

# CONFERENCES AND NEGOTIATIONS

## Chronological quotes

"There is at present in the United Nations system a large number of bodies exercising ... global policy-making functions related to development and international economic cooperation.

In addition ... it has become a recent practice of the United Nations to convene on an *ad hoc* basis world conferences to deal with ... [many] global issues ....

While all these mechanisms [make available] a wealth of policy inputs, an unchecked proliferation of such initiatives may undermine their ability to attract world attention and lead to an excessive diffusion of responsibility for global policy making, with a consequent loss of coherence.

Furthermore, the fixed periodicity of conferences is not always conducive to good results in that it may prevent the United Nations system from responding in a flexible and effective way to new developments and newly perceived interrelationships among development issues."

A new United Nations structure for global economic co-operation, Report of the Group of Experts on the Structure of the United Nations system, E/AC.62/9, United Nations, New York, **28 May 1975**.

"The decline of the U.N.'s public image and performance is spoken about commonly. Staff morale is at rock bottom ...

Meetings...

The introduction and enforcement of accountability into a bureaucracy like ours is a major undertaking. It could be partially achieved through a series of small measures. For example:

-- If a meeting of one week's duration does not consider anything else but who should chair, and over which agenda item, then the secretary who was responsible for that meeting should not preserve his function on the next occasion; ...

-- The authors of U.N. documents should be identifiable. The responsibility of the Secretariat for the contents of such documents should be unaffected, but the possibility of hiding behind the anonymous Secretariat should be reduced ..."

Andreas Kahnert, "Needed: U.N. accountability", UN Special (Geneva), **March 1985**, pp. 10-11.

" The United States should .... make the very deliberate decision that the U.N. serves neither its own original purposes nor ours.

There is no reason the United States cannot support independent agencies, that pass the test of both fiscal responsibility and ideological neutrality. Originally non-political entities such as

WHO might even benefit from a delinking from the U.N., which in recent years has helped politicize and thus devalue the work of many of these specialized agencies. Conferences on telecommunications, water resources, postal cooperation, or population will be more productive if they do not have to deal with the U.N.'s permanent agenda of neocolonialism, disarmament, apartheid, and Palestinian rights."

Charles Krauthammer, "Let it sink: Why the U.S. should bail out of the U.N.", The New Republic, **August 24, 1987**, pp. 18-23 [22-23].

"According to U.N. [and member government officials] some of the greatest waste .... stems from publishing mountains of material of negligible value. A propensity for holding conferences and churning out endless reams of reports has given the United Nations a reputation as a huge talk shop and paper mill. ....

Some critics see the blizzard of paper as symptomatic of ... a swollen U.N. bureaucracy and, often, a lack of genuine productivity in which issuing reports becomes an end in itself. U.N. bodies will often spend a year doing a report that hardly anybody ever reads -- in any of the organization's six official languages.

[The UN argues] that member governments continually request the reports. However, critics say that many publications are never solicited but seem to be cranked out to justify the existence -- and budget -- of the offices that issue them.

Despite repeated recommendations to cut back, the U.N. paper flow continues unabated. In 1991, the [New York, Geneva, and Vienna offices] produced 164.1 million documents totaling 2.12 billion pages ... Printing these tons of documents cost \$275 million, a figure that excludes the cost of writing them... "

William Branigin, "The U.N. empire: polished image, tarnished reality", "Costly publications raise concerns about red ink: Documents criticized as out of date, too esoteric", Washington Post, **September 20, 1992**.

"There is a succession of high-level meetings in store for early 2000, starting with Davos. In the spring international meetings at the United Nations and in Geneva will mark the fifth anniversaries of the 1995 Copenhagen Social Summit and the Fourth World Conference on Women. There's the Millenium Summit at the United Nations later in the year, which is expected to attract more than 150 world leaders. There is a growing expectation that the privilegerati will fashion a new agenda for equitable development, economic and social."

Pranay Gupte, "The Mahatma's message: 'Think about tomorrow, but act for today' Ghandi said. Not a bad millennial mantra", Newsweek, **January 31, 2000**, p. 4.

"It took decades of international pressure and weeks of intense negotiations, but when a month long conference of more than 185 nations ended at the United Nations in New York this weekend the five original atomic powers had agreed for the first time to the 'unequivocal' elimination of nuclear arms.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan called the move, part of a broad agreement to reinvigorate nuclear arms control, 'a significant step forward in humanity's pursuit of a more peaceful world.'

The five nuclear powers -- Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States -- never considered setting a deadline for this goal, and there are strong lobbies in every country arguing for a retention of nuclear arms as a deterrent against possible future threats ....

But the five nations' pledge, brokered by a group of seven middle-level powers ....., gives at least a psychological boost to flagging efforts to contain and abolish nuclear bombs, the aim of a 30-year- old treaty whose achievements and failures have been under review by the UN conference.

The accord, the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, was adopted in 1968, went into effect in 1970, and was extended indefinitely in 1995."

Barbara Crossette, "5 atom powers agree to scrap arms: But UN accord provides no timetable in first such declaration", International Herald Tribune, **May 22, 2000**.

