

Is There a Future for the United Nations and for UNESCO?

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[power point slide #1]

Friends and colleagues will undoubtedly think that I have been inhaling as well as smoking because I am going to answer “yes.” How resounding that affirmative reply is, however, will depend on my qualification, “if they fix endemic problems.”

As J. P. Singh summarized in the opening paragraph of his 2011 history: “At its best, UNESCO is the heroic intellectual and moral force of the idealism encapsulated in its Preamble At its worst, UNESCO, like many other UN agencies, is a functional tragedy of our own making, suffering from power politics, lack of resources, ineffectiveness, and managerial ineptitude.”¹

Let’s not close our eyes to that dual reality. We do not need more card-carrying members of UN or UNESCO fan clubs. Rather we need supportive yet critical voices for multilateral cooperation. Today I would like to ask, as my recent book’s title does, what exactly is wrong and can we fix it?² How can we minimize the worst aspects and maximize the best? To use an economist’s notion, what can we do to exploit the UN’s and UNESCO’s comparative advantages?

No subject makes eyes glaze over more quickly than “reform.” Shortly after leaving his post as deputy-secretary-general and prior to becoming the UK’s minister for Africa, Asia, and the United Nations, Mark Malloch-Brown commented that no topic, not even sex, was more popular than UN reform around water coolers or over coffee. Neither governments nor Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon understood “the scale of change required.” Member states “would have to rise above their own current sense of entrenched rights and privileges and find a grand bargain to allow a new more realistic governance model for the UN.” But, he continued, “That may take a crisis.”³

UNESCO’s current financial straits undoubtedly provide such a shock. Rather than muddling along, the usual default option amidst crises across the UN system, UNESCO can and must change fundamentally.

And when I say “UNESCO” or the “United Nations,” my embrace includes the First UNESCO of member states, the Second UNESCO of international civil

servants, and the Third UNESCO of interested members of civil society, the private sector, the media, and academics.⁴

August commissions, high-level panels, task forces, and summits come and go, but almost everyone in this room would agree to three propositions:

1. The UN system does not function on the basis of evidence.
2. It is sprawling and diffuse and more focused on protecting turf than thinking creatively.
3. And finally, and most importantly, the UN system simply cannot continue as it is.

And in the next breath, virtually all of us will mobilize our most articulate rationalizations to explain why transformation is impossible, why incremental tinkering is the most that we can imagine, why it is easier to chop 5 or 25 percent from all programs rather than to establish priorities.

The UN's organizational chart refers to a "system," which implies coherence and cohesion. In reality that system has more in common with feudalism than with a modern organization. Frequent use also is made of the term "family," a folksy image that I prefer almost as much as "clan" because, like many such units, the UN family is dysfunctional and clan members are involved in pitched battles with neighbors.

My original affirmative reply about the UN's and UNESCO's future is premised on radical transformation over the next decade. Mine is not a pipe dream; a big bang is not far-fetched but rather essential. One of the more disconcerting thoughts, for this observer at least, is that most UN officials—from the very top to the most junior—and many supporters including groups like this one, appear blissfully unaware that the UN system is more and more marginal in more and more countries.

My presentation proceeds in three parts. It begins with four endemic problems of the UN system and then spells out four remedies, if not cures, for what ails the world organization and its constituent parts. It concludes with a specific suggestion for UNESCO.

What's Wrong?

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Four afflictions afflict the world body and such specialized agencies as UNESCO. The first—the most obvious and acute—is the enduring concept of the international community as a system of sovereign states, a notion dating back to the 1648 Treaties of Westphalia following the Thirty Years' War. All countries and the governments that represent them are loath to accept elements of overarching central authority and the inroads into their capacities to act autonomously. Non-interference in the internal affairs of states is a sacred principle spelled out in organizational constitutions. State sovereignty remains sacrosanct even as the reality of globalization, technological advances, and interdependence, along with a growing number of trans-boundary crises, should place planetary interests more squarely on the agenda, even in Beijing and Washington. But major powers are not the only ones impeding collective action. Smaller and poorer—or newer and less powerful—states are as vehemently protective of their sovereignty. “Organized hypocrisy,” as former US National Security Council director and Stanford professor Stephen Krasner reminds us, is either 365 years old or 365 years young.⁵

The basis for membership in the UN system, of course, reflects the equality of states, at least on paper. As a result of sovereignty's grip, the current international system functions amid a growing number of anomalies between virtually all of the problems facing the planet and existing structures to make international decisions to address them. For those whose preoccupation is nuclear proliferation, the evidence is obvious from the stalled discussions in reviews of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons accompanied by ongoing developments in Iran and North Korea. For those worried about climate change and sustainability, the evidence lies in the paltry results to replace the Kyoto Protocol emanating from conferences in 2009 to 2012 in Copenhagen, Cancún, Durban, and Rio.

According to all too many realist (small “r”) national decision-makers as well as the so-called Realist (capital “R”) scholars of international relations, narrowly defined vital interests are the only basis on which to make commitments or avoid them. The UN system remains the most formidable bastion of sacrosanct state sovereignty, ironically, even as globalization continues apace and trans-

boundary problems proliferate and intensify. National borders make less and less sense, but they are the only basis on which the UN system operates. This claim is, in my view, akin to claiming that the gold standard was sacrosanct in August 1971.

The second ailment stems from the diplomatic burlesque in UN circles on First Avenue in Manhattan or on the place de Fontenoy in Paris.⁶ The artificial divide between the aging acting troupes from the industrialized North and from the developing countries of the global South provide the main drama. Launched in the 1950s and 1960s as a way to create diplomatic space for international security and economic negotiations by countries on the margins of international politics, the once creative voices of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77 developing countries now have become prisoners in their own theater. These rigid and counterproductive groups—and the artificial divisions and toxic atmosphere that they create—constitute almost insurmountable barriers to diplomatic initiatives. Serious conversation is virtually impossible and is replaced by meaningless posturing in order to score points back home.

Spectacular recent examples of marquee “stars” include former U.S. ambassador to the UN John Bolton and Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. In the limelight of the General Assembly’s stage in the fall of 2006, Chávez’s performance referred to George W. Bush as the devil and stated that “it smells of sulfur.” Bolton responded by calling Chávez irrelevant and warned that Venezuela would be “disruptive” in the Security Council, that putting lipstick on a caterpillar would not make it a butterfly.

This theater has a long and undistinguished history. Who can forget Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev’s 1960 shoe-banging incident on the podium, or Yasser Arafat checking his pistol before entering the General Assembly Hall in 1974—the first person to address the body with a holster on his hip while claiming to be carrying an olive branch? Or former Maryknoll priest and president of the General Assembly Miguel d’Escoto Brockmann, who in 2009 invited Noam Chomsky to rail harangue delegations? Obviously, UNESCO is still recovering from the New World Communication and Information Order.

Former Canadian politician and senior UNICEF official Stephen Lewis quipped: “Men and women cannot live by rhetoric alone.”⁷ But clearly his characterization does not apply to UN ambassadors and officials.

