

**The United Nations in the 21st Century - London School of Economics and Political Science,
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Mr Howard Davies - Director of the London School of Economics,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the great honour and privilege to participate in this LSE Lecture Series on the relevance of the United Nations at sixty.

Tomorrow I will also have the privilege of presenting the inaugural lecture on the "International Legacy of Oliver Tambo" at the Glasgow City Hall. The coincidence of these events during this week could not have been more opportune and significant because Oliver Tambo, among his many distinguished qualities, was an ardent internationalist.

Oliver Tambo led the African National Congress during the entire period of its underground and exile existence spanning three decades. He is one ANC President that interacted most with the United Nations, the Organisation of African Unity and the Non - Aligned Movement.

He worked for self-determination, democracy, the respect for human rights, the upliftment of those disempowered and living in poverty, non-racialism, non-sexism, the resolution of conflicts by peaceful means as well as the destruction of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction.

The values and principles that he stood for and asserted are also those which today form the cornerstone of the constitution as well as the foreign policy of the new democratic South Africa
Ladies and Gentlemen

Above all he believed in the true solidarity and the potential of the United Nations to serve as a conscience of the world and collective energy for dealing with the most pressing challenges facing humanity.

I recall the work of Oliver Tambo to also indicate that in South Africa we have a long and rich history with the United Nations. Indeed South Africa provides a case of what the international community can do better under the United Nations in support of a people in need. It also shows the potential of the United Nations to use the various tools at its disposal in pursuit of the noble objectives on which it was founded. Furthermore it illustrates the dilemmas that come with the asymmetries in the use of power within the world body.

The United Nations was also founded at a time in history when a large number of peoples in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean still lived under colonialism. However the principles and values under which the United Nations was created served to inform and give moral and political authority to the struggle against colonialism and apartheid.

With great foresight the founders of the United Nations identified a set of fundamental Purposes and Principles, which are still relevant today. They said that its Purposes are, I quote: "to maintain international peace and security; to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self determination; to achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character; and to be the centre for harmonising the actions of nations in the attainment of these common goals".

PREAMBLE

We the peoples of the United Nations determined ,

To save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetimes has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and to

To reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights , in the right dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of the nations large and small, and

To establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and

To promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

AND FOR THESE ENDS

To practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and

To unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and

To ensure, by the acceptance of principles and institutions of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and

To employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples,

Since its creation these Principles of the United Nations became the shiningrod and benchmarks for a better world order. We experienced this directly in South Africa as we saw the world unite under the United Nations to oppose apartheid. Decolonisation and the fight against apartheid are perhaps among the best successes for the United Nations General Assembly.

One of the ironies of history is that South Africa's racist apartheid government was also represented and participated in the drafting of the Charter of the United Nations. Oliver Tambo called this the "fault of the times". The policies of the South African government from 1945 up until 1994 were in direct contradiction with the Charter and the purpose of the United Nations.

The African National Congress has always believed that the honourable task of freeing South Africa rested firmly with the people of South Africa themselves. This remained the fundamental position of principle from which all international action are to be appraised

During this period the 'bonds of bondage that bound millions of South Africans were tightened to the absolute limit , the screws of oppression and exploitation had been driven in without mercy and racial discrimination permeated every sphere of South African life. Basic freedoms which were few and far in between had been whittled away until there was none worth mentioning" Violence against the majority of the people had reached frightening proportions.

Indeed the relations that apartheid South Africa enjoyed at that time especially with the Western countries meant that the United Nations would take a longer time before calling for strong actions against apartheid. From 1946 when the United Nations first addressed the problem of discrimination against people of Indian origin in South Africa, as had been highlighted by the great Mahatma Gandhi, to 1960 the United Nations was rather timid. There was resistance by Western States to an outright condemnation of apartheid as a blatant violation of human rights.

It was only when the apartheid police unleashed violence against peaceful South Africans demonstrating against pass laws in Sharpeville in 1960 and in response to the worldwide condemnation of this act that the Security Council itself started considering action. The Security Council resolution 181 of 1960 deplored the policies of the South African government and called upon it to abandon apartheid and racial discrimination. This period had also coincided with the admission of more African States in the United Nations as a result of decolonisation and their calls for stronger action from the United Nations.

