CHANGING THE UNITED NATIONS

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At the outset, let me thank Chatham House for honouring me with this invitation to address such a distinguished audience, and on an issue of critical importance to all of us as global citizens. Every time I enter these hallowed precincts I am reminded of the great Prime Ministers who lived in this house and the outstanding Directors who headed this institution after it was converted to the study of international relations following the Paris Peace Conference. What would their thoughts be of our present global situation and of the greatest experiment in multilateralism, which we are now renovating, and reinvigorating 60 years after its inauguration in San Francisco? Perhaps what one of them - William Pitt the Elder, later Lord Chatham - said in another context would be appropriate - "Where laws end, tyranny begins". For indeed the United Nations (UN) stands for the Rule of Law in international relations with its actions deriving legitimacy from the norms the UN maintains and continues to build.

What I propose to do this evening is first, to set out some definitional parameters. Then to proceed to describe what I think should not change, what has already been changed through consensus and what remains to be changed. Finally, I will attempt to draw some conclusions.

You will observe that I have used as my title the word 'changing' rather than the more commonly used word 'reforming' to describe the process that is going on within the United Nations today. I have done so advisedly. 'Reform,' to my mind, has a distinctly pejorative implication. I am reminded of what John Foster Dulles, the U.S Secretary of State during the Cold War, once said." The United Nations was not set up to be a reformatory. It was assumed that you would be good before you got in and not that being in would make you good."!

 But, more importantly, all human-made institutions have to change from time to time. Not to do so will certainly result in their eventual fossilization and atrophy. All organizations must engage regularly in introspection and review to remain responsive to the challenges of changing times - a familiar motif of challenge and response in the human condition, as one of your former Directors, Arnold J. Toynbee, concluded in his monumental, multi-volume *'A Study of History'*.

Even the highly developed continent Europe had to undertake reforms in its multilateral institution – the European Commission -following disclosures of corruption and inefficiency. So did the International Olympic Committee in Lausanne despite being devoted to the high ideals of the Olympic movement. But change does not have to take place in response to the discovery of some malfeasance alone. Japan's economy, whose post-war miracle was widely admired, has had to undergo reforms to get out of its stagnation. The searchlights have now been turned on the International Monetary Fund.

National institutions and even non-governmental organizations have had to make changes from time to time. Examples are a multitude but suffice to say the need for change is not something to be defensive about. On the contrary, not to change would be indefensible. There have been attempts to change structures and procedures in the UN in the past and there will be similar efforts in the future. The curtain can never come down on such change.

At the same time change must be managed and managing the change of a complex inter-governmental organization like the UN with the enormous diversity of its 192 member states is indeed a challenging task. We must also be clear about what we mean by the United Nations. Some refer to 'three' UNs - the member states who are the primary stakeholders; the Secretariat described in the Charter as one of the principal organs; and the group of NGOs representing civil society who work within the UN system - also described by the New York Times as that 'other super power' representing world public opinion.

 I have myself distinguished among three categories of change that must take place in the UN – the change of institutions within the UN system; the change of mandates and programmes adopted by the member states; and Secretariat or management change. The cumulative effect of this change is to make the UN a more efficient, accountable and transparent institution.

What not to change

I have frequently warned that when we change the UN we must be careful not to throw the baby out with the bathwater - to use a homespun expression. There is a lot of good that the UN has done and is doing and there are many good, dedicated people working effectively within the UN system where I have also worked - admittedly for a small part of my long diplomatic career. The Intellectual History Project of the UN led by Sir Richard Jolly and others has documented the ideas launched by the UN system in the area of economic and social development alone. It is a glimpse of the remarkable vision and creativity of the founders of the UN, which must remain, unchanged to inspire us and guide us. It shows how the UN in its economic and social development work has often been significantly ahead of governments, academics and other international institutions that later adopted its ideas. The capacity to generate these ideas must continue.

