

2005 WORLD SUMMIT

HIGH-LEVEL PLENARY MEETING | 14–16 SEPTEMBER 2005



» CREATING A UN FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Proposals that could create the most sweeping overhaul of the United Nations in its sixty-year history are up for decision at the 2005 World Summit in September. Momentum for change has been building to respond more effectively to a range of interconnected threats and challenges. Secretary-General Kofi Annan said, on the occasion of this year's sixtieth anniversary of the signing of the UN Charter, that "the stakes could hardly be higher. The opportunity to forge a common response to common threats may not soon recur. It is in that context...that a reformed and strengthened UN is so badly needed."

Reforms that could be instituted under the authority of the Secretary-General, especially management and Secretariat reforms, were carried out following Mr. Annan's election in 1997, and again in his second term, beginning in 2002 (see "Secretariat", below). An April 2005 report from the UN Department of Management

records continued savings and creation of extra value under reforms that respond to the longstanding request from Member States that the UN "do more with less".

New changes have come in the last few months. These include the creation of: two executive-level decision-making committees — the Management Committee and the Policy Committee — in order to streamline top-level management decisions; an Ethics Office that strengthens whistleblower protection and enhances ethics standards; a Management Performance Board that systematically assesses the performance of senior managers; and an Oversight Committee of the UN Secretariat that ensures that managers implement the recommendations of the UN oversight bodies. In addition, the UN procurement system is being strengthened to be in line with best practices, in order to avoid some of the pitfalls incurred in the oil-for-food programme in Iraq. On the operational front, a self-financing Democracy Fund is taking shape, to help countries to strengthen democratic practices.

Other operational improvements, affecting the inter-governmental machinery, will require Member State approval. In his March 2005 report, *In Larger Freedom*, the Secretary-General fielded a series of proposals, in some cases drawing on recommendations from the 2004 report of an independent high-level panel on threats, challenges and change, and in others repeating or reinforcing ideas he aired during his tenure.

These ideas include:

- » creating a new Peacebuilding Commission, to assist countries emerging from conflict;
- » establishing a Human Rights Council to replace the discredited Human Rights Commission;

» FACTS AND FIGURES

- » In 1945, representatives from 50 countries met in San Francisco to draw up the founding charter of the United Nations. Today, there are 191 UN Member States; the last two countries to join were Switzerland and Timor-Leste in 2002.
- » The UN Secretariat regular budget for 2005 is \$1.8 billion. By comparison, the Tokyo fire department has a budget of \$2.2 billion, and the annual administrative budget of the European Union, even prior to its recent expansion, was \$8.3 billion.
- » Efficiency reforms created \$1.2 million in new value during 2004 — mostly due to new electronic and digital technologies, according to the UN report on "Progress and impact assessment of management improvement measures" (document A/60/70).

- ❖ reviewing operations of the UN's Office of Internal Oversight Services with an eye to increasing its independence and efficacy;
- ❖ streamlining deliberations of the UN General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, and making them more directly relevant to world events; and
- ❖ expanding the Security Council, to make it more representative of the world of the 21st century.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The General Assembly, which brings together all 191 Member States, plays a deliberative and policy-making role in the UN. It has the authority to consider and approve the budget, and it also elects the members of other deliberative bodies, including the rotating members of the Security Council.

Revitalization of the Assembly could entail rationalizing its work programme and speeding up the deliberative process, notably by streamlining its agenda and its committee structure and by strengthening the role and authority of the Assembly President. This process has already begun, with Assembly adoption of resolutions in December 2003 (58/126) and July 2004 (58/316). *(See also backgrounder on the sixtieth session of the Assembly.)*

At present, the General Assembly addresses a plethora of often overlapping issues. There were over 150 items on the agenda of last year's session, many of them recurring from previous years. The Secretary-General has suggested in his March report that the Assembly concentrate its attention on the major substantive issues of the day.

SECURITY COUNCIL

There has long been interest in reforming the Security Council to reflect present geopolitical realities over those of 1945, when the Organization was founded. In the Millennium Declaration, all States resolved to intensify their efforts "to achieve a comprehensive reform of the Security Council in all its aspects." There

is also agreement that the Council's working methods can be made more efficient and transparent.