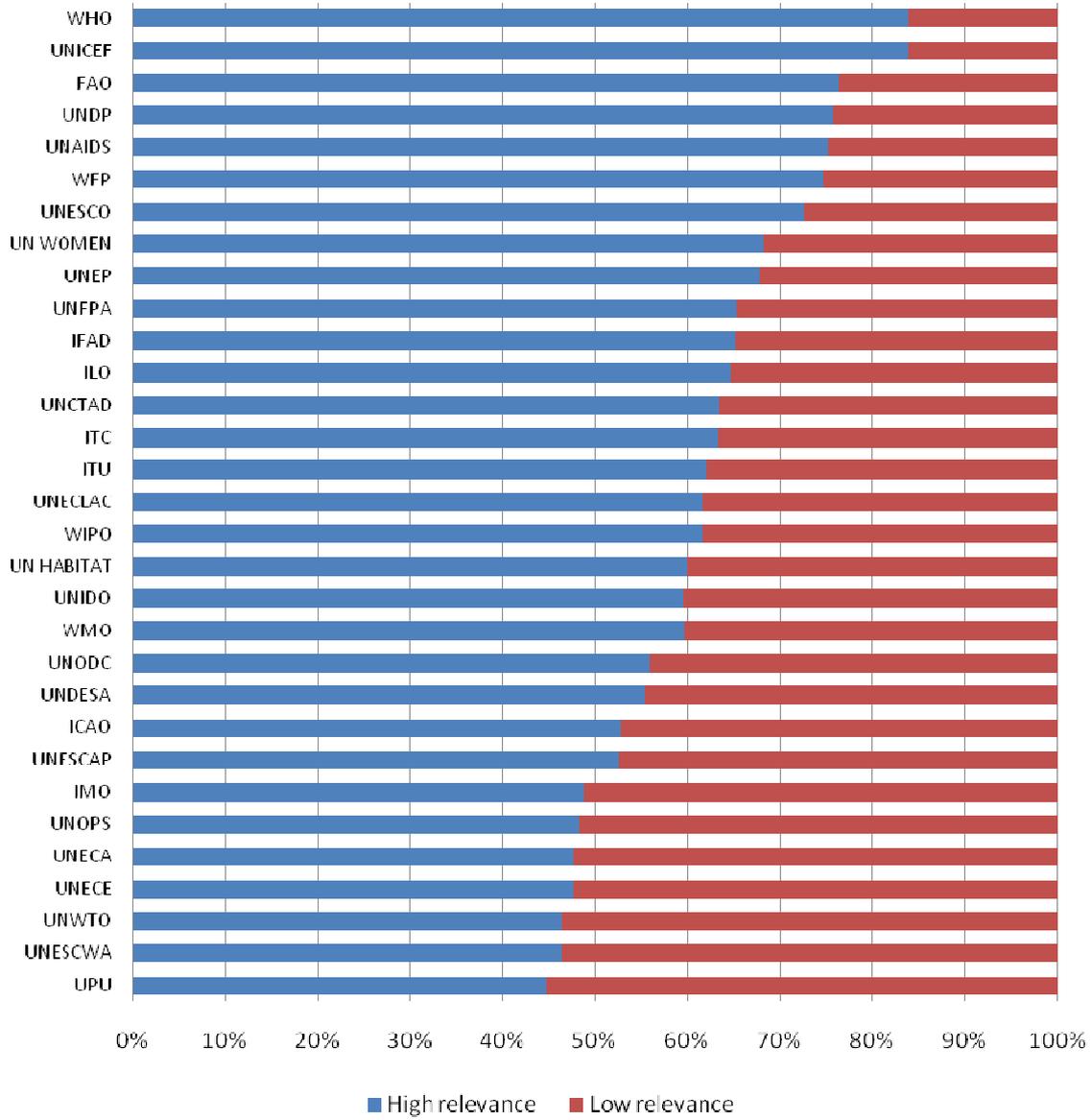
These two structural political problems are exacerbated by two internal organizational ailments: the decentralized—and wasteful—nature of the UN system and the mediocre quality of staff and leadership.

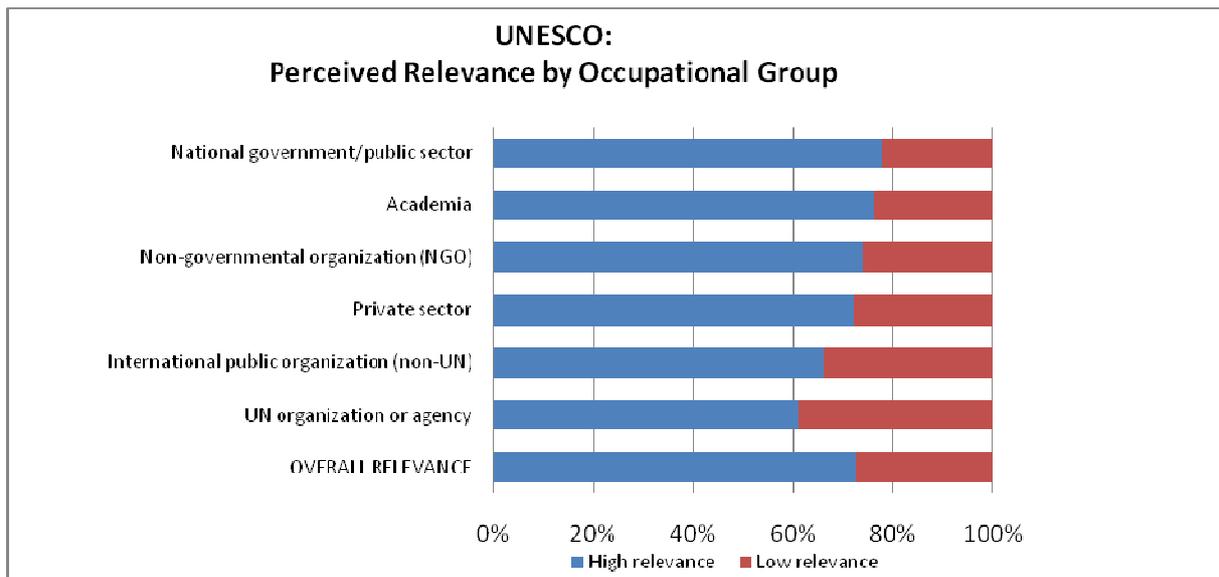
So, let's begin with the third malady, the overlapping jurisdictions of various UN bodies, the lack of coordination among their activities, and the absence of centralized financing for the system as a whole. Struggling over turf is more attractive than sensible collaboration. The UN's various moving parts work at cross-purposes instead of in an integrated and mutually reinforcing fashion. Agencies relentlessly engage in cutthroat fundraising to finance their expanding mandates, stake out territory, and pursue mission creep.

Permit me to open a parenthesis here, because I have been involved with a recent survey about the Future of the UN Development System. With almost 3,500 responses from around the world, three-quarters from the global South, the idea of consolidation and more dramatic change is not simply an idea emanating from my head.⁸ Within this sample and filtered for respondents who declared themselves familiar with mandates and performance, UNESCO's overall rating was relatively high (seventh out of thirty UN organizations rated). The lowest ratings about its pertinence, however, came from other UN staff who apparently do not think highly of UNESCO in relationship to other UN organizations.

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Relevance of UN System for Today's Development Problems





Former senior staff members Brian Urquhart and Erskine Childers used a music metaphor to capture the problem: “The orchestra pays minimum heed to its conductor.”⁹ In his customary picturesque fashion, Sir Robert Jackson, the Australian logistics genius who moved goods to Malta and the Middle East in World War II and subsequently oversaw a number of key UN humanitarian operations, began his 1969 evaluation of the UN development system by writing: “The machine as a whole has become unmanageable in the strictest sense of the word. As a result, it is becoming slower and more unwieldy like some prehistoric monster.”¹⁰ How do we describe a dinosaur that is 43 years older but not better adapted to the climate of the 21st century?

The fourth disorder stems from the overwhelming weight of UN bureaucracy, its low productivity, and the underwhelming leadership within many international secretariats. The stereotype of a bloated administration is partially inaccurate because it overlooks determined efforts by talented and dedicated individuals. However, recruitment and promotion across the system are certainly part of what ails it. Success usually reflects personalities and serendipity rather than having the best persons for the right reasons and institutional structures designed to foster collaboration. Staff costs account for the lion’s share of budgets, and the international civil service is a potential resource whose composition, productivity, and culture could change, and change quickly. There is little hope in the short run, however, as the uninspired and uninspiring leadership of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon will continue for another five years. But the top of the agenda for the next secretary-general has to be the people who work across the UN system.

