BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

United Nations Office

The Search for Values in an Age of Transition

The Baha'i International Community's statement on the 60th anniversary of the United Nations.
2 October 2005

I

In 1945, the founding of the United Nations gave a war-weary world a vision of what was possible in the arena of international cooperation and set a new standard by which to guide diverse peoples and nations towards a peaceful coexistence. Against the backdrop of the most calamitous war in human history, the creation of a world organization for the protection of the dignity, equal rights, and security of all peoples and nations was an extraordinary feat of statecraft. Sixty years later, the questions that fuelled the San Francisco Conference assert themselves anew: Why have the current systems of governance failed to provide for the security, prosperity, and well-being of the world's people? What responsibilities do nations have towards their neighbors and their citizens? What fundamental values should guide relationships between and within nations to secure a peaceful future?

In the collective effort to find answers to these questions, a new paradigm is taking hold – that of the interconnected nature of our challenges and our prosperity. Whether the issue is poverty, the proliferation of weapons, the role of women, AIDS, global trade, religion, environmental sustainability, the well-being of children, corruption, or the rights of minority populations – it is clear that none of the problems facing humanity can be adequately addressed in isolation from one another. The blurring of national boundaries in the face of global crises has shown, beyond a doubt, that the body of humankind represents one organic whole.[1] The practical implications of this emergent paradigm for the reform of the United Nations are the focus of the Baha'i International Community's contribution on the 60th anniversary of this august body.[2]

The processes of United Nations reform must be understood as part of a broader evolutionary course, starting with early forms of international cooperation such as the League of Nations and leading to increasing levels of coherence in the administration of human affairs, facilitated by the creation of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the growing body of international law, the emergence and integration of newly independent states, and mechanisms for regional and global cooperation. The last fifteen years alone have seen the establishment of the World Trade Organization, the International Criminal Court, the African Union, the significant expansion of the European Union, the global coordination of civil society campaigns, and the articulation of the Millennium Development Goals – an unprecedented global development framework aimed at the eradication of poverty worldwide. In the course of these developments, the definition of state sovereignty – a cornerstone of the modern system of international relations and a foundational principle of the United Nations Charter – has itself emerged as the object of vigorous debate: what are the limits of traditional notions of sovereignty? What responsibilities do States have towards their citizens and towards each other? How should such responsibilities be enforced?[3] Although uneven and fraught with setbacks, the emergent institutions, movements, and discourse evidence an increasing drive towards unity in world affairs and constitute one of the pervasive features of social organization at the end of the 20th century and in the first years of the new millennium.

Why, then, given the dramatic increase of mechanisms and fora for cooperation is the world so deeply divided against itself? Why the universal affliction, which assails relations between those of different cultures, creeds, religions, political affiliations, economic status, and gender? To answer these questions, we must examine dispassionately the legal standards, political and economic theories, values and religious formulae, which have ceased to promote the welfare of humankind. The advancement of men and boys at the expense of women and girls has sorely limited the creative and material capacities of communities to develop and address their problems; the neglect of cultural and religious minorities has intensified ancient prejudices setting peoples and nations against one another; an unbridled nationalism has trampled the rights and opportunities of citizens in other nations; weak states have erupted in conflict, lawlessness, and massive refugee flows; narrow economic agendas exalting material prosperity have often suffocated the social and moral development required for the equitable and beneficent use of wealth. Such crises have laid bare the limits of traditional approaches to governance and put before the United Nations the inescapable question of values:

which values are capable of guiding the nations and peoples of the world out of the chaos of competing interests and ideologies towards a world community capable of inculcating the principles of justice and equity at all levels of human society?

The question of values and their inextricable link to systems of religion and belief has emerged on the world stage as a subject of consuming global importance, which the United Nations cannot afford to ignore. While the General Assembly has passed a number of resolutions addressing the role of religion in the promotion of peace and calling for the elimination of religious intolerance,[4] it struggles to grasp fully both the constructive role that religion can play in creating a peaceful global order and the destructive impact that religious fanaticism can have on the stability and progress of the world. A growing number of leaders and deliberative bodies acknowledge that such considerations must move from the periphery to the center of debate – recognizing that the full impact of religion-related variables[5] on governance, diplomacy, human rights, development, notions of justice and collective security must be better understood.[6] Neither political leaders nor academics foresaw such a widespread re-emergence of religion in the public sphere, nor did the practice of international relations develop the conceptual tools to address religion in a meaningful way.[7] Our inherited notions of religion as an irrelevant and obstructionist voice in the international public sphere offer no help in resolving the complex problems before the leaders of the world's nations. In fact, the appropriate role of religion in the public sphere is one of the most pressing issues of our time.

