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“Future of the United Nations”

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United Nations

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NOEL LATEEF: Good morning. I’m Noel Lateef, President of the Foreign Policy Association and I’d like to welcome you to this conference on the Future of the United Nations.

This is a timely moment to ask diagnostic questions about the United Nations and its role at the very underpinnings of the international system.

Significant reforms have been proposed in recent months, and we are fortunate to have with us this morning, key players in this very important debate.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the excellent cooperation we have received from numerous permanent missions to the United Nations, but in particular, I would like to acknowledge the support and very good cooperation we have received from the Permanent mission of Japan.

Our conference chairman is Michael Reisman who holds the Myers McDougal Chair of International Law at Yale Law School. And is one of the world’s leading authorities in public international law.

I am pleased to turn over the floor to Michael.

MICHAEL REISMAN: Thank you very much, President Lateef. As some of you know, the conference commenced yesterday with a very detailed and intense set of discussions that were off the record. Today, we are on the record and hope to explore many of the same issues in a shorter period of time and one would hope, with very active participation by the audience.

Since much of our discussion is shaped by the High Level Panel Report dealing with reforms of the United Nations, we are particularly pleased to have present Robert Orr, who played such a large and decisive role in the preparation of that report. And without further ado, may I introduce the Assistant Secretary General for Policy Coordination and Strategic Planning, Robert Orr.

ROBERT ORR: Thank you, it's a great pleasure to be with you here today, in part because what is happening just a few blocks from here, both today and throughout the coming months is of fundamental importance, and it is extremely encouraging to see this kind of group, this kind of crowd here today, because it shows that you understand the importance of what's happening there. And I will say that that is not a generalized phenomenon on a regular daily basis. So thank you for being here and for having me.

I want to start with something today that I usually try to avoid. It's the three words that if you can duck, you do: oil-for-food. I'm going to talk about the reform process and what's happening at the UN substantively. But we really do need to start by clearing the air and discussing just where we stand today.

And a lot of where we stand today as an organization is related to oil-for-food. Anyone who opens up their *New York Times* this morning sees three people indicted on oil for food. It is very difficult for people to interpret what is happening on this oil for food question. And we won't know all the answers, I think, until Chairman Volker has his final report over the summer.

But we do know enough to know that this is very, very serious business. This is not a crisis of the secretariat, it's a crisis of the entire organization and of its entire membership. It's not surprising to see that when these indictments come down, they're of nationals of virtually every country. If you look around the world and as we work through this process, almost no one is left untouched.

But it's also a crisis because it gets to the fundamental ways of working of the organization. This is not just a small managerial issue, this is not a question of one bad apple. It's a question of decision making. It's a question of collective action. So it cuts to the core of what the UN is and its credibility.

We may find that all of our worst fears aren't realized and that Chairman Volker may identify problems that are more discrete and don't implicate everyone and don't make the organization be fundamentally questioned. But I think we need to be honest with ourselves that we need to be very prepared for whatever comes out in that report. What know already is of great concern.

Now, the Secretary General has said very clearly, everything within his purview he will act decisively and he has already shown a great willingness to do that. We're going to need equal seriousness from member states when it comes to dealing with the problems identified, because the blame here is going to be spread far and wide.

Why do I start talking about oil-for-food when we're talking about a reform process that gets to fundamental issues of the day, from weapons of mass destruction and terrorism to economic development and human rights?

I start there because it is fundamental that we understand now is the time for reform at the UN. This is not something that can wait. The organization does have a crisis on its hands, and it's a broad crisis. And the only way to deal with it is to deal with some fundamental reforms that are not just management in nature – though there are a series of management reforms already underway – but that is political in nature. That we address the credibility of the organization and its ability to deliver on the primary challenges of the day.

I've been known as the guy within the secretariat who runs around and says, "Substance is salvation." You don't spin your way out of one like this. There's a lot of serious accusations against the UN.

What will save the UN is decisive action to reform and to take on the major issues of the day. There is no question the world needs the UN today more than it has ever needed it. If you look at the 18 peacekeeping missions spread across the globe touching every region, the needs are intense.

If you look at the questions of terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, human rights, people debating genocide in Darfur, the UN and the need for collective action spans the globe and spans all the range of issues. But to do that, we need to move on multiple fronts at once.

The international community has been stuck, and it's been stuck on virtually every set of issues we're considering this year. It's been stuck on fundamental security questions, it's been stuck on fundamental development questions. It's been stuck on fundamental human rights questions. It's been stuck on fundamental institutional reform questions.

