



  
Dag Hammarskjöld  
Foundation

# The Art of Leadership in the United Nations

Painting perspectives, staying  
true to principles

2022





# Carbon neutral

Print product

ClimatePartner.com/14796-2209-1002

## Publication Reference

Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, The Art of Leadership in the United Nations: Painting perspectives, staying true to principles, (Uppsala: Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 2022).

## Contributors

Chris Agoha, Tina C. Ambos, Helmut Buss, Maritza Chan, Christopher C. Coleman, Radhika Coomaraswamy, Hannah Davies, Adama Dieng, Ahunna Eziakonwa, Aida Ghazaryan, Kate Gilmore, Lynn Hastings, John Hendra, Marc Jacquand, Henriette Keijzers, Toily Kurbanov, Caroline Lambert, Alexandre Marc, Izumi Nakamitsu, Susan Ngongi Namondo, Victor Ochen, Ozonnia Ojielo, Yesim Oruc, Ulrika Richardson, Joel Rosenthal, Shadi Roushahbaz, Shombi Sharp, Katherine Tatarinov, Veronika Tywuschik-Sohlström, Daniela Zelaya Raudales.

*The views and opinions expressed in these contributions are the author's personal reflections and do not necessarily represent the United Nations nor the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation's view.*

Producing a report takes a village. Thanks to all Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation and UNHCR colleagues for their support and contributions: Moh'd Al-Taher, Hamzeh Almomani, Francesco Bert, Sigrid Gruener, Henrik Hammargren, Per Knutsson, Johanna Mårtendal, Haddy Sarr, Kate Sullivan and Nida Yassin.

## Production Lead

Veronika Tywuschik-Sohlström

## Editors

Marc Jacquand

Veronika Tywuschik-Sohlström

## Text Editors

Simone Hagfeldt

Annika Östman

## Graphic Designers

María Langa

Pär Jansson (graphs)

## Cover Art

'Dag Hammarskjöld' by Iyad Sabbag

## Printer

X-O GrafTryckeri AB

Uppsala, Sweden

June 2022

## ISBN

978-91-987398-1-7



# The Art of Leadership in the United Nations

Painting perspectives, staying true to principles



# Acknowledgements

■ This second edition of the Art of UN Leadership is the result of informal and formal dialogues with former and present UN and non-UN staff members.

We are grateful to the reflection group, specifically created for this publication and their support, guidance as well as collective and individual inputs on the framing of this year's report. Specifically: Naoual Driouich, John Hendra, Ben Majekodunmi, Claire Messina, Fatoumata Ndiaye, Ruth Blackshaw and Kanni Wignaraja.

This publication was made possible with the support and commitment from our guest authors: Chris Agoha, Tina C. Ambos, Helmut Buss, Maritza Chan, Christopher C. Coleman, Radhika Coomaraswamy, Hannah Davies, Adama Dieng, Ahunna Eziakonwa, Aida Ghazaryan, Kate Gilmore, Lynn Hastings, John Hendra, Marc Jacquand, Henriette Keijzers, Toily Kurbanov, Caroline Lambert, Alexandre Marc, Izumi Nakamitsu, Victor Ochen, Joel Rosenthal, Shadi Roushahbaz, Katherine Tatarinov, Veronika Tywuschik-Sohlström, and Daniela Zelaya Raudales.

Resident Coordinators Susan Ngongi Namondo (Uganda), Ozonnia Ojielo (Kyrgyzstan), Yesim, Oruc (Guyana), Ulrika Richardson (Kosovo) and Shombi Sharp (India) we are thankful for your cooperation with the dialogue

on leadership, which shaped one of the contributions in Chapter Four.

A special thanks goes to the Chief Executives Board (CEB) colleagues in Geneva for their continued support to provide and create data sets on specific categories for our analysis on data and leadership in Chapter Five. Their engaging dialogues on how data can be improved and strengthened were imperative to the contribution's outcome.

The report would not be the same without connecting Dag Hammarskjöld and art. As Barbara Hepworth put it, 'Dag Hammarskjöld had a pure and exact perception of aesthetic principles, as exact as it was over ethical and moral principles. I believe they were, to him, one and the same thing. Literature, music, the visual arts, and nature were both his recreation and an important and sustaining part of his routine.'

The 2020 edition featured art from Dag Hammarskjöld's own collection. For this publication the art was sourced from the UNHCR refugee community in Jordan. We thank UNHCR Jordan for their cooperation and partnership and all the artists for their trust. If you would like to know more about the art and the artists and support their livelihoods, please view the last few pages. ■





'Dag Hammarskjöld had a pure and exact perception of aesthetic principles, as exact as it was over ethical and moral principles. I believe they were, to him, one and the same thing. Literature, music, the visual arts, and nature were both his recreation and an important and sustaining part of his routine'.

-Barbara Hepworth



*This 21-foot-high abstract sculpture was unveiled outside the United Nations Headquarters in New York in 1964. It is entitled 'Single Form' and was executed by Barbara Hepworth in memory of Dag Hammarskjöld. Credit: UN Photo/Yutaka Nagata.*



# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ..... 4  
Foreword..... 8  
Introduction ..... 11

**Chapter One**  
**The landscape: Sketching the UN’s relevance**

The United Nations: A distinct and exceptional purpose  
BY JOEL ROSENTHAL ..... 16

Eighty years of uninterrupted male leadership in the UN is intentional  
INTERVIEW WITH MARITZA CHAN ..... 19

Solving global problems in a multipolar world: Qualities of UN Leadership  
BY CHRISTOPHER C. COLEMAN ..... 24

Leadership behind the scenes  
INTERVIEW WITH IZUMI NAKAMITSU ..... 29

UN leadership in a multilateral system in crisis  
BY ALEXANDRE MARC..... 34

**Chapter Two**  
**The portrait: Drawing out principled leadership traits**

How dare you?  
BY KATE GILMORE ..... 42

Youth leadership in action  
BY VICTOR OCHEN ..... 52

Ethical leadership: the power of principles, purpose, values and the human touch  
BY HELMUT BUSS ..... 57

Integrity and ethical leadership: Enhancing the UN’s role in the world  
BY ADAMA DIENG ..... 63

**Chapter Three**  
**The vanguard: Breaking the traditional leadership mould**

Three questions about UN leaders of the 21st century  
BY TOILY KURBANOV ..... 70

From youth inclusion to intergenerational feminist leadership  
BY SHADI ROUHASHAHBAZ ..... 74

Feminist leadership for transformative social justice  
BY DANIELA ZELAYA RAUDALES AND CAROLINE LAMBERT ..... 81

A world in dire need of intergenerational leadership  
INTERVIEW WITH AHUNNA EZIAKONWA ..... 86



## Chapter Four

### The still life: Depicting the reality on the ground

Resident Coordinator leadership: Magicians without a magic wand? BY DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD FOUNDATION .....	94
Finding the balance between engagement and accountability BY RADHIKA COOMARASWAMY .....	99
How can leadership by UN Resident Coordinators become truly transformative? BY JOHN HENDRA.....	104
Frankness and honesty: Essential traits of a UN Leader INTERVIEW WITH LYNN HASTINGS .....	110
Trajectory of United Nations leadership roles in the Liberia peace process BY CHRIS AGOHA .....	114

## Chapter Five

### The abstract: Rendering innovation and change

The innovation movement for UN Leaders: Connecting research and practice BY TINA C. AMBOS AND KATHERINE TATARINOV .....	120
Unloved and unappreciated: The General Assembly Budget Committees and UN leadership BY HANNAH DAVIES.....	126
Leadership from where you sit: Behavioural challenge BY AIDA GHAZARYAN .....	131
United Nations 2.0: Can the current leadership deliver the workforce it requires? BY VERONIKA TYWUSCHIK-SOHLSTRÖM, MARC JACQUAND, HENRIETTE KEIJZERS .....	137
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	155
<b>Featured Art</b> .....	157
<b>Acronym List</b> .....	167



# Foreword

■ Leadership is as easy to call for as it is difficult to define, teach and practice. In our first edition of this UN leadership publication series, we recognised the need for effective, inclusive, and principled multilateral leadership. We framed leadership in the United Nations as an art and provided a gallery of leadership stories to illustrate and inspire dialogue. In this second edition we continue this approach, taking on new perspectives, and with a focus on nuances we expand and go deeper.

Critical reflection, dialogue and accountability on various aspects of leadership are essential for all organisations to uphold standards, mitigate risks and stimulate progress. In the UN system, the discourse on leadership remains fragmented and would benefit from sharing positive examples and inviting critical reflection. Leadership success or failure can also be further understood through an analysis of the data.

This second edition of *The Art of Leadership in the United Nations* brings together a unique group of leaders, illuminating their vision of UN leadership for us. They write about the topic from their lived experiences, observations, and research within and outside the UN system. They dare to open up, sharing opinions and examples of what works and what needs improvement. Some of their core messages contest the status-quo and call for new means to tackle issues such as the protection of whistle-blowers, the distribution of financial resources and the complexity in the leadership transformation that is being sought across the UN system.

Leadership is indeed expected in and demanded of the UN. Given the dramatic changes over the past two years this is as acute as ever. Advancement of climate change, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the increase in armed conflict place further and extreme demands on leadership in the entire multilateral system.



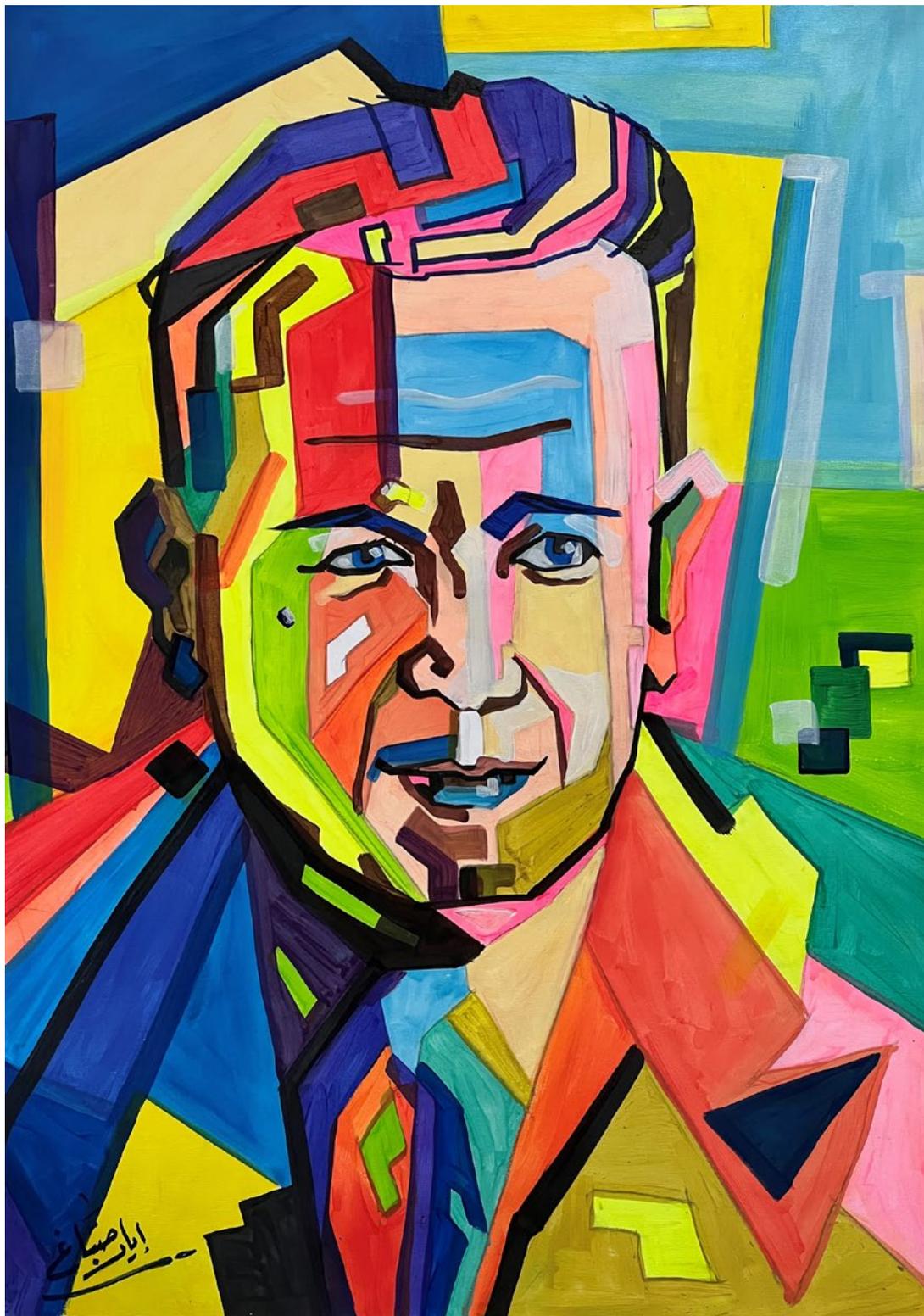
At the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation we aim to advance dialogue and policy for sustainable development and peace, grounded in and building on Dag Hammarskjöld's legacy. His dedication to strengthening and defending the independence and integrity of the international civil service is a central element of that legacy. It has provided inspiration and guidance to countless leaders over the decades since his untimely and tragic death 61 years ago. With this report, our ambition is to support UN staff and Member State representatives' efforts to strengthen the International Civil Service. We also hope that it can encourage continued implementation of the UN leadership framework, reinforcing systematic attention to and internalisation of leadership across the organisation at all levels. Our optimism is that this second edition will continue to inspire and inform staff of the UN, Member States' interaction with the UN and serve to inform a broader public.

We would like to sincerely thank all the authors for their valuable contributions. Without brave and bold testimonies that reflect critical inquiry we will neither know about the leadership exercised in the UN, nor learn from it. While it is relevant to note that these texts were written before the war in Ukraine, the issues they speak to are just as, if not more pertinent now than they were before. In this current global context, principled leadership from the multilateral system is crucial, and the Foundation is committed to facilitating critical thinking, learning and exploration of innovative new practices in this field.

In the absence of clear and principled leadership multilateral efforts risk being undone, and in the process hard-won development and peacebuilding efforts will be lost. One of the most important perspectives added in this edition is the one on inter-generational leadership. We must all ask ourselves who will be leading tomorrow and ensure constructive and inclusive engagement that reflects responses to that question.

Henrik Hammargren  
Executive Director





Iyad Sabbag  
*Dag Hammarskjöld*  
Zataari Camp



# Introduction

■ The second edition of the ‘Art of Leadership’ renews the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation’s effort to bring together diverse perspectives on United Nations leadership today. Released only two years after our first publication on the topic, it has been put together under a radically altered context, shaped by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the accelerating threats of climate change and by new armed conflicts.

Together, these developments cast an even more acute light on the need for leadership in the multilateral system and particularly in the UN. They vindicate our continued framing of UN leadership as an art, rather than an exact science, at a time when the practice of principled leadership seems so difficult, even occasionally appearing to be somewhat of a rare artform indeed.

They also explain the subtitle ‘painting perspectives, staying true to principles’. It captures both the need for diverse views and approaches, including from those who may underestimate or doubt UN leadership realities, while recognising that what unites and makes UN leadership unique is the principles offered by the UN Charter.

The issue of relevance constitutes the main thread of this second edition. Regardless of the specific angle or the theme for which we imagined each piece, the overriding concern shared with the contributors, when

we first engaged with them, was the connection between principled, ethical, and lived UN leadership and the ultimate pertinence of the organisation.

The choice of chapters was therefore first and foremost influenced by the global context. But it was also shaped by recent internal developments within the UN, including a number of collective and individual initiatives that belie the notion that the UN is unaware of the need to persevere in its efforts to strengthen its leadership capacities. And it was also informed by feedback received on the first publication, with several voices asking for further examination of specific themes, such as accountability and feminist leadership, as well as expectations on UN leadership at the country level.

## A reader’s guide

To this end, the report begins with a section on ‘The **landscape**: Sketching the UN’s relevance’, where contributions from within and beyond the UN paint the big, and ominous, stage on which UN leadership must be thought about and practiced. Against this backdrop, the authors share their perspectives on why UN leadership must matter, and speak to the dangers of receding, diminished leadership, not just for the Organisation’s relevance, but for our collective ability to navigate these perils.



In ‘The **portrait**: Drawing out principled leadership traits’, contributions turn inward, towards the leader as a person, casting an eye on the behaviours and personal features of principled leadership. This examination brings the concept of UN leadership back to its core, ethical dimensions, far from its bureaucratic provisions, thereby extending the responsibilities and possibilities of leadership beyond grade and function, and across generations.

Speaking of possibilities, in a subsequent chapter entitled ‘The **vanguard**: Breaking the traditional leadership mould’, the contributors apply a more forward-looking lens to the nature of leadership and more modern ways to practice it. The concept of feminist leadership is revisited and further unpacked, notably in light of experiences during the pandemic. Other contributors focus their examination on how the UN can better utilize the leadership potential of youth and how inter-generational leadership can rejuvenate the UN and help reconnect it to realities beyond the organisation.

From the desired to the lived experience, the chapter on ‘The **still life**: Depicting the reality on the ground’ includes dispatches from the country level, where what should be done meets the reality of daily pressures, disincentives and centrifugal forces. Where one would expect despair, these contributions speak instead, and at times in a disarmingly simple fashion, to the very powerful ways in which UN individuals, and senior officials in particular, navigate these obstacles.

A similar interest in exploring new ways to practice, recognise and assess leadership guides the contributions under ‘The **abstract**: Rendering innovation and change’. The role of research, innovation labs, behavioural insights and even the arcane world of the Fifth Committee are discussed in their relation to what UN leadership is, should be, or is expected to be from its members. The chapter concludes with the Foundation’s second foray into the world of data, to examine the leadership stories that emerge from closer scrutiny of various data points.

## **Continuity and evolution**

This publication replicates several features from the first one. In particular, it maintains an effort to convene a diversity of voices, notably by having UN contributors with very different exposures to the organisations, some

offering the wisdom of a few decades spent within, and others providing the fresh perspective from a more recent entry.

As was the case last time, the publication does not seek to personalise insights, sentiments, and suggestions towards any specific individuals. Nor should it be misconstrued as an evaluation of individual leadership performance. The intent is to provoke and challenge but not to name and shame.

This edition also renews the effort to look at certain data points to uncover certain realities, related leadership dimensions and to examine to what extent claims and declarations of intent have actually been translated into lived practices. Finally, as with the first publication, the Foundation does not offer, impose, or apply one uniform definition of leadership – what true, ethical, and effective leadership is remains in the eye of the beholder/contributor, who all share the same goal of enabling reflection and inspiration.

## *Differences*

These elements of continuity are combined with a few differences. In particular, the publication has a stronger focus on norm-based leadership and the lived experience of these core leadership principles, with clearer links to practical implications in relation, for example, to UN reform or country level responses.

In addition, the diversity within the UN that we tried to replicate is this time complemented by a broader set of perspectives from beyond the UN, with insights offered from a range of academic and civil society contributors. By charting new ways to think about leadership, their participation has enriched the tenor and the flavour of the entire publication.

Finally, on a more prosaic note, and for ease of reading, the publication features a greater mix of formats, ranging from individual contributions and short interviews to joint dialogues and comparative pieces. We hope this type of diversity will also appeal to a wider audience.

## **The Art within**

Before the reader embarks on this exploration, the Foundation would like to give recognition and thanks



to the artists who each agreed to pair their art with a selected written contribution. These artists all reside in refugee camps in Jordan. The intent behind linking each contribution with a distinct artwork was not just to emphasise the aesthetic, creative dimensions of UN leadership, or to stress the difficulty, and danger, that lies in restricting UN leadership to bureaucratic checklists or frameworks. It was also designed to connect people, writers, and painters, across places and perspectives.

Additionally, it is meant to connect this work with the spirit of the Dag Hammarskjöld himself. In 1954 the second Secretary-General of the United Nations was invited to speak at the 25th anniversary of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In his short speech, Hammarskjöld ventured to draw a parallel between modern art and modern politics, thus underlining that his perspective on art was not confined to a 'private interest'. *Hammarskjöld said: 'In modern international politics – aiming toward that world of order which now more than ever seems to be the only alternative to disruption and disaster – we have to approach our task in the spirit which animates the modern artist'.*

For these connections, we sincerely thank Dominik Bartsch and his team at UNHCR Jordan, who facilitated the outreach to the artists, and enabled this collaboration to come to fruition. By giving the publication added colour and depth, these paintings invite the reader to think of UN leadership in new ways. ■

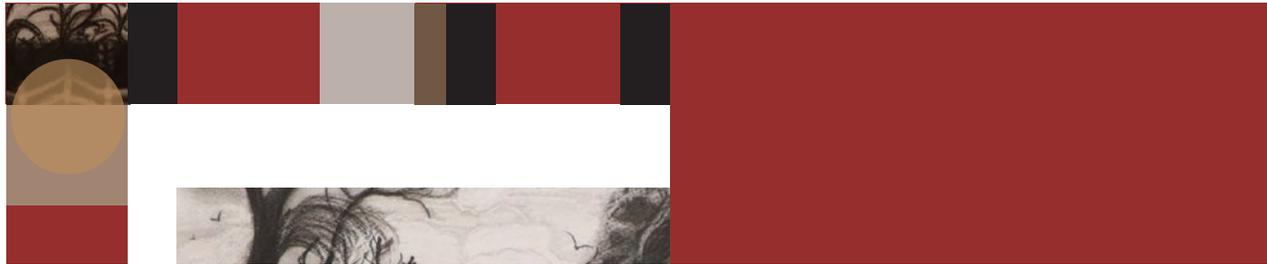




Majd Al-Hariri  
*Landscape*  
Zataari Camp

# Chapter One

## The landscape: Sketching the UN's relevance



The United Nations: A distinct and exceptional purpose  
BY JOEL ROSENTHAL ..... 16

Eighty years of uninterrupted male leadership in the UN is intentional  
INTERVIEW WITH MARITZA CHAN ..... 19

Solving global problems in a multipolar world: Qualities of UN Leadership  
BY CHRISTOPHER C. COLEMAN ..... 24

Leadership behind the scenes  
INTERVIEW WITH IZUMI NAKAMITSU ..... 29

UN leadership in a multilateral system in crisis  
BY ALEXANDRE MARC ..... 34



# The United Nations: A distinct and exceptional purpose

BY JOEL ROSENTHAL



Bara'a Al-Hamoud  
*Loss and Longing*  
Zataari Camp



**Joel H. Rosenthal** is president of Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs. A non-profit leader, teacher and scholar who works to empower ethical action in the context of U.S. foreign policy, war and peace issues, human rights and pluralism.

■ The story of world politics in the early 2020s can be told in one word: fragmentation.

Just as humanity is becoming more connected, political forces are driving us apart. Whether the issue is climate change, pandemics, refugees, or the vast new powers of digital technology, the need for global cooperation grows, only to be answered by fracturing politics.

The United Nations stands as the preeminent symbol and hope for the universal aspirations of human society. Built on the ashes of failure, the UN is a political answer to the moral imperatives of avoiding war, affirming human rights, and promoting social progress. It tells us that the UN founders were realists. The catastrophe of world war, the Holocaust, and the atomic bomb required a bold response. A new structure was needed, and the United Nations would become the mechanism to avoid another cycle of economic depression and global-scale conflict.

Simultaneously we can see the founders were also idealists. In addition to politics, they wanted the UN to embody the moral, ethical, and spiritual dimension in the quest for peace and human dignity. It is no coincidence that after the initial founding moment, deliberate action created a myriad of signature moments. Adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, followed by the establishment of numerous humanitarian, social, and cultural agencies dedicated to health, education, and human development shows significant commitment to these ideals.

The founders have now passed from the scene. As their experience fades into the background, so too perhaps, does the clarity and urgency of their purpose.

### **Making its case anew**

Given the passage of time and an understandable undercurrent of scepticism, the United Nations needs to make its case anew. In doing so, it should emphasize rather than retreat from the moral dimension of its case.

The moral compass of those born in the late 20th and early 21st century is not informed by the catastrophes and legacies of World War II. It is rather oriented by serial failures such as the global war on terror, wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the financial crisis of 2008, worsening climate change impacts, numerous refugee crises, a loss of faith in democracy and a rising tide of autocracy around the world.

By moral, I do not mean that the UN can or should claim a superior set of values or a sacred mission. In this case, I take moral to mean that the institution is uniquely positioned to express universal human needs and common human interests.

Encoded in the DNA of the UN is a distinct and exceptional purpose - to create a world body 'to harmonize the actions of nations' in pursuit of peace and mutual respect. In principle, this mission gives the UN moral standing unlike any other international political organisation.

The moral dimension of the UN mission has been recognised from time to time even if it has been questioned in moments of political disagreement, ineffectiveness, and bureaucratic scandal. Pope Paul VI gave expression to the idea of universality in his address to the General Assembly in 1965: 'It is enough to recall that the blood of millions, countless unheard-of sufferings, useless massacres, and frightening ruins have sanctioned the agreement that unites you with an oath that ought to change the future history of the world: never again war, never again war!'

In the Pope's words, 'the agreement that unites you' is based on the recognition of our common human experience. While this high-minded speech might be deemed irrelevant in light of the UN's actual performance, even the most hardened sceptic understands the power of moral conscience. Stalin famously dismissed such thinking with his remark, 'How many divisions has the Pope?' And yet, world history proves that moral voices do matter, especially in response to the crimes and cruelties of ruthless actors.



**Necessity will breed invention as it did in the founding days of the UN more than 70 years ago. Now more than ever, our common future depends on our common humanity. Now more than ever, leadership must embrace this message and rise to this challenge.**

### Universality alone is not enough

Universality cannot transcend politics, but it can inform it. The UN's ethos is based on the equal moral standing of every human being. Its constituency includes every person on the planet. Its goals are inclusive and ecumenical. In this sense, the UN is truly peerless.

What can the UN do with this unique position? This is where the hardest work begins. Assertion of universality alone is not enough. Any universal principle must be case specific. No organisation can express universality without running into inevitable trade-offs and compromises. Limitations always loom. Disappointments are inevitable.

This insight is one of the lasting legacies of one of the greatest UN leaders of all time, the 1950 Nobel Laureate Ralph Bunche. Described by his biographer Brian Urquhart as a practical optimist, Bunche was wary of platitudes and declarations of good intentions.

Urquhart concludes his biography of Bunche with a revealing quote about the limits of universal thinking for a practicing diplomat—specifically, questioning the utility of the idea of 'brotherhood.' Borne out of Bunche's frustrations with the unresolved issues of civil rights in the United States and race relations around the world, Bunche said:

'May I say a word or two against brotherhood? . . . We can save the world with a lot less . . . Brotherhood is a misused and misleading term. What we need in the world is not brotherhood but coexistence.

We need acceptance of the right of every person to his own dignity. We need mutual respect. Mankind will be much better off when there is less reliance on lip service to 'brotherhood' and 'brotherly love,' and much more practice of the sounder and more realistic principle of mutual respect governing the relations among all people.'<sup>1</sup>

### Bringing lofty visions down to earth

Bunche's sober message, delivered at the end of a life of so much accomplishment is a reminder that utopian visions can inspire. But these visions must be translated to life as it is lived, shaped by vast inequalities, duelling narratives, competing moral claims, and clashing egos. For all the grandeur of an idea such as 'brotherhood,' Bunche's life shows that ground-level virtues like persistence, humility, trial and error, and self-correction are the keys to human progress.

Following in the tradition of Bunche, the next generation of leaders will be called upon to bring lofty visions down to earth in specific and practical ways. New ideas will be needed, systems put in place and networks created. This will spur the emergence of novel models of leadership likely to be intergenerational and more inclusive. Necessity will breed invention as it did in the founding days of the UN more than 70 years ago. Now more than ever, our common future depends on our common humanity. Now more than ever, leadership must embrace this message and rise to this challenge. ■

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Brian Urquhart, *Ralph Bunche: An American Life*, (New York: W.W. Norton Co., 1993).



# Eighty years of uninterrupted male leadership in the UN is intentional

INTERVIEW WITH MARITZA CHAN



Mohammad Al-Ghazawi  
*Reaching Aspiration*  
Zataari Camp



**Ambassador Maritza Chan** is a Costa Rican career diplomat with more than two decades of professional experience. She has spent sixteen years representing Costa Rica in multilateral organisations, both in Washington D.C and New York. She is an expert in international peace and security matters, and a champion of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Ambassador Chan is a founding member of the Accountability, Coherence, and Transparency Group (ACT), the Group of Friends of Mediation, the Group of Friends of Human Security, and has in-depth knowledge of major political issues such as the revitalisation of the UN General Assembly, reform of the UN Security Council, the International Criminal Court, culture of peace, Our Common Agenda, and SDG16. Ambassador Chan has vast connections within international and regional organisations, as well as with civil society.

■ *Ambassador Chan, you are currently holding the position of a Deputy Permanent Representative for Costa Rica. What comes to mind when you think about leadership in the UN?*

The first thing that does come to my mind is that the size of your country does not matter. Rather, it is the power of your ideas, the strength of your principles, as guided by the United Nations Charter.

You see, I represent a very small country with less than 5 million citizens, but that doesn't impact our influence in the UN. Costa Rica might not be powerful in economic terms, and we might not have a large diplomatic corps, but even the smallest mission can lead if the message is clear.

I express my leadership through the power of words. Words to me have weight and are — in some ways I believe — my strength.

For me it is important that my message is inspiring, that it speaks truth to power, and at times, when necessary, that it unveils uncomfortable realities in a poetic, diplomatic and respectful way. I try to honour the responsibility that I've been given by using my platform to address unfulfilled promises or highlight important work that remains to be done. I try to do so in a way that magnifies the voice of my country and our shared goals and responsibilities across the multilateral sphere.

*Following up on what you just said about every country in the UN having a powerful voice, I wanted to touch upon something that is/was quite close to your heart: the revitalisation of the General Assembly. Part of the process was to advocate for the next Secretary-General*

*to be a woman. Why do you think this is important?*

Did you know, at the end of the current Secretary-General's term, men will have headed the UN for 80 uninterrupted years? We must send a strong signal to the international community that we believe in progress. We need to send a message of change that gender equality is here to stay. Women are as effective in leading as men. It's our turn now.

I was very lucky to be part of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency (or ACT) group which led the thematic sub-group on transparency when former Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon was finishing off his second term and a new selection process for a new Secretary-General was underway. Together with Estonia, we issued a non-paper for a more transparent, democratic and inclusive Secretary-General process with some clear recommendations to the Security Council on what that process should look like. We must start 'electing' the Secretary-General, not 'selecting' him — or her, for that matter.<sup>1</sup>

It was back in 2015, in a small conference room in the Croatian Mission, that we resolved to include a paragraph which would ask Member States to present women candidates for the Secretary-General selection process. But when we brought it to the negotiating table in 2021, it became a fight. For some the timing will never be right to see a woman as the face of this organisation. For some, it was not right then, and it will not be right in the future. Too destabilising, too contentious, too progressive — whatever have you. There will be always an excuse. The challenge begins with the Charter of the United Nations itself, which states that 'he' shall be the chief



**For some, the timing will never be right to see a woman as the face of this organisation. For some, it was not right then, and it will not be right in the future.**

administrative officer of the organisation. Regrettably, this masculine-gendered language is further compounded by Resolution 11 of 1946, which states that the Secretary-General must be a ‘man of high eminence’.<sup>11</sup> A man. Not a person. A man. Even in Costa Rica, our 200-year-old constitutional documents speak of ‘people’ and does not use such masculine-gendered language. It’s embedded in Costa Rica’s DNA to be inclusive and to provide leadership opportunities for all people. I think this tenet of inclusiveness gives me an advantage in the revitalisation process. During the 2021 negotiations on revitalisation, I spoke on behalf of Costa Rica, and that empowered me to lead by example.

I can’t stop thinking of the row of portraits of former Secretary-Generals in the General Assembly Hall. There are only men. What is the message that we are giving to our young girls and women in the world? They are being told they do not ‘have what it takes’ to be the world’s premier diplomat. We must move the needle. For me — without discrediting the legacy of these Secretary-Generals — that row of portraits represents all that we have accomplished as well as what we have yet to achieve. Eighty years of uninterrupted male leadership is not an accident or a coincidence; it is intentional. It is structural. Thus, our efforts to bring a woman to the helm of the United Nations must be intentional and structural, as well.

*So, why do you think it’s so difficult for some Member States to accept change, embrace it and support gender equality?*

We need a conceptual change in language. I remember during the negotiations when talking about women candidates, we were starting to add adjectives: she must be competent; she must be capable, speak several languages, she must be this and that. The bar for women, I believe, is always higher. It is not only higher for the Secretary-General position but higher for any woman representative at the UN. We must be technically and politically stronger. Infinitely capable. We cannot make mistakes.

Moreover, the language in peace and security is soaked with masculinity despite more women entering the peace and security sector. Even I get comments: ‘you are so passionate,’ or at times, ‘you are not ready’. But women are ready. We always have been.

So, in my point of view, there needs to be a cultural and intellectual shift. For example, per this year’s resolution (A/75/973), thanks to Costa Rica’s efforts, every single panel organised by the President of the General Assembly must ensure gender parity.<sup>13</sup> This is fantastic progress. But it took us 76 years to implement. So, whether or not we realise it, we still have a patriarchal system. Breaking those structures and reframing the discourse is not something that all delegations are doing because it’s a lot of intellectual work. It takes effort. And political will.

It’s important to flag that the Global South has been on the forefront of this change. For example, did you hear the Prime Minister of Barbados speaking at the 75th General Assembly? Now that’s a leader. That’s a voice. She’s fearless. She does not need a prepared statement. She is a woman of colour from a small island who holds the powerful accountable. Also, Namibia, for example, helped birth UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.<sup>14</sup> Namibia’s Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN at the time recalled the mood at the UN Security Council when the theme was introduced; it was apparently like a minute of silence, followed by a mix of laughter and plain astonishment accompanied by ridicule. Today the resolution belongs to all Member states. It places women at the heart of the consideration of the issue, not just as victims but as empowered agents of change forging their own destinies, and as brave contributors to peace and development in societies suffering from armed conflict or emerging from conflict.

However, challenges remain with women largely excluded from formal peace processes and negotiations and subsequently left behind without gendered considerations in peace agreements. To realise the transformative vision



**Why are we still fighting to include women and girls in resolutions? Why are we still pressuring for gender parity? Should this not be a given by now? And why are we being excluded from these conversations?**

set out in Resolution 1325 and espoused by women leaders and changemakers across the world today we must take up the mantle and support our feminist activists and movements. I thus welcome the last Report of the Secretary-General on Women, Peace and Security, which finally recognises, after 21 years, that there is a correlation between gender inequality, gender-based violence and excessive military spending.<sup>v</sup>

*Speaking from experience, do you think feminist leadership could be helpful in the field of disarmament?*

You have countries saying: ‘We have a feminist foreign policy’, but what does this exactly mean? How do you translate this into action? Do you have a feminist nuclear policy? Are you looking at small arms and light weapons through a gender lens?

During the seventh Biennial Meeting of States on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Costa Rica secured progressive language on the equal and effective participation of women and the nexus between small arms and gender equality efforts in the outcome document.<sup>vi</sup> If Costa Rica and the 63 supportive Member States would have not done so, the language on gender would have disappeared.

In the UN General Assembly First Committee, which deals with disarmament and international security matters, only one in five statements is delivered by a woman.<sup>vii</sup> In the recent High-Level Event on the Elimination of nuclear weapons, only one in six speakers was a woman. I had a nuclear feminist manifesto prepared. But I did not get to speak. There we’re simply leaving women out of the conversation. Making sure that women’s voices are heard must be intentional. You know, I thought that those issues have passed. We are still voting on issues that should already be part of our collective DNA. Why are we still fighting to include women and girls in resolutions? Why are we still pressuring for gender parity? Should this not be a given by now? And why are we being excluded from these conversations?

*The role of the UN as a multilateral leader is being constantly tested. How can Member States, like Costa Rica, strengthen UN leadership?*

Walking the talk. Leading. Showing coherence in our positions. Driving that intellectual shift that I talked about. Not turning our back on our progress. We cannot be halted by a few. I think it is important to ask: What motivates us? Is it improving the lived realities of our constituents, and opening doors for those who have historically been marginalised? Or is it positive press, self-congratulations, and applause in fancy conference rooms? We have enough performative activism—now we need people to put the work in.

So, we keep reminding Member States of their duties, of their responsibilities, of their obligations. A recent resolution on Myanmar is such an example.<sup>viii</sup>

There was discussion to hold arms transfers, which is line with Article 6 and 7 of the Arms Trade Treaty, as an increased flow of weapons would amplify violence in the country.<sup>ix</sup> We were not afraid of reminding Member States, especially those who are signatory to the Arms Trade Treaty, to honour their commitments, and, to respect the UN Charter. But we also bring issues of importance to the table: Costa Rica was the first country addressing excessive military spending in times of COVID-19. Now everyone talks about it.

The COVID-19 pandemic has left a mark on everyone — including international organisations. There are not many incentives for change. This impedes bold leadership. We must revert this trend. My aim is to leave a legacy in this mission: I’m trying to reframe everything that we’re doing through a gender lens. I want to bring women and girls into everything we do.

*The challenges you raise regarding gender equality are close to my heart. I must admit, I have worked for over 15 years in international development, and I have never*

*had a woman boss. It's quite striking. We cannot come to a point of gender equality if there is no pathway for women. There are so many obstacles.*

Me neither. I have worked for 23 years under men. My first boss was the President of Costa Rica where I started as a speechwriter. After that I joined the service and every single Ambassador I worked for was a man. But I do not think this is a problem of the diplomatic service only. Looking at the UN system, a lot needs to change regarding gender equality, especially at the mid-level. It's only now in my mid 40s that I get the chance to deliver my own statements and have my voice reflected. That's why I am active on social media and in other forums: visibility came very late in my life. I've spent 23 years working at the international level with the highest level of power in my country. I'm undisputedly a strong multilateralist, but people still don't know who I am. So, every time I leave the negotiating table, I make sure that the people around me know that I'm not here by chance.

I wish that women did not have to walk into the negotiating room with the added burden of dismantling prejudiced preconceptions about their intelligence or capability or strength. Diplomacy is challenging enough as it is. But this added challenge also means we have put the work in, we have always done a bit more research than our counterparts; we do not take anything for granted. Particularly women from the Global South. We are substantively prepared.