Combining the third and the fourth maladies, we can summarize: Organizations of the UN system focus on a substantive area, often located in a different city from relevant partners, and have separate budgets, governing boards, organizational cultures, and independent executive heads. Institutional fragmentation and competition lead not only to waste and redundancy but also to issues falling between agency stools. Moreover, secretariats are staffed with too many people who are hired, retained and/or promoted for the wrong reasons, being led often by senior staff selected for political and not substantive reasons. Dealing with crucial global challenges requires multidisciplinary perspectives, efforts across sectors with firm central direction and inspired leadership. The UN system too rarely supplies this package.

Can We Fix It?

Are there palliatives, if not cures, for the United Nations and UNESCO? The four afflictions suggest four ways to initiate surgery that is radical and not cosmetic. Suggestions about how to mitigate these problems point as well toward a more ideal world in which the institutional ills might be “cured.”

My fixes are not based on pious hopes for the multilateral equivalent of a miracle cure but rather on specific and encouraging examples that could be replicated. Dramatic change is possible; we are not starting from scratch. My health regimen begins with the most difficult and least likely palliatives and moves toward easier ones. Rienhold Niebuhr’s “Serenity Prayer” jumps to mind: “God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things that should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.”

[insert WFUNA power point slide of four fixes as #5, but not in text]

The first remedy requires building upon the spotty yet significant progress by recasting national interests. The prescription for the Westphalian system’s ailments consists of yet more energetic recalculations of the shared benefits of fostering the provision of global public goods and respecting international

commitments. Democratic member states, whether large or small, should theoretically find this pill relatively easy to swallow because they have a long-term, rational, and vital interest as well as a moral responsibility to promote multilateral cooperation.

While it will undoubtedly sound like Pollyanna, there is more than a therapeutic benefit from uttering “good international citizenship,”¹¹ an expression coined by Gareth Evans, the former Australian foreign minister and onetime president of the International Crisis Group. This vision underpins the conviction that there is a relationship between the provision of basic rights and wider international security. Nothing illustrates this better than “the responsibility to protect” (R2P), which redefines state sovereignty as contingent upon a modicum of respect for human rights rather than as an absolute characteristic.¹² If a state is manifestly unwilling or unable to honor its responsibility—or worse, is itself the perpetrator of mass atrocities—then the responsibility to protect the rights of individuals shifts upward to the international community of states.

With the possible exception of Raphael Lemkin’s efforts and the 1948 Genocide Convention, no idea has moved faster in the international normative arena than R2P, including its embrace by more than 150 heads of state and government at the 2005 World Summit. The benefits from redefining sovereignty were evident from the 2011 Security Council decision to protect Libyans from their 69-year-old dictator’s murderous ways. A less authoritarian form of government is hardly guaranteed, and blowback almost inevitable. But redefining sovereignty means that it is not quixotic to utter “never again”—no more Holocausts, Cambodias, and Rwandas—and occasionally mean it.

Why is this significant? The domestic institutions that every society relies upon to provide public goods do not exist at the global level for genocide prevention or any other crucial international issue, including the essential ones on UNESCO’s agenda. Not to put too fine a point on it, there is no power to tax, conscript, regulate, educate, or quarantine. But at least we have seen the ability to take steps in the right direction when sovereignty is redefined to include a modicum of respect for human rights.

Overcoming sovereignty’s constraints is the toughest nut to crack, but my second prescription for what ails the UN system is more feasible, namely moving out of the North-South quagmire. Again, states on occasion have forged creative

partnerships across the fictitious boundaries that supposedly divide the industrialized from the developing countries of the global South. Less posturing and role-playing is a prerequisite for the future health of multilateral cooperation. Building bridges across the South-North divide is required for addressing climate change, development finance, nonproliferation, reproductive rights, terrorism, and poverty and illiteracy reduction to name merely a few of the most pressing and distressing issues.

Moving toward issues-based and interest-based negotiations is an essential prescription for what ails the system. Let's begin with an illustration of how not to proceed: moving ahead last July with the UNESCO-Equatorial Guinea International Prize for Research in the Life Sciences after five years of intergovernmental wrangling. Elsewhere however, states have breached the fortifications around the North-South camps and forged creative partnerships that portend the formation of other types of coalitions that might unclog deliberations in Paris and elsewhere.

Examples of wide-ranging partnerships across continents and ideologies include those that negotiated the treaties to ban landmines and to establish the International Criminal Court. Landmines mobilized a very diverse group of countries across the usual North-South divide as well as global civil society under the leadership of the World Federalist Movement and the usually reticent International Committee of the Red Cross. The idea of a permanent criminal court had been discussed since the late 1940s but received a push after the ad hoc tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. The 60-country, like-minded coalition gathered in Rome in 1998 represented a formidable and persuasive group that joined forces with the 700 members of the NGO Coalition for an International Criminal Court. The ICC treaty moved ahead in spite of strong opposition from several permanent members of the Security Council, and the wisdom of that tactic has subsequently been demonstrated as some of those same permanent members have seen the ICC's utility demonstrated for international judicial pursuit and judgments for Sudan and Libya.

These breakthroughs were mirrored in the economic arena by the Global Compact, through which the UN seeks to bring civil society and transnational corporations into a more productive partnership. The energy and resources of for-profit and not-for-profit private actors clearly are required for the future health of multilateral cooperation. But the creation of the Global Compact required

jettisoning familiar shibboleths about the dangers of the market and other neo-imperial designs from the global capitalist North that formerly were rejected automatically by the global South and many NGOs as well.

A possible way to diminish the North-South divide could involve the equality that comes from enhanced transparency. Problems still exist for the implementation of the Universal Periodic Review within the Human Rights Council, but a variation would be worthwhile in other contexts. Why not require a universal periodic review of commitments to the Millennium Development Goals for ECOSOC, or of girl's education for UNESCO? Rather than a voluntary system that allows states merely to report what they wish on topics that suit them, why not move toward independent, obligatory, and across-the-board scrutiny of industrialized and developing countries?

While they got a bad name during the Iraq War, international politics invariably involve "coalitions of the willing." The results-oriented negotiations on landmines, the ICC, and the Global Compact suggest the benefits of more pragmatism and less ideology. Within international institutions, we should be seeking larger and more legitimate coalitions of the willing around specific policies. The tired North-South shenanigans and stereotypes serve no one's interest and should be tossed into history's dustbin.

The third line of treatment would be to pursue the possibility of making the UN's work more cohesive, as advocated by *Delivering as One*, one of the last reports initiated by Kofi Annan before his departure.¹³ To be fair, there has been more adaptation by UN organizations over time than many recognize. Indeed, founders might not recognize today some elements of the world organization that they created in 1945. Nonetheless, those same founders would find familiar decentralized institutional silos for problem-solving that are incapable of addressing the global challenges increasingly and routinely confronting humanity.

As indicated earlier, eyes customarily glaze over at the mention of "reform." Nothing to date has made even modest inroads in reducing turf battles and competition for funds. Talk is cheap, but no meaningful reform has taken place.

But could it? Yes, but donors would have to stop talking out of both sides of their mouths and insist upon the centralization and consolidation that they often

preach in UN forums and before parliamentary bodies. Consolidation of agencies, programs, and funding would require confronting domestic lobbies and interests, both public and private, which wish to maintain the kind of preferential control that comes with principal-agent relationships.

It is hard to keep a straight face when examining references to “system-wide coherence.” The overlapping jurisdictions of UN bodies, the lack of coordination among their activities, and the absence of centralized financing make bureaucratic struggles more attractive than sensible collaboration. The incentives for going it alone are such that the UN’s various moving parts necessarily work at cross-purposes instead of in a more integrated, mutually reinforcing, and collaborative fashion. Not to put too fine a point on it, agencies relentlessly engage in cutthroat competition to finance their expanding mandates, stake out territory, and pursue mission creep. Fundamental change and collaboration are not in the career interests of any UN bureaucracy or its leadership; turf battles and a scramble for resources are.

