
**PROMISE, POTENTIAL AND PITFALLS -
THE UNITED NATIONS
ON THE EVE OF THE 21ST CENTURY**

Remarks by Ambassador George Moose
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to the European Office of the United Nations

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I am greatly honored to be here today. I am, however, very sensitive to the potential pitfalls of having chosen Friday the 13th as the date for my first public address since taking up my post here in Geneva.

As a new resident and neighbor, I have already become aware of the tremendous experience and expertise that is reflected in the membership of the American International Club. From my predecessors, I also know of the extraordinary contributions the Club has made over the years to Swiss-American relations, and to the vital international community that is the essence of Geneva. Given that history, I am doubly honored to have been invited to speak to you today.

What I would like to do is to share with you some thoughts about the role and the relevance of the United Nations, especially those organizations and agencies based here in Geneva, and to discuss some of the issues and challenges that I believe the UN and its member states will have to confront as we enter the 21st century. I also want to explain why I believe it is important for the United States to stay fully engaged in the work of the UN and its constituent organizations.

In order to keep within a reasonable time frame, I will have to be general, but I hope we will have a chance to explore some of the issues in more detail in the question and answer period.

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First, let me say that I am here in Geneva because this is where I wanted to be. When I was asked where I wanted to go for my next assignment, my answer was always the same. As you might imagine, it is not always the case in our diplomatic service that one gets the assignment one seeks.

My interest in coming here was not merely that Geneva is a fabulous place, although I won't pretend that that was not a consideration. But it was also because I sincerely believe that the UN has an extremely important role to play. And also because I believe I have something to contribute here, given my previous experience.

I am certainly no stranger to this city. My first visit was in the fall of 1976, to participate in the first all-party negotiations aimed at settling the problem in then Southern Rhodesia. What was to have been a two week meeting lasted three months. And then, in January 1981, three days after my wife and I were married, I abandoned my new bride in a snow storm in New York City in order to fly to Geneva for a similar negotiating effort regarding Namibia. Over the past five years I have made frequent visits related to the problems of Rwanda, Liberia and Nigeria.

Over the course of my 30 years in the foreign service, I have also had extensive involvement with the UN. I was twice assigned to our UN mission in New York, most recently in 1991 and 1992 as the U.S. Alternate Representative in the UN Security Council. My two tours as ambassador in West Africa allowed me to see first hand the work of various UN agencies in the field. Most recently, my four plus years as Assistant Secretary for Africa brought me into frequent contact with many UN offices and agencies. I have been privileged to work with many of the leaders of the UN and other Geneva-based organizations, including

Mrs. Ogata, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees; Dr. Sommaruga of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Under Secretary General Petrovsky.

That experience has given me a deep appreciation of the work of the UN. I can speak from direct knowledge know of the some of the important contributions the UN has made. For example:

- The role of United Nations peacekeepers was critical to bringing an end to fratricidal wars in Namibia, Mozambique and Angola, and to giving the peoples of those countries a new sense of security and hope
- For all the tragedy that has been recorded in places like Somalia, Rwanda and Liberia, hundreds of thousands more would have perished but for the heroic efforts of the UN humanitarian agencies such as UNHCR, UNICEF and the World Food Program, working with other international and non-governmental organizations.
- In coordinating the work of hundreds of international observers for South Africa's first truly democratic elections in 1994, the UN's office for electoral assistance made a significant contribution to South Africa's historic and peaceful transition from apartheid.
- The presence of human rights monitors and advisors from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in places like Rwanda and Liberia has provided vulnerable populations with a greater sense of security and educated local officials in their responsibilities under international law.
- In 1992, the timely forecasts and interventions of the World Food Program and the World Meteorological Organization were key to averting major starvation that could have resulted from the El Nino-related drought that struck Southern Africa. As a result, there was no starvation, no mass migration of displaced persons, and no dramatic news story and, alas, no CNN.
- Through programs directed by the World Health Organization, we have seen smallpox eradicated; and there is every hope that polio will also be eliminated by the target date of 2010. Childhood vaccinations programs sponsored by UNICEF and WHO have increased child survival rates and extended life expectancies.

I know of these things because I have personally witnessed them in my work in Africa. But I also know that they are typical of what UN has accomplished in many other parts of the world. That is why I value the role the UN has played, and why I have enormous respect and admiration for the many courageous and dedicated international civil servants who staff its agencies.

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But I also know that the UN is not performing nearly as well as it should, and as it must. In places like Somalia and Rwanda, I have seen the deep disappointment and despair that can occur when the UN is not able to live up to its promise and potential. Certainly it would not be fair to blame the UN and its agencies for these horrendous tragedies. But it is fair to say that the world might have been able to do much more in those situations if the instruments of the UN system had been in better shape.

We also know that our world has changed dramatically in the 50 years since the UN was founded, and no more so than in the last decade. The UN must change, too, if it is to be relevant to the challenges of today's world.

