REFLECTIONS ON THE REPORT OF THE
UN SECRETARY-GENERAL'S HIGH-
LEVEL PANEL ON THREATS,
CHALLENGES AND CHANGE

ADDRESS
by

IBRAHIM A. GAMBARI (Prof.)
Under-Secretary-General and
Special Adviser on Africa
United Nations

At

The Presidency
Abuja
Nigeria

February 18, 2005
I INTRODUCTION

It is a great honour and distinct privilege for me to share with this distinguished audience, my reflections on the Report of the United Nations Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change. As you are aware, Secretary-General Kofi Annan announced the creation of a 16-member Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change in a November 3, 2004 letter addressed to the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Julian Robert Hunte (Saint Lucia). He pointed to the Panel's task which is "examining the major threats and challenges the world faces in the broad field of peace and security, including economic and social issues in so far as they relate to peace and security and making recommendations for the elements of a collective response".

The Panel has since submitted its Report titled "A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility". Since its submission, the Report has been the subject of intense discussions at the United Nations, in member states and at regional organisations including at the recently concluded Mid-Term Summit of the African Union, here in Abuja, January 31 - February 1, 2005. This presentation is a contribution towards further analysis of the major elements of the Report and their implications for our country's national policy on the reform of the United Nations and of the international system as we respond, collectively to the challenges of the post-Cold War and the post 9/11 world.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE PROPOSED REFORMS

In my view, the Report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel should not be seen in isolation from the process of reform at the United Nations, which was given particular impetus by the immediate past Secretary-General, Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali. In this regard, it should be recalled that he was not only the first Secretary-General from the African continent; he was the first United Nations Secretary-General in the post-Cold War era. In an unprecedented meeting at the level of Heads of State and Government in January 1992, the Security Council requested the new Secretary-General to produce a Report which would position the United Nations to address the challenges in a post-Cold War era. Dr. Boutros-Ghali responded by producing the famous "Agenda for Peace", which set out in a clear and comprehensive manner, the steps which the United Nations might take in promoting peace and security in a changing international system. This was followed by an Agenda for Development and later by an Agenda for Democratization.

The current Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, has sought to develop further the themes of the three seminal reports by his predecessor. Among his own important reports are: The Causes of Conflict and Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa (A/52/871-S/1998/318); the implementation of the Brahimi Report and the Report to the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations (1999). The Secretary-General has also promoted greater openness of the United Nations by encouraging the involvement of civil society and the private sector in the work of inter-government bodies.
Indeed, as Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan has demonstrated his commitment to a vigorous and comprehensive programme of reform of the UN in order to modernize and prepare it for the challenges of the 21st century. Accordingly, he has made significant administrative changes, promoted efficiency in the Secretariat, reduced staff at Headquarters, consolidated the UN Development Group (UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, etc.), and then identified and recommended those areas of fundamental reform of the UN organs and operations which require decisions by Member States. Accordingly, he submitted a report to the UN General Assembly on 16 July 1997 titled "Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform", which was subsequently approved by Member States.

The second tier of Mr. Kofi Annan’s reform involves bringing more focus to the manner in which the General Assembly conducts its business. The agenda items for the three month regular session of the annual General Assembly cover over 150 subjects; for example, the 1999 session had 163 items. The fact that the Assembly has had to stage several international conferences on specific, pressing global issues suggests there is a need to streamline the agenda and focus discussion on a lesser number of major and pressing issues.

Additional reforms, apart from those that have already been implemented, may need to be considered in future, particularly for determining the content and manner of conducting business in the General Assembly. For example, it may be important to ensure a greater role for the General Assembly in maintaining peace and security and not cede the entire responsibility for these matters to the Security Council which is not representative of the full global community. Another reform could be to resolve critical issues relating to human rights situations within Member States by consensus in the General Assembly rather than to decide such matters by voting.

