

## **AN AWESOME BOTTLENECK**

A recent article by Iqbal Quadir illustrates why the idea of *the* UN leadership role for the world must be challenged in the 21st century. He focused on the way in which modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) are generating profound changes in advanced countries, and can facilitate them in poor countries as well. He felt that the real bottleneck blocking processes -- such as ICTs -- that may transform societies in developing countries is the quality of general governance. He observed that:

"Despite an increase in professional institutions and multilateral organizations promoting international norms of behavior ... Transparency International ... [cites] 'a worldwide crisis involving pervasive misuse of power by public officials.' ...

... top-down state-led efforts have, by and large, failed ... [because they] all involved strengthening the state, centralizing it, and making it immune to pressures from citizens ...

... recognition of governance problems [by the World Bank and the UN] may do little good ... [without] genuine dispersion of power. ...

Most interestingly, governments may ... [have to accept] ideas and concepts that ... compete with the concept of territory on which they place their strongest claims. ...

ICT's empower from below while devolving power from above, resulting in a two-pronged attack on abuse of state power that has left so much of the world's population languishing in poverty.

What can be done to sustain this trend? ... Promote tailwinds to these technologically driven ... processes that are empowering citizens ... Empower commercial and social entrepreneurs ... ICT's can help people [to help others] directly, without the need to have state-to-state intermediaries. ... ICTs can be the means to freedom and development by blindsiding the obstacles to both."

Iqbal Z. Quadir, "The bottleneck is at the top of the bottle", Fletcher Forum of World Affairs, vol. 26:2, **Summer/Fall 2002**, pp. 69-89 [73, 75, 77, 83m 87-88.]

[Note: Mr. Quadir is the founder of Grameen Phone in Bangladesh.]

Three quotes help illustrate just how much of a bottleneck the UN and its decision-making processes are to global governance solutions: the first on continual UN decision-making disputes and disorder, the second on the UN's lack of structure and process to address pressing modern questions, and the third a harsh recent assessment from Secretary-General Annan himself.

"Secretary-General Kofi Annan's plans to make major changes in the way the United Nations works have run into serious trouble in General Assembly committees,

where they are being buried in a blizzard of questions and objections.

... the measures -- totaling more than 70 large and small ones ... are being dissected by national delegations.

The fate of Mr. Annan's plans, which critics in Congress have dismissed as not bold enough, will reflect on [his] reputation as an insider who knows how to get things done. ...

... what is happening now in the General Assembly shows the near-impossibility of quick action from the 185-member body, where every proposal is scrutinized for any number of reasons by one or more national delegations or groups of countries. ...

... Pakistan's representative ... said ... that there 'wide divergences' among countries on the dozens of measures they are considering."

"UN leader's grand plans for reform hit obstacles," International Herald Tribune, **November 3, 1997**.

"Challenges that must be globally managed keep popping up: genetic engineering, AIDS, and global terrorist networks. Yet ... the global landscape has dramatically changed in the last 50 years, but the institutions serving the world have not.

The array of institutions is bewildering. Within the U. N. system alone, there are 112 agencies. More than 20 agencies deal with water, for example. ....

Functions overlap, mandates conflict, and each agency has its own standard of accountability, [or unaccountability] to member governments. ....

The institutions cannot reform themselves. Two generations of institutional contamination and tenured self-interest ensure that this deadlock continues. But this lack of coherence damages their collective credibility, frustrates their donors and owners, and gives rise to public cynicism. There is a consensus that something must be done, but no consensus on how to go about it."

Mike Moore, "Multilateral meltdown", Foreign Policy, **March/April 2003**, pp. 74-75.

[Note: Mr. Moore was Director General of the World Trade Organization from 1999 to 2002 and a former Prime Minister of New Zealand. He is the author of A world without walls: Freedom, development, free trade, and global governance, Cambridge University, Cambridge, UK, 2003.]

"Secretary-General Kofi Annan said Monday that the United Nations must consider sweeping reforms in the wake of the Iraq war and warned that the organization had lost the confidence of many across the globe.

In unusually strong language that reflected strains over the crisis in Baghdad, Annan suggested that the credibility of the Security Council, the General Assembly, and other UN bodies was at stake.

'If they are to regain their authority, they may need radical reform,' Annan said before making public his report on the organization's future.

'We can no longer take it for granted that our multilateral institutions are strong enough to cope with all these challenges,' Annan wrote, saying UN members should ask themselves whether the existing structure is 'adequate for the task we have before us.'

...

He also criticized the 191-member General Assembly for lacking priorities, the Security Council for being undemocratic, the UN trusteeship Council for failing to perform, and financial institutions for not adequately involving the developing nations the measures are meant to serve."

"UN needs big changes, Annan says," International Herald Tribune, **September 9, 2003**.