

Towards a strong, credible and effective United Nations

UNA-UK policy document 2008

as agreed by the membership at UNA-UK's 63rd Annual Conference
Exeter University, 28-30 March 2008



UNA-UK



Towards a strong, credible and effective United Nations

UNA-UK policy document 2008

as agreed by the membership at UNA-UK's 63rd Annual Conference, Exeter University, 28-30 March 2008

1 Millennium Development Goals ('MDGs') and Sustainable Development

a Climate change

- i UNA-UK submits that it is increasingly urgent to have a comprehensive international framework to meet the challenges of climate change and to deliver the necessary cuts in carbon emissions. UNA-UK recognises that the ultimate goal of the UNFCCC-led post-Kyoto framework on climate change should lead to an overall contraction in greenhouse gas emissions and convergence in per capita emissions.

UNA-UK notes Annual Conference's 2007 policy position that 'The UK government should initiate a public debate on the way international solutions can be found via the 'contraction and convergence' strategy'. Recognising the imperative to build upon the international agreement made at Bali in December 2007, UNA-UK believes that such a public debate must now be wide-ranging and embrace a diversity of political and technical approaches that will accelerate international progress towards a low-carbon world. In this respect, it is vital that developed countries, especially the EU, the US, Canada, Japan and Australia, accept ambitious, binding emissions targets as part of a post-2012 agreement, negotiated under UN auspices. UNA-UK calls upon the UK government to demonstrate leadership in this regard.

- ii. Bearing in mind the comments of the head of the UNFCCC that it would be 'nothing less than criminally irresponsible' for the international community to recognise but fail to act on global warming, UNA-UK calls on the citizens of the UK, and especially UNA-UK members, to take responsibility for and reduce their own carbon footprints, easily ascertainable from www.direct.gov.uk. Furthermore, we call on the UN to establish an agency tasked to coordinate research and development of renewable 'clean' energy sources, and to facilitate the provision of renewable energy systems to all member states, in particular to developing countries.
- iii. UNA-UK urges the UK government to respond constructively to the warnings contained in the report by Javier Solana, EU Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, and Benita Ferrero-Waldner, European Commissioner for External Relations, presented to the 27 EU Heads of Government in March 2008. The report highlights the possibility of conflict arising from depleting resources and mass migration.

UNA-UK urges the UK government to ensure that the needs of developing countries are taken into account in drawing up EU policy in response to this report.

b. Health

i. *Social and economic development: human security in respect of health*

The spread of old and new diseases has escalated in a world of widening gaps between rich and poor where warfare continues to disrupt development. In recognition of their human rights and of their contribution to economic growth, each country should strengthen its economy for the benefit of the health, nutrition and education of its people.

The WHO is calling for health to be placed at the heart of development, and is cooperating with other UN agencies, the World Bank, the IMF and the EU to ensure adequate investment in national health systems in developing countries.

In 2005, through its presidencies of the G8 and the EU, the UK led on updating and integrating global health and development policies along these lines.

The UK's Department for International Development and Department of Health are working in partnership with national governments to ensure that Britain's increasing development aid arrives as coordinated 10-year plans, and with substantial ring-fenced money for investment in health, education, water and sanitation.

However, despite this recent progress, we cannot be certain that this policy will be implemented and maintained, because governments were distracted from implementing similar commitments made in 1978, and again in 2000.

Therefore, UNA-UK calls on the UK government to follow through on its 2005 commitment by supporting the 1978 global policy of 'Health for All through Primary Health Care'.

This will require:

- fully implementing and maintaining the global policy to make healthcare a foundational part of development; and
- participating in strengthening national healthcare systems according to the WHO's research-based guidelines, which support the maintenance and extension of networks of generic health centres.

ii. *HIV/AIDS in Africa*

According to UNICEF, more priority needs to be given to combating HIV/AIDS in Africa by supporting families in their communities. Governments have a duty to protect children, and children could be better represented by their parents or guardians if the parents or guardians were given more education, psycho-social assistance and resources.

All African countries in need of assistance should receive the appropriate level of support. UNA-UK urges the UK government and the UN to give further support to families affected by HIV/AIDS in Africa through the programmes already put in place by UNICEF and the WHO, and through improved policy and legislation and additional support.

Special consideration should be given to prenatal and postnatal treatment of HIV pregnant women. By far the best hope for newborn children of HIV mothers is to be free of the disease at birth, thereby avoiding the expense of continual treatment throughout their lives. Otherwise each and every infected child will require antiretroviral treatment, antibiotics, vitamins and the management of opportunistic infections, and will have to endure the stigma attached to HIV.

Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) treatment should be promoted throughout Africa for children born in the home and born in hospital.

iii. *Millennium Development Goal 5*

Alarmed that estimates at the end of 2007 indicate that it is highly unlikely that Millennium Development Goal 5 – to slash maternal mortality by 75 per cent from 1990 levels by 2015 – will be achieved,

UNA-UK calls for UK initiative at the UN to underpin the wake-up call given by the medical profession and UN agencies with proposals for a renewed international effort to invest in women's health and well-being, and calls on its membership to draw attention to this unacceptable situation caused by avoidable or treatable conditions suffered by so many women, particularly in the poorest countries.

iv. *The legitimate production and trade of opium*

UNA-UK suggests that the UK government initiates the idea of allowing Afghan farmers to be licensed to produce opiates for pharmaceutical products.

This could help remove the influence of the Taliban and Al Qaeda over the farmers and warlords. With a growing need to alleviate physical suffering in the developing world – cancers, for example, are increasing in African countries – many more opium-derived products will be needed. UNA- UK notes the legitimate production and trade of opiates in India.

v. *Debt*

Recognising that international debt stops many poor-country governments from providing their people with the basic human rights of water, sanitation, healthcare and education, and that much debt has arisen from irresponsible lending, leading some private lenders (vulture funds) to exploit debt relief by buying discounted poor-country debts and suing the countries for large amounts.

UNA-UK calls on:

- the World Bank to make the International Development Association (IDA) Debt Reduction Facility easily available to help Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC)s quickly eliminate their commercial debts, thus preventing debts being sold on to aggressive creditors;
- the UK government to support the IDA Debt Reduction Facility and work to ensure that HIPC)s have easy access to legal and technical assistance to defend themselves against litigation; and

- the members of the G8 to work with the United Nations Financing for Development Office to develop a Charter of Responsible Lending to include protection from vulture-fund activity.

vi. *Vulture funds*

There are currently \$1.8 billion of assets being chased in lawsuits brought by so-called vulture funds against 11 of the 24 low-income countries that have received debt cancellation under the Heavily Indebted Poor Country initiative. For example, Donegal bought Zambia's debts for £3 million, and sued Zambia for \$55 million; in the end the courts awarded the company \$15 million. Vulture funds buy up highly discounted poor-country debts and then litigate for the nominal amount, as well as for interest and penalties. These greedy and opportunist companies are seriously undermining debt relief and the world's other initiatives to reduce poverty and help countries achieve the MDGs.

UNA-UK urges the UK government to develop regulation to stop vulture funds operating in UK jurisdictions and to press for UN action to prevent vulture fund activities internationally.

vii. *Conditionality*

UNA-UK urges the UK government to work to ensure that loans to poor countries by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are not tied to conditions of privatisation.

Poor countries should have the right to decide whether they have a free trade policy or retain some tariff barriers.

viii. *The Costa Rica Consensus*

UNA-UK urges the UK government to support the Costa Rica Consensus, which was proposed by the President of Costa Rica at the UN General Assembly on 19 September 2006, and subsequently presented to the High-level Dialogue of ECOSOC with the Bretton Woods institutions at the UN on 16 April 2007.

The Consensus proposes that debt relief and international financial support for developing countries should depend on their agreement to spend less on armaments and more on education, health and housing, in accordance with the requirements of article 26 of the UN Charter.

c. Social

i. *Girls' education*

UNA-UK notes that insufficient progress is being made towards the fulfilment of Millennium Development Goals 2 and 3 – respectively, universal primary education, and gender equality and the empowerment of women. UNA-UK therefore calls for greater priority to be given urgently to the education of girls in developing countries, both for the fulfilment of women themselves and because women are the first educators for the next generation.

ii. *Corruption*

The UK government should fully implement its commitments under the UN Convention Against Corruption and ensure that any British companies, humanitarian organisations and/or

individuals suspected of corruption are prosecuted, and that, furthermore, a major effort is made to trace and repatriate stolen assets that are in bank accounts in UK jurisdictions.

UNA-UK urges the government to ensure that British companies and humanitarian organisations do not use bribes or other 'sweeteners', and that UK jurisdictions do not support illegal capital flight.

iii. *Gender equality*

The UK government should, as part of its continued support for the work of UNFPA, promote the importance of both sexes within that society, so one sex is not promoted to the detriment of the other.

