



The G20 at the Leader's Level

## The L20 and UN Reform

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### ***Michael Barnett, Mock Communiqué on United Nations Reform from a Hypothetical Leaders-level G-20 Meeting L20 Project Meeting Briefing Note***

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The leaders of the G20 countries have convened to consider the reform of the United Nations at a moment when its future has rarely been more uncertain. Few truly believe the UN's survival is at stake. However, the urgent undertones that accompanied UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's presentation on March 21, 2005 betrayed an uncomfortable fact: reform is not a luxury, it is a necessity. The bold agenda contained in his report, *In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All*, makes clear that the UN requires sweeping changes if it is to remain relevant and legitimate. What is required is reconstructive, not cosmetic, surgery.

In recent months there has been extensive discussion of the proposals generated by *In Larger Freedom* and various other reports, including those by the Secretary-General's High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change, the Brahimi Report on UN Peace Operations, and the Millennium Project's *Investing in Development*. So far, there is good news and bad news. The good news is that member states are taking seriously the reform challenge. They understand that only they can deliver the structural changes that the UN requires. The bad news is that there is the ever-present danger that the same forces that have blocked past reform exercises will re-appear and doom the current effort.

The L20 has the opportunity to make a difference and help ensure that history does not repeat itself. The challenge for the L20, though, is to determine where and how it can make that difference. The various commissions and reports have identified dozens of areas of concern and delivered scores of excellent proposals. However, if the L20 is to make a difference it must carefully decide which of the dozens of candidates it will "sponsor." In short, the L20 must think strategically. In the end, it identified fourteen core reforms that can be organized into five baskets – international security, human rights, international development, UN structure, and human resources. We selected these reform proposals after answering two basic questions. First, what are the critical areas of need? Although the Secretary-General has forcefully argued that member states should consider the proposals as a part of a tightly integrated package and avoid the temptation to pick and choose, we opted to concentrate on those proposals that will immediately impact the effectiveness and legitimacy of the UN. Second, where can the L20 make a difference? Some proposals are at the take-off stage, some are taxiing, and some are grounded. We determined to focus on those reforms that have a reasonable chance of being accepted at the September summit.

### **Basket One: International Security**

A central goal of the United Nations is to advance international peace and security. Yet the security challenges that currently confront the UN are substantially different from those that it faced sixty years ago. Traditional security threats now pale in comparison to nontraditional security threats. The UN needs to retool to meet these security threats.

*International Terrorism.* The L20 believes that the UN can play a more important role in the campaign against terrorism. It supports the Secretary-General's recently unveiled strategy for containing and defeating terrorism. Most important, though, following Kofi Annan's recommendation (para. 91), the L20:

- urges the General Assembly to adopt a definition of terrorism as part of a comprehensive convention on terrorism.

*Peace Operations.* Interstate conflict has decreased in relative frequency and domestic conflict has increased, and many forecasts predict that there will be more failed states, collapsed states, and weak states over the next ten to twenty years, generating dire predictions for the future. The L20 strongly recommends that the United Nations increase its peacekeeping capacity and develop a peacebuilding capacity. The Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (A/55/305-S/2000/809, annex) began the process of improving the UN's capacity for peacekeeping, and the Secretary-General's report (paras. 111-113) identifies several areas for immediate attention. In order to ensure that the UN's capacities can meet demand and be effective in the field, the L20:

- advises the immediate and effective creation of stand-by capacity that can be deployed rapidly;
- advocates the creation of a more connected peacekeeping system, one that links UN and regional organizations.

Although the L20 recognizes that most peacekeepers ably and honorably perform their duties, those peacekeepers that abuse their power and transgress the law must be punished. Those peacekeepers that become the tormentors of the innocent that they were sent to protect not only violate their professional and ethical duties, they also do incredible damage to the UN's reputation. Annan's "zero tolerance" policy is a good start. However, the real power of punishment resides with national capitals. Consequently, the L20:

- recommends that a panel be convened to examine how to censure member states that refuse to investigate and punish the crimes committed by their troops, and consider delisting them as possible troop contributors until they have done so.

Approximately half of all countries that emerge from a civil war re-erupt into violence within five years; and, many forecasts predict that there will be more failed states, collapsed states, and weak states over the next ten to twenty years. Therefore, it is absolutely critical the international community help states navigate that tortuous transition from civil war to civil society. Presently, once peacekeeping ends there descends a motley assortment of international and regional organizations, states, nongovernmental organizations, and commercial firms that have differing priorities and understandings of how to best engineer post-conflict peacebuilding. This situation harms the chance of success. Moreover, many implementing agencies have little understanding of how their activities either help or hurt the post-conflict process – in part because there is scant knowledge about how to build states and societies after war. There is desperate need to improve the international community's institutional and intellectual capacity for peacebuilding. As recommended by Kofi Annan (paras. 114-119), the L20:

- supports the immediate establishment of a peacebuilding commission and a peacebuilding support office;
- advises consideration of a peacebuilding trust fund.

