

The United Nations at the Crossroads

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A year ago the United Nations, its member states, and the peoples of the world recognized that a new opportunity had presented itself. The Cold War had ended; the United Nations could play the pivotal role in promoting progress and in establishing world order, as assigned by the drafters of the Charter.

The past 12 months leave no doubt that the opportunity has been grasped in a positive way. The vast potential of the world Organization has been recognized and has begun to be employed in the establishment of a more stable world order: as a strengthened voice for the poorest countries, as a deliverer of humanitarian relief, as a guardian of human and minority rights, as a rescuer of states in crisis, and as an instrument for repairing a damaged global environment. In virtually every area there have been substantial achievements. But there have been serious setbacks and shortcomings as well. This is to be expected in view of the comprehensive agenda that we are facing, both in quantitative terms and in light of its complexity.

This piece was adapted by the Secretary General from his September 1993 report on the work of the Organization.

Beyond the gains and losses inflicted by reality, however, troubling questions of will and purpose have been exposed. The pattern of the past 12 months displays three realities: the comprehensive nature of the global challenge, the indispensability of the United Nations, and the gap that has been revealed as the demands of member states on the Organization are not matched by the resources provided.

The comprehensive reality is most clearly revealed through three objectives: peace, development, and democracy. They are interlocking and mutually reinforcing.

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In mid-1992, in my report entitled "An Agenda for Peace," I discussed the need to view efforts for peace as a continuum over time. From preventive diplomacy to peacemaking and peace-keeping, to post-conflict peace-building, the cycle continues through perpetual rounds. Increasingly we have learned that working for peace provides us with no place of rest.

The past 12 months have demonstrated that peace operations involve interrelated functions. United Nations operations in the field—most prominently in Cambodia, El Salvador, Somalia, and the former Yugoslavia—have had to range far beyond the accepted notion and definition of peace-keeping. Virtually every one of the departments and established functions of the United Nations may now be involved in operations for peace. The second generation of peace-keeping is certain to involve not only military tactics but also political, economic, social, humanitarian, and environmental dimensions in a unified and integrated approach.

Development is now understood to involve many dimensions; it is no longer merely a matter of economic policy and resources. Political, social, educational, and environmental factors must be part of an integrated approach to development. Without development on the widest scale, the young will be restless, resentful, and unproductive. People will fight for resources, and creativity will be misdirected.

A new, workable, and widely accepted concept of development still eludes us. Until it is achieved, the United Nations will continue to face a sequence of conflicts. There can be no flowering of development without the parallel advance of another key concept: democratization. Peace is a prerequisite to development; democracy is essential if development is to succeed over the long term.

The real development of a State must be based on the participation of its population, which requires human rights and democracy. To ensure such an achievement, democratization must not only take hold inside a State, but among States in the international community. And democracy within States can be fully sustained over time only if it is linked to expanding democratization among States and at all levels of the international system.

Without peace, there can be no development and there can be no democracy. Without development, the basis for democracy will be lacking and societies will tend to fall into conflict. And without democracy, no sustainable development can occur; without such development, peace cannot long be maintained. It has become evident that three great concepts and priorities are inter-linked, and that they must be addressed at every level of human society. We can see in recent events the relationship between the individual, the State, and the global society in which we all now participate. In the course of the modern era, one or another of these three has tended to be the primary focus, to the relative neglect of the others.

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At times, the individual was seen as having little need for State institutions. At other times, the State has been exalted as the supreme object of human effort and sacrifice. And still at other times, the demise of the State has been predicted and an almost transcendental globalism has been promoted as the ultimate goal of life.

We are fortunate today to see before us, in the theater of

history, a more integrated vision. The individual has been reaffirmed as the creative source of economic progress, political expression, artistic achievement, and intellectual discovery. States and their sovereignty are increasingly recognized as indispensable building-blocks of international order and to problem-solving. Cooperative global integration is now an inescapable fact and requirement for all the world's peoples. This is anything but utopian; it is an effort to address compelling problems with practical methods and to produce a cooperative community that can manage global change.

The globalization now taking place requires a profoundly renewed concept of the State. Between the isolated individual and the world, there must be an intermediary element, an organized community that enables the individual to participate in the life of the world. This element is the State and its national sovereignty. They respond to the need of all human beings for identification. In a world, both impersonal and fragmented, such a need is greater than it has ever been in history.

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Individuals find identity in nations. And nations should find identity in universalism. There is no international community if there are no nations. So the opposition between nationalism and globalization is, to a large extent, false.

In Chapter I of the Charter of the United Nations, the founders proclaimed the intention "to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights ... of peoples." This is the foundation of a well-ordered internationalism. National sovereignty is the art of rendering unequal power equal. Without State sovereignty, the very instrument of international cooperation might be destroyed and international organization might itself become impossible. States are not the only actors in the international arena; they must be part of regional associations and global organizations. Together they

provide the framework for collective security and cooperative progress.

Thus, from every angle of vision—chronological, practical, functional, conceptual, individual, and institutional—we come to one conclusion: humanity's project is now truly universal, and to cope with it we must fashion comprehensive and integral projects, policies, and efforts.

The character of the challenges and realities I have outlined here make it clear that the world Organization—the United Nations—is indispensable. Only the United Nations has the universal character, the global convening power, and the extensive networks which cover virtually every international function in the service of all peoples.

It has become evident that the reach of the international community at this time exceeds its grasp. United Nations Forces increasingly find themselves thrust into areas of conflict where major powers are not willing to venture themselves and are reluctant to make the hard choices posed by a new era of challenges to peace. And the United Nations is struggling to keep a focus on development when the poorest countries no longer hold the same interest to the wealthy as they did in the previous decades of ideological competition.

Yet, all too often, the eyes of the media are focused on some aspects of the Organization's work to the exclusion of others. As presented in the media, the work of the United Nations appears

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to center around the multiple tasks of peace-keeping operations. And, when it comes to the media's concern with peace-keeping, the operations in Somalia and Bosnia and Herzegovina dominate reports. Though activities for development may not be as glamorous as peace-keeping operations, they are just as important and, indeed, provide the foundations for global security and stability. Nor are some peace-keeping operations more important than others. The United Nations attaches equal importance to all conflicts.

Global organizations, especially the United Nations, are

being called upon to do a growing share of the public's international work. But it must always be remembered that the Member States are the motive and supporting force of the world Organization. Clearly, the United Nations cannot resolve the major problems on the international agenda in the absence of the political will, the sufficient support, and the continuing commitment each particular endeavor requires.

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The achievements of the past year vastly outweigh the setbacks. Common concern has become more evident and effectively expressed. The readiness to rely upon the United Nations is heartening and gives reason for growing hope that the world Organization will fulfill its original purpose and prove able to adapt to the new challenges of this changing time in history.

While recent accomplishments deserve great credit, they do not provide a sense of true satisfaction. The United Nations renaissance remains in question. The international community stands at a turning-point. There is an undeniable disparity between vision and reality. This must be faced squarely by the member states of the world Organization and the peoples they represent. Greater realism, engagement, effort, and political creativity will be essential if the present turning-point is to lead to a successful next stage in shaping the common future. ■