On its part the General Assembly passed resolution 1761 in 1962 urging Member States to impose economic and other sanctions against South Africa. But these resolutions could not have the intended effects without the support of all Member States. Resolution 1761 also established the Special Committee Against Apartheid, which had to play a very crucial role in mobilizing international support.

Following on these the United Nations was to pass other successive resolutions over the years as it remained seized of the South African question. Notable among these were resolutions establishing arms and oil embargoes, the proclamation of 21 March as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on the anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre and the declaration of the General Assembly in 1970 of apartheid as a crime against the conscience and dignity of humankind.

The General Assembly, under the leadership of the then Foreign Minister of Algeria, His Excellency Abdelaziz Bouteflika, used the powers bestowed upon it to reject the credentials of the South African delegation in 1974. Following this South Africa withdrew from other UN organs and specialised agencies such as the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the International Labour Organisations (ILO). In its place our liberation movements (the ANC and the PAC) were recognised from 1975 as the representatives of the South African people and given observer status at the United Nations.

The United Nations General Assembly, in a special session in December 1989 accepted the principles of the Harare Declaration of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) under resolution S16/10. The Harare Declaration, originally prepared by our own liberation movement, the ANC, spelled out the steps needed for a conducive climate for negotiations in South Africa, the modalities for those negotiations as well as the principles that should underpin a new South African constitution. It served indeed as the blueprint for the transition to democracy in our country.

In addition to the resolutions passed the United Nations and some of its agencies also convened a series of international conferences to draw world attention to the travesty of apartheid. United Nations world conferences have resulted in global consensus on many issues of concern to the international community. They epitomise the convening power, which is one of the strengths of the United Nations. In this extent I wish to refer specifically to the two joint OAU/UN conferences, the International Conference of Experts for Support of Victims of Colonialism and Apartheid in Southern Africa, held in Norway in 1973 and the World Conference for Action Against Apartheid held in Nigeria in 1977. There were other conferences as well including the International Conference on Sanctions Against South Africa held in Paris in 1981 as well as many others.

But, let me hasten to add that even though apartheid was declared a crime against humanity, action against it at the United Nations did not always receive unanimous support. In the Security Council; the three Western permanent members consistently opposed resolutions against South Africa, including through the repeated use of their veto powers. In particular they used the veto to block the imposition of mandatory economic sanctions against South Africa.

The General Assembly was the body that drove the Agenda to resolve the South African problem peacefully together with UNESCO, ILO, WHO and others.

The UNSC was not responsive to the General Assembly even as it tried to impose economic sanctions against the Apartheid regime, the three Western Members of the UNSC used their tripple veto.

That is one of the weaknesses of the United Nations that there is no harmonisation between the General Assembly and the Security Council. Whereas the General Assembly is more representative and therefore will have broader views and more sensitive to the needs of humanity as a whole.

For the United Nations to be relevant, the Security Council should be more responsive to the calls from the General Assembly.

The three Permanent members - (Veto casters) acted in defence of their narrow national interest rather than in the interest of international peace and security.

As Oliver Tambo stated decades ago in relation to the South African scenario " They were extracting super - profits from the exploitation of black labour in the apartheid economy and wished to continue to do so". Thus in arguing for stronger action, Oliver Tambo stated " If sanctions are not imposed on such a blatant offender and so persistent a violator of the Charter as Apartheid South

Africa, then the efforts of the international community towards a peaceful resolution of international problems will have proven an exercise in futility

This support by the 3 Western Permanent members of the Apartheid, white racist regime against the overwhelming world view illustrates the problem of the asymmetrical exercise of power especially the veto.

But of course, there were other aspects of the United Nations work in the fight against apartheid which demonstrated the strengths and relevance of the United Nations.

Harmonisation and synergies between Regional Organizations and the United Nations

The work and contributions of the regional organizations can significantly reinforce the work of the United Nations as our own case showed. The Organisation of African unity was very responsive to the views of the liberation movements in SA. The OAU worked hand in hand with the United Nations. Both the UN and the OAU convened joint Conferences to deal with the issues of Southern Africa, including South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe.

This was in line with Chapter 8 of the Charter. If I use Africa as an example, the African Union Peace and Security Council which can contribute enormously in making the UN relevant at sixty if the UN gave it the necessary logistical technical material and financial support to prevent and resolve conflict and help build peace in Africa .

