

Response from Australian civil society groups, including the representatives of **Global Action to Prevent War**, to the March 2005 Report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, **'In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all'**

*Preamble*

We are grateful for the Secretary-General's invitation to respond to this significant Report and for his recognition that civil society at both national and international levels, 'plays an increasingly important role in world affairs.'

This Australian civil society response addresses three issues (1) Proposals for disarmament (2) Humanitarian intervention and peace keeping (3) Reform of the Security Council.

In selecting these issues we are identifying those sections of the Secretary-General's Report which correspond with the aims of the *Global Action to Prevent War (GAPW)* program: conflict prevention; disarmament; and the promotion of a culture of peace. Our selection of these issues in no way minimizes the significance of related Millennium goals: freedom from want, freedom from fear, freedom to live in dignity.

***(1) Proposals for disarmament***

At the heart of the comprehensive program of the Global Action to Prevent War (GAPW) is the belief that we already know how to stop killing. We believe that the end of war will remain an elusive dream until we have overcome what the World Council of Churches refers to as the 'the spirit and logic of violence'. We must challenge the assumptions which lead us to believe that violence and war are an inescapable part of life. It is these assumptions which have helped to entrench the industry of war within our social, political and economic systems. The legitimatisation of violence will continue as long as we behave as though we have no other choice. The construction of 'security' as that which can only be achieved by amassing weapons to deter potential invaders has served to bolster the logic and spirit of violence. Our response to issues of disarmament arises, therefore, from our deep conviction that until we have achieved the complete disarmament of all nuclear weapons we will never overcome violence and achieve the genuine security that comes from peace with justice.

*(a) Re-defining global 'security'*

Disarmament is not simply a matter of technicalities. It has to be informed by enthusiasm for the philosophy, language and practice of non-violence. Global 'security' will be achieved through social policy and other forms of non-violence not from the possession of arms. GAPW proposes three main strands of activity: a comprehensive program of global conflict prevention which includes systematic build-up of the conflict reduction capabilities of multilateral organisations; a phased program to implement global disarmament; and an insistence that global security is defined in terms that reflect the health and well-being of human society and its environment, not in terms of armed defence capabilities of individual states.

We concur with the Secretary-General's support of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and his acknowledgement that 'we should welcome recent efforts to supplement it' (p.28, para.100). In particular, the Secretary-General's appeal to nuclear-

weapons states to own their ‘unique responsibility ...to further reductions in their arsenals of non-strategic nuclear weapons and [to pursue] arms control agreements that entail not just disarmament but irreversibility’ (p.28, para 98).

*(b) A disarming dialogue*

Regular dialogue with civil society groups committed to non-violence must not be confined to the occasion of significant conferences. The contribution of civil society groups concerned with global disarmament and the prevention of war can be harnessed as a powerful voice on the promotion of global ‘security’ issues. Constant dialogue with civil society groups such as the GAPW produces a literacy about global disarmament and insight into ordinary citizens’ opposition to militarism and their aspirations for peace. To this end, we support the recommendation that the ‘General Assembly... establish mechanisms enabling it to engage fully and systematically with civil society’ (p. 41, para 162). For example, GAPW proposes that ‘all UN member governments commit themselves not to increase the overall size of their armed forces, military budgets, or arms holdings’ (GAPW 2003:9) within a specified period. However, our commitment and the vision of GAPW is for complete global disarmament, for a world without war. In working towards this vision, the GAPW implementation program reflects many of the issues and ideas conveyed by the Secretary-General in ‘Section D -- Reducing the risk and prevalence of war’ ( pp.29-33).

***(2) Humanitarian intervention and peace keeping***

On this issue we advocate the creation of a permanent United Nations Emergency Peace Service (UNEPS) (see Johansen 2005). Following our description of the essential characteristics of the proposed UNEPS, we identify those comments in the Secretary-General’s Report which imply support for a permanent peace keeping service. We want to make that support explicit.

*(a) A service not a force*

This is a proposal for a service, not for a force or for an army. It would be permanent, would operate under international law and would function within a unified command and authority. It would number between ten and fifteen thousand carefully selected volunteers who would represent a religious, gender and cultural balance. They would be professionally trained in areas of conflict resolution, humanitarian and medical aid, policing, international human rights law and the laws of war. It would cost two billion US dollars to establish and approximately \$900 million annually to sustain. The GAPW paper on UNEPS quotes the conclusions of the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict that the international community ‘spent approximately \$200 billion on conflict management in seven major interventions in the 1990’s’ whereas the existence of a service akin to UNEPS could have saved \$130 billion of this amount (Johansen 2005 pp. 14-15).

