

# UN REFORM: 1997–2003

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## Summary

1. The war in Iraq has changed the language of UN reformers. Before this year, it was quietly accepted that where consensus existed, reform would be enacted and where political will was lacking, it would founder. The war may have provided the necessary impetus for change so far, only the rhetoric has been transformed. Substantive plans for reform are yet to emerge.

### 2. Pre-Iraq: The quiet revolution

#### *2.1 Consensus*

2. Consensus was mainly on reform of internal processes aimed at efficiency, coordination and inclusion.

3. Where there was consensus, action was successfully undertaken to implement reforms.

#### *2.2 Disagreement*

4. Disagreement over reform was inevitably rife where member states believed it would dilute their individual influence. This applied mainly to structural change and to the Security Council, ECOSOC and financial reform in particular.

5. Where there was disagreement, reform stalled for over a decade.

### 3. Post Iraq: Clamouring for Change

6. The war in Iraq has replaced widespread support for Annan's 'quiet revolution' with loud cries from within and without, for fundamental structural reform of the Security Council, General Assembly, ECOSOC and even the Trusteeship Council. At the opening of the General Assembly in September, heads of state and government including Jacques Chirac, Gerhard Schröder and Jack Straw on behalf of Tony Blair, reiterated their support for 'radical reform'. Bush's speech did not address the issue and the new 'creative ideas' for reform that Annan had requested, failed to appear.

7. Annan insists that collective action must be proved to be a viable alternative to unilateral pre-emption and has appointed a high-level panel to consider 'Global Security Threats and Reform of the International System'. They will report to the General Assembly this time next year with their recommendations.

### Key Documents

1997: Renewing the United Nations: A programme for reform.

2000: 'We the Peoples' – The role of the UN in the 21st Century.

2002: Strengthening the UN: An Agenda for Further Change.

2003: Speech of the Secretary-General to the 58th General Assembly.

# Main Report

## 1. Introduction

1. Analysis of UN reform can be usefully split into two sections: Pre and post war in Iraq. A radical change in approach has occurred and is manifest in Kofi Annan's presentation of the reform issue. What was previously a 'quiet revolution' aimed at streamlining processes and greater coordination has become a quest for structural reform and a wholesale reconsideration of the UN's role.

## 2. Pre-Iraq – The quiet revolution: 1997–2002

2. Annan's quiet revolution was characterised by two opposing themes: Firstly, consensus and action and secondly, disagreement and inertia. Consensus and action were found in three overlapping spheres: efficiency, coordination and inclusion. They extended from management of the secretariat to peacekeeping practices. Disagreement and inertia occurred where tension was perceived between individual-country interests and effective collective action. Reform stalled primarily in the Security Council, ECOSOC and over financial reform.

3. Reform has been officially split into two 'tracks' since 1997. 'Track one' involved immediate reform of the secretariat and the streamlining of procedures. It was under Annan's direct control and made a considerable impact (see paragraphs 5, 7 & 8). 'Track two' was published in 'Renewing the United Nations: an Agenda for Reform' (1997). It was concerned with long-term goals and was subject to the ratification of the General Assembly, which it got. Track two included the recommended creation of a Deputy Secretary-General and cabinet-style government, in which Annan succeeded. It also included reform of the General Assembly and the introduction of results-based budgeting, with which the organisation is still struggling.

### *2.1 Consensus and Action*

#### **2.11 Efficiency:**

4. General Assembly reform was based on decreasing and focussing the workload of the GA, to generate more effective participation by smaller nations in particular. It is still ongoing<sup>1</sup>. Action undertaken so far includes adoption of sunset provisions, multi-year financial frameworks<sup>2</sup> and the election of a new president three months prior to the beginning of his/her term to enable better preparation. 'Sterile debate', rehearsing entrenched national positions, is the key remaining difficulty.

5. Secretariat efficiency has been improved by decreasing administrative staff numbers, increasing training and encouraging greater staff mobility.<sup>3</sup> In 1998, the Economist reported that the resulting cut in the administrative portion of the UN budget, from 38% to 25%, could release an extra \$200m for frontline economic development.