We must be part of the change: I am mentoring young promising women. I tell them that they do not work for me, but they work with me. I give them a voice. A pathway. I have a message for them. Consistency matters. Education matters. Good writing matters. How you deliver your statements matters. Make yourself visible. Publish. Write. Read. And raise your voice. ■

## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group (ACT), 'Better Working Methods for today's Security Council', May 2019.

<sup>ii</sup> Economic and Social Council Resolution, 'Commission on the Status of Women', E/90 adn E/84, 21 June 1946, in *Journal of the Economic and Social Council*, 29 (July 1946), [https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/pdf/CSW\\_founding\\_resolution\\_1946.pdf](https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/pdf/CSW_founding_resolution_1946.pdf).

<sup>iii</sup> General Assembly Resolution (A/75/973), 28 July 2021, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/204/57/PDF/N2120457.pdf?OpenElement>.

<sup>iv</sup> Security Council Resolution 1325, 31 October 2000, [https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325\(2000\)](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325(2000)).

<sup>v</sup> United Nations Security Council, 'Women and peace and security: Report of the Secretary General', 2021/827, 27 September 2021, [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_2021\\_827.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2021_827.pdf).

<sup>vi</sup> United Nations General Assembly, 'The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects and assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons and collecting them: Report of the Secretary General', A/75/78, 14 April 2020, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N20/095/75/PDF/N2009575.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>vii</sup> See: <https://www.un.org/en/ga/first/index.shtml>.

<sup>viii</sup> Human Rights Council Resolution 47/1, 16 July 2021, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/A\\_HRC\\_RES\\_47\\_1\\_E.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/A_HRC_RES_47_1_E.pdf).

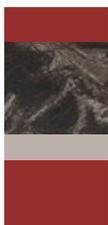
<sup>ix</sup> The Arms Trade Treaty, 3 June 2013, entered into force on 24 December 2014, <https://www.thearmstradetreaty.org/hyper-images/file/TheArmsTradeTreaty1/TheArmsTradeTreaty.pdf>.

# Solving global problems in a multipolar world: Qualities of UN Leadership

BY CHRISTOPHER C. COLEMAN



Abdo Abu Salu  
*My Children*  
Zataari Camp



**Christopher Coleman** is a mentor to professionals in peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. He was the United Nations Secretary-General's Deputy Special Representative for Kosovo from 2016-2020 and a member of the UN Observer Delegation to the Sudan Peace Talks from 2002-2005. For more than 30 years, Coleman has been involved in the prevention and mediation of armed conflict, peacekeeping and post-conflict reconciliation.

■ We live in 'interesting times' buffeted by contradictory currents, several positive and others negative. Some evidence suggests that the world can be made better, or at least saved from becoming worse, through international cooperation.

The Millennium Development Goals and the follow-on Sustainable Development Goals spurred broad commitments across the globe. The results from 2000 to present have been impressive, notwithstanding some setbacks due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Significant to note, in this period infant mortality fell dramatically and adult literacy climbed. Painful and disfiguring diseases affect an ever smaller part of humanity and an unprecedented number of people now have access to electricity and running water.<sup>i</sup>

These results were achieved, in no small part, because states cooperated to identify meaningful and challenging goals to address daunting problems, made commitments to improve the situation and to a large extent delivered on their promises.

These success stories are broader than the field of Development. In the case of international peace and security, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has acted decisively to manage and resolve a raft of armed conflicts over the past 20 years, saving countless lives and easing global tensions in the process.

Alas, despite these gains, other evidence indicates the contrary. It suggests that the international system has become hopelessly fragmented to the point that multilateralism is a mere illusion — or at best a framework for dealing with small problems, the resolution of which requires only the barest sacrifice and commitment from any given player. The world failed miserably as Syria was torn asunder. COVID-19 vaccines are still unavailable to many people worldwide, so no one can predict what new and possibly deadly variant might emerge or where

it might strike first — though we can be certain that it will spread rapidly from continent to continent. Whilst some progress has been made in tackling climate change, no one would hold this up as an example of decisive international cooperation to surmount a compelling global threat.

Looking at these areas, we have reason to fear that unilateral initiatives and unbridled power politics may soon make it impossible for countries to solve truly global problems. Such problems affect a multitude of individual states and require governments to work together for sustained periods in pursuit of shared objectives.

### Facts and factors of change

Of these two trends, the positive and the negative, which will dominate in the years to come? Will countries work together for the well-being of humankind, or struggle against each other vying for narrow gains, the result being to the detriment of all?

Several factors will determine the answer to these questions. One factor is national leadership. A collection of multilateralists who understand that cooperation is essential to solve the biggest problems will lead to one set of outcomes, while unilateralists going for short-term victories to shore up their own individual political fortunes will lead us to another, very different fate. National leaders operate, to one degree or another, based on popular sentiment, so the role of civil society — of the people — is another crucial factor.

A third vital factor is the strength and integrity of international institutions. Consider these irrefutable facts: power in the world is increasingly dispersed and as the number of power centres grows, ad hoc cooperation becomes more difficult. Since no single state nor any handful of states can resolve global problems alone, the interests of a wide variety of actors must be



accommodated to achieve results that will be respected and therefore sustained.

The concertation of numerous actors requires international institutions with well-established practices, procedures and implementing capabilities, through which states are accustomed to working together. Otherwise, it is just too difficult with the cacophony of voices advocating a seemingly infinite number of contradictory courses of action and the absence of mechanisms for them to find common ground on the nature of a problem.

In addressing any important global problem, differences arise over what to do about it. Issues such as what to do about it? How to share the costs of action and allocate benefits when a solution is in place? Precisely why the United Nations was created, and it is needed now more than ever. Indeed, the UN system is the only universal institutional framework playing this role. No other institution has the global membership and recognised authority to deal with a broad array of global problems.

To be effective and able to rise to the unprecedented challenges facing the world today and into the foreseeable future, the UN must have good leadership. As with any complex organisation, leadership is exercised, not just at the highest level, but by many at several levels. Given the nature of the challenges as outlined in this introduction, the rest of this paper will discuss the most important characteristics of good UN leadership, the type necessary for the institution to fulfil its essential role in addressing and resolving global problems.

## Characteristics of a good UN leader

### *Integrity*

The most important characteristic of a good UN leader is integrity. Central to a UN official's integrity is an unwavering commitment to the greater international good rather than the narrower interests of any government or group of governments. This involves objectivity and impartiality, calling a spade a spade — and acting accordingly — regardless of the political pressures to bend the storyline for the benefit of one set of interests over another. Take, as an example, the role that leaders play in the management and resolution of armed conflict. Almost all UN peace operations are headed by a Special

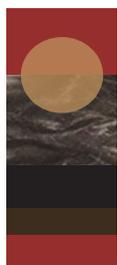
Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG). They are nominated by the Secretary-General and agreed by the UN Security Council. In most cases the SRSG is expected to be the custodian of the peace process.<sup>ii</sup>

This role entails working with the conflicting parties, easing their path when they act in ways that will help to bring about the Security Council's agreed end state and making it harder for obstructionists or spoilers to pursue their agenda. Put another way, the SRSG as custodian of the process should actively support local leaders who work constructively towards an enduring peace and actively oppose those who work against it. This means helping the parties see that their interests are better served by working within a legitimate political framework.

A variety of instruments can be used to do this. Some common ones are close cooperation with foreign governments and other external actors to manipulate the incentive and disincentive structure for the parties. They can use economic leverage, projection of military power, political strategies to isolate the recalcitrant, and legal procedures to reduce the corruption that might feed militia activity.

The SRSG can choose to employ the appropriate approach in the given circumstance. Governments, including those on the Security Council that provided the mandate for the peace operation, may agree with each other broadly on a desired end state. At the same time, they will have their own interests, which they will be eager to advance, that might mean cutting side deals with one or another party. Too much of that self-interested behaviour by individual governments or organisations would cripple a peace process. Invariably, the SRSG as custodian of the process has to nurture and expand the common ground, not just among the direct parties to the conflict, but among the international players as well. No one, besides the SRSG and the UN staff who support him or her, has that singular responsibility and solitary purpose, putting the success of the mission—defined by the achievement of the Security Council's agreed end state—above all other priorities.

For SRSGs to play that role effectively, they must be—and be seen as—scrupulously fair and impartial. Should one or more of the direct parties to the conflict or their external supporters, sense that the SRSG is tilting towards one party and its allies at the expense of another, the SRSG's



**The best UN leaders can work through this messy mélange of views. This may require exhaustive discussions with a seemingly endless array of interested governments. This is sometimes the only way to identify the common ground, enabling a meaningful path forward.**

credibility as custodian will be compromised. This will diminish the overall success of the peace process.

Impartiality does not mean treating parties with different behaviours equally. If one party is acting as an obstructionist, and/or is operating in flagrant violation of international norms and standards, it is the SRSG's role to work with them to correct that behaviour. Where warranted, the SRSG can call the problem to the attention of the outside world and mobilise leverage as needed. The party that is the target of this leverage may then call the SRSG's impartiality into question, but the latter will have firm ground to stand on, having scrupulously pursued the achievement of the Security Council's end state.

The uniqueness of the UN rests on the readiness of its leaders to support the principles and values of the UN in pursuit of the greater good. This requires scrupulous impartiality, applying the same standards to all, without fear or favour. If UN leaders lose that quality, a crucial element of global problem-solving is lost with it.

### *Consensus builder*

Pick any major problem affecting the world today. Identify the governments whose active cooperation would be necessary for solving the problem and ask them what to do about it. Depending on the problem, this will easily involve 30 to 40 or even 100 or more governments. Chances are you will receive dozens of contradictory answers. It will range from major differences about the origins and nature of the problem, to whose fault it is and the implications for people's lives today and in the future.

Timeframes, money, possible solutions and on and on. The answers will be rooted, in part, on relatively objective assessments of the facts. They will also be partly based on how the facts are perceived through different lenses, such as national interests, cultural values, socio-economic status and group identity.

The best UN leaders can work through this messy mélange of views. This may require exhaustive discussions with a seemingly endless array of interested governments. This is sometimes the only way to identify the common ground, enabling a meaningful path forward. A good UN leader's role is to resist the temptation to go for the lowest common denominator to which everyone can relatively easily agree, but which will achieve very little. Instead, they persist in finding a course that will make the needed difference or, in the most difficult circumstances, at least help states take a few prominent steps in the right direction, while further compromises are forged and consensus is developed, piece by piece.

Returning to the example of the role played by SRSGs when more actors are involved in each theatre, the SRSG must draw upon greater assets. Simultaneously a higher number of actors will mean bigger challenges in forging and maintaining a united front vis-à-vis the parties. An example can be if militia or government forces are inflicting high numbers of civilian casualties. What is to be done about it? Which states and other actors can create incentives and disincentives? Who will pay financially or with political capital?

These questions will have contradictory answers based in part on the competing interests of external states and other involved entities. It is the SRSG's responsibility to forge a sufficient level of consensus to get the job done and keep the peace process moving in the right direction.

### *Motivator*

A third essential quality of UN leaders is the ability to motivate people and organisations to do what they thought was impossible. The UN was not created to manage or solve easy problems. It came into existence to solve the kinds of problems that governments and peoples have not been able to solve on their own. For the most part, the hardest kind of problems — those that no one

else could tackle —finally make it to the UN. Integrity and consensus-building attributes are vital to deal with these problems, but this is not enough. UN leaders also have to inspire people and convince them that they are capable of more than they know, then show them how to dig deeper. This might mean using persuasive strategies such as convincing erstwhile enemies to work together or a nervous government leader to take unpopular, but necessary action. Other examples are communicating with a journalist to go the extra mile and tell the whole story or with a staff member to take risks, because playing it safe accomplishes nothing.

Seemingly insoluble problems can only be surmounted by breaking through whatever real or imagined barriers that seemed impermeable. It is a special kind of leader who empowers people to take on such a task, making them believe they are up to the job and motivating them to jump eagerly to it!

## Conclusion

In a multipolar world where power is increasingly dispersed, the United Nations is an indispensable organisation for solving global problems. This can be for the sake of peace and security, development, health, human rights, or the well-being of the planet itself. For the organisation to play its problem-solving role successfully in these particularly challenging times, effective leaders are needed at all levels. It requires integrity, including scrupulous impartiality in pursuit of the greater good. UN leaders also have to be doggedly persistent in building consensus for meaningful action by a wide range of actors, and they have to be inspiring individuals who motivate us to rise above our limitations and achieve what might seem impossible.

Do such persons exist? Yes, a few thrive at virtually every level in the UN system, and they are easy to find because of their results. Others would do well to emulate their example. Absent such leaders — and a UN system that rewards the best with ever greater challenges and responsibility — the organisation will not be able to play its assigned role in the world. A crucial element in global problem-solving will be lost. ■

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Nicholas *Kristof*, 'This Has Been the Best Year Ever', *The New York Times*, 28 December 2019, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/28/opinion/sunday/2019-best-year-poverty.html>>.

<sup>ii</sup> The concept of a 'custodian of the peace process' was first introduced by Stedman, Stephen John, 'Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes', *International Security*, 22/2 (1997), pp. 5-53, <<https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.22.2.5>>. It was elaborated in Jock Covey, 'The Custodian of the Peace Process', Jock Covey, Michael J. Dziedzic and Leonard R. Hawley (eds), *The Quest for Viable Peace* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2005).

# Leadership behind the scenes

## INTERVIEW WITH IZUMI NAKAMITSU

*Izumi Nakamitsu was interviewed in her personal capacity and the article does not necessarily reflect the view of the UN.*



Nizar Al Haraki  
*The Snow of My Country*  
Zataari Camp



***Izumi Nakamitsu** is the United Nations Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs. She served as Assistant Administrator of the Crisis Response Unit at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Other positions includes Special Adviser Ad Interim on Follow-up to the Summit on Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants, UNDP Director of the Asia and Middle East Division and Policy, Evaluation and Training Division Director. Jobs outside the UN included being Professor of International Relations at Hitotsubashi University in Tokyo, where she also served as a member of the Foreign Exchange Council to Japan's Foreign Minister, and as a visiting senior adviser on peacebuilding at the Japan International Cooperation Agency. Earlier in her career Nakamitsu was a member of Secretary-General Kofi Annan's UN Reform Team. She also held positions at UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) with the Office of Assistant High Commissioner for Policy and Operations Sergio Vieira de Mello and UNHCR field operations in the former Yugoslavia, Turkey and northern Iraq.*

■ **Question:** *The Secretary-General recently spoke of a 'five alarm global fire' happening at a time when many people seem to question the relevance and effectiveness of the United Nations. In this context what is effective UN leadership and what does it look like?*

I think the first thing to understand is that while it is often difficult to see what the UN is doing, there is actually a lot of work happening behind the scene, and much that goes unnoticed. We live at a time when leadership often means getting on stage and advertising what one does. Effective UN leadership is different.

I've been with the UN basically throughout my career, I am UN to the bone, and have studied the history of the UN and its evolution. In particular, I have been inspired by Dag Hammarskjöld, who is one of our UN heroes one and who really articulated the role of the UN during probably one of the most difficult times in international relations.

Today, it feels as if we are returning to a new Cold War-like environment but it's actually probably much more complicated than the previous Cold War in the sense that it's a multilateral competition, rather than a bipolar competition and one fueled by increased military capabilities. In addition to this new 'great power tensions', none of the post-Cold War conflict dynamics have disappeared - the multiplicity of internal and regional conflicts, the proliferation of non-state actors, global terrorist organisations and international criminal groups, (etc). You have a really complicated picture.

So, UN leadership today has to navigate this great complexity, without competing with actors for credit or the limelight, but rather by identifying when and how we can add value by working with many of them to deliver results. So much like Dag Hammarskjöld emphasised and did, many of the useful things we do is behind the scene.

Let me share one personal story: When I was a graduate student at Georgetown, I came to the UN and interviewed an Assistant Secretary-General who said exactly the same thing. 'Many of the most important things that the UN is doing are things we must do behind the scene. So if you really want to be an effective UN leader, first and foremost you have to understand how you want to make a difference, and whether you want to appear as the person getting the international limelight or whether you would like to see the substance of what you're doing move forward'. Few people may know this but the UN has been instrumental in recent years in encouraging dialogue between various word leaders. The behind the scenes convening power of the UN remains very relevant.

That being said, for the UN to continue being relevant, it requires that we consistently reflect upon ourselves and that we have the ability to change with the times and the context. UN leaders should not be afraid of changing, of incorporating more innovative creative approaches and getting out of our comfort zones. This means bringing in and listening to different stakeholders beyond just government actors. This requires courage. Courage to test new approaches, bringing new perspectives and creating space for non-traditional actors. Courage as well to bring

more creativity into our organisational set-up to fit to our new environment.

There is a third aspect of UN leadership that needs to be mentioned. Let me start with the example of what happened in Afghanistan. We need to truly understand what has happened and learn from it, but one thing that I think is very clear is that the UN has always been representing the interests of the most vulnerable there, and the UN really continues to be the voice for the people. Placing people at the center of everything we do, of course in the realm of peace and security, but also on all other agendas, such as the climate crisis. I think that's another very important aspect and I would say somewhat unique to UN leadership; that we truly prioritise a people-centered approach. Let me also add that in most difficult situations, the UN stays and delivers. Afghanistan is an example – the UN has been in the country for decades, we are still there to support the people.

*Question: You mentioned Dag Hammarskjöld and some personal leadership traits, including the ability to self reflect and the ability to evolve. Can you elaborate and speak to the kind of inspiration you draw from Dag Hammarskjöld's leadership?*

When I'm interviewed, mainly by Japanese media, I often quote Dag Hammarskjöld and some of his qualities. To me, he had this bravery in the midst of the Cold War as well as the creativity. For example, giving birth to peacekeeping which is not in the UN Charter, but which is now an important example of multilateral cooperation. He gave real thought to the history of humankind and the UN's place in it. I am also very much inspired by the depth of his reflection, as articulated in his book *Markings*, which honestly I still don't understand fully. He was one of those people who had the intellect, the political skills, the creativity and also the philosophical belief that we need to come together around a collective effort to better humankind. This is why, for many UN officials, he continues to be one of our heroes.

*Question: You now work in the field of disarmament where we see increasing competition, a return as you mentioned to Cold War era posturing, and the increasing impact of new technologies, which the UN is not always equipped to understand. What does this new, rapidly evolving context mean in terms of UN leadership?*

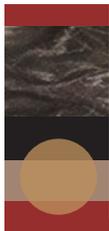
You know, I never asked to be in the position I am right now. In February 2017, the Secretary-General called me into his office and asked me: 'what about disarmament?'. I was surprised, as I had never worked in this field before. He told me that I didn't need to be an expert. The UN Office of Disarmament Affairs (ODA) already had experts. But he wanted someone who can shake things up and look at disarmament through a broader perspective and frame it within the overall UN priorities and agendas. Disarmament has been siloed and some people have a tendency of looking at disarmament simply as a technical field. Now of course, like any other substantive field, you do need substantive knowledge and technical expertise, but it is important to understand disarmament as a prevention tool, as a contributor to conflict resolution. I understood that what the Secretary-General wanted was to lift disarmament as instrument for peace and security, as well as achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Now, we need to recognise that disarmament is directly linked to national security so it is sensitive. Our role is to try and identify common grounds, which we can translate into multilateral agreements in various fields, or to give birth to new norms for example in cyber, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and outer space. As you know, these new domains are not sufficiently governed so in addition to facilitating dialogue, we provide options and substantive advice on how to approach new challenges. Then we try and go a step further to help implement those voluntary norms, which hopefully will, sooner rather than later, be enshrined or codified more strongly.

We need to combine the technical expertise with our political affairs hats and provide, without wanting to sound too arrogant, the sort of thought leadership in these transformative times like the one we're living in now.

*Question: It sounds like the leadership qualities you refer to at the very beginning apply here as well. Listening and not wanting to occupy the stage. Would you say that it's even more relevant for leaders to abide by this principle today because disarmament is so tightly connected to issues of national sovereignty?*

I jokingly say this to the Secretary-General: 'You cannot just simply tell Member States to disarm, they're not going to do it just because we say it'. The responsibility rests



I attend many different meetings with diverse groups of people, including civil society and youth organisations, and you can spot the leadership traits in certain individuals across levels and ages, so I definitely do believe that leadership is at all levels and in all different types of organisations.

with Member States. We are in a supportive role but in that supportive role there are actually quite a number of things that we can do. When I look at the substantive outcomes, we don't do it for the fame or the credit, and we should not be seeking the stage.

*Question: You have worked at the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) then Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), at UNDP's Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) and elsewhere; so when the Secretary-General was asking you to connect the dots between disarmament and other parts of the UN, do you think this was in part due to your different experiences across the UN? What is your perspective on the importance of having had experiences across the 'First Avenue divide' and of mobility more generally for UN leadership?*

Absolutely; I started in UNHCR, where they have a mandatory mobility scheme. I was with them for more than 10 years so it's really ingrained in my way of thinking. I feel that if I am doing the same thing for more than four or five years, I come to the limits of growth. Here in disarmament, there are people who have been working on the file for decades, and that's needed for the expertise, and the historical and institutional knowledge. But I also encourage our young bright officers to go, for their own growth, and do something else and come back with broader perspectives.

At headquarters, we focus on policies and norms so it's also helpful to do some work at the field level to see to how these policies or norms are actually implemented and operationalised; if and how they are actually changing the lives of ordinary people. That way, you can connect the two sides –policy making and implementation– and understand better the kind of policies and norms we need to strengthen or advocate for that will make a difference. This goes back to the human-

centered approach we were discussing. If I hadn't started my work with the UN in the field, in Yugoslavia, Turkey and Iraq, some 30 years ago, I may not be saying that, but I truly believe that this is needed to understand what a human-centered approach means and why it is so needed.

*Question: What else do you think the UN should be doing to strengthen the leadership capabilities and capacities of the system at all levels?*

I attend many different meetings with diverse groups of people, including civil society and youth organisations, and you can spot the leadership traits in certain individuals across levels and ages, so I definitely do believe that leadership is at all levels and in all different types of organisations.

The UN has been making efforts to increase training and learning opportunities for leadership development. I tend to think the management skills can be trained, but I would be curious to whether people think leadership skills can be trained as well. Or is this something we need to be better at identifying, further developing and utilising?

Beyond that, it's really about inspiring people especially those who are in the organisation so that they can see 'yes, these are the skillsets I will acquire', and to bring back the passion. People join the UN because they share a passion – so making sure that you maintain that passion, despite the challenges, tensions and pressures is critical.

Going back to our earlier discussion about UN relevance, we are indeed regularly faced with this skepticism, and we do need this passion and inspiration to enable us to keep doing what we must be doing.

Former UNHCR Commissioner Sadako Ogata was very good at inspiring and motivating her teams. I remember when she arrived at UNHCR, when she first launched the



reform process. Her approach was to put together teams regardless of seniority considerations, focusing instead on those who had the belief in the organisation and truly wanted to keep UNHCR relevant, in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War. She was able to motivate everyone and we need more of that in the UN today.

*Question: In many ways, she anticipated some of the thinking and hopefully the emerging practices around collective leadership. You mentioned passion, how do you maintain that passion despite challenges, pressures, setbacks and disappointments?*

Well my starting point is my very difficult field assignments with UNHCR. I was young, I was in my 20s and I was sent off to war zones. The conditions were very difficult, especially for women, at a time where there was little consideration offered to very practical gender equality issues. I have this particular experience in a small town of Tuzla in Bosnia Herzegovina,<sup>1</sup> where, through an interpreter of course, I was speaking to a very old lady who was cared for at an internally displaced people center. She knew nothing about the UN, but after asking me where I came from, she said to me: 'I know Japan; I don't know anything about the UN but if the UN is an organisation that brings a young person like you so far away then it must be a good thing, it must be a good organisation'. This lady's grandfathers fought in World War I; her father and husband fought in World War II, and her sons and grandsons were missing in the civil war at the time.

That was the moment when I understood the preamble of the UN charter in a real sense and that has always remained as my inspiration: 'We the peoples of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind'. It's the common people, ordinary people, saying; 'I have no idea what the UN is, but it must be a good thing and I hope that our future will be a little bit better than now'. Those experiences when I was much younger stay embedded in my heart and they are what I go back to when in moments of pressure and challenges from various actors.

*Question: You said you joined the organisation in your 20s. Today, there are not so many people who join in their 20s, and the average age at the UN is now 47. And the opportunities to join young and grow within*

*the UN as a seasoned international civil servant are becoming rare. We now have more people joining the organisation later, whose experiences and principles are grounded elsewhere. What is your perspective on this evolution, its implications on the organisational culture, and the efforts underway to rejuvenate the UN?*

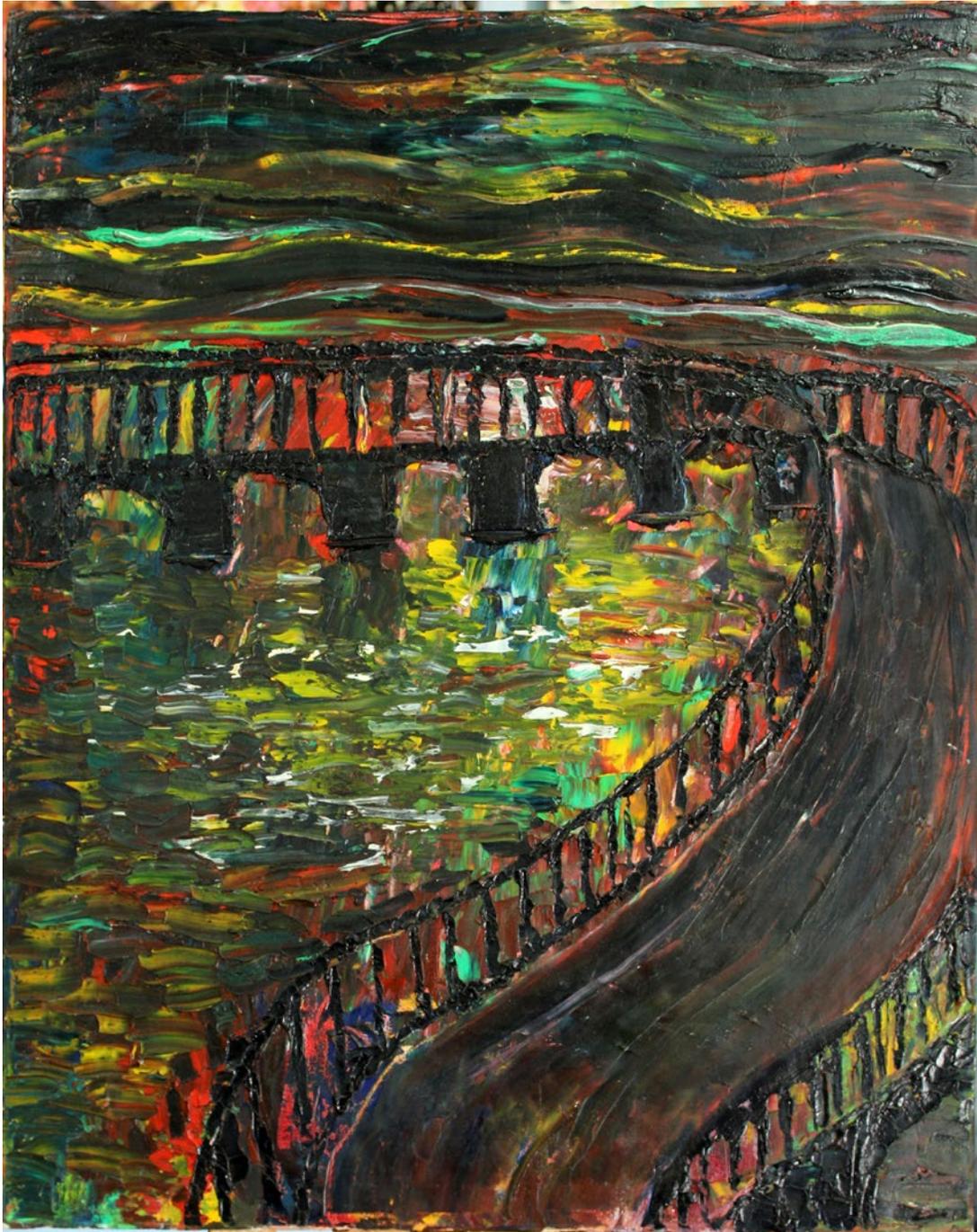
Like any other organisation we have to have a right balance between those who, like myself are career staff, who have been with the organisation for many years, preferably doing many different things, and the need, which is healthy, to bring in people from other institutions, from government services or the private sector or civil society because the organisation needs to evolve.

One of the best things that I did was to leave the UN for about 10 years in total. For five years, I was with the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), thanks to an exception granted by UNHCR at the time, and then I taught at a university for five years. You learn then that the UN is not the center of the world, and for us to remain relevant, we need exposure to other perspectives. Hence the importance of having people coming in at different levels, from different backgrounds.

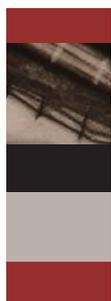
That being said, it is also really important to have young people joining us early. That's why I'm such a great fan of both the Young Professionals Programme (YPP) and the Junior Professional Officer (JPO) programmes. I myself am a JPO graduate. We need to have a healthy balance and as you know the Secretary-General is keen on making the UN younger and there is an effort to gradually replace senior level posts with more junior level positions, and I fully support this. This is about looking at the UN with a longer-term perspective, and not just focusing exclusively on its short-term needs, ensuring we stay resilient and relevant. With the world changing so rapidly, we need people with fluency in many new fields, including new technology, and with many new perspectives. ■

# UN leadership in a multilateral system in crisis

BY ALEXANDRE MARC



Mohamed Hassan Ibrahim  
*Bridge under a colourful sea*  
Azraq Camp



*Alexandre Marc is a writer and political scientist specialising in global social transformations, conflicts and violence. Marc worked for over three decades with the World Bank, spending his last five years at the organisation as the World Bank Chief Specialist on Conflict, Fragility and Violence. He was also the main author of the 2018 UN-World Bank flagship report 'Pathways for Peace'. Marc was then a Non-Resident Senior Fellow at The Brookings Institution and a Member of the Institute for Integrated Transitions. He holds His Doctoral Degree in Economics from the Paris Institute of Political Science (Science Po).*

■ The ongoing fragmentation and erosion of the multilateral system established at the end of World War I, constitutes a major impediment for addressing the incredible challenges that humanity is facing in the 21st century.<sup>I</sup> Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the fast emergence of new global and regional powers, tensions and competition have increased considerably between nations in practically all areas. This can range from security to trade, investments to scientific research and infrastructure to the Internet. At the same time the private sector and the scientific community are leading the way in transforming society through powerful new technologies that often have a global reach, but lack the necessary regulatory framework to ensure that their positive impact is equitably felt.

The Western powers that at the end of the last century were in many ways controlling the multilateral system are increasingly unable to adapt to the emergence of multipolarity in the international order. They are themselves confronted with the emergence of a new brand of national populism and with major internal resistance to change.<sup>II</sup> It is widely recognised that a reform of the current multilateral system is more than urgent, but narrow vested interests and harsh competition between regional and global powers make it extremely difficult to achieve.<sup>III</sup> The UN itself is directly suffering from this crisis in multilateralism, which adds challenges to its central responsibility of making multilateralism work.

### **Competition for multilateral organisations**

The world is experiencing a major breach of trust between nations and people, a weakening of respect for core human rights and rule of law across the world. It spurs an increased questioning of the value of democracy,

which unavoidably reflects on the multilateral system. As a result, it is more and more difficult for the community of nations to make progress with addressing the global threats that humanity is facing, as well as resolving conflicts and building peace.

The new report of the Secretary-General 'Our Common Agenda' has articulated this situation in a way that does not leave much room to doubt the seriousness of the situation for the future of humanity. Even organisations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) who seem to have a well-defined agenda, see dark clouds accumulating on the horizon.

Respect for social and environmental safeguards is increasingly put into question in countries where these institutions intervene. Suddenly they face direct competition from new Development Banks, such as the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and powerful private sector investment funds looking for short-term profits. Countries increasingly find support and financing to meet their needs outside the rules and conditionalities set by traditional development lending institutions. The governance structures of these organisations are also outdated. The traditional informal agreement that the WB should always be led by a US nominee and the IMF by a European one is seen today as exclusionary of other nations and a remnant of the Cold War period when most of the financing used to come from Western donors.

### **A shift towards new collaborative networks**

Meanwhile, new ways of collaboration between nations, private and public organisations, and people are emerging through more flexible networks of collaboration like the

G7, the G20, the Davos World Economic Forum and a multitude of gatherings and networking systems that are often lightly institutionalised. Also, many specific multinational organisations or loose associations are being established around specific geopolitical interests: the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation with China and India in the lead; the Collective Security Treaty Organisation that was set up with Russia at the centre; and GUAM, an informal association of the former Soviet republics of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova that oppose Russian hegemony, to name a few.

Non-governmental networks of researchers and scientists are also becoming central to the progress made by the scientific world. Medical research is increasingly based on associations of laboratories, large firms, and universities, with limited government involvement and very little participation by the multilateral system despite its huge impact on global welfare. An example of the latter is the development of the RNA vaccines that are so central to the fight against COVID 19.<sup>IV</sup>

The shift towards networks of collaboration that are often very fluid and adaptive is good for certain needs in a complex and global world, and might be a necessary step to bypass the institutional sclerosis and reduced effectiveness that many of the more traditional multilateral organisations are suffering from.

However, the emerging new mechanisms are not enough to replace the more structured frameworks of collaboration that are necessary for making global commitments and for adopting international law commitments of the type necessary to achieve real policy changes at the global level. It may be useful to discuss issues in open settings such as Davos, although not much in terms of binding agreements will ever emerge from such meetings.

In such a challenging context, what are the essential components of UN leadership to effectively leverage the broader multilateral ecosystem? The thoughts I am presenting here reflect my life experience both working for a large international financial institution and collaborating with the UN at multiple occasions. My view is therefore as a UN outsider and based on concrete field experience. I would like to outline three areas where I feel the UN has an essential leading role in fomenting a more fluid and effective multilateral ecosystem.

### *1. Anchoring UN leadership in the principles of the UN Charter, human rights norms, and respect for the rule of law*

The multilateral system with its formal organisations and its increasingly flexible networks of collaboration needs these principles to remain central to its operations and actions to maintain its credibility. Keeping these principles high on the agenda is particularly important in view of how nations seem to be sliding into cynicism, egocentrism, and global backstabbing.

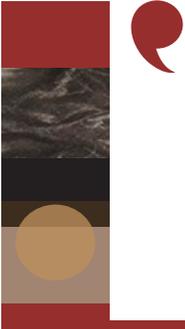
The UN is the only institution with a clear mandate to be impartially and systematically involved with multilateral initiatives and agreements and to ensure they are not made in a way that will weaken the international human rights architecture and the rule of law. For instance, the UN has a role to play in keeping high standards of social, environmental, and participatory safeguards that frame country engagement by international financial institutions. The UN is also key in ensuring that regional organisations keep operating with high standards for the respect of international law, respect of human rights and respect of essential humanitarian norms.

This does not always make the UN popular with governments and therefore requires courage, consistency, and diplomacy. The multilateral system is increasingly under pressure to bend their rules to please powerful nations and while a more representative multilateral system is needed it also cannot be set up at the cost of weakening the norms and principles of the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and losing the respect for essential treaties and agreements.

UN leadership is not only expected in this area, but it is more essential than ever to keep the multilateral parties true to the international agreements and treaties that followed World War II.

### *2. Maintaining open dialogue between nations and organisations to ensure cohesiveness in the multilateral system*

UN leadership in such a turbulent period should be about keeping the dialogue going wherever possible between increasingly competitive nations and in particular between the western blocks and non-western powers. At a time when the multilateral system is increasingly pulled apart by tensions between countries, the ability of the UN to talk



The rapid change in geopolitics that affects all aspects of international relations and the prospect of collaboration between nations requires an adaptation of UN leadership. It is taking place, but it might require intensifying efforts at joint leadership level. Thus, enabling the UN to work directly with institutions that have a strong capacity to influence policies and programs on the ground, but do not have the broad legitimacy that the UN has and the reach to all member states.

to all parties has become its strongest asset and not only on peacebuilding initiatives.<sup>v</sup> Better dialogue is urgently needed in many areas such as economic and social issues, cyber security, management of outer space, the oceans and much more.

The IMF and WB, for instance, are struggling to keep the level of indebtedness in poor developing countries at sustainable levels but lack the traction with new lending nations and the private sector players.

A dialogue is urgently needed in this area and the UN can play an important role in bringing everyone to the table. The Conference of the Parties (COP) on climate change engagement is a brilliant illustration of how the UN can succeed in bringing nations around the table and then support an alignment of the broader multilateral system on the commitments made during these conferences. This is an illustration of the unique role the UN can play in getting relevant actors to the table.

The COVID Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) initiative for bringing COVID-19 vaccine to poor nations around the world is another successful way to talk to everyone despite a major competition taking place on vaccine production and distribution. The multilateral system is engaging around the initiative led by the World Health Organisation and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (GAVI). Similarly, multilateral efficiency is most useful when it can gather the majority through initiatives like the COP and COVAX that provides the political framework under which competing nations can engage positively.

However, this requires a strong leadership because of today's tendency to use the multilateral system as a battleground between nations, especially the world powers.

The UN should encourage the evolving multilateral system to remain, as far as possible, inclusive of all member states. The UN should try to ensure that communication channels remain open in a multilateral system that tends to evolve into alliances around narrow geopolitical interests. Organisations, such as the World Bank for example, should realise that closer ties with the UN can offer some guarantees that their programmes and country engagement are not seen as serving geopolitical interests supported by some of its most powerful shareholders. This would be essential for its longer-term effectiveness and credibility.