As the UN Intellectual History Project stated in 2001 "Ideas matter. People matter"- and ideas that benefit the peoples of the United Nations matter the most. The UN is uniquely situated to be a vanguard of global public opinion. Transcending individual state-centred approaches the UN can take a synoptic view of issues highlighting a multilateral perspective with global interdependencies clearly delineated. And because these synoptic views are based on consensus, broader public acceptance is made easier.

Over the six decades of the UN's existence we have seen many successes although major challenges remain. The achievement of the decolonisation of scores of Asian and African countries; the focus on Human Rights and its mainstreaming in international relations; the

emphasis on Environment and Sustainable Development; on Gender issues and the shaping of a co-ordinated response to globalization, to terrorism and other global challenges like HIV/AIDS are some of them. At the same time the UN has been engaged in the prevention of conflict and, where conflict has broken out, in peacekeeping, peacemaking and peace building.

This is truly a collective achievement. It is not the record of a 'pillion passenger' - to use the phrase made memorable by Chatham House. But it also derives from a value base of the organization. Beginning with the Charter which sets out the purposes and principles of the UN in Chapter 1 there has also been an ethical foundation built over the years. The Millenium Declaration adopted in September 2000 identified the shared values of the UN community as Freedom, Equality, Solidarity, Tolerance, Respect for Nature and Shared Responsibility. No change can affect these values, which represent powerful forces motivating humankind through history. They provide what might be called the collective legitimation of the UN. They have been the accelerators of human progress and the benchmarks for assessing the performance of the UN. The UN is not merely a platform or a forum. It is a depository of values and ideals and an incubator of ideas. It has to generate new thinking constantly and for this an effective Secretariat is essential.

There has also been a consensus established that the core areas of the UN's work are in peace and security, human rights and development and that all three of these areas are interconnected and interlaced so that you cannot have one without the other. The Budget of the UN must reflect this for the UN's institutions to function effectively.

There is another guiding principle that must remain with us as we change the UN to make it a more effective vehicle of multilateral action. I am deeply convinced that the architects of the UN wisely built into the organization an indispensable equilibrium amongst the principal organs of this world body benefiting from the experience of the League of Nations.

Thus while the General Assembly functions as the Parliament of Nations based on the democratic principle of the sovereign equality of nations (Article 2:1) making recommendations on a wide range of issues and approving the budget, it is the Security Council that acts on behalf of the UN members in its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security using the powers vested in it under Chapter VI – Pacific Settlement of Disputes - and Chapter VII – Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression.

Amidst the unfulfilled demands for the reform of the Security Council, and especially its enlargement, tensions appear to have grown between the General Assembly and the Security Council. The current debate on UN reform has been seriously complicated by deep-seated concerns that, under the guise of reform, attempts are being made to change the equilibrium that is inherent in the Charter. The need for change is recognized. That however should not be an occasion for a struggle for power over the organization by one group of countries over the other. Whether it is a group enjoying the power of the purse

or the power of the majority we need to allow the equilibrium to remain as difficult as it may be. To upset it is to unravel the Charter.

Another important principle that has to be observed in implementing change is the need for equity as far as the member states are concerned. Changing the UN is not the object of one country or group of countries. It is the collective wish of the entire membership and consensus documents vouch for this. Change must therefore benefit all countries. It is for the purpose of making the UN deliver public goods in a more efficient and effective manner. If changes are perceived as being asymmetrical in the benefits they will confer on the member states they will be controversial, as indeed some of them have been. Often the problem is in the perception and that arises from the atmosphere of mistrust that prevails among the groups notably between the developing and developed countries. Urgent confidence-building measures are necessary and they can be designed and led by a group of middle ground countries that enjoy the trust of all member states.

The role of the Secretary-General must at all times be impartial and he must not be perceived to be acting under pressure from any side. Nor should his proposals for change be seen as tilting the delicate power balance to one side or another. For this the most painstaking consultations are vital however time-consuming they may be. We need a transparent and accountable system of running the world's most indispensable multilateral body and we must work hard for it.