#### **2.12 Coordination:**

6. Cabinet-style leadership was a key proposal of Annan's 'Track 2' reforms in 1997. He has delivered, holding weekly Senior Management Group meetings of heads of departments, funds and

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<sup>1</sup> UN 2002, UN 2003(e)

<sup>2</sup> Both measures endorsed in DfID 1998.

<sup>3</sup> UN 2003(d)

programmes to ensure ‘coherence and common purpose at the top’<sup>4</sup>. Five cross-departmental Executive Committees have been instituted to oversee the main areas of policy.<sup>5</sup>

7. Country-level coordination in LDCs has been improved by the ‘UN House’ initiative. Over fifty of these now exist, bringing together under one roof the diverse programmes and agencies operating under the auspices of the UN in a given country. A further thirty ‘Virtual UN Houses’ have been set up to share Internet connectivity.<sup>6</sup> Common programming by agencies at a country level has begun using the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and Common Country Assessments (CCA) as well as PRSPs.

8. Specialised agencies have better coordinated their policy formulation, decision-making and operations through the UN Development Group (UNDG). Members include UNDP, UNICEF, WFP and UNFPA. Problems stemming from funding arrangements still remain (see paragraph 22).

9. Integration of UN and Bretton Woods planning frameworks has enhanced this partnership. Fourteen pilot countries participated in intense joint monitoring of the linkages in 2000 – summaries of lessons learnt are being disseminated.<sup>7</sup>

10. Peacekeeping has been better coordinated (and more efficient) following the Brahimi Report of August 2000.<sup>8</sup> This advocated and secured greater funds and support for all missions, and delegated greater authority to field level for flexibility. Brahimi oversaw application of the new approach in Afghanistan, East Timor and Sierra Leone.

11. Humanitarian work and donor coordination has been partially improved by implementing the Strategic Framework and Principled Common Programming (PCP) at country level. ‘Friends of groups facilitate greater engagement between major donors and agencies.’<sup>9</sup> Major problems still exist in coordinating the work of agencies themselves (see paragraph 22).

## **2.13 Inclusion:**

12. Civil Society is now engaged more widely by the UN and its influence is taken seriously. In June this year, the ‘Secretary-General’s Panel of Eminent Persons on Civil Society and UN Relationships’ met for the first time. The council will deliver its recommendations in April 2004. More than 2300 NGOs now have consultative status with ECOSOC. Earlier this month, the UN held its annual Department of Public Information/NGO conference – a record two thousand representatives attended, forty percent of who were from LDCs.<sup>10</sup>

13. Business has been targeted by Annan through his Global Compact initiative. It was operationally launched in July 2000 and challenges companies to openly support nine principles in the areas of human rights, labour and the environment – over three hundred businesses are now involved.<sup>11</sup> Earlier this month, a new website, ‘The UN and Business’ was launched to promote relations between the UN and private sector and to disseminate best practice.<sup>12</sup>

14. Non-members of the Security Council have also benefited from a culture of greater openness and transparency. Following the deliberations of the Open-Ended Working Group

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<sup>4</sup> UN 2002

<sup>5</sup> These are Peace and Security, Economic and Social Affairs, Humanitarian Affairs, Development Cooperation and Human Rights.

<sup>6</sup> UN 2003(a)

<sup>7</sup> Bezanson and Sagasti et al. 2002.

<sup>8</sup> UN 2002, UN 2003(a)

<sup>9</sup> Reindorp and Schmidt 2002, Macrae and Harmer 2003.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Recent Additions 9/9/03’, [UN website](#).

<sup>11</sup> ‘UN Global Compact’ website 9/03.

