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**“TRANSCENDING BORDERS-
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“The United Nations - Forum for ‘One World’?”

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1. After the collapse of the League of Nations, the founding of the United Nations represented a second attempt to create a global peace system. Both, the League and the United Nations were founded in the aftermath of world wars. Thus, they symbolise the precariousness of the international order and, at the same time, the steadfast confidence that peace is possible. The question is whether this confidence amounts to wishful thinking or whether it may be regarded as a serious attempt to break the historic cycles of violence by institutionalising the belief that the latter can be done (positive self-fulfilling prophecy).

2. In the first forty years, the UN existed under the spell of the East-West conflict. It is generally held that this conflict blocked the UN and prevented it from living up to its assigned tasks. This is only partly true. With a view to North-South issues, the East-West conflict enhanced UN activities - first and foremost in regard to de-colonisation and its aftermath. Taking up the historic perspective of self-determination created under the League, the UN gave legitimacy to the claim of the remaining colonies to become independent states. The UN offered the new countries an arena for communicating among each other, and a forum for addressing issues concerning North-South relations, including issues of equity which, in the meantime, have been lost on the international agenda. It also provided a framework for widening the concept of human rights and for unfolding a score of other functional activities which, taken together, may be regarded as a seedbed for a world social order.

4. In particular, the UN, in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, offered an arena for the debate on restructuring of the world economy in favour of the South. The break-down of the Bretton Woods system, the 'oil crisis' and the ensuing economic recession on the one hand, the 'Vietnam trauma', domestic unrest in most of the Western societies and the seeming progress of Real Socialism in the Third World on the other hand - all these factors contributed to an atmosphere in which the South was able to engage the West (and partly the East, too), in a serious exchange on stabilising export earnings, increasing the flow of capital and technological know how to the South, recognising the right of the South to nationalise its natural resources, and strengthening the voice of the South in world economic issues. This great debate, which was designed as a prelude to formal negotiations, was launched in the UN General Assembly and UNCTAD. It not only by-passed the World Bank and the IMF but actually aimed, on the part of the South, at strengthening the role of the UN in world economic issues at the expense of the World Bank and the IMF.

5. However, on both accounts the South failed. It succeeded neither with a view to initiating formal negotiations, nor with a view to upgrading the UN. At the Cancun meeting in 1981, the West did finally agree on negotiations. But then the debt crisis broke loose and the entire perspective on North-South relations changed. Instead of negotiating with the South on restructuring the world economy, the West pressured the South into structural adjustment. As a consequence, the role of the IMF and the World Bank in world economic affairs was further strengthened, while UNCTAD was marginalised.

6. Up to the early eighties, the East-West conflict gave the countries of the South some leverage, because it seemed important to the East and the West to collect "votes" in the South. Unfortunately, it was precisely this kind of leverage that allowed Third World elites to postpone internal reform in favour of pushing for more international support. In this context, the *one country-one vote* principle of the UN played an ambivalent role. While it gave a voice even to the smallest country, it helped the South to deceive itself with a view to domestic roots of maldevelopment. Furthermore, the UN-administration offered the possibility to extend domestic clientelistic networks onto the international level. It thus helped to stabilise 'state classes' with dubious legitimacy. In this respect, the turn of the 1980s brought to light that the UN in the context of the East-West conflict, while facilitating a global discourse on a more equitable international order, had also served to dodge unpleasant domestic issues of development. On the other hand, the politics of structural adjustment in connection with the

upgrading of IMF and World Bank - as already hinted - almost completely removed issues of equity from the international agenda.

6. In the early 1990s, a window of opportunity opened for strengthening the role of the UN in world affairs in general and on North-South issues in particular. In the first half of the 1990s it seemed that this chance would be seized immediately. The Security Council, by expanding the precedents set in the cases of South Africa and Rhodesia, decided that the systematic violation of minority rights (in the case of Iraq), the gross violation of human rights (in the case of Yugoslavia) and the break-down of the public order (in the case of Somalia) may constitute a threat to international peace and thus call for collective action under the UN Charter. The then Secretary General, Boutros Boutros Ghali, was asked by the Security Council to consider systematically new ways and means to foster peace on the part of the UN. This resulted in the famous Agenda for Peace which was soon matched by an Agenda for Development.