### *3. Leveraging an increasingly fragmented multilateral system*

While the two previous areas are essential to make the overall multilateral system work, UN leadership will also need to be very focused while remaining adaptive. The UN system still often gives the impression of being everything to everyone while very constrained financial resources is a major drawback for implementing its actions. The only exception is humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping where the UN receives the bulk of the financing that nations provide for these efforts directly. In these cases, the UN can lead 'through implementation' by having the broader multilateral institutions working along the UN. In most of the other areas the UN system depends highly on the rest of the multilateral system and on national governments to implement and finance its priorities.<sup>vi</sup>

Leadership is very much about knowing what to focus on. Countries see themselves less and less bound by general assembly resolutions and agreements signed in international conferences. When resolutions adopted under the UN leadership are not respected this dramatically reduces the credibility of the UN. Too often UN organisations are seen as being engaged in too many competing initiatives



Leadership is very much about knowing what to focus on. Countries see themselves less and less bound by general assembly resolutions and agreements signed in international conferences. (...) Leadership, especially at the country level is therefore very much about focus and making trade-offs and to ensure leverage with the broader multilateral system.

and tasks with little overall leverage on national or global policies. Leadership, especially at the country level is therefore very much about focus and making trade-offs and to ensure leverage with the broader multilateral system.

will result in a less just and effective world. Time will tell, but to avoid this scenario from happening UN leadership is needed now more than ever. ■

## Conclusion

The rapid change in geopolitics that affects all aspects of international relations and the prospect of collaboration between nations requires an adaptation of UN leadership. It is taking place, but it might require intensifying efforts at joint leadership level. Thus, enabling the UN to work directly with institutions that have a strong capacity to influence policies and programs on the ground, but do not have the broad legitimacy that the UN has and the reach to all Member States.

This should help the UN to stay focused and other organisations to benefit from the moral clout of the UN at a time when many multilateral organisations must struggle to remain effective in view of geopolitical pressures. Joint leadership with organisations such as the African Union and the WB on prevention of conflict in Africa, for instance, needs to be deepened. This will improve the effectiveness of all the organisations concerned. It was started with some success, but unfortunately seems to have somehow stalled lately because of lack of WB leadership in this area.

Optimists, on the one hand, see the development of collaborative networks based on unstructured and fluid exchanges as the beginning of a deeper transformation of the multilateral world, obviously the UN should be a sort of centre of gravity for the emergence of such a new collaborative system.

Pessimists, on the other hand, see it as a slow fragmentation and collapse of the multilateral system as we know it, that

### Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> Bruce Jones and Susana Malcorra , ‘Competing for Order. Confronting the Long Crisis of Multilateralism’, *Competitive Multilateralism: Revitalization and Realism in an Era of Global Tension Series*, 2020, <<https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Competing-for-Order.-Confronting-the-Long-Crisis-of-Multilateralism.pdf> >.

<sup>ii</sup> Dominic Eggel and Marc Galvin, ‘Multilateralism Is in Crisis – Or Is It?’, *Global Challenges*, 7 (April 2020), <<https://globalchallenges.ch/issue/7/multilateralism-is-in-crisis-or-is-it>>.

<sup>iii</sup> Multilateralism consists of sets of rules and norms that countries agree to follow in their relations with others. It also consists of institutions especially set up to ensure those norms are respected and at the same time to organize the collaboration between nations.

<sup>iv</sup> Dolgin, Elie. ‘The Tangled History of mRNA Vaccines’, *Nature*, 597/7876, (2021), pp. 318-324, <<https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-021-02483-w>>.

<sup>v</sup> Bruce Jones and Alexandre Marc, ‘The New Geopolitics of Fragility: Russia, China and the Mounting Challenge for Peacebuilding’, Project on International Order and Strategy, (Washington D.C.: Brookings, 2021), <[www.brookings.edu/research/the-new-geopolitics-of-fragility-russia-china-and-the-mounting-challenge-for-peacebuilding](http://www.brookings.edu/research/the-new-geopolitics-of-fragility-russia-china-and-the-mounting-challenge-for-peacebuilding)>.

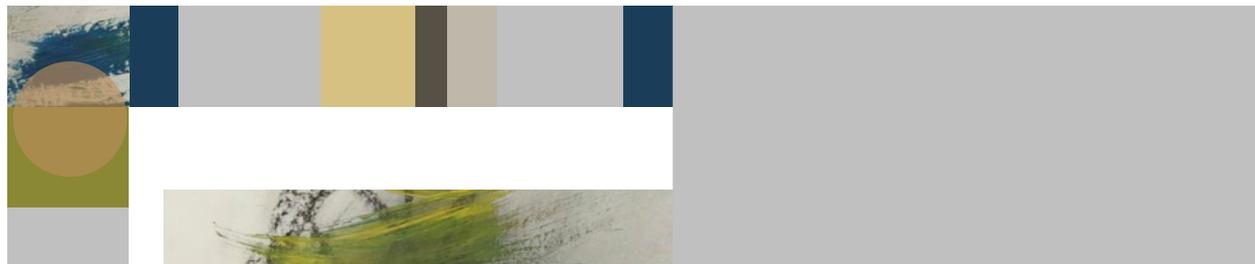
<sup>vi</sup> United Nations and World Bank, ‘Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict’, (Washington, D.C: World Bank, 2018).



Zaid Hussein  
*Portrait*  
Zataari Camp

# Chapter Two

The portrait: Drawing out principled leadership traits



How dare you? BY KATE GILMORE .....	42
Youth leadership in action BY VICTOR OCHEN .....	52
Ethical leadership: The power of principles, purpose, values and the human touch BY HELMUT BUSS .....	57
Integrity and ethical leadership: Enhancing the UN's role in the world BY ADAMA DIENG .....	63



# How dare you?

BY KATE GILMORE



Melad Bassam Al-Ghazali  
*Portrait in green and blue*  
Azraq Camp



**Kate Gilmore** is a Professor-in-Practice at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and Honorary Professor at the University of Essex and Chair of the Board of International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), Vice Chair of the Interpeace Board and member of the World Health Organization Human Reproduction Programme Gender and Rights Advisory Panel. After working as the Executive Deputy Secretary General of Amnesty International she was United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights and Assistant Secretary General and Deputy Executive Director of the UN Population Fund.

■ When addressing the 2019 UN Climate Conference, Greta Thunberg demanded of world leaders failing to address the climate crisis decisively, simply: *'How dare you!'*: *'... People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction. And all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!'*<sup>i</sup>

*'How dare you!'* stands out. An exclamation of acute frustration, the phrase can also be more interrogative, meaning something akin to: 'How do you dare do what you do?' It's a leading question and a question for all leaders.

Thunberg's pungent assessments give words to what millions feel, yet few dare articulate. Her summation that, in response to the climate crisis, world leadership is just so much *'blah blah blah'*<sup>ii</sup> is perhaps her best known, but *'how dare you!'* is a clarion call, striking an alarm bell whose peal should resound far and wide.

Greta Thunberg herself is a global leader. As yet she holds neither high-level office nor post-graduate credentials. She oversees no institution and has no institutional resources to deploy. Nonetheless, she dares lead. Initially, she did so by the sheer moral force of her example. Then it grew and spread from there into what is now a global platform of action – 'Fridays for the Future'.<sup>iii</sup> As a result of her daring, Thunberg has inspired and mobilised hundreds of thousands of her peers, and others, the world over.

If her gaze was to turn to leaders' efforts to address other global threats, would her assessment, or that of her peers, be any different? Their assessment of leaders' efforts for poverty eradication, or to end vaccine nationalism? Of efforts to eradicate inequalities, eliminate discrimination, end impunity, reject armed conflict or to establish effective governance of new technologies and of new weaponry?

Those are interconnected global concerns too of course, and increasingly so: interconnected one with the other, and entangled now with the global climate crisis also. And all their warning signs are flashing red-hot. With the Doom's Day Clock<sup>iv</sup> set at just 100 seconds to midnight, Thunberg's challenge should already be heeded more broadly beyond the few seated at the UN's top decision-making tables, important as those leaders are.

### How dare we?

How dare we lead? During accelerating global crises exacting awful local costs? When, thanks to man-made exploitation, natural resources are rapidly shrinking<sup>v</sup> yet evidence mounts daily of our interdependence with other species and their habitats?<sup>vi</sup> When commitments to resolve inequalities' historical and structural injustices – between and within countries – evaporate,<sup>vii</sup> yet public and private funding for new arms races, even newer space-races, escalate?<sup>viii</sup> When UN goals for sustainable development are trumped by national goals for economic growth – for inequality-deepening, unsustainable growth?<sup>ix</sup>

How dare UN leaders do what is needed now and for tomorrow? How dare they lead in the interests of generations to follow, not merely for the generation to which they belong? What makes for 'daring' leadership of the kind that our world of accelerating change needs, but is so often left wanting? The research suggests that leadership daring is not about more risk-taking; it's not more dare-devilry. Rather, as a positive state, daring is the combination of *moral courage* and *inner strength*; qualities on which the exercise of *ethical* or *principled* leadership depends; qualities in high demand when uncertainty is high too.<sup>xi</sup>

*Daring* should be a quality for which UN leaders are selected and elevated and that UN organisations should

foster, encourage, and reward. It raises a fundamental question: Is *daring* embedded sufficiently in the UN's human resources, management, and leadership systems? Is *daring* discernibly part and parcel of the operational policies and practices that govern leader selection, performance assessment, professional development, reward and advance? It should be. After all, in essence, that's what the 'UN System Leadership Framework' promises.<sup>xii</sup>

But *daring* is not just some esoteric characteristic. Guideposts for its exercise can be quite practical. Daring leaders will go wherever evidence-based assessment of critical issues and their contributory factors leads.

Apply up-to-date technical knowledge and pay close attention to applicable values and standards, policies, regulations as well as the law. Refer to, but don't mindlessly defer to, relevant precedents. Identify and consult with groups most affected by the decisions to be made. Be frank about the available options and their various likely consequences. In *daring*, leadership and self-examination is key.

Honestly probe inner fears and desires to guard against distortions out of ego and self-interest. Sustain your energy and maintain the focus needed to stay the course. Take responsibility for whatever actions you take and be prepared to be held accountable for that. Monitor implementation and evaluate it transparently, so that any distances between the actual, as compared to the intended, outcomes are revealed and examined.<sup>xiii</sup>

In other words, opportunities for UN leaders to be more *daring* present daily. But the reality is that leading is rarely that systematic. It is frequently an amorphous and fragmented business. Often dispersed across issues, forums, systems and colleagues, and then exercised in sequences, that all combine to undermine systematic approaches. This can work to drive a leader away from loyalty to the best outcomes. On top of that, often leaders' decisions must be taken quickly without the time to process them in more ideal ways. Frequently decisions must be made without sufficient, or even despite conflicting, information and under stressful and pressurised organisational and political circumstances.

That's why the personal and professional idiosyncrasies of the individual leader matter.<sup>xiv</sup> Indeed, fostering *daring* in leaders may be less about decision-making logic or frameworks and more about a leader's moral posture and demeanour or, what the research calls, their *moral courage* and *inner strength*.

The exercise of *daring* requires moral courage. That in turn depends on *inner strength*, which is the fuel of leaders who dare.

### **Moral courage**

*Moral courage* is not a calculus of the danger to be faced, nor is it feeling less fear. It is not reduced to one's own moral code, or personal judgement as to the *morality* of an issue. Rather, it involves a leader's *moral clarity* about the

*Box 1: An account of leadership by the CEO of US energy giant Enron, the subject in 2001 of the world's largest ever bankruptcy case (Mclean, B., Elkind, P.; The smartest Guys in the Room: The amazing Rise and Scandalous Fall of Enron; Penguin, 2013, pg. 3).*

'[the CEO] was a hard man not to like. His deliberately ... modest manner... built a deep reservoir of goodwill among those who worked for him. He remembered names, listened earnestly, seemed to care about what you thought. But ... He cared deeply about appearances, he wanted people to like him, and he avoided the sort of tough decisions that were certain to make others mad. His top executives ... knew that as long as they steered clear of a few sacred cows, they could do whatever they wanted. And as we all know, many of them did'.

*Box 2: Concluding passage to the German Bundestag, Yehuda Bauer, 27 January 1988. See: <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191826719.001.0001/q-oro-ed4-00000799>*

**'Thou shall not be a perpetrator, thou shall not be a victim, and thou shall never, but never, be a bystander'.**

depths of the wrongs they are to right – such as the wrongs of rights abused or betrayed. The deeper those wrongs, the more *daring* the leadership should be.

The word '*courage*' has its root in '*cor*', the Latin for '*heart*'. Its original meaning was not a rallying cry to heroics, but an invocation to '*speak one's mind by telling one's heart*'.<sup>xv</sup> For UN leaders, *courage* thus is both the taking the UN's moral code to heart, and the speaking up clearly for it. That code is made explicit by the UN Charter, set out in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and has been elaborated upon, over decades, in human rights treaties, declarations, and countless resolutions of the General Assembly.

*Daring* UN leaders are those that can not only clearly see the crossroads between right(s) and wrong(s), as defined by that code. They are those who have the courage to turn always towards right(s), even if doing so is against their own comfort, preference or self-interest eg their popularity or future prospects for elevation.

When, UN leaders are not *daring*, dissonance is created with the organisation's values and, arguably, its aims and purposes. When such contradiction is visible to others, the risks of damage to the UN's credibility, and thus its effectiveness, further mounts. That said, it is the *immoral* leader alone who wreaks havoc. As high-profile cases elsewhere demonstrate, an immoral leader's misconduct or mendaciousness may even unite others in clearer opposition to just that.

However, if as they navigate complexity, leaders opt to remain silent or avoid communicating about values, norms, and standards; are indirect or inconsistent in their application of those principles in their daily work? While they may not be *immoral* as such, they are likely to be seen to be *amoral*.<sup>xvi</sup>

*Amoral* leaders – those not anchored discernibly in values, who act with indifference to core principles or who invent their own to suit themselves – do more than discourage principled, courageous efforts by others.<sup>xvii</sup> In other settings, such leaders have been found to act as vectors for the spread of unprincipled conduct.<sup>xviii</sup>

Particularly, in workplaces where values are core to their organisation's identity, as is the case for the UN, leaders whose posture or approach is devoid of, or ambiguous about, their organisation's values are likely to be detrimental to staff, systems, and results.<sup>xix</sup>

That's a challenge for the UN, and specifically for its civil service. The UN cannot afford to have leaders treat its values as accessories: adorned for special occasions but discarded in operations' daily settings. Values don't work only performatively: displayed if convenient to do so, but then muted, distorted, or betrayed when politics or circumstances so entice. For the sake of the system's inherent integrity, to better limit a broader sweep and reach of unethical conduct, UN leaders – without exception – should dare to demonstrate, quotidian and in both word and deed, an unambiguous, and unwavering adherence to the values and norms on which the UN, by Charter, is founded. That is not some lofty, idealistic expectation; it is a signpost towards greater impact.

How does – how might – the UN better foster, encourage, and reward *moral courage* in its leaders; the courage to dare to adhere to fully to its core values? How is '*speaking one's mind by telling one's heart*' valued among and by UN leaders?

### **Inner strength**

*Moral courage* is not enough on its own.<sup>xx</sup> For *daring* in leadership, *inner strength* is also essential. If both moral courage and inner strength coexist within a leader, the

*Box 3: Thomson, C.J., 'How could Vietnam happen? An autopsy', The Atlantic, April 1968, as cited by Applebaum, A., 'History will judge the complicit', The Atlantic, July/August 2020.*

When the war in Vietnam was going badly, many people did not resign or speak out in public, because preserving their 'effectiveness' – 'a mysterious combination of training, style, and connections', as Thomson defined it – was an all-consuming concern. He called this 'the effectiveness trap'.

research suggests not only is a leader's own behaviour likely to be more ethical, but so too is that of those they lead. Furthermore, a leader's 'in-role' performance is found to improve and, intriguingly, it also helps foster 'psychological flourishing' for all.<sup>xxi</sup>

The inner strength to resist opting for the merely popular or conventional, to speak up where others are silent, to stand up when even superiors fail to, to confront rather than concede to the system's sponsors – to its funders or political partners; to resist those who by power of their influence would purchase compromise of principles: in such times, for UN leaders, *moral courage* is a GPS by which to chart principled pathways, but *inner strength* is fuel for the journey.<sup>xxii</sup>

The courage to perform – consistently and visibly – to standards requires the capacity (and the effort) to stay strong within oneself – to attain, maintain, and sustain for the duration, well-being, including mental well-being. If a leader's well-being depletes, their inner strength or resolve is more likely to weaken. A weakened resolve means a weakened ability to '*resist ... temptation and to stand up and take action against ... the wrong thing*'.<sup>xxiii</sup> That's a timely reminder of the relatively untapped contribution that well-being (and its absence) makes to workplaces, and a pointed message about the importance of leaders taking (and being seen to take) active personal responsibility also for their own well-being, no matter the level at which they serve.

This is a long-neglected dimension of leadership, nonetheless research now concludes that the key to the personal well-being on which inner strength depends, is self-care. Training and coaching can help a leader develop the required self-care skills to prevent depletion and renew

inner strength; to build up '*moral muscle*'.<sup>xxiv</sup> Taking a practical approach to self-care also matters. Such as getting enough rest, maintaining fitness and building a quality of lifestyle. Even sustaining blood glucose levels have been found '*to help preserve reserves of self-control for ethical leaders*'.<sup>xxv</sup> Support systems play an important part too. Working with the help of '*Aides, associates, friends or family members who will save us from ourselves*'.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Daring again can be quite a practical matter. It involves the desire or the will '*to generate responsibility and motivation to take moral action in the face of adversity and persevere through challenges*'.<sup>xxvii</sup> Thus, it is not only a question of the courage to follow wherever UN principles lead, but of perseverance in doing so by sustaining the inner strength for the tough journey's *daring* demands. That said, *daring* is also 'ecological'. It's not just about individual leaders alone. The fuller challenge, to generate UN leadership better suited to our times, involves the organisation itself and the expectations it has of its leadership. As Gifford et al put it, leadership is not merely about the quality of the 'apples', but of the 'barrels' that hold them and the contexts or 'situations' they are expected to confront.<sup>xxviii</sup> To paraphrase: Is an absence of *daring* the result of:

- *Bad apples?* ie, individuals making bad choices, OR
- *A bad barrel?* ie, a systemic or organisation-wide failure or culture of ingrained behaviour? OR
- *Sticky situations?* ie, the difficult, often compromising, nature of decisions that leaders so frequently face?<sup>xxix</sup>

### **In leadership - the barrel matters, not just the apples**

The 'barrel' matters. If the organisation's policies, instructions, and technical guidance are ambiguous about

the application of values or otherwise undermines their exercise, then the UN's leaders' and its staff's loyalty to those principles is set adrift. If the organisation's culture is to encourage and reward only 'yes-people' rather than the daring, or fails to signal clearly that it 'has the back' of its leaders when they stand up for principles, or fails to provide clear and accessible protections if leaders face threats, intimidation and bullying of the kind for which some Member States are infamous, then again it is *daring* that will be among the first casualties.<sup>xxx</sup>

As will be the case where the informal culture frowns on or belittles efforts to promote well-being, or it means a lack of disciplined action by leaders and all staff to sustain their well-being.

Furthermore, UN leaders are, of course, also the led. What they see when they look 'up' is important to what they demand when they look 'down' the hierarchy. To propel all leaders to greater daring, a visibly strong and constant alignment, and cascade of expectation consistent with *daring*, is needed across all levels, from the top executives to front-line staff.<sup>xxxI</sup> And for that, it would be wise to ramp up investment in selecting, training and commissioning both the led and their leaders to speak up about the organisation's values confidently and not selectively.

To find ways to engage consistently with the organisation's values and norms and to apply them coherently, particularly in the 'sticky situations' - the sensitive or complex or controversial situations - that so often fall under the purview of UN leaders.

It would also be smart to strengthen integration of affirmative expectations of and support for mental and physical well-being among all leaders across the system and at all duty stations.

## **Sticky situations are no excuse; they are why we need daring leaders**

However, it is situational complexity - or the 'stickiness' of situations that UN leaders confront - which frequently is offered in excuse for their compromises on values. Human rights concerns, for example, may be deemed too 'sensitive' or 'controversial' to raise with those in power. Upholding UN values in the messages of formal demarche may be deemed too confronting. That a Member State or development partner will be open to advice based on core principles, rather than expediency, may be dismissed as unrealistic. But are those moments more a question of smart tactics or strategy, rather than unassailable grounds on which to justify a betrayal of principles? When is self-censorship just self-comforting?

Simple and routine situations do not need leaders. Once the technical guidance is in place and the priority has been set, most good people can lead themselves perfectly well. However, it is precisely in the 'stickiest situations' that leadership moments emerge - moments requiring daring leadership that is.

Look out for the leadership moments that sticky situations offer. Be alert to and create and expand those spaces to make a difference; spaces to be prised open wherever cracks are found in dense walls of resistance and '*There is a crack, a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in, where the light gets in.*'<sup>xxxII</sup>

## **For whom are we daring to lead?**

For moral courage there must be moral purpose. For moral purpose to propel forward, it must be rooted in a moral consequence or, in other words, in moral accountability. It is here, that the UN has, if you like, a 'superpower': a

*Box 4: Dag Hammarskjöld as cited by Erling B., 'A reader's guide to Dag Hammarskjöld's Waymarks', Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 2011, pg. 58.*

**'It's a deeply personal question ... The longest journey is the journey inwards. Of him who has chosen his destiny, who has started upon his quest, for the source of his being'.**

powerful energy to be handled with care. That superpower is contained in the answer to a tough question: *'To whom are UN leaders ultimately accountable?'*

Most organisations accept the need for financial accountability to donors or investors; programme accountability to partners; the accountability of the subordinate to the bosses. Audited accounts, annual reports, executive boards, 360-degree performance appraisals: all play their part at the UN, but none addresses that deeper question. To whom are the UN leaders morally answerable for their legacy – that which they create, those whom their decisions affect, what they leave behind? How is that answerability manifested, managed, and adjudicated in the UN?

The UN's Charter opens not with *'We the Member States'* or *'We the Donors'*. It does not open with *'We the Development Partners'* or *'We the Leaders'* or *'We the International Civil Servants'*. It opens, of course, with *'We the Peoples'*. How is their distinctive authority – the authority of the peoples of the world – as voiced by the UN Charter – distinctively manifested?

The UN's politicians may consider it redundant, if not outright problematic, to attempt to channel the organisation's accountability directly to the world's peoples rather than only through Member States' representatives eg the diplomats or national ministers of the governments of the day. But *daring* UN leaders should understand their ultimate accountability to be rooted differently. Programmatically, for example, ultimate accountability starts and ends with intensive efforts to ask, listen, and take on board as mission-critical, the opinions, preferences, and choices of the beneficiaries whom UN programmes serve. In both humanitarian and development settings, appreciating that targeted populations are rights-holders is thus an obligation of the first order. The UN is a duty-

bearer, for whom adherence to norms, standards, evidence, and transparency of action to those whose lives it affects must surely be its bread and butter.

When a doctor loses sight of their patients' needs, and answers first or only to income? When a lawyer cares less for the rights of their client and more about their billable hours? When a journalist worries more about social media hits than about authoring factual copy? When a UN leader lobbies for the award of a more senior post in answer for long service, seeking to bypass competitive and impartial selection? When a UN leader is elevated to higher leadership, not on merit, but because their home country or a regional grouping insisted upon it? Does each scenario not reveal a similar troubling failing: a failure to remain loyal foremost to those whom leaders are duty bound to serve first?

The driving force that can most powerfully congeal a courageous ecology for daring in UN leadership is surely to be found in a clear, unambiguous answer to the question of *'On whose behalf do we dare to lead?'* Its practical tests should be rooted in such as *'Whose assessment of us matters the most?'* A much-needed development within UN practice and methodologies is just that. The placement of more investment of resources, time, and effort in direct and material accountability to those whom it serves as expressed in *'We the Peoples'*. In addition, far greater use should be made of the results of those efforts as tangible evidence of the moral authority that the UN can then choose to wield authentically as a 'superpower' – the UN's unmatched moral accountability which converts to true authority, if fulfilled.

## Conclusion

When among the world's 'top' leaders, and their pretenders waiting in the wings, there are so many willing to treat



The UN's Charter opens not with *'We the Member States'* or *'We the Donors'*. It does not open with *'We the Development Partners'* or *'We the Leaders'* or *'We the International Civil Servants'*. It opens, of course, with *'We the Peoples'*. How is their distinctive authority - the authority of the peoples of the world - as voiced by the UN Charter - distinctively manifested?

Box 5: Baldwin, J., 7 January 1971, 'Open letter to my sister, Miss Angela Davies', *The New York Review*

'... If we know, then we must fight for your life as though it were our own— which it is—and render impassable with our bodies the corridor to the gas chamber. For, if they take you in the morning, they will be coming for us that night'.

universal norms and legal standards, fact and science, not as guide-stars, but like poker-chips in a populist power game; when global decision-making tables are intentionally enfeebled and, in every region, nativist nationalism is on the rise: How dare we lead?

We should not forget that the UN was forged in tough, not prosperous, times. It was forged amidst global chaos and under the shadow of the very worst that human beings can do to one another. Its authors were not realistic, they were *daring*. Which realist would have ever drafted the UDHR?

In our times - crisis and anxiety ridden, unpredictable times - it is time to repurpose UN leadership more coherently and comprehensively to do exactly as the UN Charter promises - to be daring. In fulfilment of that mission, leadership is not rank, it is responsibility.

But take heart. In darkest of hours, at the worst of times, with the future threatened more than inspired and although self-interest pulled hard away towards self-comfort, there are still those who chose to dare. How dared they?

In South Africa, medical student and anti-Apartheid activist Steve Biko dared lead. He was repeatedly imprisoned and ultimately killed in detention for organising resistance to his country's racially segregated healthcare system; a segregation that can be traced back to the 1900's outbreak of the bubonic plague.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Biko dared leading and lost his life nearly two decades before the world saw a post-Apartheid South Africa.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

British physician Judith Mackay dared lead. Among the first to speak up against the dangers of smoking, she was publicly branded 'psychotic human garbage' and a 'power-lusting piece of meat' by those multinational tobacco companies

who helped to fund multi-million dollar campaigns to discredit her and her research.<sup>xxxv</sup> She dared lead us to understand that public health for all matters so much more than profits for the few.

In February of 2021, a Russian police captain dared to resign rather than obey orders to restrain and detain those peacefully protesting state corruption and impunity: '*I am ashamed to wear this uniform because I realize it is covered in blood*,' he said, tossing it into a dumpster. He dared lead us to appreciate the rule of law as protection of the rights of the people, not protection of the interests of the powerful.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

They all used what little power they had and, against great odds, in the toughest of situations, dared to lead. So we can't say that we didn't know. For they have shown us. If, for all the reasons that Greta Thunberg and other youth leaders implore us to, we dare to lead courageously, and sustain our strength to do so, we too will lay down daring footsteps that others can follow. But it's okay not to be daring. Not everyone has what it takes. But if you know you are not made for daring, please don't dare lead.<sup>xxxvii</sup> ■

## Endnotes

<sup>I</sup> Greta Thunberg, 'If world leaders choose to fail us, my generation will never forgive them', *The Guardian*, 23 September 2019, <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/sep/23/world-leaders-generation-climate-breakdown-greta-thunberg>>.

<sup>II</sup> Damian Carrington, 'Blah, blah, blah: Greta Thunberg lambasts leaders over climate crisis', *The Guardian*, 28 September 2021, <<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/sep/28/blah-greta-thunberg-leaders-climate-crisis-co2-emissions>>.

<sup>III</sup> See: <<https://fridaysforfuture.org/>>.

<sup>IV</sup> 'At doom's doorstep: It is 100 seconds to midnight', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 20 January 2022, <<https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/>>.

<sup>V</sup> See, for example: Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), 'Shrinking Natural Resources, Rising Insecurity Leading to Dire Situation in Sahel, Speakers Tell Meeting of Economic and Social Council, Peacebuilding Commission See, for example, United Nations Press Release, 13 November 2018, <<https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/ecosoc6951.doc.htm>>.

<sup>VI</sup> See, for example: Nathan Deutsch 'Human Dependency on Nature Framework: Qualitative Approaches Background Study.' *People in Nature*, working paper No. 1 (Gland, Switzerland: IUCN and CEESP, 2014), <<https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/PIN-WP-001.pdf>>.

<sup>VII</sup> See, for example, Lucas Chancel, Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman, 'World Inequality Report', *World Inequality Lab* (United Nations Development Program, 2022), <[https://wir2022.wid.world/www-site/uploads/2021/12/Summary\\_WorldInequalityReport2022\\_English.pdf](https://wir2022.wid.world/www-site/uploads/2021/12/Summary_WorldInequalityReport2022_English.pdf)>.

<sup>VIII</sup> See, for example, Herbert Wulf, 'Not even the pandemic could stop the arms race', *International Politics and Society*, 13 March 2021, <<https://www.ips-journal.eu/topics/foreign-and-security-policy/on-the-way-to-an-arms-race-and-a-new-cold-war-5096/>>.

<sup>IX</sup> See, for example: Ronald Labonté, 'A Post-Covid Economy for Health: From the Great Reset to Build Back Differently', *BMJ* (Online) 376, (2022), pp. e068126-e068126, <<https://doi-org.ezproxy.its.uu.se/10.1136/bmj-2021-068126>>.

<sup>X</sup> John J. Sosik, Jae Uk Chun, Ziya Ete, Fil J. Arenas

and Joel A. Scherer, 'Self-Control Puts Character into Action: Examining how Leader Character Strengths and Ethical Leadership Relate to Leader Outcomes', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 160/3, (2019;), pp. 765-781, <<https://doi-org.ezproxy.its.uu.se/10.1007/s10551-018-3908-0>>.

<sup>XI</sup> Margie Warrell, 'It's Time For Leaders to Be Daring. Not All Will Take The Leap', *Forbes*, 19 June 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/margiewarrell/2021/06/19/this-is-a-time-for-leaders-to-be-more-daring-not-all-will-be-brave-enough-will-you/?sh=14df604c6e23>.

<sup>XII</sup> Craig Mokhiber, 'The price of compromise', in *The Art of Leadership in the United Nations: Framing What's Blue*, (Uppsala: Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 2020), <[https://www.daghammarskjold.se/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/un\\_leadership\\_2020.pdf#page=16](https://www.daghammarskjold.se/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/un_leadership_2020.pdf#page=16), pp. 16-19.

<sup>XIII</sup> See for example: R. Rocco Cottone., & Ronald E. Claus, 'Ethical decision-making models: A review of the literature', *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 78/3, pp. 275-283 <<https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2000.tb01908.x>>.

<sup>XIV</sup> See for example: Brenda Nguyen and Mary Crossan, 'Character-Infused Ethical Decision Making', *Journal of Business Ethics* 3 (2021), <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-021-04790-8>>.

<sup>XV</sup> Brené Brown, *The gifts of imperfection: let go of who you think you're supposed to be and embrace who you are* (Center City: Hazelden Publishing, 2010), pg. 32.

<sup>XVI</sup> Rebecca L. Greenbaum, Matthew J. Quade, and Julena Bonner, 'Why do Leaders Practice Amoral Management? A Conceptual Investigation of the Impediments to Ethical Leadership', *Organizational Psychology Review*, 5/1,(2015), pp. 26-49, <<https://doi-org.ezproxy.its.uu.se/10.1177/2041386614533587>>.

<sup>XVII</sup> Leslie E. Sekerka, and Richard P. Bagozzi, 'Moral Courage in the Workplace: Moving to and from the Desire and Decision to Act', *Business Ethics* (Oxford, England), 16/2, (2007), pp. 132-149, DOI: [10.1007/s10551-008-0017-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-008-0017-5).

<sup>XVIII</sup> Bird, Frederick B., and James A. Waters. 'The Moral Muteness of Managers', *California Management Review*, vol. 32/no. 1, (1989), pp. 73-88, DOI: 10.2307/41166735.

<sup>xxix</sup> Matthew J. Quade, Julena M. Bonner, Rebecca L. Greenbaum, 'Management without morals: Construct development and initial testing of amoral management', *Human Relations*, 75(2):273-303, <<https://doi-org.ezproxy.its.uu.se/10.1177/0018726720972784>>; Bilal Afsar, Asad Shahjehan, Sajjad Ahmad Afridi, Syed Imad Shah, Bilal Bin Saeed and Shakir Hafeez, 'How Moral Efficacy and Moral Attentiveness Moderate the Effect of Abusive Supervision on Moral Courage?', *Economic Research - Ekonomska Istraživanja*, 32/1, (2019), pp. 3437-3456, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/1331677X.2019.1663437>>.

<sup>xx</sup> Martin Hagger, Chantelle Wood, Chris Stiff, Nikos Chatzirantis, 'Ego Depletion and the Strength Model of Self-Control: A Meta-Analysis', *Psychological Bulletin*, 136/4, (2010), pp. 495-525, <<https://doi-org.ezproxy.its.uu.se/10.1037/a0019486>>.

<sup>xxi</sup> Sosik J. J. et al, *ibid.*.

<sup>xxii</sup> Global Positioning System.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Sean T. Hannah, Bruce J. Avolio, and Douglas R. May, 'Moral Maturation and Moral Conation: A Capacity Approach to Explaining Moral Thought and Action', *The Academy of Management Review*, 36/4, (2011), pp. 663-685, DOI: [10.5465/AMR.2011.65554674](https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.2011.65554674).

<sup>xxiv</sup> Roy F. Baumeister and Julie Joula Exline, 'Self-Control, Morality, and Human Strength', *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 19/1 (2000), pp. 29-42, DOI: [10.1521/jscp.2000.19.1.29](https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2000.19.1.29).

<sup>xxv</sup> Matthew T. Gailliot, Roy F. Baumeister, Nathan C. DeWall, Jon K. Maner, E. Ashby Plant, Dianne M. Tice, Lauren E. Brewer, and Brandon J. Schmeiche, 'Self-control Relies on Glucose as a Limited Energy Source: Will Power is More than a Metaphor' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, DOI: 92(2), 325-336; 2007.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Marta Lagace, 'Beware the Leader' citing Barbara Kellerman; Harvard Business School: Working Knowledge, 27 September 2004, <<https://hbswk.hbs.edu/archive/beware-the-bad-leader>>.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Hannah et al, *ibid.*, p. 664

<sup>xxviii</sup> Jonny Gifford, Melanie Green, Eric Barends, Barbara Janssen, Alessandra Capezio, and Paul Nguyen N, 'Rotten apples, bad barrels and sticky situations: an

evidence review of unethical workplace behaviour' (Australian National University and Centre for Evidence-Based Management 2019), <[https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/unethical-behaviour-in-the-workplace\\_report-2\\_tcm18-57022.pdf](https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/unethical-behaviour-in-the-workplace_report-2_tcm18-57022.pdf)>.

<sup>xxix</sup> Gifford et al., *ibid.*, borrowing from their definitions of the terms at p. 3.

<sup>xxx</sup> See, for example: Kate Gilmore, 'Without Fear or Favour?', in *100 Years of International Civil Service* no. 6 (Uppsala: Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 2019), <<https://www.daghammarskjold.se/publication/without-fear-or-favour/>>.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Quade et al., *ibid.*, pp 275-277

<sup>xxxii</sup> Leonard Cohen, 'Anthem' from the album 'The Future', 1992, Columbia Records.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> See: 'Three cases of Bubonic plague are reported in Cape Town', South African History Online, <<https://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/three-cases-bubonic-plague-are-reported-cape-town>>.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Steve Biko Foundation, 'Steve Biko, The Black Consciousness Movement. The SASO, BCP & BPC Years', n/d, <<https://artsandculture.google.com/story/GQWBgt1iWh4A8A?hl=en>>.

<sup>xxxv</sup> Judith Mackay, 'Feminist, subversive and a challenge to Big Tobacco', Dangerous Women Project, 11 August 2016, <<https://dangerouswomenproject.org/2016/08/11/judith-mackay/>>.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Marc Bennetts, 'They're going to frame me, says Russian officer who quit in disgust', The Times, 16 February 2021, <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/policeman-who-quit-over-alexei-navalny-violence-fears-he-will-be-framed-lx6bwtl0f>>.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Agence France-Presse, 'Shoot me instead': Myanmar nun's plea to spare the protesters', The Guardian, 9 March 2021, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/09/shoot-me-instead-myanmar-nuns-plea-to-spare-protesters>>.

# Youth leadership in action

BY VICTOR OCHEN

The Portrait



Ibrahim Ali Al-Abed  
*Portrait*  
Azraq Camp



*Victor Ochen is the Founder and Executive Director for African Youth Initiative Network (AYINET) and United Nations Goodwill Ambassadors for Peace and Justice representing SDG Goal 16. He is also a member to the Global Advisory group to the UNHCR on Gender, Forced Displacement and Protection. Ugandan by birth, Ochen spent 21 years as a refugee in his own country where at 13 he founded the Peace Club while living in an internal displacement camp. This initiative worked as a counter movement against child soldier recruitment in the armed conflict between the government and the Lord Resistance Army. Through his activism in societal healing and social transformation, he has provided reconstructive medical rehabilitation to 21,000+ war victims. His life work and worldviews are based on the principles of peace, morality and a common humanity.*

### ■ Long-term goal consumed by immediate needs

As someone growing up amidst violent conflict in northern Uganda in the 1980s, it shouldn't come as a surprise if my perspective of the United Nations comes from a historical struggle element which takes into account the complexity of progress. I am a survivor and witness of the late 20th and early 21st centuries' torment of war and injustice, and so during my childhood the world always appeared on the brink of destruction.

Everywhere I looked there was fear and suffering, one more conflict turned into another, always us versus them. It left me wondering if humanity could ever live together as one. I was exposed to an inevitable and unfortunate fact of life that we are often mistreated by others: nations, leaders, tribes, families and individuals too. But my mother who had very little education, taught me that God created all men equal and diversity is a mercy and a blessing. It is her belief that we have many people, religions as well as ways of life and it comes down to tolerance. She always emphasised that there is so much that we are yet to know about others and must learn to see beyond our differences and live in peace with one another.

I saw truth in her words as communities helplessly struggled for decades to support each other during devastating wars. I watched families comforting one another in the midst of unbearable pain and agony after their children were abducted, killed or recruited as child soldiers.

The collective power of poor people standing up and raising their voices, condemning war being waged by politicians remains forever loud in my heart. It was at the peak of war that I first heard about the UN.

Repeatedly hearing people cry that the UN was a body that was supposed to help people in war situations, but they were not present in northern Uganda then. It appeared as if we were suffering from a forgotten war. I hope to resist oversimplifying the history and rather condense a combination of reality, both historic and present with its challenges, unexpected curves, and the failures of humanity and the UN.