*(b) The decision to deploy*

A key feature of the feasibility of this proposal depends on the answer to the question ‘who would make the decision to deploy this service?’ In the GAPW deliberations, a major concern was the need to avoid delay so that lives could be saved and deadly conflict prevented. The need to respond humanely and with speed suggests that the service could be

deployed at the discretion of the Secretary General. Nevertheless we are also aware of a need to operate with the authority of the Security Council and the General Assembly. In these circumstances we recommend that intervention by this peace service could be authorized by the Secretary General if conditions previously specified by the Security Council have been met. The service could be used not only to resolve conflicts before fatalities occur but also to prevent wars and respond to humanitarian crises caused by natural disasters.

*(c) The context of our response*

We are influenced by the reminder of a Nigerian colleague that the most barbaric wars are not national or international but local conflicts which would almost certainly make the living envious of the dead. We are motivated by the promise 'never again' made by those who have witnessed genocide. Yet the GAPW report reminds us that mass murder has happened again and again. The ongoing genocide in Darfur underlines the need for a conflict prevention service whose deployment would be rapid and effective. The GAPW Report stresses that 'the conscience of every human being should be shocked and aroused by the international community's inability to quell atrocities in Darfur ten years after the lessons 'learned' in Rwanda.'

We also make this response out of a deep commitment to the philosophy, language and practice of non violence. Yet we are writing in a mood of dismay because the significance of the United Nations is being eroded by the cynicism of governments, as when the United States nominates as its prospective ambassador to the UN a man who has been disdainful of the role of that international body. Such cynicism is compounded when an acknowledged human rights abuser such as Zimbabwe is easily readmitted to membership of the Human Rights Commission.

*(d) Implications of the Secretary-General's Report*

The Secretary-General's Report is peppered with observations which imply support for the idea of a conflict prevention, peace building service. Support for multi-lateralism a binding theme of that Report . UNEPS would be multi lateral. In an observation about developing countries' reluctance to commit troops to peace keeping operations, the Secretary-General seeks (p. 31. para 112) 'an interlocking system of peace keeping capacities...' On peace building he observes that roughly half of the countries which emerge from war lapse back into violence within five years. He concludes that 'no part of the UN system effectively addresses the challenge of helping countries with the transition from war to lasting peace.' (p. 31. para 114).

The Secretary-General's Report makes various observations about the obstacles to implementing previous recommendations about humanitarian intervention. He says that we must move from an era of legislation to an era of implementation (p.35 para 132) and he notes the emerging norm of a collective responsibility to protect, as compared to a right to intervene. Yet the age old claims about a sovereign state's rights continue to hinder the implementation of this responsibility to protect : 'no legal principle- not even sovereignty – should ever be allowed to shield genocide, crimes against humanity and mass human suffering.' (p. 34 para 129) . In a previous paper Kofi Annan (1999) said that 'the United Nations Charter protects the sovereignty of peoples and was never meant as a licence for

governments to trample on human rights and human dignity. Sovereignty implies responsibility not just power.'

Although we should guard against claiming too much for the influence of an immediately available but fledgling Peace Service, we believe that the proposal for a permanent UNEPS addresses the Secretary-General's request for better ways to implement all the previous but hitherto ineffective proposals for humanitarian intervention.

### ***(3) Reform of the Security Council***

We welcome recommendations to the General Assembly to review the membership of the Security Council. We note, however, that the declared nuclear states also hold permanent seats on the Security Council and have the power of veto.

Neither Models A or B (p. 43 Box 5), which have been put forward as options for reform, address the issue of the nuclear weapons states and their continuing to possess the power of veto. So long as the declared nuclear weapon states are the only member states with both veto power and permanent seat status, any models to lessen the influence of this nuclear weapon power stronghold will fail, i.e. the existing five member states can continue to veto any recommendation that is not in their political interest. To ensure that the remaining 184 states do feel that the United Nations is pushing for broad representation of the international community, principles of fairer representation coupled to shared responsibility for using veto power must be introduced. In this respect, Model A has merit. First, increasing representation to include six new permanent seats and three new non-permanent seats is important. Second, the idea that veto power be held by five states continues to be feasible but the power should not be permanent and would not be held always by the same states. In future, the possession of veto power would be shared by the eleven new permanent members and on a two year rotating basis.

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### **References**

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