

---

---

# RETHINKING THE UNITED NATIONS' MISSION

*“We must ensure that the links between the UN’s pre- and post-conflict work, peacekeeping activities, and development programs are strengthened.”*

BY CLARE SHORT

**T**WENTY PERCENT of the world’s population—1,200,000,000 people—live in abject poverty, without adequate food, water, sanitation, health care, or education for their children. Yet, this is a time of a growing abundance of knowledge, technology, and capital which is generating more wealth and material plenty. It is possible to remove extreme poverty from the human condition. It is no longer a dream for the distant future; it is achievable in our generation if we can generate the political will. To do that, we need to focus on systematic poverty reduction in developing-nation governments, the United Nations system, international financial institutions, and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries.

The moral case for a greater effort is clear. Current levels of poverty and inequality are the biggest moral challenge humanity faces. However, we live at a time when the moral challenge and self-interest coincide. If we do not do better in reducing that inequality, it will lead to growing conflict, refugee movements, environmental degradation, disease, and natural disasters. This will bring instability and danger to future generations, wherever they live.

The International Development Targets, originated by UN conferences of the 1990s, set out the first milestones on this road. They embody the commitment of the international community to reduce the proportion of people living in poverty by half; ensure that every child is in primary education; lower infant, child, and maternal mortality; and reverse the loss of environmental resources—all by 2015. Their achievement should be an overriding objective of the United Nations in the coming years.

Globalization is creating a new opportunity to achieve the International Development Targets, but also a new risk that the poor will be left further behind. Globalization is not a new phenomenon, but the pace of change seen now—driven by technological innovation, increased mobility of capital, and reductions in the barriers to trade and the costs of international transactions—is unprecedented.

Some have reacted with alarm to the rapidity and scale of this change. Nevertheless, the lesson of history is clear: Open societies that learn from and trade with others are enriched materially and culturally. In recent decades, it is those nations which have seized the opportunity offered

by more-open markets to increase exports and attract inward investment that have made the greatest strides in reducing poverty. If the poorest countries can be drawn into the global economy with access to modern knowledge and technology, the world could make massive progress towards the removal of abject poverty from the human condition. If they are not, we will see growing poverty, marginalization, conflict, and environmental degradation.

If we are to achieve this, we must challenge the siren voice of the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting protestors of Seattle, Prague, and Quebec City. Many of them might mean well, but the dominant voice is antidevelopment and a call for protectionism and the tearing down of international institutions. The last time those views prevailed was the 1930s, and we know where that led. The systematic reduction of poverty requires more international cooperation, not less, and flows of trade and investment that make available the fruits of modern knowledge and technology to the poor. The question is not whether we should be “for” or “against” globalization, but—in the words of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan—how “to

ensure that globalization becomes a positive force for all the world's people, instead of leaving billions of them behind in squalor."

The United Kingdom's white paper on development sets out an agenda for action to achieve this aim. I would like briefly to summarize four of its main conclusions:

First, all the evidence shows that we cannot achieve systematic and sustained poverty reduction without economic expansion. It will more quickly lift people out of poverty where levels of inequality are low, because the fruits of growth tend to be distributed in proportion to the original distribution of inequality. Poverty reduction cannot become reality without economic growth, and faster growth is needed in the poorest countries to speed up the reduction of poverty. However, it must be sustainable and must bring benefits to all—especially the poor. To achieve this, we must combine policies that promote a vibrant and strong private sector, generating employment and increasing wealth, with effective government systems to regulate the private sector and provide education and health care for all, as well as justice and security. We need effective states *and* efficient markets. Countries that want to benefit from globalization must promote both.

Second, a well-educated, healthy population is not only a moral imperative, it is necessary if a country is to benefit from globalization. Investment in people, skills, and knowledge is essential for nations that wish to be part of the globalizing economy. The new revolution in information and communications technologies in particular creates an urgent need and an enormous opportunity to improve poor people's access to education and knowledge. We must promote the appropriate policies and legal and regulatory frameworks to enable this technology to be shared. For example, it is currently more expensive to be connected to the Internet in Africa than anywhere else in the world. This is a dangerous barrier to development.

