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
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Natalie Samarasinghe and Thomas G. Weiss

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FIGHTING RACISM
E. Tendayi Achiume

LAST WORD
LET US RISE
Kofi Annan
The United Nations Association – UK (UNA-UK) is the only charity in the UK devoted to building support for an effective UN.

We believe that a strong, credible and effective UN is essential if we are to build a safer, fairer and more sustainable world. We push for government support for the UN, find ways to make it work better and demonstrate why it matters to people everywhere.

Our members, supporters and local groups form a powerful network of global citizens with impact in the UK and beyond. Together, we’ve fought for more British peacekeepers, for children to learn about the UN at school and for a more transparent process to appoint the UN Secretary-General.

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(addressing the wider structural and histori- cal causes, as well as the impacts, of racism.

Few have captured the essence of this challenge better than Ambalavaner Sivanandan, who died the 1980s 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 past, this is a good thing, with movements such as Black Lives Matter and #RiotsMustFall 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 rally 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 an insular and exclusionary society.

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 are asserting their human rights laws to advance their cause.

At its best, the UN can level the playing field between the powerful and the oppressed, both within and between 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 believe, and what we 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 on page 22: let us rise. We must expose simplistic "keep 'em out" solutions
WHO HAS THE POWER?
UNA-UK lets facts and figures speak for themselves

THE THE UN IN NUMBERS

UN member states in 1945

- 4
- 6
- 9
- 12
- 20
- 33
- 54
- 23
- 3
- 0

UN member states in 2018

- 53*
- 1
- 2
- 2
- 3
- 9
- 8
- 1
- 0

Permanent seats on the Security Council

- 1
- 1
- 1
- 1

Elected seats on the Security Council

- 2
- 2
- 3
- 0

UN Senior Management Team, as of September 2018

- 9
- 3
- 2
- 1

Population

- 1.19 BN 18%
- 4.43 BN 68%
- 632 M 9%
- 632 M 11%

THE FACTS

THE REGIONAL GROUPS

- UN member not in any voting group
- Observer states

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.

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.

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

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

SECRETARIES-GENERAL have been European

**Including a seat ‘share’ with the Netherlands in 2017–18

**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

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

Japan 11
Brazil 10
India 7
Argentina 9
Pakistan 7
Colombia 7

Highest number of elections to the Security Council

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

JAPAN 11
BRASIL 10
ITALY 7**
ARGENTINA 9
PAKISTAN 7
COLOMBIA 7

**Including a seat ‘share’ with the Netherlands in 2017–18

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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.

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. Arab 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 world, 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.

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.

PERSPECTIVES
AHMED SNAID
UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights of the Palestinian people and of other peoples subject to foreign domination or exploration

Industry of the Global North, through colonialism and neocolonialism, has been the largest contributor to climate change. Through colonialism, 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 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 economi-

PRESIDENTS

PRIME MINISTERS

POLITICAL PARTY

AGENCIES

SARRA TEKOLLA
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 solutions. It 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 colonisa-

RAMESH THAKUR
Former UN Assistant Secretary-General who served as a Commissioner of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty

PREVENTING MASS ATROCITIES

One of the most important developments in world politics in recent decades has been the idea that there exists a responsibility to protect (R2P) people threatened by mass-atrocity crimes – vested in individuals 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 humanitarian-ism 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 local leaders or be subject to the ad hoc geopolitical calculations of powerful Western countries, rather than to globally validated norms and due process.

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 dis-

VICTORIA Tauli-Corputz
UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples and an indigenous rights activist

Ahmed Shaied
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 1966, in response to outburst of organised racism and religious fundamentalism in the 1960s. The UN decided to develop separate normative protections for religion and race, with the latter pursuit produc-

Without such a mandate, responsible parties will continue to deny their role in the destabilisation of our communities. It is never a given that states will respect indigenous 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.
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 worries 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 homogeneous 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 it 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 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.”

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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 are not created in a vacuum but result from 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.”
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 Azhary, 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.

