

The United Nations and the Common Man

“Maybe the process of serving the individual rather than the effort of transforming nations will give mankind the universal peace that has eluded it for so long.”

by NURI EREN

At the San Francisco Conference of 1945, the founders of the United Nations were primarily concerned with formulating controls that would ensure peaceful relations among sovereign governments. But the traumatic experience of the Second World War, in which the minds of men had engaged in conflict long before arms were committed to battle, also had taught them that international peace and security rest ultimately upon the spiritual and physical well-being of individual citizens within the states. From the beginning, therefore, plans were to create a U.N. system of “special agencies” to promote the health, education, and living standards of the average human being. Today, while peace between nations seems as distant a goal as ever, U.N. service to individual citizens has bloomed beyond all expectations and has slowly and quietly fostered, especially in the “underdeveloped” world, an increasing realization of the relation between personal freedom and welfare and global security. Maybe the process of serving the individual rather than the effort of transforming nations will give mankind the universal peace that has eluded it for so long. In this context, the first twenty-five years of the United Nations deserves to be truly celebrated.

First, the U.N. system is helping millions of individuals to improve the con-

ditions of their material existence. In the U.N. system seventeen different agencies specialize in promoting education, health, economic growth, social development, agriculture, ecology, and communications. Almost 90 per cent of the budget flows into these efforts, servicing two-thirds of the world’s peoples who are needy, and answering some need or another for almost all of them.

For example, consider the case of Sadik Harbi. Today he functions as a fully qualified primary school teacher. When Algeria became independent in 1962, he was only fourteen. Eighty per cent of the teaching staff in the country had quit because they were French. Harbi was one of those recruited into a crash four-week teacher-training course by UNESCO experts. Later, while the fourteen-year-old taught elementary school, he received further evening instruction in a U.N. training center and used teacher-training materials provided by U.N. agencies. Now, with 15,000 other monitors, he belongs to the new and up-to-date army of primary school teachers in Algeria.

Sadik Harbi’s experience was part of a worldwide U.N. effort to spread primary school education to millions of children in underdeveloped lands. Tens of thousands of peasants have been transformed into teachers like Harbi. In Carthage, Tunisia, for instance, Ridwan Hilali’s students love their school. Hilali, along with 3,000 other Tunisians, has been trained in new techniques of education and teaches his classes how to test the soil, value their food, and handle electricity. Four million additional children will be at-

tending schools in Tunisia as a result of U.N. assistance. Meanwhile, in Latin America, U.N. help in founding and modernizing primary teacher-training schools has helped 90,000 teachers, thereby increasing school attendance from twenty-five million to sixty million pupils in nine years. Altogether, U.N. training programs operate in seventy-seven countries.

The effort has been extended to secondary and higher education. For example, Eduardo Lopez of Lima, Peru, is spending this year in Santiago, Chile, at the Training, Experimental and Educational Research Centre sponsored by UNESCO, learning to be a secondary school director. The program calls for 2,000 trainees. When they all return to work they will help an extra five million Latin American children receive secondary education. In Africa the success of the Higher Teacher Training Institute in the Sudan has prompted the founding of additional institutes in seven other African countries. Two million pupils in Africa will benefit from these new teachers.

Thousands of students also are in universities today as a result of U.N. efforts in higher education. The Middle East Technical University in Ankara, Turkey, was founded initially with U.N. assistance and funds. In India the United Nations supports postgraduate engineering studies in eight new regional colleges to help the country to meet its increasing need for technical personnel. In Latin America the United Nations family collected \$200-million for upgrading and modernizing university education in the Southern Hemi-

sphere. This program embraces all universities on the continent.

U.N. efforts in health and nutrition also have touched millions. In the African Republic of Mali they call them "United Nations guns." Appropriately, the guns are vaccine injectors and they shoot to save people from communicable diseases such as smallpox, cholera, and yaws—the deadly enemies of Africa and Asia. In India alone malaria cases have dropped from a hundred million to 150,000 a year. The United Nations has vaccinated 226 million persons in ninety-five countries against tuberculosis. It has protected 39 million children from trachoma and five million against leprosy.

