



The UN and the Principle of Sharing

In 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human rights. All the world's nations agreed that every human being in the world had the right to adequate food, water, housing, healthcare, education, political participation and employment. Almost sixty years later, a global economic system based on competition and profit has failed to provide these essentials for the majority of the world. 800 million people are still starving to death in a world of plenty and the gap between the rich minority and the poor majority has increased and continues to increase.

The global economy needs to be reformed or replaced. Religious groups, including the World Council of Churches and CAFOD, NGOs and charities, such as War on Want, and individuals from all over the world are calling for a more equitable global system, based on a fairer distribution of the world's most essential resources.

The United Nations is currently the only international body through which such fundamental economic change can be facilitated. However, in recent years, many aspects of the UN system have been severely criticised by member countries and civil society groups around the world. It has been accused of being undemocratic, ineffectual and of wasting vast amounts of money. This article takes a look at the UN, its aims, how the original intentions behind its formation have affected its ability to carry out those aims, how it needs to change and the role it could play in sharing the world's resources.

The United Nations

The UN was set up by the victors of the Second World War: America, Britain, France, Russia, China, with the primary objective of maintaining peace and security in the world. But the UN is far more than just a peace-keeping organisation. It is an umbrella for a whole collection of international agencies responsible for coordinating essential policies. For example the World Health Organisation (WHO) is responsible for the development of international health policy for the treatment, control and prevention of disease worldwide.

The office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs coordinates a collection of UN agencies to provide humanitarian assistance and emergency disaster relief. They provide food, drinking water, shelter and other humanitarian services to populations suffering from disasters such as famine, war, earthquakes, tsunamis and floods. The World Food Programme delivers one third of the world's emergency food assistance to more than 100 million people a year in 80 countries. The High Commissioner for Refugees provides international protection and assistance to over 22 million refugees and helps set up refugee camps in over 116 countries. The UN Development Programme plays a key role in

assisting disaster-prone countries in developing contingency planning. But these agencies are desperately under funded, which prevents them from achieving far more.

In March 2006 Kofi Annan launched the Central Emergency Response Fund to bring food to those threatened with starvation in the Horn of Africa. Again, a lack of funding has prevented this agency from carrying out its remit.

The UN supports countries in transition to democracy. It supplies technical assistance towards free and fair elections, improving judicial structures, drafting constitutions, training human rights officials and transforming armed movements into political parties.

The UN provided and continues to provide an essential forum for discussion and the development of international legislation. It negotiates treaties, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and has sponsored over 500 multilateral agreements covering a wide range of subjects. International agreements and treaties form the basis of laws governing relations among the world's nations, and recently an International Criminal Court Statute that established the International Criminal Court, stating that the court would subject US nationals to a politically motivated international justice. This action further undermines the International Criminal Court. Nevertheless the international criminal court became operational in 2002 and began its first case in 2006. In May 2002 the White House announced that it would withdraw its signature from the Rome

Since the 1960s the UN has been holding International Conferences as they realised that poverty in the South was as big a challenge as world peace-keeping. There have been International conferences on many issues, including the environment, population, food, women, human settlements, employment, water and desertification. Most of the issues have been debated several times at several international conferences. Conferences are an important vehicle for the UN, a forum for discussion, where international agreement can be reached on basic principles, conclusions drawn and used to influence the policy of member states. For example the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio in 1992 led to the creation of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development to advance the conclusions reached in Agenda 21.

Unfortunately it is impossible to enforce agreements from international conferences because member states are not accountable to a higher international authority. There is only moral pressure to deliver on commitments. The only force that can make governments implement what they have agreed to is the force of popular disapproval.

Is the UN democratic?

In order to answer this question one needs to go back to the UN's inception, during the last years of the Second World War. It was President Roosevelt who originally used the term United Nations, long before the end of the Second World War, and he was not referring to all the world's nations but only to those who had formed an alliance against the Nazis – the US, the UK, France, Russia and China. So after the Second World War these five countries became the core of the UN, forming the Security Council. They have permanent membership of the Security Council and each one of them has an individual veto over its decisions. Although the Security Council has now been enlarged to fifteen members, only the five original members have permanent status and only the original five retain the power to veto decisions taken by the majority of the member states. Not one

permanent member represents the Muslim world, although developing a positive, tolerant relationship between the West and Islam is one of the most pressing security issues of our time. The Security Council remains geographically unbalanced and seriously unrepresentative. Germany, Japan, Brazil, India, South Africa, Nigeria and others want to join the club of permanent membership but the permanent five oppose anyone else joining. There are now 192 members of the UN. However, even though 192 countries discuss UN policy and vote on it, the decisions of the General Assembly are not binding on member states. Those of the Security Council are. This is undemocratic and weakens the power of the UN as an international organisation.

The five nations in practice also appoint the Secretary General, though officially the appointment is made by the General Assembly on the Council's 'recommendation'. Appointments rotate through continents, for example, it is accepted that the new Secretary General in 2006 will be from Asia. This is clearly an undemocratic method of choosing leaders. Furthermore, the leaders chosen are people who will not rock the boat or disturb the current global economic system. Even the infinitely patient Kofi Annan, the current Secretary General, is constantly criticized by the neoconservative US administration for his forthright stance on many global issues. The same administration would like to choose the next Secretary General. The directors of the UN Agencies are similarly chosen by undemocratic process, sometimes influenced by large corporations who stand to benefit by having 'their man' in a key position to promote 'their product', whether it be pharmaceutical products or pesticides.