The Peacebuilding Commission would serve several important functions, including: providing information to the Security Council on post-conflict development and institution-building; helping ensure smooth flow of finances to critical areas of need; establishing and reviewing progress; and enhancing coordination between UN agencies. The peacebuilding commission should comprise of members of the Security Council, UN agencies, international financial institutions, troop-contributing countries, and relevant regional organizations. It also must include representatives from the conflict in order to ensure their full participation in the peacebuilding process.

The Peacebuilding Support Office would be an advisory body of around twenty staff whose functions would center on the creation, organization, and dissemination of knowledge on peacebuilding operations. It would help the peacebuilding commission carry out its work. It would advise during the planning process. It would consult widely with experts to ensure that the most up-to-date knowledge is available for understanding the ins-and-outs of peacebuilding. It would have a small research unit that would be capable of answering questions of timely importance. It would be able to provide specific advice and general knowledge to those in the field.

### **Basket Two: Human Rights**

The UN's human rights machinery must be reformed and strengthened. Toward that end, the L20 recommends that member states develop those features of the UN that help create, legitimate, and diffuse international human rights norms and laws. To begin, the UN must do more in the face of genocide and crimes against humanity. The L20:

- requests that the General Assembly pass a resolution affirming the international community's responsibility to protect populations when states fail to perform this primary duty.

The UN also must re-examine its current architecture for human rights. The Commission on Human Rights has become the sorry symbol of the UN's commitment to human rights. It is time that member states disband this institution that has brought discredit to the UN and mocked the meaning of human rights. Although the L20 agrees with the Secretary-General that there should be a Human Rights Council, we believe that the exact design needs further study. Consequently, the L20:

- recommends that there be a special panel comprised of member states and international experts to study the design and structure of a Human Rights Council.

### **Basket Three: Development**

The L20 strongly supports the UN's re-engagement with core development issues, most prominently signaled by the Millennium Development Goals. The challenge is to better identify how concerted, practical, and effective action can be accomplished, that is, how to coordinate international, transnational, and national activities in order to accomplish these goals. The L20:

- recommends the establishment of a regular meeting, attended by member states, international organizations and financial institutions, nongovernmental organizations, and experts, to consider how to maintain momentum toward the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

#### **Basket Four: The Structure of the UN**

The L20 agrees with the Secretary-General that there are obsolete organs that should be eliminated, highly ineffective organs that need to be reimagined, and new organs that need to be created. In addition to the creation of a Peacebuilding Commission and a Human Rights Council, member states must give serious thought to the functions and purpose of ECOSOC. Toward that end, we

- recommend the establishment of an independent panel of experts to consider ECOSOC's basic mandate, organization, and design.

There must be reform of the Security Council. At present, most discussions regarding reform focus on expansion. The L20 does not have a position on whether or how the Council should be expanded. It does believe, however, that there are ways to improve its effectiveness, accountability, and transparency –and thus its legitimacy - that do not depend on expansion. Therefore, the L20 reminds member states that reform and expansion are not synonymous, that it is possible to create a more effective and legitimate council without expansion, and that expansion without other changes will not necessarily improve the council's effectiveness or legitimacy.

The L20 implores member states not to allow the debate on Security Council reform to hold hostage the other reform proposals. Such linkage politics will weigh down the reform process, and have no basis in merit. The L20 pledges to try and decouple discussions of Security Council reform from other initiatives.

#### **Basket Five: Human Resources**

Reforming the structure of the United Nations is unlikely to significantly improve the organization's effectiveness if the existing personnel, human resources, and management system remains the same. There is little transparency in the organization. There is woefully little accountability. Equally disturbing is that the current staffing system discourages effective, rational decision-making; it inculcates a tendency to begin discussions with a consideration of "what the traffic will bear"; it works against debate, the consideration of alternatives strategies and goals, and the very idea of strategic planning. The L20 strongly recommends that:

- the UN's human resource and management system be reformed so that it recruits and promotes the best and the brightest; develops an organizational culture that encourages debate, dissent, and creative thinking; and holds individuals accountable when they make mistakes and rewards them when they succeed;
- member states approve the Secretary-General's proposal (para. 190) of a one-time staff buyout;
- there be a consideration of a Freedom of Information Act to improve the transparency and accountability of the organization;
- the Office of Internal Oversight Services be reviewed as a necessary step toward strengthening its independence and authority.

Member states allowed the UN system to sink into its current state of disrepair. Only they can repair the damage and create a very different future. We strongly support the current international focus on UN reform and the desire to create a more effective and legitimate world body that can meet the challenges of the future. The L20 intends to seize the opportunity to make a critical difference at this crucial moment in the UN's history.