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THE UNITED NATIONS IN THE 21st CENTURY

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Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends

Let me start by thanking Neil [Kinnock] for that wonderful introduction. I’m thrilled to be able to
give this lecture, both in front of you and Glenys, who is a great friend too of development and
the United Nations, and before so many friends. Although I’ve been out of London for a long
time, it is a city which remembers its sons and daughters and also has more than its fair share
of citizens engaged internationally, allowing me to keep in contact with a very wide range of
people, many of whom are here today. It’s wonderful to see you all.

Our subject today is a broad one: the UN in the 21st Century. And to understand the
challenges the UN faces this century, we need to go back to the end of the Cold War and to
the extraordinary period of globalisation that followed it.

During the 1990s we saw a dramatic integration of world economies, not just around trade,
but around information flows and capital flows and even cultural flows. Indeed in some ways it
seemed we had reached a moment where international organisations had their epiphany:
that they had found their moment in the sun and the world order they had been calling for,
often as lonely voices during those cold war years, had finally come about.

Hence, I suspect for all of us, who believe in these organisations, there has been a real sense
of surprise and dismay at the fact that, 15 years later, nearly all of these organisations are in a
profound crisis of legitimacy, mandate and purpose. Not just the United Nations, but I think it
would be fair to say at the European Commission as well, NATO even, the IMF and the World
Bank. And if all of these organisations are struggling to recover lost ground with public
opinion in member countries, to reconnect with those they're seeking to help, reconnect with
the governments that must support them, one must, I think, seek some common roots, some
common explanations for why we see this crisis in the very international organisations that
might have been expected to be in their heyday in this era of global integration.

A Broad Legitimacy Crisis

I see three broad roots to this crisis.

First one of governance; second, one of the demands placed on these organisations, which
are growing dramatically; third, whether their mission has kept up with those new demands.

In terms of governance, pretty much all of these institutions - even the European Commission
and European Union, which were founded significantly later than the others - have a system
of ownership which rests in the outcome of the Second World War. Nearly all of them have, if
you like, got stuck in a 1945 groove, with, in many cases, still a mandate and mission which
also derives from how the world was in 1945.

And yet when you look at today versus then, the world couldn't really be a more different
place. Yes, China is a member of the Security Council, a permanent member, but in some
ways the one whose voice is least evidently heard. And yet it, together with India, comprises a
third of the world’s population and arguable an even larger share of economic dynamism and
change in today’s world.

And India is not in that Security Council, as we heard loudly and angrily during the debate
about the Security Council enlargement last year. Nor, of course is Brazil and nor is Germany,
and nor, as I know the Italian Ambassador is here, should I add, is Italy. And in fact as to the
point about 1945, one of his colleagues, the Ambassador at that time in New York famously declared when the Security Council enlargement began, ‘What is this? Is this now about including all the losers in the new Security Council? Germany, Japan? Why not Italy too then?’ which I think pointed out the difficulties of the original arrangement but also the limitations of some of the ideas for enlargement that have come since.

But it’s not just about leaving out big important powers, it’s about leaving out voices that are critical to solving the kinds of problems around the world, that in the case of the UN, the Security Council must address.

It is very hard, for example, to deal with the problem of Sudan and Darfur, when several members of the Security Council are competing to secure long term oil supplies from that country. And it is simply impossible for the traditional western powers to solve the problem of North Korea without the full involvement of China certainly, but also other Asian regional powers as well.

Or take conflict. A UN built on the ashes of 1945 was driven by a vision of conflict resolution of traditional wars between states. Today we have very few of those - really the only one which meets that definition that is on our books at the moment, is the uneasy truce between Ethiopia and Eritrea. This is a conflict that has a kind of First World War quality to it, with trenches and two armies facing each other from dugouts willing to fly at each others throats across a border. But pretty much every other conflict we’re dealing with in Africa and elsewhere is today inside a state - fired by ethnic, class, religious and other schisms.

And as we have brought down the number of those conflicts, quite successfully in fact, over the last decade, the one emerging and growing, albeit from a relatively low base, source of conflict and violence and fatalities, is terrorism. And here there is almost no UN framework, let alone NATO or any other framework, to handle it successfully. Indeed we do not yet even have a commonly agreed definition of terrorism.

If one then moves to the social side and takes welfare, which in 1945 in this country meant Beveridge, we see that today’s debate has been changed, largely, not into an argument between parties at the domestic level, but between nations at the global level. We all struggle with the fact that it is almost impossible to sustain in a globalised world the levels of inequality and poverty in a world with more than a billion people living still on less than 75p a day, and in fact almost half of the world’s population, 45% or so, still living on less than £1.50 a day. But even as the debates are gradually changing, and the issues are new, the structures to deal with them have largely remained unchanged for 60 years.