The UN's problems are further compounded by the fact that it was originally conceived by the US, set up by the US, together with the allies, and currently has its headquarters in the US. This puts the US in a powerful position. For example the US can threaten representatives of other member states with visa refusal if they do not vote according to the wishes of the US. On one occasion the US actually prevented the Iranian representative from attending the UN, against the wishes of the other member states, by refusing to issue a visa. Although this caused outrage from many of the other member states, there was nothing that they could do because the UN is based in the US. The UN's independence is severely compromised by its subservience to the US. For example, since the US didn't want to get involved in Bosnia "We have no strategic interest in the Balkans" said the State Department's Lawrence Eagleburger, and the UN ended up powerless to end the ethnic cleansing. And it was US reluctance to get involved which stopped the UN from preventing the massacres in Rwanda.

In the 1960s and 1970s newly independent developing nations could still make their voices heard and win meaningful changes in the world order through the UN. This was because the USSR championed their cause. But the power of the US over the UN has grown exponentially since the demise of the Soviet Bloc. In recent years there has been no-one to counter the US in support of the third world.

The World Bank, IMF and WTO

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), both established immediately after the Second World War, are technically part of the UN. The IMF was originally set up to lend money to governments in order to stabilize the international monetary system. But Edward Holloway, British economist at the time, already predicted that it would lead to un-payable indebtedness between nations. By 1971, by which time un-payable indebtedness of the poorer countries of the world was already becoming

apparent, the IMF had re-written its articles of association in order to grant itself permission to interfere in almost any aspect of a country's governance. Instead of facilitating stable exchange rates and helping countries protect themselves against financial fluctuations, it began pushing aside any and all obstacles to capital flow and unfettered profit. This is virtually the opposite of its original mandate.

The IMF has 184 members and is run by eight of them – the US, Russia, Japan, Germany, the UK, France, Canada and Italy (the G8) through meetings cloaked in secrecy. These countries represent about 65% of the world economy. Each one of these countries votes on decisions according to its financial power, which effectively means that, although the IMF is based in Europe, the US has the largest (17%) vote and a veto over all decisions. The 80 poorest countries in the world have just ten percent of the vote. The G8 choose the managing director (a European) and his deputy (an American). For many decades the IMF has been responsible for worsening the lives of the world's poor through its imposition of stringent loan conditions. The IMF is inherently flawed, constitutionally unjust and undemocratic.

The World Bank was created in order to facilitate long-term investment in underdeveloped countries and to expand and strengthen their economies. It lent money at low interest rates to poor countries to finance major projects. By the 1980s Wall Street and the United States Treasury Department were inextricably linked with and able to influence the World Bank. So instead of facilitating investment on behalf of the local poor economies, the World Bank began providing and withholding loans in order to facilitate corporate access to these countries. They financed more and more projects that would benefit major corporations.

The World Bank began to impose stringent conditions, known as 'Structural Adjustment Programs', on recipient countries, forcing them to adopt reforms. These reforms included deregulation of capital markets and privatization of state companies, such as water supplies, state schools, hospitals and public pensions. Structural Adjustment Programs also forced third world countries to downsize public programs for social welfare. Conditions for the majority of the third world worsened as a result.

Last year George Bush chose the neoconservative Paul Wolfowitz as the new leader of the World Bank. The fact that the president of the US can be responsible for the choice of the president of the World Bank is, in itself, undemocratic. This can only further the interests of the US Treasury and of US based multinational corporations, further weakening the ability of the UN to act as a democratic international organization. This year the IMF announced that it wanted to increase the shares and voting powers of China, South Korea, Mexico and Turkey. This will not be sufficient to make the IMF a democratic institution since the poorest countries in the world will still remain under-represented.

In recent years the World Bank and IMF have declared themselves to be champions of poverty reduction and good governance. But as long as third world countries, including those suffering from the after-effects of the Tsunami, countries ravaged by war and overwhelmed by HIV/AIDS continue to be dominated by debt repayments, as part of the World Bank 'debt sustainability' framework, the World Bank and IMF cannot honestly claim that they are working for poverty reduction and 'financing for development'. There is no level of debt that is sustainable in these countries. The debt relief initiatives which were trumpeted so loudly by world leaders this year have only covered a very small part of the debt which currently afflicts the south. And this debt relief comes with conditions

which undermine the sovereignty of the people of the countries affected, and keep the economies of the south tied to the interests of global corporate profit.

It is ironic that the same World Bank which was responsible for the funding of hydro-electric dams, mines, pipelines and oil exploration projects, displacing millions of innocent subsistence farmers and causing massive environmental damage, should now claim that they are leading in the fight against climate change and environmental destruction. The World Bank Group, which claims leadership in developing alternative energy, devotes much greater resources to developing conventional energy sources. In fact, it is the world's leading financier of projects producing greenhouse gases, refused to implement recommendations of its own 'Extractive Industries Review', including:

- 1) The principle that communities faced with resource extraction projects must give free, prior and informed consent,
- 2) The phase out of investment in hydrocarbon extraction projects.

After the Second World War the countries who set up the UN, World Bank and IMF also wanted to create a World Trade Organization (WTO). But it was not until 1995 that it actually came into being, replacing the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). It's apparently democratic aims were to lower tariffs and non-tariff barriers in order to increase international trade. But although 149 countries are members of the WTO, it does not function democratically. WTO trade agendas were, up until recently, negotiated in secret by a select few countries, in the notorious green room. The majority of the world's poor countries are still not permitted to influence this predetermined agenda. This has resulted in global trade rules which favour the economically dominant countries. The trade agreements have stripped away trade barriers previously imposed by third world countries in order to protect their fragile home-grown industries, their environment, and their social institutions. At the same time they allow the rich countries of the north to pay out huge subsidies to protect their own agriculture.