Third, development assistance continues to be vital for poverty reduction, but it has to be used in new ways and its effectiveness improved. Too high a proportion of current resources are spent on small, nonstrategic projects and are not targeted on the poor. We can improve the effectiveness of the current \$50,000,000,000 of official development assistance if we focus on the poor and support reformers. In the international system and in all countries, we need a better coordinated and more co-

herent effort, which brings together all development actors behind country-owned poverty reduction strategies. Reorientation of our views of development assistance is called for to see it as a resource for investment in effective government systems and conditions that will promote efficient markets to generate the growth necessary to reduce poverty. If we can show people that development funds are being well-used and are helping to improve the life opportunities of the poor of the world, they should be willing to vote for increasing such assistance.

Fourth, a stronger international system focused on the systematic reduction of poverty can enhance the efforts of governments and take collective action where required. Action at a global level is necessary to tackle corruption, reduce conflict, and generate new drugs and vaccines for the diseases of poverty. Sustainable management of the planet's natural resources requires global agreement and action. The International Monetary Fund, World Bank, Regional Development Banks, the UN, and all development agencies must collaborate to support governments that are committed to meeting the International Development Targets.

Above all, we must have fair rules and strong international institutions to harness private capital and trading opportunities in order to improve the life of the poor. Without rules, the strong will dominate the weak. Representative institutions, in which all can pursue their interests equally, is what the WTO is for. If it was destroyed, as the demonstrators wanted, the rich and powerful would dominate the rest. To achieve fairer rules, we need to increase developing nations' capacity to negotiate in international forums and a commitment from developed countries to do away with indefensible trade protectionism and the tying of aid to national procurement.

The UN has a key part to play in such an agenda. I believe strongly that, under Annan's stewardship, we have a real opportunity to enhance the effectiveness and authority of the UN system. In a globalizing world, we need the UN more than ever before. If globalization is to be managed with equity, we need stronger international institutions and must enhance the authority of the United Nations and the moral case for progress for the whole of humanity for which it stands.

Throughout the Cold War years, the UN played a valuable role in keeping people talking and both sides engaged with each other, thus preventing it from turning

into a shooting war. It has played an important part in the advances in human development over the last 50 years. We must be clear about the progress that has been made. All is not simply doom and gloom. Life expectancy has risen in developing countries since the 1960s from 46 to 64. Infant mortality rates have halved. The proportion of children in primary schools has increased by 80%. Access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation has doubled.

The UN has mighty achievements behind it, but some of the slowness of bureaucracy and cumbersome procedures that were necessary to keep everyone on board in the Cold War years should be reformed. We need more speed and flexibility in a rapidly changing world. We have made progress, but there are now more people than ever before—6,000,000,000—and therefore there are more poor people. To build on the success of the past, but speed up our efforts and take them to a larger scale, is why we need a more effective United Nations.

There has been a lot of progress since Annan launched his Track II reform process in 1997. The World Health Organization has made great progress under Gro Harlem Brundtland. Juan Somavia has introduced important reforms in the International Labor Organization. The United Nations Industrial Development Office has undergone an impressive transformation under Carlos Magarinos. Mark Malloch Brown has set in motion a number of important measures to improve the field effectiveness of the United Nations Development Program. UNICEF is taking action across the world to secure for all children the rights laid down in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The UN has played an indispensable role in helping establish a new state in East Timor and rebuild Kosovo. The World Food Program has improved its capacity to mount swift and effective operations and performed admirably in Mozambique and Kosovo. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has made serious efforts to address the weaknesses exposed by its performance in Kosovo. The Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has undergone a fundamental transformation and spearheaded improved efficiency in the international humanitarian system.