Two U.N. agencies, the World Health Organization and UNICEF, with an annual joint budget of \$140-million, are especially concerned with health. In the isolated town of Madurai on the south tip of the Indian subcontinent, for example, people are drinking safe milk for the first time in their lives. UNICEF-sponsored milk-processing plants operate in 200 communities around the world. In Thailand's Prae province and in many Andean countries UNICEF plants manufacture iodized salt, the one protection against goiter.

U.N. agencies have created new lands for landless peasants. Ahmad Badawi, a camel herder of eastern Jordan, has turned into a prosperous dirt farmer, thanks to underground water recovered by a United Nations specialist. Farmers in the Vardar River Basin in Yugoslavia, in Sebou River Region in Morocco, in Wadi Jizan in Saudi Arabia harvest rich crops from vast tracts of land reclaimed by U.N. flood-control programs. A United Nations-sponsored five-year project has opened 988,400 acres of virgin forest in Ecuador. U.N. efforts in Nigeria, India, and Brazil have increased the production and export of tropical woods to more than \$1-billion a year.

All of these international programs were carefully planned. Of the sixteen organizations in the U.N. family, the U.N. Development Program and the World Bank Group are the key strategists. The Development Program has spent \$1.6-billion in research to help a host of nations to use their natural resources more productively. The

World Bank Group has provided the capital for building the technical infrastructure needed to develop these capacities. It has provided millions with electric light and energy, new ports, railways, water supply and sewer systems, telecommunications, new industries, even research centers for technological development. In 1969, the Bank Group provided nearly \$1.9-billion toward the development of public services, transportation, industry, and agriculture in twenty-five countries. In the last two decades its contribution to some one hundred nations has totaled almost \$20-billion.

The United Nations also has sought to provide the human resources necessary for industrial production. In India, for example, 150,000 workers in forty industries received their training from 4,500 U.N.-sponsored instructors. U.N. institutes operate in more than sixty countries and train thousands of managers and technicians every year.

The Institute of Technological Research in Colombia, for example, taught coffee planters a new technique in depulping that helped to bolster Colombian coffees' position in the market. In Ghana more than 100 of the top officials in government services took training from the U.N. Institute of Public Administration.

Another major accomplishment of the United Nations in its first twenty-five years has been its contribution to law in all lands. One revolutionary aspect of the charter signed in San Francisco was its explicit recognition of the close relationship between a nation's decency toward other nations and its decency toward its own citizens at home. The charter also reflected the conviction that the fostering of human rights constitutes one of the essential conditions of international peace and that these rights must be protected internationally. From the first, this concept took a firm hold of the corporate



conscience of the U.N. family. Even in the hectic postwar era it influenced many peace treaties. On the recommendation of the United Nations, Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Rumania, and Japan pledged themselves to the observance of human rights in their new postwar constitutions.

But it was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the U.N. on December 16, 1948, that set mankind moving toward an international standard of individual rights. The pursuit has been relentless and unbelievably successful.

First, the declaration's recognition of "self-determination" as a fundamental human right shook the foundations of the international community. The insistence that the subjugation of alien peoples constitutes an impediment to peace led to the independence of some sixty countries within fifteen years. Today, a mere handful of people remain under alien rule, and the U.N. family continues to fight indefatigably for their liberation.

A closer look at the developments within the U.N. system reveals the two-pronged process by which the declaration enabled common man to achieve his elevation to international status. First, the declaration and similar assertions of principle set up standards of behavior for governments in their relationships with their own citizens.

Though not binding on the states, these principles influenced legislation and initiated the internationalization of the rights of individual citizens. As a Southwest African testified before a U.N. committee: "Whether the declaration has been binding or not, we have learned through it those rights which are ours to demand."