The Secretary General looking at this situation and having been asked by member states five years ago to prepare a report updating the membership on where we are five years out from the Millennium Declaration. And that declaration covered all these areas and laid out a vision for the United Nations that was powerful and that still speaks, I think, to people around the globe today.

But if we don't acknowledge that in these intervening five years, a lot has happened, and that we're in a situation where the UN to be able to deliver the goods today needs to do some things differently. But the UN can do that and it can lead.

A lot of the issues that are going to be discussed in September when all the heads of state come to New York, are issues that we have, as I said, been stuck on, that we can unstick ourselves in the next six months. It is going to be intense, and I see some of the permanent representatives here that are going to have to carry us forward on this.

But the truth is that we need to be honest in our self-assessment, that we have a situation that requires change. The status quo is not acceptable.

I'm going to quickly take you through some of the major parts of the Secretary General's report. I know that you're generally familiar with it, but I just want to take a few highlights to give you a sense of just how important these issues are today and how wide ranging they are.

The Secretary General started his report on development, intentionally. People think of the United Nations as fundamentally – they think of the first line of the charter – to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. Yes, that is what our job is. But what does it take to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war?

It goes far beyond narrow boundaries of peacekeeping or matters military and political. We need to look at fundamental economic and social roots on everything. Development matters, development is central to the human experience. We need to promote development on a global basis.

We are in a moment today that we have a surprising and I would say unprecedented consensus on what to do about development. There have been debating schools of development for decades. How does a country develop? Where does it need to come from? What is needed from the outside?

Today more than ever, and especially over the last five years, there's been an incredible convergence on how to pursue development. But what are we lacking? If we've had a convergence that the Millennium Declaration set out some goals in the area of Millennium Development Goals. Everyone says, and agrees, this is an important first step. We need to meet the basics for everybody. And sets out specific targets.

Contrary to many expectations five years ago, we have made incredible progress through the Millennium Development Goals. Countries have mobilized their internal political will, their internal resources to do things like halve poverty, empower women, provide education to girls and boys that have never been in school before, provide healthcare. These basics, address HIV/AIDS are the things that have motivated, as a package, have motivated countries around the globe in every region.

Countries that have the problems that we're talking about and countries that need to make contributions to help those countries address them. It has mobilized the membership of the UN. It's also mobilized the World Bank, the IMF, regional development banks; places that were not used to talking about some of these issues.

So the UN has played a crucial catalytic role in getting everyone to agree on an agenda that is moving forward. What do we need to do now, this year on development? So if everyone's agreeing, what's the problem? Why don't we just

declare victory and go home? I'd like to do that, actually. How about we try that?

In fact, we lack implementation on a lot of the very fundamental agreements that have been made in the last few years. In Monterrey, Mexico three years ago, there were a fundamental set of agreements, essentially a global deal on development between developed countries and developing countries.

Some have started to implement the things in that deal. We need to move that deal dramatically forward. In this package the Secretary General identifies a few of those pieces. First, we need some fundamental agreement on the question of debt. Debt is the mill stone around the necks of various countries that cannot move forward on their development challenges if we don't deal with the debt problems.

We need to deal with trade and increasing the openness of trade, but also the ability of countries, large and small, to engage on a level playing field on that trade debate. We need the Doha round of the WTO to move forward expeditiously. And in the report, the Secretary General calls for the Doha round to be completed by the end of 2006. This is an aggressive but absolutely necessary timetable.

The Secretary General's principal recommendation in the area of development however gets to the issue of official development assistance. Countries cannot do it all on their own. While developing countries have principal responsibility for their own development, we know from everything that has been studied and worked through on the development challenge, that there is a crucial role for external assistance, especially in certain stages of development.

There is a bottleneck in terms of the amount of assistance available to unlock the development potential in many countries. The target that the Secretary General sets out is that every developed country provide 0.7% of its gross national income for official development assistance. Zero point seven percent, doesn't sound like a whole heck of a lot, especially when you think most Americans believe that the U.S. taxpayer gives about 20% of tax dollars to this, 0.7% doesn't sound too terribly difficult. Unfortunately though, it is difficult for a lot of donor countries that aren't giving this level of assistance.

In the last five years, this issue has been debated unlike it has ever been debated before. It's been in discussion in international circles for decades, but in fact in the last five years, we've finally gotten some momentum. A number of countries are turning their trajectory of assistance around from declining to moving up the scale. We need to get more countries moving in that direction to the 0.7 target. That's a key issue in this summit.