This progress is encouraging, but it is still only half the story. The important policy and management changes being made by many of the funds, programs, and agencies at headquarters levels must be accompanied by a real push to improve impact at

country level. The UN's effectiveness on the ground still leaves too much to be desired. Many country offices and programs are weak. Yet, it is where poor people live that the UN needs to be at its most effective. The UN funds, programs, and agencies must focus increasingly on improving their in-country performance.

One of the UN's great successes in recent years has been the development of the International Development Targets, which have been adopted by virtually all the key international institutions. They provide the essential framework for ensuring that the entire international development system is focused on systematic poverty reduction and that the benefits of globalization are shared by all.

The International Development Targets have captured the high ground of the international system. One after another, the major multilateral institutions—the OECD/Development Assistance Committee, International Monetary Fund, and Regional Development Banks—have adopted the International Development Targets. Even the Group of Eight gives prominent place to development issues at its annual summits and has agreed to measure progress towards the Targets each year. Because they can be held accountable for progress against quantified, time-bound goals to free the world from poverty. We call on the WTO to join the UN and the international financial institutions in committing itself to the development targets, so that we can make the next Trade Round a "Development Round."

Now that we have established an unprecedented international consensus, we must act to speed up implementation. Based on present trends, we will meet the halving poverty target—largely because of great progress in Asia, and China in particular—but many countries, particularly in Africa, are not on course to meet this standard, and progress on the other goals varies. We must aim to reach the targets in every nation. This means that many countries and their development partners have to increase their ambition and improve their performance. I am very pleased that the UN is engaging at the highest level to ensure that we improve worldwide implementation of the Targets so that the poor children of today do not become parents of larger numbers of poorer youngsters in the next generation.

I would like to suggest six priorities for the UN to help to maximize its effectiveness in the struggle to ensure that the ben-

efits of globalization reach the poor. First, build on the impetus created by the Millennium Summit and lead the effort to achieve the International Development Targets. The UN must ensure that all of its funds, programs, and specialized agencies adopt the targets stipulated in the Millennium Summit Declaration and focus their programs around the pursuit of these goals.

Second, we must recruit the best leaders available for the funds, programs, and agencies to tackle this agenda. I believe the UN should introduce procedures to guarantee open and competitive processes for the selection of its top management. These should include definition of the competences for the post, selection and search committees, and a clear process for taking the final decision, in which competence should be put above considerations of nationality. Obviously, the UN must be staffed by people who are representative of all the people of the world, but we should seek out the brightest and best, not just the politically connected. Clearly agreed-upon and transparent processes for making decisions on appointments are the best way of ensuring that the UN gets the leadership it needs to meet the challenges of the new century.

Third, the development efforts of the funds, programs, and agencies must be coherent and well-coordinated. I am heartened by the moves the UN is making to improve coordination. The goal for the UN's Development Assistance Frameworks should be evolution into an implementation plan for the UN system at field level, detailing how the organization will support country-owned poverty reduction strategies. There has been progress, but there is much left to do to move the UN development system from a fragmented and often competing set of agencies to a coherent and powerful whole.

Fourth, it is necessary to look at whether each piece is in its proper place at policy level in the current jigsaw of the United Nations' funds, programs, and agencies. The UN's development machinery has grown up over time, piecemeal and ad hoc, in response to needs and demands, many of which have now changed. We must look at where there are areas of duplication and overlap, as well as where there are gaps, and identify practical ways to strengthen policy and operational coherence among the funds, programs, and agencies. Clarity of purpose and role will enable UN agencies to draw clear boundaries between what they do best and what

is done by others. We should be willing to change and improve the system.

Fifth, we need to use the Financing for Development process to look at how we can best mobilize the resources required to achieve the International Development Targets. This goes beyond aid. The Secretary General has provided challenging leadership in his report to the Preparatory Committee. We must take up that challenge.

