
THE COLOUR LINE IS THE POWER LINE IS THE POVERTY LINE

RACE IN GLOBAL AFFAIRS

PERSPECTIVES

Pok Yin Stephenson Chow,
Jayati Ghosh, Dan Plesch,
Ahmed Shaheed,
Victoria Tauli-Corpuz,
Sarra Tekola, Ramesh Thakur

ESSAY

MANAGING DIVERSITY

Rita Izsák-Ndiaye

FEATURE

THE SOUTH AT THE UN

Natalie Samarasinghe
and Thomas G. Weiss

INTERVIEW

FIGHTING RACISM

E. Tendayi Achiume

LAST WORD

LET US RISE

Kofi Annan

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Cover image: Quote taken from the song "Colour Line" by Asian Dub Foundation featuring lyrics written and spoken by Ambalavaner Sivanandan, who directed the UK-based Institute for Race Relations from 1973 to 2013.

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// Beach near Cape Town, 1982. This literal “colour line” marked the boundary between the white and non-white areas of the beach © UN Photo



THE COLOUR LINE

NATALIE SAMARASINGHE // UNA-UK EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This issue of UNA-UK’s magazine considers race in international affairs. Ten years ago, the content might have focused more narrowly on racism, seeking to shine a spotlight on longstanding ills, such as the systematic oppression of Kurds, Palestinians and Sri Lankan Tamils, or the global rise in intolerance fuelled in part by the financial crisis. And we would have been right to do so.

The past decade has seen a worrying resurgence of racist ideologies. Earlier this year, the UN Special Rapporteur

on racism, E. Tendayi Achiume (interviewed on pages 20–21), warned that “globally, racial equality is under attack”. Secretary-General António Guterres has urged member states to protect human rights, saying: “We are increasingly seeing the perverse phenomenon of populism and extremism feeding off each other in a frenzy of growing racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim hatred and other forms of intolerance.”

Fear of the other increasingly dominates the political discourse in countries

from Austria to Australia, India to Israel, South Africa to Sweden, as ultra-nationalist parties have encouraged leaders from across the political spectrum to adopt insular and exclusionary policies. In Brazil, Italy and the Philippines leaders have openly praised fascism. Some of the biggest refugee hosts – such as Tanzania and Turkey – have conducted expulsions and are planning more. Neo-Nazi groups have perpetrated violence in countries including Argentina, Estonia, Greece and Russia. In the US, they accounted for more than half of all extremist killings in 2017. The World Jewish Congress estimates that over 100 social media posts per day deny the Holocaust.

At the extreme end of the scale, we have seen atrocities – against Muslims in Myanmar, Christians in Iraq and Anglophones in Cameroon, among others – and slave auctions for black migrants seeking refuge in Libya.

Clearly, we need to focus on fighting racism. But doing so requires an approach that goes deeper than the policies of yesterday, which too often pitted notions of equality against diversity and multiculturalism against integration. It means

addressing the wider structural and historical causes, as well as the impacts, of racism.

Few have captured the essence of this challenge better than Ambalavaner Sivanandan, who fled the 1958 anti-Tamil pogroms of Sri Lanka and became editor of the London-based journal *Race & Class*: “The colour line is the power line is the poverty line.” While political movements have long grappled with these dynamics, modern communications mean they are no longer confined to activist circles in the West, or elites in the global South. Popular culture has become woke.

For the most part, this is a good thing, with movements such as Black Lives Matter and #RhodesMustFall provoking much-needed debate and action. But it has prompted a backlash which racists have been quick to exploit. They brand those speaking out against discrimination as snowflakes who are too easily offended, even though there is much that should offend. At the same time, they rail against injustices committed against white people – particularly white men – by the powers that be, despite the fact that the powerful are still, so often, white and male.

So how should we respond? First, we must call out these narratives, and those who peddle them, for what they are. Racism has always adapted to the discourse of the day, from the pseudo-religious justification of colonial crimes against humanity, to the pseudo-scientific Nazi doctrines of racial superiority. Today, it is the language of privilege and marginalisation that is being co-opted. Second, we must challenge the lies that seek to bolster division, from hugely inflated refugee numbers (0.24% of the UK population) to myths about overzealous multiculturalists recasting Christmas as “Winterval” to politicians branding entire populations as “criminal” or countries as “shitholes”.

Third, we must reclaim the political space. Even when racists remain on the fringes of power they have been able to shape the debate. Along with sections of the press, they have pushed political parties to sacrifice principles for the lure of support, with many now seeking to occupy populist ground rather than challenge it.

Fourth, we must expose simplistic “keep ‘em out” solutions, which lay the blame for social and economic ills at the door of foreigners and give a free pass to the political elites to which so many of these

self-appointed representatives of the people belong. As Rita Izsák-Ndiaye of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination writes on pages 12–13, when “people are busy analyzing their differences ... they will not be able to unite to demand civil, public, political or socio-economic rights and changes, such as equal access to quality education, proper health care or ending corruption, to mention just a few”.

Fifth, we must ensure that racist rhetoric does not derail much-needed global co-operation. At a time when parallels are being drawn between now and the lead-up to the First and Second World Wars, we must learn from the past to avoid a third. This means countering increased attacks against the international community of states – whether they come from those espousing the (oxy)moronic vision of a transnational alliance of nationalists, or those seeking to defend liberal values by appealing to like-minded nations to band together.

Finally, we must seek to understand how race colours our approach to challenges ranging from climate change to disarmament to sustainable development. We cannot hope to unpack these issues in 24 pages, but we offer some perspectives from scholars and activists on pages 8–11.

We also need to take a hard look at the UN as an institution. On pages 14–17, Tom Weiss and I highlight the role of “the global South” in shaping its work – a story told through quotes in this issue’s Ten (pages 18–19).

It is a complicated story. On the one hand, the UN has helped to maintain the “power line”: the structures that underpin racism and other forms of marginalisation. While the organisation has delivered much for the poor, Western states have arguably gained more from the post-1945 system, which favours them in structure and approach.

Appointments, elections and numbers of seats, most notably in the Security Council, still favour the pale. There remains a solidarity deficit. The West has an outsize influence on UN programming and provides a large, albeit modest, amount of funding (collectively, the EU contributes around 30% of the UN’s regular budget – an annual contribution roughly equal to 1.4% of GDP of its poorest member state, Bulgaria). Developing states, meanwhile, shoulder the bulk of

We must expose simplistic “keep ‘em out” solutions

the burden when it comes to sheltering refugees or sending peacekeepers into harm’s way.

But the UN has also been subversive. Its crucial role in the struggle against colonial oppression and apartheid dramatically changed the make-up and focus of the international community. Once radical ideas, from people-centred development to self-determination, are now mainstream. The values we sometimes call Western were shaped by Asians, Africans, Arabs and South Americans, and across the world the marginalised use international human rights laws to advance their cause.

At its best, the UN can level the playing field between the powerful and the oppressed, both between and within states. It has shown time and again that it can transgress and wear down the colour line. Amid all the pressing challenges we face, we must not lose sight of the need to strengthen and transform the UN, so that this line can eventually be erased.