2. Peace and Security

a. Peacekeeping

i. *UK contribution to UN peacekeeping operations*

UNA-UK notes that British armed forces have in the past demonstrated their capacity for making an effective contribution to UN peacekeeping (e.g. in Sierra Leone), and regards the current UK commitment of around 370 military and police personnel to UN peacekeeping operations as a miserably inadequate contribution by one of the richest states in the world.

UNA-UK calls upon the UK government to redeploy troops and police withdrawn from Iraq in support of UN peacekeeping operations in those parts of the world where they are most needed.

b. Nuclear weapons

i. *Nuclear-weapons control*

In view of the manifest shortcomings in the current system of international nuclear-weapons control, including the failure of the 2005 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference; the experience of false allegations as regards Iraq leading to war; the increased risk of regional nuclear exchanges, for example on the Indian sub-continent and in the Middle East; the ever-present risk of nuclear weapons falling into the wrong hands; the agreement between the US and India flouting the requirements of the NPT; and the renewed accumulation of nuclear arms as represented by Russian, Chinese and British policy decisions in 2007.

UNA-UK calls on the UK government:

- to seek through the Security Council the development of a nuclear-weapons convention as outlined in the 13 point plan of the 2000 NPT Review Conference and as proposed by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons with the aim of securing immediate restraint and eventually general and complete disarmament; and
- to give strong support to the Reykjavik initiative aimed at achieving progress towards a world free from nuclear weapons, and urgently needed efforts to strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime at the 2010 NPT Review Conference.

ii. *Middle East nuclear-weapons-free zone*

UNA-UK calls upon the UK government to initiate negotiations within the Security Council for a binding treaty on all states in the Middle East which would establish that region as a permanent nuclear-weapons-free zone (NWFZ), comparable to the Treaty of Tlatelolco currently in force in Central and South America.

In 1974 Iran and Egypt jointly introduced a UN resolution calling for a NWFZ in the Middle East; Iran repeats that call regularly at the UN General Assembly.

UNA-UK calls on the UK government to enter into dialogue with states in the region, and to work with the EU, the IAEA, UNIDIR and other relevant agencies, to formulate proposals and route-maps towards a Middle East NWFZ.

iii. *World Court Coalition*

UNA-UK supports the World Court Coalition's initiative to obtain a resolution requesting the International Court of Justice to deliver an Advisory Opinion on whether or not the signatories to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty who retain nuclear weapons are fulfilling their commitments to act in respect to their nuclear disarmament obligations.

c. Small arms and cluster munitions

i. *Weapons and armed conflict in Africa*

UNA-UK notes that in a 2007 report prepared by Oxfam, IANSA and Saferworld, it is estimated that in the period 1990-2006 the amount spent on small arms in Africa exceeded the amount received in aid.

UNA-UK notes further that the numerous armed conflicts in Africa and the vast sums spent on them (it is estimated these conflicts shrink an African economy by 15 per cent) and is alarmed that in these conflict states there are on average 50 per cent more infant deaths than in those at peace.

UNA-UK urges the UK government to support stronger international controls of small arms and ammunition manufacture and sale, in order to end impunity for illegal arms traffickers and make the trade more transparent, by means of securing a robust treaty to ban the trade and production of small arms and ammunition, which should also put in place an effective system of control and inspection under the UN.

ii. *Cluster munitions*

UNA-UK welcomes the government's active involvement in the preparatory meetings in Oslo, Lima and Wellington which have established a wide consensus on the need for an international convention to ban the possession or use of cluster munitions.

UNA-UK welcomes NGOs' vigilance in bringing attention to this process and parliamentary monitoring of the failure rate of cluster submunitions to self-destruct, and urges its members to continue campaigning in support of a comprehensive treaty banning the use of such weapons.

UNA-UK considers that cluster munitions cause appalling harm to innocent civilians, as demonstrated most recently in the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in south Lebanon, and that their use is therefore militarily disproportionate.

UNA-UK therefore urges the government to ensure that at the forthcoming Dublin meeting of the Oslo Process in May 2008 the text of an international convention banning cluster munitions is completed and opened for signature later in the year.