It is worth noting that the majority of the global population are now the generations born after 1945. And, perhaps close to three-quarters of the planetary population is a quarter of the age of the UN. There have been tremendous leaps in human progress over the last decades, pretty much driven and influenced by leadership and innovation from a younger cohort. This generational shift in leadership, power and influence will continue, and it would be pragmatic and realistic for the UN to step up. It should embrace the shift and collaborate with the new era of social, political and economic leadership. This could be a tactful way to match the new generational needs and leverage their technological innovation for greater global goods.

### UN leadership, power and influence

Overall, this argument may reflect the fundamental difference in the generational outlook of the UN. As an African, it is often difficult to navigate the relationship we have with global institutions such as the UN. We understand that relationships with such institutions are critical. Conversely for the UN to get its desired outcomes it is important to understand how it subsequently affects the interpretation and ownership of the UN by the younger generations. I observe and learn that so many are



now left wondering about racial identity, religion as well as the generational gaps. It seems like a majority in Africa feel the UN is representing the face of Europe, North America and to some extent Asia; maybe to put it in simple terms the 'UN is white'.

At the same time the young generation think the UN is meant to serve older people, because of the dominant older generation leadership. Perhaps even to the population of the global south namely Africa, South-East Asia and Latin and South America, the UN is a representative of the global north. Despite all these ideas, the leadership of the UN in peacekeeping and humanitarian interventions are appreciated by the local communities. Even when their work has time and again continued to face widespread criticisms from local authorities, governments and technical experts. Particularly those communities who feel that the UN does not have sufficient capacity to mediate the current need for world peace.

In building on the legacy of its 70-year existence, the UN can and must work to avoid only embracing higher-level thinking dominated by the global north, but deliberately nurture and bring on board the new generations. Exploring the ideas of a leadership with deeper understanding of the UN vision, mission, mandates, treaties, conventions and declarations is critical. One cannot wonder if a general lack of inclusion results in a world order where the gruesome televised beheading of humanitarian aid workers, use of rape as tools of war and attacks on UN missions which we have witnessed recently. Is this simply because young people in these regions don't know the rules of engagement?

### **Lack of unity at the UN**

Several community discussions among young generations across Africa has manifested that while the UN remains the only global body, it remains an institution being held hostage by western interests.<sup>1</sup> There are those key moments when the UN has been very promising, but there are areas that could be regarded as successive failures. Of course, like any institution, the UN sometimes appears to do things that seems to be morally wrong or impermissible, but for which the institution is maybe not blameworthy.

There seem to be an undeniable growing anxiety among young African leaders about the future of the UN

especially if to date the UN feels the entire continent of Africa is still not good enough to have a permanent seat of representation at the UN Security Council. The conversations and platforms are abuzz with ideas and views that it is no longer about economic might, military or political power anymore but a racial and historical discrimination against African people. With the new generation under pressure to address this global inequality, there is a risk of future African departure from meaningful engagement with the UN for an alternative institution that pays attention to their interests. An example is when in 2019, one of the permanent members of the UN Security Council organised an Africa – 'Country A' summit nearly in parallel with the September UN General Assembly and more the 60% of African Presidents did not attend the UNGA but went to the summit. The fear is that similar actions of such a nature may purposely undermine the UN.<sup>11</sup>

Another element to consider is the belief that repeated lack of political consensus at the UN seems to be a tradition and counterproductive. In many cases it manifests as symptoms of a general lack of UN capacity and this keeps the UN in survival mode. To the younger generations, the UN's tactical and strategic decisions seem to be inconsistent and the depth of disagreement is sometimes too divisive and unhelpful in resolving and responding to the crises at hand.

The power to veto is only vested in the hands of the few and seems to be abused as some nations with such powers fight whenever and against whomever they want. The youth would prefer the use of such power to veto wars and not to sanction war, particularly those societies around the world especially in the global south who carry scars from conflicts and having lived in hope of UN decisions.

We are aware of how much people around the world look up to the UN. It is not yet too late for the it to find a path forward by looking back throughout a history that has generated positive change and evaluate its success. The UN can be realistic, rather than idealistic in nature, and we can ground our discussion about the UN's messy struggle for a better future by embracing the necessity of real work and focusing on the issue of disintegration.

By doing an analysis of the political, historical, military and humanitarian dimensions of the UN in a coherent way the emphasis on UN leadership alone is incomplete. The



**The beauty of the diversity enshrined in the UN would only require the best leadership in UN at all levels to inspire the best of human progress rooted in strength, humility and tolerance.**

key focus should be on UN successes: taking in the lessons from the failures and exploring the newest departure point to the future of the united world we seek. It is worth remembering that if we could go back 20 years, what could we tell ourselves? And if we had the opportunity to correct our past mistakes, when is the next best time? To which the answer for the next best time for immediate action is NOW. Whether in New York, at country level or in the community; the UN should meaningfully learn from setbacks and engage in preventive measures and cultivate these merits that can move humanity closer to the collective flourishing of all.

### **The UN in the eyes of the new generation**

The last quarter of UN existence has attracted an image of an institution of lucrative jobs, and an elite community of academically successful as well as those who are privileged. It is the dream of many young Africans, with few exceptions, to do all it takes to work with the UN. Some of the reasons are mentioned above and unfortunately are so divorced from the core values and merits in which the UN was established.

And yet for most young people, who have continued to suffer from the misfortunes of life, they see an institution that was created with intent of helping them turned into a place of luxury. Examples of people earning prohibitively high salaries and benefits raises the question that if the UN is so luxurious and so rewarding, will the war ever stop? It is in the interest of justice and dignity for the affected populations that the UN leadership at all levels display regulated behaviours, without undermining the humanitarian spirit and the sensitivity to peoples' suffering.

At the risk of being controversial I also want to highlight an issue that has affected the view of the UN over the years. Recently many UN agencies have adopted the culture of inviting celebrities to work as goodwill ambassadors

and champions especially for humanitarian causes. They undeniably mean well, but it has been received with mixed feelings from the differently affected victims and survivors of wars and violations. Assessing the impacts of such engagements, feedback revealed that the whole mission was and is always about the celebrities, media and visibility, not about victims and if not in most cases insensitive to their suffering. Affected persons feel deprived of their rights to speak for themselves. Their voices are delegated to someone who has never been in their shoes.<sup>III</sup> They might just be there because they look like those key UN decision-makers and are hired and made to speak for them.

As a way forward and a show of respect and dignity to those fearless men, women and children who have survived or are still caught up in the midst of conflict adversity, the UN leadership can identify role models amongst them. Even special appointments shouldn't be just about the best education, the region one comes from, race, age or gender, but it should be in solidarity and aimed at uplifting the victims and survivors of conflict. Only when we can demonstrate to them that they can do it, will they own the UN and feel part of the struggle.

The beauty of the diversity enshrined in the UN would only require the best leadership in UN at all levels to inspire the best of human progress rooted in strength, humility and tolerance.

### **Violation committed with protective intent**

Over the last few years, Africa has witnessed continued violence and subjugation perpetrated with the active assent of UN members as 'protective measures', such as the military intervention in Libya in 2011.<sup>IV</sup> It could be of benefit to the world to purposely undertake systematic and participatory action-oriented efforts to nurture the preventive tools of peace and dignity. This can be rooted





With all the wars and conflicts happening around the world today there is an opportunity to shine the light of reconciliation. Every step forward, where young people are taking the lead in innovation and technology, is clear evidence of human potential for sustainable progress.

in the form of dialogues aimed at understanding the protective origins of the problem, engaging rather than condemning those involved in its perpetration.

This would serve to actualise the unwavering desire for the prevention of all forms of violations, build peace, a better world, culture and human dignity, which are vital universal necessities that accounts for every single facet of human life on this planet. This is the only way the UN can be a role model at the individual or in community settings. It can use its platform to inspire understanding of the power dynamic variables that lead to violations of human rights of women and girls, minority groups, deal with issues of ethnicity and racism, among other practices that have always damaged the image of humanity. When nations are empowered, they can protect themselves, just as when communities and families are empowered, they will take positive actionable steps to empower women and girls.

In our diverse world, the UN as a globally acceptable body should and may lay tracks for the world to follow. Effective and globally balanced, the UN will help the world realise that we share a race – the human race and that it is far more important than what divides us. I do believe that with every defeat that the UN has faced is an opportunity to learn and improve. With all the wars and conflicts happening around the world today there is an opportunity to shine the light of reconciliation. Every step forward, where young people are taking the lead in innovation and technology, is clear evidence of human potential for sustainable progress. All we need is the leadership at the UN committed to helping world leaders set their differences aside and work together to make the seemingly impossible peaceful world, a reality. ■

## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> Godfrey Olukya, 'Africa calls for permanent representation at UN Security Council', Anadolu Agency, 21 January 2022, <<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/africa-calls-for-permanent-representation-at-un-security-council/2481204>>.

<sup>ii</sup> Abdi Latif Dahir, 'Twice as many African presidents made it to China's Africa summit than to the UN general assembly', Quartz Africa, 5 October 2018, <<https://qz.com/africa/1414004/more-african-presidents-went-to-chinas-africa-forum-than-un-general-assembly/>>.

<sup>iii</sup> Alexandra C. Budabin, 'Do Celebrity Humanitarians Matter?', Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs, 11 December 2014, <[https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/ethics\\_online/0100](https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/ethics_online/0100)>.

<sup>iv</sup> Hassan Isilow, 'African intellectuals remember late Muammar Gaddafi as pan-African', Anadolu Agency, 20 October 2021, <<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/african-intellectuals-remember-late-muammar-gaddafi-as-pan-african/2397444>>.



# Ethical leadership: The power of principles, purpose, values and the human touch

BY HELMUT BUSS



Abdo Abu Salou'  
*Mother*  
Zataari Camp

**Helmut Buss** brings over 30 years of working experience in international humanitarian organisations on different continents and in various leadership positions. He held functions in the fields of law, ethics and conflict management. In that context and until the present, he has been coaching leaders and organisations in developing collaborative safe spaces for problem resolution and values-based compliance and ethical decision-making. He has recently retired from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), where he held the position of Director of the Ethics Office. Previous assignments have included Ombudsman for the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (ICRC), based in Geneva, Ombudsman for the United Nations Funds and Programmes (UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS and UN-Women), based in New York, UNHCR Legal Counsel and UNHCR Country Representative. He is a certified coach and mediator, holds Master's in Law from Hamburg University, has a Master's in Mediation from the Institut Universitaire Kurt Boesch (IUKB) in Sion, Switzerland, and an MBA from the Open University Business School in the United Kingdom.

■ News about unethical behaviour has become part of everyday headlines, in governments, businesses and also in international organisations such as the United Nations. Major scandals have shaken the organisations concerned with massive implications for their reputation and financing.

While values and ethical principles have gained relevance over the past decade in guiding organisations and informing best practice in leadership, their impact still seems to be limited. Is it just wishful thinking that ethics, values-based decision-making and ethical leadership should all be part of good business practice? What is the situation in the UN? What are the UN values and ethical principles and do they remain relevant in today's world? If so, how much are the UN values lived and translated into the daily life of international civil servants and the Member States? What are the challenges and opportunities in generating the force of those values? What can be done concretely and what does that mean for leaders and managers in the UN family and the future of the UN international civil service?

I would like to address some of those questions based on my more than 30-year experience in the UN.

### UN core values and ethical leadership

The founders of the UN aimed at building a workforce that is held to the highest standards, including living up to core values such as professionalism, integrity and respect

for diversity. Working for the UN means that one is never truly off duty.

Ethical leadership is only one component of effective leadership and means that leaders behave in accordance with a set of principles and values recognised by the UN and put them at the centre of everything they do. There is no debate about whether being ethical in life and in business is the right thing to do, it is even more important than competence. There is also no question that the large majority of UN personnel continue to adhere to those highest standards of conduct and actively work to keep those standards and values as part of their daily actions. Also, there is an overwhelming amount of research that shows that organisations with a strong values-based culture are more successful, providing the workforce with a strong purpose and the space to excel and address the challenges of today. How else than by employing a value- and purpose-based approach can the UN generate the innovative and creative potential of its workforce to meet the UN's current and future challenges?

### The big illusion or real-life experience?

Despite all the above, reports show that uncivil and unethical behaviour occur regularly throughout the UN. Multiple staff surveys continue to show experiences of harassment and abuse of authority, with a high percentage of colleagues being afraid to speak up, and significant rates of stress and burnout. There is a widespread perception that accountability is selective and does not include everyone,



particularly in the case of senior managers. While many UN organisations make official statements committing themselves to values and ethical conduct aspiring to zero tolerance, those values are too often not lived in practice.

From my experience, I have not seen very many leaders in the UN system with the ability and courage to address today's challenges and who possessed the leadership skills now required. Times have changed and leaders today are held to greater accountability than in the past. However, even those good leaders whom I knew in the past already struggled to adhere to the high standards set in the UN.

Of those leaders who tried, some just gave up, became disillusioned or left. It begs the question whether ethical leadership is realistic or just an illusion? If we say yes to ethical leadership, do we do enough to recognise ethical leadership or exemplary people managers? From my experience, there is still a heavy focus on the WHAT we do and the results that are achieved and much less on HOW those results were achieved. There are still too many situations where unethical leadership and management practices are tolerated for the results achieved or the so-called greater good those leaders brought, or for political reasons. It seems to be much easier to list examples of problematic or uncivil managers and leaders than to provide a list of exemplary ethical leaders.

The claim that we in the UN must live up to the highest standards and ambitious values statements is too often not linked to the real-life experience in the workplace. At the same time, there have been many efforts in strengthening the UN internal justice system, integrity mechanisms, risk management, victim-protection and whistle-blower protection mechanisms. Are those efforts making a difference?

I have always taken the view that there have been huge improvements in the way we are currently working in the UN. This is supported by a number of important regulatory changes over the past 15 years. The creation of Ombuds and Ethics functions, a reform of the internal system of justice, the professionalisation of jobs that are part of the integrity mechanisms and the focus on supporting leaders and managers in putting UN values into action are all examples. That being said, it always depends on which perspective one takes. Do I want to see the glass half full or half empty? Do I focus on what is lacking or do

I build on what is there? These are all questions we have to ask ourselves. We all have a choice on which of those perspectives to take.

Some also argue that the UN's core values and the UN Oath of Office require updating, including using language that speaks to us in today's world, with social media, increasingly polarised dialogue, challenges to democracy and human rights or global challenges such as climate change. Do the UN's core values and principles as expressed in the nearly 100-year-old UN Oath of Office capture contemporary reality? While these values and principles and their meaning should continuously be discussed, reviewed and updated to reflect the interests, needs and concerns of an evolving world context, the UN Oath of Office can still serve as an important reminder of the principles sworn to by UN personnel on behalf of those with whom we serve and work. It is less about the taxonomy we use and more about how we translate values and ethical principles into action every day.

### **Reasons for ethical failures**

Why do so many UN leaders still fail when it comes to ethics? What can be done to further promote ethical leadership practices?

There are multiple reasons why leaders and organisations do not engage pro-actively in prioritising ethical leadership. Among those reasons I observed are: (a) a certain reluctance to engage in cultural and behavioural change programmes; (b) overconfidence and ethical blindness; (c) the straight jacket of hierarchy, processes and bureaucracy; and (d) the perceived existence of first- and lower-class citizens among the UN workforce.

### *The challenge of cultural change*

Organisations are struggling to address challenges relating to organisational culture, values, behavioural change and people management. There appears to be something like an illiteracy when it comes to so-called soft skills such as empathy or how to use values in an authentic way to provide purpose and orientation and to support ethical leadership and decision-making. In addition to this lack of expertise come challenges such as a perceived lack of time and consequently lower priority given to the challenges of cultural change and behavioural evolution in the light of more pressing operational priorities. As a result, there



According to the prevailing theory of self-serving positive illusions, we hold inaccurate, overly rosy views of ourselves because they make us feel better about ourselves, and so boost our psychological wellbeing.

is a need to make culture and behaviour an integral part of an organisation's risk-management framework and to strengthen the know-how on managing cultural change.

### *Ethical blindness*

People tend to systematically overestimate their ethical characteristics. According to one study, even prison inmates think that they are more honest and trustworthy than the average citizen.<sup>i</sup> Belief in our moral superiority is the most irrational, self-enhancing bias of all.<sup>ii</sup> According to the prevailing theory of self-serving positive illusions, we hold inaccurate, overly rosy views of ourselves because they make us feel better about ourselves, and so boost our psychological wellbeing. One of my mentors told me that when reflecting on this fundamental aspect of human nature, he always thinks of the lines of Robert Burns' poem 'To a Louse': 'O would some Power with vision teach us to see ourselves as others see us!'.<sup>iii</sup>

The research on unethical decision-making<sup>iv</sup> has helped us in UNHCR to help leaders and managers to better understand what makes good people do bad things<sup>v</sup> and to be more attentive to environments and contexts that make people behave unethically. This includes situations where people argue that 'everyone else is doing it' or 'it is unfair', and also situations where people are exposed to high-stress environments or are experiencing loyalty conflicts.

### *The straight jacket of hierarchy, processes and bureaucracy*

Fighting bureaucracy has been a call from several Secretaries-General. The reality is that status, privilege and processes continue to paralyse our work. I have often wondered why everything has to be so complicated, requiring lengthy processes, complicated authorisation mechanisms and time. Many leaders use language such as 'my team' and 'I have done this' rather than promoting a collaborative approach using language such as 'we' or 'us'. Organigrammes cement a hierarchy, a directive, top-down

approach and an 'I am the boss' culture. This then cascades down throughout the whole organisation. At the same time, we talk about agility, creativity and innovation. How can that ever happen in such a hierarchical system? Leaders have an opportunity and a responsibility to break down such hierarchies, promote flatter structures, collaborative styles and take more of a 'just-do-it' approach.

### *First- and lower-class employees*

While we promote the core value of diversity and inclusion, the UN workforce lives a different reality. Today, a considerable number of the UN personnel works on short-term contracts without job-security and often with far fewer benefits. And while UN personnel continues to be held to highest standards with an expectation of full loyalty to the UN interests only, the UN does not return that loyalty to its employees in the form of some job-security or career expectations.

How can UN colleagues feel included, if there is such difference in treatment and status, unrelated to the quality of work and commitment of the colleagues concerned?

There is a new generation of colleagues who choose their employer on criteria such as work/life balance, atmosphere in the team, role-modelling of the team leader. The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored this shift in expectations and people have had time to reflect on questions such as purpose of work, quality of life and importance of health and family. This will result in higher expectations of employees in what the UN can offer in that regard and it will become even more challenging to be a successful and ethical leader in this new work environment.

### **What can be done?**

Ethical leadership has the potential to drive the evolution of a mindset that encompasses values-based decision-making and a serving leadership. Key elements are an



ability to listen, empathy, humility, and a people-focus in recognising and empowering others. I am convinced that it is possible to be both kind-hearted and tough-minded. Another central requirement for ethical leadership is to self-reflect, to be very honest with oneself and to use the UN's core values and ethical principles as a compass and guide. To generate maximum potential from the UN workforce, it will be important to do much more than offer protected spaces for dialogue where colleagues feel invited to contribute and speak up. A culture of respect and inclusion also begins with recognising those who speak up. The relatively recent initiatives by UN colleagues, be it Young UN<sup>VI</sup> or Stronger Together,<sup>VII</sup> reflect the potential contribution of voices of colleagues, referred to by some leaders as the civil society of the UN workforce.

A lot is happening to strengthen values-based decision-making and ethical leadership and it is now important to build on those islands of best practice to further strengthen the practice of ethical leadership. There is no question that all of this will take time and will require daily practice, courage, patience and determination. From behavioural science, we know that on average it takes 66 days before new behaviours became automatic although there can be marked variation in how long habits take to form; the results of one related study showed that it could take between 18 and 254 days in the habits examined.<sup>VIII</sup>

It is important to use 'nudges' and reminders to help colleagues be mindful of a goal until their actions become automatic and to look for opportunities to encourage the practice of new behaviours, similar to the daily training of muscles in a fitness room.

I take the view that there is a way to be a successful leader in the UN. It takes a person who can be driven by the UN's core values, and has a mindset of serving, prioritising team and inclusivity while living up to the highest standards. All this and still abiding by the changing profile of leadership required to navigate today's challenges.

I firmly believe and promote the concept that the power

of principles, purpose, values and the human touch is ultimately a greater guide of leaders' actions than the principles of power and ego. Upholding values and ethical principles as a higher calling must be understood as something more than organising code-of-conduct sessions or avoiding conflicts of interest. It is about re-calling and bringing to life the commitment of service, translated as serving the objectives, values and purposes of the UN. That includes putting the UN principles and values into action every day. A return to principled action is necessary not only for the sake of the UN's political relevance and moral authority, but more urgently for the sake of the peoples of the world the UN is meant to protect from the vagaries of unprincipled power.<sup>IX</sup>

In my experience, it is possible for UN leaders to do exactly what I have been reflecting on in this article. This is not hypothetical. It is up to every person in leadership in the UN to honour their oath of office and to make a difference. It can be done, and I have witnessed leaders who have done it. Furthermore, it makes life in the UN more rewarding, more fulfilling, more effective – and creates an inspiring place in which to work. ■



**Ethical leadership has the potential to drive the evolution of a mindset that encompasses values-based decision-making and a serving leadership.**

## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> Constantine Sedikides, Rosie Meek, Mark D. Alicke, and Sarah Taylor, 'Behind bars but above the bar: Prisoners consider themselves more prosocial than non-prisoners.' *British journal of social psychology*, 53/2, pp. 396-403, <<https://doi-org.ezproxy.its.uu.se/10.1111/bjso.12060>>.

<sup>ii</sup> Emma Young, 'Belief in our moral superiority is the most irrational self-enhancing bias of all', *Research Digest The British Psychological Society, Research Digest*, 29 November 2017, <<https://digest.bps.org.uk/2017/11/29/belief-in-our-moral-superiority-is-the-most-irrational-self-enhancing-bias-of-all/>>.

<sup>iii</sup> Robert Burns 'To a Louse': O would some Power with vision teach us/ To see ourselves as others see us!/ It would from many a blunder free us/ And foolish notions/ What airs in dress and carriage would leave us/ And even devotion!; in its original Scots, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DsC-Aumx4dk>; for the English translation see: <http://shsjdyer.pbworks.com/w/file/attach/52084477/>>.

<sup>iv</sup> One of the renown researchers in this area is Professor Guido Palazzo of the University of Lausanne. His research and teaching has informed UNHCR's new approach to ethics; see also his online course: <<https://www.coursera.org/learn/unethical-decision-making>>.

<sup>v</sup> Jeremy Willinger, 'The only way is ethics, why good people do bad things and how to stop us', Ethical Systems NYU Stern's Business and Society Program, 22 June 2017, <<https://themindgym.com/resources/whitepapers/the-only-way-is-ethics>>.

<sup>vi</sup> See: <https://www.young-un.org>.

<sup>vii</sup> Stronger Together is a network of hundreds of UNHCR colleagues supporting and informing the dialogue on race in the organisation.

<sup>viii</sup> Phillippa Lally, Cornelia H.M. van Jaarsveld, Henry W.W. Potts, and Jane Wardle, 'How are Habits Formed: Modelling Habit Formation in the Real World', *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 40/6 (2010), pp. 998-1009, <<https://doi-org.ezproxy.its.uu.se/10.1002/ejsp.674>>.

<sup>ix</sup> Mona Ali Khalil, 'Restoring the Values and Spirit of the International Civil Service', *100 Years of International Civil Service* (Uppsala: Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation 2019), <<https://www.daghammarskjold.se/publication/restoring-the-values-and-spirit-of-the-international-civil-service/>>.



# Integrity and ethical leadership: Enhancing the UN's role in the world

BY ADAMA DIENG



Mohamed Hassan Ibrahim  
*Two faces in one panel*  
Azraq Camp



***Adama Dieng** served as United Nations Under- Secretary-General and Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide from 2012 to 2020 and was Registrar of the UN International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Dieng was Secretary-General of the Geneva-based International Commission of Jurists from 1990 to 2000. Other experience includes UN Independent Expert for Haiti and Envoy of the UN Secretary-General to Malawi to mediate between the Government and the pressure groups. He is one of the architects of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights and was part of the first draft of the African Convention to fight Corruption. Dieng served as Supreme Court Registrar in Senegal. He is a former founding member of the Board of Directors of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance as well as former President of the Martin Ennals Foundation.*

■ When the United Nations Charter was founded in 1945, the world had just emerged from the devastating Second World War.<sup>1</sup> Lives had been lost. Hopes were dashed and replaced by despair, while human rights had been relegated to the footnotes of history. The Charter was therefore conceived not as a world constitution, but rather as a universal document which could underpin collective peace and security, recognition, and respect of the dignity of humankind, international law and peaceful coexistence among nations. Above all, it was envisaged as a unique deliberative body. A place where humanity could converge as equals and respect to discuss mutually shared challenges and hopes.

However, if the Charter was to succeed, it was imperative that, it avoids or rather learn from the shortcomings of the League of Nations which had spectacularly failed to live up to its founding ideals, particularly in terms of inclusion and respect for the less powerful nations and citizens. We can therefore accurately say that imperfect as the Charter might be, it has contributed enormously to the relative peace we enjoy today.

The Charter has inspired numerous instruments which continue to underpin a wide range of issues that are critical and consequential to humanity's peaceful coexistence. The promotion of universal human rights, climate change, peace and security, development, international trade, intellectual property, criminal justice to name some. Indeed, inspired by the UN Charter, different regions have further adopted a wide range of instruments to address more specific challenges facing them. However, despite its epic contribution to world peace and security, it is imperative to examine the kinds of leadership both internally and on the global stage. I will venture some ideas as to what

is required for the organisation to live up to its founding ideals and attain legitimacy before those it serves.

### **The UN and the quest for ethical leadership**

Among the values that guide the work of the UN, integrity forms a core part of these values. And this is not by default. It is rather in recognition of the decisions made at the UN which affects the lives and wellbeing of billions of people around the world. Leadership characterised by integrity calls for leaders to exercise service above self; providing leadership that transcends temporary or short-term political or economic consideration while advancing the broader interest of humankind as reflected in the Charter.

Ethical leadership entails transformational, authentic, people-oriented, fair, encouraging and empowering values. For the UN, it calls for principled leadership that stands for those norms and qualities that reflect the highest ideals of humanity. Clarity of vision, integrity and political insights are essential for leadership, but they cannot thrive where the courage to face controversy and to weather unpopularity or condemnation are lacking.<sup>11</sup>

The UN, while a deliberative body where Member States, both powerful and less powerful, converge to discuss and find solutions to mutually shared challenges, is not a world government. Yet, how those entrusted with the power and authority emanating from the Charter, exercise those powers matter. The organisation is run by individuals who make daily decisions with consequences beyond the domain of UN halls in New York or Geneva.





**Being an international civil servant means you have a responsibility to humanity irrespective of your personal beliefs or preferences. It is important that in this role UN staff live and manifest the founding ideals of the Charter, particularly when dealing with beneficiaries and each other. This will make the UN effective and fit for purpose.**

For example, key decisions with profound impact on the lives of millions of people are made daily such as the distribution of vital humanitarian assistance in refugee camps, allocation of development funds to support rule of law institutions, provision of immunisation kits in some of the hardest to reach and dangerous areas. Often taking care of crucial tasks such as providing access to winter blankets and food rations for the displaced and taking decisions to investigate and prosecute potential perpetrators of atrocity crimes among many others.

How these individuals with such vast and important powers understand and interpret these rules and values impact the work and credibility of the organisation, but also the lives of those they serve. Furthermore, how the UN leaders or staff treat each other, their subordinates, contractors, or volunteers reflect on the organisation and its ability not only to live up to the ideals of the Charter but as its sole guardian and defender.

The staff members of the UN are international civil servants, and their responsibilities are not national, but rather exclusively international.<sup>III</sup> While they receive guidance and directives from Member States, with often contradictory and competing interests, they have the responsibility to ensure that their primary and sole consideration in decision-making is to serve the people of the world rather than interest of a single or particular government.. With these enormous powers, it is imperative to examine how international civil servants are accountable for their actions.

### **Legitimacy, accountability, and UN Leadership**

Being an international civil servant means you have a responsibility to humanity irrespective of your personal beliefs or preferences. It is important that in this role UN staff live and manifest the founding ideals of the

Charter, particularly when dealing with beneficiaries and each other. This will make the UN effective and fit for purpose. Staff members must have confidence that their managers and superiors share their visions and convictions. As often noted, motivated and respected staff are the heartbeat of any institution.

How leaders and managers within the UN leadership structures treat their subordinates, determine their ability to serve the rest of humanity. One of the greatest challenges facing the organisation, and which I must add, will define its mission and relevance to the world for many years to come, is its quest to live up to its core value of respect for diversity.

One's ability to serve is still the prevailing practice and a primary consideration for employment and career progression. But when it comes to diversity the relevant section of the Charter refers only to geographical diversity, which can be construed as quite vague in a more modern or broader context rather than race, ethnicity or any other considerations.<sup>IV</sup> When staff lack confidence or trust in their managers and superiors, it is difficult for them to fulfil their mission and responsibilities. This is particularly difficult when recognising the imperative nature of a lack of diversity at all levels among its workforce.

The Report by the Task Force commissioned by the UN Secretary-General to examine racism in the organisation laid bare the scourge of racism facing the institution.<sup>V</sup> The Report candidly recognises that 'professional, substantive and decision-making roles in the Organisation appear to be disproportionately staffed by one regional group (Western European and other States)'.<sup>VI</sup>

The report also notes that against the wisdom of the UN Charter, geographical representation has been on



The United Nations can only live up to its founding ideals if it treats its workforce with respect and dignity. If it recognises the imperative nature of diversity through commitment and actions rather than mere words. The organisation must represent and be seen to represent the human family in its entirety irrespective of their colour, gender, national origin or any other attributes that is consistent with the Charter. How the organisation understands and accommodates these complex issues will be key not only to its survival but also competence and legitimacy in the many years to come.

the back burner for too long and it seems to have been lagging in the context of other issues such as gender or sexual orientation.<sup>vii</sup> It further suggests that to have progress in addressing racism and racial discrimination, the UN needs unwavering commitment from senior leaders and the full participation of its personnel. This will ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate in the work of the organisation and is treated with respect and dignity.

The Secretary-General has expressed his commitment to address and fight racism with 'robust investigative and accountability measures, coupled with persistence and sustained collective actions to enhance support and build trust'.<sup>viii</sup> To buttress this commitment, the Secretary-General has undertaken a wide range of initiatives to ensure that the UN is not only representative of our human family, but that everyone is given an opportunity to serve and excel in the service of the organisation irrespective of one's gender or background.

The gender parity championed by the Secretary-General immediately after assuming office in 2016, is a testimony to this effect. The establishment of the Task Force and the growing conversation on racism in the organisation are all positive developments.

A lot will now hang on the delivery of these promises. The Member States, the UN system, its senior officials, and staff members should all mobilise to give this ideal every chance of success. Ultimately, an organisation that is representative of humanity in all its dimension will do more to reaffirm founding principles and values of the Charter than anything else.

The United Nations can only live up to its founding ideals if it treats its workforce with respect and dignity. If it recognises the imperative nature of diversity through commitment and actions rather than mere words. The organisation must represent and be seen to represent the human family in its entirety irrespective of their colour, gender, national origin or any other attributes that is consistent with the Charter. How the organisation understands and accommodates these complex issues will be key not only to its survival but also competence and legitimacy in the many years to come.

### Conclusion

Ethical leadership and integrity are the core values that guide the work of the UN. The founding of the UN Charter was a watershed moment for humanity. It reaffirmed the indivisibility and interdependent nature of our human family. The ability of the organisation created to address the myriad of challenges facing humanity is situated in its sense of legitimacy. From those it was called on to serve, but also those who serve within its structures.

The Charter should not be seen as a document with a collection of lofty ideals. Rather a document whose existence inspires the lives and hopes of our collective humanity on a day-to-day basis. Those privileged with having the trust and responsibility to interpret and implement these values must be accountable for their actions and decisions. Ultimate success will be when those who carry out and represent its values believe in its mission and visions. They must have the moral courage to represent and defend the hopes and aspirations of our human family as espoused in the UN Charter. ■



## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> Charter of the United Nations, signed 26 June 1945, entered into force 24 October 1945, <<https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/ctc/uncharter.pdf>>.

<sup>ii</sup> Hochschild Fabrizio, 'Courage and Integrity in UN Leadership', *100 Years of International Civil Service* (Uppsala: Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation), 2019 <[https://www.daghammarskjold.se/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/ics\\_100\\_no\\_1\\_f\\_hochschild.pdf](https://www.daghammarskjold.se/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/ics_100_no_1_f_hochschild.pdf)>.

<sup>iii</sup> Charter of the United Nations, *ibid.*, Art. 100.

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*, Art. 101(3).

<sup>v</sup> United Nations, 'Report of the Secretary-General's Task Force on Addressing Racism and Promoting Dignity for All in the United Nations Secretariat', 2021.

<sup>vi</sup> United Nations, *ibid.*, p. 25-28.

<sup>vii</sup> United Nations, *ibid.*

<sup>viii</sup> Secretary General in his letter addressed to staff in January 2022.



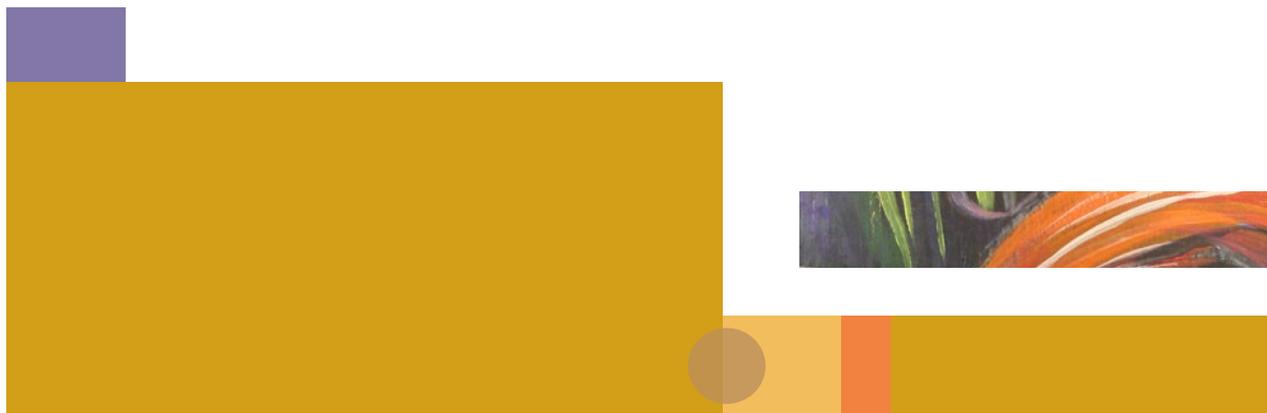
Mohamed Hassan Ibrahim  
*Three faces*  
Azraq Camp

# Chapter Three

The vanguard: Breaking the traditional leadership mould



Three questions about UN leaders of the 21st century BY TOILY KURBANOV.....	70
From youth inclusion to intergenerational feminist leadership BY SHADI ROUHASHAHBAZ .....	74
Feminist leadership for transformative social justice BY DANIELA ZELAYA RAUDALES AND CAROLINE LAMBERT.....	81
A world in dire need of intergenerational leadership INTERVIEW WITH AHUNNA EZIAKONWA .....	86



# Three questions about UN leaders of the 21st century

BY TOILY KURBANOV

*This article is written in Toily Kurbanov's personal capacity and does not necessarily reflect the views of the UN.*



Asim Abdul Hamid Al Ashram  
*Overlapping faces*  
Azraq Camp



**Toily Kurbanov** is the executive coordinator of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV). He has 30 years of experience as banker, government policy maker, diplomat, development practitioner, humanitarian and UN leader.

■ A practitioner doesn't get a lot of time to reflect about leadership traits in a structured way. What a practitioner tends to do instead is ask questions. Some questions will have 'answers' which a practitioner will try to translate into 'solutions'. Others may not have answers – not at all, or not now – and so we leave them open until better times.

In this article, searching for the identity of United Nations leaders of the 21st century, I will ask three questions:

1. Who are you, the UN leader of 21st century?
2. What issues do you care about?
3. What will you do about these issues?

While not having the answers, I will also take the risk of sharing lessons from my generation that future UN leaders themselves can use on their own leadership pathway.

### Who will lead the UN in the 21st century?

In my view, the most important demographic cohorts that will constitute and define future UN leaders are those who were born at the turn of the 21st century and in its first decade.

Right now, these two cohorts, which the media often calls Generations Z and Alpha, are coming of age. In their communities, at national level, and increasingly, on the international scene they will soon start driving the next development agenda.<sup>1</sup> By 2050 they will reach the peak of their careers and will continue to shape the world all the way until the end of the century. Even today, 70 is widely considered to be the new 50. By 2075, with advances in health sciences, 70 might be the new 30. Thus, expect these generations to still be part of the workforce well into the last quarter of this century.

Incidentally, when we look back to the 1900s, a similar demographic cohort defined the modern UN: Trygve Lie, Dag Hammarskjöld, and U Thant were all born just

before or at the start of the century. As were Eleanor Roosevelt and Indira Gandhi who, even without having executive roles inside the UN, had major roles in shaping the organisation into what it is today.

I count on generations Z and Alpha to give the world its 21st century UN leaders of the stature of Eleanor Roosevelt and Dag Hammarskjöld. That said, as a global citizen I also expect most of these leaders to come from the global south where the majority of generations Z and Alpha are born. When I meet a young start-up owner in Nigeria designing public health tracker apps or a female student fighting for her right for education at Kabul university, I keep thinking: 'UN leadership in the 21st century is *them*'.

### What will motivate the UN leaders of the 21st century?

While it is still too early to delve into the generational formative experiences of these cohorts, here are a couple of glimpses.

Generations Z and Alpha are much more digitally savvy and globally networked than most people of my generation. They grew up in the world of low or no digital space boundaries. Even during the recent years of the pandemic, when some of the borders were resurrected in the physical universe, they have almost completely disappeared in the digital world.

Unlike their predecessors they will grow up in a multi-polar world and, hopefully, not under a spell of an us-vs-them identity, such as East-West and North-South. Those divisions still characterize the world as we know it, but much less so than a generation ago.