<sup>12</sup> Easy access via [UN website](#).

considering Security Council reform, non-member countries have received more briefings and been included in more ‘open meetings’.<sup>13</sup>

## 2.2 Disagreement and Inertia

### 2.21 Security Council reform:

15. Instituting change requires unanimity of the Security Council and a two thirds majority of the 191 UN members.

16. The UN agenda has officially included Security Council reform since 1993, when the ‘Open-Ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation and Increase in the Security Council and Other Matters related to the Security Council’ was established. It has succeeded in delivering more transparent working practices (see paragraph 14) but structural reform has been unsuccessful. Member states agree that to retain its legitimacy, the Security Council must be enlarged to between twenty and twenty-four members but there is deep division regarding its future composition. In this context it is interesting that this time, Annan’s recently appointed high-level panel has been tasked primarily with considering policy and not structural issues (see paragraph 26).

17. Britain supports a Council of 24, including permanent membership for Germany and Japan as well as new permanent and non-permanent seats for the developing world<sup>14</sup>. Obstacles to adoption include South Korea’s opposition to Japan’s membership and disproportionate representation of the EU.

18. The EU, in the form of Javier Solana, its high representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, supports a single EU seat with permanent membership.

19. *The 1997 Razali plan aimed to break the deadlock over reform<sup>15</sup> – it foundered over its suggestion to limit the veto power of the five original members. The veto and reluctance of permanent members to dilute their powers will also be the key stumbling block for reform this time round.*

### 2.22 ECOSOC reform:

20. This is equally contentious but the need for reform is similarly acknowledged. ECOSOC is seen as unfocussed, too large and unwieldy for real decision-making and as suffering overlap with GA affairs. Reforms so far have scratched the surface, streamlining ECOSOC’s processes and making its work thematic. Its structure remains unchanged<sup>16</sup>.

21. The creation of an Economic Security Council has consistently been floated by academics<sup>17</sup>. It would be a high-level council of roughly twenty members meeting twice a year. The ESC would be a discursive forum, not aimed at challenging national sovereignty in economic and social policy. At ODI’s public meetings on global governance in Autumn 1998, Deputy SG Louise Fréchette stated that ECOSOC had played a significant role in the debate on important issues such as the environment and human rights. She cautioned against abstract institutional reform as a panacea before building on ‘whatever has been shown to work’.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> UN 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Foreign Office Website 2003

<sup>15</sup> Presented to the UN by the ‘Open-Ended Working Group’ in March 1997

<sup>16</sup> UN 2002

<sup>17</sup> Stewart and Daws 2001, Stiglitz 2003, DfID 2003

<sup>18</sup> Speech by the Deputy Secretary-General, Louise Fréchette

## 2.23 Financial Reform:

22. Core UN funding to its agencies has declined rapidly in the past decade. Between 1996 and 1999 alone UNDP's core funding dropped by 20%, reflecting a UN wide trend. Non-core funding by bilateral donors has increased dramatically so total resources have not suffered. The change is still significant. Agencies have been forced to pursue a 'chase-the-money' strategy which is damaging in three ways: Firstly, wasteful overlap and duplication occur as multiple agencies attempt to claim jurisdiction for the politically favoured cause of the moment. Competition between agencies discourages coordination of their activities.<sup>19</sup> Secondly, core competencies are lost. Dwindling core funding is used for administration of donors' non-core activities, crowding out 'traditional' operations. Finally, the UN's legitimacy as a multilateral organisation is challenged as its operations are skewed by the concerns of bilateral donors. It is unrepresentative of the priorities of all its 191 members.

23. Country-level coordination is similarly under-funded. It is an expensive and vital core activity but is politically unattractive to bilateral donors seeking to promote a domestic agenda. Currently a small 'UN Country Coordination Fund' provides the only targeted resources – its largest donor is the government of the Netherlands.

