economic policy, be more effectively subjected to the supervision of the Economic and Social Council, as well as be made more democratic, transparent and accountable, and be transformed from their present role of representing richer states' interests over poor countries' development;
- (b) that all new permanent seats to be created in the Security Council be made to have the right of veto;
- (c) that Africa be allocated three seats on the expanded security council. (This will make it possible for Nigeria, South Africa and Egypt to go through), and

¹⁸[19] US position on International Treaties, in *Global Policy Forum*, at globalpolicy@globalpolicy.org

¹⁹[20] "US, UN and International Law—General Articles", in *Global Policy Forum*, March 7, 2005, at globalpolicy@globalpolicy.org

(d) that either the world nuclear powers agree to an immediate programme of disarmament, or Nigeria and other capable African countries assert the right to develop and own nuclear weapons.
