

## **WE NEED THE UN AS MUCH AS IT NEEDS US**

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The United Nations (UN) was created in 1945 to promote peace, justice, human rights and social progress worldwide. Ever since, two of the main problems it has been facing are: first, its politicization and abuse by states as an instrument of national policies; and second, financial problems caused by member states -- especially the big, wealthy and powerful ones -- which are not willing to pay their fees or help finance UN actions and programs.

The first problem arises almost naturally from the fact that as an organization of sovereign states competing over power, influence and resources, the UN has been entangled in disputes and confrontations which are inherent in the world system and international politics. The politicization of the UN has, in fact, become a major feature of the modern state-centric international political system. As a public forum for the practice of "international parliamentary democracy" in the General Assembly and conflict resolution in the Security Council, the world organization has increasingly and understandably (though not justifiably) turned into a tool of national policies. It could be argued that in most cases, states look at it, and make it work, as a confrontational political arena or a center of competitive and oblique diplomacy, if not open propaganda. Occasionally, it is also used as a means for the mobilization of world public opinion or as an arena for diplomatic maneuvering. Quite often, it is also used as an instrument for exercising political pressure or gaining collective legitimization for certain national actions. Politicization is in the nature, logic and dynamics -- if not the fate and destiny -- of any intergovernmental organization. However, member states should realize that the political credibility and functionality of any intergovernmental organization depends totally on the support of countries. In the case of the UN and its mission, there is no other source of credibility than the political will and support of the governments of member

states. Quite often, however, there is a shortage of political support that is not helpful for promoting UN objectives.

The second problem the UN is facing has to do with financial difficulties. This is also a long standing issue. In the past, the organization was making headlines as being at the verge of economic collapse. The problem is mainly the result of lacking will on the part of the member states to pay their dues in time or make voluntary contributions to finance peacekeeping operations and other activities. Some of the actions of the UN, like peacekeeping operations enacted by the Security Council, are quite costly. Currently there are 15 peacekeeping operations with almost 120,000 uniformed and civilian personnel worldwide with an annual cost of about \$7.8 billion. Overdue contributions for peacekeeping alone are over \$2 billion. Obviously, the UN, like any other organization, cannot achieve much if it does not have the resources to implement policies and carry out operations that cost money. Again, the UN can only rely on the good will and the national budgets of member states. Obviously, if there is no "financial will" on the part of member states, there can be no ways and no means for the UN to carry out its activities including peacekeeping operations.

While the UN is striving to overcome its difficulties, the international community and individual states are expecting its involvement in addressing international issues and resolving conflicts. At the same time, the prevailing general feeling is that the world cannot afford further weakening of the UN. After all, it is the only universal governmental forum where nations can get together to talk. Exchanging arguments and words in Manhattan is better than exchanging fire elsewhere in the world. In a shrinking world of escalating complexity, increasing interdependence and narrowing options, a global organization with adequate political credibility and sound economic foundations is a necessity. Let us not forget that the UN was born -- like a phoenix -- amidst the flames and ashes of World War II with the primary goal of maintaining peace and saving "succeeding generations from the

scourge of war.” This objective has not been achieved, but it is worth continuing the effort and keeping the hope alive.

Although many UN efforts in conflict resolution and peace maintenance have failed, blaming the UN (or only the UN) is an oversimplification. After all, the UN is nothing else than a microcosm and a reflection of the real world which has many problems and few solutions, or no solutions at all in some cases. As an institutional arrangement through which countries interact, the UN can be efficient only if all parties involved have the will and commitment to overcome difficulties and find solutions. This is the real issue. After all, we need the UN as much as it needs us.