I would like to see as the high-level event in 2002 the promotion of a clearer understanding of how we create an environment that will increase private investment in developing nations and how we help developing countries create sound governance, crack down on corruption originating from overseas as well as at home, and regulate their financial sectors. I hope that Financing for Development will achieve a commitment from development agencies to reform and improve the effectiveness of their assistance. This means a commitment from all donors to coordinate their efforts around country-owned poverty reduction strategies, focus their programs on the poorest nations, untie their aid, and move more quickly to harmonize the Babel of procedures and mechanisms which limit the effectiveness of development assistance and burden developing countries, rather than helping them improve the effectiveness of their administrative systems.

We must also build on the much-improved cooperation between UN agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions. We need these institutions to work together. They have all committed to the development targets. We have to pool all our resources and collaborate on our efforts, not squabble and compete.

Sixth, and most importantly, it is in leading the international response to conflict where the UN must provide global leadership most resolutely. We look to the UN because it alone possesses the moral authority and universal membership to create the consensus for concerted action and the machinery—from the Security Council to representatives in the field—to make a difference.

Here, more than anywhere else, the UN has to take center stage. We all know there must be improvement. The Secretary General has bravely and openly acknowledged the failings in Rwanda and Srebrenica. Current progress in Sierra Leone demonstrates that systems have to be urgently improved. Member states cannot shirk their responsibility to provide the UN with the political support and operational tools it needs to do

the jobs we give it. That begins with paying the dues of the organization. I hope that the recent agreement on a new Scale of Assessments will provide a firm basis for renewed commitment to the UN from all member states.

The UN must take rapid and decisive action to transform the machinery of its conflict management work. There are still too many examples of competition among agencies trying to promote their own interests, rather than working together to a common goal. Moreover, there is a considerable problem with some of the UN's procedures and bureaucracy, which prevent it from acting as quickly and decisively as is needed.

Let us be clear. Those who want these changes are the real friends of the United Nations. Those who resist change perpetuate inefficiencies and undermine its reputation. The UN staff members deserve better. Existing rules too often tie their hands as they seek to fulfill UN mandates in difficult and dangerous circumstances. The quality of the staff is inspiring, and they should be backed up by efficient systems and adequate resources. They must also be as safe as possible.

We must learn urgent lessons from the fact that, in East Timor and Kosovo, UN operations were undermined by weak administrative, monitoring, and financial systems, which were either unnecessarily heavy and bureaucratic or nonexistent. As a consequence, UN assistance to people in the most desperate of straits was delayed and its effectiveness reduced.

Lessons are being learned and improvements made which are already making a difference on the ground, but much more remains to be done. Let no one forget that 20 of the 38 poorest countries in the world are or have recently been in the midst of conflict, their people suffering and poverty growing. Many of these nations hardly have a functioning state. The people need the UN to help make peace and build a modern nation. The experience of Sierra Leone teaches all of us that we must do better in resolving these conflicts and preventing others if their people are to have any hope of a better future.

It should be clear that, in the post-Cold War world, the nature of conflict has changed. Most conflicts are within, not between, countries, and those who suffer most are women and children. There is no trade-off between peacekeeping and devel-

opment. The two are inextricably interlinked. We must ensure that the links between the UN's pre- and post-conflict work, peacekeeping activities, and development programs are strengthened.

The test against which the changes in the UN system should be measured is the difference it makes on the ground. We should all be haunted by our collective failure in Rwanda and Srebrenica and worried that we are not making faster progress in Sierra Leone. The task there is not insurmountable. We must succeed and move on to tackle bigger conflicts in larger countries.

Millions of people are living in nations affected by conflict. Without peace, they are trapped in growing instability and impoverishment. We have to improve the capacity of the UN to reach out to them both in making peace and creating the conditions in conflict-torn countries and elsewhere to ensure that the wealth and abundance being generated by globalization brings real benefits to the poor of the world.

---

*Clare Short is the United Kingdom's Secretary of State for International Development.*