The formal meetings of all 149 members are, according to John Hilary of War on Want, "just a ritual". The British agency, Action Aid says "The WTO's policy-making process is anti-democratic, non-transparent and systematically skewed in favour of rich countries. Developing countries have been repeatedly pushed into accepting agreements that damage their interests." "It's almost impossible to get an outcome that favours developing countries from negotiations so heavily stacked against them", says Peter Hardstaff of the World Development Movement, who also added that "Rich countries field vast teams of lawyers, experts and negotiators to make sure they get the result they want. A small country with two or three delegates cannot hope to compete."

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) recently studied the impact of trade liberalization in 36 poor countries during the 1990s. It concluded that "The incidence of poverty increased unambiguously in those economies that adopted the most open trade regimes". In theory the WTO should foster the sustainable long term economic development and improvement of living standards in rich and poor countries alike. It should act in partnership with the UN to protect the human rights of all. But in practice, the WTO acts on behalf of the rich nations and their corporations, often in flat contradiction with the aims and policies of the UN. Global corporations are allowed to lobby the WTO and influence its policy decisions. The WTO, with a budget of \$83 million, exerts extraordinary power and its international trade agreements can override not

only national economic policies but even multilateral agreements that relate to labour, human rights or environmental protection. Policies of the WTO, the IMF and the World Bank are all interlinked.

Over the years the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO have gained more and more power, and, rather than serving the interests of the UN, seek to dictate its policies in a completely undemocratic fashion.

Kofi Annan, who is acutely aware of the lack of democracy inherent in a UN dominated by the IMF, World Bank and WTO, signposted the direction the UN should take in his 2005 report. He proposed a regenerated UN with new authority for its collective decisions. "However" as the late Robin Cook MP said in 2005, "collective decision-making is only possible if there is broad equivalence among those taking part. And there is the rub. The neoconservatives who run the US administration want supremacy, not equality, for America and hanker after an alternative model of global governance in which the world is put to right not by the tedious process of building international consensus, but by the straightforward exercise of US puissance." The US made far-reaching demands and in the end Kofi Annan's reforms were watered down leaving the UN as undemocratic as it was before.

Is the UN ineffectual?

Again we need to go back to the beginning, when it was decided that each member state should provide funding for the UN, the richer countries contributing more and the poorer countries contributing less. The US agreed to make the largest contribution (25%) to the UN's budget. Many of the member states pay their dues late, but none as late as the US, which sometimes does not pay for years. This means that the UN is always short of funds. Without proper funding it is impossible for the UN to function properly. Even if the US were to pay all its dues, the UN's budget is too small to enable it to be truly effective.

The UN is forced to accept the terms dictated by the US in order to receive the payment of its dues. The latest terms have served to reduce the US share of UN payments to 22% in return for payments going back several years. Theoretically this should reduce the power and influence of the US over the UN, but in fact, because the US is a member of the Security Council and because the UN buildings and the World Bank are situated in the US, they can still hold the UN to ransom. Japan now makes almost as large a contribution as the US: 19.63% but Japan is not a permanent member of the Security Council because it was not one of the victors of the Second World War and therefore it does not have the same influence in the UN as the US.

Neo-liberal policies pursued by the World Bank conflict with the development agendas of the other UN agencies. The UN Charter obliges all member nations to promote "universal respect for, and observance of, human rights" and to take "joint and separate action" to that end. UN agencies try desperately to promote the terms of the Charter, against a continual blockade erected by the US-driven neoconservative policies of the World Bank. These policies benefit the US and US-based multinational corporations which are profit-driven, not focussed on human rights.

The United Nations and its various agencies would be central to upholding the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights if the UN had the power to implement these principles. But the very nature of its funding prevents the UN from

carrying out effective measures to ensure that these principles are respected. The US has long tried to discredit the Human Rights Commission, which they criticise for being bureaucratic, excessively political and ineffectual. They also criticize it for allowing membership of states with bad human rights records, such as Zimbabwe, Sudan and Saudi Arabia. In March 2005 Kofi Annan responded to these criticisms in his report and called for the Human Rights Commission to be abolished and a new smaller Human Rights Council to be established. This would meet year-round and have its membership restricted to countries that would abide by the highest human rights standards. The General Assembly voted overwhelmingly for a new Council. But the US (together with three other states) voted against it. How can Kofi Annan, or indeed the UN, function effectively if the democratic decisions of the General Assembly are constantly blocked by the US?

The structure of the UN hampers its effectiveness. The Security Council towers above the Economic and Social Council in terms of power and status. Kofi Annan pointed out the perversity of this imbalance in his report in 2005, as so much of the agenda of the Security Council is taken up with violent conflicts that have their roots in the failure to promote peaceful development. This lack of authority on the part of the Economic and Social Council results in a failure to co-ordinate the many geographically separate UN Agencies. They therefore sometimes end up competing against each other in the same field. The agencies have varied and continue to vary in their approach to problem solving. For example the World Health Organisation used to be an effective advocate of low-tech primary health care at local level instead of hi-tech hospitals and medicine that would only have benefited the few who could afford to use them. But the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), on the other hand, has been responsible for promoting 'green revolution' policies, without consultation with local people. Edouard Saouma, Director of FAO for 18 years up until 1994, imposed his policies from above, promoting dangerous pesticides, artificial fertilisers, dams and irrigation projects and insisting that small farmers switch to cash crops instead of growing their own food. These policies have caused enormous social and environmental damage.