Will world leaders recognize the essence of the challenge and respond? So far, the indications are good, but we need to push that further.

The second major set of challenges we face on the security front, maybe for those of you in the audience that are Americans, it sounds second nature. But it does not sound second nature for many peoples around the world that the challenge of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction and particularly the intersection of these two issues is fundamental.

Now, it's not just for those of us sitting in New York City that have to worry about terrorism. In fact, I've pointed out to friends in parts of the world that don't think this affects them, that 9/11 killed more people in other countries than it killed in the U.S.

If you think about the economic implications of the downturn that happened directly attributable to 9/11, more people died of poverty in the developing world than died in New York City, in Washington, in Pennsylvania. Now that's not in any way to diminish those deaths, but to recognize the implications of the interconnected world we live in today.

No one is safe from terrorism, even if it hits all the way across the globe. And certainly no one is safe from weapons of mass destruction. If one were to conceive of a nuclear event, we won't even say a terrorist attack or an intentional event, accidental, a nuclear event, the implications would be global and they would be immediate. We are interconnected in a global economy today that that event whether it happens in the U.S. or in Tokyo or in Brussels or Amsterdam, London, effects would be immediate around the globe, just as they were on 9/11, but much more severe.

So terrorism, weapons of mass destruction are everyone's concern. They have to be everyone's concern. They're not an American problem, they're not a northern problem. They're everybody's problem.

But we can't stop there. The security agenda, the new security agenda is not just terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. More people die on a daily basis around the developing world from internal conflicts, from small arms and light weapons, from landmines. Those are the concerns, linked with poverty, that most countries are concerned about.

So, if those of us in the United States and I say that because we are here in the United States, if those of us in the United States aren't concerned about their problems, why should they be concerned about our problems?

This event that we're talking about year is to get everyone to look at everyone else's problems, not only their own problems.

The Secretary General has put forward in this report a proposal for a Peacebuilding Commission. Sounds innocuous, a new UN body, ho hum. Not really. Currently today 50% of peace agreements die within the first five years, they fail. Fifty percent. Now in major league baseball, batting .500 is a good

average, but in peace, batting .500 is totally unacceptable. It just isn't good enough.

How do we change that success rate of peace agreements from 50% to 80, 90, 95%? For over a decade, roughly since the end of the Cold War, 15 years, people have debated how to secure peace in all of the internal conflicts around the world. We've seen what doesn't work. A lot of the things we have tried haven't worked. But we've also started to see what does work.

What's missing? What's missing is global agreement on how to coordinate these activities. There are lots of actors that flood into post conflict societies, NGOs, governments, international organizations, all the different aspects of international organizations. International financial institutions, everyone goes in and it is chaos. I will tell you, having been in a number of places in countries, lived in countries where there were peace operations happening, simultaneously major economic investment; it is chaotic.

It's very important that we get our act together on the international scene to be able to pull our resources together to address the actual needs in a way that the receiving society can receive it. These are fractured societies with institutions that may have stopped to function or that are shattered institutions.

We need to have an institution in the UN that pulls together the security elements, the economic elements, the political elements and the institutional support for all of that. That is this new Peacebuilding Commission proposal.

Luckily, we have an amazing amount of agreement on such a proposal. This will still go into negotiations shortly and we'll see where we come out, but all the signs are good. The countries around the world are recognizing the need for this and that the proposal of the Secretary General is a good basis for that discussion.

I want to move onto human rights because this is an area in which the UN has an extremely proud history. The UN has built the normative framework on a global basis for human rights. But that very proud history has fallen under some very dark clouds in recent years.

The Human Rights Commission in Geneva, which has long been a paragon and a standard bearer for human rights has become a place for political bickering, for very ungainly debates about human rights, and fundamental questions have been asked about this body.

The UN continues to do very powerful work in the area of human rights through the office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights. And yet her office gets only under 2% of the regular budget of the UN. The major missions of the UN, as laid out in the charter, peace and security, economic and social development, human rights and the rule of law, human rights get 2% of the budget. What's wrong with this picture?

So the Secretary General has put forward a proposal to address some of the deficiencies in this area. Strengthen the office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights. Create the follow up mechanisms for implementing all the treaties that countries have already agreed to. But then finally also to take a good hard look at the intergovernmental mechanism, this Commission on Human Rights.