That religions have been manipulated and used for the accomplishment of narrow ends cannot be denied. Yet, a careful historical analysis reveals that the periods of greatest advancement in human civilization have been those where both faith and reason were permitted to work together, drawing on the resources of the totality of human insight and experience. For example, during the height of Muslim civilization, sciences, philosophy, and the arts flourished; a vibrant culture of learning propelled the human imagination to new heights, providing, among others, the mathematical basis for many of today's technological innovations. Among humanity's diverse civilizations, religion has provided the framework for new moral codes and legal standards, which have transformed vast regions of the globe from brutish and often anarchical systems to more sophisticated forms of governance. The existing debate about religion in the public sphere, however, has been driven by the voices and actions of extreme proponents on both sides – those who impose their religious ideology by force, whose most visible expression is terrorism – and those who deny any place for expressions of faith or belief in the public sphere. Yet neither extreme is representative of the majority of humankind and neither promotes a sustainable peace.

At this juncture of our evolution as a global community, the search for shared values – beyond the clash of extremes – is paramount for effective action. A concern with exclusively material considerations will fail to appreciate the degree to which religious, ideological, and cultural variables shape diplomacy and decision-making. In an effort to move beyond a community of nations bound by primarily economic relationships to one with shared responsibilities for one another's well-being and security, the question of values must take a central place in deliberations, be articulated and made explicit. While the United Nations has repeatedly emphasized the need for multilateralism, such efforts alone, while a step in the right direction, will not provide a sufficient basis for community building between nations; collaboration alone does not confer legitimacy or ensure benevolent outcomes for the greater good. In order to fulfill the promises of the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent treaties and resolutions, we can no longer be content with a passive tolerance of each other's worldviews; what is required is an active search for those common values and moral principles which will lift up the condition of every woman, man, and child, regardless of race, class, religion or political opinion.

We assert that the emerging global order, and the processes of globalization that define it, must be founded on the principle of the oneness of humankind. This principle, accepted and affirmed as a common understanding, provides the practical basis for the organization of relationships between all states and nations. The increasingly apparent interconnectedness of development, security and human rights on a global scale confirms that peace and prosperity are indivisible – that no sustainable benefit can be conferred on a nation or community if the welfare of the nations as a whole is ignored or neglected. The principle of the oneness of humankind does not seek to undermine national autonomy or suppress the cultural and intellectual diversity of the peoples and nations of the world. Rather, it seeks to broaden the basis of the existing foundations of society by calling for a wider loyalty, a greater aspiration than any that has animated the human race. Indeed, it provides the moral impetus needed to remold the institutions of governance in a manner consistent with the needs of an ever-changing world.

From the teachings of the Baha'i Faith, we offer the following vision, in the realization of   which the members of the worldwide Baha'i community across 191 nations are engaged:

"A world community in which all economic barriers will have been permanently demolished and the interdependence of capital and labour definitely recognized; in which the clamor of religious fanaticism and strife will have been forever stilled; in which the flame of racial animosity will have been finally extinguished; in which a single code of international law—the product of the considered judgment of the world's federated representatives—shall have as its sanction the instant and coercive intervention of the combined

forces of the federated units; and finally a world community in which the fury of a capricious and militant nationalism will have been transmuted into an abiding consciousness of world citizenship…"[8]

II

In light of the foregoing analysis and the areas currently under consideration by the United Nations, we offer the following recommendations as concrete steps towards the realization of a more just and effective United Nations system. Our recommendations address human rights and the rule of law, development, democracy, and collective security.

