

# **TRANSFORMING THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM: DESIGNS FOR A WORKABLE WORLD**

**Presentation at St. Joan of Arc Church, Minneapolis, January 16, 2014**

**Thanks:** To Gail, other Board members of GS.orgMN, MAP, St. Joan of Arc Church, audience.

**Joint reading of “An Affirmation of Human Oneness.”**

## **Global Peace Requires Global Justice**

Look at the posters around the room indicating various aspects of global justice, which I’ve called **“global justice from A to Z.”**

These are all achievable goals.

The promotion of these goals is what inspired the creation of MAP [the Minnesota Alliance of Peacemakers].

It is also what inspired me in writing the book that we’ll be discussing this evening.

Regrettably, much of the work in the peace and justice movement is devoted to pointing out what is wrong with the present global system, rather than to advancing ideas for rectifying those shortcomings. My book is distinctive in its emphasis on advancing **workable ideas** for putting things right. Not everything, of course, but the decision-making framework within the United Nations system.

## **Title of the Book:**

**Transforming.** I’m not talking about reforms that will tweak the system here and there, but about a comprehensive overhaul of the entire system.

**United Nations System.** By system I refer not just to the core agencies (GA, SC. etc.) that we read about from time to time in the newspapers, but also the affiliated agencies and the links between the UN and civil society and corporations and, potentially, with ordinary citizens as well

**Why?** Because **global problems require global solutions**; the idea that sovereign nations acting on their own can solve such problems as nuclear proliferation, climate change, resource depletion, and the obscene North-South economic gap is no longer tenable.

**Designs:** A basic premise is that the design of any decision-making body has an important bearing on the quality and legitimacy of the decisions it makes. Inclusiveness of all interested parties – stakeholders as well as shareholders – must play a role.

**A Workable World:** My aim is not to create a utopia, but to work towards a world in which basic problems can be solved through the force of law rather than through the law of force; a world in which human rights norms are generally honored, a world in which women and men can look forward with realistic hope for a better life for themselves and their children.

### **This Presentation**

Although my book is very comprehensive, I will focus this evening on just a few problems, mainly in respect to **decision-making** and, if time permits, to the problem of **security**. I will speak until about 8 p.m. and then stop for questions. But you should feel free to ask about any aspect of our system of global governance whether I've touched upon it or not.

### **The Problem of the “Sovereign Equality of Nations”**

The current “**one nation – one vote**” voting system, dating from the Treaty of Westphalia at the end of the Thirty Years War in 1648,

This flies in the face of reality. Consider population, Nauru, the UN's least populous member, with 9,300 people, has the same vote in virtually all UN organs as China, with 1.35 billion, whose population is 145,000 times greater. If one considers size of the economy, the ratio between the US and Tuvalu is roughly 560,000 to one. But Tuvalu's vote is equal to that of the US.

In fact, there are so many insignificant nations in the UN, that the 128 smallest, which collectively account for roughly 8% of the world's total population can muster the two-thirds majority needed to pass a resolution in the **General Assembly**, while the 65 smallest nations, accounting for only 1% of the world total can prevent a resolution supported by the remaining 99%. Is it any wonder, then, that GA resolutions are not binding. They command little respect and are ignored with impunity.

Things are not much better in the anachronistic Security Council, in which five nations that happened to be on the winning side in World War II, enjoy permanent membership and the privilege of the veto, (which are denied to such powers as India, Japan, Germany and Brazil); and in which an often motley assortment of ten additional nations, often undemocratic, serve overlapping two-year terms. The unfairness of this dispensation is

almost universally condemned, but while scores of reform proposals have been put forward, none has found sufficient favor to be adopted.

Bottom line? Most important decisions are made outside the UN, by the self-appointed G-8 or G-20 powers, by organizations of the global North, such as NATO, by conventional power-political diplomacy, or unilaterally by the US, when our government deems it politically expedient to do so. And of course, many tough problems, such as climate change or the civil war in Syria, are either seriously neglected or even totally ignored. There has to be a better way.

