

Africa's population bomb

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By Gwynne Dyer

According to United Nations Population Fund, Africa currently has one-seventh of the world's people: just over one billion. But during the rest of the century, this single continent will add an extra 2.6 billion people, more than tripling the population, while the rest of the world will add just half a billion.

If it weren't for the African population boom, the world's population would never exceed 7.5 billion. That is still probably twice as many people as the planet's resources could support comfortably for more than a couple of generations — but birth rates are falling to below replacement level in most places. If that were happening in Africa too, the global population could be headed back well before 2100.

It isn't happening in Africa, or at least not nearly fast enough. Nor is the UN naively projecting current birth rates into the indefinite future. It assumes that the current average fertility rate for the African continent of 4.6 children per woman will fall to only three children per woman by 2045, though some countries — Niger, Mali and Uganda, for example — will continue to have higher birth rates.

The problem is that replacement level is 2.2 children per woman. Africa may well reach that level late in the century, but the population growth will continue for a further 30-40 years, until the last generation from the baby-boom days has grown up and had its own 2.2 children per family. So a total African population of 3.6 billion by the end of the century — a third of the human race — is probably as good as it is going to get.

If African birth rates do not decline steeply, it could be a great deal worse. If the current rate of African population growth persisted, we would have a global total of 15 billion people by the end of the century, with about half of them crammed into that single continent. But let's go with the optimistic assumption that there will be 'only' 10 billion of us.

What will the African population boom mean for the rest of the world, and for Africa itself? It may be a surprisingly self-contained disaster.

An Africa that more than triples its population during the rest of this century will certainly still be the

world`s poorest continent at the end of it. Even the current improvement in economic growth rates in many African countries will largely be cancelled out by population growth: few countries are seeing significant rises in per capita income.

If Africans stay poor, then their impact on the rest of the world will be slight. They will not become major consumers of resources imported from elsewhere, because they cannot afford them. Even their impact on the global environment, while not negligible, will be quite limited. It is high-income consumers of energy, manufactured goods and processed foods who really count when it comes to global issues like climate change.

Three hundred million Americans have more effect on the global environment than would three billion Africans living more or less in their present style. Subsistence farmers mostly affect the local environment, even when there are a lot of them. If they degrade their land, pollute their rivers and destroy their forests, the damage they do is mostly to themselves. Urban slum dwellers do even less damage to the global environment.

If no miracle intervenes, the African continent is going to have a very hard time in this century. It is already the only continent to experience recurrent famines, and they will probably get much worse. Civil wars and massacres are already more frequent in Africa than anywhere else, and that too will get worse, because people under great pressure rarely behave well.

What, if anything, can be done about this? Even a big push to make contraception available to the 100 million African women who do not now have easy access to it would not substantially change the outcome at this point. Only a brutally enforced one-child policy like China`s could do that, and it is simply impossible to believe that this could be done in any African state.

Africans have done nothing wrong, nor indeed is their birth rate higher than those on other continents at various past times. But there is only a limited time available to get the birth rate down once modern medicine and sanitation have brought the death rate down. For various reasons, none of their own fault, Africans have stayed poor for too long. Individual countries can still save themselves, and some will, but the continent as a whole probably cannot.

The farce of United Nations reforms

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Ramzy Baroud

US campaign against UN bodies does not represent a genuine democratic endeavor The country that has long been known to abuse its powers and privileges in the United Nations is now leading a campaign to reform the same organization. While UN reforms are welcomed, if not demanded, by many of its member states, there is little reason to believe the recent US crusade is actually genuine. Rather, it seems a clear attempt to stifle any semblance of democracy in the world's leading international institution.

Most American politicians actually despise the UN. While the Security Council is directed or tamed by the US veto (often to shield the US and its close ally Israel from any criticism), other UN bodies are not as easily intimidated. When the UN education and science agency, UNESCO, accepted Palestine's bid for full membership last October, following a democratic vote by its members, the US could do little to stall the process. Still, it immediately cut funding to the agency (about 20 percent of its total budget). The move was devoid of any humanitarian considerations. The UNESCO provides vital services to underprivileged communities all over the world, including the United States.

Yet, State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland insisted on sugarcoating on what was an entirely injudicious political act. "Today's vote by the member states of UNESCO to admit Palestine as member is regrettable, premature and undermines our shared goal of a comprehensive just and lasting peace in the Middle East," said Nuland. The fact is, there has been much saber-rattling in the US Congress targeting the UN. The campaign, led by Republican congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, chairwoman of the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, is threatening the UN with all sorts of punishment if the organization does not cease its criticism of Israel and tighten the noose around Iran. Naturally, the UN is not meeting the expectations of Ros-Lehtinen and her peers. It happens to be a body that represents the interests of all its member states. Some US politicians, however, see the world through the distorted logic of former president George W. Bush: "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."

