

Building a world community

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UN: Wrecking ball or transformation? by John E. Trent

Proposed changes at the United Nations can take two forms: the wrecking ball or constructive transformation.

The Trump administration will be using a wrecking ball approach based on fences, fear, force and finance. It will not work. The second approach is to use knowledge, diplomacy and leadership to transform the UN into the effective institution it should become. This could work. Nikki Haley, the new U.S. ambassador to the UN, is going to make a list “of those who have our back.” Trump distrusts the UN and wants to cut American expenditures. It will only become worse as he unleashes the ‘antiinternationalist attack dogs in Congress’ eager to bash the UN.

But Donald Trump may have one positive influence. He might break the logjam at the United Nations. It has needed reform for years. Proposals for the transformation of the UN are ready. In the last years alone there have been nine sets of proposals for various aspects of global governance reform.

Changes include the control of sovereignty by the principles of the Responsibility to Protect. The Security Council must become more representative and the veto limited. All the organs need weighted voting to take into account differences in power, population and economic contributions. The rich and powerful must be enticed back from the G20. The General Assembly needs to be streamlined and democratized. The Secretary-General must be given more authority and autonomous finances and emergency forces. Of course, Donald Trump may have an alternative agenda. Nor should we fear American threats about taking back their piggy bank. The UN never should have been so dependent on American finances. Their current assessed dues -- 22 per cent of the regular budget and 25 per cent of the peacekeeping budget -- should be brought to about 10 or 15 per cent.

Canada should work hard to bring knowledgeable and determined diplomatic leadership to the transformation of the United Nations. As the World Federalist 2014 booklet ‘The United Nations and Canada: What Canada has done and should be doing at the United Nations’ clearly showed, we have politicians, diplomats, academics and NGO’s with the experience and ideas to help steer the UN in the right direction.

It is urgent the Government of Canada give a new mission to the Department of Global Affairs to analyse and encourage the transformation of the United Nations to make it a more effective global institution. But – and the ‘but’ is very important, Global Affairs must not do it alone. It must mobilize like-minded countries. More importantly, it must bring into the ‘Canadian UN Transformation Operation’ or ‘UN Plus’ for short, all the talent of knowledgeable UN experts and civil society organizations that work in this domain. It will be the synergy of government working with civil society that will have an impact. The first task will be to remind everyone of the UN’s great achievements. It is the UN that delivers most of the world humanitarian aid, looks after refugees and

immigrants, promotes human rights and the advancement of women, handles peacekeeping, and acts as a diplomatic forum for the nearly 200 countries of the world. We must not let the blundering of Donald Trump or the shadow of the UN's failings blind us to the brilliance of its achievements and the world's need for its call to cooperation.

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Documents, links, and other items referenced in the June 2017 issue of Mondial are available at <http://www.wfmcanada.org/mondial-links-june-2017/>