24. *A critical mass of predictable, core funding is the solution to both problems and is central to the effective functioning of UN agencies and programmes. The resources exist in non-core donations but are stuck. Tension between the particular interests of individual donors and effective collective action prevents the diversion of these funds to core purposes.*

## 3. Post Iraq – Clamouring for Change: 2003

### 3.1 Calls for change from within and without:

#### UN

25. Annan always insisted pre-Iraq that 'reform is a process and not an event'. Before the opening of the GA in September, he cast aside his 'quiet revolution' with a loud endorsement of 'radical reform'. The SG stated that 'we need to take a hard look at our institutions themselves, including especially the principal organs of the United Nations – the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and maybe even the Trusteeship Council'.<sup>20</sup> He stressed that the UN must prove collective action to be a viable alternative to unilateral pre-emption and requested the presence of heads of state and their 'creative ideas for reform' at the opening of GA debate. Attendees included Chirac and Schröder who reinforced the SG's call for change, as well as Bush, who did not address the reform issue.

26. At the opening of the GA, Annan announced his intention to form a 'High-Level Panel to Study Global Security Threats and Reform of the International System'. On November 4, the membership of this body was confirmed: the Panel will be chaired by Anand Panyarachun, former Prime Minister of Thailand and includes Gro Harlem Brundtland of Norway amongst its sixteen members. Its terms of reference are 'to recommend clear and practical measures for ensuring effective collective action, based upon a rigorous analysis of future threats to peace and security, an appraisal of the contribution collective action can make, and a thorough assessment of existing approaches, instruments and mechanisms, including the principal organs of the United Nations.'

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<sup>19</sup> Bezanson et al. 2002.

<sup>20</sup> UN 2003(b)

Annan has stressed that economic and social issues and institutions should be included in the analysis where they have a direct bearing on future threats to peace and security.

## UK

27. The UK Foreign Office made its preliminary proposals for substantive reform in May this year. Suggestions include the Security Council reform detailed in paragraph 17, the content of which remains unchanged from proposals made in 2000. The insistent language in which they are couched is very different.<sup>21</sup>

28. In September, the FCO published a command paper, 'The United Kingdom in the United Nations'. This first annual report contained a section on the UK vision of UN reform. It largely echoes Annan's agenda, focusing on GA reform, the inclusion of civil society, coordination of ECOSOC activities and of course, Security Council reform.

29. A debate on reform of the United Nations was held in the House of Commons on November 11. Foreign Office minister Bill Rammell re-iterated the UK's commitment to the UN as an 'important, relevant and necessary' institution and to the reform agenda laid out in the Command Paper. He emphasised the importance of Security Council debate on guidelines for intervention and on the threat of proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction.

## US

30. US backing for a reformed UN was reiterated by George Bush at the Azores Summit in March. More recently, Richard Williamson, US special representative to the UN, outlined 'structural reforms' aimed at strengthening the UN<sup>22</sup>. These include 'finding ways to lessen the influence that domestic commercial and political considerations play on decisions made by members of the Security Council' and 'examining how the UN secretary general and the Security Council can work together more effectively on implementing actions by the council'.

31. On October 31 this year, Kim R. Holmes, Assistant Secretary for International Organization Affairs, made a speech outlining the US role in the UN. Once again, a US commitment to multilateralism and to the UN was stressed. He singled out 'bloated bureaucracy' and the General Assembly as key areas for reform. The importance of the US to the UN in both financial and military terms was also highlighted, a point that was echoed last month by Annan who declared, 'I believe profoundly that the US and UN need one another.'

## International

32. There are several international initiatives which will be central to raising the profile of UN reform:

33. The Helsinki Group<sup>23</sup> is a high-level forum of eighteen members, co-chaired by the foreign ministers of Finland and Tanzania, Mr. Erkki Tuomioja and Mr. Jakaya Kikwete. It was created to consider new solutions to the 'dilemmas of global governance' and will report its findings at the next Helsinki Group Conference in autumn 2005. Launched in October this year, the group will consider UN Reform in its 'Track 1 – New Approaches to Global Problem Solving'. Clare Short MP is the convenor for the group and has stressed that the UN must retain a central role in global affairs. In its first meeting, the Track 1 group agreed that current discussions on UN reform are 'insufficient'. They stressed that national governments must play a leading role in the reform process as it is they

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<sup>21</sup> BBC News 4/9/00 – Joint Lib Dem/Lab report published in run-up to Millennium Summit.

