

extreme difficulty, coordinating urgent relief efforts in 20 countries, saving thousands and thousands of lives, and stimulating us all to do better.

The struggle against poverty, ignorance and violence is so daunting that it is tempting to give up in despair. But it must be said that, despite errors and setbacks, mistakes and shortages, progress has been made. Infant survival and life expectancy have risen, birth rates have declined. The people of South Asia and China can feed themselves. And for the first time in all human history, more people are literate than are not.

So we need not be diffident about it. Looked at honestly, the UN is a success. But far from a complete success. It has, at best, a marginal role in too many vital issues of peace and security.

Almost before the ink was dry on the charter, it was clear that the UN could not guarantee our security, nor that of our friends or others, either. The allies of one day became the enemies of the next. And yet in the last forty years there has been no global conflict. The several hundred regional conflicts have not engulfed us all. When the political will has existed, the UN has been able to provide peacekeeping mechanisms, particularly in the explosive middle east situation. But this has not always led to peacemaking - the conundrum of the middle east continues; the Iran/Iraq slaughter goes on; the two communities in Cyprus remain at loggerheads; apartheid remains and Namibia must still achieve independence; terrorism continues unabated.

Who is to blame? It is not the creative, visionary Secretary-General and his hard-working staff. It is not the institution of the UN, the body corporate, that is to blame. The UN Secretary-General cannot impose its will on nation states. Those states have not wanted to sacrifice very much of their own sovereignty to the world body. There is no UN capacity to dictate to member states or even to interfere very much. The UN cannot make Iran and Iraq stop the slaughter, much as we wish it could. The blame for UN ineffectiveness resides in member states.

And some UN agencies are in urgent need of reform if they are to survive - UNESCO is the most pressing example. Indeed, UNESCO should heed one of the lessons suggested by UNICEF - that the UN functions best when it has clear objectives, and the authority to carry them forward.