However, these generations will have also grown up in a strange era of convergence *between* developed and developing countries and yet face exploding inequalities *within* our countries.<sup>11</sup> It is quite possible that *international*





Will the future of the UN leaders come from more privileged and sheltered backgrounds and turn the UN into a more elitist supranational entity, detached from the wider communities and yet claiming to speak on their behalf? Or will their formative experiences make the new generation of UN leaders care even more than us about fairness, inclusion and social justice?

borders between the future UN leaders will be replaced by even more dramatic *domestic divides* such as class and income. Will the future of the UN come from more privileged and sheltered backgrounds and turn the UN into a more elitist supranational entity, detached from the wider communities and yet claiming to speak on their behalf? Or will their formative experiences make the new generation of UN leaders care even more than us about fairness, inclusion and social justice? I hope for the latter, but much depends on the progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and the decade ahead of us – the decade which coincides with the formative years of the next leadership generations.

Finally,

### How will they address global issues?

Their formative experiences will have bearing not only on what issues and values the next leaders will care about, but also on how they will go about addressing them. Let me again admit that I don't have answers, but will at the same time 'park' a couple of points which might resonate with the UN leaders of the 21st century.

First, because future leaders are growing up in a more open multi-polar, hopefully less antagonistic world, for them seeking global solutions to planetary issues is going to be much more intuitive. This contrasts with the approach still prevailing in my generation.

We face a world where most development issues are framed as domestic concerns and therefore the solutions are also designed at national level. Where solutions don't fit the domestic boundaries we will define them as 'cross-border'. I expect that for future leaders the default sequencing will reverse and the global solutions will be more often a measure of first rather than last resort. This can be good

news for delivering climate action or responding to future pandemics, ie issues which, as the world painfully came to realise, require a truly global response.

The current cloud of uncertainty around the future of work might resolve in another set of implications for the decision making and leadership by the next generation of UN leaders. Take one tectonic change that started in my generation and will carry into the future: the adjustments in the life cycle as the world evolves from industrial to a knowledge-based era.

In the 20th century the life cycle comprised of three distinct and neatly linear phases: 1-education; 2-work; 3-retirement. This is no longer the case. Today, the education cycles are lengthier (not 6-7 years, but 15 or more) as is the age of retirement, which in addition, can promise a fulfilling second career. Moreover, the lines between these cycles get blurred and the transitions – from education to work and from work to retirement – are often accompanied by community service and volunteering. The 20th century's notion of the UN and government careers as a lifetime pathway – or even as long-term assignments – might not be viable in the 21st century. Instead, the leaders will move more seamlessly between work in business and non-profit sectors, lifelong study and community service.

In an early sign of this change, the volunteer work has quite discernibly evolved from a youth phenomenon to a 'new normal' at all career stages.<sup>111</sup> For many in generations Z and Alpha, the volunteering experience might be equally valuable as a prologue, as an intermission, and as an epilogue of their leadership pathways. We shouldn't be surprised and perhaps we should already start getting used to the idea that many future UN leaders will come from, and eventually go back to, UN Volunteer assignments. Let me 'park' this as a prospect which others can explore in future issues of the Art of UN Leadership.



The generation of Hammarskjöld lived through two World Wars. Their experience of ‘untold sorrows to mankind,’ as the UN Charter starts, ensured a strong resolve to uphold world peace.

Let us hope that the drive of the 21st century’s UN leaders will come, not from common fears, but from shared positive aspirations. And their ultimate achievement will not only be ‘to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war’, but indeed ‘to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom’. ■

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> According to UN System Chief Executives Board, UN personnel under the age of 25 years comprise 0.1% of all UN personnel. If the current age distribution of UN personnel holds in future, in 5 years this generation will comprise 3.7% and in another 5 years 26.6% of all UN personnel. See: UN System Chief Executives Board of Coordination, ‘Personnel by age and tenure’, 31 December 2020, <https://unsceb.org/hr-others>.

<sup>11</sup> In the last two decades, the gap between the average incomes of the richest 10% and the poorest 50% of countries dropped from around 50x to 40x. At the same time, inequalities increased significantly within countries: the gap between the average incomes of the top 10% and the bottom 50% of individuals within countries increased from 8.5x to 15x. See: Lucas Chancel, Thomas Picketty, Emmanuel Saez, and Gabriel Zucman, *World Inequality Report 2022*, (Paris: World Inequality Lab, 2022, <https://wir2022.wid.world/insights/>).

<sup>111</sup> Already in 2020, the average age of United Nations Volunteers was 34, with 35% under 30 and 65% over 30, including 1% UN Volunteers over 60 years. Source: Annual report of UN Development Program (UNDP), Population Fund (UNFPA) and Office for Project Services (UNOPS), 6 April 2021, <https://undocs.org/DP/2021/25>.



# From youth inclusion to intergenerational feminist leadership

BY SHADI ROUSHAHBAZ

*This article is written in Shadi Rouhshahbaz's personal capacity and does not necessarily reflect the views of the UN.*



Mohamed Hassan Ibrahim  
*Portrait of a woman*  
Azraq Camp



*Shadi Rouhshahbaz has over five years of experience working with youth leaders and young peacebuilders across Middle East and North Africa, Asia, Africa and Europe. She is currently a Young Woman Leader Fellow and a Peace and Security Programme Analyst at UN Women. In the past she has had engagements with the United Nations Information Centre and UNICEF in Iran, and the United Network of Young Peacebuilders. Shadi is the founder of PeaceMentors, a young-women-lead peacebuilding organisation in Iran. Her research interests focus on youth leadership and agency, the Youth, Peace and Security agenda and the Women, Peace and Security agenda.*

■ I will never forget my first day stepping into the United Nations Secretariat corridors as a 27-year-old Iranian woman in October 2021. This was not my first time entering these types of spaces as when I was younger I interned with the UN Information Centre (UNIC) and the UN's Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Iran, spoke at events, and attended several consultations in similar spaces around the world. This time, however, it felt truly different. Now it was no longer as a guest, an intern, or a participant. I had officially joined UN Women as part of the Young Women Leaders (YWLs) Initiative.

This much-needed programme brings 12 young women leaders from under-represented countries to serve as UN Volunteers at UN Women headquarters in New York. The aim is to give us opportunities to exercise our leadership skills to be leaders of 'tomorrow', whilst improving gender diversity in UN Women during this one-year professional fellowship. Upon selection from over 1500 applications and being amongst the younger and least represented nationalities in the staff of my agency, if not the entire system, it felt even more important to keep my focus on transformation.

I asked myself some crucial questions when settling in this new role. Like what does it mean to be one of 'tomorrow's young women leaders' at UN Women and the broader UN system? This was an important question, because I was struggling to understand when tomorrow will come. What will some of the challenges and opportunities be when working in an organisation where the average age of the staff is 45.7?<sup>i</sup> What does the world inside and outside the organisation need most from UN leaders? And how can I help achieve it? Asking these questions brought me back to previous experiences in leading projects and teams where I often reflected on the need for implementing a feminist and intergenerational leadership model. Here I would like to offer my personal experiences in response

to these questions and share some recommendations towards the practical implementation of intergenerational feminist leadership strategies at the UN.

### **The United Nations System Leadership Framework and intergenerational leadership**

We are living through one of the biggest generational shifts in the workplace with leadership in teams made up of diverse members from different generations and it comes with specific challenges and opportunities. It is becoming more and more obvious that the UN system cannot steer clear of these generational shifts while continuing to abide by its values and principles and remaining relevant to the realities of the world. I would like to add my voice to the many who already have argued that the sooner intergenerational leadership becomes an embraced and practiced reality, the better one can manage a team that has members from at least four generations: Baby boomers (1945-1960), Generation X (1960-1980), Generation Y (1980-1995), Generation Z (1995-2005).<sup>ii</sup>

With navigating different values, ideals, cultures, priorities, skillsets, communications and working styles across generations and backgrounds, it is certainly challenging to bring everyone together to work harmoniously and efficiently. Therefore, much like any other entity that wishes to remain relevant to the changing contexts and time, at the level of the UN, transformative change must happen and remain to create the enabling environment and leadership that engages team members from across all backgrounds effectively.

One step towards making effective leadership a reality has been the United Nations System Leadership Framework (see Box 1).<sup>iii</sup> When reflecting on the Framework's principles, it would be only natural for the UN to increase

and constructively engage younger leaders as partners alongside its currently more senior leadership in advancing its agendas.

The UN developed the Youth Strategy and appointed a Youth Envoy to engage with Generation Y and Z, integral to the category 'Youth'. The Security Council adopted Resolutions 2250, 2419 and 2535 speaking to the importance participation of and partnership with young people in development, peace, and security.<sup>IV</sup> Section 3 of

the Our Common Agenda, is also dedicated to youth and future generations.<sup>V</sup>

Still, the UN, as an inclusive and transformative entity, should also be accountable to youth as current and future beneficiaries. The creation of agendas, strategies, frameworks and mandates can be catalysts for pushing change forward. However there is a risk that it can fall through the cracks or be lost before they reach ecosystems of individual teams across different sections and agencies.

### *Box 1: UN Leadership Framework*

The United Nations System Leadership Framework establishes that, in today's challenging international environment, UN leadership:

- is norm-based, promoting, protecting and defending United Nations norms and standards contained in international treaties, resolutions and declarations;
- takes a principled approach at all levels, always maintaining constructive engagement with all stakeholders on the most sensitive of issues and never discriminating, turning a blind eye to abuses, or giving in to pressure;
- is inclusive and respectful of all personnel and stakeholders, embracing diversity and rejecting discrimination in all its forms;
- is mutually accountable within the system, to beneficiaries – especially the most vulnerable, excluded or marginalized – and the public beyond, for the causes the organization serves and the way it conducts its work;
- is multidimensional, engaging across pillars and functions, connecting knowledge and experience, and ensuring coherence in support of the fully integrated SDG framework;
- is transformational at all levels, supporting the overall mission to achieve positive change as well as the significant change effort to implement the 2030 Agenda while leaving no one behind;
- is collaborative, reflecting the interdependent imperatives of the United Nations Charter and the comprehensive nature of the 2030 Agenda, seeking collective 'as one' thinking, joined-up approaches and solutions, and recognizing that better connecting universal goals to people-centered initiatives requires investment in collective United Nations efforts to achieve them, and
- is self-applied, so that United Nations principles and norms are exhibited in the behaviour and interactions of all leaders.



**Putting people first also means that young people are given a chance to bring evidence of their ability to add significant value and space for their perspectives to be taken into consideration.**

For example the 2019 report on the Composition of the Secretariat notes a staff age increase from 43.8 to 45.7 years since 2014,<sup>vi</sup> and The ‘Art of Leadership in the United Nations: Framing What’s Blue’ reports that from 2015 to 2017, the average age of serving men and women remained marginally stable at around 48 and 45 years respectively.<sup>vii</sup>

While many documents, strategies and mechanisms are developed to move towards intergenerational leadership – and a few of which are even co-created in consultation with young people – the entity’s ‘culture eats [these] strategies for breakfast’.<sup>viii</sup> Unfortunately, this weighs heavy on young leaders, especially young women leaders who join the system in the hope of bringing about transformative change, only to conclude that ‘the system is not built with them in mind’.<sup>ix</sup>

The hesitation in changing organisational culture to embrace intergenerational leadership is not unique to the UN as it has multiple roots including financial implications and values. However, so long as the definition of UN leadership is limited to the vague phrase of ‘Standing up for human rights and for the principles of the UN Charter’ without connecting to the realities of the lives of young people – whether as allies and moving forces within the system or beneficiaries outside – and allocating finances to include them, there is not much hope to transform the culture to one that embraces intergenerational leadership.

‘Great leaders put people – not gadgets, processes, and personal ambition – first’.<sup>x</sup> Within complex systems like the UN, embracing change only happens when individual mindsets transform, not only among leaders, but also among team members of all generations. Putting people first also means that young people are given a chance to bring evidence of their ability to add significant value and space for their perspectives to be taken into consideration.

This translates into transitioning from meaningful youth inclusion to transformative youth engagement and can be

achieved in several ways. Such as not reducing the role of of interns or junior staff to administrative or ‘intern’ tasks, giving them the opportunity to chair meetings, listening to ideas and investing in their ability to lead processes and procedures, create enabling and inclusive recruitment processes to retain them within fair employment status. This shift in mindset and enabling conditions would mean that an immense and transformative capital can be engaged to advance the system. It can also embrace multiple strategies to mainstream rights-based intergenerational feminist leadership that challenge the prevailing leadership status quo.

### **Feminist leadership within the intergenerational leadership spectrum**

As an organisation that has been promoting women’s rights for decades and operating on the principle of leaving no one behind, the UN’s ecosystem is steadily, if slowly, moving towards gender mainstreaming and gender parity. UN Women, also known as the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, is a UN body working for gender equality and the empowerment of women around the world.<sup>xi</sup> It can therefore be concluded that UN Women should inspire feminist leadership in and outside the system.

Feminist leadership has been described in many different ways. It could be envisioned as courageous, groundbreaking, empathic, inclusive, flexible, respectful, rights-based and just, but according to Tracy Barton’s definition this type of leadership is:

‘[A Feminist leader strives to] identify injustices and oppressions and [is inspired] to facilitate the development of more inclusive, holistic ... communities. Feminist leaders are motivated by fairness, justice, and equity and strive to keep issues of gender, race, social class, sexual orientation, and ability at the forefront .... The elements particular to a feminist leadership construction include a focus on both individual or micro-level and societal or macro-level social justice concerns, a desire to bring marginalized voices to the center

of the conversation, and a willingness to take risks as one strives to enact a transformative agenda.’<sup>xii</sup>

If applied, feminist leadership can create a roadmap for meaningful youth inclusion and eventually youth engagement through intergenerational leadership practices.

This kind of leadership should ideally overcome the barriers of the infantilisation, marginalisation and exclusion based on gender, age and intersectional identity markers that are historically associated with marginalisation.

It becomes an invaluable asset to overcome the imposter syndrome among many candidates. If and once implemented correctly, intergenerational feminist leadership paves the way for moving towards ‘leaving no one behind’. It also enables the connection between generations who work together in maintaining peace and security, development and human rights inside and outside the UN.

In sum, for current and future intergenerational feminist UN leaders, regardless of their age, it is crucial to always be aware of different cultures and contexts. They should think about power dynamics and hierarchy and their enabling and disabling effects, to exercise patience, empathy, trust and genuine individualised human connection. Additionally, to encourage learning and innovation and to facilitate the integration of innovative and transformative ideas within the current systemic constraints.

## Recommendations for meaningful intergenerational leadership

When considering intergenerational feminist leadership as one of the models for intersectional, innovative and inclusive leadership at the UN, one can look back at Jay Fraser’s definition of leadership: ‘Leadership is the ability to change and to accomplish things that couldn’t have been done without you’.<sup>xiii</sup> This definition highlights the importance of the value of individuals and their talents and goes beyond systemic hierarchy. It emphasises that a leader is not just the person whose title is defined as a team or entity leader. Instead, it highlights the importance of courage and standing up for the change that is necessary to live by the values and principles of the UN and its agenda. It also recommends doing so with the support of one’s team both in scenarios when converging and diverging opinions come from across different generations.

If we as young women feminist leaders in the UN system are to grow and survive in the changing intergenerational landscape, certain practical steps can support us in navigating it. Intergenerational feminist leadership starts with active listening as an indispensable asset to good leaders across different generations. Great leaders listen to team members and consider how to create more open spaces for discussion and co-creation. Redesigning obsolete hierarchies with modesty and humility regardless of age and seniority remains essential to grounding intergenerational leadership at team level.

### Box 2: UN leadership Strategies

Successful models of such leadership with a focus on the leadership of young women have already been implemented in different contexts and the following strategies have been highlighted:

- participation of diverse young women as both a means and an end;
- a culture of power-sharing and mentorship;
- institutionalised supports for young women’s leadership and priorities; and
- a growing number of young women knowing and claiming their rights.

Leaders who recognise their shortcomings know the importance of highlighting and filling the different gaps which are not just based on traditional practice, but generational skillsets.

Conversely good leadership and thriving teams means that everyone can express their opinions and engage in supporting tasks. In doing so, mentorship, experience transfer and sharing insights from older team members can build the capacities of others while innovative ideas and the use of newer models across different working cultures coming from youth can benefit the entire team. This will be effective if the communication is with respect and devoid of patronising tones, infantilisation or tokenism. This is a great example of an exercise of power-sharing during which they can revisit explicitly exclusionary factors that affect different team members. Dialogues in safe spaces and through anonymous feedback mechanisms within a team can support team members to feel comfortable enough to express themselves and direct attention to roadblocks that decrease their performance. Not losing sight of the end goal in each team is also essential to bring teammates together. Such can be done through exercises of foresight and visioning done jointly with all members.

In terms of staff recruitment, senior team leadership must go beyond only considering UN-related experience and transferable skills. The current recruitment process of competency-based assessments may need to be transformed or replaced and become inclusive of scenarios and situations that gather candidate data that could be used to assess their abilities. It can support the cultivation of intergenerational feminist leadership across different levels of a team instead of only presenting success stories and lessons learned based on the requirements of the vacancy. Self-applied intergenerational feminist leadership is required inclusive of the technical skills to do the job.

With all that has been said about intergenerational feminist leadership, as a young woman leader from Iran engaged within the UN system, I believe that the system has recognised the indispensable need for transformational intergenerational feminist leadership. However, there is a long way to go in moving from the why to the how and making this leadership a normalised reality.

Meanwhile, many leaders, teams, and agencies including UN Women have already done a great deal to make this

leadership style a reality, such as the Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Compact.<sup>xiv</sup>

Their efforts should be highlighted and show-cased as a learning point that demonstrates the feasibility of this model and provide practical advice to others. After all, in fast changing times, 'a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step'.<sup>xv</sup> ■



## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> UN General Assembly, 'Composition of the Secretariat: staff demographics Report of the Secretary-General', A/74/82, 22 April, 2019, <https://undocs.org/A/74/82>.

<sup>ii</sup> Abresh Useini, 'How to understand intergenerational leadership - An overview of the four generations', Bloch & Østergaard, 19 November 2015, <<https://blochoestergaard.com/how-to-understand-inter-generational-leadership-an-overview-of-the-four-generations/>>.

<sup>iii</sup> UN Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), 'United Nations System Leadership Framework', CEB/2017/1 (Annex), 20 June 2017, <https://undocs.org/CEB/2017/1>. See also: <https://unsceb.org/united-nations-system-leadership-framework>.

<sup>iv</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 2250, 9 december 2015, [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2250\(2015\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2250(2015)); Resolution 2418, 31 May 2018, [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2418\(2018\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2418(2018)); Resolusion 2535; 14 July 2020, [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2535\(2020\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2535(2020)).

<sup>v</sup> UN General Assembly, 'Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary-General', A/75/982, 5 August 2021, <https://undocs.or/A/75/982>.

<sup>vi</sup> UN General Assembly A/74/82, *ibid*.

<sup>vii</sup> Veronika Tywuschik-Sohlström, 'The Art of Leadership in the United Nations: Framing What's Blue', *The Art of Leadership in the United Nations: Framing What's Blue* (Uppsala Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation 2020), [https://www.daghammarskjold.se/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/un\\_leadership\\_2020.pdf#page=100](https://www.daghammarskjold.se/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/un_leadership_2020.pdf#page=100), p. 106.

<sup>viii</sup> 'Organizational culture eats strategy for breakfast, lunch and diner', Torben Rick, 11 June 2014, <https://www.torbenrick.eu/blog/culture/organisational-culture-eats-strategy-for-breakfast-lunch-and-dinner/>.

<sup>ix</sup> Interview with an anonymous young woman employed in the UN.

<sup>x</sup> Ahmed Abdillahi Hashi, 'The heart of a leader: Lessons from a mother', in *The Art of Leadership in the United Nations: Framing What's Blue*, (Uppsala: Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 2020), [https://www.daghammarskjold.se/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/un\\_leadership\\_2020.pdf#page=50](https://www.daghammarskjold.se/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/un_leadership_2020.pdf#page=50), p. 50

<sup>xi</sup> UN Women advocates for the rights of women and girls and LGBTIQ+ rights, and focuses on a wide array of issues, including violence against women and violence

against LGBTIQ+ people.

<sup>xii</sup> Tracy Barton, 'Feminist Leadership: Building Nurturing Academic Communities', *Advancing Women's Leadership Online Journal*, 21(2006), <<https://www.advancingwomen.com/awl/fall2006/barton.htm>>.

<sup>xiii</sup> Jay Fraser, 'Etymology of Innovation', Disruptor League, 29 April 2014, <<https://www.disruptorleague.com/blog/2014/04/29/etymology-of-innovation/>>.

<sup>xiv</sup> See: <https://wpshcompact.org/>.

<sup>xv</sup> Chinese proverb attributed to 6th century philosopher and writer Lao Tzu in *Tao Te Ching*.

# Feminist leadership for transformative social justice

BY DANIELA ZELAYA RAUDALES AND CAROLINE LAMBERT



Iman Hariri  
*The Rose*  
Zataari Camp



*Caroline Lambert is currently an independent consultant who has worked in the feminist and human rights movement for more than 35 years. Her experience is both in governance and operations where she held formal and informal leadership roles.*



*Daniela Zelaya Raudales joined the World Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) as an intern in 2016 where she now works as a project specialist, supporting movement-building initiatives, coordinating peacebuilding, and championing young women's leadership. Previous roles include serving as a YWCA of Honduras board member, volunteering as a peer educator for social and gender justice, violence against women and girls including sexual and reproductive health and rights. Ms. Raudales holds a degree in communications and advertising and she is passionate about feminism and young women's transformative leadership.*

■ As the authors of this reflection, we intend to share our own perspective of feminist leadership inspired by some of our learnings gained from engaging in the women's rights movement in different capacities over several decades. The concepts we share have also been shaped by attributes we have seen in intergenerational feminist activists worldwide who continuously and bravely slay the patriarchy in their own unique ways. Our hope is to offer some reflections based on ideas and inspiration that can motivate critical thinking and action towards more feminist leadership for transformative social justice.

### **Feminist leadership seeks the transformation of inequality for all peoples...**

It is our contention that moving to more feminist forms of leadership is crucial for organisations, communities and relationships that drive social change. There are many different ways to understand feminist leadership. So, what does it mean to us? In our experience, feminist leadership is a journey from the personal to the political, and an individual and collective commitment to equality.<sup>1</sup> Our understanding of equality seeks individual and societal transformation with justice. Feminist leadership interrogates how gendered narratives – for example, stereotypes that women are emotional, while men are logical – have come into existence, been replicated, and held so many people back while propelling others forward.

Feminist leadership is intersectional – it recognises that gender justice is intrinsically connected to a range of other movements, including those striving for racial,

environmental, disability, sexuality, and class justice. It is leadership that navigates the multiplicity of these intersecting identities at the individual and the collective levels. In the process it embraces the need for complex solutions to the multiple threads of injustice that make up the network of inequalities in the world today.

By revealing the structural and systemic factors that discriminate against some groups in our society, feminist leadership challenges the myth that if you just work hard enough you can succeed. Instead, by focusing on making the structures of privilege and oppression visible, feminist leadership shows the many and varied ways in which dominant groups move with greater ease and safety through life, while those with less power and privilege are more likely to experience human rights violations. Moreover, they carry the legacy and continued detrimental effects of intergenerational disadvantage and other forms of trauma.

The advancement of intersectional feminist leadership is only possible, however, if it also holds itself accountable for its own complicity and replication of practices of power and privilege. In our movement, for example, there is a formal mandate of over 160 years that aims to foster young women's leadership. Yet we still struggle daily with the dynamics of age-based discrimination which too often sees older women holding onto positions of formal power at the expense of young leaders. It is complicated: in many instances, this mantle of formal leadership may be the only expression of power available to the officeholders within societies that disparage the leadership of women. But genuine feminist leadership embraces discomfort and creates mechanisms for change.





**Feminist leadership and its agenda of challenging ‘power over’ carries with it an inherent risk. We’re challenging entrenched systems of privilege, which can be individually and collectively dangerous.**

In the case of our global movement, we have adopted quotas for the participation of young women on boards. This embracing of intergenerational and co-leadership models fosters the creation of conscious transition periods from one leader to the next. We also, through membership training and awareness-raising, take time to reflect on where and how power needs to be transformed as well as identifying the barriers that prevent transformative change.

### **...it cares about the process as much as the outcome...**

Feminist leadership is also as much about the process as it is about the outcome. As feminist leaders we challenge the individualism of traditional leadership models and build a collective space for shared leadership instead.

We aim to evolve new practices that confront hierarchies and increase transparency and accountability. For example, feminist leadership during a period of organisational transformation or restructuring could contest who is seen as the ‘expert’ on change. This most often defaults to those in formal, senior leadership roles. In our vision of feminist leadership, we identify the value and perspectives that all individuals in their different and unique roles in the organisation can bring to the discussions. This signals a re-centering of lived experience and the fundamental challenge to who is an authorised expert. This process and reflection on who creates that authorisation (ie, the dominant power groups setting the authorisations) is a fundamental part of feminist leadership and its constant interrogation of power.

### **...it is always, always, questioning how power operates.**

At its heart feminist leadership is all about power, in its many different manifestations. Our understanding of feminist engagements with power is deeply indebted to the recent ‘All About Power’ primer produced by CREA

and written by Srilatha Batliwala.<sup>ii</sup> Feminist leadership shines a spotlight on the ‘power over’ practices of dominant ideologies – for example, the power of the patriarchy to set a narrow set of gender norms that have flow-on effects in the lives of young women around the world. Other dominant ideologies that exhibit ‘power over’ include white supremacy, ableism, ageism, colonialism and empire, the ongoing economic inequalities and denigration of the earth, hetero-normativism, and transphobia.<sup>iii</sup>

Feminist leadership and its agenda of challenging ‘power over’ carries with it an inherent risk. We’re challenging entrenched systems of privilege, which can be individually and collectively dangerous. In recent decades, the importance of individual and collective care has become an integral part of feminist leadership. It invites collective reflection and practices to support us to live with constant risk to our physical and psychological safety.

For example, it asks us to consider how we can embrace trauma-informed leadership, which supports people with lived experience of patriarchal retaliation to continue to offer their leadership. We are encouraged to build webs of care and connection<sup>iv</sup> that strengthen and deepen our movements, enable us to continue to show up, and ensure we can step back when we need to restore and rejuvenate ourselves – secure in the knowledge that others in our movement will be confident to offer their leadership.

Feminist leadership also acknowledges the ways in which ‘power under’<sup>v</sup> can leak out. This can happen in subversive resistance to those in authority, and in damaging responses to the feeling of powerlessness. Another case can be in the aggressive and bullying behaviour of those who, when finally granted some small measure of power – fear its loss and hold their power defensively.

Being aware of ‘power under’, and analysing individual behaviour and organisational culture from this perspective, supports a deeper practice of feminist leadership.





**Above all, feminist leadership is an expression of 'power with'. Feminist leadership is collective and eschews the cult of personality associated with traditional models of leadership.**

The practice of feminist leadership encourages us, individually, in small groups, and collectively, to cultivate 'power within', learning how to hold it, and most importantly how to share it with others. Cultivating this sort of power necessitates the idea of deeper kindness and grace in our day-to-day practice. This is particularly important in feminist organisations, and likely other organisations as well, where we (unfortunately) often judge ourselves and each other very harshly for perceived and actual failures, instead of showing compassion, empathy and reflection on how to do differently next time. And, of course, clear-hearted and compassionate accountability for unjust behaviour remains crucial.

Above all, feminist leadership is an expression of 'power with'. Feminist leadership is collective and eschews the cult of personality associated with traditional models of leadership.

This is a tough call in an age of individualism and a time of personal brands and influencers. But feminist leadership dwells in the space of collective power, created when a group of individuals share an agenda which transcends individual benefit and focuses instead on achieving more equitable processes and outcomes for a bigger group.

Sometimes, the 'power with' is in the form of standing in solidarity with others, using the strength of collective voice and vision to create the momentum for change.

Sometimes it is in the form of speaking up when others would be at considerable risk because the privilege you hold affords you greater protection in speaking truth to the oppressor.

Sometimes 'power with' requires you to step back, to reflect on the ease with which your voice is heard, and to practice self-silencing so that others may be heard, recognising that power is always at play and that you have the choice to step back because your privilege has already placed you ahead of others.

### **Feminist leadership isn't so much about leaning into the existing table, it's about expanding and reshaping the table...**

We live in an extraordinary moment for the promotion of women's leadership. Looking back over the past century, there has been a seismic shift in ideas about women's leadership. But feminist leadership is more than simply telling women to be more confident, strong, and charismatic; more than just aiming for the top job; more than just 'liking' social media posts that celebrate an increase in female political representation.

Feminist leadership celebrates and values the diversity by which those who identify as women and girls practice different forms of leadership in all spheres of life - the hard conversations within families, the bolstering of self-confidence through peer groups committed to social change, the informal power that comes with organisations that value lived experience when creating policy positions, or spotlighting the invisible role of caregivers and our economic reliance on them, among so many others acts of leadership.

Critically, feminist leadership is more than women obtaining power and then replicating patriarchal power structures. If organisations were more open to sharing power, then perhaps we would start to transform the overtly individualistic ideas of leadership that have dominated human history, into the more collective expression of co-thinking and co-creating that harnesses the different brilliances of a group of co-leaders.

For example, they could move to have job-shares for roles from administration to Chief Executive Officer; diffuse power and dismantle hierarchies through fully representative working groups from all levels of an organisation to ensure equitable and inclusive strategy and planning processes. Or as we suggested earlier, doing the same during a period of restructuring; have flexibility (part-time options) for all roles that would encourage



and support carers (especially men) to balance the unpaid work of parenting children or caring for elders with the responsibilities of paid work.

**...and (and this is critical)... it includes you and reshaping your ways of thinking, being, and doing.**

While feminist leadership thrives in the collective spaces, it carries within it an inherent tension. Because, to exist in collective spaces with any ease – to step up and claim power, to step back and cede power – requires diverse ways of thinking, being, and doing. Such leadership necessitates a high degree of personal insight, a different relationship with ego to that offered in traditional leadership – which includes the ability to foster confidence in ourselves, in others, and in our shared vision for a more equal and fairer world. It also includes an appreciation of diverse approaches to sharing power and brings into being different ways of defining ‘success’ in leadership and in life. Therefore, the capacity to engage in personal development, reflection, and growth are essential parts of feminist leadership. We all have different ways of doing things, seeing the world and thinking. It is only when we are comfortable with our own diversity that we can value and foster diversity in others and then be inclusive of others and their identities.

Ultimately, feminist leadership asks us to dwell in a state of perpetually unlearning. We need to take steps to unlearn what success and leadership mean to us individually and as a society. In cultures that emphasise success as an individual endeavour, we need to decentralise our own need for validation and power and learn to share: we need to create success measures that value our ability to share ‘power with’ more than our ability to practice ‘power over’.

We need to embrace a vulnerable form of leadership that enables us to fail, reflect, and grow, and mark that as a successful leadership trait. It is only when we understand that the diversity in others is not a challenge to our own validity, that we can start to share power. ■

## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> We understand equality to include ideas of formal equality (where you treat everybody the same, providing equal opportunities) and substantive equality (where you enact temporary special measures to ensure equal outcomes). Some folks use equality to mean formal equality and equity to mean substantive equality.

<sup>ii</sup> Srilatha Batliwala, ‘All about Power: Understanding Social Power & Power Structures’, *Feminist leadership for Social Transformation series*, 2020, <https://creaworld.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/All-About-Power.pdf>.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> We want to acknowledge the work of the Urgent Action Funds and FRIDA Young Feminist Fund for helping us deepen our understanding of these practices.

<sup>v</sup> ‘Power under’ is a very complex but widespread expression of power, especially by women and in women’s organisations and movements. Power under explains why people who have experienced discrimination, abuse, oppression and trauma, often become abusive, authoritarian, and oppressive themselves when they gain power (especially power over). See: Batliwala, *ibid.* p. 60.

# A world in dire need of intergenerational leadership

## INTERVIEW WITH AHUNNA EZIAKONWA



Reem Diab  
*Sweet Dream*  
Zataari Camp





**Ahunna Eziakonwa** is UNDP's Assistant Administrator and Regional Director for Africa. Prior to taking up this post, she was UN Resident Coordinator, UNDP Resident Representative and UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Ethiopia, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Uganda, and before that held the same position in Lesotho. She has also worked as Chief of the Africa Section for Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) where she managed over 15 country operations in Africa. Before joining the United Nations, Ms. Eziakonwa held a series of senior positions with civil society organisations across Africa.

■ **How do you define intergenerational leadership? What does it look like in practice?**

I've had many interviews in my career, but nobody has ever interviewed me on intergenerational leadership. But some aspects of intergenerational leadership are of interest to me, going back to my own passion and professional orientation. In terms of definition, I do not think there is an academic definition as such, it's more an ethos that really requires us as human beings to be self-aware. That is institutionally and organisationally aware of the continuity of life.

Let me explain more. Life doesn't stop at one place; it continues to evolve into processes and into things. No matter which context we find ourselves in life, we need to recognise that time for change will come. And in this context, we need to prepare for those moments of change.

The way to prepare for change that involves uncertainty, is by twinning the different generations. The connection between old and young ensures that there is learning both ways. For me, that's part of the preparation for that sort of uncertain reality that we will be facing. This cross fertilisation between generations is crucial.

We no longer talk about just two generations - old and young. There is Gen Z, X, Millennials and Boomers which requires an even more complex way of analysing the concept of intergenerational leadership. There is the infusion of values, ethics, assets and attributes from all the generations that can secure prosperity of societies and their continuity. Intergenerational leadership for me, manifests itself in multiple contexts, in political spaces for sure, in public institutions, in businesses and even in close family units.

And I believe that my role as a civil servant in the UN is to nurture a leadership environment that allows for a mix of talents from different generations and to create a reservoir of talent that institutions, public and private, can draw on to secure a prosperous future for all.

*We want to go back to your first point about the continuity of life. We were wondering if implicit in your definition of intergenerational leadership, there is the notion of responsibility for previous and future generations?*

I would subscribe to that very much. The word 'responsibility' was implied in what I was saying previously. It is a key concept that we must preserve at both ends. Each generation has a responsibility to preserve generations across the board.

I come from Africa. We put strong emphasis on age. It is something that invokes respect. Even as a young person, it is drummed into your head that you need to look after the elderly because society values the notion. Not because the elderly become old and helpless, but because existence itself represents something that future generations need.

There is this association of wisdom to age. You need to transfer your experience and knowledge to upcoming generations. You're also in touch with things that other generations would not have seen. For example, in Africa, we pass on history, culture and values through oral traditions. Things were not written but passed on from generation to generation through oral communication mechanisms. That is very much viewed as an important part of leadership.

Conversely, I think, there is a sense of responsibility to empower the younger generation. But often it's not a



two-way street. In certain geographical environments, culture sort of interferes with this concept because there is less expected of younger people. Youthfulness is often associated with lack of experience and some form of recklessness. There are no expectations that information is transferred upstream, which has the cultural implications of the information flow to be one directional.

*Given the COVID-19 pandemic and the context in which we live now, why do you think intergenerational leadership is so important?*

I feel it's always been important, but probably more so now because of the complexity of global affairs. We are faced with conditions that go beyond the understanding or the experience of one generation. We have technology as a very real and present reality with some generations being less intimate with it. Those happen to be the ones who are in charge and leading. The younger generation, who feel comfortable with the reality of technology, are not in political leadership positions but leading in other areas and sectors. With the influence and impact that technology has on humanity today, it is 'suicidal' not to promote intergenerational leadership. Bluntly saying, it would be 'stupid'.

Let's take climate change. It is now affecting millions of people globally. But who is mostly at risk? It is Generation Z. It is unthinkable not to cultivate intergenerational leadership when we are contending with climate change.

COVID-19 has also triggered reflections on how to cultivate more intergenerational spaces and more understanding between generations. What is really required? We should have that intergenerational reality enacted in the way society works. However, doing this can cause tension and at times conflict as today's generations come with diversity that the world is often not prepared for. Facing complexities where people are already highly stressed can accentuate these tensions.

*When you think about intergenerational dialogue and the power dynamic between generations, how difficult is it to ensure that the power dynamic is balanced?*

I think you just touched on something very interesting. The issue with Generations Y and Z, if you like, is the centrality of self-reliance. There is a strong sense of individualism. This generation is being raised to believe that they 'can'. There are a lot more connections to experiences beyond their community because of the proliferation of different types of communication and technology. This is a generation that is in touch with what is possible. That already changes the power dynamics. When you are informed differently, you immediately apply an upper hand.

*For the first time in history there are five generations in the workforce; do you see this as an opportunity at the UN and what are the challenges?*

For the first time ever, we have almost all generations represented in the UN workforce. I think, I saw the numbers that indicated that by 2050, 75% of those working in the UN workforce will be Millennials. There have been shifts in the UN system, whether it was planned, or a natural process spurred by reality. In my recent townhall meeting, one colleague asked a question: Now, that you are putting 'youth' at the center of your work and as a priority for recruitment, how do you plan to create a path for them to grow in the system and to become leaders rather than getting stuck at entry positions? Which has happened and happens a lot.

I responded that it is a challenge for us who are leaders in the system. You know I am passionate about bringing young people into the UN through programmes and internships that are meaningful and provide for professional growth. We started a 'Young Fellows' program for African women, bringing in over twenty a year and exposing them to opportunities within the UN. Many of the first cohort got recruited after their first year with us.



**Let's take climate change. It is now affecting millions of people globally. But who is mostly at risk? It is Generation Z. It is unthinkable not to cultivate intergenerational leadership when we are contending with climate change.**





**Younger people have different experiences. Their language is quite different from their leaders'. They have higher expectations. It's something we really need to reflect upon within the UN, as I don't think that we've done that well.**

But to be frank, what happens to them after is something I think about a lot. How can they climb the ladder in the UN system? I think, we, as UN leaders, must invest in looking beyond bringing talented young professionals into the system but also how to retain them. Do you have to wait until you're old to climb the entire ladder of UN system - P2, P3, P4 - to be considered a leader?

Sometimes we're quite comfortable just to have young people around us doing the work as Junior Officers, but we don't think all the way about their path to the top. It is important to have young professionals because if you don't have them to begin with, you can't even talk about them becoming leaders.