He has proposed replacing the Commission on Human Rights with a new Council on Human Rights. This is going to be one of the most debated propositions in the Secretary General's package this year. It *should* be one of the most debated propositions in the package. It's new and it's bold, so we don't expect member states to just raise their hands and say, "Yes, this is a good idea." We want them to debate this because we want the centrality of human rights to return to the center of the agenda where it belongs in the UN.

I've talked about three areas for reforms, and I've only touched on specific proposals in each area. There's a rather important fourth area, and that is the question of the UN itself and institutional reform.

I began by talking about oil for food and some of the fundamental challenges it poses to an organization like the UN. The reforms have to be as bold as our problems. We need reform, not just of the Security Council, which is what is being so heavily debated and covered in the media, and we do need reform of the Security Council. But we also need a reform of all of our major organs.

We need fundamental secretariat reform, managerial reform. We also need reform of the Economic and Social Council which has done very important service on key issues. But I think by all concerned, would say it has underperformed given its potential.

And then the General Assembly. Now, I have to say this very carefully because the President of the General Assembly just walked in. Mr. President, this does not bear on your tenure in any way.

The General Assembly is the universal body in the world. It is where all the countries of the world come together to debate matters of critical importance to the world. The General Assembly has a proud history on key issues. It also has had some moments that maybe some would wish to take back. But there can be no doubt about the importance of this body.

The General Assembly is where all countries come together and a great deal of legitimacy can be gained when that body is able to act. If you just look at the package that we are dealing with today, where is this being debated and who is leading the charge? It is being debated in the General Assembly of the United Nations and it's being led by the President of the General Assembly and some of his facilitators that are here today.

This is where the world comes to get agreement on tough issues. We can't leave the General Assembly out of the reform process. So yes, we need to deal with Security Council reform, it is time to reevaluate that body and to update it, enhance its credibility, enhance its ability to deliver on its resolutions, but we also need to address these other bodies as well.

So this is a big agenda, a very bold agenda. Is it achievable? The Secretary General started this exercise saying, "I want to put forward a package that is bold and achievable." And throughout, we've tried to find that balance of what is bold and yet what can be achieved.

My answer is this is most certainly achievable, and we have some key assets that make it possible. First, there is a general recognition that we've been stuck on a number of these key issues. If you go to various groups of countries and individual countries that really care about a given issue, they know why their issue has been stuck for years.

They also know that if they continue to debate those same issues in the same fora at the same level, they won't get unstuck. So there's a general recognition that we need this process.

There is also recognition that the package that the Secretary General put forward while many debate this issue of a package, recognize that these issues have to move forward together. There is really no possibility that individually we will see the kind of movement we need.

Taken together however, a lot of countries are starting to unstick themselves on key sets of issues and saying, "Well, if we would get some movement on my set of issues, maybe we could give a little on those over there." That sense is starting to pervade the house.

Now, while I'm accused of being overly optimistic at times in my life, my job right now, I'm paid to be terribly realistic about the situation. We face some big problems. There is not universal recognition that we have the fundamental problems that I described earlier, that the UN is in desperate need of these reforms. We need to convince those who aren't convinced of the overall need for bold movement.

We also need to handle the most delicate issues equally delicately. Security Council reform is one, and I think it's probably one reason why many of you have come today. Great curiosity, will this really happen? Will the world realign itself in the Security Council? This is a fundamental issue and yet we cannot let this or any other issue take hostage the entire process. There's too much to lose for too many people around the world to let any issue take all the other issues hostage.

So far, the parties to the Security Council debate have been very, very responsible. We need to continue to see that kind of behavior in order to see this

process through. In recent days, the temperature has started to escalate, and this is not helpful. We need all of the serious countries that are engaged in this debate to recognize the seriousness, not just for them, but of the entire international community.

I would say that that issue, the 0.7 issue, the use of force criteria, are all issues that are going to excite great passions in certain parts of the world. We need to channel those passions into constructive decisions and we can do that.

We have an extremely able leader in the president. We have extremely able facilitators. I think we have what we need to get an agreement. It is by no means guaranteed, by no means guaranteed. We have an intense six months in front of us; in fact, less. An intense four or five months of negotiations. But I am convinced from talking to both the ambassadors here in New York and to many of the capitals involved, that we have the will to do this.

We have the personnel in place that can get it done. And in fact, we must get it done, because as the Secretary General has said, the status quo is just not acceptable. Thank you.

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