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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

### How “The Rest” Shape the UN

Natalie Samarasinghe and Thomas G. Weiss

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### Participation in the 1945 San Francisco Conference

**Latin American and Caribbean states**

- Argentina
- Bolivia
- Brazil
- Chile
- Cuba
- Colombia
- Costa Rica
- Dominican Republic
- Ecuador
- El Salvador
- Guatemala
- Haiti
- Honduras
- Mexico
- Nicaragua
- Panama
- Paraguay
- Peru
- Uruguay
- Venezuela

**Western European and Other states**

- Australia
- Belgium
- Canada
- Denmark
- France
- Greece
- Luxembourg
- Netherlands
- New Zealand
- Norway
- UK
- US

**Asia-Pacific states**

- China
- India
- Iran
- Iraq
- Lebanon
- Philippines
- Saudi Arabia
- Syria
- Turkey

**Eastern European states**

- Czechoslovakia
- USSR
- Byelorussian SSR
- Ukrainian SSR
- Yugoslavia

**African states**

- Egypt
- Ethiopia
- Liberia
- South Africa

States are categorised by UN regional group – see pages 6–7 for more information.
their own interests and ideals. The Latin American emphasis on regionalism, for instance, is chapter XVIII of the UN Charter and is one result. Chapters XI and XII on non-self-governing territories and trusteeship reflected the widespread views of recently decolon- nised states and other advocates of self-determination. Even the structure of the Security Council—with its five per- manent 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 com- mitted to non-self-governing territories; their pursuit of this 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 interven- tion. 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 League of Nations. It was an awareness of vital interests would expand to include perspectives and cal- culations about national interests that go beyond borders. This

Human rights

Given the continued and contested debates on human rights at the UN—and the glee with which media outlets report a “notorious human rights abuser” (almost always a developing country) having 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 gen- der 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 propo- nents and defenders of the universality of rights. Many developing states embraced civil and political rights as part of the UN’s early human rights agenda; a new law for human 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. The organisation was largely the work 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 made their presence felt through condemnation and torture. African states pioneered advances in child rights and natural resources. Human rights within the UN are what Sarah Zaidi and Roger Normand call the “unfinished revolution”; despite violations, they are a continuous threat to those who would be governed.

Fueled 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 will- ing 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 incor- porated into the “responsibility to protect” (R2P) norm. Leaders such as Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo argued in favour of intervention as a genuine multilateral, if not always equitable, respon- sibility. Armed forces 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 NAS and SADD. Over the Paris climate agreement, with its overarching targets, nation- als have been added, the visibility of “emerging” or “rising” powers. The term refers to countries whose policy elites are able to drive on economic and other sources of power to project influ- ence within and outside their immediate neighborhoods, 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 uncomfortable aspects of the “old order” and its 1945 institutions. It is unnecessary to exaggerate either the shadow cast by the West, or what Amrit Aharya calls the “hype of the rest”, to see that the role of rising powers in global govern- ance 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 largest. They also authorise permanent members to partner are democracies. They are hardly shut out of global decision-making but they are included amongst a slew of coun- tries that have been described as rising or emerging (including Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Nigeria, the Philippines, South Korea, Thailand and Turkey) that align themselves in seemingly endless configurations (BRICQS, 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 be run, 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 uncom- fortable 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 cal- culations about national interests that go beyond borders. This approach is urgently needed—and more suited to global problems than the “us-versus-them” template and predictable performances that characterise what customarily passes for inter- national negotiations in various UN theatres.

JOB SAMARASINGHE // Executive Director of UNA-UK

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 members’ dues, serves the interests of imperialist powers whose wasteful economies are maintained by the plunder of the national and other resources of the peoples of Africa, Latin America, Asia and other regions of the world.

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 neocolonialist 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 discarded 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
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 structural forms of racism. States are increasingly trying to address these forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

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.

How do states and civil society try to influence you and 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 hope 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 rights law will enable further discussion, provide states with a better understanding of their human rights obligations and facilitate grassroots-driven change.

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.

forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

Preliminary findings from her visit to the UK can be found at: www.ohchr.org
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 pretenses. 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 or wanted 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 they are 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.
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