The UN discusses arms control and disarmament at frequent intervals. The first resolution of the General Assembly in 1946 was "The Establishment of a commission to make specific proposals for the elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons and of all other major weapons adaptable to mass destruction". Then the Security Council and Canada formed the Disarmament Commission in order to regulate, limit and balance reduction of all armed forces and armaments; to eliminate all weapons of mass destruction; and to ensure international control and use of atomic energy for peaceful purposes only. In 1961 the General Assembly passed a resolution making the use of nuclear weapons illegal under international law. In 1968 the UN approved the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which banned the spread of nuclear weapons from nuclear to non-nuclear powers. The US uses this principle to bully countries such as Iran, that try to go nuclear, while building up its own massive arsenal of nuclear weapons and turning a blind eye to countries like Israel, the UK, India and Pakistan, who are fellow members of the 'nuclear club'.

In 1970 the General Assembly approved a treaty banning the placement of weapons of mass destruction on the seabed. Then, in 1971 the General Assembly approved another treaty prohibiting the manufacture, stockpiling and use of biological weapons. The US did not sign this treaty. In 1991 the General Assembly passed a resolution on the registration of conventional arms. This requires all states to submit information on major international arms transfers. The US has always refused to comply with this piece of international

legislation. In 1998 the UN approved legislation banning the development, production and export of Anti-Personnel Mines and recommended their destruction. The US refused to sign the land mine agreements.

Without the cooperation of the US it will always be difficult for the UN to have much effect on arms proliferation. But the many discussions, and the treaties that have resulted from them, have served to focus public attention on the issue. Some progress has been made outside the US on limiting specific types of armaments, such as bacteriologic, chemical and toxic weapons. But the production and trade in armaments continues to increase, using up vast amounts of money, which would be much better spent on reducing world poverty.

Does the UN waste vast amounts of public money?

The UN has very little money to waste. The bill for the UN's budget plus the costs of all its agencies and projects was \$6.5 billion in 1993, the same amount as US citizens spent that year on cut flowers and potted plants. Today the United Nations and all its agencies and funds spend about \$20 billion each year, almost the same amount as the annual expenditure on advertising in Britain (\$18.4 billion). This is a small sum compared with most government budgets and just a tiny fraction (one fifty sixth) of the world's military spending. As a result, for nearly two decades, the UN has faced a debilitating financial crisis and been forced to cut back on important programs in all areas.

Part of the reason why the UN is so desperately short of money is due to the way in which it is funded. When it was originally formed, the member states agreed to make annual contributions, based on their annual incomes. The US, the wealthiest country in the world, agreed to contribute 25% to the UN's budget. The UN suffers constantly from late payment of dues. Many member states have not paid their full dues and have cut their donations to the UN's voluntary funds. By May 31, 2006, members' arrears to the Regular Budget topped \$1,206 million, of which the United States alone owed \$675 million (56% of the regular budget arrears).

The UN's small budget, made even smaller by late payment of dues, makes it very difficult, if not impossible, for it to be effectual. The US holds the UN to ransom by withholding funds and demanding policy changes in exchange for belated payment of dues.

Is the UN fit for purpose?

The short answer is – No. The UN in its present form is undemocratic, desperately underfunded and its agencies are uncoordinated and scattered over the northern hemisphere. The selection of the Secretary General and the directors of its agencies is opaque and undemocratic and the agencies are not answerable to the people they serve. The World Bank, IMF and WTO do not serve the UN but rather the vested interests of the US administration, international corporations and the world's rich minority.

However the UN represents almost every country in the world and is therefore the most representative global organisation that we have, with sixty years of valuable experience. Human Rights Law, largely created by the UN, encodes most aspects of human rights and virtually every UN agency is involved to some degree in the protection of these rights.

Mechanisms with which to promote and protect these rights have been established though unfortunately they are ineffectual under the current global economic system.

Creating a Renewed and Effective United Nations

The UN needs to become more democratic, more efficient and above all, more powerful. It needs to change in order to meet the urgent needs of those living in poverty. Democratic change must not be dictated by the neoconservative administration of the US or corporate interests. The UN was created in order to promote peace and human rights for every member of the human race. Sharing the world's resources will greatly facilitate this process by creating a fairer economy and fostering peaceful relations between nations.

Change to the structure and funding of the UN is most likely to come about as a result of pressure from member countries and the global public. Civil society groups are plentiful, growing in number and size, and forming alliances. Below are outlined the major changes that need to be implemented if the UN system is to be effective in achieving its crucial humanitarian mandate.

1. Dissolve the Security Council

The UN must be freed from the constraints of the Security Council Veto. The Security Council is a relic of the Second World War and should not hold the powerful position within the UN that it does today. Surely a truly democratic United Nations should not have to bow down to the veto of the victors of a war which took place sixty years ago.

The Security Council must be dissolved, and the General Assembly must take its place as a democratic world council, without veto powers. In this way, matters of security, economy and human rights can be dealt with in a democratic fashion, to the benefit the majority of the world.

2. Implement Global Taxation to fund the UN

Clearly the current system of funding doesn't work. The current level of funding wouldn't provide enough money to run the UN properly even if every member state paid their dues on time. A United Nations dependent on the meagre alms meted out to it by reluctant nations can never carry out the work needed to protect human rights. Global taxes would produce far greater and more reliable revenue and result in a properly funded UN, able to carry out its policies. After all, every government uses taxation to fund its programs, whether through direct taxation on goods and services or whether through income tax.

If the UN were funded by global taxation, it would be freed from the constraints of its members. It would be able to carry out the reforms needed to transform itself into the democratic, effective organisation that the world needs. It would be in a position to enforce international legislation and to overhaul global economic structures making them subservient to its needs. It would be able to curb the power of corporations making them subservient to human rights.