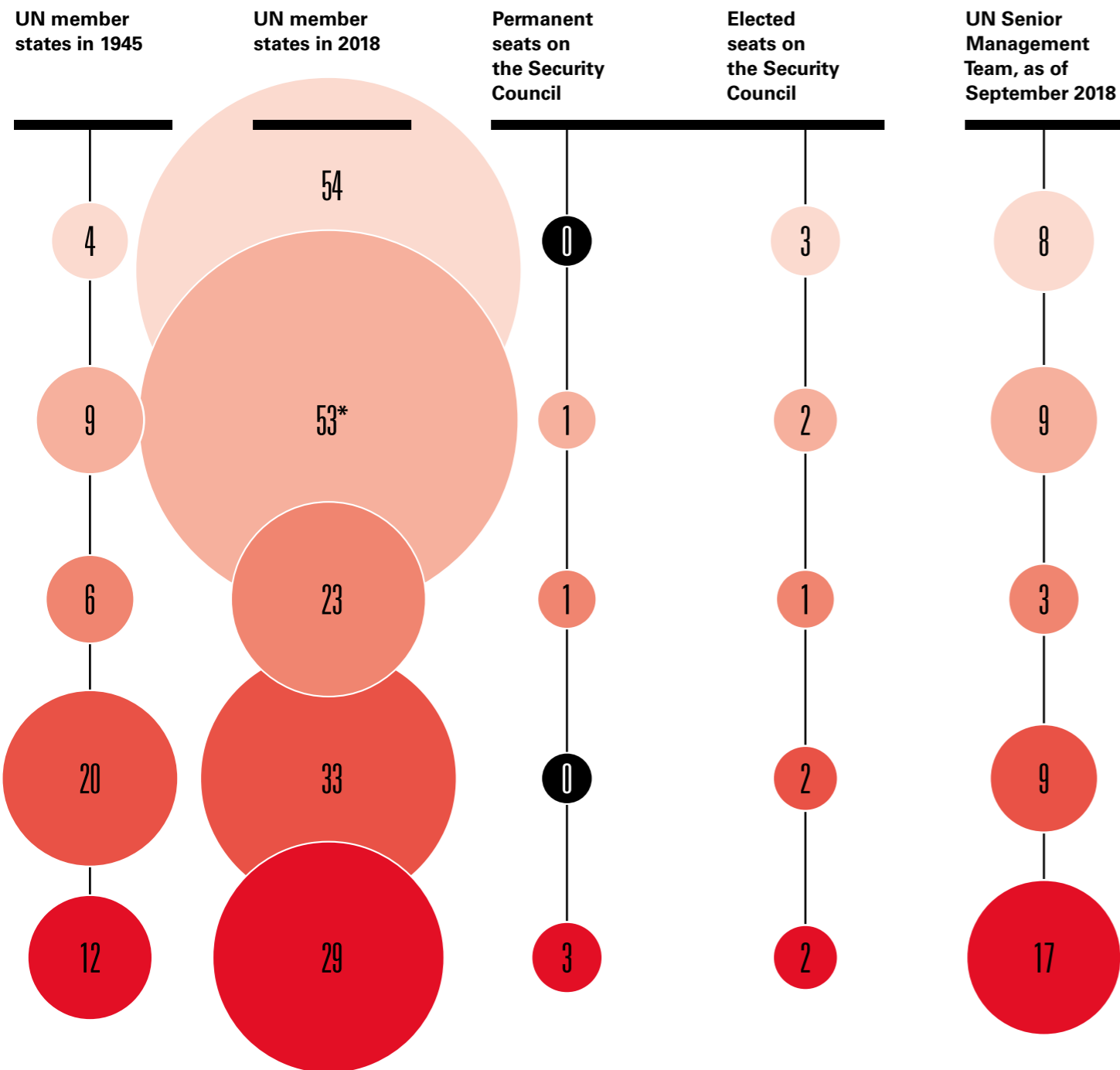
None of this is easy, but those writing in, and featured on, these pages offer hope and ideas on taking forward this agenda. This editorial is dedicated to them, and to one of my internet trolls, who felt the need to tell me: “Brown women never built anything. And they come to our civilization to lecture us. Sad.”

Whatever the level – local, national and international – we must recognise and address the complex interplay of factors that affect how we see and are seen, what we can and cannot do. We must accept that our experiences are different and that equality does not, and should not, mean “the same”. But although we are different, our common humanity in this ever-smaller world means that divided we fall, together we rise. As the late Kofi Annan invites us to on page 22: let us rise. //

WHO HAS THE POWER?

UNA-UK lets facts and figures speak for themselves

THE UN IN NUMBERS

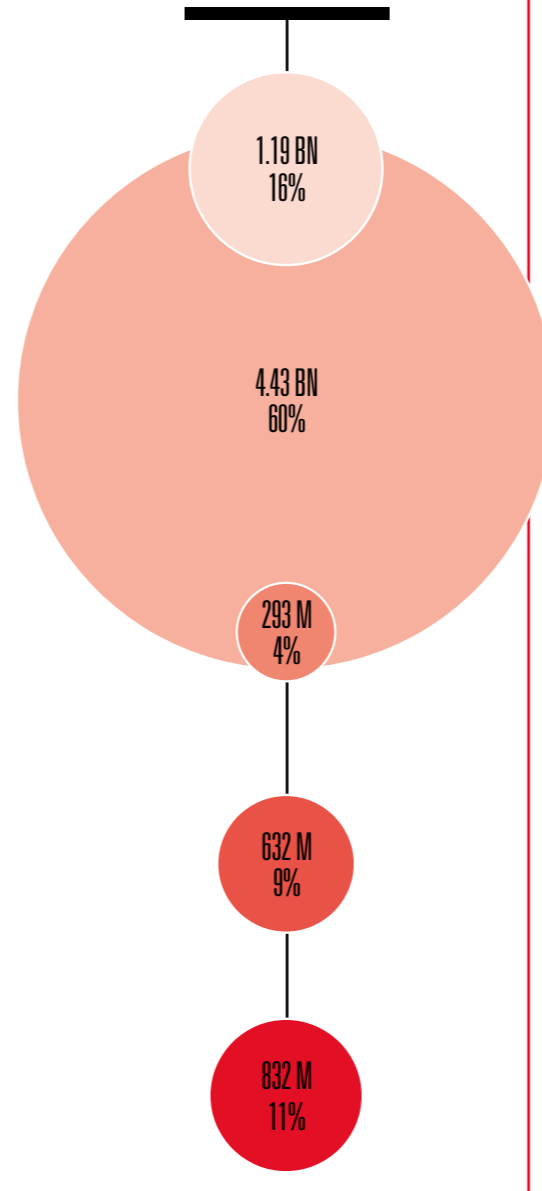


- African Group
- Asia-Pacific Group
- Eastern European Group (EEG)
- Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC)
- Group of Western European and Other States (WEOG)

The regional groups evolved from the electoral slates used in the UN's early years. Today, in addition to elections, the groups are used for discussion, caucusing and developing joint positions.

Population

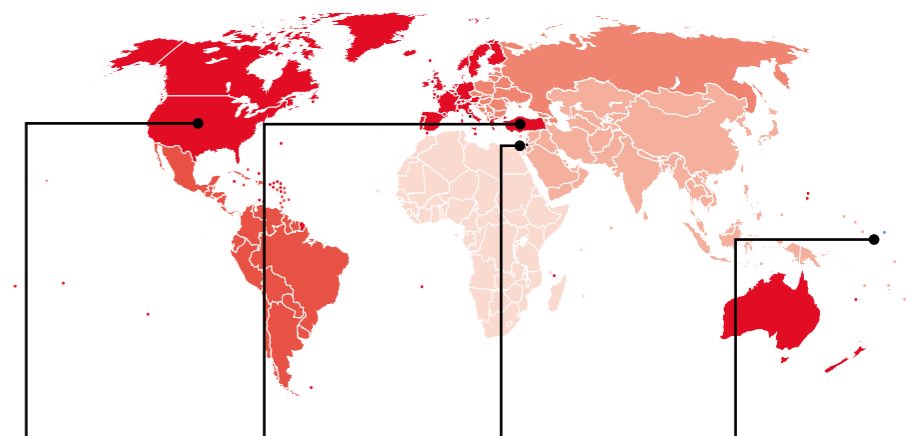
Bubbles in this column scaled 1:0.00000001



The map above shows the groups' membership. Some (e.g. African Group) are geographically cohesive. Others (e.g. WEOG) have more complex political, historical and racial origins.

UN REGIONAL GROUPS

- UN member not in any voting group
- Observer states

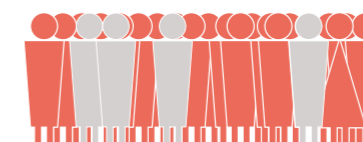


THE USA is not formally a member of any group but attends WEOG meetings and is considered to be a member of that group for electoral purposes

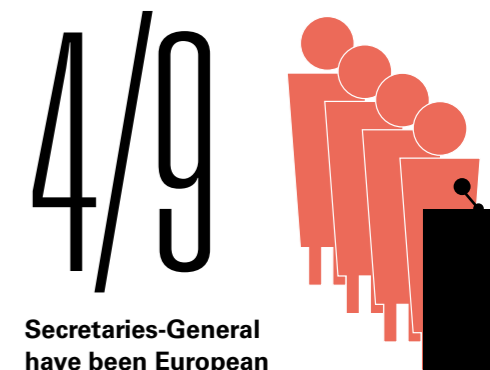
TURKEY participates fully in both the WEOG and Asia-Pacific groups but is considered a member of the former for electoral purposes

ISRAEL formally joined WEOG in 2000 (although it is geographically part of the Asia-Pacific Group, its membership would not have been accepted by some members of that group)

KIRIBATI* is not formally a member of any regional group and is therefore not reflected in the number of UN member states on the opposite page



Nearly 3/4 of all General Assembly presidents have come from WEOG, GRULAC or Asia-Pacific (roughly 24% each)



- | | |
|-------------|------------|
| JAPAN 11 | INDIA 7 |
| BRAZIL 10 | ITALY 7** |
| ARGENTINA 9 | PAKISTAN 7 |
| COLOMBIA 7 | |

Highest number of elections to the Security Council

**including a seat 'share' with the Netherlands in 2017-18

Over half of the 12,800 NGOs accredited to the UN are from Africa, almost twice as many as from Europe



COLOURING OUR APPROACH

JAYATI GHOSH

Professor of Economics at the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University

TACKLING POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

Development can mean many things, but one way of conceiving it is the movement to a world in which the accident of birth does not play such a huge role in determining life chances as it currently does. Location continues to account for around half of international income inequality, and it is no accident that the poorest areas are in the less developed former colonies that became the happy hunting ground of both old and new imperial powers. In addition, domestic differences, such as class, gender, race, caste, ethnicity and other social attributes, also matter hugely in denying people the opportunities or fruits of development.