3. **THE REPORT OF THE HIGH-LEVEL PANEL ON THREATS, CHALLENGES AND CHANGE**

The High-level Panel, established by Secretary-General Kofi Annan, had Mr. Anand Panyarachun, former Prime Minister of Thailand, as Chairman. Its membership included Mr. Gareth Evans, (Australia), President of the International Crisis Group and former Foreign Minister of Australia; Lord David Hanny, (United Kingdom), former Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations; Mrs. Sadako Ogata (Japan), former United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; Mrs. Gro Harlem Brundtland (Norway), former Prime Minister of Norway and former Director General of the World Health Organisation. The distinguished Panelists from Africa were Mr. Amre Moussa (Egypt), Secretary-General of the Arab League and former Foreign Minister of Egypt; Salim A. Salim (Tanzania), former Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), former Foreign Minister and former Prime Minister of Tanzania and Mrs. Mary Chinery-Hesse (Ghana), Vice-Chairman, National Development Planning Commission of Ghana and former Deputy Director-General, International Labour Organization.
In his address to the last African Union Summit in Abuja (January 31 - February 1, 2005), Secretary-General Kofi Annan argued that "in no continent would the implementation of the High-level Panel's recommendations save more lives than in Africa". He said further that the Report makes the point that "poverty and infectious diseases such as AIDS, which affect so many millions every year in Africa are among the gravest threats to international peace and security" and also that "any effort to build an effective collective security system must place prevention and the fight against poverty at its heart (hence) it calls for more concerted action to achieve the Millennium Goals".

In general, the Panel identified six clusters of threats which the international community must address now and in the future:

- War between States;
- Violence within States, including civil wars, large scale human rights abuses and genocide;
- Poverty, infectious disease and environmental degradation;
- Nuclear, radiological, chemical and biological weapons;
- Terrorism; and
- Transnational organised crime.

I would now like to exchange views with this distinguished gathering on the key aspects of the report and also suggest briefly some areas that I believe need more attention, both from an African perspective.

a) Some positive recommendations from the Report:

1. Conceptual:

The Nexus between peace and development: The Panel's insistence that we must see the inter-connectedness of contemporary threats to security is particularly important. Issues such as terrorism, civil war, and extreme poverty should not be treated in isolation from one another. According to the High-level Panel, "hard" and "soft" security issues should be addressed with equal seriousness. When the Panel considered the question of what constitutes a security threat, it was confronted with the political fact of diverse threat perceptions among leaders around the world. The government (or people) of the Central African Republic, for instance, is not as likely as that of the United States to consider weapons of mass destruction a palpable threat. But poverty and the associated limitations on health and life possibilities are certainly uppermost concerns for all governments and citizens alike. Poverty can, for example, lower life expectancy as dramatically as war.

Development is an “indispensable foundation” of collective security, and the eradication of poverty and disease is an essential part of the effort to achieve a safer world. Industrialized powers worried about terrorism, for instance, should also be concerned about narrowing the gap between rich and poor. Although poverty is not a direct cause of terrorism in any simple, straightforward way, factors such as minimal economic opportunity and a lack of strong governing institutions create conditions which
can be more readily exploited by those seeking to recruit new members to terrorist causes.

**Conflict Prevention:** The Report contains many proposals to prevent conflict and other global threats, with development as the first line of response. Development, it says, “serves multiple functions. It helps combat the poverty, disease and environmental degradation that kill millions and threaten human security. It is vital in helping states prevent or reverse the erosion of State capacity, a key to meeting almost every class of threat. And it is part of a long-term strategy for preventing civil war, and for addressing the environments in which both terrorism and organized crime flourish.” The Panel members criticized the “shockingly late and shamefully ill-resourced” global response to HIV/AIDS, and called on the international community to rebuild global public health capacity, disease monitoring and response, as a defense against both naturally occurring epidemics and against terrorists using biological weapons.

**Peace-building:** The Report also addresses issues that arise during and after violent conflict, including the capacities needed for peace enforcement, peacekeeping, peace-building and the protection of civilians. It finds the global supply of available peacekeepers dangerously low, and calls on countries to be readier to provide and support military deployments. Developed States especially, it says, should do more to have suitable contingents ready for peace operations, and provide the financial and logistical resources to mobilize them when and where they are needed.

**II. Proposals for Institutional Change:**

**Peace-building Commission:** The Panel recommends the creation of a new UN body, the Peace-Building Commission, which would identify countries at risk of violent conflict, organize prevention efforts, and “marshal and sustain the efforts of the international community in post-conflict peace-building”. This recommendation would involve the Security Council, ECOSOC, donors and national authorities in filling a crucial gap by giving the necessary attention to countries emerging from conflict.

**Reform of the UN:** The Panel members found that the UN “has been much more effective in addressing the major threats to peace and security than it is given credit for, but that nonetheless major changes are needed” in order to be “effective, efficient and equitable in providing collective security for all” in the 21st Century. Among the most significant changes recommended is the expansion of the Security Council from 15 to 24 members. In this regard, the panel suggested two options: one involving the addition of new permanent members with no veto; the other based on new four-year, renewable seats that would be regionally distributed, also without the veto power.