The late British author and humanitarian doctor Theodore MacDonald showed that the US actually has a love-hate relationship with the UN. In his final book, *Preserving the United Nations; Our Best Hope for Mediating Human Rights*, MacDonald reveals a strange reality that the US and its allies labor to undermine the UN, while also using it to further their own military, political and economic objectives. Expectedly, successive US governments had mastered the art of political manipulation at the UN. When successfully co-opted to accommodate US military designs, the UN suddenly becomes true to its mission — per Washington's account, of course. However, when US pressures failed to yield a unified front against Iraq in late 2002, President Bush asked in his first address to the United Nations, on Sept. 12, 2002: "Will the United Nations serve the purpose of its founding, or will it be irrelevant?" The Bush years were rife with such ultimatums — to the UN and the whole world. However, a similar attitude continues to define the administration of Barack Obama. The US latest assault on the UN is now happening under the guise of reforms, but no 'reforms' are possible without first creating the needed polarization aimed at pushing for an American agenda. Joe Torsella, the US Deputy Ambassador for Management and Reform of the United Nation, spoke of the latest US efforts at reining in the 47-nation Geneva-based Human Rights Council. "The US will work to forge a new coalition at the UN in New York, a kind of 'credibility caucus' to promote truly competitive elections, rigorous application of membership criteria, and other reforms aimed at keeping the worst offenders on the sidelines," he said.

UNHRC is an outspoken critic of human rights violations. As of late, the organization has been particularly vocal regarding the rights violations under way in Syria. It is also very critical of Israel and its one-sided wars and human rights violations in Gaza and the rest of the occupied territories. For years, the US has conspired to undercut, intimidate and silence this criticism.

The Reuters report on the US latest push for the supposed reforms states: "Council members include China, Russia and other countries where rights groups say abuses are commonplace." To offset the seeming inconsistency — between UNHRC mission and its members' records — the US, according to Torsella, wants to "hold Human Rights Council members to the same standard of truly free and fair elections that the UN promotes around the world, and insist on the highest standards of integrity for the Council and all its members." Viewed without context, it is a noble endeavor indeed. However, it becomes a tainted statement when one considers that the US status at the UN has been achieved through the least democratic of all means: a disproportionate political power (the veto) and money (used for arm-twisting).

Attempting to curb and contain the UN, as opposed to punishing and boycotting the international body, is basically what sets Democrats apart from Republicans. Unlike Republicans, "the other side of the debate (mostly Democrats) believes that achieving these reforms requires strong American leadership — and strong leadership is demonstrated by paying dues on time and in full. You can call this side 'constructive engagement,'" wrote Mark Leon Goldberg in the *UN Dispatch* (Jan. 20). Practically, both approaches are aimed at achieving similar outcomes: Realizing US policies, rewarding allies and punishing foes — even at the expense of the noble mission once championed by the UN over 65 years ago.

While the latest push for "reforms" is being hailed by Washington's media cheerleaders, no honest commentator could possibly believe the US campaign against UNESCO, UNHRC and the UN as a whole

represents a genuine democratic endeavor. In fact, the truly urgent reforms required right now are ones that aim at correcting what MacDonald described in his book as the UN's "foundational defects." MacDonald counseled for immediate addressing of the "issue of permanent membership and the use of the veto." He also recommended the granting of greater power to the General Assembly and eliminating the "imposed use of the US dollar" in mediating UN transitional affairs. MacDonald's guidelines for reforms are comprehensive, and rely on the concept of equality, guided by humanitarian and moral urgencies. The same can hardly be said of Washington's latest UN intrigues and shady politics.—Arab News

The dis-United Nations

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The Frontier Post, October 2, 2012

Air Commodore (R) Khalid Iqbal

Theme for debate in the 67th session of the UN General Assembly was fascinating as well as elusive: There were no solid proposals for "Adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means".

General Assembly is the main deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations, comprising 193 members. It is a unique forum for multilateral discussion on full spectrum of international issues. More than 120 presidents, prime ministers and monarchs are attending the meeting. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon predicted that the ministerial session will be among the busiest ever, reflecting “the tumultuous time in which we live – a time of turmoil and transition”. It is also taking place “against a backdrop of widespread violence linked to intolerance,” he said.