We are also not acknowledging enough that leadership can happen at any age, at any level. This recognition is going to be a challenge for an organisation like the UN which is very hierarchical. There's a lot of bureaucracy. Our recruitment is not agile nor fluid. It is rigid. We even count office windows against the professional grade/level.

We need to adjust our minds and mind-sets to the fact that intergenerational leadership, isn't about the 'ladder' but that you can be acknowledged as a leader at any level. When that expectation is built in, then this is where you deliver that leadership. This can empower our younger workforce to be leaders and to be recognised as leaders even if they haven't reached that seniority or specific rank.

*The intergenerational gap in Africa is quite prominent; the average age is 19.7 but its leaders are averaging 70. What does this mean for the continent*

'While it is true that there is a huge disparity in age in Africa between the younger generations and political leaders, I think it is changing due to the influx of younger leaders. But there is a gap, and that age gap is quite important because unless you're closer to the age of the population that you are responsible for, you can be quite

far away from their aspirations and desires and even from understanding these aspirations, their attributes, and values that they bring to the table.

Frankly, this distance, in my point of view, has hurt Africa quite a bit. You see this manifested in our political landscape where you have a generation now, a younger generation, not accepting to sit passively and have things thrown at them – good and bad.

This generation is a lot more enlightened. They may not necessarily be more educated than the previous generation but they're more connected to the world. They have more visibility of how life is lived beyond their borders influencing their values, their thinking, and their mindset. The older generation, in possession of leadership positions for the most part, may not fully understand this.

Their exposure however sometimes lacks understanding and patience for the 'older' generation that is leading. You see a lot of street activity as a result. People express their dissatisfaction and grievances on the streets, which at times manifests into violence and even violent extremism due to opportunists taking advantage of mistrust. It is a time-bomb. Therefore, it's important to generate intergenerational dialogue and create spaces for reflection and understanding. Not all is bad with older generations who lead, some of them are genuinely trying to navigate very complex contexts to ensure the best for their countries and their populace who are mostly young people.

I was in Chad the other day and 78% of its population is under 25. So, when you have that reality, you better generate that intergeneration dialogue and leadership. In the Sahel, meanwhile, we see a clear regression of democracy, but you cannot explain it all away by an intergenerational gap. I think there are other factors, with the intergenerational leadership gap being part of it. Younger people have different experiences. Their language is quite different from their leaders'. They have higher expectations. It's





**Believe in yourself. Especially in Africa, the younger population have faced a life where they have grown to be told they cannot – until they have reached a certain age. Therefore, confidence can be beaten down. I always tell young people that I meet: you need to believe in yourself. You have the capacity to change your destiny, to take control of your path.**

something we really need to reflect upon within the UN, as I don't think that we've done that well.

*So why do you think intergenerational leadership and dialogue is so crucial in advancing the UN's agenda?*

In the UN, we must work with Member States which usually translates into working with governments. Governments particularly in the African region are made up of the older generation. There are not a lot of young people in those leadership positions. The young people are in (youth) political groups or parties which we cannot engage with formally given our neutrality. When it comes to occupying positions of power, they are missing. And therefore, they are naturally a gap in our engagement at country level.

With the advent of digital technologies, we have woken up to the fact that particularly in Africa if we're not engaging directly with the youth and we're not invested rightly in that, not just as recipients of our aid, but as actually those who contribute to the thinking in shaping our programs, then we're missing the point in terms of development.

A concrete example from my work: UNDP introduced the 'Accelerator lab' tapping into the talent of young people in the program countries. In normal cases, the UN country team are comprised of national and international staff. With this programme, we insist that two to three staff be nationals of the country, young and have a good understanding of new technologies. Through these labs we are uncovering where the young people are hiding, understanding how they invest and how to bring their voices into the work that we do.

The labs are embedded in the UNDP country office so that you have that cross fertilisation, you have that intergenerational dialogue. We do not treat them as a universe by themselves. While we come in touch with

younger generations mindsets, for them it is also a useful journey to understand the 'traditions', the 'value system' and the strong foundations the whole system was once upon built on. We are trying to build this 'two-way' street.

*The last question is more related to you as a seasoned leader. What advice would you give the younger generation?*

Believe in yourself. Especially in Africa, the younger population have faced a life where they have grown to be told they cannot – until they have reached a certain age. Therefore, confidence can be beaten down. I always tell young people that I meet: you need to believe in yourself. You have the capacity to change your destiny, to take control of your path.

I say that to my daughter every day. The world out there is vicious and it's not always kind, but I think you don't stand a chance if you lack that inner confidence. We really need the older generations to continue to believe in, and to trust the younger people and help them to believe in themselves.

Have the strength, capacity, and the potential to be whatever you want to be, but you need to work at it. Do not think that things just fall onto your laps and stay there, and that you can just lean back. It's about applying yourself. Whatever it is that you feel is your calling, is your mission, you must apply yourself. You must put in the work. You must have those sleepless nights where you invest yourself.

You must be not afraid to fail. Failure for me is part of the journey to success. If you don't fail, you will never understand how to be better. Today, I believe with the spirit of innovation, that has really dominated the way we live our lives, we have come to see failure differently – as a passport to sharpen our trade. I see failures as a friend that will take you to greater heights.



And finally, have integrity. It is a difficult term to unpack but for me what it really means is your word needs to be your word. To lead in a way where people can trust you. People can look at you and believe what was communicated is also what was meant. Our world today is crumbling to a certain extent - all the sort of devastation that we're seeing - comes from leadership that cannot be trusted, leadership that cannot be maintained, that has no integrity, that has no transparency. UN advances the value of integrity and ethical behavior. I think the younger generation could have a lot to teach us there because it's also a generation that believes in honesty. Embrace integrity. Embrace honesty. Embrace the truth. ■



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See: <https://acceleratorlabs.undp.org>.





Moayad Ibrahim Al-Abed  
*Vase with white flowers*  
Azraq Camp



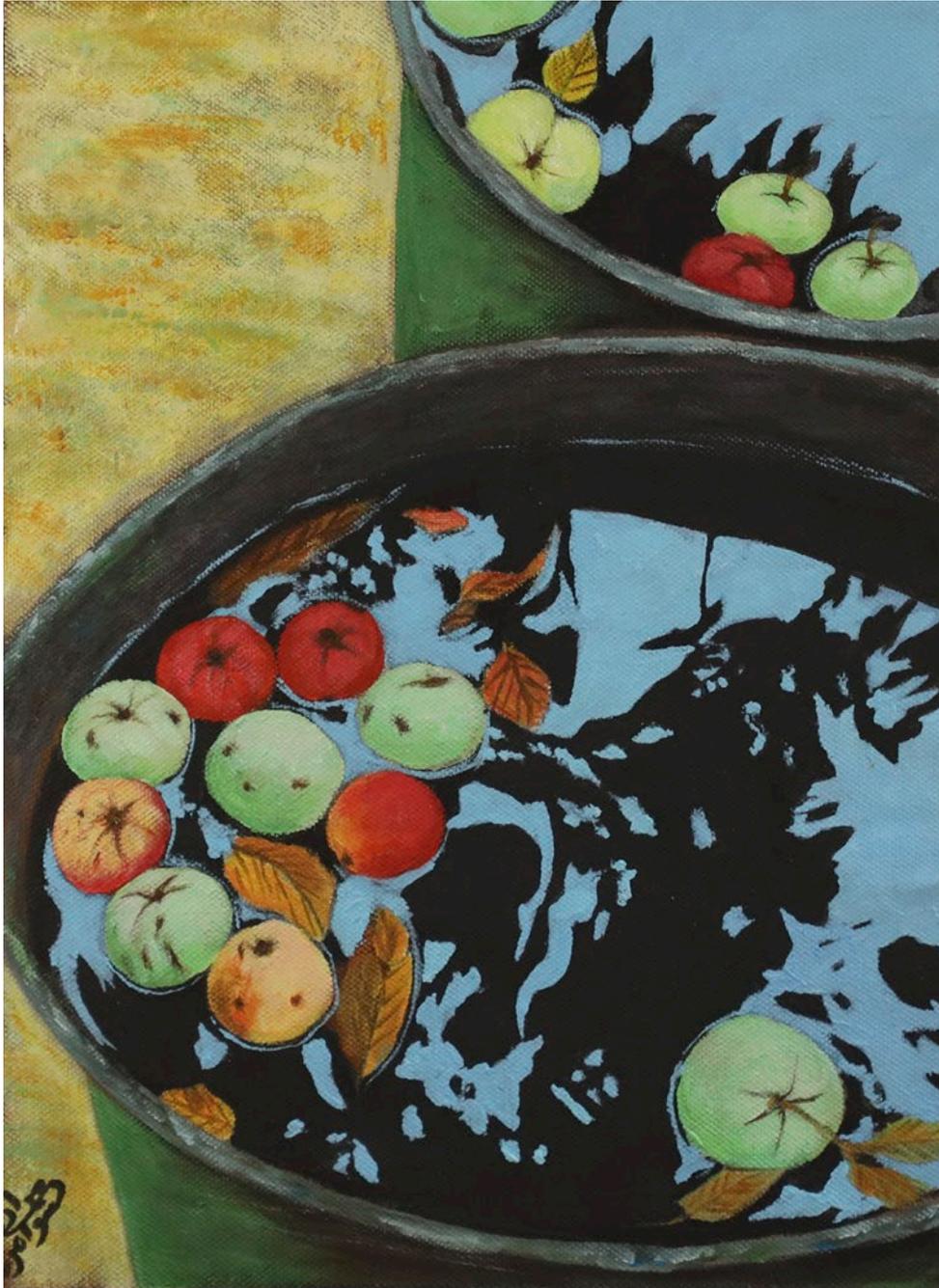
# Chapter Four

## The still life: Depicting the reality on the ground

Resident Coordinator leadership: Magicians without a magic wand? BY DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD FOUNDATION .....	94
Finding the balance between engagement and accountability BY RADHIKA COOMARASWAMY .....	99
How can leadership by UN Resident Coordinators become truly transformative? BY JOHN HENDRA.....	104
Frankness and honesty: Essential traits of a UN Leader INTERVIEW WITH LYNN HASTINGS .....	110
Trajectory of United Nations leadership roles in the Liberia peace process BY CHRIS AGOHA .....	114

# Resident Coordinator leadership: Magicians without a magic wand?

BY DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD FOUNDATION



Murad Al-Shawamreh  
*Apple Season*  
ZataariCam



*This contribution is a summary of a virtual informal dialogue between Resident Coordinators facilitated by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation<sup>1</sup> on 28 March 2022. The following UN officials participated: Yesim Oruc, Resident Coordinator Guyana, Susan Ngongi Namondo, Resident Coordinator Uganda, Ulrika Richardson, Resident Coordinator Kosovo, Shombi Sharp, Resident Coordinator India and Ozonnia Ojielo, Resident Coordinator Kyrgyzstan.*

■ In 2015, world leaders set out a comprehensive framework for realising one of the founding objectives of the United Nations: the economic and social advancement of all peoples through the 2030 Agenda. As the parameters of this new agenda were emerging, it became clear that the United Nations development system, the organisation's primary vehicle for supporting countries in its implementation, was no longer fit for this new purpose.

Antonio Guterres assumed the office of Secretary-General less than two weeks after the adoption by the General Assembly of the 2016 resolution on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review.<sup>11</sup> He then worked with Member States, UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes and other key stakeholders to develop a series of proposals to strengthen the United Nations development system. This effort culminated in June 2018 with the adoption of resolution 72/279 by the General Assembly.<sup>111</sup>

At the core of the reform adopted by the Member States was the establishment of a reinigorated, independent, impartial, and empowered Resident Coordinator (RC) system that would help facilitate the emergence of a new generation of UN country teams (UNCT), de-linking the coordination function and architecture from the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and creating a dedicated office for the RC system within the UN Secretariat.

The new system brought new opportunities for Resident Coordinators; they benefit from a new delegation of authority that provides them with strategic and coordinating functions that ensures the UN system response remains relevant, field-focused, and able to adapt resources to specific contexts and quickly changing country needs.

Through the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF, 'CF' for short), RCs have been given additional guidance on their responsibility to

integrate critical crosscutting aspects – eg human rights, gender, climate, peacebuilding, humanitarian affairs, with a strengthened focus on Leaving No One Behind.

A Management Accountability Framework (the 'MAF') has been developed to clarify and differentiate responsibilities between the Resident Coordinator and Heads of Agencies in UNCTs and to strengthen accountability of collaboration and joint results (from planning to resource mobilisation and communication). To meet the demands and profiles of the new Resident Coordinator, the RC Assessment Centre has been fully redesigned to recruit the best talent, with strong development credentials. RC pipelines have been created to bring in diverse skills-sets meeting the challenges on the ground. Gender and geographical diversity have become central to recruitment.

These structural and institutional changes have been undertaken with a view to enhance the leadership, authority, and impartiality of the Resident Coordinators, three elements stressed as essential to success and to the UN's contribution to the 2030 Agenda by the UN Secretary-General in his 2021 report on the function of the resident coordinator system.<sup>11V</sup>

### **Informal dialogue on RC leadership**

Against this backdrop, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation invited a small number of Resident Coordinators to an informal dialogue to examine the realities of RC leadership in the 2022 context. It was an opportunity to discuss how RC leadership can ensure the UN's relevance in managing the unprecedented challenges of today.

The discussion explored the various elements at play in shaping, enhancing or undermining RC leadership, including: (1) personal skills and competencies, acceptance in country and at HQ level; (2) partner behaviours eg donor funding, host government practices; (3) institutional and procedural innovations; (4) capacities and tools at the



**The RC role is at its core a mediator and facilitator— moving the needle from behind, creating spaces for UNCTs and other actors, identifying and building relationships that are needed to collectively deliver on the SDGs.**

disposal of RCs; (5) the impact of broader contextual factors (eg pandemic, climate change, geopolitical and ideological shifts) on the RC function, the skills, capacities and competencies required; and (6) expectations placed on the RC, both from within the UN and beyond, in addressing global challenges at country level.

The main elements of the conversation are summarised here.

### **The role of the RC in 2022**

Participants noted that the role of the RC fundamentally differs from what it was pre-reform. While the de-linking of the RC system meant the loss of a fair amount of ‘muscle’, the RC function has truly gained neutrality and increased its gravitas.

The RC function is now more empowered and enabled to act as a strategic broker translating global trends and agendas into policy practice at country level. As a direct representative of the Secretary-General, the RC is seen as instrumental in pushing, leading, and finding new entry points for the UN system by amplifying the ‘collective’ offer of the UN.

RCs need to act as the impartial ‘UN Ambassador’ in highly difficult political contexts – addressing political sensitive issues such as prevention, human rights, conflicts, climate justice. They are also UN policy ambassadors, drivers, and implementers of headquarters agendas— such as ‘Our Common Agenda’ or ‘Leaving no one behind’. Often though, in today’s fraught and polarised dynamics, the RC needs to decide which normative battle to fight for – without losing complete access. These imperatives result in a constant balancing act, requiring political acumen, and leading to the sense that RCs are to some degree magicians without a magic wand.

Some RCs underlined the need to continuously refine and test their own ‘added value’ – where is the RC role

most needed? Where can the function add value in the current country context? Increasingly, RCs can be used to create the ‘right’ environment and the space to convey messages on behalf of UNCT members that are difficult, sensitive, or risky to discuss with national counterparts, as for example in cases of human rights abuses or ethnic relations. Individual risks for agencies can be pooled into one collective force.

The RC role is at its core a mediator and facilitator— moving the needle from behind, creating spaces for UNCTs and other actors, identifying and building relationships that are needed to collectively deliver on the SDGs.

For the RC role to be accepted and effective, it is important that UNCT members feel that they are supported in their respective mandates but not replaced or undermined. At times, this means the RC needs to be a coach and a friend, advocating on their behalf and supporting them during the hard times, opening doors where they are closed or non-existent.

The coordination function of the RC is often highlighted when in fact many RCs are occupied with the strategic role of interpreting complex contexts and offering solutions to host governments and communities. While it is true that RCs should lead from behind, in support of the leadership of the UN Country Team, the RC is also required to lead ‘from the front’.

The RC is expected to provide a collective vision, to chart new horizons, and to foster partnerships and collaboration for improved impact. Crucially, in support of the collective vision the RC must offer strategic leadership on the processes required to implement the vision and to enable the UNCT to flourish.

In fact, the traditional coordination role is an incidental one and only meaningful if it derives from the strategic visioning and leadership functions, which constitute the real core and essence of the RC.



## Context matters: Enabling and undermining factors for RC leadership

The extent to which RCs successfully play this role is very much dependent on the context in which they operate. And different factors have a different impact on the RC.

Some see an opportunity with the newly signed ‘Cooperation Framework (CF)’ as the driver of multilateral and collective responses. This CF impact could be further enhanced by allowing the RCs to act as certifier of UN agency country programs, to verify that these are in line with the CF and that together, they constitute a truly ‘collective and compelling offer’ for the country.

While there is strength in an instrument such as the CF, it was also noted that some country contexts and factors can undermine it. For one Resident Coordinator, the CF and other processes were squandered and not owned – neither by the UNCT nor by the government. In such instances, what are the remedies against a ‘mentality of exclusion’ rather than cooperation? The RC must look to all of the tools at their disposal and bring a wide array of skills to bring momentum to the UN’s work, make it the interest of UN agencies to collaborate and place themselves in the rooms and conversations that are critical for the UN’s engagement and success.

The new toolbox is helpful, but challenges rooted in how the UN system has worked and interacted with each other for years persist. The path towards the SDGs requires a different, more integrated working culture within the UN and between the UN and its membership. Yet, UN ambitions and Member States behaviour do not always coincide. UN agencies are often asked to respond to Member States’ priorities, which do not necessarily match the UN country needs and the UN’s collective effort. They are forced to look inwards and follow funding streams. The UN’s work on the ground is at times more about pleasing the visibility and funding modalities of funders/donors than working towards national priorities and SDG

acceleration. And for Member States themselves, working with just one agency offers more visibility and is therefore preferred to engagement at the UN system level.

This speaks to the larger observation made by the group that over the last 20 years, UN business models have not changed enough. The continued trend towards, and preference for projectized development is underpinned by short-term thinking and implementation with little room for collective approaches. Daily work is still dominated by activities and projects delivered by selected agencies instead of joint funding modalities and joint activities. This trend is further fuelled by the rewards system in the UN system, whereby most heads of agencies are assessed – and promoted – against their resource mobilisation successes, which, in turn, incentivises national ministries to work only with certain agencies instead of opting for collective approaches.

The UN’s working culture is failing to reward those leaders that seek collaborative, integrated and collective approaches. Without changes to the incentive structure the UN will struggle to meet the ambition of the General Assembly Resolution 72/279.<sup>v</sup> And lastly, the group acknowledged that while the Management Accountability Framework – the ‘MAF’ has helped in identifying and describing the role of the RC vis-à-vis the UNCT, it still leaves too much room for interpretation. It leaves RCs to continuously litigate issues of responsibilities and accountabilities with their peers, to the detriment of effective and collective focus on the goals at hand.

## Going forward means to invest into the UN and the RC system’s intellectual firepower

In the last part of the conversation, participants explored the issue of intellectual firepower, and the ability by the UN, under RC leadership, to offer new, bold ideas in support of SGD integration. Most agreed that such



The RC must look to all of the tools at their disposal and bring a wide array of skills to bring momentum to the UN’s work, make it the interest of UN agencies to collaborate and place themselves in the rooms and conversations that are critical for the UN’s engagement and success.

intellectual fire power of the UN is work-in-progress. Most of the inputs delivered by the agencies remain too operational and UNCTs are still thinking too much in project terms. However, there are opportunities to seize.

The RC –for the first time ever– has the ability – and responsibility – to examine all of the UN’s work at country level and explore what is missing and where the UN’s collective offer needs to be reinforced. This can range from identifying existing policy gaps and bringing in new actors to address them, to creating links between development partners that would traditionally not interact – including by establishing intellectual and practical bridges between the North and the Global South. It can also mean approaching a major issue through different and new lenses, and mobilising UN expertise around innovative responses. But much more remains to be done for RCs, and the UNCTs, to be seen as trusted and sought after providers of high quality intellectual capital for SDG achievement.

The conversation ended with a reflection on the time we live in. The new Resident Coordinator system was born right before the pandemic hit. Most interaction and collaboration between various UN interlocutors and stakeholders are born out of a crisis and COVID-19 proved no different. The RC system played a crucial role, one that has been recognised both locally and internationally. But now that the crisis is either receding or losing relevance, everyone is tempted to revert to their UN bubble, and efforts undertaken up over the last two years – collective approaches in effectively responding to the pandemic as one UN voice – could revert to single agency responses.

So, how does the UN system preserve a collaborative leadership culture beyond crisis?

In this reflection a word of caution prevailed. Executive Board meetings often feature plenty of talk about the transformational change needed to deliver on the SDGs.

For Member States and agencies alike, the burden of this transformational change seems to reside with the Resident Coordinator. Yet, this view undermines the true collective purpose of the UN reform. The burden for transformational change needs to be shared. The concept of ‘Team’ UN needs to be revitalised, incentivised, and lived.

In an increasingly polarised world, the RC role has become more important. RC leadership is needed to make the case for multilateralism and to translate it into meaningful change in people’s lives. But the value of multilateralism lies in its collective nature, not just in the skills, knowledge, and practices of an individual. ■

## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> The summary of the discussion was written by Veronika Tywuschik-Sohlstrom, Marc Jacquand and Simone Hagfeldt with input from several colleagues as well as comments by the Resident Coordinators.

<sup>ii</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution 71/243, 1 February 2017, <https://undocs.org/A/RES/71/243>.

<sup>iii</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution 72/279, 31 May 2018, <https://undocs.org/A/RES/72/279>.

<sup>iv</sup> UN General Assembly, ‘Review of the functioning of the resident coordinator system: rising to the challenge and keeping the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Report of the Secretary-General’, A/75/905, 7 June 2021, <https://undocs.org/A/75/905>.

<sup>v</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution 72/279, *ibid.*



# Finding the balance between engagement and accountability

BY RADHIKA COOMARASWAMY



Adham Khaled Al-Ammar  
*Flowers on bicycle*  
Azraq Camp



**Radhika Coomaraswamy** worked as an Under Secretary-General and The Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict. She was the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women from 1994-2003 and main author of the *Global Study on the Implementation of Resolution 1325*. From 2003-2006 Coomaraswamy chaired the Sri Lankan National Rights Commission.

■ The Charter of the United Nations begins with the words ‘We, the peoples...’ Recent scholars have written about the history of the term ‘peoples’ and the strength and flexibility of its constituent power.<sup>1</sup> Such powers and their interpretations continue to evolve over time. Like sovereignty, ‘we the peoples’ has a very different connotation today than it did in the 1940s, primarily due to the growth of human rights. Despite this, the structure of the UN still revolves around nation states. A realist would argue that the actual structure is really the only thing that matters. Yet, that would be a short-sighted analysis. Networks of international actors and international public opinion do have an enormous impact. Though the decisions of the UN are made by nation states, the credibility and legitimacy of the UN continue to rest with ‘we, the peoples’.

### One UN, different departments

The tension between these two aspects of the UN Charter runs throughout the UN. The first calls for engagement and diplomacy, the second recognises the importance of accountability. An effective leader is one who captures the confidence of nation states while ensuring a certain level of integrity to represent the voice of the international community. Such a leader is asked to be both a partner and a conscience keeper. Departments too, are affected by this tension. They rarely work with the proper understanding of the holistic picture of the UN. For instance, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) focuses on engagement for development. Mention of human rights accountability rarely sits well with their officers. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) stresses accountability. They are wary of being set aside and ignored by the UN’s other agencies. Yet, a Resident Coordinator on the ground must deliver both messages. They should convey the importance of engagement but also the concerns on human rights. This becomes the crucial test of leadership especially in conflict and post conflict areas.

In recent years, partly to deal with this tension, the Secretary-General began appointing Special Representatives on thematic issues including Children and Armed Conflict and Sexual Violence in Conflict. The creation of the offices at the Under Secretary-General level ensures interlocutors at the highest positions of the UN and allows them to deal with governments at the appropriate level. Such posts are also created to cut through bureaucracy and red tape to allow for a more targeted response. Those who become Special Representatives require the skills of a diplomat to engage with governments and other stakeholders at the highest levels. They also need the skills of a human rights activist to promote accountability for grave violations and to advocate for their most vulnerable group. It is an appointment that attempts to bridge engagement with accountability in one person.

### The unique position of a Special Representative

The position of Special Representative requires that one engage with a whole array of actors. In the case of children and armed conflict, for example, it often involved persuading rebel groups and warlords to enter into action plans to release children and prevent their recruitment. These meetings had a pattern. First was the drama of entering into rebel held territory. Informing the government, discovering a secure route, and ensuring that we were welcomed. In making these journeys one is often taught to recognise gunfire as parties continue waging violence against each other.

The second moment of spectacle comes when the warlord or a rebel group is informed that they are on a Security Council list for possible sanctions. This is usually greeted with a great deal of anger, a period where it is required to react with grace and equanimity so as not to provoke an incident. But for the six years I held the job, no-one asked me to leave. After a diatribe against the UN, they almost always agree to sit down to discuss the details.





**I have found over the years that the most important factor in delivering bad news is to find the right moment. The belief that personal charm can change the destiny of history is a myth that many of us cultivate when we engage governments.**

There are cynical people who question many of the actions of the UN. But I was struck by how much value these warlords and rebel leaders placed on the Security Council and seeing themselves as future leaders and how eager they were to avoid sanctions or the possibility of sanctions. I must hasten to add that this was not the case for the Taliban who I met in the late 1990s in the context of violence against women, and I never dealt with the more radical groups such as Al Qaeda and ISIS.

One of the key aspects of UN leadership was the need to have good working relations with other UN agencies and departments. This was particularly true for a small department who had to rely on the larger agencies to follow through with agreements in the field. For children and armed conflict, the relevant agencies were UNICEF, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO)<sup>ii</sup> and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Though there were the usual tensions we always came to a mutual understanding and these agencies were truly committed and excellent in their work. The recognition of the complementarity rather than the competitiveness of our work is central.

For example, the children released through negotiations were usually handed over to UNICEF who were in charge of their rehabilitation and release. Thanks to the work of all these agencies the problem of child soldiers is less severe in most parts of the world.

### **Breaking bad news**

Perhaps the utmost difficult part of the job as Special Representative was to deliver hard messages. The UN is just beginning to train its staff on how to do this. Earlier Resident Coordinators and others coming from the development field just balked at the suggestion of delivering unpleasant messages. With the importance

given to OHCHR and Special Representatives in recent years this has changed. But my sense is that the UN and its staff are still very unprepared. Training regarding delivering harsh messages should be central to the preliminary training of Resident Coordinators and other UN staff.

I have found over the years that the most important factor in delivering bad news is to find the right moment. The belief that personal charm can change the destiny of history is a myth that many of us cultivate when we engage governments.

The political, economic and social forces must be aligned to support your request. An example is the case of Myanmar. For years we were attempting to try and enter into an action plan with the Myanmar military about the recruitment of child soldiers. But it was only when General Thein Sein became President in 2011 with a packet of democratic reforms that the country and the military were ready to step forward. An action plan was signed that continues today.

Those agreements signed in the right moment of change tend to be more long-lasting and are not mere public relations exercises by the government or the rebel group with no intention of implementation. Many UN officials also get wrapped up in the public relations exercise and do not pay attention to the details of implementation. This sets the whole agreement up for failure or to be cast away.

The second most important factor in delivering a hard message is to ensure that the UN staff in the field does the due diligence. Before I spoke to governments, rebel groups or warlords, child protection officers from UNICEF and the DPKO would have begun negotiations and set the parameters. They are the unsung champions in many of these exercises. Once the due diligence is done, they call for the Special Representative to push for the terms of the agreement at the highest level. Giving guidance to these young protection officers is absolutely crucial for the work



in terms of accountability mechanisms, especially those dealing with women and children.

In delivering hard messages I have always learnt from experience that it is very important to avoid an arrogant tone. Often interlocutors would make a big issue of my Sri Lankan origins, implying I was to be trusted and that we were dealing with each other as equals. To retain grace and to point to ways forward out of the current situation is always a recipe for a good meeting. The arrogant gaze, a remnant of colonialism, still continues to haunt many in the global south.

### **The accountability process**

Delivering hard messages is often part of a general accountability process. For children and armed conflict this involved Security Council resolution 1612<sup>III</sup> and subsequent resolutions dealing with the grave violations against children during situations of armed conflict.<sup>IV</sup> Besides reporting on country specific areas, the process requires the creation of lists that name and shame parties. In a very specific context where there are already sanction regimes, sanctions may be also imposed.

To create a consensus at the Security Council requires the active lobbying of Member States. The first thing that is often done is to create a Friend's group of the mandate where Member States who have supported the mandate can be active players in the lobbying process. The second is to create a coalition of stakeholders from government, civil society, including committed individuals, to also be active in taking the mandate forward.

In the case of children and armed conflict, former child soldiers were strong supporters. Some were pursuing studies; several had become rock stars and others had created community centres. We tried to include them in the process and we also managed to get them to address the Council in the open sessions. Their participation often brought a sense of reality to the Security Council members. With all this support and enthusiasm we managed to pass many resolutions and move the agenda forward.

For the accountability process to be fair in the eyes of Member States it requires a solid evidence gathering mechanism. With regard to children and armed conflict a monitoring and reporting mechanism (MRM) chaired

by the Resident Coordinator and involving all the UN agencies was to spearhead this process. The protection officers from the different agencies were the eyes and ears and there was an attempt at triangulation, to have information confirmed by three sources if possible. This was a unique and expansive role for the UN system and raised serious concerns among some Member States. The findings of the MRM that had to be conveyed to the government by the Resident Coordinator led to awkward and difficult moments so much so that many Resident Coordinators did not wish to play this role.

The report is finally cleared by the Secretary-General, some were more courageous than others, and there were often allegations of double standards by affected Member States. But the mandate persisted and since many of the countries covered were in armed conflict contexts with high levels of brutality, the system was allowed to pass and some of the big powers who are generally unhappy with UN interventions were persuaded to abstain. Managing this Security Council process was truly a test of leadership and was often very difficult and stressful.

Many will question whether this process, the heartache and tension involved for the UN system, is worth the final result. Because I have been in the field and felt the granular aspects of this policy, I can honestly say yes. Deterrence is a factor in the decision making of most, though not all, states, armed groups and war lords. Because of the intervention of the UN, the vast majority of national armies do not recruit children. The problem of child soldiers exists, but we have come a long way from the 1990s when it was a widespread practice. This has been because of two solid decades of work beginning with the visionary Olara Otunnu who created the foundation for this mandate.

### **Advocacy: A key tool**

The final aspect of the Special Representative's mandate is advocacy. The results of such advocacy is rarely known or measured. It is always difficult to convince the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) that you have changed people's minds. They are looking for tangible indicators. But in the area of children and armed conflict and violence against women, one of the main activities has to be awareness raising, globally, nationally and locally. Advocacy used to be something the United Nations did well. Recently the communications

style adopted by the UN in general, slightly vague and obtuse, would not properly reflect the concerns of a mandate like the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict.

Recent communications tend to be technical, risk averse and often do not say anything. It is important that the UN reflect on its communications style and consider whether one of the reasons it has received low credibility ratings in public opinion polls is because it has lost the ability to express itself in a clear and meaningful way.

A great deal of public attention is directed at what some call the Machiavellian machinations of states at the Security Council. But a great deal of the UN's work is with and for 'the people'. The work of Special Representatives includes both aspects. In a small office they are asked to engage stakeholders, especially nation states and also work toward accountability. At a micro level they play out the tension within the United Nations as a whole, a tension rarely recognised or understood -that we must engage, create trust with nation states while carrying difficult messages. The credibility of the UN system depends on UN staff and officials being trained to deal with this dual calling. ■

## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> See the writings of Zoran Oklopčić.

<sup>ii</sup> Now DPO, Department of Peace Operations.

<sup>iii</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 1612, 26 July 2005, [https://undocs.org/S/RES/1612\(2005\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/1612(2005)).

<sup>iv</sup> Though there are six grave violations against children, each with an analysis, I have focused on the recruitment and use of children.



# How can leadership by UN Resident Coordinators become truly transformative?

BY JOHN HENDRA



Heba Aklofi  
*My Candle*  
Zataari Camp



**John Hendra** provides advice on sustainable development issues, leadership, multilateral financing and multilateral reform through his consultancy practice. He served the United Nations for 32 years, most recently as UN Assistant Secretary-General (ASG) with the UN Development Group, helping prepare the UN Secretary-General's two seminal reform reports and substantively supporting intergovernmental negotiations which led to comprehensive reform of the UN Development System (GA Res. 72/279). Other roles included serving as UN ASG and Deputy Executive Director at UN Women, and as UN RC and UNDP Resident Representative in Vietnam, Tanzania and Latvia. In his consulting capacity he is a part-time Senior Advisor to the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation and to the Joint SDG Fund; he is also an Associate Researcher with the German Development Institute and a member of FinDev Canada's Advisory Council.

At the heart of the current United Nations Development System (UNDS) reform is the reinvigoration of the role of the UN Resident Coordinator (RC). It is their coordination, leadership and convening capacities that are critical in helping the UN to lift its game and provide the multi-dimensional support countries require to get back on track in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As recognised in various assessments of UNDS reform conducted over the past year, RCs have been playing a critical leadership role in enhancing overall UN impact.<sup>i</sup> The Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment (MOPAN) study on UNDS reform noted that the transition to an impartial RC system is the reform area that has seen most progress. It also found that RCs are increasingly recognised as a valuable tool by government stakeholders for simplifying engagement with the UN; development partners also recognise the increasingly independent and empowered RC and see it as bringing positive outcomes in terms of greater inclusion of UN entities, more effective collaboration and advocacy and promoting strategic partnerships.<sup>ii</sup>

### **Current RC leadership, coordination and convening capacities**

The UN's country-level response to COVID-19 has demonstrated the ability of RCs and UN Country Teams (UNCTs) to collaborate in response to a crisis, with UNCTs working together in emergency mode to develop 118 Socio-Economic Response Plans (SERPs) within months of the pandemic's outbreak.<sup>iii</sup>

Evidence suggests that these plans helped enable a coherent response, that the independent leadership and

convening role of the RC contributed to greater country-level coherence and that the overall response was a good example of the benefits of a reconfigured Resident Coordinator function and a new generation of UNCTs, as well as the flexibility and agility of coordination within the system.<sup>iv</sup> Host government officials mirrored these comments in interviews and often described the clarity of leadership.<sup>v</sup>

Further, as highlighted by UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)-conducted surveys cited in the Secretary-General's 2021 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) Report, 78% of programme country government respondents see the RC as an effective entry point to access the UN system at country level, 88% consider the RC to be effective in leading the UNCT and 79% consider RCs to have sufficient prerogatives to effectively fulfil their mandate. This reflects a 'substantial improvement since 2019'.<sup>vi</sup>

That said, feedback and data show that the leadership, coordination and convening capacities of RCs is not yet where it needs to be. Both the Secretary-Generals' RC review and the MOPAN reports highlight the need to develop a more systemic approach to partnerships, especially with the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), private sector and civil society. Strengthening these partnerships is central to mobilising the investment countries require to drive sustainable energy, food security, digital and other transitions.

If the UN's potential for leveraging investment in SDG acceleration is to be maximised, many RCs will need to have a more nuanced understanding of development

finance and the dynamic convening skills required. Almost all major assessments also highlighted that greater priority needs to be given to the development-humanitarian-peacebuilding 'nexus' as well as better conceptually understanding, and implementing, much more integrated UN approaches to the 2030 Agenda.

Finally, like the UN's response to the pandemic, it will be critical that RCs and UNCTs unite behind Cooperation Frameworks that truly deliver transformative programming. In order to do so, priority attention needs to be given to: (1) Accelerated development of further enabling instruments; (2) Development of key leadership capacities required to maximize RCs' leveraging power and impact; and (3) Further reflection on the RC's profile and selection.

### **Ongoing capacity development of RCs is critical**

In addition to more enabling tools and clearer approaches to SDG integration, it is critical that priority also be given to effective capacity development of RCs. As the MOPAN study noted, formalised training is not always addressing limitations in skill sets to help newly-appointed RCs more effectively perform the leveraging elements of their role.

Current training provisions are not sufficient to ensure the quality leadership required for coherent leadership of UNCTs and RCs cannot rely in practice solely on accountability mechanisms to support a more coordinated way of working. This is especially true in particularly challenging situations; crisis settings, also make it difficult to assess, measure, and train to the requisite competencies.<sup>vii</sup>

Member States recognised this through the recent GA Resolution 76/4: 'Requests the Secretary-General to ensure that all Resident Coordinators, including in particular Resident Coordinators who also serve as Humanitarian Coordinators or Deputy Special Representatives of the Secretary-General, receive in an ongoing manner the necessary training and support to acquire the skills and knowledge needed to ensure they are well-prepared and equipped to effectively exercise the empowered, strategic, effective and impartial leadership role envisaged for them...'<sup>viii</sup> In addition to being able to navigate skilfully in increasingly complex environments,

two other skillsets that will be critical to maximizing RCs' leveraging potential for transformative impact are multi-sectoral policy capacity and a strong grounding in development finance.

To this point, Development Cooperation Office (DCO) has undertaken a number of important steps to strengthen the leadership skills of RCs. Attention has been given to mentoring and coaching, virtual peer exchanges on leadership and on individual and team resilience in contexts of disruptive change, and efforts to help them build relationships and broaden their networks.

This is complemented by leadership dialogues for RCs on systems thinking, collaborative leadership and the application of foresight in the new Cooperation Framework. It is also inspired by the key ways in which the nine leadership behaviours in the UN System Leadership Framework manifest themselves: that is systems thinking; co-creation within the UN system and with external partners; focusing on producing impact for the most vulnerable; and driving transformational change.