And of course globalisation is not kind to weak structures. It’s like a natural flow of water which takes down riverbanks and dams and anything in its way, which doesn’t move effectively with the flow. And it is not just communications, but global public health problems, such as Avian Flu, or HIV/AIDS, or an issue such as immigration.

Indeed, immigration is arguably the great missing component of a successful vision of globalisation. If one goes back historically, where there are intensive flows of trade and capital and information across borders, they are largely unsustainable if you prevent the movement of people. Peter Sutherland, who’s with us today and is the Secretary General’s Special Advisor on Migration, I think could comment more on that. But the fact is we have no international mechanism for dealing with perhaps the most difficult slow burn of all: international migration in today’s rather borderless world.

A Wide-Ranging In Tray

All this means that when I look at my in-tray on a typical day at the UN, I’m occasionally a little daunted by the difference between the size of the problems and the weakness of the institutional means we have to address them.

Nearly always on any morning there are a couple of local wars somewhere, which have flared up overnight. There is the nagging, difficult problem of Darfur, which continues to resist the
kind of international intervention required to end and is the closest thing we have anywhere at
the moment to an internal genocide. Today we have the difficult issue of Iran's nuclear
programme which will arrive at the Security Council at the beginning of next week. And of
course there are the long running, intractable difficulties of seeking a resolution to Iraq in the
form of an exit strategy for the coalition and the establishment of a stable, self governed and
self policed state. And while the UN has been a little on the margins of that effort – at least
when compared to our role in Afghanistan, which was much more substantial – we
nevertheless are the second biggest international presence there, after the coalition and have
been heavily involved in the elections, the writing of the constitution and now the political
negotiations for a broad based government.

But look beyond these political issues to something I've already mentioned: Avian Flu. Here
the UN faces a challenge which goes beyond those of multinational corporations or other
entities trying to do contingency planning for a potential catastrophe. Not only do we have to
figure out how protect our operations during an outbreak, if it tragically occurs, but how we will
be able to deliver massive amounts of humanitarian assistance and support world-wide while
trying to protect our people and broader operational effectiveness in other areas at the same
time.

And of course beside all those old problems of conflict and health are very new ones. For
example there is a struggle to work out how, if at all, the United Nations should be involved in
an issue such as internet governance – an issue which also happened to pop into my in-tray
this week. And as a result, when one looks at this vast range of issues, one again and again
comes back to this question: how can a venerable 1945-designed institution deal with all this?

Three Pillars for the Future

To answer that let me set out what Secretary-General Kofi Annan saw as the three pillars
around which we need to reorganise today’s UN to give it focus and to meet a test that all of
you from the business or political world would understand: to reconnect the UN with the
customer, the voter, the base. In our case that is how to reconnect the UN with, and make it
relevant to, our core constituents: the peoples of the world. And as we looked both across
Western and developing country audiences alike it seemed to us that there was a great
commonality of demand in three broad areas: development, security and human rights and
democracy.

On the development front, this has been driven by a conviction that this global world that
we're entering into has to tackle poverty collectively, that current trends are just not
sustainable. In some ways, at the global level we have been on a continuum that late 19th
Century/early 20th Century British social reforming politicians would have recognised: a
patched-together welfare system which depended on a lot of private charity and a lot of local
church and Poor Law support, but that needed to be revolutionised into a more
comprehensive system of strategic and properly financed anti-poverty programmes intended
to put people on their own feet, give them the benefits of education and opportunity, and very
quickly allow them to become net contributors to the society they lived in.

And it is from this impulse that the extraordinarily ambitious goal - the centrepiece of the
Millennium Development Goals - of trying to halve extreme poverty world-wide by 2015 is
ultimately derived from. To do for the world, what has been done within many Western
countries a century ago. It is a goal that came out of the United Nations Millennium Summit in
2000, and it is a goal whose implementation needs in part to be orchestrated by the United
Nations, but has got as far as it has because of a much more wide-ranging support cutting
across governments, the private sector and others.