What has been changed

The Secretary-General's 'fork in the road' speech in September 2003 heralded a period of accelerated change in the UN following in the wake of the 'Oil-for-food' investigation conducted by the Volcker Committee, revelations of corruption and sexual misconduct by Secretariat staff and a widespread dissatisfaction with administrative systems in the UN which had become rigid and dysfunctional. On the basis of the report of the High level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change the Secretary-General issued his own report which was the basis of the decisions taken by the members at Head of State and Head of Government level last September.

In the category of the changes of institutions we have had institutions like the Trusteeship Council that have patently outlived their historical usefulness. Thus the deletion of Chapter XIII of the Charter has been recommended by the High Level panel and accepted in the Outcome document. The Commission of Human Rights has been controversial and widely perceived as being dysfunctional. Accordingly its replacement with the Human Rights Council (HRC) has been achieved albeit with some reservations. The inauguration of the HRC in Geneva last month amidst the hope that it will advance the cause of human rights without being politicized was a landmark event.

We have also seen the innovative creation of new institutions in response to demonstrable needs. The Peacebuilding Commission recommended by the High Level Panel has also now come into being. It represent a synthesis of several bodies in the UN system and augurs well for concrete, co-ordinated action among the General Assembly, the Security

Council, the Economic and Social Council, different departments within the UN Secretariat, groups of countries such as donors, troop supplying countries in peacekeeping situations and the International Financial Institutions. This bringing together of the different elements in a synergy is rare in the UN. It should be seen as a harbinger of direct benefits in peacebuilding ensuring that countries recovering from conflict no longer slip back into chaos because of political instability, economic insecurity, lack of stable institutions and democratic governance and human rights violations.

In the category of mandates and programmes the Secretary-General has responded to the Outcome Document's call for the strengthening and updating of UN programmes of work and a review of mandates older than five years originating from UNGA resolutions – approximately 93% of the mandates. In March 2006 he issued a report and an inventory of the resolutions that have to be reviewed. This is being undertaken in phases within a Working Group. Sensitive questions are being raised as to the political motives behind the suspension of some mandates and their replacement with others. We would be well advised to proceed in accordance with the Latin motto – *'festina lente'*.

Finally in the category of Management Reform the Secretary-General has issued a comprehensive report, which needs to be supplemented with further reports expected in September this year. A wide-ranging resolution on 'Investing in the United Nations for a stronger Organization Worldwide' was adopted on 7 July. Already an Ethics Office has been set up, whistleblower and financial disclosure policies have been finalized, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) is strengthening its capacity, the Central Emergency Response Fund has been established - enabling speedy deployment of resources in response to humanitarian emergencies - and an Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Safety of UN and Associated Personnel has been adopted.

What has not changed

In the realm of institutional change the most glaring omission is the absence of any change in the Security Council. The expansion of this body is only one aspect of the reforms that have been called for. There are other issues regarding working methods, transparency, improved reporting procedures and greater communication between the General Assembly and the Security Council. There has been a disproportionate attention paid to the question of expansion with only two possible scenarios recommended by the High Level panel and repeated by the Secretary-General. The G4 resolution sponsored mainly by Brazil, Germany, India and Japan focussed on Model A with six new permanent members and 3 non-permanent making a total of 24 as against the present 15 member Council. Efforts to have this model accepted last year did not succeed as opposition built up with other member states working in a "Uniting for Consensus" initiative.

There is clearly no agreement on the issue and we would be unwise to force the pace until there are some intensive consultations to broaden the basis for constructive action. Meanwhile think tanks and Governments must explore other models that may be feasible.

The continuing perception that the Security Council is unrepresentative does undermine the authority of its resolutions and actions and that alone should prompt us to urgent change. The difficulty in finding an acceptable solution should not result in this issue being permanently on the back burner.

Another area where major changes in institutions could be expected is with the, rather ponderously titled, High-Level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence in the Areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance and the Environment – typical UN-speak I am afraid! This panel is co-chaired by the Prime Ministers of Mozambique, Norway and Pakistan. The report of the panel is expected in September and a fundamental restructuring of the current institutions in these areas is anticipated so as to prevent overlap, avoid duplication and ensure more efficient resource utilization. A more co-ordinated approach, rather than the existing 'silo' edifice, is expected but again some fears are being harboured that this exercise is being donor-driven. The presence of so many eminent developing country representatives in the panel should allay those concerns but we must await the report.