UNA-UK expects that the government will then sign and ratify such a convention with no distinctions or reservations between different categories of cluster munitions, all of which should be banned.

d. Darfur

UNA-UK welcomes the UN's initiatives to resolve the desperate situation in Darfur and urges the UK government to:

- resist the delaying tactics of the government of Sudan to reach a peaceful settlement based on the equitable distribution of power and resources to the regions and the protection of human rights especially for women.
- emphasise the need for women everywhere to be able to empower themselves in civil society as a prerequisite to the social, economic and political development of their country.
- encourage and support all parties to agree to an immediate cessation of hostilities and to participate in the ongoing peace process.

e. Reunification of the Korean Peninsula

UNA-UK welcomes the positive steps taken by the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) at the 2007 Presidential Peace Summit in Pyongyang towards creating greater peace and prosperity on the Korean peninsula, with the long-term goal of eventual unification, and urges the UK government:

- to use its good offices at the United Nations to ensure that the DPRK honours international human rights standards to which it has signed up and the international denuclearisation and non-proliferation obligations to which it agreed at the Six-Party Talks in 2007; and
- to ensure that long-term UN development assistance to the DPRK by the UN, the UK government, the EU, and the wider international community is made conditional on the fulfilment of these agreements.

f. Iraq

- i. UNA-UK, appalled by the suffering of the Iraqi people as a consequence of the war in that country – 2 million Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries, particularly Jordan and Syria, 2.7 million people displaced within Iraq, and inadequate supplies of power, water and other services – recommends:

- the initiation of post-conflict peacebuilding by the United Nations in partnership with the government of Iraq;
- that post-conflict peacebuilding be carried out using the expertise of UN agencies such as UNHCR, UNICEF, the WHO and others; and
- the rapid withdrawal of all foreign armies once the above points are complete.

ii. *Military presence in Iraq*

UNA-UK welcomes the important re-thinking within the armed forces by military officers serving in Iraq arising from battlefield and reconstruction experiences in favour of what is termed 'soft-power' and 'brain-power', and notes in particular the doubts raised about the continuing use of a 20th century model of international warfare with large armies.

g. Israel-Palestine

- i. UNA-UK reaffirms its policy of support for a durable and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Direct talks between Israel and the Palestinians, including on the final status issues, are essential to achieve this peace but there needs to be a mediator or intermediary to help the two parties move forward. Negotiations should take account of the Road Map and other initiatives including the Arab Peace Initiative.
- ii. Negotiations should include all parties to the conflict, as well as the Quartet, with the UN playing a prominent role. The reconstitution of a Palestinian national unity government such as was foreshadowed in the Mecca agreement of February 2007 could be one way of achieving this objective.
- iii. UNA-UK calls for the UK government, working within the EU and UN, to support a full ceasefire in Gaza, with a complete cessation of rocket attacks on Israel and of Israel's military incursions into the Gaza Strip and including an exchange of prisoners.

3. Human Rights and Humanitarian Action

a. Child labour and human trafficking

i. *Child labour*

Alarmed that many goods on sale through well-known high street outlets contain elements produced with forced child labour; noting in particular the BBC2 Newsnight programme (30/10/2007) alleging that some 450,000 children are shut out of school at harvest time and sent to Uzbekistan cotton fields for which there is filmed evidence; recalling Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the ILO Convention on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour; and noting that the ILO 2006 report estimates that about 190 million children are still trapped in unsuitable work,

UNA-UK calls on the UK government to take measures to encourage transparency, promote best practice and discourage UK companies from using Uzbek cotton and, through the UN and EU, to initiate urgent enquiries with a view to taking effective action on this issue.

ii. *Human trafficking*

Noting that trafficked persons are victims and not perpetrators of crime, UNA-UK calls upon the UK government to increase efforts to stop human trafficking, with a particular focus on protecting trafficked children and on providing them with the support they need. UNA-UK also calls on the UK government to toughen sentences – including the seizure of assets – for the conviction of criminal gangs trafficking human beings in this modern-day British ‘slave trade’, which includes the sex industry.