The very real successes that have already been achieved - most notably in helping get
commitments from the EU to ratcheting up development funding for the future to the kind of
scale we need to meet the MDGs - are in no small part due to the extraordinary activism in
very considerable part of British NGOs who started the Make Poverty History movement. I'm
sure many others here wear this white band that I have around my own wrist and that many of
us in the UN wear to signal our commitment to these broader objectives.
Of course here in Britain it didn’t stop with the NGOs. I really would applaud both Prime Minister Blair, but also the opposition parties as well, for a common commitment to dramatically increasing British development aid. And I’m very pleased to see Michael Howard here today, who put a commitment to “Point 7” – the promise to pledge 0.7% of GDP to foreign aid - into the Tory Manifesto in the last election.

It is worth noting that this is a dramatic transformation of the political debate that is very striking to me as someone who has spent most of his adult life arguing that development matters and that even if it doesn’t have a strong political constituency, it’s worth doing for its own right. Because I’ve suddenly found my cause has become politically popular - that there is a demographic of voters for whom this is perhaps as important as domestic issues, and as important a way for politicians to differentiate themselves as any domestic agenda. And that is replicated across many other donor countries as well.

So on the development side the world now has a bold ambitious strategy which goes much wider than the UN and involves governments, involves the European Commission, the World Bank, NGOs and very significantly the private sector. But somehow that network focused on the MDGs needs a centre, and I think the UN provides that today – and last year’s UN World Summit in New York provided a key focal point for rich and poor countries alike to recommit to their implementation over the next decade.

The second pillar of this new, refocused UN of Kofi Annan’s is security. And in today’s world it is rooted in the fact I cited earlier that the old wars across borders have been replaced by these new threats and that there is a need for an international security regime which reflects it.

So this means a huge focus on trying to get a common definition of terrorism, not just agreed, but put at the basis of global anti-terrorism collaboration and cooperation. And it means a new focus on failing and failed states, - based in part on the recognition that it was out of Afghanistan that so much of the terrorism of a few years ago was sourced and originated. This recognition that failing states are not just a problem for their own citizens, but a time bomb waiting to go off in the broader world.

And so we also created out of our summit last September a new Peace Building Commission, intended to bring together the economics, the politics and security of rebuilding states that have fallen apart in this way. And we also got a doctrine passed, whose effectiveness will soon be tested in Darfur, the so called ‘responsibility to protect.’ This is something that Kofi Annan has championed since becoming Secretary General and was initially laughed out of court as a principle that an intergovernmental organisation would never accept. The idea that when a state turns on its own citizens and the level of human rights abuse comes close to that of a war crime or a genocide, that it no longer remains that state’s business; that there is an overriding obligation on the world to intervene and stop it. That if you like is the legacy of Rwanda and of the former Yugoslavia.

But now in Darfur we see the principle put to the test, and we see the difficulty of constructing an effective diplomatic effort and resourcing it with the troops and money and political will to actually go into a very distant place, the size of France, and impose a peace.

And from there to the third pillar of this new UN: a focus on human rights and democracy underpinned by the conviction that these are universal concepts even if their application may be culturally and politically defined, particularly in the case of democracy. Nevertheless, of all the UN documents it is perhaps the founding language about human rights which has worn best and remains most relevant today, that those wonderful words calling for freedom of speech, respect for religions, that all these things are as true to day as they’ve ever been and offer us a template for dealing with issues such as the Danish cartoons and the response to them in the Muslim world.

Here what we need to do is to take human rights to the centre of the political discourse, to drive these values across all societies and all peoples in those societies. And hence the effort
to discard the discredited UN Human Rights Commission, which has operated under the chairmanship of countries such as Zimbabwe and Sudan and Libya, almost a kind of thumb in the eye for western human rights champions. And that is why the Secretary-General last year proposed the creation of a new Human Rights Council where countries could only get elected if they respected certain human rights criteria. The guiding idea was that voting would move from a situation where regional slates were constructed in back rooms and then the rest of the membership accepted them, to a secret vote on a country by country basis, where you need to secure a majority of the membership. And as an added check, seeking to get elected anyway is a potentially risky for abusers, because the first thing that happens to a new member is that they are peer reviewed on their own human rights record by the membership as a whole.

This important reform is, as I speak, hanging in balance, because the bar is a little bit lower than the Secretary General wanted. Kofi Annan had proposed that there be a two thirds vote to get elected, but a lot of decent human rights respecting countries, smaller countries, felt that was too high - that they didn't have two thirds of the world who were their friends and would vote for them and that this would favour big countries with global alliances and friendships. So the bar had to be lowered to an absolute majority. That has led to uncertainty about the whole endeavour because the United States is worried that the bar isn't high enough. So a huge debate is going on, where we are trying to bring the US on board so we can proceed with this important new global human rights instrument, which may not be perfect, but is nonetheless a significant improvement over what came before.

