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Terrorism: a global problem requiring global solutions

For many countries, including the United States, the struggle against terrorism is not a new one. However the audacity and magnitude of the disaster of September 11 shocked the world as never before. Immediately afterwards there was a general recognition that terrorism is a global problem and requires the engagement of all countries to find solutions. That is still true, and at this moment in history the United Nations and its organizations are needed more than ever as the only viable forum through which this work can be done. Now is the time to look at what the UN has already achieved with regard to curbing terrorism, to strengthen and support its work, and to ratify and abide by its treaties and conventions.

UN Resolutions and Conventions on Terrorism

For 30 years the UN has worked through treaties and resolutions to eliminate the threat of terrorism. There are 12 treaties currently in place that form the basis from which many non-military actions are being undertaken (see side box). Two new conventions on terrorism are presently being considered that will address the theft of nuclear weapons and provide an overarching structure for addressing terrorism.

Shortly after September 11, in a rare use of authority the Security Council established a mandatory, legally binding requirement on all Member States to collaborate fully in an international effort to counter terrorism (Resolution 1373). A special committee was appointed to oversee the effort. In January 2002 another resolution (Resolution 1390) was passed, calling on states to freeze funds, prevent transit of individuals, and ban the sale of arms to terrorists and terrorist groups.

The special Counter-Terrorism Committee established by the Security Council to monitor implementation of Resolution 1373 has now received reports from many Member States on their efforts to combat terrorism within their countries. The committee is expecting a 95%

United Nations Conventions and Resolutions Against Terrorism

The UN has been working on the elimination of terrorism since the first airline hijackings of the 1960's and 70's. In all, the Organization has worked on 12 conventions, most of which have been ratified and adopted.

- Convention on Offenses and Certain Acts Committed on Board Aircraft (1963)
- Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Seizure of Aircraft (1970)
- Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against the Safety of Civil Aviation (1971)
- Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Crimes Against Internationally Protected People (1973) (outlaws attacks on senior government officials and diplomats.)
- International Convention Against the Taking of Hostages (1979)
- Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material (1980)
- Protocol for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts of Violence at Airports Serving International Civil Aviation, supplementary to the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Civil Aviations (1988)
- Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against the Safety of Maritime Navigation (1988)
- Protocol for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against the Safety of Fixed Platforms Located on the Continental Shelf (1988)
- Convention on the Making of Plastic Explosives for the Purpose of Detection (1991)
- International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombing (1997)
- International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism (1999)

reporting compliance and will be approaching countries which have not yet reported.

Resolution 1373 is particularly controversial as it requests countries to supply a list of suspected terrorists and terrorist groups working within their borders. How will these lists be used? How does one define *terrorist* or *terrorism*?

The sensitivity of defining terrorism also makes it difficult to establish a comprehensive treaty. This discussion is beginning, but some in the UN community feel that the definition of terrorism is so controversial in the Middle East that it cannot be addressed until there is a resolution of the Israeli-Palestine conflict.

However the Secretary-General Kofi Annan said in a press conference on January 26 that, "regardless of the differences between governments on the definition of terrorism, what is clear and what we can all agree on is any deliberate attack on innocent civilians, regardless of one's cause, is unacceptable and fits into the definition of terrorism."

International Legal Alternatives for Prosecuting Terrorists

While existing treaties and conventions present long-term solutions for addressing terrorism, there is no ideal way to prosecute individuals apprehended as terrorists since September 11. The International Criminal Court is not yet operational, but it will almost certainly be ratified before the end of summer 2002. It will become a forum where individuals accused of crimes against humanity can be tried in the future, but it will not have retroactive jurisdiction.

In response to September 11 the US could have approached the UN to establish, under its charter, an International Criminal Tribunal, as was done in the case of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. However the US, feeling it is essential to be able to interrogate and control the prisoners as well as impose the death penalty on people apprehended in the military action in Afghanistan, has chosen not to go this route.

Resolution 1373 recommends that if Member States detain and prosecute potential terrorists, they should do so under the guidelines of the Geneva conventions and international law. Mary Robinson, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Secretary-General Annan and other world leaders have called on the US to abide by the Geneva accords in its

treatment of the Taliban and Al Qaeda prisoners. The response with respect to the Taliban has been positive, but questions remain about members of Al Qaeda apprehended.

Challenges to the United Nations

The United Nations Security Council is the body designated by the world community to address the threats to international peace and security. It is hampered in doing this by a shortage of resources, money, support, and cooperation from some Member States.

(1) Expansion of the War

Chris Patten, the European Union's external affairs chief, has expressed the fear that "the Afghan war perhaps reinforced some dangerous instincts: that the projection of military power is the only basis of true security; that the US can rely on no one but itself; and that allies may be useful as optional extras."

Many Member States have also expressed concern about a unilateral approach to combating terrorism and the expansion of the war into other countries such as Iraq and Iran. Secretary-General Kofi Annan recently warned, "any attack on Iraq at this stage would be unwise."