Consolidation is anathema as officials rationalize futile complexity and react to incentives from donors to go their own way.¹⁴ As each organization has a separate budget, governing board, culture, and executive head, what else should one expect? An almost universal chorus sings the atonal tune praising decentralization and autonomy, and UN forums provide some of the best acoustical concert halls for this cacophony.

One possible bright spot is that opinion among development specialists understands the desperate need for change even if leaving the system alone usually appears the only option because inertia is so overwhelming. Both the 2010 and the 2012 independent surveys to which I referred earlier found that the UN system’s neutrality and objectivity remained strong suits, but that decentralization was by far the defining weakness. When asked about 2025, more than two-thirds of the respondents proposed that there should be fewer UN agencies with dramatic changes in mandates and functions, including stronger NGO and private-sector participation.

Proposals to create a single governing board for myriad special funds and programs, for instance, are met with guffaws. The decision to create UN Women in July 2010 was an encouraging institutional breakthrough of sorts. While no formal UN institution had ever previously been shuttered as an anachronism, at

least UN Women consolidated four weaker autonomous units. It would have been an even better precedent had the consolidation also included the UN Population Fund and avoided creating yet another governing body, whose leadership ironically (or shall I say predictably) has approved replicating a field representation system.

In short, the UN system remains more wasteful and weak than it should be. We need to get more from the system through centralization and consolidation rather than hoping for the best from ad hoc serendipity and fortuitous personal chemistry. Much of what passes for “reform” amounts to wishful thinking, meriting Bernard Shaw’s description of a second marriage, the triumph of hope over experience.

The final therapy consists of taking steps to reinvigorate the staff of the United Nations. There is an urgent need to revive the notion of an autonomous international civil service as championed by Dag Hammarskjöld.¹⁵ Competence and integrity should outweigh nationality and gender as well as cronyism, which have become the principal criteria for recruitment, retention, and promotion. In fact, Hammarskjöld’s ideal goes back to what a working group of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace during World War II called the “great experiment” of the League of Nations.¹⁶

Moving back to the future for the international civil service would involve open searches to recruit people with integrity and talent without interference from member states. No exceptions. It is especially important because there are numerous ways to attract more mobile and younger staff members with greater turnover and fewer permanent contracts for twenty-first-century secretariats. As noted earlier, because the expenditures for staff account for such a huge chunk of all budgets across the UN system, and certainly UNESCO’s, strengthening performance and productivity by improving output and efficiency should be at the top of any to-do list. This undertaking is an administrative issue and does not necessitate changes in geopolitics or constitutional amendments.

This gets me to our deliberations today and where I began.

What Is UNESCO’s Comparative Advantage?

Let me repeat Singh's comment: "At its best, UNESCO is the heroic intellectual and moral force of the idealism encapsulated in its Preamble." An oft-ignored reality across the UN system is the requirement for people with vision and leadership capable of priority-setting. Ideas and concepts are a main driving force in human progress and arguably the UN's most important contribution over the last six-and-a-half decades. This conclusion comes from a decade of research by the independent United Nations Intellectual History Project, whose directors (Richard Jolly, Louis Emmerij, and I) summarized 17 commissioned books and an oral history in *UN Ideas That Changed the World*.¹⁷ I would like to share with you quickly the findings from that project, namely the five ways that ideas matter and illustrate them briefly from the oral histories.¹⁸

[insert UNIHP power point slides 1-2 as #6 and #7 but not in text]

Applying our central conclusions to the place de Fontenoy, UNESCO's comparative advantage surely consists of thriving in the world of ideas and rewarding the people who produce them. The first of the project's volumes succinctly concludes: "People matter. Ideas matter."¹⁹

UNESCO's future is based on the fact that international organizations live and die, or thrive and shrivel up, for two reasons: the quality of the people who work in them and of the policy ideas that they put forward. I cannot possibly do justice to the project's findings—you will have to buy the book—but let me tease out the five reasons that ideas matter.

[insert UNIHP power point slide 12 as #8 but not in text]

First, the way that governments and individuals, public and private actors talk about issues and aspire to improve human existence by solving problems owes much to ideas and to their translation into policies. For instance, the meaning and the content of security and development are very different when viewed through the lenses of bombs and bullets and GDP per capita, on the one hand, or through the lenses of human security and human development.

Second, the way that we set agendas for action, especially when values clash, rely on ideas. Here, we could point to examples like the responsibility to protect that seeks to bridge the chasm between human rights and state sovereignty or sustainable development that seeks to find common ground between the imperatives for growth and protection of the environment.

Third, the ways that alternative coalition mobilize for change reflect ideas as we have seen in the unusual new constellations of states and NGOs that have successfully pushed for empowering women or protecting human rights as earlier to establish the International Criminal Court, or to ban land mines.

Fourth, ideas matter because institutions—governmental, intergovernmental, and nongovernmental—can be held accountable when they devote human and financial resources to a new idea. Sometimes new units are formed or old ones adapt to address new needs—we need only to the institutional treatment of the environment after Stockholm, or women after Mexico City, or peace-building after the World Summit.

And fifth, ideas matter when the rubber hits the road in national legislation and action, as well as intergovernmental decisions.

[Let me digress for a moment with a few quotes from the oral history to illustrate how some of our respondents illustrated the five ways that ideas matter.

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What does all of this mean for UNESCO? The middle-term plan should provide resources for more intellectual sparks about the fundamentally changed nature of contemporary problems and their solutions. It should seek to bridge the deepening gap between scientific knowledge and political decision-making. Because policy research and ideas matter so much, UNESCO should enhance its ability to produce or nurture world-class public intellectuals, scholars, thinkers, planners, and practitioners. UNESCO and UN officials more generally are typically considered second-class citizens in comparison with counterparts from the Washington-based international financial institutions. This notion partially reflects the resources devoted to research by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as well as their respective cultures, media attention, dissemination outlets, and the use of the research in decision-making.

But reality is different. Nine persons with substantial experience within the United Nations and its policy discussions have won the Nobel Prize in economic sciences—Jan Tinbergen, Wassily Leontief, Gunnar Myrdal, James Meade, W. Arthur Lewis, Theodore W. Schultz, Lawrence R. Klein, Richard Stone, and Amartya Sen—whereas only one from the World Bank, Joseph Stiglitz, has done so. But he resigned from his post at the Bank in protest and is now deeply associated with UN policy work. In addition, Nobel Peace Prize winners include 15 organizations and individuals who worked for years as staff members, including Ralph Bunche, Dag Hammarskjöld, Kofi Annan, Mohammed ElBaradei, and Martti Ahtisaari. No other organization comes even close to being such a center of excellence, a fact missed by many politicians, the media, and a global public looking for answers to global predicaments.

In order to have ideas and the people who produce them taken more seriously, a number of priority steps should be taken to improve research, analysis, and policy work. UNESCO leadership should move more vigorously to facilitate staff exchanges from universities and think tanks for original and synthetic research; create space for truly independent research and analysis; ensure more effective outreach and media promotion activities so that the research produced reaches more audiences and has more impact on decisions around the world; and transform recruitment, appointment, promotion, and organization of responsibilities as an integral part of a human resources strategy to exert intellectual leadership.

Despite a rich tradition of scattered contributions from various UN organizations, the system's and certainly UNESCO's full potential for policy research and analysis has scarcely been tapped. Cross-agency collaboration is too rare. Researchers across the system seldom venture beyond their silos. Regular, mandatory gatherings for sharing research and ideas could reduce parochialism. A UN research council, for instance, should be established to expand opportunities for information-sharing and collaboration, and reduce the chances of redundancy and the pursuit of different projects at cross-purposes. I suggest that UNESCO should convene such a council.