Several forms of global taxation have been put forward- even by the UN itself, before the US forced it to withdraw these proposals by threatening to continue its non-payment of dues in 1997. However third world countries and NGO's continue to press for global taxation. These are some of the proposals:

An international tax on arms production, trade and export

An international tax on international air transport

An international tax on buying and selling currencies (a Tobin Tax)

An international pollution tax

Even the adoption of two of these taxes would provide the UN with a better budget than the one it currently struggles to survive on. The adoption of all these taxes would provide the UN with adequate resources to carry out the millennium goals. International taxation would rid the poorer countries of the burden of payment (always in dollars) of UN dues. Revenue would instead come from corporations and traders. International taxation would prevent any one country from having undue influence on UN policies.

3. Adopt the Principle of Sharing

In order to fulfil its humanitarian mandate and secure basic human needs across the world, a new economic system based on sharing essential resources, such as land, food, water and medicine, must be implemented. A system of sharing would be based on cooperation, not competition. It would replace existing aid and development structures and would exist alongside an overhauled market based economy that can continue to supply non essential goods. This principle of sharing is discussed in more detail below.

4. Restore the UN's democratic control over the Global Economy

The UN was originally intended to oversee all aspects of the global economy, including the decisions and practices of the international trade and finance institutions. In order for the UN to create a democratic and fair global economy, it needs to be freed from the constraints imposed on it by the World Bank, IMF and WTO. Given the inherent bias of these three institutions, it is essential that they are progressively decommissioned. Their mandates must be transferred back to the United Nations agencies which have all the necessary experience to regulate and support international trade, finance and development.

Through global cooperation and sharing resources for development purposes, the World Bank would be rendered largely redundant and any remaining development funding requirements could be administered through the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

Under a system of sharing, the majority of commercial goods would be cooperatively owned and distributed by the global public under the auspices of the United Nations. All remaining trade could be regulated through the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), allowing the WTO to be progressively dismantled. The remaining trading system should utilise an inherently balanced mechanism such as an International Clearing Union, as initially proposed by John Maynard Keynes.

All multilateral debt must also be completely forgiven. Balanced trading between nations and the removal of debt burdens would mean less chance of countries experiencing major balance of payment deficits. The IMF too could then be progressively dismantled. When there is a need for short term emergency foreign exchange loans, a new UN based Finance

Organisation could lend money and provide the necessary expertise in a pro-development manner and without corporate influence.

The neo-liberal United States-based global economic system must come to an end and the economic power and political influence of corporations must be curbed. Corporations must be made subservient to social needs and human rights.

The UN must also push forward international legislation to put a stop to currency speculation. And there must be an end to the profligate waste of money and resources on the production of arms; and international legislation, as agreed by the UN, regarding arms limitation, must be respected.

The UN and the Principle of Sharing

Central to the work of the United Nations is the conviction that lasting international peace and security are only possible if the economic and social well-being of people everywhere is assured. This means that all people should be provided with adequate food, water, housing, healthcare, education, political participation and employment. This cannot be provided under the current global economic system. The only way that global social and economic well-being can be secured is through a new economic system, based on the principle of sharing. The UN, which already promotes the principle of human rights, should also promote the principle of sharing and this should become part of the UN charter. The UN should provide the structure required for sharing the world's resources and a UN agency for this purpose should be created, such as a UN Council for Resource Sharing (UNCRS). The first activity the UNCRS should undertake is to initiate an UN emergency redistribution program (UNERP) to re-distribute food and other essential resources to those living in extreme poverty.

The UNCRS would also work closely with many other UN agencies, such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), World Food Programme (WFP), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), UN Centre for Human Settlements (HABITAT) and the World Food Council (WFC).

It would also liaise with the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and would control the remaining trade within and between countries, not as trade is currently controlled, for the benefit of the rich world, but control based on the need of the people in each country.

Sharing the World's Land

Land is the world's most important resource; it is the provider and sustainer of life. Each and every one of us has an equal right to the earth as our birthright. Thomas Jefferson said "The earth is given as a common stock for men to labour and live on." Abraham Lincoln said "The land, the earth God gave to man for his home, sustenance, and support, should never be the possession of any man, corporation, society, or unfriendly government, any more than the air or water, if as much. An individual, company, or enterprise should hold no more than is required for their home and sustenance. All that is not used should be held for the free use of very family to make homesteads, and to hold them as long as they are so occupied." Yet the right to land was left out of the founding documents of democracy

and is not mentioned in the Declaration of Human Rights. In his essay “The Problem of the Modern World” John Mohawk states, “When land became a ‘commodity’ and lost its status, Western civilization began its history of subjugation and exploitation of the earth and earth based cultures.”

The Romans were the first to develop the concept of land ownership to legitimize the theft of land taken during invasion and war. The early Christians complained bitterly about the Roman concept of land ownership, quoting passages in the Bible which state clearly that the land belongs to God, who issued instructions that it was to be shared and stewarded by all.

The land must not be sold beyond reclaim, for the land is Mine; you are but strangers resident with me. (Lev. 25:23)

The profit of the earth is for all. (Eccles. 5:9)

Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place. (Isaiah 5:8)

Restore, I pray you, to them even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their olive yards, and their houses. (Nehemiah 5:11).

The erosion of land rights began in earnest in Britain in 1235, when the first enclosure act became law. At that time more than half of British arable land belonged to the villagers. The enclosure acts redefined land as “private property” so that it became a commodity, which could be bought or sold within the market system. Gradually, over the next 500 years the British villagers were forced to leave their land.

Thomas More (1478-1535), Chancellor of England, who believed in justice and Common Ownership of land, pleaded passionately against the injustice of mass evictions from villages to make way for sheep farming. But his exhortations fell on deaf ears. The enclosure, or privatization, of British land continued inexorably for the next half millennium, with the passing of 4,000 Private Enclosure Acts, covering some 7,000,000 acres. By 1876, according to Alanna Hartzok, only 2,225 people were left in possession of half the agricultural land in England and Wales and 0.6 per cent of the population owned 98.5 per cent of it. Today 2% of the population of Britain own 74% of the land.