Ratified by sixty nations and therefore transformed into national law, the declaration affected the fundamental law of citizens' rights in these countries. The result was to spread the liberal ideas of the dignity and worth of the individual. Nine countries cite the declaration as the source of the freedoms to which they commit themselves in their constitutions; forty-one others have incorporated the declaration's freedoms into their own constitutional system. Still other nations, such as Libya, had their fundamental laws drawn up by U.N. experts.

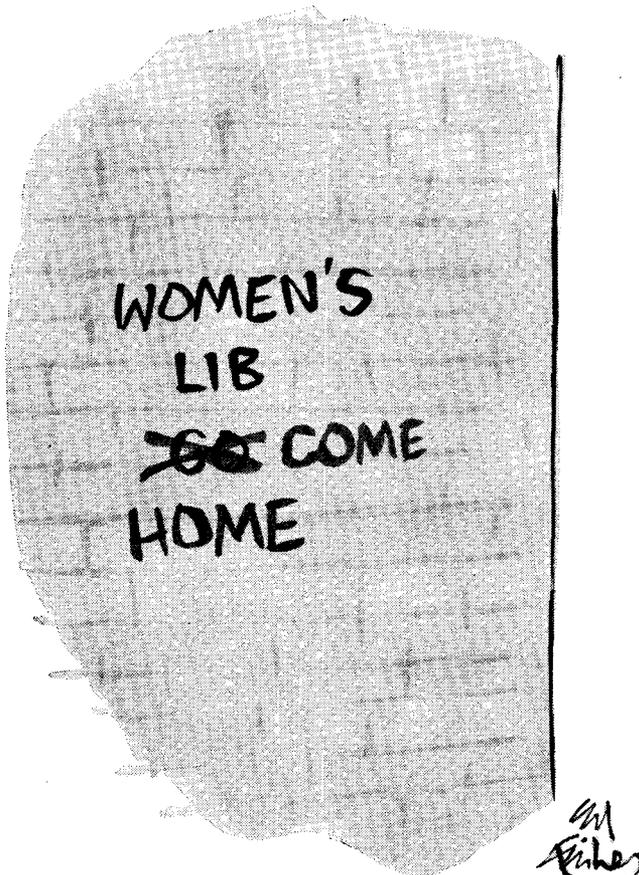
The second prong of the escalation of the individual to an international status is constructional. The principles enunciated by the declaration were gradually transformed into more explicit, binding terms for the enjoyment of these rights by the individual citizen. In the past twenty years the U.N. system produced thirty-seven agreements affecting every aspect of the political, social, and economic life of common man. For instance, the Convention of the Status of Women has in-

fluenced life in almost every land. One hundred and thirty countries have granted voting rights to women since 1946. Ninety countries have extended other political rights. In France married women were given the right to own property. In Austria women were allowed to conserve their permanent civil service status after being married.

In fact, principles inspired by the United Nations have left few areas in national legislation unaffected. In 1951 and again in 1954 Ontario's legislature adopted two acts to eliminate discrimination "because of race, color, creed, nationality, ancestry, or place of origin in order to meet the standards proclaimed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights." In Bolivia a legislative act reaffirmed the equality of opportunity for all and declared that "national education shall be inspired by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights." In Panama a law condemned discrimination as a flagrant violation of the Universal Declaration. In the United States the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Economic Act of 1964 include the substantive rights of the U.N. declaration, as do the principles of the Age in Discrimination Employment Act of 1967.

The declaration also has influenced judicial action. The International Court of Justice has referred to it on various occasions. Its principles have pervaded national courts, including those in the United States. The declaration was cited in the New York Supreme Court in 1950 and in the U.S. Supreme Court in 1949. With the enactment of two additional covenants in 1966, the United Nations has completed the transnational legal framework that has increasingly affected individual citizens for the last century. The slow accretion of U.N. services in this area has given the individual an international identity beyond his status as citizen of a state.