International institutions are – at least on the face of it – all about development and inequality reduction. But the activities of bodies like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have long been seen across the world as part of the problem, perpetuating neo-colonial division of labour and preventing governments from privileging the human rights of

citizens over the legal rights of companies. Their policy advice is presented in supposedly “technocratic” terms, failing to recognise that decisions affecting distribution (both national and international) are deeply political.

Other parts of the UN system therefore have an important part to play in correcting this imbalance. But sadly, over the past decades, they have been less successful in playing this role, and more likely to get caught up in passing development fads (ranging from microfinance to cash transfers) that are presented as silver bullets for development and poverty reduction. All too often, UN agencies end up supporting strategies being pushed by large global corporations, rather than providing an effective counterbalance to growing corporate power.

Yet the UN and its various agencies still form the most viable framework within which to fight for global justice and human rights. They must be revitalised and energised to fulfil this important task. //

DAN PLESCH

Director of the Centre for International Studies and Diplomacy, SOAS University of London

ERADICATING WEAPONS

Issues of race and neo-colonialism pervade both UN and global efforts at disarmament. The tacit acceptance by major powers of a nuclear-armed apartheid South Africa, followed by a near panic that a nuclear bomb might come under Nelson Mandela’s control, illustrates the case in stark terms.

The same attitudes pervade efforts to reduce conventional weapons. The rhetoric of legitimate and illegitimate weapons counts the Anglo-Americans as legitimate acquirers of unlimited conventional arms, despite wars of aggression, such as that against Iraq. Arabian despots allied to the West are favoured while Iran and North Korea have been demonised, and Israel allowed a free pass.

Good news on disarmament from the developing – read, non-white – world is routinely buried and ignored in Western debates. The nuclear-free zones across Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, South-East and Central Asia and in the Pacific are discounted by self-styled realists buried in

a pre-atomic delusion that nuclear arms can be kept forever without a nuclear war.

At the UN, it is non-aligned states that keep up the pressure on disarmament, by insisting to nuclear states that disarmament is not merely realistic but essential. UN Secretary-General Guterres’ initiative on world disarmament is an opportunity that all supporters of the UN should rally behind and carry forward. It is the first full set of proposals on disarmament ever brought forward by a Secretary-General – in large part the result of calls from outside the nuclear-armed alliances and powers of the global North.

The devastating impacts of conventional war in places such as Syria and Yemen should serve as an urgent call to action that humanity as a whole must grapple with disarmament. North-South dynamics continue to shape debates at the UN, but while important, they cannot and should not be used as an impediment to progress on this vital agenda. //

POK YIN STEPHENSON CHOW

Assistant Professor at the School of Law, City University of Hong Kong

PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS

Intersectionality has become an important part of women’s rights advocacy, as it promises a more nuanced understanding of the multifaceted experiences of women based on multiple identities such as race, gender and class. However, applying this concept to international human rights law has proved challenging.

When we speak of ‘identities’, we are often invoking socially constructed representations of difference. In international law, this has produced a focus on the exclusionary effects and consequences brought about by more than one of these representations whilst ignoring another understanding of identity – i.e. the ways in which we feel, understand and identify ourselves.

As a result, when mechanisms such as the UN human rights treaty bodies, which monitor compliance with instruments like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, address practices such as veiling, they tend to assume that it is a practice imposed because of gender and cultural/religious membership as opposed to a practice that a woman willingly engages in or something that she feels morally compelled to do.

So how should we understand the practice of veiling? Women who veil are often caught at the intersection of prevailing discourses in which gender and religion play only a part. Exclusionary politics founded on nationalist sentiment and anti-Islamism also play a significant role in the battle over what is supposedly the real meaning of veiling. This has an effect on how actors regard themselves: even if not all women who veil agree with the practice on traditional or religious grounds, they may continue to do so to resist the political discourse which demeans them as members of that tradition/religion.

The lesson for our treaty bodies is, therefore, that in examining discursive practices it is important to acknowledge the very nature of such practices as the site where contradictory discourses compete for dominance. To avoid outright endorsing (and thus reinforcing) a particular discourse, intersectional analysis requires a thorough examination of the context in which these discourses are produced and reproduced, and how they affect the actual experience of individuals. //



// A woman takes part in a protest on the treatment of Uighurs in China. In August, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination said it had received credible reports that some two million Uighurs and Muslim minorities were being held in a so-called re-education centre resembling “a massive internment camp” in the Xinjiang region. © Emmanuel Dunand/AFP/Getty Images

AHMED SHAHEED

UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Deputy Director of the Human Rights Centre at the University of Essex and a Maldivian diplomat who served twice as Minister of Foreign Affairs

FIGHTING INTOLERANCE

Responding to rising intolerance based on religion or belief and race requires paying attention both to the overlaps and distinctions between these two forms of hatred.

The UN began to examine racial and religious intolerance jointly in 1960, in response to outbursts of anti-Semitism. However, in 1962 the UN decided to develop separate normative protections for religion and race, with the latter pursuit producing the 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). A treaty on freedom of religion or belief remains pending.

In practice, however, it has proved difficult to compartmentalise these two issues. The UN special procedures mandates on religion and race frequently work together, especially through joint communications to countries. The ICERD Committee's jurisprudence shows that it does not regard religious intolerance as an independent basis for intervention. Nevertheless, the Committee seeks information from countries about the situation of ethno-religious communities.

Racism and religious intolerance frequently overlap. Race can be a fluid, floating marker, and a shared culture or shared religion can engender a racial identity regardless of descent or chosen identities. In the case of anti-Semitism and intolerance towards Sikhs, the overlap is evident. In other cases, as with Christians,

Muslims and many others, religious markers can become core features of ethnic identity.

Despite the frequent crossover, it is important to observe the conceptual distinction between these two phenomena, while advancing human rights protections. Article 4 of ICERD, for example, prohibits the dissemination of ideas of racial superiority. Applying a similar restriction in regard to religion or belief, however, could destroy the essence of freedom of religion or belief and also undermine other human rights.

The way to ensure there is no gap in protections is not to ignore the important distinctions and overlaps between race and religion, but to take a holistic approach to human rights and to ensure that we pay attention to the lived realities of the intended victims of intolerance. We must also focus on the thresholds of risk and the triggers of violence and discrimination.

Accountability for violations and redress for victims are crucial, as is implementing a preventive approach that pursues positive measures to promote societal cohesion. These can be more effective than lowering the threshold at which criminal sanctions are imposed. The Rabat Plan of Action and Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18 – which seek to tackle issues such as negative stereotyping and incitement to violence through measures including education, training and media codes of conduct – provide useful guidance in this regard. //

SARRA TEKOLA

Black Lives Matter activist and scientist who is currently studying for a PhD in sustainability at Arizona State University

PURSuing CLIMATE JUSTICE

Addressing climate change is going to take more than technological advances. We must start at the root, changing the power structures that uphold colonialism. It is often stated that countries in the global South are the least responsible for, yet most affected by, climate change. What is not discussed, however, is why.

The industrialisation of the global North, through the exploitation of resources from the South, is the largest contributor to climate change. Through colonisation, the North stole resources, land and labour and subsequently developed in ways that now insulate its people from many climate impacts.

This unequal exchange of ecological capital continues today through free trade agreements and structural adjustment policies that are forced upon developing countries – an oppressive form of economic neo-colonialism. The UN Development Programme has long been critical of conditionality, particularly the intense pressure exerted by international financial institutions during the 1980s and 1990s to abandon national projects and nationally-driven priorities in favour of unprotected participation in the international market. However, a global system

of supremacy continues to keep the South economically poor and more vulnerable to climate change.