Guardian 11/6/03 – Jack Straw announce plans for 'radical reform'.

<sup>22</sup> Williamson 2003

<sup>23</sup> [Helsinki Process website](#)

who 'turn ideas into reality' through funding and legislation. The other two tracks are: 'Track 2 – Global Economic Agenda' and 'Track 3 – Human Security'.

34. The State of the World Forum<sup>24</sup> was founded by Jim Garrison (President) in 1995 with the purpose of 'working with partners worldwide to gather together the creative genius on the planet in a search for solutions to critical global challenges'. The Commission on Globalization grew out of the State of the World Forum in 2000 and annually brings together over two hundred world leaders from 'diverse constituencies' to discuss globalization issues. The two organisations held a joint-conference in June this year entitled 'National Sovereignty and Universal Challenges: Choices for the world after Iraq'.<sup>25</sup> The conference agreed that the UN system must be reformed to make it less bureaucratic and more meritocratic, responsive and transparent. It was unanimous about the need for greater global representation but split on the question of whether reform of existing institutions or the creation of new ones was the answer. The suggestion of an 'e-parliament' to draw together elected representatives received strong support.

35. The International Ethical, Political and Scientific Collegium<sup>26</sup> was formed by Michel Rocard in 2002 and counts former heads of state and government Mary Robinson of Ireland and Milan Kucan of Slovenia amongst its members. It is an independent advisory body to governments and international institutions which aims to 'observe and alert on the main risks threatening humanity'. The group met with UN officials and experts in early November and stressed that 'new and novel threats to world peace and security make it imperative to reinforce the role, authority and credibility of the United Nations'. The group's contribution of an ethical angle to the debate on cooperation is seen as important by Shashi Tharoor, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information.

36. The World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization<sup>27</sup> was established by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in February 2002 and is co-chaired by Ms Tarja Halonen, President of Finland and Mr Benjamin Mkapa, President of Tanzania. It is an independent body, set up to consider the different aspects of globalization and its implications for economic and social progress. It will produce its final report late this year. The Commission is currently studying seven policy areas including 'International governance for inclusive globalization'.<sup>28</sup> This policy group has stressed the 'urgent need to give social concerns and policies equal weight with economic factors at an international level' and the need for a better integrated multilateral system to cope with such an ambitious agenda.

### *3.2 Prospects for reform*

37. Overall, the war in Iraq has encouraged talk of reform as renewal and not as a euphemism for the UN's demise. 'In a way, Iraq has more or less driven home to leaders around the world that the UN is a precious instrument, the UN is important' says Annan.<sup>29</sup> Tony Blair insists that 'if the UN did not exist we would be forced to invent it.'

38. The GA debate in September was only useful insofar as it reinforced this general support and the momentum for change. It did not produce the creative ideas for reform that Annan requested. Whether this enthusiastic rhetoric becomes action or not will depend largely on the political environment when the High-Level Panel to study Global Threats, deliver their recommendations next year<sup>30</sup>. For member states to enact real reform, considerable domestic and

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<sup>24</sup> [State of the World Forum website](#)

<sup>25</sup> [Commission on Globalization, conference 2003](#)

<sup>26</sup> [Press release on the work of the International Collegium](#)

<sup>27</sup> [World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization website](#)

<sup>28</sup> [Policy Topics website](#)

<sup>29</sup> UN 2003(c)

<sup>30</sup> [Details and Terms of Reference of the Panel](#)

international pressure on world leaders will be necessary. The US presidential elections will be held in November 2004. Bush's domestic prospects next summer may well influence both his eagerness to tackle reforms, and their ultimate success.

**Important Upcoming Dates**

<b>Late 2003:</b>	<b>Presentation of the programme budget for 2004-05 – will include reorganization of several departments.</b>
<b>April 2004:</b>	<b>High Level Panel on Civil Society presents recommendations.</b>
<b>September 2004:</b>	<b>High Level Panel to Study Global Threats presents recommendations</b>

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