In addition, the Report recommends changes in the General Assembly, ECOSOC and the Commission on Human Rights, and in the UN’s relations with regional organizations. It proposes strengthening the Secretary-General’s critical role in peace and security. To be more effective, it says, the Secretary-General should be given substantially more latitude to manage the Secretariat, and should be held correspondingly accountable with respect to the exercise of greater authority. It also recommends the addition of a second Deputy Secretary-General, who would focus on peace and security,
and prepare early warning reports and strategy options for decision by the Secretary-General, thus complementing the achievements of the present Deputy (whose post was created in 1996) in “bringing far greater coherence to the work of the UN in the social, economic and development fields”.

III. Process of Cooperation:

The report identifies the collaboration with regional organizations such as the AU as being crucial and sets out a series of principles that would govern a more structured partnership between them and the UN. The recommendation on the use of assessed contributions by the Security Council to support those peace-keeping operations undertaken under its authority and on its behalf would, for example, be particularly useful to the African Union to enhance its peacekeeping operations in Africa.

b) Some areas that need more attention:

I. There is some ambiguity in the recommendation to expand the Security Council from 15 to 24 members as proposed by the panel. The Panel suggests two options: one involving the creation of new permanent members; the other based on new four-year, renewable seats to be distributed among the regional groups. In both categories, there would be no veto power for new members. The Panel did not indicate its preference among the two options. Member States of the United Nations are left to decide their preference.

II. The Report could have provided elements of a comprehensive development and humanitarian strategy, such as identifying sources for the much needed humanitarian assistance for countries in distress and specifying mechanisms to help developing countries alleviate extreme poverty and curb the spread of infectious diseases. The explanation for not doing so is that the Panel was tasked to examine economic and social issues only as they relate to peace and security. Fortunately, the Jeffrey Sachs's Report on the Millennium Declaration is expected to fill part of this gap. In this regard, according to the Secretary-General, during his address to the last African Summit in Abuja, most of the Millennium Declaration report's recommendations have Africa clearly in mind. It calls on African states to adopt development strategies bold enough to meet the Millennium Development Goal targets by 2015. It calls on donors and Africans alike to identify the external financing gaps, and to fill these through official development assistance and significant debt relief measures. It suggests that at least a dozen "MDG fast-track" countries be designated for a rapid scale-up of ODA, with more countries granted such status as soon as they are ready. It stresses the need for a major breakthrough in the Doha trade round. And it urges the immediate launching of a set of "quick win" actions - such as the free mass distribution of malaria bed nets, the expansion of school meal programmes using locally produced foods, and an end to user fees for primary schools and essential health services.

III. Africa’s special needs were not specifically addressed in the High-level Panel's Report. Nonetheless, Chapter 7 of UN Millennium Declaration and paragraphs
27 and 28 of General Assembly Resolution A/Res/55/2 (18 September 2000) make reference to the special needs of Africa. Moreover, in operative paragraph 31 of its Resolution on NEPAD, (A/59/L.33) of 21 December 2004, the General Assembly "invites the High-level Plenary Meeting which is to be held on the commencement of the 60th Session of the General Assembly, to address the special needs of the African continent". In addressing the special situation of Africa, there is a critical need for an increase in financial commitment by the United Nations system, which is in turn dependent upon whether the UN system and its agencies receive additional financial resources for their joint programmes and new initiatives from the donor community. The High-level Panel's report did not articulate fully the ways of increasing financial resources for the United Nations system and its agencies in order to better assist African countries. However, it is estimated that Africa will need about half of the estimated $50 billion additional ODA, over the 2001 ODA level, in order to achieve the MDGs by 2015. The pledges of additional ODA made in support of Africa’s development still fall below the 0.15 to 0.20 of GNI to ODA agreed in the Brussels Programme of Action. Furthermore, the report did not address the issue of mutual accountability whereby both the donor community on the one hand and the developing countries in Africa and elsewhere, on the other hand, would honor their respective commitments on resources for development.

IV. There is also a need to spell out the precise mandate of the Peace Building Commission and the sources of funds for peace-building operations and post-conflict reconstruction of war-torn areas in Africa and elsewhere. Will the funding for the Peace-Building Commission come from assessed contributions or voluntary contributions? In addition, the institutional home for the proposed Peace Building Commission continues to be the subject of vigorous debate with many Member States of the UN questioning the Security Council as the appropriate location for the Commission.

