

## **Urgent: Refounding of the United Nations**

In December 1918 at the end of World War I, US President Woodrow Wilson decided that the horror of the war that had just ended should never be relived. And he urged a Covenant for “permanent peace” and founded the League of Nations, to establish a new order “based on the rule of law, the consent of the governed and the organized opinion of mankind”.

Unfortunately, due mainly to the pressure from weapons manufacturers, the secular adage “if you want peace, prepare for war” prevailed.

And World War II arrived, and at its end President Franklin D. Roosevelt designed a multilateral system, the United Nations, founded in San Francisco in 1945. To support the UN's international security activities, the United Nations System includes organizations specialized in labor (ILO); health (WHO); food (FAO); education, science and culture (UNESCO)... together with development funds (UNDP), programs for children (UNICEF), etc.

But the strongest and most prosperous nations soon began to distrust this international system of cooperation and coordination, and replaced development aid with loans, progressively shunning the United Nations System institutions, and what is much worse,

replacing the values that should guide international governance (the “democratic principles” so firmly established in the UNESCO Charter and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) with the laws of the marketplace. And the richest countries banded together in groups (G7, G8), replacing the democracy of multilateralism with plutocracy, converting the International Monetary Fund (FMI) and the World Bank (“for reconstruction and development”!) into instruments of their economic policies, and in the 1990s setting up a World Trade Organization (WTO) completely outside of the scope of the United Nations System.

At the end of the Cold War the world expected a profound reform of the United Nations to “democratize” international relations, and to reap the “dividends of peace” by reducing social inequalities and finally promoting endogenous development in the poorest countries. But none of this was achieved, and commencing in the early 1990s, the predominance of the richest countries imposed “globalization,” with the creation and growth of huge multinational business conglomerates, limiting the power –as well as the responsibilities!- of the States, with considerable social strife that has fostered breeding grounds for frustration, radicalization and hostility, frequently resulting in the use of force and in great waves of immigrants who have lost all hope. As was to be expected, this has led to a situation of profound crisis in which multilateralism appears as the only solution for reversing the present tendencies.

As a consequence, it is urgent to call an Extraordinary Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly to establish the principal criteria for achieving this in-depth renewal, endowing it with the

necessary moral and political authority to required to face the great challenges of our time, along with sufficient personal, financial, technical and, when necessary, military resources to enable the United Nations to exercise its functions on an international level. Working together in a coordinated manner, the United Nations System as a whole would be able to prevent and/or resolve conflicts peacefully; establish, maintain and consolidate peace; seek disarmament; and jointly confront international terrorism and transnational delinquency;... while at the same time through dialogue and agreements on a worldwide scale, working toward resolving the major issues on which the quality of life of all of the inhabitants of the world depends.

“We, the Peoples of the United Nations have determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war” is the initial pledge in the Preamble to the United Nations Charter. This formula, if correctly interpreted, requires no further change. But contrary to the terms of the Charter, those represented should not only be Nations, but should likewise include representatives of civil society (non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations, association of cities, regional and business institutions, etc.).

In this refounded United Nations Organization, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, together with the World Trade Organization (which would be an institution within the United Nations System) would fulfill their original functions of procuring global development, capable in a few years of substantially improving the the situation on a worldwide scale. As a direct offshoot of the General Assembly, the Security Council would have permanent and

proportional representatives influencing decision-making, but without veto rights, in order to address the principal issues of human security, with the fundamental mission of “preventing war”; economic and social security, as long ago proposed by Jacques Delors, renewing the work of ECOSOC, which for years has almost exclusively dealt with economic issues, ignoring social ones; and environmental security.

Only then will it be possible to swiftly eliminate all forms of trafficking (in weapons, drugs, capital and people, by bringing the guilty to justice), proceeding immediately to close down tax havens, an action that can only be accomplished with the support of a United Nations endowed with the appropriate authority and resources. “No resources were available” for funding the fight against AIDS or the eradication of hunger and poverty, but suddenly thousands of millions are available to “rescue” the same people and institutions who have created this difficult situation we are now experiencing. The time has come to “rescue” people, starting with the eradication of poverty through a great Global Development Plan.

The coordinated action of the United Nations would also provide adequate personal, technical and humanitarian resources to assist in natural or man-made catastrophes. In that regard, a proposal has been put forth to create a force of “red helmets” for rapid deployment to areas where their presence is most needed.

The so-called “right to intervene”, used in connection with “humanitarian” does not adequately express what should actually be considered a duty of the International Community: to prevent

genocide, endless suffering, humiliation, torture... . In 1996, in a UNESCO working group that included Bernard Kouchner and Karel Vasak, we proposed that blue helmets should be “imposed” in two situations: massive and documented violations of human rights (such as in Cambodia and Rwanda) and in cases in which the state is nonexistent (such as in Somalia in which power is fragmented among warlords). The United Nations cannot permit future scandals of this nature, which seriously affect the collective conscience.

As in 1945, it is necessary to refound the United Nations for the sake of our future generations. And, contrary to those who seek to underestimate and even denigrate them, we must take the youth movements of 1968 and 2008 (in Greece) very seriously. They are not student uprisings, but rather social conflicts.

Instead of “preparing for war”, “We, the Peoples...” are going to build peace each day through our actions, fully participating in civil society, which urgently demands guarantees that democratic and efficient criteria will be implemented on a global scale.

In appointing Susan Rice as Ambassador to the United Nations, directly and under his authority, President Obama has clearly signalled his determination to foster multilateralism as a relevant part of, in his own words, the “new beginning” for the American people and the entire world. Together We Can!

Federico Mayor Zaragoza

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