### **The Need for Weighted Voting**

If UN decisions on matters of global importance are to command respect and be regarded as legitimate, they call for appropriately **weighted voting**. They must be made according to rules that are widely regarded as fair and by a system in which the allocation of power bears some resemblance to the distribution of power in the real world, outside the UN itself. Population has to matter; and if economic powers -- those who will have to pay most of the costs that decisions will entail -- are to get in the game, economic power must matter as well. That does not mean that one has to completely ignore sovereignty; but it does mean making sovereignty but one factor in the allocation of decision-making power. With these thoughts in mind, I have devised a number of **simple weighted-voting formulae**, the terms of which are related to the functions of specific UN agencies.

### **General Assembly:**

Let us first consider the General Assembly. The formula I recommend is as follows:  **$W = P + C + M / 3$** , in which a nation's voting weight is the average of three terms: P, the nation's population as a percentage of the world's total population; C, the nation's assessed contribution to the UN budget as a percentage of the total budget; and M the nation's membership (as a sovereign entity) as a percentage of the total membership, which, in the present UN with 193 members would come to 0.52% per nation.

For the United States, the weight would come to 9.9% of the world total. China would rank second at 9.6%, though it would pass the US in the not-too-distant future. India would rank third at 6.7%, Japan next at 3.5%, Germany at 2.5%, France, Brazil and the UK at roughly 2.0% each, and so forth. At the bottom end of the hierarchy would be a number so microstates, such as Nauru and Tuvalu, with weight of 0.17% each. The ratio of the US's weight to that of these microstates would be 57 to one.

If adopted today, the proposed system would increase the combined voting weight of nations ranked by Freedom House as “free” from 44% to 55%. The weight of nations with relatively advanced economies (those in the OECD) would be increased from 17% to 36%. In all, 31 member nations would have their weights increased from their present uniform 0.52%. But these states account for 78% of the world’s population and 86% of the world’s total GNI. Their combined voting weight would rise from 16% to 60% of the total.

But why, one might ask, would the 162 nations whose collective weight would go down from 84% to 40% of the total vote to adopt a system that would substantially reduce their power? Good question. The answer would have to entail an enhancement of the power of the General Assembly, changing it from an impotent, little respected talk shop to a legislature empowered to make **binding decisions** in matters of truly global importance. Initially, the range of such matters would be narrow, limited, let us say, to issues posing existential threats, such as nuclear proliferation or climate change, and gradually expanding in the light of need and experience. The argument would then be that 40% of something, a UN that could deliver tangible and gradually increasing benefits, is a great deal better than **86% of** what is, in effect, nothing. Moreover, if the major powers came to the realization that the proposed changes were indeed necessary, the lesser powers would, I believe, see it in their interest to go along.

### **A World Parliamentary Assembly**

I spoke a moment ago of the General Assembly’s becoming a **global legislature**. But legislatures typically represent **people** as well as states, and often even to the exclusion of states. The UN, however, despite the initial words of the Charter, “We the peoples,” is an organization of nation states, with virtually no recognition of people, either as individuals or collectivities. Its **democratic deficit** is profound.

Happily, in many parts of the world a movement is growing -- though only barely as yet in the United States -- in support of a UN or World Parliamentary Assembly. Worldwide, more than 1,100 parliamentarians, including more than 800 incumbents, as well as numerous other eminent individuals, are on record as supporting the establishment of such a body. This past October I had the pleasure of attending a conference on a UN Parliamentary Assembly hosted by the European Parliament in Brussels at which participants from 27 countries set out a road map to bring this project to fruition. If established the Assembly would become analogous to the US

House of Representatives, while the General Assembly would be the analogue of the US Senate.

The idea would be to begin with a body in which parliamentarians would be elected by the legislatures of the member states and in which decisions would be strictly of an advisory nature, rather than binding. Over time, however, as was the case in Europe, the powers of the Assembly would be gradually increased and the members of the Assembly would be chosen by direct popular elections.

Obviously, the process would be slow and complicated, but it is eminently doable. In a monograph published in 2012 by the Berlin-based Committee for a Democratic U.N., *Creating a World Parliamentary Assembly: An Evolutionary Journey*, I spell out a three-stage process by which a truly democratic body could be established. As in the European Parliament, weighted voting would be necessary and I have devised several formulae to deal with this issue with a gradual shift towards the one person – one vote ideal. The details are presented in one chapter of my new book.