True climate justice must include reparations from the colonisers to the colonised, and the UN's Green Climate Fund offers a vehicle to provide this. Rich countries tend to see their contributions to the Fund as voluntary assistance – a charitable act – rather than what it should be: a mandated responsibility.

Without such a mandate, responsible parties will continue to deny their role in the destabilisation of entire regions. How can action on climate happen when we fail to acknowledge its inextricable ties to race, colonisation and privilege?

As with so many issues, climate change disproportionately affects people of colour, and issues that do so invariably remain unaddressed. If all lives truly mattered, we wouldn't wait to tackle climate change until white people's lives were being threatened. Currently, it seems that global climate negotiations are aimed only at protecting white people's standards of living. A colonial racial hierarchy is still in effect via the actions and policies of all of our modern institutions – a hierarchy that is one of the biggest hindrances to global co-operative climate action. //

VICTORIA TAULI-CORPUZ

UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples and an indigenous rights activist

STRUGGLING FOR INCLUSION

Indigenous people have always had to struggle to be heard at the United Nations. It is never a given that we will have a voice in international institutions, and indeed we have often had to protest on the margins before being granted our rightful seat at the table.

The groundbreaking 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was the product of decades of advocacy from indigenous peoples from around the world. It took years until the UN finally started to draft the declaration in 1982, and formal discussions only began in 1995. At that time, we were told that we were not allowed to speak in the negotiations. We could only observe. But we refused to legitimise yet another decision made about us without our participation or consent, so we walked out, and won the right to participate formally.

The declaration that resulted is still at the heart of indigenous peoples' global advocacy. It recognises our unique rights as peoples who have suffered generations of violence, discrimination, land grabbing and the denial of our right to our customary lands. Since its adoption, it has been the basis for numerous victories in the form of new laws recognising our land ownership,

How can action on climate happen when we fail to acknowledge its inextricable ties to race, colonialism and privilege?

titles granted for indigenous territories, court decisions that uphold our rights and increased participation in international platforms.

Our standing at the UN has come a long way since we walked out of the declaration negotiations. Indigenous voices are heard far more often in New York, Geneva and other international platforms. Indigenous leaders from around the world now participate in every major climate conference. We are part of the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals, and there is growing recognition of our contributions to sustainable development and climate change. I am proud to be the first indigenous woman to be appointed UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples.

Challenges remain, of course. It can be difficult to meet governments and international actors when the reality on the ground so often still involves violence, legal harassment and the failure to recognise our rights – but we have a lot of cause for hope. Much more than in the past, indigenous peoples have a voice in discussions about their rights. I only hope the world will listen. //

RAMESH THAKUR

Former UN Assistant Secretary-General who served as a Commissioner of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty and was one of the key authors of the Commission's 2001 report on the responsibility to protect

PREVENTING MASS ATROCITIES

One of the most important developments in world politics in recent decades has been the spread of the idea that there exists a responsibility to protect (R2P) people threatened by mass-atrocity crimes – vested in individual states at the national level and in the UN Security Council at the global level.

R2P was articulated by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) in 2001 and unanimously endorsed by world leaders at the UN in 2005. For advocates, it is a poster child of liberal internationalism, summoning forth the better angels of human nature to save strangers in distant lands within a rules-based global order. For critics, it is the enabler of choice for powerful countries to appropriate the language of humanitarianism when violating the sovereignty of weak nations.

The notion that R2P is an updated version of the old “white man's burden” can itself be racist. It denies agency to developing countries, insisting they can only be victims. It suggests their citizens should either be left to the mercies of thuggish leaders, or to the ad hoc geopolitical calculations of powerful Western countries, rather than to globally validated norms and due process.

It ignores the origins of R2P, agreed in the aftermath of the 1994 Rwanda genocide, 1995 Srebrenica massacre and 1999 Kosovo intervention, and driven by African and European victims. It also ignores the indigenous traditions in many parts of Asia and Africa that hold rulers owe duties for the safety, welfare and protection of their subjects. For instance, the Hindu concept of *rajdharm* means duty of rulers – a point that was made by then-Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee to the then-state Chief Minister Narendra Modi, of the same political party, in relation to his failure to protect 2,000 Muslims killed in targeted violence in Gujarat in 2002.

R2P is a global norm that, in the allocation of solemn responsibilities of protection, does not discriminate on grounds of nationality, race or religion, but applies equally to all. As such it speaks eloquently to the highest UN ideals of international solidarity. Just as the UN is the symbol and site of the full family of nations, so R2P is an acceptance of the duty of care by all of us fortunate enough to live in zones of safety towards our fellow human beings trapped in zones of extreme danger. //

THE STRUGGLE TO ELIMINATE RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Rita Izsák-Ndiaye

In the face of rising mobility, urbanisation, the increasing need for foreign workers, and the rapid evolution of instant, global communications, one often wonders whether we are making any progress at all in forging peace and friendship across our different identities.

Increasingly, I am surrounded by friends and colleagues whose multiple, multilayered, contextual, dynamic identities are a given. My Hungarian-Senegalese children in Dakar speak four languages with ease and can recite both Catholic and Muslim prayers. However, while intercultural marriages prove that differences can be overcome by love and respect, general public discourse is often rather discouraging.

Fear of the unknown is on the rise. The conflation of race, religion, nationality or status is a common tool in populist propaganda when politicians want to appear as saviours of a falsely claimed homogenous national identity and culture, which has never really existed anywhere in modern history. They know too well that as long as people are busy analysing their differences and are kept separate along ethnic,



national, religious or linguistic lines, they will not be able to unite to demand civil, public, political or socio-economic rights and changes, such as equal access to quality education, proper health care or ending corruption, to mention just a few.

But our challenge in safeguarding pluralism lies not only in countries where political will is lacking because of a manipulative agenda. There are many others that seemingly accept or even cherish diversity, yet fail to put in place even the minimum necessary guarantees to manage it.

Of course, managing diversity is a complex task. It requires political leadership that assesses challenges courageously and regularly, and designs specific legislation, policies and programmes with corresponding budgets to tackle and, eventually, overcome them.

Sadly, at the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, we often come across governments that do not understand our suggestions in this regard. Some even reject them outright.

During our last session this summer, we listened to a head of delegation who

maintained that collecting disaggregated data would endanger racial harmony in his country. We heard arguments that communities suffering caste-based discrimination should not fall within our remit. We learned about the establishment of specialised bodies for minorities that had no representatives of those minorities. We were told that asylum-seekers from one particular country are obviously all economic migrants and therefore can be lawfully returned to their home country in the absence of an appropriate legal and formal procedure. It was a disturbing, but sadly not untypical, session.

Perhaps what disturbs me most, though, is the obvious lack of open and systematic communication channels between decision-makers and vulnerable groups, such as minorities or indigenous peoples, even in the most progressive countries. I often wonder how we can improve our efforts to prevent human rights violations if governments do not build relationships and trust with those at risk of violence and atrocities – precisely the people who should be flagging

early warning signs or reporting crimes. It is alarming that more than 50 years after the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination was adopted, we still have glaring gaps in some of the most fundamental prerequisites for securing racial, ethnic, religious and linguistic harmony.

We must also be alert to the dangers that social media bring. Various studies show that algorithms are built to maximise user engagement and the posts that perform best tap into negative, primal emotions like anger or fear. I have noticed a very disturbing phenomenon on my own social media feeds. Hatemongers seem much more organised, strategic and active – and much louder – than peace lovers, which enables them to dominate the discourse and gives a false impression that they outnumber other voices.

Having met with hundreds (if not thousands) of people in the more than 50 countries I have visited in recent years, I firmly believe that we, the peace lovers, are indeed the critical mass. But we must change our ways of communication. We must learn to be more expressive and outspoken. We must become active anti-racist advocates because, as Holocaust survivor and activist Elie Wiesel, said: “The opposite of love is not hate, it’s indifference.”

This is especially the case at a time of growing scepticism towards multilateralism, and the doubts expressed in various parts of the world as to whether we can all be bound by the same set of universal values. My answer is rooted in our shared history.

There is a multitude of regional and international treaties and agreements that cover a vast range of issues. They were not created in a vacuum but result from the recognition, after terrible human tragedies, that we must better co-operate to secure peace, security, development and human rights. Let us honour this commitment by carefully studying and reinforcing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which will be 70 years old this December and starts by declaring that: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” //

RITA IZSÁK-NDIAYE // Expert Member and Rapporteur of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; previously the Human Rights Council’s Independent Expert on minorities.