(2) The role of the UN in rebuilding Afghanistan

While the UN has been left with the task of rebuilding Afghanistan, it continually finds itself hampered in its work. Monetary support for reconstruction is inadequate, and the continued fighting between warring factions prevents the return of refugees to their villages and threatens the stability of the interim government. There is tension between those who recognize the need for an expanding role of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the US and its allies, who fear that such a force will interfere with the military action against the Taliban and Al Qaeda.

(3) The Middle East

International leaders at the World Economic Forum in New York warned that there can be no resolution to the war on terrorism unless the problems of Israel and Palestine are addressed, and the escalation of violence there makes involvement of the UN even more essential. The Secretary-General in his February 21 briefing to the Security Council said, "I truly believe that it is imperative for the Security Council and the wider international community to work in a concerted manner with the parties towards a just, lasting and comprehensive peaceful settlement of the conflict."

In fact, our planet seems to many more and more like a small boat driven by a fierce gale through dark and uncharted waters, with more and more people crowded on board, hoping desperately to survive. None of us can afford to ignore the condition of our fellow passengers on this little boat. If they are

Prevention and the Roots of Terrorism

Increasingly since 1998 the Secretary-General and the UN community have defined *prevention* of violent conflicts as an important part of the UN mandate. It seems

inevitable that part of the discussion on terrorism will need to address root causes.

Root Causes of Terrorism

If there is to be a solution to the threat of terrorism the UN must address the sensitive issue of the root causes of terrorism; including but not limited to global poverty, inequitable distribution of resources, discrimination and intolerance, violation of human rights, repressive regimes, and environmental degradation.

There are those at the UN who see the US as an obstacle in many of the international community's attempts to deal with these issues, defining the boundaries and limits of global agreements in light of only its own national interests, disregarding international treaties as it wishes (i.e., Kyoto Treaty, Ottawa Landmines Ban, Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, ABM Treaty).

The Task Ahead

The threat of terrorism will be reduced only through a global approach with all nations committed to working together to:

- Strengthen the work of the United Nations and its organizations with financial and diplomatic support;
- Work creatively together to come up with nonmilitary ways of apprehending terrorists that strengthen the rule of international law;
- Examine and understand the root causes of terrorism and work to address them globally;
- Work constructively on a lasting peace in the Middle East;

- Support and strengthen global treaties on the environment, reduction of arms, financing for development, and racism;
- Ratify and support the implementation of the International Criminal Court;
- Ratify and abide by the treaties on terrorism adopted by the UN.

September 11 has highlighted the potential global reach of terrorist groups. Cells are believed to exist in many countries, north and south, industrialized and non-industrialized. These cells are fed and supported by individuals, groups and governments feeling the effects of poverty, despair, powerlessness and intolerance. A military approach to destroy these pockets state by state would run the risk of alienating countries, and creating more and more converts to the terrorist cause.

On the other hand, addressing the underlying causes of terrorism would deny the terrorists the support that fuels them and narrow the ground upon which they can act. This should be done in a cooperative global approach through the UN.

List of Possible Actions and Resources

Resources

- Encourage everyone you know to expand their information to include foreign sources on a regular basis. Web sites of foreign press: The Guardian, www.guardian.co.uk. The Financial Times, www.ft.com; The BBC, www.bbc.uk. Al-Ahram, www.ahram.org.eg/weekly; The Toronto Globe and Mail, www.globemail.ca.
- Keep up to date on information and actions by monitoring websites such as the United Nations www.un.org, Quaker United Nations Office www.quno.org, American Friends Service Committee www.afsc.org, Quaker Peace and Social Witness UK www.quaker.org.uk/peace.
- Learn more about Islam. The best sources tend to be books written by Islamic scholars. Useful websites include: www.islam.org.

Actions

- Go to organizations that share your views for actions and ideas, e.g. in the US, FCNL's, is a good source of information, www.fcnl.org.
- Write letters to let your government and representatives know of your concerns.
- Get information, articles, and letters in the press.
- Support the establishment and ratification of the International Criminal Court as the long-term international legal responses to terrorism. (www.iccnw.org)
- Reach out to the Muslim and Arab communities to establish trust and understanding, and to find ways to work towards eradicating discrimination.
- Actively work on promoting civil liberties for all.
- Initiate dialogue and information sharing between friends, neighbors, family and colleagues to share ideas on alternatives to military intervention and the root causes of terrorism and violent conflict, but also to promote and support the United Nations as the organization best equipped to combat terrorism. The Public Conversations Project has put together a very good self-facilitation guide for dialogue on the present crisis. It can be downloaded from its website at www.publicconversations.org.

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The Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO), located in Geneva and New York, represents Quakers through Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC), an international nongovernmental organization with consultative status at the UN. QUNO works to promote the peace and justice concerns of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) from around the world at the United Nations and other global institutions. It is supported by the American Friends Service Committee, Britain Yearly Meeting, the worldwide community of Friends, other groups and individuals.