### **Building leadership for change**

Currently there are three initiatives underway that should help bring a further shift in competencies across UNCTs to promote more systemic change. Initiated by DCO, and building on pilots in Uganda and Cambodia, SDG Leadership Labs with the Presencing Institute have been working with 14 UNCTs. Here they build capacity in systems leadership and cross-agency collaborative working that will help transform leadership behaviour in humanitarian and developmental operational settings.<sup>ix</sup>

Hosted in Geneva by UNOPS, and initiated in 2020 in close collaboration with DCO, OCHA and IASC members, the Global Leadership Initiative (GELI) offers knowledge and development opportunities for executive leaders managing humanitarian, development, and peace operations based in countries of operation through bespoke programmes.

More broadly, one of the UN System Staff College's Knowledge Centre for Sustainable Development's signature executive courses, 'UN Country Team Leadership: Maximising Synergies for Greater Impact', focuses on the systems thinking, strategic communications

and collaborative and agile leadership skills UN heads of agency at country level need to meet the challenges incumbent in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Finally, two other critical things are needed – change in mindsets and behaviour change. Despite the UN’s limited financial assets, if RCs, and UNCTs, more imaginatively deploy the UN’s vast leveraging potential and normative mandates, they can have a real impact on creating enabling environments.<sup>x</sup> This is a key expectation of the repositioned RC function, with each RC office now substantively backed by a senior economist, a partnerships specialist and a monitoring and evaluation specialist.

On another level it will also mean consciously changing behaviours, especially for those UN RCs who used to also serve as UNDP Resident Representatives.<sup>xi</sup> When Ingrid Fitzgerald and I developed a Theory of Change for the UNDS to function better as a system, we interviewed over 100 staff in the field and at Headquarters who told us time and time again that leadership, political will and funding were absolutely key to real change and that behaviour and attitude change is just as, if not more important, than structural change.<sup>xii</sup>

A key and unique tenet of the current UNDS reform though is that a number of structural changes, such as removing potential conflict of interest by delinking the functions of RCs from UNDP Resident Representatives, as well as enhancing global and regional UN leadership, have been necessary preconditions to further behavioural change.

### RC profile fit for future challenges

While most of the evidence points to highly skilled individuals occupying RC positions, recruiting RCs and UNCT Heads of Agency with the skillsets needed

to address tomorrow’s priorities will be a critical driver for transformative impact. As noted, it will be important that future RCs have exhibited capacity in at least two of three areas – navigating the ‘nexus’; multisectoral policy capacity; and a solid grounding in development finance for SDG acceleration. Overall, it’s critical that RCs have suitable profiles for the very different contexts in which they are to operate.

Two final comments. First, the 2030 Agenda is an agenda for change – and if RCs are to help facilitate more transformative change, they simply have to take risks; it can’t be ‘business as usual’. As Ben Ramalingam highlighted in *Aid on the Edge of Chaos*, aid organisations (including the UN) are driven by bureaucratic structures and reporting imperatives and hence struggle to foster and support risk-taking and innovation which is so imperative for transformative impact. To get things done, more transformative leaders often need to focus on the goals and values of the organisation – and circumvent its formal systems.

Too often aid agencies ‘replace initiative and inspiration with bureaucracy; replace trust with contracts; replace human relationships with matrices; and replace moral values with value for money’.<sup>xiii</sup> Does it sound familiar? The bottom line is in order to effect transformative change RCs have to take risks – but they need to both manage these risks themselves, and be enabled and supported by top UN leadership. The fact that RCs now report directly to the UN Secretary-General, and no longer have the programmatic responsibilities of the previous system, should open more space for this.

Second, in addition to substantive skillsets and an appetite for risk-taking, with the challenges incumbent in inspiring a UNCT, especially when people are experiencing multiple kinds of stress exacerbated by the pandemic, it will be increasingly important that future RCs be more



**While most of the evidence points to highly skilled individuals occupying RC positions, recruiting RCs and UNCT Heads of Agency with the skillsets needed to address tomorrow’s priorities will be a critical driver for transformative impact.**

systematically assessed for empathy, a critical skill for successful, impartial and committed UN leaders at country level.

As a Harvard Business Review article recently put it ‘obviously we need smart, experienced people in our companies, but we also need people who are adept at dealing with change, understand and motivate others, and manage both positive and negative emotions to create an environment where everyone can be at their best’.<sup>XIV</sup>

While empathy has long been an important skill, new research demonstrates its outsized importance for everything from innovation to engagement to inclusivity.<sup>XV</sup> RCs do not inspire UN colleagues by holding up paper frameworks, but they do when they seek out colleagues’ different points of view and engage in healthy debate towards better, mutually owned solutions. People trust leaders and feel a greater sense of commitment and engagement when there is alignment between what a leader says – and what a leader does. In that context, it will become increasingly important that future RC candidates are well screened for their levels of empathy and emotional intelligence, perhaps the most important leadership competency for ‘fit for the future’ RCs. ■

## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> See: Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) Secretariat, 'Is this time different? UNDS reform: progress, challenges and opportunities, Lessons in Multilateral Effectiveness', 2021, [https://www.mopanonline.org/analysis/items/MOPAN\\_MLE\\_UNDSR\\_Progress\\_challenges\\_opportunities\\_June2021\\_web.pdf](https://www.mopanonline.org/analysis/items/MOPAN_MLE_UNDSR_Progress_challenges_opportunities_June2021_web.pdf); UN General Assembly, 'Review of the functioning of the Resident Coordinator system: rising to the challenge and keeping the promise of the 2030 Agenda. Report of the Secretary General', A/75/905, 7 June 2021, <https://undocs.org/A/75/905>; UN Executive Office of the Secretary-General, 'Early Lessons and Evaluability of the Evaluability of the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery MPTF', April 2021, <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/early-lessons-and-evaluability-un-covid-19-response-and-recovery-mptf>; UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), 'Early Assessment of the Resident Coordinator System', 2020.

<sup>ii</sup> MOPAN Secretariat, *ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>iii</sup> UN OIOS, *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>iv</sup> MOPAN Secretariat, *ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>v</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>vi</sup> UN General Assembly and Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), 'Implementation of General Assembly Resolution 75/233 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations System: Report of the Secretary-General', A/76/75/E/2021/57, <https://undocs.org/A/76/75-E/2021/57>

<sup>vii</sup> See: Sebastian von Einsiedel, Josie Lianna Kaye, Cale Salih, Wendy A. McClinchy, and Francesco Galtieri, *Works in UN Resident Coordinator-led Conflict Prevention: Lessons from the Field* (New York: United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, 2018), <https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:6547/RC-Project-Book-Upd-29JUN18.pdf>.

<sup>viii</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution 76/4, October 28 2021, <https://undocs.org/A/RES/76/4>, para 11.

<sup>ix</sup> Rachel Hentsch, 'SDG Leadership Labs: Supporting UN Country Teams to Achieve Agenda 2030', Medium, <<https://medium.com/presencing-institute-blog/sdg-leadership-labs-taking-theory-u-into-the-united-nations-60361916b58c>>.

<sup>x</sup> John Hendra & Arif Neky, 'Walking the talk':

Accelerating the United Nations' role in leveraging the private sector for the SDGs" in *Financing the UN Development System: Time to Meet the Moment* (Uppsala: Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 2021), <https://www.daghammarskjold.se/publication/unds-2021/>, pp. 135-139.

<sup>xi</sup> For example, when I first went to Vietnam as UN RC and UNDP RR in 2006 at the start of the 'Delivering as One' pilot, I knew that if I was to be seen as an impartial 'One Leader' for all it meant branding myself as UN RC, separating the RC office physically from UNDP and moving away from staff meetings with UNDP to UN-wide staff townhalls. Quite quickly for some UNDP Vietnam staff I had gone from being a new, engaging leader to an RC who was somewhat aloof. It was not easy to do, and not always perfect, but I knew it was what I needed to change to have the credibility within the UNCT to lead the 'One UN Initiative'.

<sup>xii</sup> John Hendra and Ingrid FitzGerald, *Who Wants (to) Change? A 'Theory of Change' for the UN Development System to function as a system for Relevance, Strategic Positioning and Results* (Tokyo: United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, 2016), [http://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:5849/HendraFitzGerald\\_WhoWantsToChange\\_FINAL.pdf](http://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:5849/HendraFitzGerald_WhoWantsToChange_FINAL.pdf).

<sup>xiii</sup> Ben Ramalingam, *Aid on the Edge of Chaos* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>xiv</sup> Annie McKee, 'How to Hire for Emotional Intelligence', *Harvard Business Review*, February 5 2016 <<https://hbr.org/2016/02/how-to-hire-for-emotional-intelligence>>.

<sup>xv</sup> Tracy Brower, 'Empathy Is the Most Important Leadership Skill According to Research', *Forbes*, September 19 2021, <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/tracybrower/2021/09/19/empathy-is-the-most-important-leadership-skill-according-to-research/?sh=1e9c9d143dc5>>.

# Frankness and honesty: Essential traits of a UN Leader

## INTERVIEW WITH LYNN HASTINGS

*Lynn Hastings was interviewed in her personal capacity and the article does not necessarily reflect the views of the UN.*



Samir Al Ghafari  
*Vase with flowers*  
Azraq Camp



**Lynn Hastings** is the Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, and the United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory (DSRSG/RC/HC). She has over twenty years of experience in humanitarian affairs, development coordination and political affairs and peacekeeping. Hastings also served in diverse roles and geographical locations including in Pakistan, East Timor, the Balkans and New York and she practiced private sector law in Toronto, Canada before joining the UN.

■ *In your role you often have to coordinate United Nations entities that may have either competing agendas or competing expectations - what leadership approaches are needed to manage these pressures?*

It is true that the UN entities form a very diverse family, with differences in areas of focus, in perspectives and ways to see the world. It makes the UN quite unique and implies quite a degree of coordination, which can be notably challenging in conflict contexts. I think the first approach is to take the time to understand these perspectives – from both an organisational and personal levels– so as to find persuasive ‘entry points’ with the entities. It is important to know the mandates, incentives, and pressures that they themselves (the other UN entities) are subjected to.

At the end of the day, if the DSRSG/RC/HC wants these different entities to be coordinated, she or he needs to ensure that they, these various sources of pressures, also know that you understand or are trying to understand their point of view. Then, you have to demonstrate the advantages of a common approach, in either principled or practical terms, or both. Often ‘leaders’ prefer a ‘lone wolf’ approach, rather than rallying their constituents (in our case, UN entities or Member States) behind common approaches. This is especially true when it comes to sharing information so that common messaging can be developed.

You also have to do your homework to be able to respond, and at times, push back against pressures. A DSRSG/RC/HC must really invest time and effort in knowing about the ways the different parts of the UN operate, in order to assess what is feasible, what isn’t. Then you have to manage system trade-offs accordingly and communicate your decision in a way that UN entities, even if they may disagree, can understand your rationale. I would also add that having allies and the ability to rally support is critical to withstand inappropriate pressures. You may think this

is just about external pressures, say from an individual Member State or a donor, but this applies internally as well.

As DSRSG/RC/HC, my role is to lead by forging and enabling consensus. But there are times when you do need support from other quarters to push back against internal demands that are not realistic, or that are not fully in the best interests of the UN as a whole. At times, this support comes from within. At other times, it will need to come from beyond. For example, at times you need donors to pass on messages or to behave in a certain way to promote the common UN good amongst UN entities. And remember that your allies may come from previous postings or someone you worked with many years ago. It is important to maintain those relationships.

Finally let me add one trait that is essential, and the sine qua non condition for a UN leader: frankness and honesty. Most UN entities and colleagues will accept your decision as DSRSG/RC/HC, even if they disagree, as long as you are trusted as a frank and honest leader. As soon as this perception and trust is weakened, it becomes very difficult to manage these pressures.

*In countries where you are working, or have worked, protecting and preserving UN agendas entails difficult discussions with national counterparts. What leadership approaches are effective?*

Some of the behaviours or approaches I described in the first answer apply here as well. And actually, let me flip that around. When it comes to difficult engagement with external actors, including governments but also Member States and donors, it should not all be on the DSRSG/RC/HC. At times, it helps to have other parts of the UN, in country or globally, to step in and deliver hard messages. And I think we are not always very good at strategising

accordingly, that is, thinking through who is best placed to engage and when.

More generally, what is often the most effective is when the UN and its partners engage as one, with common approaches and messages, especially on sensitive issues, when collective engagement is much better than hoisting it all on one function. In this regard, one issue that arises relates to the debate between public and private diplomacy. The DSRSG/RC/HC universe, which straddles the political, the human rights, the development and the humanitarian spheres, is one populated by very diverse opinions and methods on this issue. It is a difficult balance to strike, but all too often, the debate is driven more by ideology than by a focus on what is effective.

*With regards to your own experience of, and exposure to lived leadership, can you speak to your sources of inspiration such as people, texts, (etc) within the UN and/or beyond?*

Well, let me start with a story that has little to do with the UN, which also shows that inspiration can come from many diverse sources. When I was young, I used to work at an A&W Root Beer restaurant as ‘car hop’, where I would take orders and deliver food from car to car. I remember that my manager at the time would often take on some of the most menial tasks so that we could focus on our tasks and do them right.

The idea that a manager, or leader, can at times ‘get in the trenches’ and perform tasks that ‘enable’ the work of others has stuck with me since. Too often at the UN, and I suspect elsewhere, the leader stays atop, almost aloof, to review, critique and decide on work that is produced by others. We need to challenge this way of thinking and doing. We need leaders who produce, and have the courage, and humility, to subject their own work, their own production, to the review and inputs of others. I have seen and worked for many types of leaders at the UN. Those who had the

ability to lead the team by joining in the work of the team have been those that have inspired me.

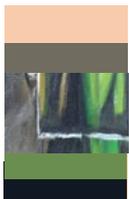
Another trait that has inspired me from different leaders is the ability to take responsibility. And here, I don’t just mean taking responsibility for one’s own actions, including one’s own failures, that should be a given.

I have in mind those leaders who take responsibility for the work and failures of every member of their team, regardless of level. Here as well, it requires courage and humility, but I think this is really the practical meaning and translation of many of the concepts the UN is discussing at headquarters, including in the Leadership Framework. That’s what it means, on a daily basis, to do co-creation, or to exercise collective leadership.

*Beyond personal traits, the support from headquarters, and the support from Member States and donors are critical for ethical and principled UN leadership. In this regard, what works, and what is missing?*

Let me start by stressing that support is often driven by personalities rather than the organisation itself. So, depending on the time, the place, the issue, support (in the form of joint messaging for example) can be forthcoming or not, depending on the people in place in these various organisations. It is often a function of their own individual choices and courage, and how they chose to manage their respective institutional pressures.

Beyond this, we should also recognise some realities. Support from headquarters and from Member States depends on a number of factors, including the political context. When the UN works in a country that perhaps is less polarising and carries less geopolitical weight, both headquarters and Member States are more likely to exert principled leadership – when the reverse is true, principled leadership will be combined with other imperatives. UN leaders who forget this reality will be quickly disillusioned.



**We need leaders who produce, and have the courage, and humility, to subject their own work, their own production, to the review and inputs of others. I have seen and worked for many types of leaders at the UN. Those who had the ability to lead the team by joining in the work of the team have been those that have inspired me.**

Now even within this complex context, it helps to reiterate how crucial it is for headquarters to be united in its engagement with UN leaders on the ground, and with our external interlocutors. There is little that is more damaging to the leadership on the ground, and its ability to withstand pressures than having a cacophony of voices within the UN: within headquarters, and between headquarters and the field. External actors see it immediately, and exploit it accordingly, and this really undermines field leadership. This is true everywhere, but perhaps more so for triple hat functions, given the broader range of UN actors and issues that the function covers.

Finally, one dimension of recent UN efforts that greatly helps, in theory at least, is the move towards decentralisation, delegation of authority and field empowerment. This is the spirit of UN reform, and when that spirit is practiced, it has a real, tangible impact on our ability to lead teams on the ground, to unify entities behind a common purpose. When that spirit gets bogged down in bureaucratic minutiae, rules and procedures, the reverse impact is also just a visible and tangible. Given our structures, it is easy for anyone, consciously or not, to enmesh the triple hat function in a maze of processes, hogging time, energy and political capital that could be better spent on our core mandates and obligations to the UN, the countries and the people we serve. ■



# Trajectory of United Nations leadership roles in the Liberia peace process

BY CHRIS AGOHA



Hisham Mohammad Al Ghafari  
*An apple core representing the  
remaining parts of Syria  
Azraq Camp*



**Chris Agoha** is the Country Manager at the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue in Nigeria. He is a political scientist and peace and conflict analyst who worked in the United Nations Missions in Liberia (UNMIL) between 2004 and 2018. This was followed by a posting as Political Affairs Officer and Team Leader with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) from 2018-2020. Agoha's academic work includes serving as Adjunct Professor of Peace and Conflict Resolution at the Graduate School of International Affairs, University of Liberia from 2006-2012 under the United Nations teaching support to the University of Liberia. He has a bachelor's degree in Political Science from Bayero University Kano, Nigeria and a dual master's degree in International Law and Diplomacy, and in Political Science, from the University of Lagos Nigeria. His Doctorate Degree in Peace Studies is from the University of Bradford, United Kingdom.

Leadership is important no matter the setting. Effective leadership supports higher quality and improved delivery of goods and services. It brings a sense of cohesiveness and space for personal development and raised satisfaction between workers.<sup>1</sup> Progressive leadership creates an alignment with the environment, promotes healthy mechanisms for innovation, encourages creativity, and serves as a resource for invigorating organisational culture.

Here I would like to take the opportunity to explore and present evidence of this type of progressive and genuine UN leadership in the complex political and security environment of Liberia.

Over one decade, the UN operated on a multi-leadership track that yielded positive dividends in the national, bilateral, and multilateral engagements. They succeeded in moving the country forward on its democratic path. These leadership styles and qualities were embodied in five Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSG)<sup>ii</sup> who oversaw and managed a complex peace process generating many lessons that can be replicated in other UN peace operations.

### UN leadership in Liberia

A leadership review of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) showed that the staff and the national stakeholders appreciated the SRSG leadership experience, which manifested in the country's phenomenal peace mission outcomes. The interventions were driven by transformational leadership strategies that looked beyond the boundaries of the UN mandate and articulated principled visions that propelled the peace process forward.

By scrupulously implementing ethical with morally bound decisions, they were able to keep the UN staff from becoming vulnerable to the national laws and institutions. The leadership was strategic, implementing good decisions taking all reference points into consideration.

The five SRSG's respectively, brought rare specialisations and a vast accumulation of knowledge which laid the foundation for 'earned' confidence. It can thus be understood that it was this spectrum of trust that created successful leadership opportunities. In the process they were able to lead the processes that delivered programmes without getting caught in any political entanglement with national leaders and stakeholders.

Intelligence, self-confidence, awareness, integrity, humility, critical thinking, and good communication were some of the traits I admired in the SRSG's charged with leading the UNMIL. They were able to motivate and inspire their staff to believe in the leadership, as well as build trust with the Liberian political stakeholders and the population. It is important to note how they carried the UN principle of integrity as a core value and significant tenet of their leadership style. In the process they were able to lift the accountability levels between themselves and their team.

### Practicalising UN leadership roles in Liberia

UN leadership in Liberia manifested at different levels and forms under the auspices of the SRSG. Their responsibility was broad and they had to lead processes from the local to the international level. This meant that incorporating grassroots communities and traditional institutions, civil



**With a display of self-confidence and -determination the leadership survived every crisis that threatened the implementation of their mandates. By listening and embracing new ideas and having an 'open door policy' that highlighted statements of principled leadership.**

society organisations, national political leaders, UN staff members, Inter-Mission Cooperation levels, and the international community was key.

The overall agenda required that the UNMIL leadership required officials who were able to connect with people, having conversations that avoided the tendency to 'talk down to people'. Their job was to travel across the length and breadth of the country interacting with a network of local contacts and confidants in line with the UN intermediary messaging strategy and directly communicating UN mandates to the population.

In setting the pace for its role, the leadership routinely rehearsed a zero failure strategy in the implementation of the UN mandates and building lasting peace for the country. They served as a unifying force for everyone and gave the population hope for a better future and managed to keep promises whilst speaking more of rewards rather than punishment. Indeed, the UNMIL successes came without any measures of coercive leadership. This type of leadership was seen as abhorrent and counter-productive. The 'carrot-and-stick' approach with incentives and concessions based on one actor's control over events important to others. With a display of self-confidence and -determination the leadership survived every crisis that threatened the implementation of their mandates. By listening and embracing new ideas and having an 'open door policy' that highlighted statements of principled leadership. This strategy gave everyone an equal opportunity to consult and give valued advice on the peace process.

### **Embracing 'shuttle peacebuilding'**

Constructive criticism of the leadership was accepted and lessons learnt. One strategy was to engage in extensive 'shuttle peacebuilding' initiatives nationally and internationally. This meant meeting stakeholders at the grassroots and national levels to seek consensus on

peace and development activities that would be benefit all. International level processes included bilateral and multilateral engagements to support for the country's peace agenda. It culminated with the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission Liberia Configuration in 2010. It had the mandate to implement the Security Council peacebuilding priorities. The focus was on security sector development, strengthening the rule of law, promoting national reconciliation as well as running peaceful and inclusive elections.

Other areas supported by UNMIL were to work with the government to implement peacebuilding activities on, what as then, considered as new frontiers like political, social, economic and gender inclusiveness, taking an integrated approach with local ownership and respect for human rights.

### **Going beyond peacekeeping to sustaining peace**

As Liberia sought to firmly establish a stable and secure environment with an irreversible path towards sustainable, equitable, and inclusive growth and development it was imperative to establish mechanisms to revitalise the economy. This was much needed as the country shifted from post-conflict stabilisation to laying the foundation for sustained and shared growth and poverty reduction.

This process was guided by the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program (GEMAP) implemented in 2005. It was developed by the International Contact Group for Liberia (ICGL) through the UN leadership and supported by the Liberian government. The GEMAP sought to reshape the fundamentally broken governance system that contributed to the 23 years of cumulative of conflict in the country. As the guarantor of peace in Liberia, the ICGL with members from the UN, African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African



States (ECOWAS), Nigeria, Ghana, the Embassy of the United States of America, the European Union (EU), World Bank (WB), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The role of the UN in the ICGL was critical because it provided the leadership and ensured that the group decisions conformed to the Security Council mandates towards achieving sustainable peace for the country. The leadership successes were seamless and consistent, and the spirit of continuity in the implementation of its mandate was unequivocally demonstrated.

### Challenges of UN leadership

Good leadership is demanding and contemporary leaders face additional challenges. While the shared-power environment created in the second half of the twentieth century enhanced many aspects of democracy, 'it also makes leadership more difficult'.<sup>111</sup> In the case of Liberia, thanks to media and internet access the public had better access to observe the UNMIL leadership and made constructive criticisms. They lived with the constant public scrutiny and leadership had to contend with the excesses of societal spoilers.

To fully understand the challenges faced by the UNMIL leadership it is also important to know that their task

was made very difficult by the prevailing Liberian frame conditions, such as working in a landscape dominated by authoritarian rulers. Like in many other post-conflict situations, the society was enmeshed in powerful political, social and economic systems that were impervious to change. Another issue they faced was how to work with individuals who committed human rights abuses including atrocities during civil wars. This remains a serious problem and is coupled with corruption in the governance structures that appears to be institutionalised. Additional issues are nepotism, deep political cleavages, divisive associational lifestyles, and a culture of violence that continues to plague communities. The country also continues to face long-standing disputes about land and other resources among ethnic groups that contribute to social and political tensions.

The difficulties did not hinder the UN leadership from carrying out its mandates and serving the Liberian population. They displayed exceptional intellectual and diplomatic prowess which led to the successful implementation of UN mandates and closure of the mission in a celebratory fashion. Liberia can therefore be referred to as the 'New Spirit' in terms of exemplary peacekeeping and peacebuilding in Africa. ■

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Montgomery Van Welsh, 'Public-Sector Leadership Theory: An Assessment', *Public Sector Administration Review*, 63/2, March/April 2003, <<https://doi-org.ezproxy.its.uu.se/10.1111/1540-6210.00281>>.

<sup>11</sup> From 2003–2018, the leadership of the United Nations Missions in Liberia (UNMIL) at the level of SRSG comprised of Mr. Jacques Klein (USA); Mr. Alan Doss (United Kingdom); Ms. Ellen Margrette Loj (Denmark); Ms. Karin Landgrin (Sweden); and Mr. Farid Zarif (Afghanistan).

<sup>111</sup> Douglas Henton, John G. Melville, Kimberly Welsh, *Grassroots Leaders for a New Economy: How Civic Entrepreneurs Are Building Prosperous Communities*, (Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, 1997).



Mohammed Joukhdar

Zataari Camp



# Chapter Five

## The abstract: Rendering innovation and change

The innovation movement for UN Leaders: Connecting research and practice BY TINA C. AMBOS AND KATHERINE TATARINOV .....	120
Unloved and unappreciated: The General Assembly Budget Committees and UN leadership BY HANNAH DAVIES .....	126
Leadership from where you sit: Behavioural challenge BY AIDA GHAZARYAN .....	131
United Nations 2.0: Can the current leadership deliver the workforce it requires? BY VERONIKA TYWUSCHIK-SOHLSTRÖM, MARC JACQUAND, HENRIETTE KEIJZERS .....	137

# The innovation movement for UN leaders: Connecting research and practice

BY TINA C. AMBOS AND KATHERINE TATARINOV



Mahmoud Khaled Al-Hariri  
*Abstraction*  
Zataari Camp





**Tina C. Ambos** is Professor of International Management and Director of the Center for Innovation and Partnerships at the Geneva School for Economics and Management at the University of Geneva. Her research and teaching interests include global strategic management and innovation in the context of multinational corporations, technology start-ups and international not-for-profit organisations. She has published widely in the academic journals and is a regular speaker at international conferences and practitioner forums as well as leading executive programs.



**Katherine Tatarinov** is Post-doctoral Scholar and Research Director of the Center for Innovation and Partnerships at the Geneva School for Economics and Management at the University of Geneva. Her research focuses on social innovation, digital transformation and managing the grand challenges. The United Nations organisations are her primary research context. Katherine lectures at Ecole Polytechnique Federale de Lausanne and is the Managing Director of the Geneva Innovation Movement Association, where she translates her research findings into applicable insights and community building.

■ In studying innovation practices in the United Nations we learned that intrapreneurship –an entrepreneurial project originating from within the organisation– is a frequent phenomenon and an incredibly powerful mechanism to spur organisational change. We observed more than 70 intrapreneurial initiatives across UN organisations and identified both facilitators and inhibitors.<sup>1</sup> This made it clear that while UN leaders face challenges to embracing intrapreneurship in today’s complex and connected world, the impact of this type of innovation on the lives of beneficiaries and the different UN organisations is clear.

### The innovation challenge in the UN

The most powerful innovations are often designed on the periphery of an organisation. This is true of both big corporations and the UN where many new ideas have come from the field, close to the beneficiaries themselves. Take for example the accountant in the World Food Programme (WFP) office who worked with the WFP Innovation Accelerator to develop Building Blocks,<sup>ii</sup> an initiative that uses blockchain technology to facilitate cash-based transfers in refugee camps. Or the UNICEF field office that developed U-Report<sup>iii</sup> a social messaging and data collection system to improve citizen engagement, inform leaders, and foster positive change.

Another great example is SheTrades,<sup>iv</sup> which brings female entrepreneurs to market, and was developed by a

passionate intrapreneur at the International Trade Centre (ITC). Yet, harnessing all the innovative ideas coming from the field and dispersing them to the country offices is a task these organisations were not designed to undertake. The UN will however learn how to structure innovation internally and decide which ideas to pursue.

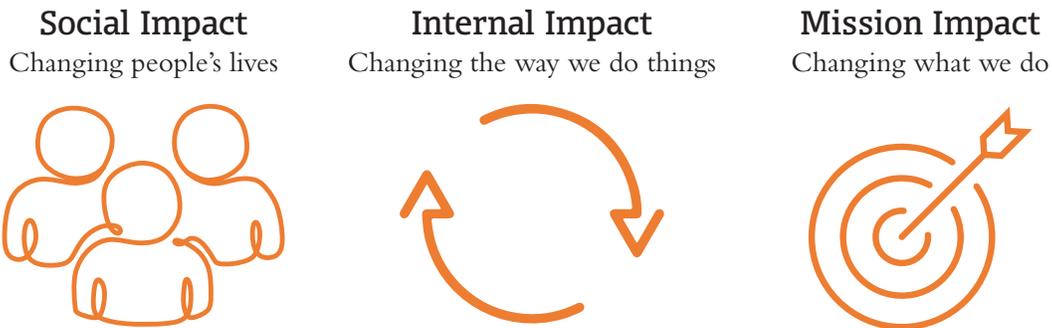
Looking at the issue from a management perspective, we hosted a series of workshops and roundtables to learn from the innovators themselves. Based on their insights around existing silos and a lack of safe space to learn, we created a nurturing space for UN staff to share across organisations and sectors to spur intrapreneurship for innovation in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This platform is the Geneva Innovation Movement<sup>v</sup> – a network of change agents who have the common goal to connect silos and transform their organisations to create a greater impact in their roles.

From our research, we share the following lessons:

### The impact of intrapreneurship

Multiple factors influence the degree to which intrapreneurial initiatives impact organisations and beneficiaries. While ‘success’ is defined differently based on the organisation and its context, for us a successful initiative is built from the bottom up, operational in many locations, and delivers impact. A successful innovation seeks to transform the way a product, process, or policy affect

*Box 1: Social, internal and mission impact. Originally published in Tina C. Ambos, Katherine Tatarinov, Sylvia Somerville and Katherine Milligan, 'Initiatives with Impact: Unleashing bottom-up innovation in International Organizations, October 2018, p. 4 (See endnote I).*



beneficiaries or the organisation itself. Seeing a positive impact is a critical component of successful interventions, but it is multi-faceted and difficult to measure.

Our research identified three key types of impact that international organisations deliver, namely social-, internal-, and mission impact.<sup>VI</sup> Some interventions touch on all three, others just one. But for each, the bottom-up problem identification and human focused solution development has significant advantages.

**Social Impact** – ‘changing beneficiary lives’ refers to the impact on beneficiaries across the globe and reflects the direct benefits of intrapreneurship as a demand-driven activity, addressing real needs identified in the field. This impact is measured in metrics such as number of lives saved, reach, increase in yield, higher admission rates to schools, increased production, or greater speed and efficiency in aid delivery.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) created an e-Cash Smart Card.<sup>VII</sup> This project built a digital cash payment system for migrants. It reached 19,300 households in its first two-years, simplifying paying for goods and making the aid delivery process faster.

**Internal Impact** – ‘changing the way we do things’- refers to the impact on the core processes of the

organisation itself and shows that intrapreneurship can be a means to renew and rejuvenate from within. Stimulating the development of new capabilities, structures and processes. For example, UNHCR’s Instant Network Schools<sup>VIII</sup> initiative, brings training material to refugee classrooms. It built a bridge between the innovation and education team to create a new workstream around Connected Education.<sup>IX</sup>

**Mission Impact** – ‘changing what we do’ - refers to impact on the core mandate of the organisation when innovations go beyond the traditional mission of the organisation. These initiatives have the potential to transform the organisation fundamentally. For example, the WFP’s Building Blocks work makes WFP cash transfers more secure, collaborative, traceable, and cheaper using Blockchain technology.

This means the WFP has taken on a broader range of activities to address the resilience needs of the beneficiaries without shying away from the potential of new technology.

### **The two-levels of success factors for intrapreneurship in the UN**

Our research found that initiatives that scale and deliver impact share common variables on two distinct levels: 1) the initiative level; and 2) the organisation level.



### *Initiative Level*

- Applicable in many locations.
- Defined goals from start.
- Diverse partners.
- Linked to implementing organisational mandates.
- Simple with visible impact.
- Strong project owner.
- User-driven, human-centered.

### *Organisation Level*

- Adequate financing.
- Alignment to strategic objective.
- Culture of trust and transparency.
- Dedicated team or staff time.
- Executive and key stakeholder buy-in for innovation.

While an initiative could be well aligned to the organisations' mandate and have a strong project owner as well as be scalable, it also needed specific organisational elements to thrive. Most importantly, we found that resources such as time and financing were crucial in the early stages of the initiative development. As the interventions start to scale up we see top management buy-in as particularly important.

Interestingly, our interviews over the last five years show the UN culture changing. While incentive systems and processes may not have been amended to allow for greater innovation yet, we see a shift in openness towards organic innovation and transformative ideas.

## **The leadership challenge: learning across sectors**

UN leaders play a pivotal role in setting the internal organisational narrative. To innovate in large bureaucratic organisations, leaders need to frame key challenges while giving people the space and resources to solve those issues creatively. While we saw a strong bottom-up push for innovation from UN staff, recent events and speeches by

the Director-General prove the importance of a top-down approach as well. Innovation flourishes when the top and bottom meet in the middle and create organisation-wide transformation.

As management scholars, we draw parallels across sectors. We can bring learnings to the UN context from private firms that have experimented significantly with innovation. Even though the leadership challenge for innovation is omni-present, we see a clear difference in three areas between the private sector and the UN regarding innovation practices and processes. The main differences are in the incentives of intrapreneurs, breadth of stakeholders involved, and the innovation governance structures.

First, while private sector intrapreneurs aim for organisational recognition for their work; UN intrapreneurs are intrinsically driven to change the world and help beneficiaries – often without taking ownership for their work. Consequently, motivating and empowering leaders and their staff members to engage in innovation work is an important success factor. Organisations who succeed in fostering innovation are the ones that give leaders space to experiment with new ways of working. This includes room to fail and expand their mindsets.

Second, in terms of stakeholders, we observed that innovation in the UN often happens in cross-sector projects. During the development and implementation of innovative ideas, new project partners were brought in, leading to the creation of an innovation ecosystem. Project ownership was not often seen as a priority by the UN, but the trade-off was that participation by numerous stakeholders resulted in project management complexity and differences in resourcing capacity. This made stakeholder management crucial. Leaders are increasingly aware that working across sectors requires managing the needs and priorities of different partners – particularly around goal setting and motivation.

 UN leaders play a pivotal role in setting the internal organisational narrative. To innovate in large bureaucratic organisations, leaders need to frame key challenges while giving people the space and resources to solve those issues creatively.



**An important concern is nurturing new perspectives and using innovation methodology tools in a safe and trusted environment – particularly demystifying innovation jargon.**

Finally, the usual UN governance structures and mandates do not allow for straightforward approaches to innovation due to rigid accountability measures and multiple gatekeepers. Emerging innovation units often sit outside the regular functional areas of the organisation. Thus, while these units are becoming more accepted, culturally they are frequently seen as non-relevant to the daily working processes of the organisations. Therefore, the units face strategic issues in determining organisational roles and activities.

Several solutions for structuring innovation exist, but a dynamic perspective is crucial. As innovation is continuously developing, so are its facilitation structures.<sup>x</sup> Organisations and their leadership require a certain flexibility to review and adjust innovation structures frequently.

### **From research to leadership practice: the Innovation Movement**

Despite the strong push for innovation, we noticed that new projects were often stifled due to operational processes in the UN. This was particularly evident when senior staff had to take responsibility for often risky innovation work and ensure the legitimacy of initiatives. We worked with large organisations in Geneva to develop a training program to foster a senior management mindset shift and develop capacity at this influential level.

The Innovation Movement Workshops were started as a collaboration and co-created with the Chiefs of Learning and HR from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG), and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). The objective was to work with senior middle management of the organisations (P4/P5/D1) who experience the most pressure from the top to implement new priorities, and from the bottom to motivate and empower team members.

These workshops give managers tools and grow their confidence to understand that leading innovation is a continuous process of experimentation. Key ideas and content are developed from research evidence and practical experiences of innovation leaders in the specific context of the UN. An important concern is nurturing new perspectives and using innovation methodology tools in a safe and trusted environment – particularly demystifying innovation jargon.

The objective of the training is two-fold. First, on the content-level. It seeks to engage senior leaders, particularly those managing teams in innovation work. Support them with the provision of processes and tools to critically assess the value-adding potential and the challenges of innovation-driven UN agencies. Second, on the interpersonal level, create a movement of collaborators across the UN with the aim of enabling an innovation environment. The workshop models the innovation journey as a continuous iterative process that requires strategy, structures and initiatives to change the processes, mindsets and culture of organisations.

The training has been well received since its launch in March 2020. Participants are *'impressed with the combination of conceptual, theoretical and practical aspects of this training'*. There are now an increasing number of organisations participating and the virtual format has opened the possibility for field-based staff to join. It has gone a long way to bridging the field-headquarter divide. Building this network of innovators within and across organisations became an important added value for participants as they reflected on the workshops. *'The topic, focusing on human centered approach, and opportunity to connect to the UN colleagues, which is a rare opportunity. In the UN reform context, this connectivity is of crucial importance'*, one participant said.

We take this as encouraging evidence that successful bottom-up innovation works in large part due to the collaboration of intrapreneurs with and dissemination of

ideas between colleagues and partners, across sectors and organisations. Innovators are constantly learning, testing, failing, and iterating. They cannot remain in a bubble, but must push. to learn outside their own boundaries and develop the capacity to engage stakeholders around them.

The key challenge for innovation leaders is to share knowledge and dare each other to think creatively and design effective solutions. We have already seen a major shift in the mindset in the last five years and welcome the continuation of this work in the next five years! ■

## Endnotes

<sup>I</sup> Please see for more details on this research:

Tina C. Ambos, Katherine Tatarinov, Sylvia Somerville and Katherine Milligan, 'Initiatives with Impact: Unleashing bottom-up innovation in International Organizations, October 2018, [https://www.unige.ch/gsem/files/1016/2193/7051/Report\\_Initiatives\\_with\\_Impact.pdf](https://www.unige.ch/gsem/files/1016/2193/7051/Report_Initiatives_with_Impact.pdf).

<sup>II</sup> See: <https://innovation.wfp.org/project/building-blocks>.

<sup>III</sup> See: <https://www.unicef.org/innovation/U-Report>.

<sup>IV</sup> See: <https://www.shetrades.com>.

<sup>V</sup> See: [www.genevainnovation.org](http://www.genevainnovation.org).

<sup>VI</sup> Tina C. Ambos, et. al., *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>VII</sup> See: <https://emergencymanual.iom.int/entry/26763/cashbased-interventions-cbi#1,1645196140544>.

<sup>VIII</sup> See: <https://www.un.org/partnerships/content/instant-network-schools-programme-united-nations-high-commissioner-refugees-unhcr-and>.