Interestingly, in contrast to many structural changes that I recommend, creating a UN Parliamentary Assembly would not require Charter reform in that Article 22 reads as follows: “The General Assembly may establish such subsidiary organs as it deems necessary for the performance of its functions.” Legal opinion indicates that a UNPA could be regarded as a GA subsidiary organ.

### **The Security Council**

Let me turn now to the Security Council, the only entity within the UN proper that exercises theoretically binding powers, the one that is most frequently in the news, and the one that has, by far, generated the greatest number of reform proposals.

Despite some successes, the record of the Security Council has been remarkably spotty. It failed utterly to prevent genocide in Rwanda, it has proved virtually impotent in the present civil war in Syria, it has not stopped nuclear proliferation or brought about disarmament, and it has done virtually nothing to enforce human rights treaties that are a part of international law.

Moreover, the Council is remarkably undemocratic. The only times when its membership has accounted for more than half the world’s population were in eight of the twelve years when India held a seat. And in 1965, when Taiwan still held the permanent seat reserved for China, the Security Council membership represented a mere 17% of the world’s people. In that year, the six non-permanent members, of which the Netherlands was the most populous, accounted for only one percent of humanity. Anomalies

abound. Panama, for example, despite having only a fortieth the population of Mexico, has served for ten years, as opposed to Mexico's nine. For four years, Africa was supposedly represented by the tiny island nation of Mauritius, most of whose population is ethnically Indian. But "represented" is not really the right word in that the ambassador from Mauritius, like those from all other non-permanent members, votes in the interests of his own country rather than in the interests of the region he theoretically represents. Finally, 72 nations have never served at all.

But, once on the Council, the votes of every member nation are equal. Thus, the vote of Malta (which, with roughly half the population of Minneapolis, is the least populous nation ever to have held a Security Council seat) has the same weight as that of any other SC member, except in respect to the veto, which only the P-5 (including Taiwan until 1972) can employ.

There have been literally scores of proposals for increasing the size of the Security Council, by anywhere from one to ten additional seats, thereby making it somewhat more representative; but every such proposal has run into strong opposition from the "wannabe" nations who would not make the cut, or because nations from the global North opposed new members from the global South, or vice versa. To the best of my knowledge, my own proposal is the only one to advocate a smaller Council and yet to become **universally representative**.

The key is **weighted regional membership**. I recommend a Council with only **twelve seats**. Based on a formula similar to that explained for the General Assembly, three of these would go to single nations: the United States, China and India and the remaining nine to multi-national regions: Africa South of the Sahara, the Arab League, East Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Russia and certain European neighbors, Southeast Asia, West Asia, and what I've called the Westminster League, consisting of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the twelve small island states of the Pacific Islands Forum.

As with the General Assembly, a formula for allocating regional voting weights is needed. I have proposed the following:  
**W = P + C + 8.33% / 3**. Here the terms P and C, total regional population and total contributions to the UN budget are analogous to the same terms for individual countries in the GA formula. The third term, 8.33% (or one twelfth) is a constant signifying a **new legal fiction**, the equal worth of each regional perspective. This is analogous to the legal fiction of the sovereignty equality of nations established by the Treaty of Westphalia. The effect of this term is to reduce the spread in voting power between the top and bottom

of the power hierarchy, which would range from 15.9% for Europe to 4.5% for the Westminster League, a ratio of roughly 3.5:1. The United States, with a weight of 12.5%, would rank second. No region would have the power of the veto. In the United States the near doubling of voting power, from the present 6.7% (one-fifteenth of the total) to 12.5%, might be accepted as a reasonable **political trade-off** for surrendering the veto.