The South African case also illustrate how the international community should facilitate and complement the peoples' efforts in any conflict rather than try to impose its own solutions. The South African people under liberation movement never shirked their responsibility to liberate themselves but also campaigned for international support to complement their efforts.

South Africans negotiated their own transition themselves with international support. They found their own innovative solution since they understood the fault lines better than anybody else in that country. They had to implement their solution and live with those consequences and thus avoided the civil war that was predicted. This is why people call it a miracle. Actually, it was not a miracle, the international community supported us, we had to find our own solutions.

Maybe, what the UN may still need to learn is not to be too keen to impose solutions because the people who have to implement and live with the consequences may not be too keen on the imposed solutions, as those solutions may not be sustainable.

_ The role of civil society in complementing the United Nations work in South Africa's case was exemplary.

The whole world in terms of civil society was mobilised under the general banner of the Anti-Apartheid Movement. Ordinary school children, housewives, senior citizens, workers, professionals, faith groups, some politicians and other organisations of civil society who supported our liberation struggle, they did not come with their own Agendas. That is why it was overwhelmingly successful. They supported us in our struggle to liberate ourselves, they did not fight for us.

The work of civil society properly defined can strengthen the work of the United Nations at sixty.

In other areas as well the United Nations achieved success. From human rights to environmental conservation the United Nations built consensus and created norms. It strengthened international human rights and international humanitarian law.

United Nations agencies continue to make great strides working in countries and with communities all over the world to fight diseases, malnutrition and infant mortality and a whole range of other things.

Thus, it becomes critical to ensure that the harmonization of all UN bodies is important especially between the General Assembly, UN Security Council and the Bretton Woods institutions . For instance again, whilst the GA was driving an Agenda to weaken the Apartheid regime peacefully, the IMF was offering loans and strengthen the regime. There was no harmony in the UN family.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I recalled the work of the United Nations in relation to South Africa to illustrate the potential that the Organisation and of course the weaknesses it has in ability to convene countries of the world on matters of common concern for humanity. It is for these reasons that the United Nations has to continue to address the plight of the peoples of Palestine as well as the much less known plight of the people of Western Sahara and take decisive actions in order that they can also achieve self-determination.

The United Nations, in our view may need to convene a World Conference on terrorism as this is major concern for humanity so as to reach consensus on all its aspects.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The United Nations to be relevant at sixty needs to deal with certain issues urgently. For almost five decades unforeseen to the founders of the UN, it would spend years hamstrung by rivalries between great powers. They could not have imagined that this important world organisation would be a theatre for the ideological battles of the Cold War era. Nor could they have thought that some of its very founding members would be found wanting in implementing its principles in their own countries. Yet; this is what the United Nations endured for decades. Even after the end of the Cold War the peace dividend did not materialise as more resources continued to be expended on arms instead of development.

Another problem is that the relationship of the powerful States with the United Nations has at times been contradictory. They have tended to resort to the Organisation and to utilise it to advance their narrow national interests and objectives. Thus they have refused to understand the concerns of the rest of humanity and to act on them.

We see this in many instances. The most stark are the attempts to reduce the role of the United Nations and deny it resources for development activities. This is done despite the achievements of the United Nations in this field. It is the convening power of the United Nations that has always led to consensus on the global benchmarks for development, the latest being the Millennium Development Goals.

On the other side; the image of the United Nations suffers when the majority of people see it as an instrument of the powerful. They lose hope and even become desperate when they see the Organisation passing countless resolutions and commanding action only when the interests of the powerful are threatened.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Another major problem for the United Nations is that the powerful States continuously seek to be treated in an exceptional manner refusing to accept norms and rules of the United Nations which they themselves champion. They view these as being applicable to other States but not to themselves. However this exceptionalism unwittingly undermines the norms and legal frameworks established under the United Nations in many areas. It makes adherence to these universal norms and values optional.

In the light of all of these the question is what can be done to make the United Nations, at sixty, more relevant for the future.

I believe that the key lies in UN Member States realising that the problems and challenges facing the world today require a collective global response.

We also need to recognise that the international system will earn its credibility from its ability to address the concerns of all peoples whether they are poor or rich. As long as we are unable to see that we all stand to benefit from the resolution of each others' problems, whether it is underdevelopment or conflict, we will not be able to construct an effective multilateral system.