UNESCO also should seek as many alliances as possible with centers of expertise and excellence—in academia, think tanks, government policy units, and corporate research centers. The criterion must be excellence not geographic distribution. Human resources policy should do more to foster an atmosphere that encourages creative thinking, penetrating analysis, and policy-focused research of a high intellectual and critical caliber. The model of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change could well be replicated for UNESCO's issues. The 2007 Nobel Peace Prize acknowledged the UN system's comparative advantage in mobilizing world-class public intellectuals (in this case, by the World Meteorological Organization and the UN Environment Programme).

UNESCO should excel at pulling together world-class intellectuals rather than trying to be all things to all men and women in a variety of technical cooperation activities. These projects are a distraction when UNESCO should concentrate organizational energies on a few intellectual issues where limited staff and resources could make a difference.

UNESCO's budget crunch, like Samuel Johnson's hanging, could and should focus the mind. It is impossible to continue trimming across the board, and tough love is required for decisions about priorities. Undoubtedly some current staff will have to be let go and replaced by others with different skills and ambitions. The intellectual firepower of staff members is essential, which will depend on better professional procedures in recruitment, appointment, and promotion. These nuts-and-bolts issues of operational alliances and staffing affect directly the quality of policy outputs.

By definition, however, such an orientation requires courage and tough hides in the most senior officials. It is a fool's errand to try and please all 193

member states all of the time if a bold and forward-looking policy agenda is desired. Encouraging free thinking and exploration of ideas and approaches is vital but not cheap. Ideally, donors should tie multi-year non-core funding to research and analysis—with no strings attached but with peer-reviews for UNESCO's performance. At the very least, conversations about the need for and benefits of such policy autonomy and accountability should be on the agenda of national commissions.

Without first-rate people and autonomy, messages typically are watered down to satisfy the lowest common intergovernmental denominator. We have learned since 1990 from the annual howls greeting the *Human Development Report* that intellectual independence can be tolerated even by hypersensitive government representatives. And there is a lesson for UNESCO. Calling a spade a shovel in numerical terms does not always gain friends and fans among countries that fare less well than they thought they should have. Embarrassed government officials ask how the United States could not be first, how Russia could rate so poorly on so many indicators, and how 15 African countries could always bring up the rear.

But UNDP's experience since 1990 suggests that researchers at UNESCO too can be liberated from the need to clear analyses with boards or donors before publication. "Islands" or "safety zones" will be necessary within which serious and independent research can take place not only away from daily tasks but without fearing the loss of income or publication because one or more governments are irked. Intergovernmental tolerance for controversy can be higher than commonly thought; academic freedom should not be an alien concept for analysts working within UNESCO or other UN secretariats on twenty-first-century intellectual and policy challenges.

Conclusion

Let me conclude quickly. In this regard, a graduate student working on her thesis recently brought my attention to deliberations by the Conference of Allied Ministers of Education (CAME), who met throughout World War II. One proposal, pushed by the French but opposed at the time by the United States and the United Kingdom, was to establish UNESCO as a non-governmental organization. Counterfactuals are not useful at this juncture, but the spirit behind that rejected

option is crucial because ideas and research simply cannot be subject to the constraints of a totally member-state-driven organization.

UNESCO needs to reinvent itself. It should be less constrained by narrow state interests and North-South theater, and it should rely more on bright young staff and rope in networks of world class intellectuals as it breaks down bureaucratic and disciplinary walls separating it from other parts of the UN system.

I remain persuaded that individuals and states can be as strong as the institutions that they create. There certainly are plenty of things wrong with the UN system in general and with UNESCO in particular, but many can be fixed. For all its warts, these organizations still matter for their norms, their legitimacy, and their idealism.

Thank you.

Notes

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¹J. P. Singh, *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization* (London: Routledge, 2011), 1.

²Thomas G. Weiss, *What's Wrong with the United Nations and How to Fix It*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012). This address also draws on the synthesis in Thomas G. Weiss, *Can We Fix the United Nations?* (New York: World Federation of UN Associations, 2012), Acronym #1.

³Mark Malloch Brown, "Can the UN Be Reformed?" *Global Governance* 14, no. 1 (2008):1-12, quotes from 7-8.

⁴This concept first appeared in Thomas G. Weiss, Tatiana Carayannis, and Richard Jolly "The 'Third' United Nations," *Global Governance* 15, no. 1 (2009): 123-42.

⁵Stephen D. Krasner, *State Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

⁶Thomas G. Weiss, "Moving Beyond North-South Theatre," *Third World Quarterly*, 30, 2 (2009): 271-84.

⁷Stephen Lewis, *Race against Time* (Toronto: Anansi Press, 2005), 145.

⁸Stephen Browne and Thomas G. Weiss, *Making Change Happen: Enhancing the UN's Contributions to Development* (New York: World Federation of UN Associations, 2012). See also other publications at www.futureun.org.

⁹ Erskine Childers with Brian Urquhart, *Renewing the United Nations System* (Uppsala: Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 1994), 32.

¹⁰ United Nations Development Programme, *A Study of the Capacity of the United Nations Development System* (Geneva: United Nations, 1969), document DP/5, iii.

¹¹ Nicholas J. Wheeler and Tim Dunne, "Good International Citizenship: A Third Way for British Foreign Policy," *International Affairs* 74, no. 4 (1998): 847–70.

¹² International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, *The Responsibility to Protect* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2001). See also, Thomas G. Weiss and Don Hubert, *The Responsibility to Protect: Research, Bibliography, Background* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2001).

¹³ United Nations, *Delivering as One*, Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence, *Delivering as One* (New York: UN, 2006).

¹⁴ Without counting the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)—de jure but not de facto components of the UN system—more than 50,000 UN officials spread out in 15 different headquarter country locations and in some, 1,400 representative offices worldwide command annual budgets of almost \$16 billion but are largely indifferent to other family members..

¹⁵ Dag Hammarskjöld, "The International Civil Servant in Law and in Fact," lecture delivered to Congregation at Oxford University, 30 May 1961, reprinted by Clarendon Press, available at www.un.org/depts/dhl/dag/docs/internationalcivilservant.pdf.

¹⁶ Egon Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat: A Great Experiment in International Administration* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1945).

¹⁷ Richard Jolly, Louis Emmerij, and Thomas G. Weiss, *UN Ideas That Changed the World* (Indiana University Press, 2009). For other details about the project, see www.unhistory.org.

¹⁸ Thomas G. Weiss, Tatiana Carayannis, Louis Emmerij, and Richard Jolly, *UN Voices: The Struggle for Development and Social Justice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), and The Complete Oral Histories for UN Voice, available on CD-Rom from the United Nations Intellectual History Project.

¹⁹ Louis Emmerij, Richard Jolly, and Thomas G. Weiss, *Ahead of the Curve? UN Ideas and Global Challenges* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 214.

What Future for the United Nations and UNESCO?