"In retrospect, it is difficult to understand why United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan and his senior advisers ... were so determined to organize a summit conference of world leaders ... on the occasion of the first General Assembly of the new millenium. In many ways, the 1990s was a decade of peacekeeping failures and conferences for the world organization. The failures are all too obvious; and most of the conferences, if they are remembered at all, exist only in the institutional memories of the organizations that participated in them. ...

This [Millenium Summit] is of course a public relations ploy, not a serious idea. The problems of the world organization cannot be solved by summits, millennial or otherwise. ...

Yes, almost every major head of state dutifully trooped to New York to address the summit -- for an allotted time of five minutes each! That alone should have been enough to demonstrate what an inconsequential event the entire summit really was. ... Tellingly, almost no one at the United Nations today talks about the summit, although the event took almost two years to plan and occupied the attention of some of the institution's best minds. It is almost as if it never happened. And, in a sense, it never did."

David Rieff, "The Millenium Assembly", Global Governance, 7 (2001), pp. 127-130 [127, 130].

"The idea of a UN conference on racism was flawed from the start, and the protracted wranglings in South Africa have only underscored this point. Racism, xenophobia and related prejudice .... are so entrenched that they are a difficult challenge for national governments, let alone an unwieldy gathering of all the world's nations. ....

There is a simple lesson here: The United Nations is an umbrella for many indispensable activities, from peacekeeping to care for refugees, as well as for much insufferable posturing. The more the UN members allow the organization's name to be associated with the kind of posturing that went on in Durban, the more they stoke anti-UN feeling in key industrial nations.

This year, when a global AIDS fund was established, many poor countries were angry that the United Nations was not allowed to administer it, since they have a stronger voice within the organization than in other international bodies, but the United Nation's deserved reputation for disorder and confusion made that decision inevitable. The Durban conference will only encourage the world's leading powers to keep more of the world's business outside the United Nations. ...."

"After the walkout", *The Washington Post*, in the International Herald Tribune, **September 10, 2001**.

"Hamlet famously moaned 'words, words, words' when Polonius asked him what he was reading. Such dismissiveness is often echoed by observers of the international diplomatic scene. 'More empty talk,' a journalist said to me the other day. 'What difference will it make?'

He was referring to the meeting I was attending, a United Nations-organized seminar in Copenhagen on peace in the Middle East. But he could as well have been talking about the confabulations of the food summit in Rome earlier this year or the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg next month. I have no doubt critics are dusting off the clichés for that one, preparing to denounce one more gabfest. ....

Yet talk is the necessary precursor for action. ....

Of course, talk can be distorting, hate-filled, unconstructive. It doesn't matter. ....

Apathy is the real enemy. Silence is its accomplice. We can only know each other by talking to each other."

Shashi Tharoor, "Don't knock gabfests: Not all UN talk is empty", International Herald Tribune, **August 15, 2002**.

[Note: The struggling defense that Mr. Tharoor, the UN Under-Secretary-General for communications and public information, makes of this recent UN world conference, as the UN's top "PR" man, is interesting: the reverse formulation of the article's title is of course that almost all UN talk *is* empty.]

"In the end, the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development was just too complex. .... The ambitious project .... ended with a sprawling document that had something for everyone but few specific promises. ....

One thing seems certain. There may never be a conference like this again. Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen of Denmark, currently president of the European Union, said he did not think such 'megasummits' were the way to ensure implementation of critical environment and development tasks. 'The 1990s was the decade of mega summits,' he said. 'I think we should make the next 10 years the years of action.' ....

Another shortcoming of the summit, according to its critics, was its failure to go beyond a general sentiment to reduce trade distorting energy and farm subsidies in the rich countries. ....

But having made and broken so many promises at the Earth summit meeting in Rio [in 1992], some say it was just as well that the Johannesburg summit meeting did not erect another series of pledges to be broken.

'Why make promises you can't keep?' asked Donald Johnston, secretary-general of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development ...."

Barry James, "Johannesburg summit: A triumph or a disaster?", International Herald Tribune, **September 6, 2002**.

"Just as the nuclear standoff between the U.S. and the Soviet Union defined an age, so too may the emerging era of [nuclear weapons] proliferation.

.... the 'axiom of proliferation' is still operative -- as long as any state possesses nuclear weapons (or any weapon of mass destruction), others will seek to acquire them. ....

The problem ....is that the ultimate [preventive] power .... is supposed to be the UN Security Council. And as [former UN chief weapons inspector] Richard Butler concedes, 'deep concern about the Security Council's unreliability' in enforcing its nonproliferation treaties is 'reasonable.' ....

Despite the UN's inadequacies, [some think] now is precisely the time for the Security Council to show it has teeth on this, the most pressing issue it faces. [But] If, despite a UN-ordered embargo, North Korea or Iran continues to flout the nuclear nonproliferation treaty (NPT), what then? Does the UN accede to [or the US undertake] military action to defang the violator? If [they don't], it would mean the end of arms control as we know it. ....

What other options are there? Anyone have any ideas? If not, last one into the bomb shelter shut the door, thank you."

Bill Powell, "The end of the world: Is there any way to stop the spread of nuclear weapons", Fortune, **October 27, 2003**, p. 72.