V. Finally, the need for policy coherence in international assistance to Africa is highlighted by the lack of complementarities in debt, aid and trade policies of the developed countries towards Africa. For example, for a period stretching back over 10 years, ODA to Africa has been almost offset by debt service payments by the Africans. Another example of incoherence is evident in trade and ODA relief whereby for nearly a quarter of a century starting from 1970, the dramatic decline in Africa’s market share amounted to an estimated income loss of $70 billion per annum, almost five times the average annual ODA to Africa. The report has not adequately addressed how such policy incoherency can be remedied.

Nonetheless, it is fair to say that the High-level Panel's report is a start, a good start, but not an end to the process of defining collective threats and challenges and designing collective responses to meeting them. Moreover, the implementation of the recommendations depends on adequate follow-up mechanisms. The 2005 General Assembly Summit is expected to provide a climax to and focus for intergovernmental debate of the High-level Panel’s recommendations, while discussions in other fora such as the G-8, the African Union and other regional summits would give further impetus. As
noted in the report, building a more secure world takes much more than a Report or a Summit. It will take resources and commitments commensurate with the scale of the challenges and which are long-term and sustained. Most of all, it will take leadership, within States, and in the intergovernmental bodies to translate recommendations and expectations into reality.

Meanwhile, at its last Summit Meeting held in Abuja, Nigeria (January 31-February 1 2005), the African Union made the following Declaration of Appreciation to the UN Secretary-General which, inter alia, commended his leadership of the UN during the last seven years of his tenure and particularly the process of reform of the Organisation which he has set in motion. "In that context" continued the Declaration, "we take note, with considerable satisfaction, of his appointment of a High-level Panel to consider and make recommendations on Threats, Challenges and Change, facing the United Nations.

The report of the Panel, which is now the subject of intense focus throughout the world, including Africa, we believe will make a major contribution to the repositioning of the UN to respond more effectively to the demands of the present time. Africa, which expects much of the UN, is in the process of studying the recommendations in their totality and making its views known to the Secretary-General".

The Summit endorsed the decision made by the Executive Council of the AU, which preceded the Summit, to examine further the High-level Panel's Report and:

- "to set up a Ministerial Committee of Fifteen (15) Members, which is open-ended, on the basis of the AU formula for equitable geographical distribution applied to the Peace and Security Council;
- to request the various regions to urgently undertake consultations in conformity with their respective regional mechanisms and submit the names of the members of the Committee thereof to the Commission;
- to mandate the Committee of Fifteen (15) to consider the two options relating to the reform of the UN Security Council, taking into account:
  (a) the African Common Position contained in the Harare Assembly Declaration of June 1997;
  (b) developments on the international scene since the adoption of the Harare Declaration; and
  (c) the essence of the long debate held in this Session of Council on 28 January 2005 as summarized by the Chairperson.
- That the meeting of the Committee should be convened from 20 to 22 February 2005, followed by an Extraordinary Session of the Executive Council, to adopt
Africa's position which will then be presented to the UN Secretary-General for inclusion in his report to the UN General Assembly in March 2005;

4. CONCLUSION:

In his Commencement Address at Harvard University, 10 June 2004, Secretary-General Kofi Annan argued that the UN matters "because the UN offers the best hope of a stable world and a broadly equitable world order based on generally accepted rules. That statement has been much questioned in the past year. But recent events have re-affirmed, and even strengthened, its reality". He went on to say that; "in devising and applying the rules, the legitimate interests of all countries are accommodated and decisions are reached collectively that is the essence of multilateralism and the founding principle of the United Nations".

Permit me to end with the observations that I made at the Seminar for the newly appointed Ambassadors of the Federal Republic, in Abuja, September 17, 1999, which in my view, are still relevant to today's global reality. "The United Nations system", I said, "badly and urgently needs revitalisation and re-structuring if it is going to survive as a major player in the 21st Century. A future UN that does not cater for those left behind by the fast paced process of globalisation is going to lose its moral authority and legitimacy. A future UN that is not collectively tackling the challenges of environmental degradation, drug trafficking, refugees, human rights and good governance, illiteracy, poverty, ignorance and diseases would have failed to live up to its principal goal of promoting human development". This generation owes succeeding ones the responsibility to help reform the United Nations Organization as a collective instrument to promote a safer, fairer and more prosperous world.

I thank you for listening.