Modern Land Distribution

All over the world land ownership has gradually been eroded away, leaving the world majority landless. The United Nations, who recently carried out a survey of land ownership in 83 countries, found that three quarters of the land was owned by less than 5% of the population. For example, in Brazil 183,397 square miles belongs to 342 land owners, while the white minority in South Africa still own 86% of the land, and in El Salvador 2% of the population own 60% of the land.

Part of the reason why the poor suffer hunger in developing countries is because the large landowners grow food for export and not for feeding the citizens of their own countries. In 1973 the UN reported that 36 out of 40 of the world’s poorest countries exported food to the US. In Mexico more basic grains were consumed by cattle (which were exported to the US) than by the country’s peasants. In Brazil, traditionally the most widely planted crop

was corn, but in 1977 over a third of this crop went to fatten livestock, either in Brazil or Europe. And although Soya is a valuable protein-rich crop, large amounts of the world's Soya is exported to fatten livestock in the west. Large landowners also leave land uncultivated. For example in Scotland, where the villagers were deprived of their land hundreds of years ago, vast areas are used for breeding grouse for a few rich gentlemen to shoot.

It is a widely held belief that large farms, using big, expensive machinery, artificial fertilizer and pesticides to produce single crops are more productive and cost effective than small farms. But this is a fallacy. In 1975 the World Bank carried out a study, which showed that 79% of all farmland was owned by large landowners (each owning 114 acres or more). This constituted about 3% of all landholders but they were the least productive, harvesting lower yields per acre than the smallest farmers. In 1972 Edgar Owens and Robert Shaw described in their book 'Development Reconsidered: Bridging the Gap Between Government and People', how the value of output per acre in India was more than a third higher on the smallest farms than on the larger farms. In Thailand plots of two to four acres produced almost 60% more rice per acre than farms of 140 acres and more. The World Bank reported that output on small farms was between three and fourteen times more productive per acre than on large farms in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Guatemala.

And so you would be forgiven for concluding that the World Bank would have chosen policies based on its findings and done everything in its power to promote subsistence farming. Nothing could be further from the truth. In many parts of the world, the World Bank has been responsible for the erosion of subsistence farming as it has funded large scale dams, dispossessing millions of their tiny plots of land. Corporate agri-business and mining have also been responsible for the dispossession of ever increasing numbers of small farmers.

Peasant farmers grow more on their land because it is all they have to survive on. They plant more carefully than a machine would, mix and rotate complementary crops, choose a combination of cultivation and livestock that is labour-intensive and, above all, work their limited resources to the fullest. Small farmers grow food first and foremost to feed themselves. They sell the surplus locally, or to the nearest town. Thus redistributing the land to small farmers tends to increase food supply for that country. Many countries that have carried out land redistribution have seen an increase in agricultural production. In 1945 over half the farmland in Vietnam was held by landlords and French colonists who extracted rents of up to three quarters of the harvest. In 1954, North Vietnam began their land reform and by 1957 45% of the North's arable land had been redistributed to 77% of rural households. According to the FAO's Sixth Report on Land Reform, between 1960 and 1970 yields of rice went up 20% in North Vietnam and other crops by 50%, despite the war with the US.

In 1974 fascism was overthrown in Portugal and agricultural labourers seized almost 3 million acres covered by the huge estates of southern Portugal. Within two years they had tripled the acreage under cultivation in the area. They created many new jobs and were soon supplying 50% of all Portugal's wheat and one-fifth to a quarter of the meat.

In Italy after the Second World War the people of the Valley of the Po reclaimed the land owned by the big landowners and began to farm it cooperatively. They were so successful that the whole area became rich and has remained rich up to the present day. Similarly in

Basilicata, in the South of Italy the poor banded together to farm the land cooperatively, this time organically. The area is now far more productive than it was before, producing fruit, vegetables, olive oil, wine, and many other essential foodstuffs. The people of Basilicata, once the poorest region in Italy, now enjoy a high standard of living. In Sicily, land confiscated from big landowning Mafia bosses has been redistributed to farming cooperatives that have increased the productivity of the land through organic farming. Cooperative farming shares expertise and equipment.

Perhaps the most impressive example of land re-distribution leading to increased production can be seen in Cuba. Export of food crops was cut right back and a policy of prioritizing small farmers, combined with research into every aspect of organic agriculture- including bio-pesticides, has led to complete food self-sufficiency. In addition to a multitude of small farms in the countryside, seven thousand allotments were created in the cities. These urban allotments now supply the people of the cities with almost 90% of their fruit and vegetables. Every piece of spare land, including people's gardens, is cultivated organically.

Access to Land is a Human Right

We need political and economic systems based upon the human right to land and resources. In 1996, the UNCHS - United Nations Center for Human Settlements – pointed the way when it issued a global agenda which stated:

“Access to land and legal security of tenure are strategic prerequisites for the provision of adequate shelter for all and for the development of sustainable human settlements affecting both urban and rural areas... The failure to adopt, at all levels, appropriate rural and urban land policies...remains a primary cause of inequity and poverty.”

In 1996 in Istanbul 165 nation states endorsed the UN Habitat II Action Agenda which states in the Ensuring Access to Land section (B.3.c.):

“Every government must show a commitment to promoting the provision of an adequate supply of land in the context of sustainable land-use policies. While recognizing the existence of different national laws and/or systems of land tenure, governments at the appropriate levels, including local authorities, should nevertheless strive to remove all possible obstacles that may hamper equitable access to land and ensure that equal rights of women and men related to land and property are protected under the law.”