Human Rights and the Rule of Law

No effective and peaceful international order can be founded and sustained unless it is firmly grounded in the principles of justice and the rule of law. An adherence to such principles provides the requisite stability and legitimacy required to gain the support of peoples and nations that the system aims to serve. We offer the following recommendations:

a. The grave threats posed by religious extremism, intolerance and discrimination require the United Nations to address this issue openly and earnestly. We call on the United Nations to affirm unequivocally an individual's right to change his or her religion under international law. The General Assembly may request the International Court of Justice, under Article 96 of the United Nations Charter, to issue an advisory opinion on the issue of freedom of religion or belief. Specifically, the Court could be asked whether the principle of freedom of religion or belief has attained the status of *jus cogens*, customary international law, or is merely left to the interpretation of each state. Such a clarification would help to remove fallacious interpretations of this right and lend moral force to the condemnation of policies and practices that violate the principle of non-discrimination in matters of religion or belief.[9]

b. Beyond the ongoing structural and functional reforms of the United Nations human rights machinery, the legitimacy of this machinery must be restored through its consistent adherence to the highest principles of justice, including those elaborated in the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Only in this way, will it secure the legitimacy and trust of Member States and their citizens required for it to exercise its mandate.

c. The General Assembly should consider setting a timeline for the universal ratification of international human rights treaties.

d. The Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, bolstered by the requisite moral, intellectual, and material resources, must now become the standard-bearer in the field of human rights and an effective tool in alleviating the suffering of individuals and groups whose rights are denied.

- As one of the most effective instruments for the protection of human rights, Special Procedures should receive adequate budgetary and administrative support. Government cooperation with Special Procedures should not only be limited to access to the country in question but, equally important, should include full consideration of subsequent recommendations. These should be reflected in the interactive dialogues between the Rapporteur and Member States.
- The Public Information section of the Office of the High Commissioner should be developed in order to allow resolutions of the Commission on Human Rights/Human Rights Council, recommendations of the Special Procedures and concluding observations of the treaty monitoring bodies to be accorded more prominence in the media. This could include, for example, the translation of documents into relevant national languages in order to generate more publicity.
- The Office of the High Commissioner, along with the Council, should continue its productive engagement with non-governmental organizations, which, since its inception, has contributed positively both to the work of the Office and to the development of non-governmental organizations' capacity to interact meaningfully in this context.

Development

At the heart of human development must be the understanding that people are irreplaceable resources in a self-sustaining process of change. The challenge is to find methods that allow them to fully express this potential in all its dimensions. Development defined in terms of certain patterns of "modernization," however, seems to refer exactly to those processes, which promote the domination of people's material ambitions over their spiritual goals. While the search of a scientific and technologically modern society is a central goal of human development, it must base its educational, economic, political, and cultural structures on the concept of the spiritual nature of the human being and not only on his or her material needs. We offer the following recommendations:

a. The capacity of people to participate in the generation and application of knowledge is an essential component of human development. As such, priority must be given to the education of girls and boys, women and men in order to enable them to set the path of their own development and to apply their knowledge in the service of the greater community. The United Nations should consider that in terms of economic investment, the education of girls may well yield the highest return of all

investments available in developing countries considering both private benefits, as well as returns to family members and the greater community.[10]

b. We submit for the consideration of the United Nations five spiritual principles, which may serve as a basis for the creation of indicators of human development, to be used alongside existing measures of development. These principles include: unity in diversity, equity and justice, equality of the sexes, trustworthiness and moral leadership, and the freedom of conscience, thought, and religion.[11]

c. The rich countries of the world have a moral obligation to remove export and trade distorting measures that bar the entry of countries struggling to participate in the global market. The Monterrey Consensus, which recognizes the importance of creating a 'more open, rule-based, non-discriminatory and equitable' system of trade is a step in the right direction.[12]

d. Alongside reform in systems of trade, countries must facilitate the flow of labor and address the dehumanizing impact of trafficking in persons, which leads to widespread economic and sexual exploitation of people seeking a better life.

<center>**Democracy**</center>

We commend the international community for its commitment to democracy and to a freely elected government as a universal value. However, the standard of deliberation and truth-seeking required for the realization of goals set by the United Nations needs to go far beyond the patterns of partisanship, protest, and compromise that tend to characterize present day discussions of human affairs. What is needed is a consultative process – at all levels of governance – in which individual participants strive to transcend their respective points of view, in order to function as members of one body with its own interests and goals. Through participation and unity of purpose, consultation becomes the operating expression of justice in human affairs. Without this principled anchor, democracy falls prey to the excesses of individualism and nationalism, which tear at the fabric of the community - both nationally and globally.