What are some of these new challenges?

o I would begin with the need to improve our collective capacity to respond to what, for want of a better term, are called "complex emergencies," those catastrophes, whether natural or manmade, that wrench our hearts and our consciences. Our collective humanitarian impulse and the human rights imperative demand that we find ways to put an end to the horrors we have seen in Bosnia and Central Africa. At the recent World Economic Forum in Davos, the Speaker of our House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich, rightly described the ongoing tragedy in Central Africa as one of the world's greatest unresolved crises. He also noted, rightly, that the international community has yet to develop the instruments that would allow us to intervene effectively to prevent or mitigate such tragedies. (A)

o The new international agenda also includes the urgent need to improve our collective capacity to thwart the new threats to our national and individual security: the globalization of narcotics trafficking; other forms of criminal activity that threaten our institutions and our freedoms; the trafficking of weapons, including those capable of mass destruction. (X)

o More positively, it includes the challenge of expanding global prosperity. That means refashioning the roles of international institutions like the World Intellectual Property Organization, the International Telecommunication Union and the International Labor Organization in ways that allow them to facilitate the role of the private sector, in developing new ideas, in creating new technologies, and in translating them into new jobs and economic opportunities. (X)

o Not least, the world will face the continuing challenge of bring about an end to poverty and under-development. To paraphrase Abraham Lincoln, our world cannot long exist half enslaved by poverty and half free. For not only do poverty and underdevelopment diminish those who are trapped in their clutches, they also create the breeding grounds for ills that threaten the security and the welfare of us all: despair, disease, crime, terrorism and war. The special challenge to international institutions, such as UNCTAD, is to enable those in developing countries to take advantage of the promise of prosperity that is inherent in the process of globalization. (B)

All of these new challenges have one thing in common: they all require for their solution a much higher degree of international integration and cooperation. None of them can be addressed successfully by individual nations acting alone. Indeed, all are global in their scope, and in their implications. In short, all require the creation of international structures capable of bringing the world together in concerted, collective action. (P)

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That, of course, is the role that the United Nations was created to play. But I don't know anyone who would claim that the United Nations and our other international institutions are currently up to the challenge. After fifty years, the organizations and agencies that make up the UN more closely resemble a hodgepodge than a system. They are saddled with outdated mandates, conflicted with overlapping and duplicative functions and

encumbered with programs that continue out of inertia long after their original purpose has been forgotten. The UN landscape is cluttered with the accretion of ad hoc structures and specialized offices created to deal with specific issues that no longer exist. Some have been likened to feudal fiefdoms that expend more effort in protecting their perimeters than in seeking mutual, cooperative advantage with sister UN agencies.

To be fair, one cannot hold the agencies themselves fully responsible for this situation, for often it is the member states themselves who have been slow to recognize the need to adapt and adjust to changing realities and requirements. Many have not yet themselves accepted the need for transparency in operation and a customer service approach to doing business.

Over the past decade, governments and private corporations around the world have had to make tremendous adjustments to the political, economic and technological revolutions that are now taking place. They have been challenged to redefine their purpose and their mission, identify their comparative advantage and improve their performance. In the United States, we have eliminated more than 350,000 jobs from the federal government in the last decade and managed our expenditures to the point where we have the first balanced budget in 30 years. Even my venerable institution, the Department of State, has not been spared the requirement to adjust to this new reality. It has been a difficult and painful process, in both public and private sectors, one that I suspect everyone in this room has been affected by. The one certainty is that those who fail to adjust are unlikely to survive.

There is no reason to expect that the United Nations, for its part, can be immune to this same logic. All that the UN is being asked to do is to apply the same rules of rational management and effective planning. It is being asked to focus on those high-priority activities that it does best, and to concentrate on doing them well. It is being called upon to look across the system for ways to consolidate duplicative functions and eliminate outdated and unproductive programs. It is being challenged, like institutions everywhere, to impose more effective financial discipline so that its budgets will continue their inexorable and uncontrolled growth.

Only by doing these things can the United Nations hope to be relevant to the new global agenda and responsive to the interests and the needs of its members. The less developed nations of the world, in particular, need a competent, functioning UN system, one that can deliver the services they require in order to realize their aspirations for a healthier, more secure and prosperous way of life. We all need a UN system that things seriously and pragmatically about the future, communicates a clear and consistent vision, both to its members and to its own constituent parts, and that is able to harness the energies of the world community. In sum, we need a UN that is more than the sum of its parts, a UN that is worthy of our best hopes and aspirations.

Geneva is important because it is the home, the headquarters of so many of the agencies that deal with this new international agenda. If New York is the center of international politics, Geneva is the place where much of the practical work of the UN system gets done. For that very reason, it is also the place this urgent process of revitalization and renewal should begin.