// Opposite: Mevlüde Genc, who lost two daughters, two granddaughters and a niece in a neo-Nazi arson attack in Solingen, Germany in 1993, prays during a memorial service. © Marius Becker/AFP/Getty Images



// Kenyan peacekeeper with Croatian family in 1992
© UN Photo/John Isaac

HOW “THE REST” SHAPE THE UN

Natalie Samarasinghe and Thomas G. Weiss

In his first address to the General Assembly, US President Trump used the S word – sacrosanct “sovereignty” – 21 times, drawing loud applause from such human rights champions as Myanmar, Venezuela and Zimbabwe. Commentators rushed to lament the demise of Western liberalism and its 20th-century offshoot: the United Nations. So far, so familiar.

Except that the UN has never been merely a side project of its most powerful member state. Recent research by scholars such as Amitav Acharya, Eric Helleiner, Andy Knight, Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink shows the extent to which Southern agency has been a genuine but essentially under-appreciated source of global norms, and that we need to set aside the traditional – and often convenient – narrative that the UN in particular, and the post-Second World War system more generally, were imposed by the West on “the rest”. The contributions of China and Imperial India in the 1940s, for example, to early efforts to pursue war criminals and to determine the post-war

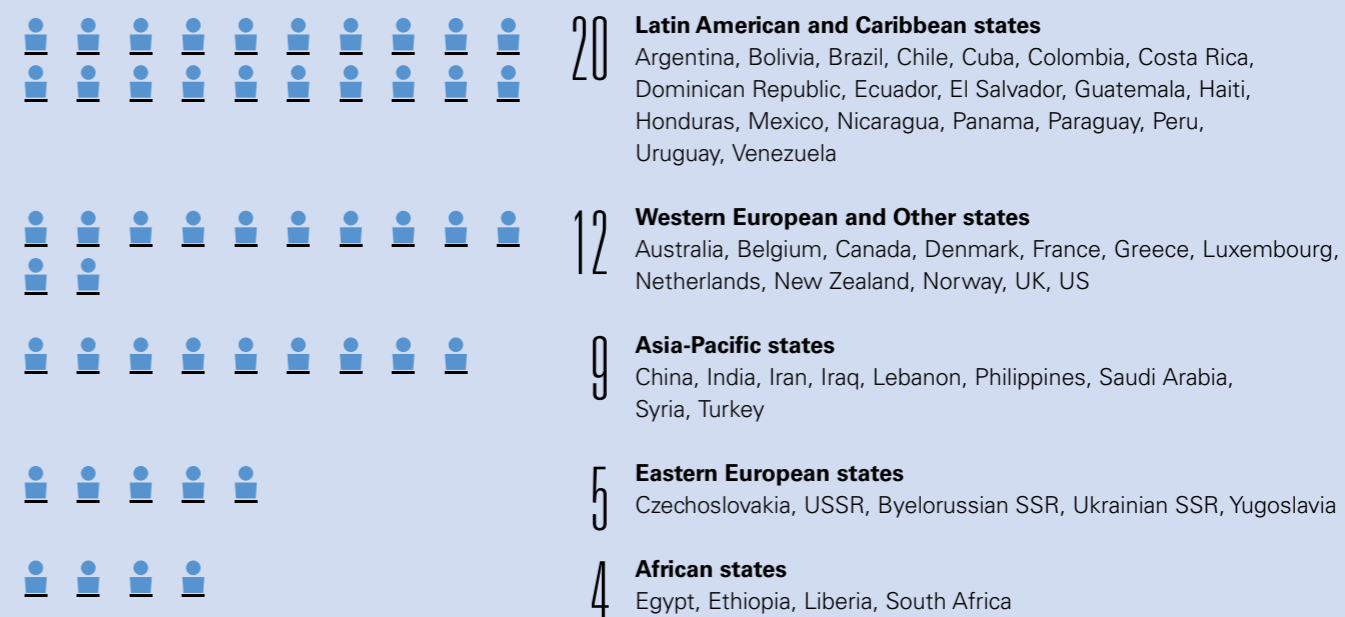
direction of assistance to refugees, and of trade and finance, complicate considerably this facile storyline.

To be sure, deliberations about the future UN occurred before rapid decolonisation. Fifty states participated in the 1945 San Francisco conference whereas today’s UN membership is 193. Of these states, just four were African and nine Asian (see below) although Latin America, independent since the early 19th century, was fully present and active in deliberations.

The shape and values of the UN were not simply dictated by the West – a misconception readily embraced by regimes in the global South that prefer not to be bound by universal human rights or security agreements. Indeed, rapid decolonisation is hard to imagine in the form and with the speed that it took place without the UN.

The more powerful countries, especially the US, had more to say in San Francisco, as during all international negotiations. But less powerful states influenced the agenda and advanced

PARTICIPATION IN THE 1945 SAN FRANCISCO CONFERENCE



States are categorised by UN regional group – see pages 6–7 for more information

their own interests and ideals. The Latin American emphasis on regional arrangements in Chapter VIII of the UN Charter is one result. Chapters XI and XII on non-self-governing territories and trusteeship reflected the widespread views of recently decolonised states and other advocates of self-determination.

Even the structure of the Security Council – with its five permanent members and their veto powers – was the result of a more complex bargain than conventional wisdom holds. Every country had an interest in making sure that the major powers were committed to the new world organisation; their outsized role and veto were a Faustian pact to ensure that the UN would not go the way of the League of Nations.

SHAPING THE UN'S AGENDA

The Southern contribution to the UN's agenda is often framed in terms of resistance to colonialism and superpower intervention. Despite their increasing heterogeneity, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Group of 77 (G77) remain influential and continue to marshal arguments against neo-imperialism in UN debates on issues such as debt and trade.

Sustainable development

Their approach has been readily apparent in the development sphere. By the mid-1960s, decolonisation had nearly tripled the UN's membership. Former colonies emphasised programmes to alleviate poverty and accelerate economic growth – a shift from the UN's early focus on humanitarian relief and development as a means to underpin security. Development was a legitimate pursuit in and of itself. The UN World Food Programme, Conference on Trade and Development, and Industrial Development Organization were created in the 1960s. The 0.7% aid target was adopted by the General Assembly in 1970.

The East Asian Miracle challenged the standard Western formula of free trade, deregulation, privatisation and market liberalisation – as did the formula's casualties in Latin America and Africa during the “lost decade” of the 1980s. But the notion of a more people-centred development – once radical and anything except music to certain Western ears – has, over time, become mainstream. At the UN Development Programme, Pakistan's Mahbub ul Haq paved the way for a rights-based approach to development through the human development report and index, drawing on a partnership with Indian Amartya Sen's work on capabilities.

Southern and indigenous actors were also early advocates of sustainable development. Activists such as Kenya's Wangari Maathai, who founded the Green Belt Movement in 1977, joined the dots between environmental, societal and security concerns. Ten years later, the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights set out rights to development, a satisfactory environment and peace and security – a spread now reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Climate change, meanwhile, demonstrated the extent of division in what is often treated as a cohesive group. Smaller states, particularly islands, were vocal supporters of robust action to address what was, in their view, clearly an existential threat. Larger emitters vehemently resisted any form of binding targets, pointing to the overwhelming historical responsibilities of

Western states for environmental degradation and emissions, and reigniting debates as to the level of assistance the international community should provide to emerging economies.

This standoff enabled reluctant Western states to drag their feet, individually and collectively, which stalled progress for several years. Yet, again, the principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’ is now widely accepted, and in fact is the basis for the Green Climate Fund. The 2015 Paris climate agreement, with its overarching targets, nationally determined commitments and peer review, is symptomatic of a trend in global governance towards more flexible, stakeholder-driven frameworks.

Human rights

Given the continual and contested debates on human rights at the UN – and the glee with which media outlets report that a “notorious human rights abuser” (almost always a developing country) has been elected to a rights-related body – it is a pity that the Southern contribution to international laws and norms is so often overlooked. At the San Francisco conference, South American women – notably Brazil's Bertha Lutz, Uruguay's Isabel P. de Vidal and the Dominican Republic's Minerva Bernardino – successfully lobbied to include language on gender equality in the Charter. During the drafting and adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Lebanon's Charles Malik and the Philippines' Carlos P. Romulo were vocal proponents and defenders of the universality of rights.

Many developing states embraced civil and political rights as part of the struggle against colonialism and racism, and these rights continue to inspire the powerless and drive civil society movements in the South. They also supported economic, social and cultural rights more enthusiastically than some Western states, who were wary of the Soviet Union's co-optation of these rights. And they took the lead in promoting group and collective rights.