Final work is needed in Economic and Social Council reform, in shaping a counter-terrorism strategy including the adoption of a Comprehensive Convention on Terrorism and on the revitalization of the General Assembly.

On the mandates and programme reform, as I have already said, we have some way to go. The report on legislative mandates identified the need for better procedures; the lack of a coherent system of evaluating mandates and their effectiveness; the overlap and duplication among mandates being pursued by different parts of the UN and the gap between mandates and resources allocated for their implementation system. This report has been received cautiously. The review of mandates has to be undertaken as a joint exercise with the confidence that mandates of importance to particular groups such as in the development area are not going to be cut. There will have to be some basic understandings arrived at if the exercise is to succeed.

On management reforms in the Secretariat, despite the unprecedented vote in the Fifth Committee on April 28 followed by a similar vote in the UNGA on May 8 rejecting some of the recommendations made by the Secretary-General for greater flexibility, there is more agreement than is apparent through the fog of controversy. The creation of a post of Chief Information Technology Officer and improving ICT in the UN system, adopting international public sector accounting standards, using budget surpluses are among the areas on which agreement exists. However there are areas where more clarification has been requested and where the decisions on proposals have been postponed. The latter area relates to consolidation of performance and financial reports into one and increasing limited discretion in budgetary implementation. Postponed for consideration are human resource management changes, redesigning the system of the administration of justice, procurement reform, decisions on outsourcing and other areas. Much of this will go into the next session of the General Assembly and will spill over into the term of office of the next Secretary-General.

<u>Conclusion</u>

There is clearly a great deal of unfinished business in changing the UN to make it the efficient instrument that we all want. It is over three years since I left the UN and I am deeply concerned over the serious problem of morale within the organization. Equally worrying is the level of scepticism and even cynicism among the public over the state of affairs within the UN as a result of so much negative publicity. There is therefor a desperate need for the staff to be consulted and brought into the process. There is also a need for a better public information strategy to convey what is being done to improve the UN especially since the UN must reach out to civil society and the tax-payers who pay the assessed dues of the member states.

Communication and consensus building play key roles in the success of change initiatives. The technical and logical need for change alone is insufficient when diverse interests are involved. A primary prerequisite is the involvement and commitment of member states. We have to create a shared need for change, develop a joint vision, mobilize a commitment to change among all stakeholders and sustain the momentum. We must first achieve what is practicable given the controversies. The attempt to set artificial deadlines and impose penalties for failure to meet them has proved misguided. At the same time all groups must co-operate and compromise. We are all on a "burning platform" that we must get off quickly. The UN is not a Fortune 500 company that can be changed through the implementation of management theories better suited to the profit-making private sector. Evolving a change agenda to satisfy the diverse interests of member states requires great sensitivity since the UN is essentially a consensual polity.

At the same time let us not confuse governance of the UN with transaction processing. The latter can be changed to save costs and improve performance without yielding power in the governance of the UN. A higher state of productivity through change is in the interests of all. The overall output, quantitatively and qualitatively, of any organization is a function of the number and the quality of the people employed by it, their levels of motivation, the organization structure and the systems and processes including technology used. There has to be improvement in all of these aspects. The starting point is to communicate the compelling arguments for change; then to map the various stakeholder interests and finally to address the needs and concerns of these stakeholders. We are at this stage now in order to complete the final phase of the changes needed to make the UN a revitalized organization.

Let me conclude with a quotation from U Thant - the first and so far only Asian Secretary-General of the UN - who said just before leaving office in December 1971 - "…To the impatient voices from all quarters calling for an end to the United Nations and its replacement with a more dynamic and more effective instrument for peace, this Secretary-General can only reply: take care; in today's troubled world there might not be a chance to establish a new international organization - much less one better than the United Nations. Cherish it, improve it, but do not forsake it!"

Almost 35 years later, I can do no better than endorse that advice.

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