Beyond the administration of material affairs, governance is a moral exercise. It is the expression of a trusteeship – a responsibility to protect and to serve the members of the social polity. Indeed, the exercise of democracy will succeed to the extent that it is governed by the moral principles that are in harmony with the evolving interests of a rapidly maturing human race. These include: trustworthiness and integrity needed to win the respect and support of the governed; transparency; consultation with those affected by decisions being arrived at; objective assessment of needs and aspirations of communities being served; and the appropriate use of scientific and moral resources.[13] We offer the following recommendations:

a. To secure the legitimacy, confidence, and support needed for the realization of its goals, the United Nations needs to address the democratic deficits in its own agencies and deliberations.

b. Thorough deliberation of the pressing issues of the day requires the United Nations to develop modes for constructive and systematic engagement with organizations of civil society (including businesses and religious organizations) as well as members of national parliaments. The relationship between civil society organizations, parliamentarians and the traditional diplomatic processes of the United Nations need not be one of competition but rather complementarity, rooted in the recognition that the relative strengths of all three constituencies are necessary for effective decision-making and subsequent implementation.[xii] We urge the United Nations to give serious consideration to the proposals put forth in the Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on UN-Civil Society Relationships.[xiii]

c. A healthy democracy must be founded on the principle of the equality of men and women and equal recognition of their contribution to the establishment of a just society. In its efforts to promote democracy, the Member States of the United Nations must vigilantly work for the inclusion of women in all facets of governance in their respective countries. This is not a privilege but a practical necessity for the achievement of the high-minded and complex goals before the Organization today.

d. The meaningful integration of minority groups in democratic processes is of critical importance – both to shield minorities from the abuses of the past and to encourage their participation and responsibility for the well-being of society. We urge Member States, in their work to promote democracy, to strive for the full inclusion of minorities – belonging to any faith, race, or class – in the processes of goal-setting and deliberation. As the cultural make-up of states becomes increasingly fluid and diverse, no one cultural or religious group can lay claim to an adequate definition of the national interest.

Collective Security

We welcome the United Nations' efforts to articulate a more comprehensive vision of collective security, based on the understanding that in our interconnected world, a threat to one is a threat to all. The Baha'i Faith envisions a system of collective security within a framework of a global federation, a federation in which national borders have been conclusively defined, and in whose favor all the nations of the world will have willingly ceded all rights to maintain armaments except for purposes of maintaining internal order.[16] While cognizant of the grave shortfalls of the current system of collective security, we commend the Security Council for its landmark Resolution on "Women, Peace, and Security,"[17] recognizing for the first time in its history the

needs of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations[18] and their enduring role in the promotion of peace. We offer the following recommendations:

a. To address the democracy deficit and relentless politicization of the Security Council, the United Nations must in due course move towards adopting a procedure for eventually eliminating permanent membership and veto power.[19] Alongside procedural reforms, a critical change in the attitude and conduct are needed. Member States must recognize that in holding seats on the Security Council and as signatories to the Charter of the United Nations, they have a solemn moral and legal obligation to act as trustees for the entire community of nations, not as advocates of their national interests.[20]
b. A definition of terrorism must be adopted. We agree with the Secretary-General's characterization of terrorism as any action, "intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a Government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act." Moreover, it is imperative that problems such as terrorism be consistently addressed within the context of other issues that disrupt and destabilize society.[21]
c. We urge the United Nations to take the necessary steps to increase the participation of women at all levels of decision-making in conflict resolution and peace processes, locally, nationally and internationally, including the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.[22]

We believe the task of establishing a peaceful world is now in the hands of the leaders of the nations of the world, by virtue of the tremendous responsibilities with which they have been entrusted. Their challenge now is to restore the trust and confidence of their citizens in themselves, their government, and the institutions of the international order through a record of personal integrity, sincerity of purpose, and unwavering commitment to the highest principles of justice and the imperatives of a world hungering for unity. The great peace long envisioned by the peoples and nations of the world is well within our grasp.

[1] While the United Nations has begun to formally recognize the interdependence of human rights, development, and collective security, such a holistic perspective has been echoed throughout the contributions of civil society organizations to the work of the United Nations, as, for example at the global United Nations conferences including the Conference on Environment and Development (1992), the World Conference on Human Rights (1993), World Conference on Population and Development (1994), the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), the World Summit for Social Development (1995), and the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (1996).