The proposed scheme would require substantial diplomatic adjustments. Choosing delegates for the nine multi-national regions would necessitate **regional caucuses** to put forward a slate of from two to five candidates per region. From each regional slate the General Assembly would select the one it deemed best. Such a competitive procedure would lead to **greater meritocracy** than at present. Each region would also have to have frequent meetings of its foreign policy establishments to establish regional positions on important global issues and devise protocols to guide their respective delegates in Security Council debates. This would, of course, have been logistically impossible as little as ten years ago, but is entirely manageable in the age of the Internet. An advantage of this new mode of interaction would be that the contacts would undoubtedly relate to matters other than those coming to the floor of the Security Council, for example, river basin development, labor standards, migration, cultural and educational exchanges, and other foreseeable aspects of regional integration.

### **Engaging Civil Society**

A seldom noted, but important provision of the United Nations Charter is that it allows certain **civil society organizations**, often designated as international non-governmental organizations (or **INGOs**), to enter into one of three grades of “**consultative status**” with the UN via the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Over the years, the number of NGOs in consultative status has skyrocketed, from a mere 40 in 1948 to 3,348 in 2010. And the latter figure is but a small fraction of the more than 250,000 INGOs that exist worldwide. The advice that these agencies could offer the UN is potentially invaluable; but there is no way at present that the UN can effectively process and evaluate the glut of useful information it receives. The problem has simply not been squarely addressed.

To deal with the issue, I have proposed a system whereby INGOs willing to pay a nominal membership fee and provide regular reports of their activities can be grouped within **five thematic clusters: human rights, environment, development, peace and security, and democratic governance**. Each cluster would have its own “**civil society coordinating council**” to collect, evaluate, and integrate the reports of its member

organizations. But, as with nations, there are enormous disparities in the strength, capability and financial resources of INGOs. It is therefore in order to provide a **weighting system** for use within each coordinating council taking into the consideration each INGO's level of ECOSOC status, its budget, and the number of countries within which it operates. Additionally, coordinating councils would have **regional caucuses**, with weights assigned according to a formula that fairly balances the strength and interests of both **shareholders** (i.e. financial contributors), mainly from the global north, and **stakeholders** (i.e., beneficiaries), mainly from the global south. Based on annual meetings, each council would make its concerns and proposed agenda known to the appropriate UN agencies. The Human Rights Coordinating Council, for example, would report primarily, but not exclusively, to UN Human Rights Council.

### **The Human Rights Council**

Unfortunately, the present Human Rights Council is a highly politicized body. Many of its 47 member nations have sought their seats on that body not because of their genuine concern for promoting human rights, but rather to ward off criticism of their own nation's abysmal human rights record. Regrettably, I lack the time to tell you in detail how the Council might be reformed. But, in a nutshell, members should be selected on a regional basis, not as nations, but rather on the basis of individual merit. Additionally, there should be a reasonable **gender balance** – an issue I deal with in many chapters of my book -- and reserved seats for representatives of **indigenous peoples**.

### **The Problem of Security**

Let me turn now to the question of **security**. At its founding, shortly before the dropping of the first atomic bombs, the United Nations was more concerned with promoting security against conventional war than with any other problem. Weapons of mass destruction -- nuclear, chemical and biological – were not on the intellectual horizon of the founders. Terrorism was not an issue. Nor were possible future genocides or the need for intervention in civil wars such as the ones now raging in Syria, South Sudan and the Central African Republic. Diplomats failed to anticipate the looming Cold War. The Charter provisions for dealing with armed conflict, assigning a major role for a Military Staff Committee consisting of representatives of the P-5, were woefully inadequate and never functioned as intended. Instead, the Security Council has always been **reactive, rather than proactive**, responding to crises as they arose, creating a fire department, in effect, over



and over again after each new major conflagration. Typically, the UN response has been **too little and too late**. I will not now deal with all of the problems just noted, but will touch briefly on several agencies where I feel that my book makes a needed original contribution: a **United Nations Peace Corps, a UN Administrative Reserve Corps, and a UN Administrative Academy**.

### **A United Nations Peace Corps**

To deal with crises such as the Rwanda genocide or the civil strife in Syria before violence gets completely out of hand, the United Nations needs nothing less than a **standing, elite, internationally recruited Peace Corps** (UNPC) under the command of a military staff working not for some member nation, but rather for the UN itself. This recommendation is based on the conviction that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Rapid response saves both lives and money.