In this regard, the United Nations should re-double its efforts towards the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals in order to address the problems that I have highlighted. The

United Nations should continue to lobby for more resources so that all humanity could have the possibility to have access to clean water, sanitation, housing, health, education and indeed meet the goal of reducing poverty by half in 2015. For this the Bretton Woods Institutions need to contribute more resources for development. What is needed for the majority of the developing countries is that more of these resources should be provided in the form of grants rather than loans.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Despite its weaknesses I believe that we are better off with the United Nations than we would be without it. But there are also areas where the United Nations has come short in serving humanity.

These are the areas that will need to be addressed if the United Nations is to be stronger and more relevant at sixty and beyond.

I want to argue; that as we reflect on the issue of relevance of the UN at sixty we will need to address the power imbalances within the governance of the United Nations. When the United Nations was created veto power was given to the permanent five who were also the victors of the Second World War as well as the Security Council so that it could preserve international peace and security. This has been one of the major factors that have defined the nature of the work that the United Nations does and the way it reacts to crises facing the world.

While the Security Council is mandated by the Charter to act on behalf of all member states in most cases the special privileges have been used to advance self-interest. The imbalance in the UN's architecture and power relations that I have referred to remains one of the central obstacles in its ability to meet contemporary challenges and the expectations of the peoples of this world.

Therefore the United Nations, especially its Security Council, needs to be reformed in order that it can be in a position to address a broad range of challenges that face humanity.

Many people in the world today still live in abject poverty even at the time when there are enough resources in the world to eliminate it. Whole societies are not on track to meet the Millennium Development Goals. Estimates show that at current rates the continent of Africa will fail to achieve these goals unless urgent action is taken to support the efforts of African governments towards this end. The UN Secretary General, Mr Kofi Annan, reminded us a few weeks ago that globalisation has not been the rising tide that lifts all boats.

Many people are still denied the basic human rights. Some live under the constant threat of random acts of terrorism. The proliferation of small arms and other weapons continues to undermine peace efforts around the world. There is also concern about the proliferation of nuclear weapons and some States are also devising new ones, apparently for actual use. I believe that we should remain focused on disarmament and the elimination of weapons of mass destruction.

Many people still live in societies ravaged by conflict, violence and disease.

Furthermore, the perception that the most powerful have impunity from rules and norms has weakened the edifice of international law developed under the United Nations.

Ladies and Gentlemen

All these are challenges that require a strong United Nations. A United Nations that can bring hope to the many people who still look upon it all over the world. An Organisation that can still draw from the idealism of its founders as it addresses the present day challenges.

We need to reflect on why with all these problems the Member States of the United Nations have so far failed to muster enough will for bold reforms.

Part of it, in my view, lies in the fact that some of the powerful States benefit from the current imbalances in the distribution of power. They therefore see changes as a threat to their powers and privileges. They do not see that the relevance, legitimacy and credibility of the UN would be enhanced by fundamental reform.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I suggest that we also need to continue with the reform efforts and seek fundamental changes to the power imbalances. The composition of the Security Council is the one factor that best epitomises the contradictions between the world of 1945 and that of today. The United Nations Security Council reform is proving difficult to achieve despite the fact that its agenda has been growing over the years in both volume and complexity. I strongly believe that reform would strengthen the Security Council. From broader representivity with countries from Africa, Asia and Latin America serving as permanent members, the Security Council would draw more credibility and have broader views.

We therefore also need a renewed commitment to the strengthening of a rules-based multilateral system of global governance based on the democratic ideal. Multilateralism remains the most effective and efficient system for addressing global problems. In history no other form of inter-State cooperation has delivered the same results as multilateralism. Unilateralism usually does not stand the test of time. Coalitions of the willing on issues that require collective action have also proved to be short-term solutions that also lack credibility. They are often used simply to assert the hegemonic intentions of a minority of countries.

It is also important that we consider the importance that the drafters of the UN Charter attached in designing a system of checks and balances, as they gave different powers and functions to its different organs. Today, however, we see the increasing empowerment of the Security Council at the expense especially of the General Assembly and other organs. The Security Council has tended to encroach on the competencies of the other principal organs of the UN. It has also increasingly assumed for itself a legislative and treaty interpreting or amending role.

There is no doubt that this approach also weakens multilateralism in the sense that other organs and bodies can lose their specialised mandates to the Security Council. For example, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is the sole and legitimate body for the verification of nuclear safeguards agreements and its role must not be undermined or subsumed by the Security Council.

