

PROJECT STARLING

Remarks to the Intergovernmental Ad Hoc Working Group on
Mandate Implementation Review from
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(Some of this was left out of the verbal remarks due to time constraints).

- Thank you to the Ambassadors from Jamaica and New Zealand for inviting me to address you and share my perspective. Excellencies, Ambassadors, ladies and gentlemen,
- I am CEO and Co-Founder of [Project Starling](#), a think and do tank whose mission is to build a multilateral system that works for all. I've spent over two decades around the UN and in global affairs and I served in the Strategic Planning Unit of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General during the second term of Kofi Annan and 20 years ago, in October 2005, I was asked to lead the 2006 Mandate Review for him in support of the Member States. I heard that many of you requested to hear about lessons from the last mandate review.
- **Some 2006 -08 lessons:**
 - **A detailed backwards looking** intergovernmental review of existing mandates proved **unmanageable**.
 - **You don't have the information you need** to do a full review of past and current mandates – including budgetary information tied to every mandate.
 - **Success should not be measured on how many mandates you get rid of**, because it sets an expectation that the exercise is about cutting a high number vs making the UN more effective and streamlining its work. Mandates can create a new UN entity or they can request a report, which should not be considered in the same way.
 - Mandates are carefully negotiated outcomes of extensive, often contentious intergovernmental negotiations – you all are well aware of that. **Reviewing all existing mandates could mean relitigating decades of difficult compromises.** Current governments would be forced to rehash agreements made by their predecessors, reopening old wounds. **You will likely find yourselves relitigating 80 years of diplomacy.** That's not the best way to start a reform process that depends

on goodwill and trust.

- In 2006-08, Member States took a clerical approach to avoid reopening wounds—the right call given the 2006 World Summit’s directive to “review all mandates older than five years originating from resolutions of the General Assembly and other organs.” But after two and a half years of **tedious work to examine individual mandates for duplication and delivery, the process simply lost steam.**
- **This time, I suggest we look forward. You will always find more unity in the future than in the past.**
- **Focus instead on the fundamental reason we have a mandate problem: the mandate lifecycle—how mandates are created.** It's encouraging to see the Secretary-General address this systemic challenge in his report, which we (on behalf of the SG) highlighted in 2006, but had to still focus on old mandates given the World Summit’s mandate. **I urge you to follow the SG's lead this time and that of the co-facilitators: focus on the mandate lifecycle and not on reviewing individual mandates one by one.**
- If you take decisions to strengthen the way we create and monitor mandates, we’ll build a better UN and it’ll also enable us to refresh our existing programs. What do I mean?
- Here’s the core problem: Member States create mandates to address transnational challenges, yet too often, as the SG’s report indicates, member states have to do this without full insight into what already exists across the UN system — what is already in place doing that work, what is working, what are the overlaps, and where resources could be shifted to address a new mandate or what programs could be updated. In the absence of that visibility and transparency, decisions are made on incomplete information or rely on national analyses rather than shared evidence where all member states are making decisions based on the same information. (Not every member state can conduct their own national analysis so some are disadvantaged.)
- **This often results in fragmentation** – a major challenge – where some parts of the UN are perceived as more effective than others. This can also **increase politicization in the intergovernmental decision-making process.**
- A Secretariat capable of providing assessments is essential in order for you to create new mandates.

- **That requires investment.** It will be hard with budget austerity but necessary. Around the world, well-run organizations devote about **3 to 10** percent of their budgets to assessments and program **evaluation**; the UN system likely spends **less than 1 percent** (my own rough review of public data suggests as much but the Secretariat might be asked to provide information about how much is provided for evaluation.)
- **Strengthening the UN's capacity to do internal and independent evaluation of its work is fundamental to evidence-informed policymaking.** Member States have to be given information they need to understand, discuss, and adopt new mandates – essentially so you, the **member states can be better custodians of your mandates.** This is what Kofi Annan recommended in 2006 and what the current SG has just suggested in his report.
 - In 2006, we realized that the UN had to invest significantly in evaluation capacity across the system – OIOS, JIU, Board of Auditors and internal self evaluation – along with more analytical, **streamlined reporting and more transparent understanding of budgetary requirements when you are considering a new mandate – the essence of evidence-informed policymaking.**
- The SG's report under "mandate creation" recommends "improving Secretariat support for Member States during mandate creation" and "complementing budget estimates with information on related programmatic activities across the system." This is needed.
 - I would urge you to **consider going one step further: build into every new mandate's budget a modest, dedicated percentage for evaluation into the PBI – so that from the outset, at the mandate creation part of the cycle, implementation, learning, and assessment are part of the design.** If we don't budget for the system to assess how well your mandates are implemented, how will you know if a mandate is done or if a new one is needed?
- For those concerned with reviewing existing mandates – whether they overlap, duplicate, or remain relevant – I'd suggest that the best solution is not another sweeping review, at least not yet, but rather making these and other changes that enable robust, credible and ongoing evaluative and learning capacities. **Once the UN has adequate evaluative learning capacities, it will then allow you to review past mandates.** (Agreeing on principles for a forward-looking mandate review, as the co-facilitators have suggested is also a good basis for potentially looking backwards). At the moment on what basis will you decide if a mandate has been completed? We didn't have that information in 2006 for most mandates, and I hear the situation has not gotten better.

- What you need is robust evaluative information that tells you not only *what activities took place* but *what difference it made*. It provides evidence of implementation and results. In an era of tight budgets and rising skepticism, this kind of **information strengthens transparency, accountability, and, ultimately, public trust which is in short supply these days**.
 - And it can be **reported on in a way that enables even the smallest of member state** missions to understand what's happening, so you don't have to read through all of the thousands of UN reports.
- This is so important so that you can make the case to your funders — your citizens — and credibly adopt new mandates.
- My appeal to you today is not about an issue that will make headlines. It is about the **quiet systems that make multilateral cooperation work**.
- I have devoted my career to improving how the UN delivers **because I know, personally, what a functioning UN can do**. When I was three, after the war, my family fled Vietnam by boat. We were rescued by UNHCR and brought to a refugee camp in Indonesia before being resettled. My life was shaped by the UN's ability to work.
- When it works well and is adequately funded, the UN saves lives and expands what is possible for millions. Strengthening your ability to better adopt mandates, with better information so we learn and adapt, is one of the surest ways to ensure it can continue to do so.
- Poet Edna St Vincent Millay said, **"It's not true that life is one damn thing after another—it's one damn thing over and over."** Her point was that life keeps repeating itself and the same problems come up time and again. **By improving the mandate life cycle and addressing systemic issues, you now have the chance to prevent the same mandate problems from happening again and again.**
- I thank you.