Latin American states championed issues such as LGBTQ+ rights and action on enforced disappearance and torture. African states pioneered advances in child rights and natural resources. Human rights within the UN are what Sarah Zaidi and Roger Normand called the “unfinished revolution”; despite violations, they are a revolution nonetheless.

Fuelled by developing states, UN action to end apartheid in South Africa helped to reframe the principle of non-interference in states' domestic affairs. While non-intervention was the basis for the Charter's Article 2 and remains a popular shield for Southern (and Northern) governments, they have also been willing to act on the most contentious of issues – preventing mass atrocities. Sudanese diplomat Francis Deng recast the concept of sovereignty as responsibility, which subsequently was incorporated into the “responsibility to protect” (R2P) norm. Leaders such as Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo argued in favour of intervention, which was incorporated in the African Union's (AU) Constitutive Act. The late Ghanaian Secretary-General Kofi Annan pushed for the adoption of R2P at the 2005 World Summit. African support was critical to the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 1998. While an alleged plan for AU withdrawal received much recent media attention, only Burundi has actually left the ICC, and many AU states have reaffirmed their support for it.

Peace and security

In peace and security too, the South's role has traditionally been downplayed. While the Security Council continues to hog the limelight, with its glaring lack of African and Latin American permanent members, developing countries have in recent years provided an overwhelming number of UN peacekeeping troops (see box right). Indeed, “you lead, we bleed” is a common criticism of the divisions between the countries that mandate and fund peace operations, and those that send soldiers into harm's way. Some have gone so far as to describe contemporary UN peace operations as a “Third World Ghetto”.

On page 9, Dan Plesch writes about the role of Southern countries in pushing forward arms control and disarmament initiatives. South Africa was the first state to voluntarily give up nuclear weapons, followed by Argentina, Brazil and Libya. Countries such as Lebanon and Mozambique took the lead on banning landmines and cluster munitions (although big manufacturers from the North and South alike fiercely resisted these efforts). More recently, developing countries have increased efforts to boost the role of the General Assembly in tackling peace and security issues when the Security Council is, as so often, at loggerheads and missing-in-action.

CHANGING DYNAMICS AT THE UN

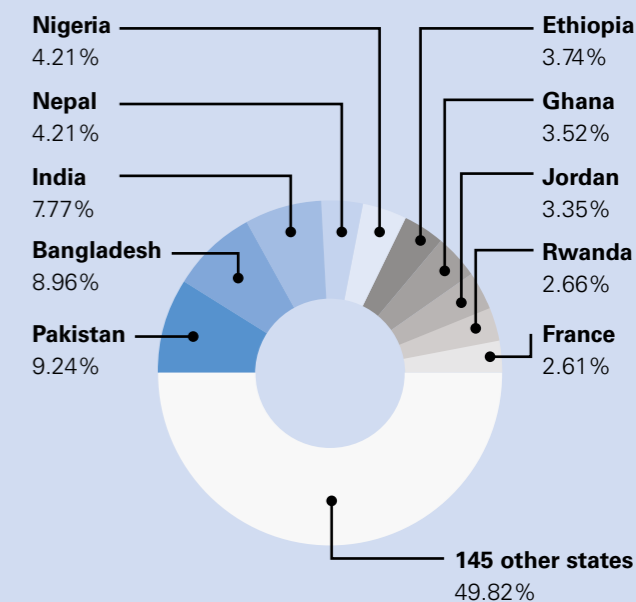
Developing countries have joined forces at different stages in the international arena to increase their voices, including through the NAM and G77. Over the past decade, a new twist has been added, the visibility of “emerging” or “rising” powers.

The term refers to countries whose policy elites are able to draw on economic and other sources of power to project influence within and outside their immediate neighbourhoods, and that play a substantial role in the call for global governance reforms. This label is problematic and should be contested, just like the terms “global South” and “Third World”. They reflect specific perspectives on development and historical experiences at specific moments in time. Despite their analytical flaws and misleading connotations, however, they matter in international politics and to the deliberations – some would say “theatre” – on various UN stages.

It is unnecessary to exaggerate either the shadow cast by the West, or what Amitav Acharya calls the “hype of the rest”, to see that the role of rising powers in global governance is changing the landscape. They are asserting their growing role as providers of development co-operation and as critics of the existing architecture for global economic governance. Both individually and through new alignments such as the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), emerging powers are engaging more directly in key normative debates about how major institutions could and should contribute to today's world order.

Their composition is admittedly puzzling. The BRICS grouping, for instance, includes two permanent members of the Security Council – one a former superpower, the other the world's second largest economy. They are authoritarian but their partners are democracies. They are hardly shut out of global decision-making but they are included amongst a slew of countries that have been described as rising or emerging (including

TOP 10 TOTAL PEACEKEEPING TROOP CONTRIBUTIONS SINCE 1990



Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Nigeria, the Philippines, South Korea, Thailand and Turkey) and that align themselves in seemingly endless configurations (BRIICS, BASIC, IBSA, MIST, etc.).

A NEW ERA OF GLOBAL GOVERNANCE?

The reality of a more multipolar order has renewed debates about the need to update our global governance system and thinking about how it should operate, as ever more countries grow unwilling to be “rule-takers” and aspire to be “rule-makers”. But too many states still accept the Anglo-American mythology, or peddle it as a justification for distancing themselves from uncomfortable aspects of the “old order” and its 1945 institutions.

A clearer appreciation of the actual history of the United Nations as a genuinely multilateral, if not always equitable, endeavour, could provide the basis for a new internationalist – perhaps even post-national – approach in which the definition of vital interests would expand to include perspectives and calculations about national interests that go beyond borders. This approach is urgently needed – and more suited to solving global problems than the ‘us-versus-them’ template and predictable performances that characterise what customarily passes for international negotiations in various UN theatres. //

NATALIE SAMARASINGHE // Executive Director of UNA-UK.

THOMAS G. WEISS // Presidential Professor of Political Science at the City University of New York's Graduate Center. His latest book is *Would the World Be Better Without the UN?* (Polity, 2018). The second edition of *The Oxford Handbook on the United Nations*, co-edited by Weiss and Sam Daws, and including a chapter by Samarasinghe on human rights, is featured on the back cover.

10

quotes on race and colonialism

The UN is often criticised for reflecting the world in 1945, when a third of its population lived in dependent territories. The Security Council's permanent members continue to wield disproportionate influence despite shifts in global power, while others – particularly African states – are underrepresented. UN programming, in trade for instance, has been accused by some of reflecting Western priorities and interests. In 1961, philosopher Frantz Fanon wrote: the UN is the legal card used by imperialist interests when brute force has failed.

But from sustainable development to sustained UN action on decolonisation, Southern concerns have always been integral to the UN's work. The UN cannot escape global power dynamics. It has been a platform for both neoimperialist and revolutionary leaders. But it has also proved a valuable tool for people around the world, inspired by its promise of a life in larger freedom. Here we provide a snapshot of this story through 10 quotes.

1. "In matters of discrimination on racial and national grounds ... America, England, and many other European countries, to my great surprise, took up an extraordinarily reactionary attitude. They categorically opposed, article by article, all specific mention of non-discrimination."
// Shaista Ikramullah of Pakistan, writing in 1948. Ikramullah was her country's delegate to the General Assembly's Third Committee and worked on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

2. "In the dynamic world society which is the objective of the United Nations, all peoples must have equality and equal rights... The UN does not seek a world cut after a single pattern, nor does it consider this desirable. The UN seeks only unity, not uniformity, out of the world's diversity."
// Ralph Bunche, UN Under-Secretary-General, 1950 Nobel lecture. He was the first African-American to win a Nobel Prize, for brokering the 1949 Arab-Israeli armistice

3. "It is a hopeful feature of this year's session of the General Assembly that several delegations have referred to the importance and urgency of solving colonial problems... [and] that of 800 million dependent people in the world at the end of the Second World War, no less than 600 million had achieved their freedom in these few years."
// Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit of India, first female President of the General Assembly, speaking in 1952

4. "For years, Africa has been the footstool of colonialism and imperialism, exploitation and degradation. ... Those days are gone and gone forever, and now I, an African, stand before this august Assembly of the United Nations and speak with a voice of peace and freedom, proclaiming to the world the dawn of a new era... There are now 22 of us and there are yet more to come."
// Kwame Nkrumah, President of Ghana, 1960, the year 16 African countries joined the UN