Overwhelming mood at the gathering is of despair, disappointment and frustration. So far, the recent anti-Islam hate movie, Syrian civil war, and Iranian nuclear programme have dominated the show. Lingering conflicts of Kashmir and Palestine have also come under discussion. Interestingly, all these issues have a Muslim dimension. Though the UN carries a huge baggage of unresolved conflicts, it would be worthwhile to evaluate current session’s performance in the context of these issues.

At the outset of his address, President Zardari said: “Before I take up my speech, I want to express the strongest condemnation for the acts of incitement of hate against the faith of billions of Muslims of the world and our beloved prophet, Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him)...The International community must not become silent observers and should criminalize such acts that destroy the peace of the world and endanger world security by misusing freedom of expression.”

President Morsi said Insults to the Islamic prophet Muhammad are part of an organized assault on Muslim religious and cultural values and cannot be brushed aside. “The obscenities that I have referred to that were recently released as part of an organized campaign against Islamic sanctities are unacceptable...We reject this. We cannot accept it,” Morsi said, his voice thin with anger. “We will not allow anyone to do this by word or deed... Egypt respects freedom of expression,” but “not a freedom of expression that targets a specific religion or a specific culture.” he added

Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, secretary general of the OIC, said on the sidelines of the UNGA session, that international community needs to unite behind action to implement international law which warns against any advocacy of religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, aggression or violence.

US President Barack Obama in his address condemned “mindless violence” over the anti-Islam movie. He said that the US could not ban the controversial video under the First Amendment law of the Constitution. President Obama said: “There are no words that excuse the killing of innocents. There is no video that justifies an attack on an embassy. There is no slander that provides an excuse for people to burn a restaurant in Lebanon, or destroy a school in Tunis, or cause death and destruction in Pakistan.”

As regards Syrian conflict, there is no likelihood of a breakthrough on the deadlock; though UNSG said, “it will be foremost in our minds.” Mr Ban further said, the world must “stop the violence and flows of arms to both sides, and set in motion a Syrian-led transition as soon as possible....international community should not look the other way as violence spirals out of control,”...brutal human rights abuses continue to be committed, mainly by the government, but also by opposition.” Russia and China have vetoed three Western-backed resolutions. “To increase pressure and to increase the isolation of the regime of Assad is one of the goals,” Germany’s Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle told reporters.

Mr Ban sounded an alarm in the context of Palestinian conflict: “door may be closing, for good” on a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, “the continued growth of Israeli settlements in the

occupied Palestinian territory seriously undermines efforts towards peace. We must break this dangerous impasse." Mellowed down by failure of last year's effort to make headway on acquiring statehood, President Mahmud Abbas has come up with a modest offer seeking an upgrade of Palestine status. The Palestinians expect overwhelming support from the assembly for the enhanced UN status, which would enhance their international legitimacy and grant them access to UN agencies and possibly the International Criminal Court.

Iran's nuclear programme is another sticking point. Secretary-General Ban "urged Iran to take the measures necessary to build international confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of its nuclear programme." Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appears convinced that the Iranians are close to developing a nuclear weapon. Iran's President has shrugged off talk of an Israeli attack on his country's nuclear facilities.

Iranian President Ahmadinejad said, "arms race and intimidation by nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction by the hegemonic powers have become prevalent, and Iran finds itself under threat from world powers seeking to impose their views... A state of mistrust has cast its shadow on the international relations, whilst there is no trusted or just authority to help resolve world conflicts." He urged that United Nations should be restructured, noting that many pressing global issues are the result of mismanagement. President Barack Obama opined that Iran and Syria were on the losing end of a sweeping tide of democracy in the region. The United States "will do what we must to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon... nuclear-armed Iran is not a challenge that can be contained." Obama said. Iran has denied western accusations that it seeks a nuclear bomb.

UNSG condemned "shrill" talk of war between Israel and Iran. Mr Ban said, he rejects "threats of potential military action by one state against another. Any such attacks would be devastating". The OIC Contact Group on Kashmir met on the sidelines of the UNGA. The meeting was co-chaired by the OIC Secretary General and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan. AJK President and Mirwaiz Umar Farooq also attended the meeting.

The OIC Secretary General reaffirmed the continued support of the OIC for the people of Kashmir and assured that the Organization would spare no efforts in supporting their legitimate endeavours and struggle.

In her address to the Contact Group, Minister for Foreign Affairs apprised the meeting of the commitment of the Government of Pakistan to constructively remain engaged with India for the early resolution of the Kashmir dispute. She highlighted the human rights situation in Indian occupied Kashmir and called upon the Government of India to take necessary steps in accordance with international humanitarian law to ensure respect for human rights of the Kashmiri people. The Foreign Minister also called upon the Government of India for the early settlement of the Kashmir issue in keeping with relevant resolution of the UN Security Council. In his statement, Mirwaiz updated the meeting on the latest situation in Indian Occupied Kashmir.

Peace and security is a prerequisite for the stability needed for global economic growth, sustainable development and social progress. Unfortunately we see that contribution of the UN towards global peace

has diminished over the previous decades. The current session of the UNGA may not achieve much beyond reiteration of already states positions. It is indeed a divided house. And, it is alarming that polarization within the UN is snowballing on Muslim Vs non-Muslim basis. Restructuring of the UN is long overdue. Though the UN may credit itself for not letting the World War III occur, multitude of conflicts sprinkled all over the world necessitate a bold course correction, lest it meets the fate of its predecessor, the 'League of Nations'.

United Nations

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Air Cdre Khalid Iqbal (R)

Excerpts from the Governor General of India's letter, of October 27, 1947, to Maharaja of Kashmir make an interesting read: "Your Highness's letter dated 26th October has been delivered to me by Mr VP Menon. In the special circumstances mentioned by Your Highness, my Government has decided to accept the accession of Kashmir to the Dominion of India. Consistently with their policy that, in case of any state where the issue of accession has been the subject of dispute, the question of accession should be decided in accordance with the wishes of the people of the state, it is my Government's wish that, as soon as the law and order has been restored in Kashmir and her soil cleared of the invader, the question of the State's

accession should be settled by a reference to the people. Meanwhile, in response to Your Highness's appeal for military aid, action has been taken today to send troops of Indian Army to Kashmir to help your own forces to defend your territory and to protect the lives, property and honour of your people..."

Notwithstanding the credible research that these two letters were written after the Indian Army had physically entered Kashmir and that Maharaja had declined to sign the letter attributed to him, it remains a well documented fact that the Governor General's acceptance of accession of Kashmir was temporary and tied down to the final settlement through ascertainment of the will of the people. It is in this context that remarks by the UN Secretary General (UNSG) about Kashmir dispute, during his recent visit to India, have been praised by almost everyone. Mr Ban Ki-Moon, while urging an amicable settlement of the Kashmir dispute, emphasised that the "will" of Kashmiri people must be respected while finding any solution. He said, "I hope this issue (Kashmir) is addressed peacefully without violence and respecting wills of the people there...fully respecting the human rights sentiments there." Commenting on efforts to boost bilateral relations by Pakistan and India, he opined: "I am pleased with the continued efforts to improve the relations between India and Pakistan. This has a broader significance for the region and for global peace. I realize there are many outstanding issues but I encourage leaders of both the countries to persist with these efforts."

All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) leader Nayeem Ahmed commented: "It vindicates our stand. It is unfortunate that different conflicts were resolved, but Kashmir dispute has been left out." He urged that the UN should not restrict itself to statements only; otherwise its credibility would be at stake. Liberation leader, Javed Ahmed Mir said: "We have been waiting for the Kashmir resolution for past over six decades. UN should play a key role in solving the Kashmir issue in the same way it has resolved East Timor and Ireland issues." A Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) spokesperson welcomed the stance by the UNSG as voice of millions of Kashmiris awaiting the settlement of dispute. He said: "We welcome the statement of UN chief. He has talked in favour of a suppressed nation, which is appreciable." He further opined that that the Kashmiri leaders should be included in the negotiation process between Pakistan and India to settle the Kashmir problem.

Pro-India parties including National Conference, Congress, Peoples Democratic Party and Communist Party of India (Marxist) have also welcomed the statement of the UNSG. Chairman of United Jihad Council (JUC) Syed Salahuddin has said that peace and stability in South Asia hinges on a just and equitable settlement of the Kashmir dispute. "The UN Secretary General's statement on the issue of Kashmir is quite optimistic, however, there is dire need that the world body should take practical measures to settle this long-pending issue in accordance with the aspirations of Kashmiris," he said. He further added that Kashmiris had offered huge sacrifices for settlement of Kashmir peacefully in line with the UN resolutions but India's traditional intransigence and obduracy remained the main hurdle in the implementation of the relevant UN resolutions.

Dr Ghulam Nabi Fai has also welcomed the statement: "We deeply appreciate the statement of the Secretary General that the 'will' of the people there must be respected while finding any solution." He further said, "The people of Kashmir are, therefore profoundly grateful to the Secretary General for

upholding the position of principle which the United Nations has sustained throughout the existence of the contentious issue relating to the status of Kashmir.” In a statement released last week by Kashmiri-American Council, Dr Fai said, “Secretary General was also right by saying that he was pleased with the continued efforts to improve the relations between India and Pakistan. This has a broader significance for the region and for global peace. While supporting the Indo-Pakistan dialogue process, Fai said the urgent goal of resolving the Kashmir dispute couldn’t be left to the two governments. “It requires the engagement of a multilateral effort on the initiative of the United Nations,” he added.

Dr Fai has also suggested that to avert drift and deterioration in the present situation, it was necessary to induct a suitable presence of P-5 in the area of conflict. A person of high international standing, like Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, needs to be appointed as the representative of either the P-5 or the Security Council or the Secretary General of the UN. “For associating the people of Kashmir in a credible peace process, it will be imperative to secure their representation on a principled basis by election in Kashmir under the control and supervision of the United Nations. This would enable all the different ethnic communities and zones in Kashmir to elect representatives who in turn would appoint a team or teams with the mandate to negotiate a settlement with both India and Pakistan,” Dr Fai further added.

This is a stark reality that left to them, Pakistan and India will not be able to settle the issue which attracts a huge political baggage in the domestic politics of both the countries. Hence, it would be in the fitness of the things that the UN plays an effective role by appointing a Secretary General’s representative to take up the task in line with the UN resolutions. Starting point could be urging India to withdraw the draconian Armed Forces Special Powers Act and other draconian laws that give Indian security forces sweeping powers to stampede human rights in Kashmir. A number of Human Rights’ organizations have pointed this out on countless occasions. Secretary General’s remarks have indeed rekindled a hope in millions of Kashmiri hearts; we hope that the good offices of the UNSG would carry forth the process.

—The writer is Consultant Policy and Strategic Response, IPRI Islamabad. He is a former assistant chief of air staff of Pakistan Air Force.

America in the Asian Century

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Misc Subjs

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Dominique Moisi

NEW YORK - At "ground zero" in lower Manhattan, two empty spaces will be filled by water cascades, memorializing in a serene and respectful way the victims of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Next to them, a powerful tower, designed by the architect Daniel Libeskind and nearly completed, rises vigorously into the sky, a symbol of the triumph of life over the forces of death. One word comes to mind to characterize the impression made by this place, the site of an unprecedented crime: resilience.

In a building that houses what will one day be a memorial museum, one can buy a DVD entitled "9/12: From Chaos to Community." Ground Zero is the architectural and human proof that, despite America's current economic woes, it would be premature, if not dangerous, to write the country off as a declining power. America has the moral and intellectual resources that it needs in order to rebound.

But what is necessary is not sufficient. In order to reinvent itself, if not to manage its relative international decline, America must proceed toward a rebalancing of its domestic and international priorities. In the immediate aftermath of World War I, a triumphant America withdrew from global responsibility, with tragic consequences for the balance of power in a Europe that was left to face its inner demons alone.

In the aftermath of World War II, by contrast, the US managed successfully to contain Soviet ambitions.

Today, unlike in 1945, Americans do not confront an imminent threat. Russia may speak loudly (using its permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council as a megaphone), but it is a greatly reduced rump of the Soviet Union. Likewise, while the nationalism of America's principal rival, China, has become more assertive lately, the communist regime's clear priority – indeed, the key to its stability – is domestic economic growth.

Indeed, the only obvious danger that the US faces stems from weapons of mass destruction, which could proliferate or be used by terrorist groups. But confronting this threat does not require a massive military budget or huge deployments of US troops all over the world. America has a much-needed opportunity to refocus on itself – to recover its inner strength without withdrawing from the world. As Richard Haass, the president of the Council on Foreign Relations, puts it, America must enter a period of “restoration” of its fundamentals.

American foreign policy starts at home, and that means reining in budget deficits over the long term, reviving economic growth and job creation in the short term, and addressing the country's deteriorating infrastructure. Indeed, America's “aged modernity” has become a drag on its competitiveness, as well as an insult to its international image and a risk to the safety of its citizens.

