

SPEAKING NOTES

Towards a Coherent and Effective UN: What the High Level Panel Must Do

Thursday 29th June 1.00-2.15PM, Thatcher Room, Portcullis House

I am an internationalist.

I believe in the UN.

The UN has an essential and unique role with its triple responsibilities for peace and security, development and human rights.

No other international organisation has the same breadth of responsibilities.

Nor the same opportunity to integrate these issues into concerted global action.

Let me give you three examples of the UN at its most effective.

It organised the elections in Afghanistan, ensuring a peaceful transition to stable democratic governance in a country that had seen decades of war and suffering.

Thanks to the efforts of the WHO and UNICEF Polio has now been virtually eradicated.

And in responding to disasters the UN plays a critical and unique role.

The Tsunami and the earthquake in Pakistan proved that.

But, and it is a very big but, I do not think the UN is fulfilling its potential.

We set ambitious targets in 2000 in the form of the MDGs.

Now we need to be equally ambitious in the reforms we demand to help the UN achieve the MDGs

How is the UN not fulfilling its potential?

Here are some examples.

Who can tell you what the UN contributes to the achievement of the education MDG?

It is impossible to get a consolidated story.

Some countries have to deal with 20 separate UN agencies on the ground.

In Vietnam 11 UN agencies account for only 2% of development aid.

Many of the agencies maintain separate premises, with separate and incompatible back-office support systems.

The potential for savings must be enormous.

Savings that could be redirected into development work that would deliver an impact.

22 UN agencies have some role in delivering clean water.

The truth is that decades of accumulated decisions on the UN have led to a proliferation of agencies.

The result is waste, duplication and loss of efficiency.

In-country agencies are more concerned with raising money than with collaborating to provide integrated and coherent support to the partner country.

Globally, multiple agencies compete over the same issue.

We now have an opportunity to change all this.

We must not waste this opportunity.

The Secretary General's High Level Panel provides the best chance in a generation to build a UN that is fit for purpose.

And able to take on the challenges of the 21st Century.

The presence on the Panel of the Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown, demonstrates the commitment he, and through him the UK Government has to supporting and strengthening the UN.

I have just returned from the Review Conference for the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons in New York.

There I saw at first hand, the need for leadership and ambition if we are to resolve and push forward on the big issues of the day.

UN reform is the same.

It will never be easy.

There will always be those who will say that it's too difficult.

Too many people will object.

But we cannot let the views of a self-interested minority deflect us from the right course of action.

We have a Panel that has the leadership and authority to make a difference.

We must not waste the opportunity

So, what is the answer?

How should the development, humanitarian and environment work of the UN be organised?

First, some basic principles.

Principle one: the approach should be country-based.

Country leadership and ownership of development plans must be the basis of any system of external assistance.

For the UN this means that programmes in-country need to be unified, responsive, and aligned with countries' own plans and ambitions.

Principle two: A focus on results must drive the reforms.

The acid test of these reforms must be how much they improve the results on the ground, out there in the real world.

In five years' time we should be asking:

How many more children are going to school?

How many children are alive now who would not have been, had we not acted?

Principle three: Consolidated and coherent funding produces consolidated and coherent action.

Piecemeal funding produces piecemeal action.

What happens if we apply these principles to the operational work of the United Nations?

Let's start by applying the first principle.

A genuinely country-based approach by the United Nations.

Our aim should be:

UN development programmes being better aligned with the priorities of partner governments;

Better allocation of UN funding between countries;

Stronger accountability of UN agencies to the partner government;

There are many ways this could be achieved.

As donors, we could pool our funding and reduce the number of separate flows of money into the UN;

To support this, consolidating governance arrangements would help, with a single board looking at consolidated UN Country Programmes.

Streamlining management roles, particularly in-country, and ensuring we have a Resident Coordinator with real power to act.

Putting one person in charge of a genuinely unified UN country team.

With authority over all UN activity.
And with control over the budget.

How might we achieve this?

There is already progress on the ground.

At country level the UN is taking steps to consolidate its work at country level, what is now known as the “Three Ones” – one office, one leader, one programme.

But for true consolidation we need to add a fourth: one budget and one source of funding – a country programme pool, under the authority of the Resident Coordinator.

Several UN Country teams are already keen to pursue these reforms.

Vietnam and Pakistan are both keen to move fast.

All of us who are providing separate flows of funding to the UN in-country would need to commit to changing the way we fund the UN at country level.

Once we get the UN operating more effectively at country level, we should take the next step and consolidate the flows of funding to the UN at the global level.

One approach would be to provide more core funding to the agencies.

And trust the agencies to collaborate globally to allocate it between the different UN country teams.

But it is hard to see this working well.

A simpler approach would be a single central funding mechanism for the country programmes.

This would allocate money by country.

The Resident Coordinator, supported by a strategic planning team would plan the strategy and programme.

Implementation would be by the individual agencies

Then there is the global advocacy work of the UN which we need to ensure is properly supported.

So we would need to develop a mechanism for supporting this.

We could continue as now and have separate board meetings for the separate agencies, and provide core funding to the agencies for their core global responsibilities.

An alternative approach would be to use the central fund as the source of funding for the core global responsibilities of the agencies.

The board of the central fund would meet with each agency to review and approve the costs of running the global programmes of the agencies.

The second principle was that our efforts should be driven by a desire to see quicker results on the ground.

Not just by a desire to reduce the running costs of the UN.

I said earlier how difficult it is to get a single clear answer from the UN of the contribution they have made to accelerating progress towards the education goal.

Nor what they have done to deliver better health care to poor people.

This is because everybody is doing a little bit.

But nobody has an overall view.

Nobody has a sufficiently strategic view of what needs to be done.

The whole is not even the sum of its parts.

When it should be more than the sum of its parts.

A focus on results and accountability for results will drive better performance.

If the UN has better information about what it is achieving together.

It will be driven to do work together better.

Finally, the application of principle number three.

Changing the way we fund the United Nations.

Donors are part of the problem.

We provide multiple fragmented streams of funding to the United Nations.

And this produces fragmented action.

Coherence must begin at home.

In 2004 DFID provided £127 million to UNDP.

Only £40 million of this – 32% - was in un-earmarked contributions to core costs.

The rest was earmarked funding for particular projects and programmes in particular countries.

Our funding for UNICEF paints a similar picture.

Total funding of £102 million.

But only £19m of that as a core contribution.

That's only 19% of our funding.

We can do better.

We also need to give longer term commitments to the United Nations.

So they can plan for the longer term.

And so that developing country partners can be assured of the level of support they will be getting.

If donors decided to consolidate their flows of funding to the United Nations in to a central funding mechanism.

And a central funding mechanism provided this funding to integrated country programmes.

Then Developing countries would really be back in the driving seat.

They would have clear idea of what they could expect as support.

They would at last be able to make real choices about what to do with the support available.

To achieve such change will require political will.

The tendency of multilateral organisations is to find what they can all agree on.

This is usually something pretty weak.

It usually means not offending anyone.

It's time for a change.

The Panel must not waste the opportunity it has in front of it.

The chance to recommend to the United Nations Member States some changes that will be:

First and foremost, good for developing countries,

Secondly, good for its supporters and donors,

And finally good for the United Nations as a whole.

We cannot let an obstructive minority put their own interests in front of the interests of the whole system, and, most importantly, in front of the interests of the developing world.

1692 Words – approx 17 minutes