Investing in the UN

Now to underpin these three new pillars UN of development, security and human rights, is a need for major management reform.

Nothing symbolises this issue of an institution still too closely held down by its 1945 roots, than the management and institutional arrangements of today's United Nations. The UN of 60 years ago - even the UN of 10 years ago - was a rather stable, static Secretariat which largely wrote reports and organised conferences out of New York and its European capitals, Geneva and Vienna. And that was good work, important work. It set many of the goals for development and other areas that we're striving to reach today. But it bears little relationship, that legacy activity of the UN, to the exploding new business of operations in some of the world's most difficult neighbourhoods that consumes us today.

The UN spends some $2 billion a year on the activities I've just described. By contrast, there's something $18 billion a year devoted to development, humanitarian and peacekeeping work around the world, all of it done in hugely difficult circumstances. About half of it is done by UN agencies, such as the UN Development Programme, which I headed for 6 years. And most of those agencies are not tied down by this 1945 architecture -- they have been able to change with times, in large part because they are voluntarily funded and so every year have to meet the market test of whether we have performed successfully in the eyes of our donors.

But for the UN Secretariat proper, with an assessed contribution funding scheme and huge intergovernmental involvement in our management, we have not changed with the times. And yet today in our peacekeeping operations alone we have more than twice as many civilian staff, UN staff, as we have in the Secretariat in New York. And whereas the Secretariat in New York is in some ways more often like a kind of comfortable, tenured university world with 3% vacancy rates and some people sitting in the same jobs for years and even decades at a time, out in the field it's a very different story. There people only have six month contracts, because most of our peacekeeping missions get renewed on a six monthly basis. They are not able to have their families with them, and are disadvantaged in terms of the financial package they're offered. And as a consequence we have 30% vacancy rates in the field and in critical functions such as procurement, 50% vacancy rates.

So what we want to do now is change the whole structure of the organisation, its management systems, its investment in people, the way we develop our leadership, the way we run things in terms of our global IT system -- in short the way the whole operation works --
to one which reflects this new global operational reality. And we've just put out our proposals on that, in the form of a new report, *Investing in the United Nations*, which was launched this week in New York by the Secretary-General, and we're racing to get it underway before he finishes his term at the end of this year.

And there is one additional dimension to this reform effort, which I mention because it is of particular interest to many of you, on the restructuring of the development side of the UN System. And here we have set up a new panel to try and set out a plan of how we can integrate today’s rather diffuse, broken up system of UN development agencies into a single more integrated group that really works together in an integrated way at country level. The British member of the panel, which is chaired by the Prime Ministers of Mozambique, Pakistan and Norway, is Gordon Brown, the Chancellor. And I hope and believe this group will deliver a bold blueprint to make sure that we have the arrangements to deliver on the MDGs.

### A New UN

So a new UN.

And while I know the word “new” can often be overused, I believe we really are creating a genuinely new UN based around these three pillars of development and security and human rights, backed by a reformed management structure and a more coherent, committed system working on the ground around the world, that we hope will reconnect us with people.

And while the broader crisis of legitimacy facing multilateral organizations is very much with us, in the case of the UN at least, I hope we've now got the plan in place to escape our history. We had the broad vision endorsed successfully at the summit we had last September. Now we have to demonstrate in how we handle these difficult operations - from public health to humanitarian crises, to peacekeeping - the kind of performance which wins back public trust. I think if we can do that, we will have an international system in which people will regain confidence and trust. And as I watch what is happening at other international organisations, I think they too are embarking on similar journeys of reform.

Now just in closing, let me just thank David Green and Neil Kinnock not just for allowing me to speak to you this morning and assembling such a wonderful audience to hear, but for a second thing as well, which is for the British Council. For someone who's lived his life in development and politics around the world, the British Council is always a friendly neighbour - the other face of British diplomacy if you like. Not the old British Council of those libraries and reading rooms, although I've seen an awful lot of people in many countries, seen their lives transformed by that dimension of it, but a British Council which has just encouraged the kind of cultural openness, the exposure to ideas from other places, which is so much the critical part of opening minds, which ultimately is the way that globalisation will become a sustaining way of organising world affairs.

We can get the economics right, we can get the politics right, but unless we breed a generation of young men and women everywhere who, while deeply engrained in their own culture and national lives, have a respect for other people’s culture and life too, then this great global experiment we’ve embarked on I fear would be a futile one.

Thank you.

From 1 April 2006 Mr Malloch Brown will be the Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations