THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL GOVERNANCE AND THE ROLE OF MULTILATERAL ORGANIZATIONS

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During my years in Secretary General Kofi Annan’s senior management team I saw, first hand, how effective multilateral action with local and regional partners, helped build progress and peace. Wars ended and hope was provided in Liberia and Sierra Leone; Angola and Burundi; South Sudan and Northern Uganda; Kosovo and Nepal.

We also coordinated, through the United Nation, massive, life-saving international relief from the Indian Ocean tsunami, the South Asian earthquake, the Horn of Africa, Southern Africa, the Lebanon war and the Darfur crisis. In several of these overwhelming emergencies, hundreds of thousands of lives were predicted to perish. The sombre predictions were averted because multilateral action, building on local capacities, is today infinitely more effective than recognized in much of world media and national parliaments.

But we fail as collective humanity when multilateral action lacks the unity of purpose among UN member states. We fail, tragically and repeatedly, when the United Nations and regional organizations are not provided with the political will and the minimum of economic and security resources needed from their member states. The endless ongoing suffering amongst Darfurians, Burmese, Palestinians, Congolese, and among climate change victims in the South, is a product of a senseless neglect among those leading nations that could have unlocked the situation.

It is already more than four years since I brought Darfur to the Security Council for the first time. It was 2 April, 2004 and the courageous German Council Presidency was two days old. For several months we had struggled to get anyone interested in this forgotten desert conflict that had already displaced hundreds of thousands defenceless civilians. As of that month, Western nations took it upon themselves to bring Darfur’s cause forward. Since then the number of dead, displaced and abused women and children has more than quadrupled in Darfur.
I noticed during these first crucial months of trying to mobilize against the atrocities in Darfur, that there was little help or interest among Sudan's Asian trading partners or among Arab nations. That neglect became fateful, because they had greater influence in Khartoum than the Westerners. Later, in September 2006, President Bashir himself confirmed this in the meeting of non-aligned countries in Cuba. We 'fear no sanctions,' he said, because Sudan has 'forged close trading links with China, India, Pakistan and Malaysia.'

In my own encounters with government officials in Khartoum, they more than once demonstrated that they were comfortable with their international position. Once, when I brought up our reports of massive rape of women in Darfur, they counterattacked: 'we see your criticism in Western media, but we also see who support you: the same nations that tear apart Iraq and betray the Palestinians—and you want us to take moral lessons from them?'

Similarly, the world cannot live with Burmese generals getting away with murder. When Burma's military rulers last year blocked life saving aid to their own cyclone-stricken people, it should immediately have fallen upon China, India and the ASEAN neighbours to take the lead in convincing the regime to provide access relief. The ball was in their court because in Myanmar these Asian economic powers have real leverage, as opposed to the West. The Burmese generals have become rich through trade with their ASEAN neighbours, China and India. They have lucrative lumber deals with regional partners and bank accounts in Singapore.

If anyone should have learnt the importance of immediate availability of life-saving relief, it should be the ASEAN countries that were devastated in the tsunami. We then pushed for and got immediate access to war-torn Aceh and Sri Lanka's strife-ridden Tamil areas. Hundreds of thousands received relief within days from a united world coordinated by the United Nations. As weeks were lost in cyclone-stricken Burma in May, lives were lost. But international attention again focused on Western powers, which had little influence, which threatened with an intervention that would not happen. Those who could have made the generals an offer they couldn't refuse did not do their job.

The recent history of international solidarity has been paved with examples of the wrong countries pushing right causes, while the right countries become passive bystanders, at best. In December 2005 I met the victims of President Mugabe's large eviction campaign in Zimbabwe and had a two-hour meeting with the president in his Harare offices.