UNA-UK further urges the UK government to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and the Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings; and to work, including within the framework of the EU Neighbourhood Policy, to counteract this problem in the victims’ home states.

b. Torture

i. *The banning of waterboarding and sleep deprivation as a form of torture*

UNA-UK notes with alarm the use of waterboarding by the CIA and the suggestion by the current US administration that waterboarding (a technique by which prisoners are made to feel as if they are drowning) and sleep deprivation would be acceptable forms of interrogation in certain unspecified circumstances. Recalling the Convention Against Torture and Other Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment, UNA-UK calls on the UK government to strongly condemn the techniques of waterboarding and sleep deprivation, and suggest that a special session on torture is held at the Human Rights Council with the aim to make it clear that the above concept and practices are wholly unacceptable.

ii. *Indefinite detention*

UNA-UK notes that indefinite detention has become an issue in relation to British forces serving in international military operations overseas; that civilians detained by British forces for security reasons are being regarded as outside the remit of the European Convention on Human Rights; that this particularly refers to the right to be charged and brought before a court, or to be released; and that the human rights situation of such civilians remains unclear in international peacekeeping operations including those authorised by the UN.

UNA-UK therefore suggests that the current position of the UK government should be clarified through further careful discussion, involving where appropriate the view of Parliament, to ensure that indefinite detention is not accepted.

c. Human rights in Burma

The long history of human rights abuses in Burma continues with increasing oppression, no freedom of speech, forced labour, the appalling abuse of ethnic minorities as mine detectors, and the misappropriation by the military government of the country’s resources, leading to a bigger divide between the wealth of the government and the poverty of the people.

UNA-UK urges the UK government to use its influence to give strong support to:

- the findings and recommendations of UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Burma Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, and the dialogue between the military government and the opposition facilitated by UN Special Envoy to Burma Ibrahim Gambari;
- trade sanctions by all trading partners, especially China, Thailand, India, Japan, Singapore and Korea, the US and the UK, on wood, semi-precious stones, oil, gas and (particularly) weapons, including military hardware and planes, as well as their maintenance;
- democratic elections; and
- humanitarian programmes, including those aimed at helping people displaced from their homes and currently living as refugees in neighbouring countries.

d. Indigenous peoples

UNA-UK strongly welcomes the adoption by the UN General Assembly of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on 13 September 2007, after 22 years of negotiations.

Noting that, as the Declaration states in its preamble, “the control by indigenous peoples over developments affecting them and their lands, territories and resources will enable them to maintain and strengthen their institutions, cultures and traditions, and to promote their development according to their aspirations and needs”, and that indigenous peoples are among the poorest and most excluded communities worldwide,

UNA-UK calls upon the Department for International Development to develop a specific programme of financial support, through the UN and through indigenous peoples’ organisations, to translate this political commitment into tangible benefits for indigenous peoples. UNA-UK also calls upon the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to encourage all members of the Commonwealth, including Australia, New Zealand and Canada who voted against the adoption of the Declaration, to implement its provisions in full.

Furthermore, UNA-UK welcomes that, by its vote in favour of the Declaration, the UK government recognises that the protection of indigenous peoples is a legitimate matter of concern for the entire international community. UNA-UK urges the UK government to strengthen this position by ratifying ILO Convention 169 – the only legal instrument that offers real protection to tribal peoples, including with respect to legal tenure of their lands – and by encouraging other countries to do so.

e. Zimbabwe

Noting the worsening humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe and continuing denial of human rights to its people, as well as the obstruction of efforts of the World Food Programme and others to assist the population, and mindful of the potentially catastrophic implications should the government collapse and Zimbabwe descend into civil war, UNA-UK urges the UK government to be a coalescing force at the UN and in the Commonwealth with the aims of:

- i. preparing a comprehensive contingency programme aimed to avoid and prepare for a humanitarian emergency;
- ii. encouraging other interested states (regional and non-regional) and NGOs to participate in this programme; and
- iii. undertaking training and simulation programmes to ensure minimum delay and maximum effect in the programme's implementation.

UNA-UK notes further that the UN Human Rights Council has not addressed the situation in Zimbabwe since 2005 and is not scheduled to consider Zimbabwe under the Universal Periodic Review until 2011, and urges it to hold a special session on the situation in Zimbabwe at the earliest opportunity.

f. Tibet

In the light of the recent repression of dissent in Tibet and aware of the traditional non-violence and patience of the Tibetan people, UNA-UK – considering the Olympic Games in China to be a symbol of the unity of humanity and a celebration of its diversity, and recalling the Chinese government's promises to improve its human rights record in the run-up to the 2008 Games – congratulates the UK Prime Minister on his decision to meet the Dalai Lama and urges the Prime Minister to take the opportunity to encourage respect for human rights (including freedom of expression, particularly in relation to national and international media) and the culture of the Tibetan people, in line with appropriate UN conventions; and to endeavour to bring about transparent talks between the Chinese government and the representative of the Tibetan people, the Dalai Lama.