Native Americans and Australian Aborigines, who refer to the land as “ours”, have fought long and hard for land rights. Their successes have been few and small but they have pointed the way towards a more just and equitable society, where the land belongs to all and all are responsible for the custodianship of the land, in much the same way as the laws governing common land prior to the enclosure acts.

Clearly the present global situation, where vast tracts of land in poor countries lie empty or are producing sugar, coffee, tea, cotton, even luxury vegetables for export to the US and Europe, while the poor in these countries suffer hunger and malnutrition, cannot be allowed to continue. At the present time the distribution of land worldwide has deteriorated to the worst level ever as a result of land and property speculation, resulting in a modernised feudal system, where a tiny minority control most of the world's land and the majority pay exorbitant rents or interest on mortgages.

Sharing Water

Second only in importance to the right to land is the right to water. The World Health Organisation stated in 2002 that: “The Human right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses.” Without access to clean water people cannot be free from numerous diseases. Dr Lee Jong-wook, Director-General, World Health Organization said: “Water and Sanitation is one of the primary drivers of public health. I often refer to it as “Health 101”, which means that once we can secure access to clean water and to adequate sanitation facilities for all people, irrespective of the difference in their living conditions, a huge battle against all kinds of diseases will be won.”

Kofi Annan, the United Nations Secretary-General said “We shall not finally defeat AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, or any of the other infectious diseases that plague the developing world until we have also won the battle for safe drinking water, sanitation and basic health care.”

Yet in recent years the concept of the right to water has been eroded by water privatization. In 1997 the World Water Council held its first World Water Forum in Morocco. CEOs from some of the world’s largest water corporations, together with representatives from the World Bank and the United Nations met together to discuss the deregulation and privatization of water. In 2000 the World Water Council held their second World Water Forum in Holland to consider how they could accelerate this process. With the backing of the World Bank and their structural adjustment programmes, the water corporations were able to overcome all objections to the removal of the universal right to water, reclassifying it as an economic good, rather than a human right.

According to the World Health Organization, 1.1 billion people have no access to clean drinking water, while 2.4 billion lack proper sanitary provision. Water privatization will exacerbate the situation since people living in the poorest parts of the world cannot afford to pay for water. In places where privatization has taken place, people have sought out sources of water that they do not have to pay for, which in many cases is not safe or clean. This has led to a rise in the incidence of water-borne diseases, such as cholera.

Adequate quantities of affordable clean water must be provided for every member of the human race.

Access to Medicine and Basic Healthcare

Every member of the world should be provided with free health care. In the past in the third world, public health and sanitation measures have, to a limited extent, kept certain diseases under control. But third world debt payments and structural adjustments, imposed by the World Bank, have caused a breakdown of these already meagre public health measures. As a result, diseases like cholera, that once were decreasing, are now re-emerging as a serious threat. We know how to control most of the infectious diseases that afflict the third world. We should be sharing this knowledge and helping with the prevention of preventable diseases, by demanding that public health and sanitation be provided for all, together with clean water and health education.

Eighty percent of the world’s population relies on traditional (mostly herbal) medicine for the treatment of physical, mental and spiritual ill health. The World Health Organisation

has recommended that every third world country should record all the plants used as medicine and that their efficacy should be ascertained. Many of these plants are effective in the treatment of certain conditions, while others are ineffectual and others are toxic. Unfortunately many third world countries, who often lack the most basic equipment, cannot afford to carry out this research. Sharing the world's resources means providing the equipment and funding required to carry out this research, so that third world countries can use safe herbal medicine where it is effective.

600 million people, most of them children living in sub-Saharan Africa, face the daily threat of death from malaria. Economic upheaval, armed conflict, structural adjustment programs and third world debt have caused the breakdown of anti-malarial control programs and the collapse of local primary health services in the third world. The malaria parasites have developed resistance to all known drugs, except artemisinin-based combination therapy. All patients suffering from malaria should be treated, either with artemisinin-based combination therapies or with local effective herbal remedies, such as the plant *Cryptolepis Sanguinolenta*, which is used to treat malaria patients in Ghana.

An estimated 38.6 million people are infected with HIV, as compared with 350-500 million who suffer from malaria each year. Yet funding for the treatment of HIV worldwide, at \$8.3 billion, dwarfs the \$600 million funding for malaria control. If adequate funds were made available, and a participatory approach followed, removing all possible breeding grounds for mosquitoes, malaria could be brought under control, along with Dengue hemorrhagic fever and several other diseases caused by insect-transmitted parasites.

1.8 million people, 90% of whom are under five, die every year from diarrhoeal diseases, mostly in the third world. These diseases are caused by unclean water, inadequate sanitation and lack of hygiene. The WHO says that "The human right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses". Treatment of diarrhoeal diseases mainly consists of providing saline/glucose solution to drink, to prevent dehydration, which kills people, especially small children. These children could be saved by the provision of health education for their parents together with affordable clean drinking water and adequate sanitation facilities.

Two billion people suffer from schistosomiasis and soil-transmitted helminths, as a direct result of ill-designed irrigation programs and major dams. Schistosomiasis is curable with a single dose of praziquantel BUT people become immediately reinfected if they are not provided with adequate sanitation facilities and not taught how to avoid (a) catching the disease and (b) infecting the water supply with it. One dose of praziquantel costs 30 cents. People suffering from these diseases have the right to treatment with praziquantel, and to participate in preventative health care programs designed to stop the spread of the disease and to prevent re-infection. Irrigation systems should be re-designed, adequate sanitation provided and everyone given health education.

GlaxoSmithKline and Merck and Co have pledged all the Albendazole and Mectizan necessary to achieve elimination of filariasis, a hideous tropical disease that one billion people are at risk of contracting. These drugs also cure the people who take them of soil-transmitted helminths (mainly hookworm). GlaxoSmithKline and Merck are to be commended for this. But provision of the drug is not sufficient. Everyone suffering from

these diseases should be provided with health education, as well as treatment, so that they can stop the spread of these diseases and prevent themselves from being re-infected.