In an effort to move the discussion forward, in December 2004, the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change (www.un.org/secure-world) proposed two models for a new Security Council. One would increase the number of permanent seats; another would create new renewable seats.

The possible enlargement of the Council has been under intense debate since the release of the Secretary-General's March report. Various models for expanding the Council from its current 15 to 25 or 26 members have been tabled as draft resolutions to the General Assembly. Some Member States worry that adding new seats to the Council would weaken its decision-making capacity.

It has been suggested that decision on these issues may need to await discussion later during the sixtieth General Assembly, which opens in mid-September. No matter when a decision is taken, changing the Security Council composition would require amendment of the UN Charter and approval by two thirds of the Assembly's membership, and subsequent ratification by national legislatures or other constitutional processes of those Member States, including the Council's five permanent members.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is the principal UN body for coordinating and reviewing economic and social policies, providing advice and fostering dialogue on development issues.

In recent years, ECOSOC has strengthened partnerships with the non-governmental and private sectors, particularly in humanitarian relief efforts and post-conflict peacebuilding, and initiated coordination with the Security Council in these areas. It also took a leading role in the UN's intensified cooperation and collaboration with the world's finance institutions since 1990, to harmonize international efforts on finance, trade, aid and national development. Such collaboration ultimately paid off in the

groundbreaking Monterrey Consensus in 2002 and the subsequent World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, opening a new chapter in North-South cooperation on development.

But there have also been longstanding doubts as to the efficacy of ECOSOC, which aside from advice and dialogue holds no formal powers to fund, as do the financial institutions, or to sanction, as does the Security Council. The UN Secretary-General has proposed that ECOSOC could improve its relevance by holding high-level biennial reviews of development cooperation and that it monitor all countries' compliance in implementing the internationally agreed development goals.

He also recommended that the Council convene timely meetings as humanitarian or economic emergencies occur to promote a coordinated UN response. In addition, it has been urged that the Council go further in linking peace and development and in coordinating with the Security Council and, if it is instituted, a new Peacebuilding Commission.

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

The UN Charter mandates that the Organization protect and promote human rights throughout the world. That mission has been hampered by many factors, including by limitations in the effectiveness of the Human Rights Commission, now regarded by many as largely discredited.

In the run-up to the World Summit, Member States have been debating a recommendation of the Secretary-General to replace the Commission with a smaller, standing Geneva-based Human Rights Council that would restore human rights to the prominence accorded them by the Charter. Early drafts of the outcome document intended for approval by Member States in September have suggested that the new Council would be a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly, instead of ECOSOC.

Members of the proposed Council would be elected directly by at least a two-thirds majority of the General Assembly, rather than solely by nomination of regional groups, to better ensure high standards.

SECRETARIAT

Secretary-General Kofi Annan has made reform a hallmark of his tenure. In 1997 he launched a "quiet revolution", designed to make the UN leaner and more effective. Among the many changes he introduced since then were the streamlining of management procedures and the elimination of approximately 1,000 posts, adopting results-based budgeting and a web-based recruitment system, and the shifting of resources from administration to development work, as well as more flexible personnel policies.

The current phase of reform coincides with a particularly critical time for the UN. The Secretary-General has initiated significant management and oversight reforms to make the UN more efficient, transparent and accountable, including the formation of two separate executive-level committees on policy and management, the institution of a whistle-blowing policy to protect staff members, the establishment of a management performance board and more rigorous and competitive policies for selecting senior management, the formation of a more independent oversight committee, and improved codes of conduct and ethics for all staff members, including those engaged in peacekeeping operations.

Other changes depend on Member State approval. One proposal is for a full review of budgetary and human resources rules and policies. Another would request a comprehensive look at the Office of Internal Oversight Services, seeking ways to increase the independence and effectiveness of the UN's main watchdog body.

Member States are also considering giving the Secretary-General, as chief administrative officer of the Organization, a higher level of managerial authority and flexibility in budgeting and staffing. The Secretary-General, for his part, has asked the General Assembly to provide him with the resources to pursue a one-time staff buyout to realign staffing to meet current needs.