Yet another area that I suggest, needs to be strengthened to make our organisation relevant is on prevention of conflicts. Even today, prevention is better than cure is more apt when we look at the history of the United Nations and realise the costs of humanitarian interventions, peacekeeping and reconstruction after wars. Prevention should also seek to address the root causes of conflicts.

The United Nations should also seriously review the role of sanctions as a useful tool that needs to be used judiciously and with care. Sanctions should support peacemaking and peacebuilding rather than impede it.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Another glaring area in which the United Nations still has to do more is to empowerment women in its own work and structures. Despite the principles that the United Nations is promoting, women are not yet playing a prominent and visible role in its leadership structures. In this area, I challenge the United Nations to fall in line with the important trend in the world, in which women are taking responsibility and leadership roles in various sectors. Put simply, we need to see more women in peacebuilding, acting as Special Envoys as well as leading the multitude of Specialised Agencies that belong to the United Nations family.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me also take this opportunity to offer some reflections on my country's recent election to serve in the United Nations Security Council as a non-permanent member for the period 2007 to 2008. This is significant as we will be serving in the Security Council for the first time. We feel honoured therefore that, twelve years into our democracy, we have this opportunity to make a direct contribution to the maintenance of international peace and security.

According to the Charter of the United Nations the Security Council is mandated to act on behalf of Member States in the maintenance of international peace and security. The Security Council is also obligated to act in accordance with the Purposes and Principles of the Charter.

We will be serving in the Security Council during challenging times in global politics. It is also a time when more than ever the world requires a strong system of multilateral governance.

We will be serving in the Security Council also at a time when it is seized of a large number of African issues. These include Western Sahara, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Sudan, Somalia and Ethiopia and Eritrea . We see our membership of the Security Council therefore allowing us to enhance the role that we are already playing in conflict resolution and peacebuilding on the African continent. In this work we have been responding to the strong resolve of African leaders, and indeed the people of Africa, who would like to see our continent achieve peace as a prerequisite for sustainable development.

We will also be informed by our own foreign policy, which is based on a vision of an African continent that is prosperous, peaceful, democratic, non-racial, non-sexist and united and which contributes to a world that is just and equitable.

We are already working with the peoples of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire and others as they take steps to move beyond years of devastating conflict and as they seek to create conditions of peace and prosperity in their countries. In this regard we express gratitude to all the countries who have been supporting these peacebuilding initiatives in Africa.

If the Security Council is to make a lasting impact on the African continent we also believe that we should seek to build synergies between its work and that of the African Union, in particular its Peace and Security Council.

Ladies and Gentlemen

We recognise that membership of the Security Council brings with it global responsibilities and requires a commitment to contribute to peace and security globally. In this regard we are committed to play our part in a constructive and responsible manner.

We shall work with all members of the Security Council and regional organisations in pursuit of peace and stability in all regions of the world, in particular the Middle East.

The Security Council is also seized with other important matters such as counterterrorism and non-proliferation. On these as well; South Africa intends to play its part in contributing to the work of the Council.

South Africa is therefore aware of the challenges that we will face as we join the Security Council and we intend to work closely with all members, including the permanent five that for historical reasons have a unique role in the work of the Council.

South Africa has already shown itself to be a reliable partner of the international community as we took part in the leadership of subregional, regional and global organisations. These include the Southern African Development Community, the African Union, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77 and China and the Commonwealth. We have also hosted various international conferences such as those of the African Union (AU), the Commonwealth, the Non-Aligned Movement, the World Conference Against Racism and the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

We hope that we will make a constructive contribution to the work of the Security Council consistent with the expectations that the peoples of our country, Africa and the rest of the world have on us.

Despite all its weaknesses, I believe that the United Nations is even more relevant today than it was in the past in view of the challenges that the world is facing especially with regard to peace and security.

It is needed to help create conditions of peace in Afghanistan, Middle East, Sudan, Cote d'Ivoire. The world is also seized with matters relating to Iran and the Democratic Republic of Korea and here as well the role of the United Nations is pivotal because, as I indicated when accepting South Africa's election to the non-permanent seat in the UN Security Council, "we do so conscious and

convinced that the multilateral system of global governance remains the only hope for challenges facing humanity today.

I thank you!