Sharing the world's resources also means sharing responsibility for cleaning up the environment. Millions of people die every year from diseases caused by pollution from hazardous chemicals, depleted uranium dust and radioactivity leaked from nuclear power stations and nuclear reprocessing plants. Even in the West, certain areas are heavily contaminated with dangerous chemicals. And these tend to be areas where the poorer members of society live. Every member of the world has the right to pure, clean air, food free from toxic chemicals and pure, clean water.

Sharing Mineral Resources

Inextricably linked with the right to land is the right to the minerals contained within that land. Yet in many parts of the world the rights of the inhabitants of the land are trampled by multinational mining corporations as they plunder the mineral resources contained within that land.

Large scale mining destroys fragile ecosystems, pollutes rivers, lakes and the sea. Mining corporations are designing ever more ambitious projects, such as that drawn up by Canada's Barrick Gold Corporation, which will bore a massive pit high up in the Andes and separate out minerals using cyanide. Ground up ore from the mine will contain arsenic, mercury and lead, which will gradually leach out into the water that flows down the mountains, polluting the Huasco province, downstream. Massive protests have been organised in both Chile and Argentina, by farmers, fighting to preserve their land.

This is just one example of the way in which multinational mining corporations continue to destroy the livelihoods of farmers and indigenous peoples. International mining companies, based in the rich world, make huge profits from large scale mining, while third world countries, often the source of large mineral deposits, pay the price of environmental degradation. In some instances, wars over mineral resources have led to the deaths of thousands.

Sharing Technology

Sharing the world's resources also means sharing technology. This does not mean exporting giant tractors to Africa or building dams in China. It means researching and developing intermediate technology, technology that is small scale, inexpensive, ingenious and makes use of the sun, the wind and the rain. For example, solar ovens in hot, sunny countries can reduce the need for firewood. Rainwater harvesting systems can help prevent people from using up diminishing underground water reserves. The development of organic agricultural techniques is vital. The world cannot continue to depend on artificial fertilizers, which are finite, or on toxic pesticides, which are harmful to the environment. The whole world will soon need renewable energy, as oil reserves become increasingly expensive. Countries that develop renewable energy technologies should make them available to every other country, especially in the third world.

Sharing is the Most Effective Form of International Aid

Around the world, those living in poverty and concerned citizens are demanding that the world's resources are shared. They are demanding that a renewed United Nations is able to act effectively to secure the most urgent needs.

Sharing the world's resources requires sharing land, water, minerals, technology and other essentials such as medicine. In particular, the universal provision of food, water and healthcare has the potential to prevent up to 50,000 deaths that occur each and every day as a result of extreme poverty. The fact that such poverty exists in the modern world points to the failure of the neo-liberal global economic system. Only an economic system based on sharing these essentials instead of trading them as commercial goods can ensure that basic human needs are universally met.

In conjunction with other agencies and all member countries, the UN Council for Resource Sharing would determine which resources are most essential to human needs. It would promote the concept of land rights and assist in the redistribution of land to the landless masses. This would enable the poor to grow food for themselves and their local communities. Achieving food security in this way will play a crucial part in creating economic and social development in the poorest countries. The UNCRS would also ensure that water services are not privatized and that they remain under the cooperative control of the global public. It would ensure that medicine and technology are provided, regardless of cost, to where they are most needed.

Combined, these measures can progressively eliminate poverty and rapidly accelerate international development efforts far beyond their current potential. At the present rate of overseas development assistance the Millennium Development Goals will not be reached by 2015, but by 2050. And even if the goals were met in time, there would still be 900 million people living on less than US\$1 a day in 2015. Sending financial aid is not enough. A system of sharing essential resources should replace all existing aid and development efforts, as they are simply too slow and ineffective.

We the People...

There has been much talk in recent years about the need for a 'global shift' in consciousnesses. This shift has, in fact, already occurred. But it is the entrenched global economic system which prevents humanity from moving forward in line with this shift. Our minds are heavily conditioned, and it is only through our complacency that politicians have been allowed to construct an economy which is based on competition and ruthless self interest. We must acknowledge our role in creating the conditions of injustice that condemn so many to absolute poverty. Most importantly, we must participate in the creation of a just world, which benefits the majority. The United Nations has the potential to assist greatly in establishing a true global democracy which can allow the individual to evolve socially, economically and above all spiritually. We must give the UN our full support.

In order for global participation to become a reality, it is essential that people understand more about the UN. The aims and activities of the UN and its agencies should be taught in schools around the world in an effort to raise awareness of its vital role for humanity. Schools should teach of the need for global unity and peaceful international relations, and the need for transparent and democratic global governance structures. Society at large, must recognize the important historical role the UN has played with respect to

governance, and consider how the UN can be renewed for the future benefit of the global public.

An effective UN, acting in the interests of the majority, should ensure that resources which are essential for meeting basic human needs are universally provided. This provision must be free from the self interest of national governments, and political thinking must be free from divisive 'isms'- such as communism, socialism and capitalism. The world requires a new global economy based on the principle of cooperation and not competition. Sharing the world's resources is the most efficient means to achieve this economy, eliminate poverty and facilitate social and economic development. It has the potential for uniting nations through cooperative action and building peace. Therefore, facilitating the sharing of the world's resources must become a central role for a renewed and revitalised United Nations.

Mohammed Mesbahi and Dr Angela Paine

Mohammed Mesbahi is the Chair and Founder of Share The World's Resources (www.stwr.net) and Dr Angela Paine is STWR's chief researcher.

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