5. "Until the philosophy which holds one race superior and another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned ... until the colour of a man's skin is of no more significance than the colour of his eyes; until the basic human rights are guaranteed to all, without regard to race ... the African continent will not know peace."
// Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia, at the General Assembly in 1963, later set to music by Bob Marley

6. "Wealth is still concentrated in the hands of a few powers whose wasteful economies are maintained by the exploitation of the labour as well as the transfer and the plunder of the national and other resources of the peoples of Africa, Latin America, Asia and other regions of the world."
// Fidel Castro, President of Cuba, speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1979. The Movement now has 120 member countries

7. "The UN understood this very well that racism in our country could not but feed racism in other parts of the world as well. The universal struggle against apartheid was therefore not an act of charity arising out of pity for our people, but an affirmation of our common humanity."
// Nelson Mandela, addressing the UN as South Africa's President in 1994. That year, apartheid was removed from the UN's agenda after nearly half a century

8. "Asking people to face up to the problems of racism in their midst is not always welcome ... It is always easier to point the finger of blame than to look hard at our own prejudices ... the UN must not only continue its historic fight against discrimination, but must intensify that struggle."
// Mary Robinson of Ireland, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, at the 2001 World Conference against Racism in Durban

9. "Inequality has deprived many societies of hope and opportunities. The absence of dreams and a meaning in the future is being used to divide our communities, intensifying racism, xenophobia and violence, all of which represents the exact opposite of the Charter we adopted in 1945."
// María Espinosa Garcés of Ecuador, speaking in 2018. She is only the fourth female General Assembly President

10. "Now, more than ever, the illusions of division threaten our very existence. We all know the truth: more connects us than separates us. But in times of crisis, the wise build bridges while the foolish build barriers. We must find a way to look after one another as if we were one single tribe."
// T'Challa, fictional superhero and head of state created by Marvel Comics, speaking at the UN in the 2018 film *Black Panther*

TAKING FORWARD THE UN'S FIGHT AGAINST RACISM

UNA-UK speaks to
E. Tendayi Achiume

You were appointed as the UN Human Rights Council's independent expert on racism last year. What does your mandate cover, and how do you prioritise work over such a large and important agenda?

My mandate addresses the profound challenges that racial and xenophobic discrimination pose today. This includes obvious and direct discrimination, of course, but also less obvious, structural or indirect forms of racism. By using an intersectional lens, my mandate brings into focus intentional and unintentional forms of discrimination and disproportionate harms across gender, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, citizenship, migration status or other elements associated with identity and social status.

I strongly believe in enabling local actors and communities on the frontlines of discrimination and exclusion to help set my mandate's priorities. I have spent much of my first year in the mandate listening to, and learning from, these communities and their advocates to understand what their priority issues are. My team and I typically draw on consultations with these groups and with state representatives to identify gaps that exist between how global human rights frameworks are deployed and these lived accounts of vulnerability and suffering. I then prioritise my work according to which legal clarifications I think are critical to ensuring that international human rights law operates in service of, and becomes increasingly responsive to, those on the ground.

How have you seen the issues you address change over your first year in the role?

One of the most remarkable changes I have seen over the past year concerns states' appetite for misguided solutions to structural forms of racism. States are increasingly trying to address problems of racial discrimination with legislation that is race-neutral or race-blind, with some even removing the term

"race" from their anti-discrimination legislation. Much of this legislation is disingenuous, an attempt to mask intentional racial discrimination that arises from the application of the law. Where such legislation is not disingenuous, states operate on the mistaken and dangerous basis that they can fix deep-seated discrimination – be it in service provision, migration policy or in the enjoyment of full human rights – simply by adopting race-blind measures. The next few years of my mandate will have to include making clear why such an approach is a serious problem.

How do states and civil society try to influence you and you them? How do you effect change? Does resourcing constrain you?

States and civil society largely try to influence my role through written submissions, through our interactions in country visits and through consultations. Quite often, their influence is meant to convince me that a particular issue requires immediate attention. Sadly, some states also attempt to convince me that a certain form of racial discrimination is not actually discriminatory, or is outside my mandate.

I attempt to influence states and civil society through a combination of continued engagement and careful research. I see my role as Special Rapporteur mostly as a conduit: a mechanism to amplify voices that do not have adequate representation or do not receive adequate attention from their state or from the UN in Geneva. Most of the change I help to effect arises from engaging with those voices and then using my mandate to identify and accelerate effective human rights responses for which local communities are already fighting.

I also hope that my thematic reports will support changes over time. I have taken care to focus on urgent matters or matters where additional clarity in the human rights framework is necessary. I hope that careful explanation of applicable human



// A protestor in Brixton, south London, in 2016. In preliminary findings following her visit to the UK this year, the UN Special Rapporteur on racism noted that while 3% of the UK population is black, they accounted for 12% of the adult prison population in 2015–16, and more than 20% of children in custody. © DANIEL LEAL-OLIVAS/AFP/Getty Images

rights law will enable further discussion, provide states with a better understanding of their human rights obligations and facilitate grassroots-driven change.

The mandate's broad scope certainly exceeds the resources to which I have access and unfortunately limits my activities as Special Rapporteur. To maintain the independence of Special Rapporteurs, we receive limited funding (and no remuneration) to carry out our mandate. Although my team is careful to stretch our funding as far as we are able, the resource shortages mean we convene far fewer state and civil society consultations than I think are necessary to understand and address the global state of racism and xenophobia.

You recently visited the UK. What did you find?

I visited the UK from 30 April to 11 May and issued comprehensive preliminary findings that are publicly accessible on my mandate webpage. I had the opportunity to discuss some of these findings with representatives of the UK Government. During this meeting, I praised the UK's anti-discrimination legal framework, and commended the Government's recent Racial Disparity Audit initiative. I did, however, express my alarm at the racially discriminatory impact of austerity measures, immigration law and policy, counterterrorism law and policy, and criminal justice law and policy. My consultations with civil society revealed horrifying experiences of intentional and structural forms of racial discrimination that require urgent attention from the UK Government.

Although some of the media coverage of my visit represented it as focusing largely on Brexit, I cannot stress enough that my analysis and findings spoke to historically rooted structures of exclusion and discrimination that pre-date the EU referendum, even if the recent political climate has exacerbated these dynamics. My visit revealed to me the significant differences in the

experiences of racial and ethnic minorities living in the four nations that comprise the UK, and the difference in political will among the governments of these nations to address racial inequality. I will present my full report to the UN Human Rights Council in July 2019.

There was a predictable but disappointing response to your visit from sections of the UK media. Do negative reactions of this kind undermine your work? How do they alter perceptions of the UK?

The media are powerful actors and have a responsibility to perform their work ethically. This includes truthful and accurate reporting. Criticism and dissenting opinions are a welcome and important part of public discourse and dialogue, but the media has a responsibility to ensure that the criticism, dissent or any other information they disseminate is accurate and definitely *not* racist. Certain media sources purposefully mischaracterised my visit as an attempt by the UN to scold the UK, when in fact my visit was at the invitation of the UK Government itself. I can never conduct a country mission without the invitation of that government. Furthermore, my role is that of an independent expert. I cannot and do not speak for the UN.

I found it telling and deeply regrettable that on a mission to investigate conditions of racial equality in the UK, I myself became the target of racist media coverage. I do have to emphasise, however, that the racist coverage was countered by exemplary journalistic practices by other UK media outlets that provided truthful and accurate information about my visit and the issues I raised. //

E. TENDAYI ACHIUME // UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Preliminary findings from her visit to the UK can be found at: www.ohchr.org

LET US RISE

We give the last word to **Kofi Annan**, the former UN Secretary-General who died on 18 August 2018 having dedicated over half a century to peace, development and human rights for all. This is an edited version of his opening remarks at the 2001 World Conference on Racism in Durban, South Africa.

Let us remember that no one is born a racist. Children learn racism as they grow up, from the society around them – and too often the stereotypes are reinforced, deliberately or inadvertently, by the mass media. We must not sacrifice freedom of the press, but we must actively refute pseudo-scientific arguments, and oppose negative images with positive ones – teaching our children and our fellow citizens not to fear diversity, but to cherish it.

Often discrimination veils itself behind spurious pretexts. People are denied jobs ostensibly because they lack educational qualifications; or they are refused housing because there is a high crime rate in their community. Yet these very facts, even when true, are often the result of discrimination. Injustice traps people in poverty; poverty becomes the pretext for injustice.

In many places people are maltreated on the grounds that they are not citizens but unwanted immigrants. Yet often they have come to a new country to do work that is badly needed, or are present not by choice but as refugees from persecution. Such people have a special need for protection, and are entitled to it.