Thomas G. Weiss

Bratislava, 10 September 2012

THOMAS G. WEISS

What's Wrong with the
United Nations
and How to Fix It



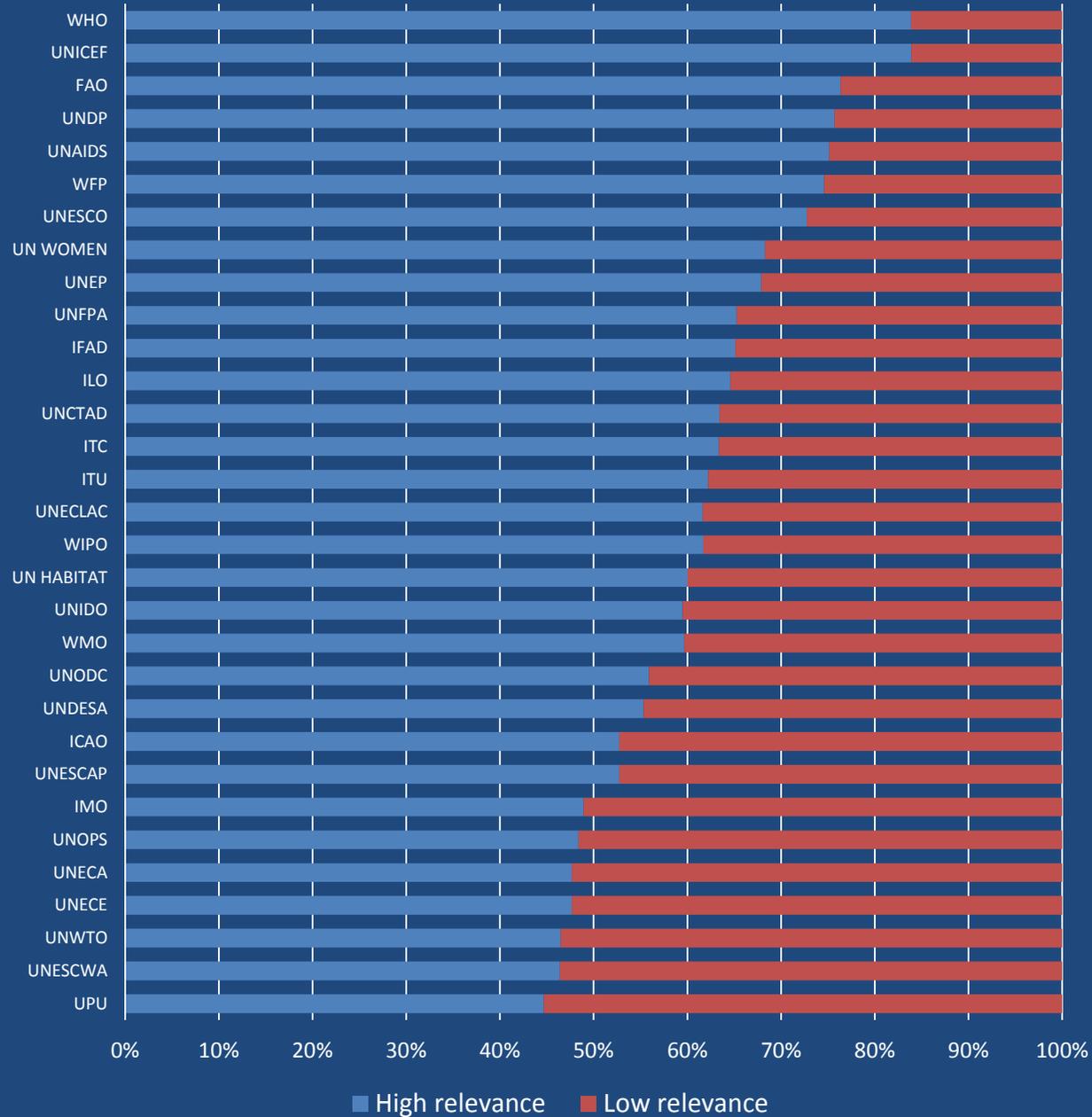
WITH A FOREWORD BY SIR BRIAN URQUHART

SECOND
EDITION

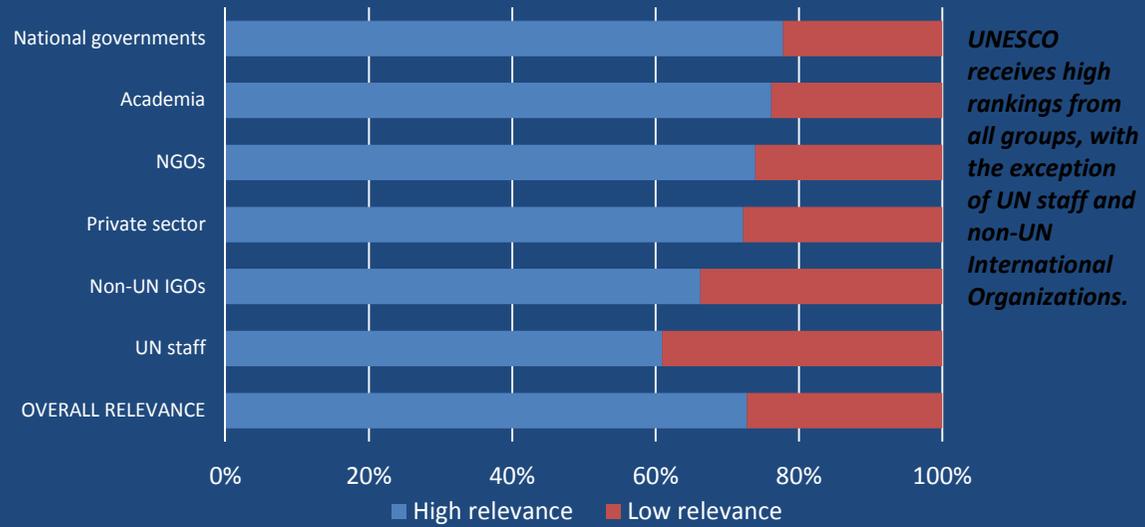
The Four Afflictions

1. Rigidly prioritizing state sovereignty restricts international decision-making on trans-boundary problems
2. Dated and divisive member state groupings and useless diplomatic theatrics
3. Decentralized, chaotic and wasteful nature of the UN system
4. Low productivity of UN bureaucracy and underwhelming leadership

Relevance of UN System for Today's Development Problems



UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

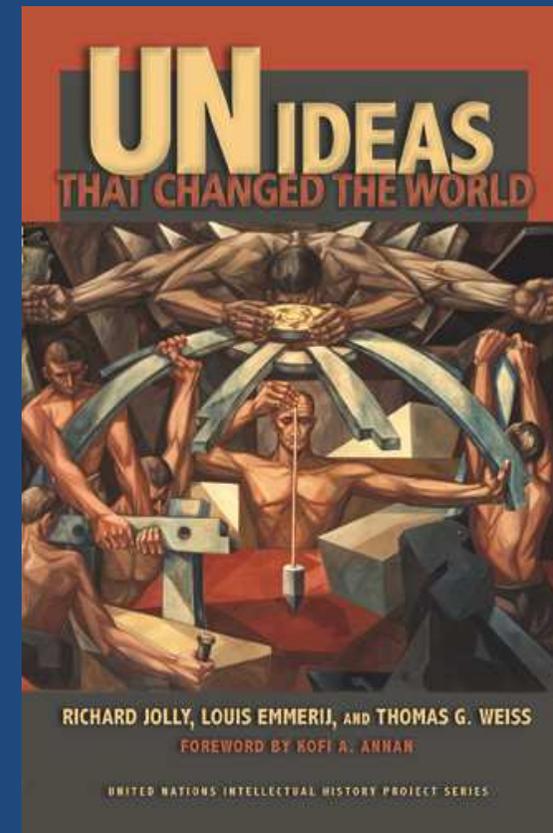
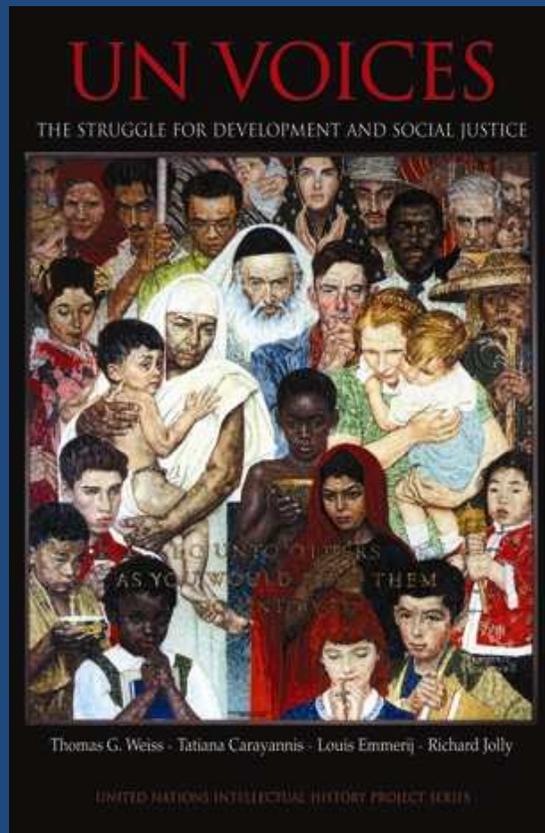


The Four Fixes

1. Promoting multilateral cooperation through good international citizenship.
2. Bridging the North-South divide through creative issue-focused partnerships.
3. Pursuing system coherence, centralization and consolidation as well as restructuring financing and spending.
4. Reinvigorating UN staff and fostering imaginative leadership.