The main question now is how effectively the common man's new legal standing can be realized and enforced internationally. The record so far is impressive and encouraging. Operations have begun at universal, regional, and national levels. Intergovernmental groups have been formed to deal with various aspects of citizen rights. A UNESCO Commission for Conciliation and Good Offices settles disputes over discrimination in education. An expert committee of eighteen nations spawned by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination focuses on complaints in this area. The Fact-finding and Conciliation Commission on Freedom of Information already has dealt with 450 cases involving disputes over freedom of expression. The International Labor Organiza-



tion (ILO) receives complaints from workers' and employers' organizations about infringements of rights.

Each year a report on rights is compiled. The reports are compiled on a three-year cycle. One year, it is on civil and political rights; the next year on economic, social, and cultural matters; the third year on freedom of information. These reports help to promote and to protect those rights through international scrutiny.

The United Nations has evolved a system of hearings and on-the-spot observations by U.N.-appointed missions. In 1963, a U.N. human rights mission visited Vietnam. In 1967, the ILO sent a study group to Spain to examine the trade union situation. In 1969, Secretary General U Thant dispatched a representative on humanitarian activities to Nigeria. More recently, the U.N. constituted a special committee for investigating the human rights of the peoples affected by the Arab-Israeli War.

More significantly, the U.N. has moved to the point of regarding infringement of basic human rights as criminal acts. The General Assembly has branded "apartheid, as well as all forms of racial discriminations," as "crimes against humanity." Previously, of course, Rhodesian and South African infringements had been universally regarded as threats to peace. The General Assembly had adopted thirty and the Security Council six resolutions regarding South Africa; upon Rhodesia the council has imposed economic sanctions and other restrictions.

The regional commissions on human rights have developed effective international machinery for supervision and adjudication in matters concerning the rights of common man. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the European Commission on Human Rights allow individuals to appeal against their own governments. The European commission can receive petitions from any person, nongovernmental organization, or group of individuals claiming to be the victim of a violation by its state. In fact, by the winter of 1968 the commission had received 3,700 such complaints. The European Court of Human Rights constituted by the convention has adjudicated many such cases. In 1967, for example, affirming its jurisdiction in the complaint of 327 French-speaking Belgians about laws requiring education of their children in Flemish, the court ruled that the Belgian practice violated the European Convention on Human Rights, which forbids discrimination in education.

From the beginning, the United Nations remained so committed to the material welfare of the common man



"You ignore her struggles and go on venting your rage and hate. You slap her again. You rip her blouse straight down the front. You kick her. You smash your fist full in the face, breaking her eyeglasses. And suddenly, without her glasses on, you find she's beautiful. . . ."

that for almost two decades it resisted accepting official responsibility for the individual's political and socio-economic rights. The organization also seemed so concerned with the rights of colonial peoples that it deliberately neglected the non-colonial. But involvement with apartheid and racial discrimination developed political attitudes and practices that paved the way to a more universal involvement. In October 1966, a resolution was passed in the General Assembly inviting the Economic and Social Council and the Human Rights Commission to give urgent consideration "to the ways and means of improving the capacity of the U.N. to put a stop to violation of human rights wherever they might occur." In 1968, the evolution progressed one step further when the Human Rights Commission adopted a resolution for handling complaints by individuals against their own governments "in cases revealing a consistent pattern of gross violation."

The final step in implementation and enforcement will be the appointment of a High Commissioner for Human Rights. Also proposed are an Organization for the Promotion of Human Rights and finally an International Court for Human Rights. The realization of all of these projects will not and should not free the individual from the control of his state. On the contrary, these groups will reinforce

his legal status within his own nation in the same manner that the development of the nation-state reinforced the ties of the individual with respect to his family through institutionalizing marriage and inheritance laws.

In the quarter century of its existence the United Nations can claim certain achievements in ordering the life of mankind. For instance, it has learned to deal with the problems of contemporary society and environment in a universal and transnational manner. It has developed institutions with transnational outlooks and means. It has forged a corporate conscience responsive to all mankind that imposes on all states a sense of international accountability for whatever they do abroad, as well as at home.