[2] The Baha'i International Community, in its capacity as an international nongovernmental organization, has been actively involved with the United Nations since its founding conference in 1945. On the occasion of the United Nations' 10th anniversary, the Baha'i International Community submitted its proposals for Charter Revision to the Secretary-General based on the recognition that "real sovereignty is no longer vested in the institutions of the national state because the nations have become interdependent; that the existing crisis is moral and spiritual as well as political; and that the existing crisis can only be surmounted by the achievement of a world order representative of the peoples as well as the nations of mankind (Baha'i International Community, " Proposals for Charter Revision Submitted to the United Nations by the Baha'i International Community [1955]," *The Baha'i World 1954 – 1963*, Vail-Ballou Press, Inc., Binghamton, New York, 1970). In 1995, the Baha'i International Community released a statement on the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, which highlighted the trend toward the ever-increasing interdependence of humanity and presented proposals for the resuscitation of the General Assembly, development of the executive function, strengthening the world court, promoting economic and moral development, human rights and the advancement of women (Baha'i International Community, *Turning Point for All Nations,* Baha'i International Community's United Nations Office, New York, 1995.) Throughout its history of association with the United Nations, the Baha'i International Community has contributed its vision and experience through submissions dealing with the advancement of women, human rights, the environment, global prosperity, and economic development, among others.

[3] In 2000, in response to the alarming failure of the international community to intervene, or to intervene effectively, in massive crises such as Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Rwanda, the Canadian Government established a commission to address questions about the legal, moral, operational, and political dimensions of humanitarian intervention. The resulting International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty released its findings and central principles in a 2001 report titled, *Responsibility to Protect*. Repeated failure to intervene effectively in the crisis in Darfur, Sudan has lent even greater urgency to the definition of legal standards and operational norms for intervention.

[4] For example, *"Promotion of interreligious dialogue"* (A/RES/59/23), the *"Promotion of religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation"* (A/RES/59/142), the *"Global Agenda for Dialogue Among Civilizations"* (A/RES/56/6), the *"Elimination of all forms of religious intolerance"* (A/RES/59/199), and the UNESCO Director-General's report (A/59/201) to the 59th Session of the UN General Assembly *"Promotion of religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation"* (A/RES/58/128).

[5] These include, among others, religious teachings and interpretation, followers of religions, religious leaders and institutions.

[6] While a detailed description is beyond the scope of this statement, examples of the resurgence of religion as a matter of urgent political importance includes: widespread violence in the name of religion; spread of religious fundamentalism and its impact on political regimes; increasing tension between religion and States' policies; challenges in the design of national and regional governing structures capable of satisfying demands for fair representation from different religious groups; social, political and economic integration of religious minorities; clashes between religious and civil law; impact of religion in international policy forums (i.e. International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 1994; Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995); violation of human rights in the name of religion including the right to change one's religion. Such developments are set against the increased efforts at inter-faith dialogue and cooperation between religious leaders and their communities; the impressive global networks of religiously inspired charitable and humanitarian organizations and movements calling attention to the ethical dimensions of global economic integration; the intellectual and moral legacy of religions in the articulation of moral principles (e.g. just war ethic); the capacity of religions to move individuals and groups towards selflessness, non-violence, and reconciliation.

[7] Several factors have contributed to the near complete rejection of religion in concepts of international relations. First, the social sciences were based upon the work of those who believed that religion was giving way to rational and scientific modes of thought which would crush what they saw as the ignorance and superstition caused by religion, thereby ushering in a period of modernity. Second, "not only was international relations theory (like other social sciences) founded upon the belief that religion was receding from the world as an important factor, it can be argued that the modern context for the relations between states was founded on intentionally secular principles. The modern concept for the territorial state, the basis for modern international relations, was articulated by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648," which, "was designed to end the Thirty Years' War between Protestant and Catholic States. In doing so, it developed a format for relations between states which did not include religion." (Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sandler (2005), "The Question of Religion and World Politics," *Terrorism and Political Violence,* 17: 296-298).

[8] Shoghi Effendi, "The Goal of a New World Order" [1931], *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1991).

[9] Baha'i International Community, *Freedom to Believe* (Baha'i International Community's United Nations Office, New York, 2005).

