

THE UNITED NATIONS AND CANADA

# WHAT CANADA COULD AND SHOULD DO AT THE UNITED NATIONS 2018: A QUESTION OF LEADERSHIP

## Ideas for United Nations Renewal

John E. Trent

People complain that the United Nations is irrelevant because the Security Council often vetoes decisions on desperate world problems – like Syria. We need ideas about making the UN a “built for purpose” organization that can make and implement decisions on difficult global issues.

We can build on the work of International specialists who have analyzed reforms for decades. This is not a specific plan for UN reform but rather a highlighting of some of the more necessary and workable transformations.

All member nations should pay their **fair portion of fees**. Prof. Joseph Schwartzberg in his book, *Transforming the United Nations System*, proposes that the best route is to abandon the present complex system of fees and voluntary contributions and replace them with a small, affordable and equal national assessment based on a percentage (say 0.1 percent) of the respective gross national income (GNI). When calculated in 2010 this would have raised twice the spending of the entire UN system at that time. Additionally, there are a myriad of proposals for independent financial resources for the UN including levies on air and sea travel, on production from the global commons, and on transnational movements of currencies. The problem with enacting these ideas is the unwillingness of many governments to endorse improved sources of finance because they do not want the UN to have too much independence. That is why it is necessary to focus on funding as the first objective of a new mobilization of public opinion in favor of a UN renaissance.

The effective functioning of the **Responsibility to Protect (RtoP)** principle is crucial. It has been the most significant step for controlling the abuses of sovereignty. The “International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty” proposed six principles that must be respected before the UN decides on military intervention to protect against human suffering. They are: a “just cause threshold”, “right intention”, “last resort”, “proportional means”, “reasonable prospects”, and “right authority”. The Commission also proposed “operational principles” including clear objectives, unity of command, force limitations, international law, and coordination with humanitarian

organizations. Disastrously, all of these propositions have been ignored. It is time they were resuscitated.

Experts conclude that the **UN Security Council** can regain legitimacy and effectiveness by becoming more representative of the world and placing limitations on the outdated power of veto (e.g. using “dissenting votes” that do not amount to a veto). Membership should be expanded (around 22 is most often proposed) to reflect the increase in UN membership. The Council should improve resources and political support for peace missions and constitute a ‘Group of Friends’ for each operation (Commission of Global Security, Justice and Governance).

Decision-making in the UN can be re-aligned to reflect the real power of member states. For instance, the General Assembly has steadily been skewed to favor relatively minor states. Some 40 members have less than a million inhabitants and 128 states collectively pay less than 1.3 per cent of the total UN budget (2010 figures). All the **organs need weighted voting** to take into account differences in power, population and economic contributions. The democratic principle would make population the determining factor. Economic capacity would be represented by contributions to the UN budget. To heed the sovereign equality principle each state would maintain its single vote. Joseph Schwartzberg (2013) carefully combined the mathematical calculations of each of these components in one simple formula as a weighted vote which could be adjusted over time.

In the case of the Security Council, to break the log jam, it is proposed that the weighted vote be based on representing 12 world regions in the Council rather than individual states. Each region would nominate a slate of candidates from which one would be elected to the Security Council by the General Assembly. Subsequent reelections would depend on good behavior.

Finally as regards the organs, the rich and powerful must be enticed back from the G20 to the UN by a new Economic, Social and Environmental Council with adequate structures and powers to oversee these three world functions. The UN’s founders intended the original ECOSOC to coordinate the economic and social work of the UN system and also coordinate all its specialized agencies and other bodies

The UN requires its own **autonomous emergency services** so it can save money and lives in the gigantic peace missions by intervening in a timely fashion to stop conflicts from spreading. The United Nations Emergency Peace Service (UNEPS) proposal would furnish the Secretary General with a standing, professional, volunteer, highly trained peace service of 15,000 soldiers, police and civil servants who could go immediately to hot spots before they explode (Peter Langille 2015).

Of course, there are many more transformations required for a full-fledged renaissance of the UN.

**It will be necessary mobilize political will.** .Already, the UN 2020 Initiative, formed of Civil Society and UN representatives, is working to make the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations in 2020 an opportunity not only for commemoration but also for stocktaking, renewal and reform. It is calling for a General Assembly led preparatory process and resolution leading to intergovernmental negotiations and a Leaders Summit in 2020.