7. The work on these agendas was paralleled in part by the great world conferences of the first half the 1990s which, under the auspices of the UN, created a world public with reference to pressing world problems (concerning the nexus of environment and development, human rights and women's rights, world population growth, social policy, urban issues and food security). However, when the celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the UN came up, it had already become clear that neither the reform of the UN nor the expansion of functional activities within the UN system would proceed as swiftly as was thought possible after the end of the East-West conflict. Under the pressure of the US, UN reform was largely confined to administrative matters, while the follow-up to the world conferences remained unspectacular, to put it mildly.

8. In stark contrast to the 1970s, the world economic order had not been the object of a world conference in the 1990s. Deliberations with a view to economic issues were confined to the continuing liberalisation of trade and debt relief. The Peso and Asian crises resulted in a debate on providing for a better multilateral regulation of international finance. However, this debate was short-lived. Instead of providing for global financial governance, the respective countries were asked to improve their banking practices.

9. At the beginning of the 21st century, the state of affairs with a view to the United Nations is rather mixed. On the one hand, there is general disappointment as to the willingness of the member states to take the UN seriously. In this respect, the "unipolar moment" in world history (i.e. US hegemony) is, of course, of special importance. True, the outright hostility towards the UN which prevailed in the second half of the 1990s in part of the US Congress has been replaced by a certain rapprochement which was speeded up in the aftermath of September 11. But the present policy of the US does not seem to be directed towards strengthening the role of UN in dealing with global terror, but in mobilising multilateral support for the unilaterally determined policies of the US. It is to be feared that reference to the UN framework of action will only last as long as this framework helps to legitimise US action. The EU stresses the need to strengthen the role of the UN. But with a view to the EU, too, there is reason to question the coherence of its respective policy. By creating an intervention force it did not necessarily aim at extending UN capacities. First and foremost it is aiming at enhancing its own capacity to act. Perhaps more seriously, the present crisis seems to undermine the value consensus underlying the idea of having a United Nations. True again, the governments have all come out with support for the right of the US to self-defence. But underneath the formal consensus, public views as to the and the meaning of the present crisis are drifting apart. Universalism has long been under attack as an expression of Western hegemony. This critique now seems to be carried from diplomatic encounters and intellectual circles to the schools and the streets. With other words, under the spectre of

economic, technological and communicative globalisation, the world is moving apart spiritually. In the Islamic world as in Israel distrust of the UN is growing.

10. On the other hand, there is no alternative to the UN. As has been stated on various occasions before, if the UN did not exist they would have to be invented. The UN have become indispensable with a view to any attempt to keep the centrifugal forces in bounds and to make the world 'hang together'. That governments may see this and act accordingly, is more than wishful thinking. Ever since the inauguration of the modern system of states (which we in the West date to the Peace of Westphalia) governments have pursued a policy of balancing autonomy with the need to bind themselves to certain rules and procedures. This has led to an ever increasing body of norms (to be understood as institutionalised expectations of rule-oriented behaviour). Ignoring the norms is costly, even to hegemonic powers. And the costs are rising. Of course, there is room for weighing these costs against the gains expected from non-compliance. But this does not imply that norms are nothing but an ideological device at the disposal of political and other actors. If this were true, norms would have ceased to exist long ago - on the international as on the national level.

11. The great challenge for the UN today lies in the fact that it was created to regulate the relations between states. Today, the functioning of the UN has to be adjusted to the increasing importance of transnational forces shaping the life of people, including global terror. The Security Council, in following the logic of inter-national qua territorial politics was admirably quick in endorsing the right of the US to self-defence. This way, however, it also has affirmed the definition of the problem in inadequate terms, i.e. in terms of inter-state conflict. Instead of concentrating on the Security Council, among other things efforts should be stepped up to install the International Criminal Court and to turn it into an effective instrument of transnational justice. Of course, a global legal order does not prevent terrorism, but it offers a frame for dealing with it in a way that will not in itself contribute to its perpetuation. It is impossible to uproot the causes of violence. But it is possible to change the environment in which it thrives. As Stanley Hoffmann in his comment on the 11th of September has written: The pursuit of life, liberty and happiness proceeds "in a bewildering world. We should now realize that we cannot safely enjoy these values at home if others, abroad, cannot hope for a share of them".

Es gilt das gesprochene Wort.