But its service to common man tops all these achievements. In a world where giant organizations threaten to dissolve the individual into a nonperson, it has lifted the worth and dignity of the common man into international status. Maybe this achievement more than compensates for its failure to order a world without war. Perhaps this is the beginning of a new era in which men bonded across their national boundaries by the same freedoms will eventually feel and live as citizens of one world. For initiating this era, the San Francisco meeting twenty-five years ago can be rated as one of the most important events in the history of man.

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Making Congress More Effective

The ancient cliché of the hard-headed businessman has traditionally suggested a stuffy, conservative fellow out to make money and, utterly lacking in sentiment, a very practical person. Since most businessmen have to be practical to stay in business and must continually make difficult decisions based on facts and not emotion, the cliché places the most recent statement on national policy by the Committee for Economic Development squarely in the realm of hard-headed thinkers and not woolly-headed dreamers. The subject is how to make Congress more effective, and the suggested changes are specific, practical, and, for the most part, long overdue.

This country, says the CED's latest white paper, is in the throes of change, and Congress, like every institution, must respond as business concerns of all sorts, universities, even religious institutions and the family are being subjected to continuous modification. The CED puts it this way: "The formulation of public policy is a joint responsibility shared between Congress and the executive branch, but in the final analysis it is Congress that adopts (or rejects) legislation that determines the health of the economy, the national security, the character of life both urban and rural, the condition of the environment, and the levels of generational, racial, and other group tensions. The people of this country have every right to insist upon a responsive and effective Congress."

To get down to specifics, the CED, which is operated wholly by business

leaders in North America, urges among other things the following steps:

- That the federal fiscal year be changed to coincide with the calendar year so that appropriations may always precede expenditures.
- That Congress establish and observe deadline dates for both appropriations and authorizations.
- That annual authorizations be discontinued; that authorizations should be made along project lines and fully funded for minimum terms of four years.
- That evaluation of program performance, in terms of both dollars and objectives, be heavily stressed.
- That means for comprehensive review of the annual budget be established and used, relating total revenues and expenditures to the current state of the economy.

Every sensible mature adult is aware that the present Congressional approach to fiscal affairs is completely indefensible. Time and again the national financial stability has been endangered—and is endangered right now—because of antique Congressional procedures in fiscal-economy matters. The five changes recommended above would bring about



fundamental improvement in the ways Congress now handles the people's money, methods much better suited to the highly agrarian economy of a century ago than they are to the chiefly urban economy of today. Only fifty years ago 30 per cent of the country's population lived on farms; now fewer than 5 per cent do so. But Congressional procedures have never taken this dramatic sociological switch into account.

Other recommendations in the CED's latest policy statement include the long-standing denunciation of the Congressional committee system. CED insists on abandonment of seniority as the sole basis for the selection of committee chairmen and seeks more democratic ways to operate committees, including many more open hearings. Rotating chairmanships, fewer standing committees but broader jurisdiction for each, and more intelligent use of joint and select Congressional committees are among the recommendations for making Congress more effective.

In any case, it is heartening that so distinguished a body of businessmen as the CED has taken sufficient interest to attempt to halt the erosion of popular respect for Congress at the same time that serious reform proposals are being made in both houses of Congress and in a splendid recent study by The Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, captained by Rexford G. Tugwell, suggesting practical changes in the American Constitution. Among proposed reforms are improvement in the Congressional code of ethics, full disclosure of political and campaign financing, and installation of modern voting procedures that would eliminate forever the secrecy now surrounding teller, standing, and voice votes in the House of Representatives. That hard-headed businessmen, academic authors, and political leaders themselves are taking prompt action on several fronts to restore public trust in the legislative system is of itself heartwarming and optimistic.

The great British Prime Minister William Gladstone once said of the American Constitution that it was the most remarkable work to have been produced by the human intellect at a single stroke. One of the facts that have made it so is the flexibility of that great document, including the right of Congress to bring itself up to date at any time in the future. Let us now then take advantage of that flexibility and bring our legislative procedures up to the new marks of an utterly altered postwar world. The CED has mapped a channel with carefully placed buoys and we disregard such practical intelligence at our peril.

—R.L.T.