I know that I share that objective with a great many other diplomatic colleagues, and that has been confirmed to me in my encounters with them since my arrival. I know, as well, that that goal is shared by many in the UN system itself, and especially by the new generation

of UN leaders, starting with our new Secretary General, Kofi Annan, who is no stranger to Geneva. I had the great pleasure and privilege of working with him when I was last in New York in 1991 and 1992, when he was UN comptroller. I can attest, therefore, to his absolute commitment to revitalizing the UN system. He cannot do it alone, however, and we all owe him our support, advice and encouragement as he strives to make of the United Nations system all that we would hope it can be.

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I sense that some in the audience may by now be asking themselves whether my views accurately reflect those of my government, and whether the American people share my belief that the UN has an important role to play.

I understand why the U.S. commitment to the UN has been called into question, given the force with which we sometimes voice our concerns, and given, more importantly, our failure to keep current in our UN dues.

I believe, firmly, that Americans understand well the importance and the enormous potential of the UN. Public opinion polls consistently reveal their underlying sympathy and support.

The vast majority of Americans would almost certainly agree that we need a United Nations, and that if it did not exist, the world would have to create it. But I am equally certain that they would strongly endorse the proposition that we need a UN that is competent, relevant and performing. Like taxpaying citizens anywhere, they want to know that their contributions, through their tax dollars, are being well and wisely spent. And they also want to be assured that the burdens of international responsibility, political as well as financial, are being equitably shared.

If there is a doubt in their minds, I suspect that it has to do with that.

In this regard, I also believe that the views of the American people are accurately reflected in the attitudes of the American Congress. It would be a mistake to conclude that the American Congress is hostile to the United Nations or unconcerned about the U.S. position within the UN. The proof of that lies in the fact that, in lengthy negotiations last year, the Administration and the Congress actually concluded an agreement that would have allowed the U.S. to pay a billion dollars of our UN arrears. In exchange, the Administration was prepared to commit to the vigorous pursuit of specific efforts to improve the functioning of the UN system. Regrettably, final adoption of this major legislative package was derailed by a disagreement on another issue, unrelated to the actual substance of the legislation itself. Despite this setback, the Congress nevertheless approved an appropriation that will allow us to pay in full all of our obligations to the UN for the current year.

In his State of the Union address, President Clinton strongly reaffirmed his determination to resolve the issue of our UN arrears. He stressed that America's leadership must begin with setting a good example for the rest of the world. In testifying before the Congress earlier this week, Secretary Albright again urged the Congress to pass legislation that would allow the U.S. to pay our arrears. Doing so, she noted, would restore our full influence within the UN system and our ability to shape the process of UN reform and revitalization. She also outlined the Administration's request for a supplemental appropriation for the

current fiscal year that would enable us to make a substantial down-payment on our outstanding UN debt.

Meanwhile, it is important to note the progress that has already been made in the effort to revitalize the UN. Last fall, the UN General Assembly in New York voted a zero-growth budget; approved the Secretary General's comprehensive package of reform proposals; and left the door open for a reconsideration of the scale of assessments.

Ultimately, the challenge is a political one. We must reassure our friends and partners around the world that we do not seek reform merely for reform's sake. We must also make it clear that reform is not a zero-sum game. Making the UN's programs more efficient and cost-effective means that the UN will be able to deliver more, not less. It means making the system more responsive, not less, to the needs of its members. It means building a UN system that is better able to support the hopes and aspirations of the peoples of the world for a world that is more secure, more prosperous, more respectful of their rights, and more nurturing of their God-given talents.

I am convinced that the opportunity exists for us to forge a new international consensus on how to revitalize the UN system. I am optimistic that we can and will succeed.

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Given the serious pre-occupations of the moment, I cannot end these remarks without a reminder that even as we approach the 21st century with its daunting new agenda, we continue to be confronted by the important, unfinished business of the 20th. The threat that the world presently faces from Iraq reminds us that the first purpose of the UN must be the maintenance of international peace and security.

There can be no doubt in anyone's mind that the responsibility for the current crisis in the Persian Gulf lies squarely with Saddam Hussein and his regime. Nor can there be any doubt that Saddam Hussein continuing defiance of UN Security Council resolutions poses a grave threat to the peace and security of the region, and the world. One need only examine the clear record of his unprovoked aggression against neighboring countries, his ruthless oppression of his own people and his past use of weapons of mass destruction.

Since 1991, he has repeatedly attempted to frustrate the measures that the international community put in place to thwart his efforts to acquire such weaponry. It should be clear to all that we cannot allow him to do so. That is why it is imperative that the world act with determination now to oblige him to honor the decisions of the Security Council.

With the Secretary General and other members of the Security Council, our fervent wish is that this impasse end diplomatically. However, there should be no misunderstanding or miscalculation. If diplomatic means fail, we will take whatever steps necessary to prevent Iraq from defying the will of the international community. We have the authority, the responsibility, the means and the will to do so.

If we do not commit ourselves to this, all the other goals that we have been striving for though the United Nations will be at risk.

Thank you.