

“WE *the*
PEOPLES”



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WE *the*
PEOPLES

THE ROLE OF THE

UNITED NATIONS

IN THE

21st Century



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Secretary-General of the United Nations

C
N **NEW** **CENTURY**
new **new** *challenges*

The arrival of the new millennium is an occasion for celebration and reflection.

The world did celebrate as the clock struck midnight on New Year's Eve, in one time zone after another, from Kiribati and Fiji westward around the globe to Samoa. People of all cultures joined in—not only those for whom the millennium might be thought to have a special significance. The Great Wall of China and the Pyramids of Giza were lit as brightly as Manger Square in Bethlehem and St. Peter's Square in Rome. Tokyo, Jakarta and New Delhi joined Sydney, Moscow, Paris, New York, Rio de Janeiro and hundreds of other cities in hosting millennial festivities. Children's faces reflected the candlelight from Spitsbergen in Norway to Robben Island in South Africa. For 24 hours the human family celebrated its unity through an unprecedented display of its rich diversity.

The Millennium Summit affords an opportunity for reflection. The General Assembly convened this gathering of Heads of State and Government to address the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century. Both the occasion and the subject require us to step back from today's headlines and take a broader, longer-term view—of the state of the world and the challenges it poses for this Organization.

There is much to be grateful for. Most people today can expect to live longer than their parents, let alone their more remote ancestors. They are better nourished, enjoy better health, are better educated, and on the whole face more favourable economic prospects.

There are also many things to deplore, and to correct. The century just ended was disfigured, time and again, by ruthless conflict. Grinding poverty and striking inequality persist within and among countries even amidst unprecedented wealth. Diseases, old and new, threaten to undo painstaking progress. Nature's life-sustaining services, on which our species depends for its survival, are being seriously disrupted and degraded by our own everyday activities.

The world's people look to their leaders, when they gather at the Millennium Summit, to identify and act on the major challenges ahead.

The United Nations can succeed in helping to meet those challenges only if all of us feel a renewed sense of mission about our common endeavour. We need to remind ourselves why the United Nations exists—for what, and for whom. We also need to ask ourselves what kind of United Nations the world's leaders are prepared to support, in deeds as well as words. Clear answers are necessary to energize and focus the Organization's work in the decades ahead. It is those answers that the Millennium Summit must provide.

Of course, the United Nations exists to serve its Member States. It is the only body of its kind with universal membership and comprehensive scope, and encompassing so

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many areas of human endeavour. These features make it a uniquely useful forum—for sharing information, conducting negotiations, elaborating norms and voicing expectations, coordinating the behaviour of states and other actors, and pursuing common plans of action. We must ensure that the United Nations performs these functions as efficiently and effectively as possible.

The United Nations is more than a mere tool, however. As its Charter makes clear, the United Nations was intended to introduce new principles into international relations, making a qualitative difference to their day-to-day conduct. The Charter's very first Article defines our purposes: resolving disputes by peaceful means; devising cooperative solutions to economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems; and broadly encouraging behaviour in conformity with the principles of justice and international law. In other words, quite apart from whatever practical tasks the United Nations is asked to perform, it has the avowed purpose of transforming relations among states, and the methods by which the world's affairs are managed.

Nor is that all. For even though the United Nations is an organization of states, the Charter is written in the name of "we the peoples". It reaffirms the dignity and worth of the human person, respect for human rights and the equal rights of men and women, and a commitment to social progress as measured by better standards of life, in freedom from want and fear alike. Ultimately, then, the United Nations exists for, and must serve, the needs and hopes of people everywhere.

For its first 45 years, the United Nations lived in the grip of the cold war, prevented from fulfilling some of its core missions but discovering other critical tasks in that conflict's shadow. For 10 years now, the United Nations has been buffeted by the tumultuous changes of the new era, doing good work in many instances but falling short in others. Now, the Millennium Summit offers the world's leaders an unparalleled opportunity to reshape the United Nations well into the twenty-first century, enabling it to make a real and measurable difference to people's lives.

I respectfully submit the present report to Member States to facilitate their preparations for the Summit and to stimulate their subsequent deliberations at the Summit. The report identifies some of the pressing challenges faced by the world's people that fall within the United Nations ambit. It proposes a number of priorities for Member States to consider, and it recommends several immediate steps that we can take at the Summit itself, to lift people's spirits and improve their lives.

All these proposals are set in the context of globalization, which is transforming the world as we enter the twenty-first century. In this new era, people's actions constantly—if often unwittingly—affect the lives of others living far away. Globalization offers great opportunities, but at present its benefits are very unevenly distributed while its costs are borne by all.

Thus the central challenge we face today is to ensure that globalization becomes a positive force for all the world's people, instead of leaving billions of them behind in squalor. Inclusive globalization must be built on the great enabling force of the market, but market forces alone will not achieve it. It requires a broader effort to create a shared future, based upon our common humanity in all its diversity.

That in turn requires that we think afresh about how we manage our joint activities and our shared interests, for many challenges that we confront today are beyond the reach of any state to meet on its own. At the national level we must govern better, and at the international level we must learn to govern better together. Effective states are essential for both tasks, and their capacity for both needs strengthening. We must also adapt international institutions, through which states govern together, to the realities of the new era. We must form coalitions for change, often with partners well beyond the precincts of officialdom.

No shift in the way we think or act can be more critical than this: we must put people at the centre of everything we do. No calling is more noble, and no responsibility greater, than that of enabling men, women and children, in cities and villages around the world, to make their lives better. Only when that begins to happen will we know that globalization is indeed becoming inclusive, allowing everyone to share its opportunities.

We must do more than talk about our future, however. We must start to create it, now. Let the Millennium Summit signal the renewed commitment of Member States to their United Nations, by agreeing on our common vision. Let the world's leaders prove their commitment by acting on it as soon as they return home.

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