

UN Reform

The United Nations currently faces new global dynamics that are not always easily addressed by the structures created in 1945. These dynamics include globalization, the much greater extension of communications, and the important role of civil society. As well, threats to the people of the world have increased in number and complexity — terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, intra-state conflicts, organized crime, and dangerous communicable diseases. The need to deal with these problems has spurred calls for reform of the UN system.

Reforming the United Nations

Since becoming Secretary-General in 1997, Kofi Annan has worked for UN reform. With the 1998 appointment of Canada's Louise Fréchette as the first deputy secretary-general, these efforts resulted in a major internal reorganization of the UN Secretariat, including a personnel reduction of more than 10 per cent and improved management.

At the Millennium Summit in September 2000, 147 world leaders signed the Millennium Declaration. This led to the elaboration of the Millennium Development Goals — aimed largely at reducing poverty and improving health and education. (See Appendix 1.) These have since served as an organizing concept for the UN development efforts.

In September 2002, the Secretary-General launched a reform package with many initiatives. These include

- establishing priorities based on the Millennium Declaration (discarding outdated activities and making provision for new issues),
- overhauling UN planning and budget processes and giving the Secretary-General more authority to reallocate resources,
- reforming conference services (20 per cent of the budget) and public information,
- mainstreaming human rights in the United Nations,
- improving co-ordination of UN development machinery, and
- reviewing UN relations with civil society.

In the wake of the Iraq crisis, the Secretary-General in September 2003 called for further reform of the United Nations. On Nov. 4, 2003, he established a 16-member body, the High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change.