In other cases indigenous peoples and national minorities are oppressed because their culture and self-expression are seen as threats to national unity – and when they protest, this is taken as proof of their guilt.

In extreme cases – alas all too common – people are forced from their homes, or even massacred, because it is claimed that their very presence threatens another people's security.

Sometimes these problems are in part the legacy of terrible wrongs in the past – such as the exploitation and extermination of indigenous peoples by colonial powers,

or the treatment of millions of human beings as merchandise, to be transported and disposed of by other human beings for commercial gain.

The further those events recede into the past, the harder it becomes to trace lines of accountability. Yet the effects remain. The pain and anger are still felt. The dead, through their descendants, cry out for justice. The sense of continuity with the past is an integral part of each man's or each woman's identity.

Some historical wrongs are traceable to individuals who are still alive, or corporations that are still in business. They must expect to be held to account. The society they have wronged may forgive them, as part of the process of reconciliation, but they cannot *demand* forgiveness as of right.

Each of us has an obligation to consider where he or she belongs in this complex historical chain. It is always easier to think of the wrongs one's own society has suffered. It is less comfortable to think in what ways our own good fortune might relate to the sufferings of others, in the past or present.

A special responsibility falls on political leaders. They are accountable to their fellow citizens, but also – in a sense – accountable *for* them, and for the actions of their predecessors. We have seen, in recent decades, some striking examples of national leaders assuming this responsibility, acknowledging past wrongs and asking pardon from the victims and their heirs. Such gestures cannot right the wrongs of the past. They can sometimes help to free the present – and the future – from the shackles of the past.

But past wrongs must not distract us from present evils. Our aim must be to banish from this new century the hatred

and prejudice that have disfigured previous centuries. The struggle to do that is at the very heart of our work at the United Nations.

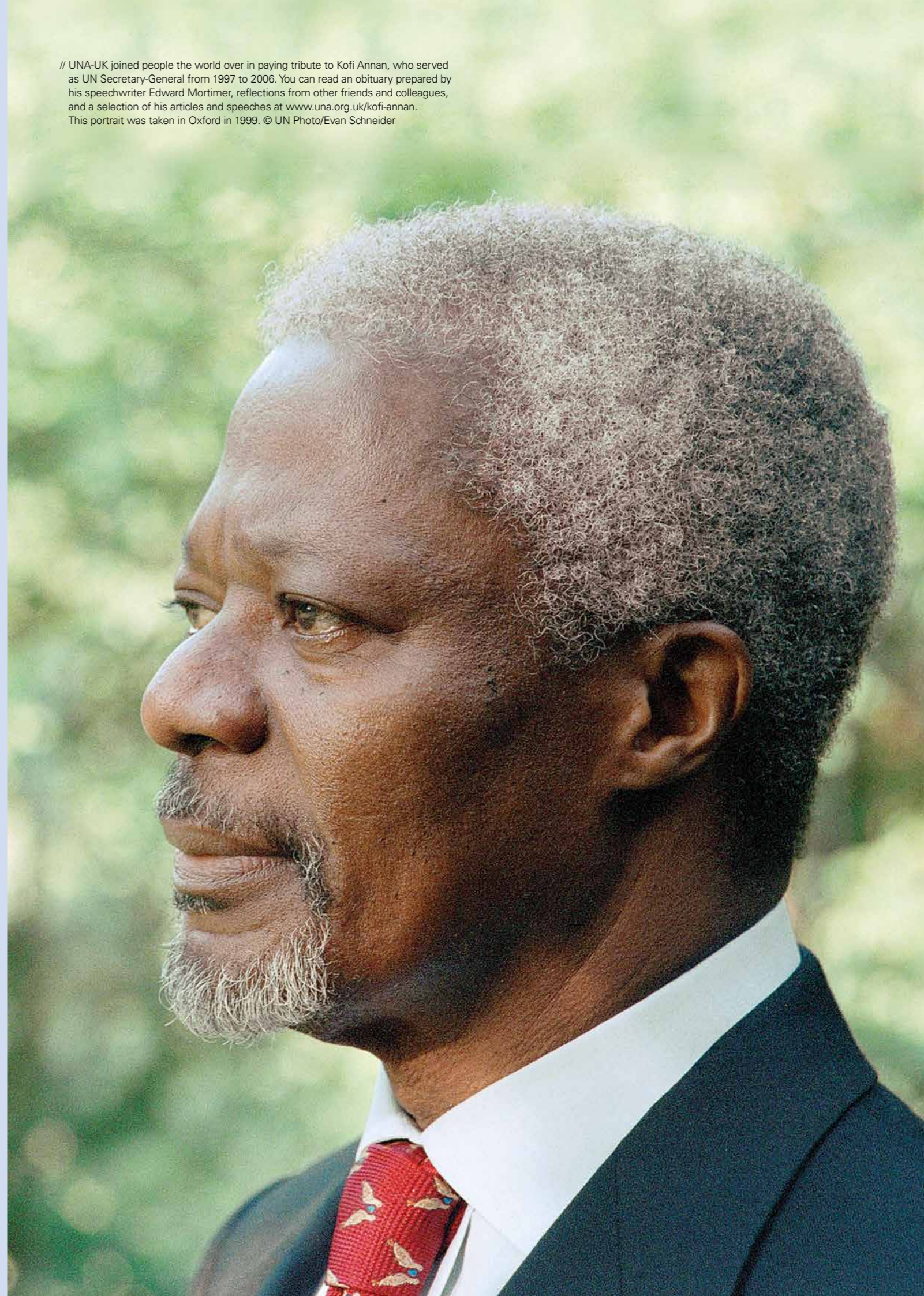
This conference has been exceptionally difficult to prepare, because the issues are not ones where consensus is easily found. Yes, we can all agree to condemn racism. But that very fact makes the accusation of racism, against any particular individual or group, particularly hurtful. It is hurtful to one's pride, because few of us see ourselves as racists. And it arouses fear, because once a group is accused of racism it becomes a potential target for retaliation, perhaps for persecution in its turn.

Nowhere is that truer today than in the Middle East. The Jewish people have been victims of anti-Semitism in many parts of the world, and in Europe they were the target of the Holocaust – the ultimate abomination. This fact must never be forgotten or diminished. It is understandable, therefore, that many Jews deeply resent any accusation of racism directed against the State of Israel – and all the more so when it coincides with indiscriminate and totally unacceptable attacks on innocent civilians.

Yet we cannot expect Palestinians to accept this as a reason why the wrongs done to them – displacement, occupation, blockade, and now extra-judicial killings – should be ignored, whatever label one uses to describe them.

Let us admit that all countries have issues of racism and discrimination to address. Let us rise above our disagreements. Let us echo the slogan that resounded throughout this country during the elections of 1994, at the end of the long struggle against apartheid: *sekunjalo*. The time has come. //

// UNA-UK joined people the world over in paying tribute to Kofi Annan, who served as UN Secretary-General from 1997 to 2006. You can read an obituary prepared by his speechwriter Edward Mortimer, reflections from other friends and colleagues, and a selection of his articles and speeches at www.una.org.uk/kofi-annan. This portrait was taken in Oxford in 1999. © UN Photo/Evan Schneider

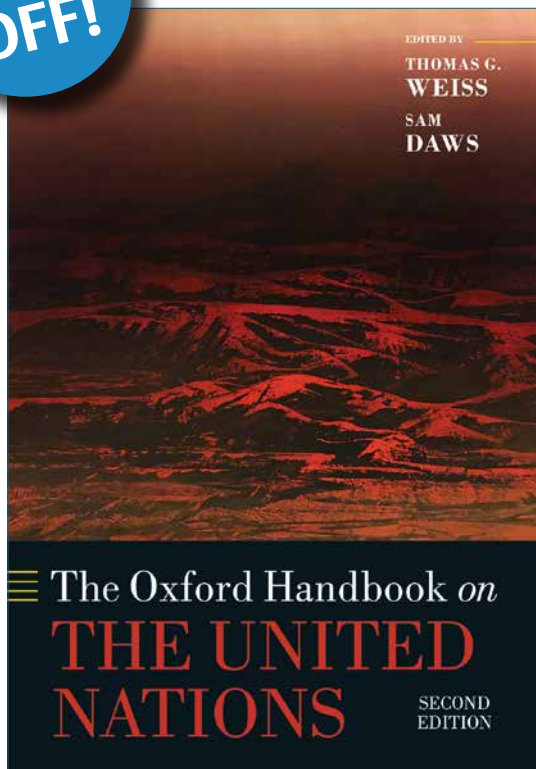


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