[10] According to the World Bank, in addition to being more productive in market work, educated women have smaller families, fewer of their children die in infancy and the children who survive are healthier and better educated. Educated women are also better equipped to enter the paid labor force, which is critical to the survival of the many female-headed households in developing countries. Nations with higher levels of female school enrollment show higher levels of economic productivity, lower fertility, lower infant and maternal mortality, and longer life expectancy than countries that have not achieved as high enrollment levels for girls. (World Bank, "The Benefits of Education for Women" (1993), URL: www.worldbank.org/html/extdr/hnp/hddflash/hcnote/hrn002.html)

[11] For a detailed discussion see: Baha'i International Community, *Valuing Spirituality in Development: Initial Considerations Regarding the Creation of Spiritually Based Indicators for Development,* a concept paper written for the World Faiths Development

Dialogue, Lambeth Palace, London (The Baha'i Publishing Trust: London, 1998).

[12] The Monterrey Consensus, (A/CONF.198/11)

[13] In the 1980s and 1990s the world made dramatic progress in opening up political systems and expanding political freedoms. Over eighty countries took significant steps towards democracy, and today 140 of the world's nearly 200 countries hold multiparty elections—more than ever before. Despite these positive developments, Gallup International's Millennium Survey (1999) found that of the 50,000 people surveyed in 60 countries, less than a third felt that their country was governed by the will of the people. Only 1 in 10 respondents said that their government responded to the people's will.

[14] Over the last five years, the United Nations has generated numerous examples of innovative governance: In 2000, the United Nations Economic and Social Council established a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to serve as an advisory body to the Council on indigenous issues relating to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, and health and human rights, culminating a decades-long struggle of indigenous peoples to regain standing within the global community; in June 2005, the General Assembly – for the first time - held interactive hearings with civil society and the private sector, in which some 200 non-governmental organizations presented their views on United Nations reform for consideration by Member States in preparation for the 2005 United Nations World Summit; also in June, 2005, a tripartite convening group composed of a core group of Member States (Argentina, Bangladesh, Ecuador, Gambia, Germany, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Morocco, Pakistan, Philippines, Senegal, Spain, Thailand, and Tunisia), civil society, the United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organization and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs organized a conference titled, *Interfaith Cooperation for Peace*, which aimed to provide input to the 2005 World Summit regarding strategies to promote interfaith cooperation for peace. It was the first time that a Member State-initiated conference had been co-organized and led by Member States, civil society and United Nations agencies working alongside. Given the challenging nature of the subject matter, the organizational approach provided a useful template for similar endeavors in the future. Also worthy of note is that in 2002, the International Parliamentary Union was granted permanent observer status in the General Assembly of the United Nations, setting in motion new forms of cooperation.

[15] Panel of Eminent Persons on UN-Civil Society Relationships. *We the Peoples: Civil Society, the UN and Global Governance*. (United Nations: New York, 2004).

[16] For the system to be successful, unity, strength, elasticity and public opinion are essential: unity of thought and purpose among the permanent members, strength involving the use of adequate force to ensure the efficacy of the system, elasticity to enable the system to meet the legitimate needs of its afflicted upholders, and universal public opinion - that of women and men - to secure collective action.

[17] Security Council Resolution 1325 (S/RES/1325 (2000)

[18] Typically wars and conflicts have drawn little distinction between militants and civilians, and between adults and children. Yet armed conflicts affect women and girls differently from men and boys. For example, rape and sexual violence perpetrated by the armed forces, whether governmental or other actors, including peacekeeping personnel, increase the spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Most of the HIV/AIDS victims in developing countries are women and girls. That disease leaves millions of orphans who, in most cases, are cared for by older women.

[19] While the veto has often served as an important safeguard against the oppressive majoritarianism, it has also obstructed effective action against countries that pose a threat to their neighbors. An interim measure may include not using veto power when voting on questions of genocide or other gross threats to international peace and security.

[20] The United Nations Charter states that, "In order to ensure prompt and effective action by the United Nations, its Members confer on the Security Council primary responsibility for the maintenance of peace and security, and agree that in carrying out its duties under this responsibility the Security Council acts on their behalf." (Article 24).

[21] Such disruptive and destabilizing factors include, among others: governments' failure to meaningfully integrate religious and ethnic minorities, increased access to weapons; the destabilization and collapse of governments; and a general sense of social, political, economic, cultural crisis - all of which combine to create an environment that could invite violent radical ideologies to take hold and flourish.

[22] This requires the implementation of the Secretary-General's strategic plan of action (A/49/587), which calls for an increase in the participation of women at decision-making levels in conflict resolution and peace processes. Member States need to follow through with their commitments under international law including the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000).

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