"The Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty is arguably the most popular treaty in history. Except for five states, every nation in the world is part of it. For more than three decades, it has helped curb the spread of nuclear weapons.

Since the Sept. 11 attacks, however, the viability of the treaty has been called into question. Some say it is obsolete. Others say it is merely ineffective. ...

Those who say the treaty is useless argue that either the bad guys don't sign the treaty, or they do and then cheat. The good guys sign and obey, but the treaty is irrelevant for these countries because they have no intention of becoming nuclear proliferators. This all-or-nothing approach is wrong. ...

Of course, ... [new arrangements] would hardly be a cure-all. And making it work would be difficult. But at a time when its effectiveness and relevance are being questioned, such an approach would strengthen the treaty by furthering its goals: preventing the spread of nuclear weapons while promoting the development of peaceful nuclear energy."

Ashton B. Carter et al., "Mend the nonproliferation treaty, but keep it," International Herald Tribune, **December 23, 2003**.

"The head of the United Nation's watchdog agency on atomic weapons said Friday that the illicit trafficking of nuclear-related material and equipment had grown so widespread that it amounted to a Wal-Mart for weapons-seeking countries.

Mohamed ElBaradei, the Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said he was taken aback during a recent trip to Libya by the scale and complexity of the black market, through which Libya obtained material and blueprints for nuclear weapons designs. ...

... neither the atomic energy agency nor the intelligence branches of the big countries have a grip on the extent of nuclear trafficking.

'The system is under a good deal of stress,' he said. 'We need to take this seriously.'

For many experts who gathered [in Switzerland, for the Davos Forum], nuclear proliferation is looming as the next big security threat. Much of the focus has centered on the suspected trail of nuclear material and skill from countries like Pakistan and North Korea to striving nuclear powers like Iran and Libya."

Mark Landler, "Trafficking in nuclear arms called widespread," International Herald Tribune, **January 24-25, 2004**.

"Western nations and arms traders are dealing out death and destruction while touting the values of peace and stability. The arms trade complicates efforts to improve human rights, fight poverty and promote democracy. Developing nations spend billions of dollars every year on military expenditures, and are guilty of neglecting their people, who often lack basic necessities such as food, clothing, education and health care. The United Nations must address the issue of the arms trade as the most dangerous plight of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Governments must no longer be negligent -- they must factor human rights, democracy and non-aggression into their arms sales decision-making. A global arms trade treaty is need to ensure accountability and to prevent weapons from falling into the hands of indiscriminate killers and human rights abusers."

"UN must establish global arms treaty", Daily Star (Beirut), in "Other views: opinions from around the world", International Herald Tribune, **September 14, 2004**.

"The recent report on global security ... identified seven principal threats ... [and gave] primacy of place to nuclear Armageddon.

The entire nonproliferation regime is now at risk because of withdrawals, a lack of compliance and new international threats, the report notes. It warns that 'we are approaching a point at which the erosion of the nonproliferation regime could become irreversible and result in a cascade of proliferation.' ...

Without naming names, the report points to two countries whose actions threaten to collapse -- or explode --- the nonproliferation regime. [Iran and North Korea are then discussed by the author] ...

The governments of the major powers ... must address the urgent nuclear danger today. A comprehensive strategy for preventing nuclear terrorism should be organized under a doctrine of Three No's: no loose nukes, no new nascent nukes and no new nuclear-weapons states.

Responding to the report, Secretary-General Kofi ANnan recommended that the international community debate these recommendations at the special summit next September. Yet avoiding the cascade about which the panel warns requires urgent actions now."

Graham Allison, "A cascade of nuclear proliferation", International Herald Tribune, **December 17, 2004**.

"Congolese often say, 'We'd be so much better off if we weren't so rich.' The great wealth of this unhappy territory at the center of Africa has long attracted foreigners. ...

[It is] ... estimated that there have been 3.8 million deaths in the six-year conflict ...

The territory has a long history of plunder. ...

Mobutu Sese Seko ... plundered the country of an estimated \$4 billion before being overthrown in 1997.

Afterward, Congo slipped quickly into war. ... Neighboring countries joined in dividing the spoils ... their [military] commanders retained lucrative mineral concessions and an ever-changing web of alliances ... A wide variety of foreign corporations ... have been eagerly buying Congo's diamonds, gold, timber, copper, cobalt and coltan. ...

... The world needs to pay more attention to how anarchic civil wars like the one in Congo are fueled by minerals. ... The [recent pact to end trading in 'conflict diamonds'] ... is relatively toothless, but it set a precedent ...

Agreements like this could begin to slash the funding for Congo's warmakers. Such pacts would be difficult to enforce, but for many years, so was the ultimately successful ban on the Atlantic slave trade."

Adam Hochschild, "The dark heart of mineral exploitation", International Herald Tribune, **December 24-25-26, 2004**.

[Note: Mr. Hochschild is the author of King Leopold's ghost: A story of greed, terror and heroism in colonial Africa.

## **Useful Sources**

*(Note: informally assembled by IO Watch, roughly ranked from "most useful" on down, and subject to change as new sources are added)*

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