The UNPC would be deployed in a police or military mode only with the **authorization of the Security Council**. At full strength, a force of not less than 500,000 men and women is envisaged. Units would be based at strategic locations in stable nations in **three regional commands**, one for the Americas, functioning with Spanish as the key language; one for Europe and Africa, utilizing both English and French; and one for Asia and the Pacific, functioning mainly in English. UNPC troops would be highly trained to perform both police and, when needed, military roles. They would also have the types of individual specialties, such as engineering, sanitation, intelligence, and so forth, that one finds in any modern army. Basic language training would also be provided when needed.

The force would be built up over a period of years – very likely more than a decade – during which needed operational manuals would be created and appropriate training facilities established. At the outset, logistical support equipment, especially for transport, would have to be leased, as needed, from willing nations. In time, however, the UNPC would become fully self-sufficient.

### **A United Nations Administrative Reserve Corps**

Time and again, after the withdrawal of UN forces from a strife-torn region, violence resurfaced between the opposing forces that led to UN intervention in the first place. Lebanon, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo are cases in point. The reason is simple. Armed forces are not equipped to restore enduring civic order, which is a prerequisite for effective diplomacy. To lay a viable foundation for diplomacy something

more than armed force is needed. The job, I suggest, can be carried out by the strategic placement of specialists from a **UN Administrative Reserve Corps** (or **UNARC**).

UNARC would be staffed by highly intelligent, culturally sensitive and motivated men and women who have graduated from an elite **UN Administrative Academy**. The Academy would offer a rigorous four-year curriculum in general administration, supplemented by concentrations in such specializations as finance, community organization, policing, public health, and so forth. Recruits to the Academy would come mainly from the civil services of nations in the global South and would have language skills in such *linguas francas* as Arabic, Swahili, Bahasa Indonesia, and the like. On graduation they would return to their previous occupation, but become a part of UNARC and be available for duty, where and when needed for a period of not less than fifteen years. They would assume their duty posts once the situation was made sufficiently safe by the UN Peace Corps and would typically remain in place after the withdrawal of UN troops. In brief, their mission would be to restore or create a **stable, politically neutral administration** in concert with regular, high-level UN personnel. Once that mission was complete, they would return to their previous positions with no loss of seniority or of other benefits in accordance with **memoranda of understanding** between the UN and their respective governments.

### **Summing Up**

What I have just proposed will strike many of you as hopelessly ambitious. I certainly agree that it will be difficult. You will undoubtedly conjure up a bunch of reasons why my proposals won't work. But, believe me when I claim that I've probably heard all the objections you can think of and have sought to address them in my book, even if I could not do so adequately in this brief presentation. Among the objections most frequently mentioned is one of cost. In fact, assuming the will to do what is necessary, my book indicates a host of ways by which to raise the needed revenue. If, for example, the UN could assess each member nation 0.1% of its GNI, that alone would raise roughly \$70 billion, almost three times the total current expenditure of the entire UN system, exclusive of the operations of the Bretton Woods institutions.

While I do recognize the difficulties ahead, they are preferable to paying the price of inaction. And I hardly expect that all of what I propose will be tackled at once. Some may never be addressed at all. Further, I make no claims that my own proposals are necessarily the best that can be devised. They are merely the best that I can presently envisage. But presenting

credible plans will, hopefully, free us from despair and give us something to work for.

In closing, I cannot but be heartened by the **overwhelmingly positive endorsements** my book has received from many eminent individuals, such as former UN Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali; former Under-Secretary-General, Sir Brian Urquhart; and former US Ambassador to the UN and Undersecretary of State, Thomas Pickering; as well as numerous leading international relations scholars. Let me quote a portion of but one endorsement, that of Alfred de Zayas, a United Nations Independent Expert on the Promotion of a Democratic and Equitable international Order:

*[This] manuscript by Joseph Schwartzberg is replete with common sense approaches and pragmatic solutions. Anyone who reads him understands how obstacles can be overcome – one by one. United Nations reform is inescapable – not utopian. Indeed, world peace requires reform of global institutions and strengthening the rule of law nationally and internationally.*

Thank you for your attention.