Moreover, imperial fatigue has set in. Recent US history has been characterized by cycles of enthusiasm about foreign engagement. In the mid-1970's, following the war in Vietnam, America, guided by President Jimmy Carter's moralizing impulse, opted for “regionalization” of its engagements. But, given that the Soviet threat still existed, this effort came too early (and probably was carried out in the wrong manner).

Today, by contrast, the starting point for a reassessment of American priorities is more economic than ethical. But the reasoning is the same, for it is based on the conviction that more America in the world today implies less costly and confused interventionism tomorrow. That means that US foreign policy itself – defined in recent years by too much attention to the Middle East, and too little to Asia – must embrace a shift in priorities.

Of course, in the midst of today's ongoing Arab revolutions, America cannot simply ignore the Middle East. Nor must the US give up hope on the Israel-Palestine front, or on its efforts to contain Iran's nuclear ambitions. But it is in Asia that history is unfolding – and where the US must define its long-term global strategy.

Must the US, as Henry Kissinger suggests in his latest book *On China*, consider the prospect of a “Pacific Community” that, unlike the Cold War-era Atlantic Community, is not based on common culture and values in the face of a direct threat, but on common interests in an “age of rebalancing of world order”?

America's resilience may contrast with Europe's multiple weaknesses. But resilience will not be enough. The US must get back into shape to face tomorrow's challenges, and that means restoring economic growth, reducing deficits, and improving infrastructure. Paradoxically, only a more confident America can accept a reduced global status, because reconciling oneself to change is always easier once one has taken the steps needed to adjust to it.

Dysfunctional disarmament

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Ban Ki-moon

As the United Nations Conference on Disarmament begins a seven-week session in Geneva, its future is on the line. Whereas countries and civil-society initiatives are on the move, the Conference has stagnated. Its credibility – indeed, its very legitimacy – is at risk. The “CD,” as it is informally known, has long served as the world’s only multilateral forum for negotiating disarmament. Its many impressive accomplishments include the Biological and Chemical Weapons Conventions, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. Much of this progress was achieved during the Cold War, proving that it is possible to create global legal norms even in times of deep political division. Yet today, all is not well at the CD. It operates under a consensus rule, and its member states have different priorities. Some want negotiations on nuclear disarmament; others want to ban the production of fissile material for weapon purposes; and still others insist that such a treaty should also cover existing stocks. Some want a treaty on security guarantees for non-nuclear-weapon states to assure them against the threat or use of

nuclear weapons; others want a treaty to prevent an arms race in outer space. But, instead of compromise and the give-and-take of good-faith discussions, there has been paralysis. There was a brief glimmer of hope in 2009, when the sense of paralysis led the Conference to consensus on a programme of work. Unfortunately, that agenda was never implemented. As a result, the CD has failed to make any substantive progress for 15 years. We simply must not let one lost decade turn into a second. The CD's future is in the hands of its member states. But the disarmament and non-proliferation agenda is too important to let the CD lapse into irrelevancy as states consider other negotiating arenas. Last September, I convened a high-level meeting at the UN to consider ways to revitalise the CD's work and to advance multilateral disarmament negotiations. The participants – who included dozens of foreign ministers – were unanimous in stressing that membership of the CD is a privilege. So is the consensus rule. Just one or two countries should not be able to block the organisation's work indefinitely. The message was clear: no more business as usual. The CD's member states must recognise that the Conference's future is at a critical juncture. Continued stalemate increases the risk that some like-minded countries might take up the matter elsewhere. After all, the deadlock has ominous implications for international security; the longer it persists, the graver the nuclear threat – from existing arsenals, from the proliferation of such weapons, and from their possible acquisition by terrorists. I have urged the CD to adopt an agenda based either on the consensus that was forged in 2009, or on an alternative arrangement. Upon my request, the UN's entire membership will take up the matter in a first-of-its-kind General Assembly meeting this July. That schedule makes the CD's current session crucial to its future. Reaffirming the CD's agenda offers the prospect of renewed negotiations on disarmament issues. Prior agreement on the scope or outcome should not be a precondition for talks – or an excuse to avoid them – but rather a subject of the negotiations themselves. The current stalemate is all the more troubling in view of recent momentum on other disarmament tracks, including last year's successful NPT Review Conference and heightened attention to nuclear security. With the world focused so intently on advancing disarmament goals, the CD should seize the moment. Shakespeare once wrote that "there is a tide in the affairs of men." The tide of disarmament is rising, yet the CD is in danger of sinking. And it will sink unless it fulfills its responsibility to act. Ban Ki-moon is Secretary-General of the United Nations

Courtesy: Khaleej Times