THE UNITED NATIONS INTELLECTUAL HISTORY PROJECT





THE UNITED NATIONS INTELLECTUAL HISTORY PROJECT

1999 - 2011

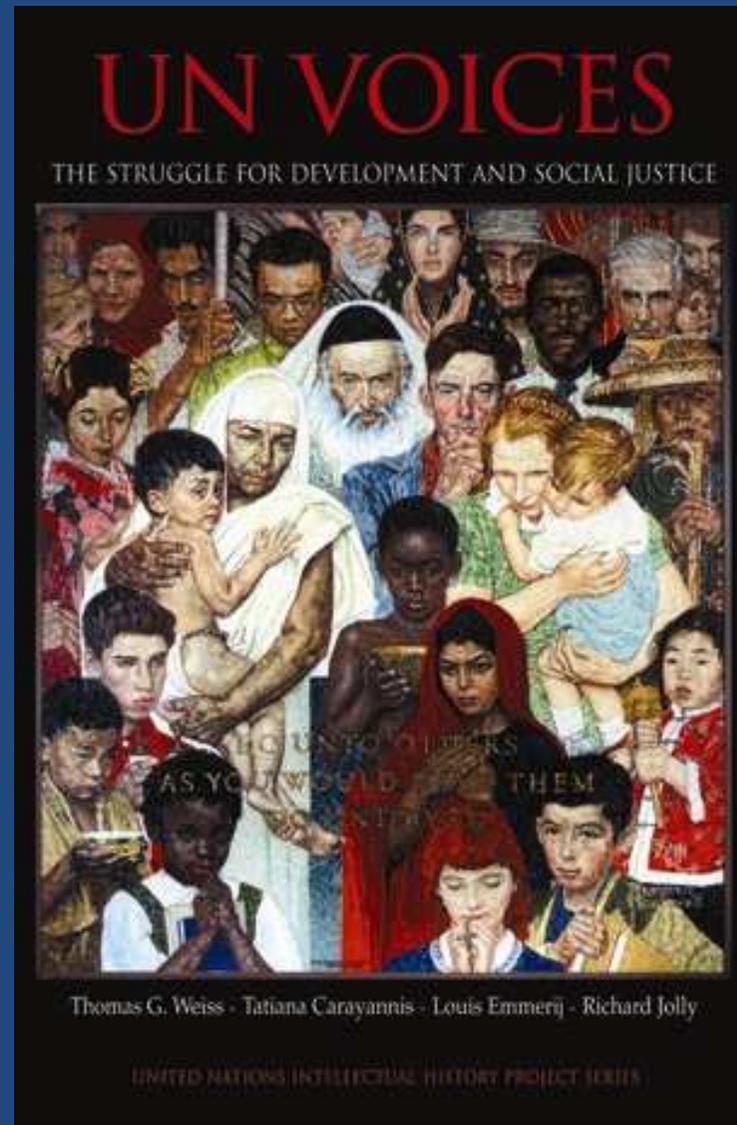
**People Matter.
Ideas Matter.**

www.UNhistory.org

5 Ways Ideas Matter to Global Values and Norms

- Ideas change the way issues are perceived.
- Ideas redefine state and non-state interests and goals, setting agendas for action.
- Ideas mobilize coalitions to press for action.
- Ideas become embedded in institutions.
- Ideas affect implementation.

UN Personalities Who Made a Difference





Oral History Interviewees

Adeniji, Adesayo	Ernst, Lucia	Michienzi, Alister	Schachter, Oscar
Alhassani, Murti	Finkler, Just	Mills, Donald Owen	Sen, Anurupa
Amis, Sierra	Finger, Seymour Maxwell	Misra, Subin	Shelton, Leticia R.
Annan, Kofi	Furtado, Celso	O'Brien, Conny Cruise	Sims, Whitney
Arce, Margaret Joan	Gardner, Richard M.	Ogata, Tadao	Singer, Hans
Arque, Lourdes	Ghi, Othman	Pratt, I. G.	Srinivas, Mary
Auz, Sany	Hansen, Sven	Pratt, Sorenna J.	Sroyles, Margaret C.
Berthoud, Paul	Heldreth, Gerald Karl	Pérez de Cuellar, Javier	Soriano, Juan
Bernhard, Monica	Hardison, Jife	Petrovsky, Vladimir	Sotomayor, Cornelio
Blandford, Francis	Hansen, Skjethave	Pichaino, Paulo Sérgio	Stavroski, Jesse
Bookling, Elise	Hayzer, Neelven	Pokak, Jacques J.	Stone, Jack I.
Boutou-Ghali, Rosine	Houdeballe, Virginia	Pratt, Jan	Stewart, Paul
Bruce, Margaret "Molly"	Iglesias, Enrique	Ramphal, Shoshola S.	Talla, Mustafa Karad
Cardoso, Fernando H.	Jain, Dewaki	Reif, Elisabeth	Ugochukwu, Brian
Chidambaram, Bernard T. C.	Jolly, Richard	Riquelme, Rubens	Uquías, Victor L.
Crow, Emma	Joseph, James O. C.	Rosenthal, Gert	Waldheine, Ralf
Cox, Robert	Kaufmann, John	Ruggie, John Gerard	Weiss, Thomas G.
Dagel, Francis	Klein, Lawrence R.	Sachs, Ignacy	Wignaraja, Paras
Davis, Leslie	Lewis, Stephen	Sacki, Hella	Zaremski, Octavio, Michael
Dwyer, Michael W.	de Marco, Guido	Selinger, Klaus S.	



UNITED NATIONS INTELLECTUAL HISTORY PROJECT The Complete Oral History Transcripts From UN Voices

This CD-ROM contains the complete transcripts of 79 individuals that were excerpted in *Thomas G. Weiss, Nelson Gonsky, Lucia Ernst, and Richard Jolly, UN Voices: The Struggle for Development and Social Justice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005). Readers will find the human and moving life stories of an extraordinary group of individuals who contributed to the economic and social record of the UN's life and activities. These individuals from around the globe have spent much of their professional lives engaged in United Nations affairs. Among those interviewed are such noted figures as Kofi Annan, Margaret Anute, Soubine Brault-Chab, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Neelven Hayzer, Conny Cruise O'Brien, Javier Pérez de Cuellar, Anurupa Sen, and Kurt Waldheim as well as many less well-known UN professional men and women who have made significant contributions to the international struggle for a better world. Their professional accounts bring to life the UN's contributions in dealing with such events as decolonization, the rise and fall of the Berlin Wall, and September 11, 2001, and such issues as human rights, the environment, poverty, and gender.

Produced by The United Nations Intellectual History Project
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The Graduate Center, The City University of New York
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Get when viewed on a PC using Internet Explorer 8 - with a monitor that supports 800x600 screen resolution.

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UNITED NATIONS INTELLECTUAL HISTORY PROJECT



The Complete Oral History Transcripts
From UN Voices

UNITED NATIONS INTELLECTUAL HISTORY PROJECT
The Complete Oral History Transcripts From UN Voices



UNITED NATIONS INTELLECTUAL HISTORY PROJECT

Ideas and concepts are a main driving force in human progress, and they are arguably the most important contribution of the United Nations. Yet, there has been little historical study of the origins and evolution of the history of economic and social ideas cultivated within the world organization and of their impact on wider thinking and international action. The United Nations Intellectual History Project is filling this knowledge gap by tracing the origin and analyzing the evolution of key ideas and concepts about international economic and social development from or nurtured under UN auspices.

The UNISP began operations in mid-1990 when the secretariat, the hub of a worldwide network of specialists on the UN, was established at the Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies of The CUNY Graduate Center. The UNISP has two main components, a series of books on specific topics, and oral histories. Ten of seventeen commissioned books have been published and all 79 oral histories completed.

This "future-oriented" history project was designed to review the ideas and concepts that have emerged over the first sixty years of United Nations debates, reports, and actions in the economic and social arenas. The broad ranging and objective UN intellectual history should not only provide an antidote to contemporary and abstract triumphalism (the end of "the end of history") but also act as a guide for navigating the shoals of future challenges and crises to the international system.

Photograph on back cover:
U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower and UK Prime Minister Winston Churchill in August 14, 1941 aboard the British battleship HMS Prince of Wales signing the Atlantic Charter, which provided the ideas for the United Nations Organization.
UN Photo Library



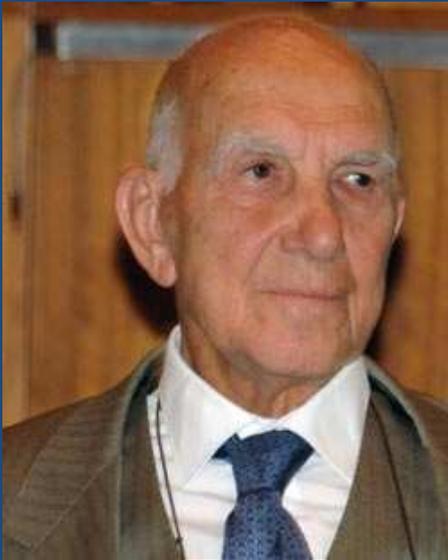
UNITED NATIONS INTELLECTUAL HISTORY PROJECT The Complete Oral History Transcripts From UN Voices

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Stéphane Hessel



“People who are not capable of having their words followed by deeds, should they therefore shut up? ... If it had not been for people like Socrates or Hegel, we would not have the kind of view of the possible future of humanity that we do have. Therefore, it is good to have the Universal Declaration. It is good to have even a strategy for the Third Development Decade... And one should, perhaps, not underestimate the fact that they do carry forward hopes and potential.”

Noeleen Heyzer



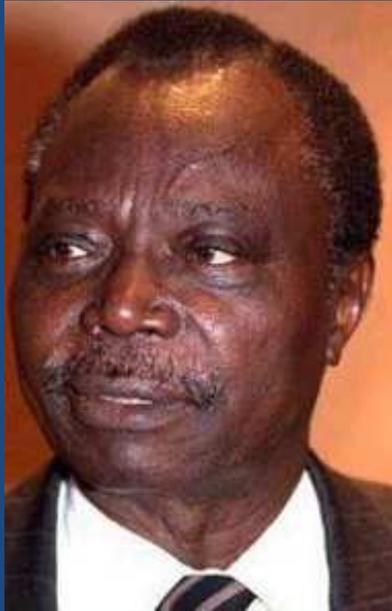
“With these international norms, women pressured for the revisions of national norms and policies based on international standards. We worked so hard to ensure that decision making in the courts and in the criminal justice system also changed because of new legal standards and norms. So ideas became action which changed people’s lives.”

Nafis Sadik



“The Vatican then organized meetings with Muslim groups in Rome—several of them...They carried out a huge demarche around the world against the conference...And there were some threats that the UN received against me...They had a guard assigned to me around the clock. These guards checked the bathrooms before I could use them.”

Adebayo Adedeji



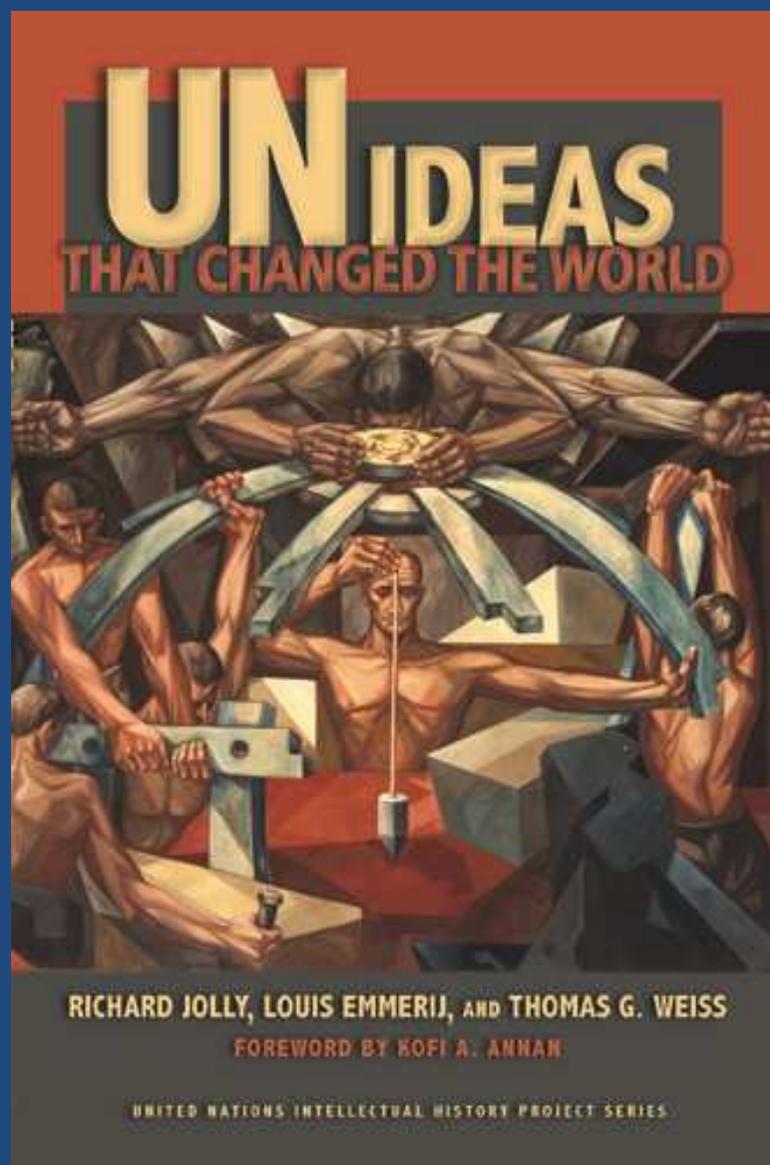
“There is no doubt that once you establish an institution... they are like cemeteries. You can't remove the graves... even when experience has proven that the particular idea needs to be drastically reformulated, if not forgotten, the institution remains...”

Lourdes Arizpe



“Someone once said that the United Nations is a dream managed by bureaucrats. I would correct that by saying that it has become a bureaucracy managed by dreamers. Certainly you have to be a dreamer to work in the United Nations with conviction. It is only if you have this sense of mission that you can withstand the constant battering by governments who are afraid that the United Nations will become a world government...

So in the end, someone who works in the United Nations has to be a magician of ideas, because working for the United Nations is like working for a government in which all the political parties are in power at the same time.”



www.UNHistory.org