<sup>IX</sup> See: <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-connected-education-challenge.html>.

<sup>X</sup> For more insights and case studies and how to 'Seed, Scale and Structure' innovation, please see: Tina C. Ambos and Katherine Tatarinov, 'Seed, Scale, Structure: How International Organizations Shape Innovation', June 2019, [https://www.unige.ch/gsem/files/2816/2193/7363/Report\\_Seed\\_Scale\\_Structure.pdf](https://www.unige.ch/gsem/files/2816/2193/7363/Report_Seed_Scale_Structure.pdf).

# Unloved and unappreciated: The General Assembly Budget Committees and UN leadership

BY HANNAH DAVIES



Mahmoud Khaled Al-Hariri  
*Abstract Integration*  
Zataari Camp





*Hannah Davies is a consultant and academic researcher based in Northern Ireland. Previously, she worked at the United Nations including in the Departments of Field Support and Management, the Office of Legal Affairs and the UN Democracy Fund. While working at the UN she supported senior staff defending various management reform proposals in the the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) and the Fifth Committee, including the Global Field Support Strategy and a new framework for reimbursing troops and police contributed to the UN by Member States.*

### ■ The tyranny of the budget process

The General Assembly's two budget committees – the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) and the Fifth Committee – are well known in United Nations policy circles, but are generally maligned and little understood.<sup>i</sup> The budget committees' role of reviewing and approving financial and human resources across the UN is essential to the functioning of the organisation. Without resources to match, pious expressions of what the UN should be doing are just hot air.

The Fifth Committee especially guards its authority jealously and strongly resists attempts by other bodies to determine resource requirements elsewhere. A favourite Fifth Committee paragraph, recalled multiple times, asserts its responsibilities for administrative and budgetary matters.<sup>ii</sup> Because Fifth Committee resolutions are almost always adopted by consensus between the 193 Member States, establishing agreement is difficult and involves hard work. Budgetary resolutions are also binding on the Secretary-General. This triggers extensive debates about the authority of the Secretary-General,<sup>iii</sup> however as Chief Administrative Officer of the organisation, a key function of the role is implementing the mandates given to the organisation, which includes leading the planning and budgeting process.

The decisions of the UN's Fifth Committee are often based on recommendations from the ACABQ. While the ACABQ reviews the administrative budgets of funds and programmes such as UNDP, and provide recommendations to their Executive Boards, the reports on the financing and management of the Secretariat are reviewed by the Fifth Committee, represented by all Member States. The universality of the Fifth Committee – compared to other governing bodies – gives it a unique degree of legitimacy, but also makes it a very challenging forum for UN leadership.

Many would consider the oversight of the budget committees a constraint on the Secretariat's autonomy – particularly with regard to management questions. Any changes to policies will involve detailed scrutiny by Member States and protracted negotiations. An example of this is when previous Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon expended significant political capital – as well as staff time and resources to push through – a new mobility framework for UN staff that was subsequently quietly abandoned and replaced.<sup>iv</sup> The current Secretary-General has proposed changes to the staff regulations and rules including making gender parity a consideration in recruitment and it is still languishing on the Fifth Committee's list of items deferred.<sup>v</sup>

### Multilateralism, the budget committees, and legitimacy

How financial and human resources are directed reflects political as well as management priorities. Conflicts in the Security Council, geopolitical flashpoints or the emergence of new interests and rising powers inevitably spill over into administrative debates. Negotiations about the funding of a new human rights monitoring mechanism, for example, provide an opportunity for states to revisit and challenge how the Human Rights Council mandate is implemented. Likewise, any budget request that even hints at interference in the sovereign affairs of a state – such as resources for drone technology or the role of Resident Coordinators will be reviewed robustly.

When Member States discuss the Secretary-General's proposed budgets or related management questions, they are not only scrutinizing his proposals, they are also negotiating with each other. Disputes over what might seem quite basic policy issues such as university accreditation or internships are subject to political maneuvering reflecting different positions on who should be able to access UN



**Member States want to see how and on what their money is being spent. For the main financial contributors, 'the like-minded group', this is often a question of efficiency and harnessing funding for their priorities.**

opportunities. As a universal body, the Fifth Committee is also a place where smaller or more marginal states can use the budget process as a proxy to make substantive points with material consequences.

Oversight and examination of the budget is an important accountability mechanism for Member States, all of whom contribute to the assessed budgets. The integration of the resident coordinator system into the UN Secretariat using assessed funding resulted in greater scrutiny of the financing and functions of funds and programmes,<sup>vi</sup> not just by donor-driven Executive Boards, but also by the recipients of UN programmes.<sup>vii</sup>

Member States want to see how and on what their money is being spent. For the main financial contributors, 'the like-minded group', this is often a question of efficiency and harnessing funding for their priorities. In the case of countries where the UN has a strong normative and operational impact – usually developing countries – it is more a question of equity and impact. The complex and often conflicting interests in the budget committee can make this kind of accountability uncomfortable.

For UN officials, it can be tempting to try to bypass detailed scrutiny by the ACABQ and the Fifth Committee, including through increased efforts to secure donor funding or partnership arrangements with other organisations.

Department heads or programme managers can show leadership by implementing initiatives within the purview of their entity that align with overarching UN goals, without necessarily requesting new or additional resources. Another approach to leadership however, is recognising that understanding, knowledge, and expertise with the budget committees and their methods, procedures, as well as role is actually a key component of UN leadership.

Showing leadership in the budget committees reflects commitment to the principles of multilateralism. Understanding and working with – rather than against –

these processes should strengthen the UN Secretariat and the independence of the civil service.

### **Leadership in the budget committees**

But in practice – beyond a general commitment to multilateralism – what does leadership look like in the budget committees?

On the side of a Member State delegate, leadership means thinking beyond individual national or regional positions and seeking to find space for agreement. The Chair of the ACABQ for example must show leadership by finding a collective voice for a disparate 21 member committee.

For UN officials, representing the Secretariat in front of the ACABQ and the Fifth Committee can provide space for a certain type of bureaucratic agency, despite the politics and micromanagement. While there is no explicit effort to train for these functions, some UN managers perform better in the Committees than others. They learn by doing or sitting in the back row absorbing good and bad practice. Either way, many officials regularly demonstrate leadership qualities in the Committees where they are contributing expertise, technical support, and information, while still maintaining their independence as civil servants.<sup>viii</sup>

### **Wisdom to strengthen leadership**

The Committees have an extensive workload. Any additions to this work in the form of new initiatives and activities create more potential for disagreement. The Committees are political. Therefore, don't make things harder by politicising budgets that obviously reflect one set of positions on an issue rather than another. Likewise, avoid contentious language that implicitly or explicitly criticises some Member States.

Timing matters. The committees have their own cycle and rhythms. It is good to avoid putting something in front of the Committees when they're busy with all the peacekeeping



budgets, or if they've only recently considered a very similar report. Don't ask for anything unless it is really needed, doesn't duplicate, and only if it aligns with existing mandates. It is better to present resource requests within the framework of the General Assembly's agreed decisions and mandates, not as something that the Secretariat wants.

Similarly, temperance is a good policy. For example, a request for five new Director positions will undoubtedly raise eyebrows. Play proposals down, position them as supporting or extending existing mandates as announcing things as radical and transformative makes many states nervous. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, the UN Secretariat does change with the times, experience shows that change tends to be incremental. Big reforms such as those made during 2018 are possible, but only in permissive circumstances such as when Member States are largely in agreement, which is rare or in the first year of a Secretary-General's tenure. Even then, these interventions require significant political capital often involving compromises or quid-pro-quo agreements with supporting states. This strategy will weaken the independence of the civil service in the longer term.

Tactically, it will be important to respect the precedents in dealing with the committees. It is essential to know what's been decided previously, quote resolutions, and reference previously agreed language and existing consensus resolutions. These texts have provided a basis for states to agree in the past and so can be a useful guide to what is possible. Given the work involved in establishing agreement on issues, Member States will not appreciate being asked to re-negotiate something they have already decided upon.

Listen and take delegate questions and concerns seriously. While ACABQ members are often seasoned diplomats, Fifth Committee delegates are largely First Secretaries, relatively junior and probably younger than many staff defending the Secretary-general's proposals. Even if

you consider their questions irrelevant or the answers obvious, there is a reason – even if it's capricious. The same professional rigour should be applied to the budget committees as in a presentation to the Secretary-General or other senior internal staff.

### **Build connections**

Relationships and trust really matter. In formal settings, observe protocol and respect that Member States are the principals who decide, and the Secretariat are the agents who implement. However it is important to build relationships with delegates informally. Whilst some may not have the status of Permanent Representatives it is extremely useful to know who the key players are such as who are the current representatives of the G77, the group of countries from the global south. This can provide a useful source of information and it can help to 'socialise' new proposals. First Secretaries might one day be a Permanent Representative or indeed a senior UN staff member.

The budget committees can be a strange technical and general hybrid. Reports on construction of new offices, or the implementation of complex information, communication and technology systems contain highly specialised information on data management or architecture and the diplomats considering them are unlikely to be experts on all these things. Preparation is therefore crucial, know the portfolio so that issues can be explained clearly and simply.

In the same context it is important to note that the budget committees are not a marketing exercise or a political briefing. Generalised buzzwords and public relations jargon is less effective than clear, concise, and factual information. Don't draw attention to anything that cannot be justified. Written information provided to the Committees is often used as background in reports. Senior managers should ensure that the documents are reviewed



**Relationships and trust really matter. In formal settings, observe protocol and respect that Member States are the principals who decide, and the Secretariat are the agents who implement. However it is important to build relationships with delegates informally.**

for consistency with an eye on what the sensitive issues might be. They should speak with one voice as internal departmental competition and in-fighting undermines the whole Secretariat. This might involve putting aside personal views in the interests of an achievable collective outcome.

Finally, the intergovernmental budgetary process is an essential part of the Secretariat's work which – for all its difficulty – is highly visible and has a degree of status and prestige. Representation in the Committees is therefore a good opportunity for senior managers to showcase and mentor talented staff. It is also an opportunity to demonstrate commitment to the UN values such as respect for diversity; thinking about the gender, cultural and regional profile of your team can also be good politics.

In this way, budgetary discussions ideally should be an opportunity to exhibit leadership in the UN by demonstrating how the UN Secretariat can be a neutral servant to all Member States – in the words of Dag Hammarskjöld – building 'a relationship of mutual confidence and trust between international officials and the governments of Member States'.<sup>ix</sup> While the outcomes of budgetary decisions and discussions can be frustrating for UN leadership, particularly when it is about reduced resources, modified proposals, and repeatedly deferring key issues on human resources questions, budget decisions can also support leadership on reform and other issues. The process itself is a vivid demonstration of the multilateral character of the UN. ■

## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> See for example: Namie Di Razza, 'People before Process: Humanizing the HR System for UN Peace Operations,' International Peace Institute, October 2017, <<https://www.ipinst.org/2017/10/humanizing-hr-system-for-un-peace-operations>>.

<sup>ii</sup> See for example: UN General Assembly Resolution 72/266 B, 5 July 2018, <https://undocs.org/A/RES/72/266B>.

<sup>iii</sup> See for example: Iain Johnstone, 'The Role of the UN Secretary-General: The Power of Persuasion Based on Law', *Global Governance*, 9/4 (2003), pp. 44-458 2003, <<https://doi-org.ezproxy.its.uu.se/10.1163/19426720-00904005>>; and Kirsten Haack, 'The UN Secretary-General, role expansion and narratives of representation in the 2016 campaign', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 20/4 (2018), <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1369148118784706>>.

<sup>iv</sup> UN General Assembly, 'Overview of human resources management reform for the period 2019–2020 and an outlook beyond report of the Secretary-General', A/75/540, 23 October 2020, <https://undocs.org/A/75/540>, para. 39.

<sup>v</sup> UN General Assembly decision 75/533, April 2021.

<sup>vi</sup> UN General Assembly resolution 72/279, May 2018.

<sup>vii</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the relationship between funding and multilateral governance see: Erin Graham, 'Money and Multilateralism: How funding rules constitute IO governance', *International theory*, 7/1 (2015), pp. 162-194, <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971914000414>>.

<sup>viii</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the agency of international civil servants see: Michael W. Bauer & Jörn Ege, 'Bureaucratic autonomy of international organizations' secretariats', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 23/7 (2016), 1019-1037, <<https://doi-org.ezproxy.its.uu.se/10.1080/13501763.2016.1162833>>.

<sup>ix</sup> Dag Hammarskjöld, *The international civil servant in law and in fact: A lecture delivered to Congregation on 30 May 1961* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), p.16.

# Leadership from where you sit: Behavioural challenge

BY AIDA GHAZARYAN



Murad Ahmed Al- Shawamreh  
*Peace*  
Zataari Camp



*Aida Ghazaryan is the Learning Portfolio Manager responsible for the training, learning and knowledge management at the United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC) Knowledge Centre for Leadership and Management in Turin, Italy. Before joining the UNSSC she worked for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) at country and regional level in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Ms. Ghazaryan is a specialist in gender issues, women's rights, reproductive health and rights, disability rights and trafficking in human beings. She is an International Policy Fellow with the Open Society Institute and Center for Policy Studies in Hungary and has a master's degree in Human Rights from Central European University in Hungary and Philology from Yerevan State University in Armenia respectively.*

'How would Hammarskjöld have handled this?'<sup>I</sup>

–Kofi Annan

■ Why was the UN System Leadership Framework created and what does it look like in practice?<sup>II</sup>

How many times have you reflected on your leadership experiences and behaviours and how do you respond to the lessons you learn?

If you were planning to change one of your leadership behaviours or adopt a new one, what would the change process look like? What would the focus of your learning be? How would you transform yourself into the leader you want to be in the United Nations?

Most importantly, how does the United Nations nurture this next generation of leaders? It is evident that a lot of thinking has gone into these questions at the UN. Truth be told, while the challenges of the 21st century have grown and significant changes have taken place in the work and culture of the UN, many would agree that its greatest strength — and the key to our success — still remains the quality of the staff and managers/leaders as indicated by the Secretary-General Kofi Annan in 'Building the Future'.<sup>III</sup>

### **One plus one equals three: Building the United Nations leadership culture**

Much work has gone into developing the leadership capacity of UN staff, and ensuring that there is a cohesive leadership culture that is centred around a collective and agreed purpose and vision. Among other guiding documents is the Resident Coordinator (RC) Leadership Profile, which now articulates who an RC should be and

how they should lead and do their work.<sup>IV</sup> The Secretariat's 'Values and Behaviours Framework', meanwhile, spells out values and behaviours important to the work of the UN in the future.<sup>V</sup> Upholding the behaviours of the Senior Leadership Commitments – 'the glue' – also guides UN leaders in transitioning their organisations and workforce towards the future of work.<sup>VI</sup>

The changing nature of the world and our commitment to the people and the planet are among the driving forces for new policies, practical tools, innovation and incorporating behavioural insights to support the implementation of our mandates.<sup>VII</sup> And yes, 'in many areas, successful outcomes in the UN's work depend on changes in human behaviour...'<sup>VIII</sup> and for the UN to remain a trusted global leader, we must, amongst others, embrace and apply innovative approaches.<sup>IX</sup>

One message that we hear loud and clear in the UN is that the time is now and the choices we make today can bring either further breakdown or a breakthrough.<sup>X</sup> Be it 'a wake-up call' or an 'organisation-wide reset',<sup>XI</sup> we know from research and science that the change starts with oneself.

At the UNSSC, we know that the new leadership vision and broader behavioural and organisational change outlined in the UN System Leadership Framework (UNSLF) – purposeful, continuous, daily, through engagement and working with others and regardless of position in the UN – will lead us in the direction of transformation.

Our view is that middle managers also have an important role to play in this process and can effectively lead and influence their colleagues to embody the characteristics and behaviours outlined in the UNSLF.



## Learning journey: Are you ready to lead?

‘The longest journey is the journey inward’.  
–Dag Hammarskjold

It is against this back drop that the UNSSC revamped UN Emerging Leaders Experience and developed the UN Emerging Leaders e-Learning Programme (UNEL-e) – a flagship programme for mid-level managers in the United Nations where we in many ways nurture the agency of change and bring to life the new leadership culture.

This is the space where diversity of perspectives and voices as well as lived experiences of UN leadership on the ground meet. It is a safe space where the UN System Staff College learning team and UN practitioners join hands and hearts. They work tirelessly and with great care to design, guide and deliver a seamless programme. Alumni have described it as a well-designed, inspiring, relevant, and immersive learning journey where UN leaders learn from, and with each other.

The major theme and focus of UNEL-e are to link up with the statement of the UN Secretary-General António Guterres in his address to staff where he set ‘the engagement challenge’:

‘So we need to have a strong engagement to change, to reform and to improve. And that engagement needs to be our engagement, by all of us. It is not an engagement of the Secretary-General or one or other managers of the Organization. It must be our collective engagement, to be able to address the shortcomings that we have’.<sup>XII</sup>

Change is not just the responsibility of senior management in the UN but everybody’s business, and one of the threads in the UNEL-e is on how you can influence the change and lead from where you sit, irrespective of rank. In that sense, we reinforce the role of UNEL-e participants as change agents. Some behavioural scientists suggest three ways to create lasting change. Namely, have an epiphany,

change your environment or change habits in tiny ways.<sup>XIII</sup> Others state that smaller contextual changes can lead to large behaviour changes over time.<sup>XIV</sup>

As we travel through the years in the UN, we have different ways of growing and learning. My leadership epiphany occurred when I was on a junior level of the hierarchical staircase.

A supervisor recommended looking into leadership positions. That unexpected invitation offered inspiration, curiosity and an opportunity to reflect inwards for what I can be, prompting the start of my leadership journey. While many elements of leadership training deserve their own account, below is a small selection of experiments that showcase innovative thinking in how we address leadership issues and unleash the leadership potential of mid-level UN managers in the UN Emerging Leaders e-Learning, which I believe merit a wider readership.

## Practicing leadership behaviours and habits

‘Of human beings and their way to unity?

The truth is so simple that it is regarded as pretentious banality. And yet it is constantly denied in action. Every day provides examples: It is more important to recognize the reasons for one’s own behaviour than to understand the motives of others’<sup>XV</sup>.

–Dag Hammarskjold ‘Waymarks’

Drawing on recent evidence from the behavioural science, cognitive psychology and other related disciplines, the team incorporates techniques for self-improvement to help participating mid-level managers shape their leadership trajectory by implementing the UNSLF leadership behaviours that they learn on the programme.

Alignment of the UNEL-e programme with the UN System Leadership Framework also provides an opportunity



Alumni have described it as a well-designed, inspiring, relevant, and immersive learning journey where UN leaders learn from, and with each other.

for learners to consider, with a collegial ‘buddy’, how to apply behaviours stressed in the Framework in practical ways, especially through new leadership habits.

The programme exposes participants to current thinking on habit development and then provides the opportunity for them to apply this by building a habit around one of the key Framework behaviours.

This process starts with a participant selecting a single UNSLF behaviour that they wish to embody. Examples include being more collaborative, innovative, transparent, empowering or inclusive. The programme then provides a space where they can learn more about this behaviour and incorporate it into their work in real time. Participants also have an opportunity to receive feedback on the challenges that they face as the programme unfolds.

For the programmatic team, it has been inspiring to hear how participants have achieved results and seen an impact in their respective settings. Most importantly they have received recognition and appreciation from their teams. This has emanated from their ability to change their team dynamics, implement improved methods of managing meetings and consultations, new –performance management approaches, partnership building techniques, better techniques to establish openly creative cultures where all ideas are acknowledged and much more.

Below are just a few reflections from UNEL–e participants:

‘The UNEL–e program not only teaches the UN leader to become more self-aware by taking daily stock of leadership behavioural strengths but also how to identify and tackle their behavioural vulnerabilities; how to use prompts to apply positive leadership behaviours in all work relationships thereby strengthening multi-stakeholder partnerships’.

‘The Behaviour Challenge provided me with the opportunity to be more self-aware during those weeks on the way I engage with the people around me. This was a very positive experience for myself. I have learned to provide the space to my subordinates to be more outspoken in meetings and share their ideas. The reactions to this were positive throughout’.

‘I gained both the inspiration and practical tools to become a better ‘me’ in order to grow as a better leader’.

Mid-level managers coming out of the UN Emerging Leaders e–Learning confess that the UN System Leadership Framework – creating a common vision of leadership behavioural needs for the UN system at all levels – has been a major guide and source of inspiration.

Through the aforementioned behaviour challenge, managers have improved their self-awareness. They are better able to identify their strengths and weaknesses and address them, and use teachings from UNEL–e to build the skills needed to help them deliver on their mandates, and in turn the UN’s mission. They leave the programme as improved versions of themselves, who are empowered agents of change, better able and motivated to influence and steer change by practicing the transformational leadership.

The challenge-based activities in the programme ‘Back to the Future’ and the ‘UN System Leadership Behavioural Challenge’ stimulate co-creation, reflective learning and the application of the new desired behaviours as leaders from where they are currently situated.

Participating in online discussion forums, live webinar conversation opportunities along with the behavioural change exercise ‘buddies’ offer peer-to-peer consultations on leadership. In the process they build best practice habits, are able to draw on a great variety of perspectives, exchange of triumphs, vulnerabilities, and out-of-the-box maverick solutions to leadership issues. They also bond and build a sense of comradery.

At the end of the programme each UNEL–e participant shares their experiences in building a new leadership habit. They talk about the prompts used, experimental actions taken and their application of the desired behaviour, as well as feedback received from accountability partners.

Other areas of reflection include how they rewarded themselves and celebrated progress, how they tracked their progress, and suggestions on how to build a new leadership habit.

The struggles that keep mid-level managers awake at night may be different; what brought them together is their desire to lead by example, transition from technical into leadership positions and to be seen as proud members of the UN family.



Our dream is that the accumulated impact from the combined individual efforts of participants will mainstream the UN System Leadership Framework and lead to bottom-up change.

## Crescendo

‘To have humility is to experience reality, not in relation to ourselves, but in its sacred independence. It is to see, judge, and act from the point of rest in ourselves. Then, how much disappears, and all that remains falls into place. In the point of rest at the center of our being, we encounter a world where all things are at rest in the same way. Then a tree becomes a mystery, a cloud a revelation, each man a cosmos of whose riches we can only catch glimpses.’  
–Dag Hammarskjöld

UNEL-e also draws from a wealth of leadership experiences from across the UN system. There are a number of untold leadership stories, whether one has been in the UN for five years or more than a decade.

Another innovative element of the UNEL-e is that it offers space for mid-level managers to meet UN leaders at different moments in their leadership path. The co-delivery by the trainer and the seasoned UN leader links theory to application, giving expression to voices from the field and can nudge towards leadership from where one sits.

During the last day there is a special learning opportunity through leadership lessons and challenges shared by the UN senior leaders. Participants can engage with them about their life experiences on their personal leadership journeys, making the learning more practical and real.

The UNEL-e finishes with reflection on the transformational leadership skills the participants have gained and what they will do in the future with their personal pledges for action.

## Final thoughts

Our goal at the Staff College is to work with the Secretary-General on his engagement challenge by raising awareness of UNEL-e participants to the importance and practice of the UN System Leadership Framework.

We provide an opportunity for current and future leaders to start, at a personal level, acquiring and modelling the behaviours required to reform and improve the UN. Our dream is that the accumulated impact from the combined individual efforts of participants will mainstream the UN System Leadership Framework and lead to bottom-up change. ■

## Endnotes

<sup>I</sup> Kofi Annan, *We The Peoples: A UN for the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 14.

<sup>II</sup> UN Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), 'United Nations System Leadership Framework', CEB/2017/1 (Annex), 20 June 2017, <https://undocs.org/CEB/2017/1>. See also: <https://unsceb.org/united-nations-system-leadership-framework>.

<sup>III</sup> United Nations, 'Competencies for the Future', 1999, [https://careers.un.org/lbw/attachments/competencies\\_booklet\\_en.pdf](https://careers.un.org/lbw/attachments/competencies_booklet_en.pdf).

<sup>IV</sup> UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG), 'The RC Leadership Profile', December 2020, [https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/The\\_Resident\\_Coordinator\\_Leadership\\_Profile\\_2.pdf](https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/The_Resident_Coordinator_Leadership_Profile_2.pdf).

<sup>V</sup> UN Office of Human Resources, 'Values and Behaviours Framework', 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9w6tPWpsFws>.

<sup>VI</sup> UN Chief Executives Board for Coordination High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM), 'Senior Leadership Commitments for the Future of Work in the United Nations System', 25–26 March 2021, CEB/2021/HLCM/6/Add.2/Rev.1.

<sup>VII</sup> United Nations, 'Report of the Secretary-General on the Work of the Organization 2021', A/76/1, 2021, <https://undocs.org/A/76/1>.

<sup>VIII</sup> UN Innovation Network, 'United Nations Behavioural Science Report', 2021, [https://www.uninnovation.network/assets/BeSci/UN\\_Behavioural\\_Science\\_Report\\_2021.pdf](https://www.uninnovation.network/assets/BeSci/UN_Behavioural_Science_Report_2021.pdf).

<sup>IX</sup> United Nations, 'Behavioural Science: Secretary-General's Guidance on Behavioural Science', 2021, <https://www.un.org/en/content/behaviouralscience/#:~:text=The%20Secretary%2DGeneral's%20Guidance%20urges,to%20progress%20on%20its%20mandate>.

<sup>X</sup> United Nations, 'Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary-General', A/75/982, 5 August 2021, <https://undocs.org/A/75/982>.

<sup>XI</sup> International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), 'Secretary-General Unveils Vision for Future-Oriented UN', SDG Knowledge HUB, <https://sdg.iisd.org/news/secretary-general-unveils->

[vision-for-future-oriented-un/](#); UN General Assembly A/75/L.1, 'Declaration on the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations', 16 September 2020, A/75/L.1, <https://undocs.org/A/75/L.1>.

<sup>XII</sup> UN Secretary General, 'Secretary-General, Addressing Staff, Calls for Strong Collective Engagement to Overcome United Nations Shortcomings, Tackle Global Concerns', SG/SM/18401, 3 January 2017, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sgsm18401.doc.htm>.

<sup>XIII</sup> BJ Fogg, *Tiny Habits: The Small Changes that Change Everything* (Boston: First Mariner Books Edition, 2020), p. 4.

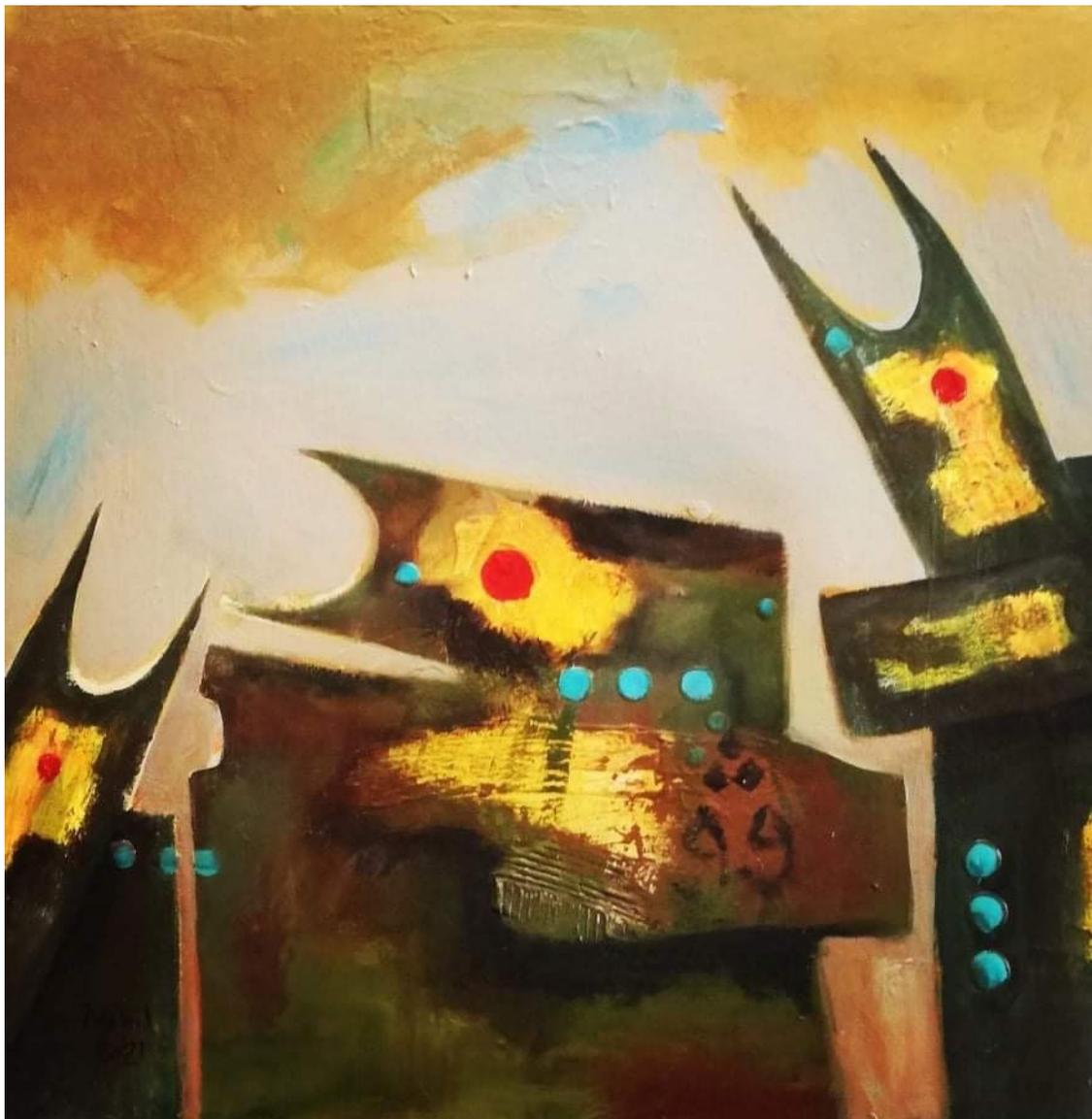
<sup>XIV</sup> James Clear, 'Atomic Habits: An Easy and Proven Way to Build Good Habits and Break Bad Ones', (New York: Penguin Random House, 2018), p. 90.

<sup>XV</sup> Bernhard Erling, 'A Reader's Guide to Dag Hammarskjöld's Waymarks' (Uppsala: Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 1987), <https://www.daghammarskjold.se/publication/readers-guide-dag-hammarskjolds-waymarks/>, pp. 134.

# United Nations 2.0: Can the current leadership deliver the workforce it requires?

BY VERONIKA TYWUSCHIK-SOHLSTRÖM, MARC JACQUAND, HENRIETTE KEIJZERS

*We thank colleagues in the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) Secretariat in Geneva for their continued support to provide and create data sets on specific categories of our analysis, as well as engaging in dialogues on how data can be improved and strengthened. Their input was imperative to the contribution's outcome.*



Nabil Jubouri  
People Simulation  
Amman



**Veronika Tywuschik-Sohlström** is a Programme Manager at the Foundation. In addition to this role, she undertakes ad-hoc consultancy work for the UN Development Programme, the UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office and the UN Secretariat. Previously, Veronika worked for several international foundations and projects including the European Institute of Peace; the Friedrich Ebert Foundation; the European Centre for Development Policy Management; the European Commission's TradeCom Facility; and for PARTICIP. Tywuschik-Sohlström holds a Masters degree from the University of East Anglia in International Development and Economics.



**Marc Jacquand** is a Senior Advisor to the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation. He is an adjunct Professor at the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University where he teaches risk management in conflict contexts. Jacquand worked two years with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General António Guterres on strategic planning and UN reform. Starting his career in investment banking, he worked in the field of micro finance for FINCA International before joining the Microfinance Unit of the United Nations Capital Development Fund. He went on to work on conflict and post crisis responses both at Headquarters, for the Development Cooperation Office and for the UN missions in the occupied Palestinian territory, Libya, Yemen and Somalia. He graduated from the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University and the HEC School of Management in France.



**Henriette Keijzers** is working as an independent consultant after completing a UN career of more than 30 years. She is currently working as an advisor to the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation. Her final UN assignment was as Deputy Director of the Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office. In this role, she co-chaired the UN team that developed the data standards for UN system-wide financial reporting and oversaw the data analysis for the annual report on Financing the UN Development System, published jointly with the Foundation. Prior to this, she worked as Deputy Executive Secretary at the UN Capital Development Fund in New York, and for the UN Development Programme in field offices in Ghana, Malawi, Nigeria, Guinea-Bissau, and Burkina Faso. Keijzers holds a Master's degree in International and Development Economics from Tilburg University in the Netherlands.

■ Since his early days in office, the current Secretary-General has made United Nations culture and leadership central to his reform agenda. On many occasions he has underlined that the UN must adapt and embrace a culture focused on results rather than process. In particular, he has spearheaded the adoption of the United Nations system leadership framework and its nine principles by the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB).<sup>i</sup>

Efforts to improve the UN's culture and leadership did not stall with the advent of the pandemic. If anything, reforms seem to have accelerated over the last two years, and COVID-19 and the response to its impact have demonstrated the importance of these efforts. Take the latest reflections on the 'Future of Work', where the CEB attempts to learn from the pandemic and explore how to

better lead and manage teams in a world where traditional working methods have been upended.<sup>ii</sup> A new 'UN Values and Behaviour's Framework' meanwhile outlines nine principles that guide staff in their daily work.<sup>iii</sup>

Another example of reform is the new mobility scheme<sup>iv</sup> for the UN Secretariat —subject to Administrative and Budgetary Committee approval<sup>v</sup>— which should allow for more horizontal and vertical mobility. It will also strengthen staff's understanding of all three pillars of the UN and address unequal opportunities between country and headquarters-based staff. In addition, a new Task Force to address racism and racial discrimination has been established.<sup>vi</sup> This team will build robust investigative and accountability measures and enhance support and build trust. Finally, the Secretary-General's 'Our Common

Agenda' report stresses the role of principled and effective UN leadership in addressing global challenges, laying the foundation for the United Nations 2.0.<sup>vii</sup>

These efforts are noteworthy for their sheer number and ubiquity in the UN discourses and processes. They attract scrutiny and raise expectations, but a question inevitably arises, are these efforts translating into real change? This is where data comes in.

### The impact of data

Our contribution in the first edition of this publication series explored the linkage between data and leadership.<sup>viii</sup> We stated that the UN demographic data, in conjunction with perception surveys can add value to understanding and improving the UN's current leadership culture. Our first attempt triggered interesting questions and reactions that can unlock valuable lessons on UN leadership. What does the data say, what does it reveal, and what (further) interrogations does it point to?

Our hypothesis was and remains that data can help uncover realities that reflect the state of leadership beyond or as a complement to claims and stories. An objective analysis of the data can test assumptions and help to better identify the gaps to be addressed. This knowledge can shape future policies related to workforce culture and support leaders in their decisions and help generate an international civil service for the United Nations 2.0, in line with the Secretary-General's data strategy.<sup>ix</sup> This time again, we have chosen to refocus on a few categories that we believe are reasonable proxies for the health and strength of UN leadership culture and practice:

- Age: Youth leadership has been identified as central to fulfil UN mandates, but is this age group really part of the UN decision-making?
- Gender: COVID-19 put the difference in leadership style and effectiveness across genders in full display and the UN has made gender parity a critical element of its leadership ambitions. Does the data validate this commitment?
- Mobility: Intra-agency and geographical mobility is important for the relevance and health of leadership but is the UN getting more mobile?

Our analysis is based on the latest available data from the CEB and various Secretary-General reports.<sup>x</sup>

### Age: The UN is serving Generation Z, but responding with Generation X

The world population is gradually aging and for the first time in history, five generations work side-by-side in the UN.<sup>xi</sup> In this context, the Secretary-General has emphasised the need for a global and internal intergenerational dialogue to highlight the importance of youth and that future generations need to be part of the decisions that determine their own future.<sup>xii</sup> This raises the question about how well positioned are Generations Y and Z to shape the organisation's decisions and actions? According to the data, not so much - for now.

#### *Generation Z represents only 0.1% of the overall UN staff*

Overall, the current UN staff age profile is skewed. As Table 1 reveals more than 73% of UN staff are 40-years or older, including Generation X and the upper age categories of the Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation. This leaves the under 40's at 27%, but those who are under 30, Generations Z and part of Generation Y, only represent 2.5 %.

Entry-level staff positions are becoming scarce – leaving little opportunity to rejuvenate. A major impediment is the low number of entry level professional staff positions. In 2020, P1 and P2 positions made up only 0,2% and 4.1% of the staff respectively and another 7.0 % of positions were at the comparable National Officers A and B levels.

An assessment of the International Professional level shows that only 11% of staff are employed at P-2 level. Interestingly, most of the UN entities with the highest volume of staff personnel and collectively the highest combined UN revenue, have also the lowest percentage of entry level positions (P2/P1).

As an example: P2 positions constitute only 2% of overall staff at World Food Programme (WFP) and 3 % at United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UN Secretariat and World Health Organisation (WHO) respectively. For both the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), it is 4%.

This is in contrast to some of the rather small UN entities, like International Trade Center (ITC) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

**Table 1: Number of staff by Age and % as compared to world population, 2020.**  
 Source: CEB 2020, [population.un.org](http://population.un.org).

Age (in years)	Type of Generation	# of UN staff by age	# of UN staff by Generation	Share of staff %	World Population of working age (15-64), in %
<25	Generation Z	128	128	0.1%	23.8%
25-29	Millennials (Generation Y)	2,794	31,100	26.7%	34.3%
30-39		28,306			
40-49	Generation X	43,329	64,933	55.8%	29.4%
50-55		21,604			
56-64	Baby Boomers	19,926	20,184	17.3%	12.4%
65-74		258			N.A.
>75	Silent Generation	36	36	0.03%	N.A.
<b>Total</b>		<b>116,381</b>		<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

(UNFCCC) where P2s account for an average of 20% of the overall staff. Looking closely at the age portfolio in relation to the entry-level International Professional positions (P1 and P2), 31 % of the P2 positions are Generation X (see Figure 1), which is the largest group by far for positions at the P3, P4 and P5.

#### *An aging UN workforce may make it challenging to connect with the world's youth*

In 2020, 58 % of the working age population were Generation Y and Z who will dominate the global workforce in the next decade. Yet, there seems to be too little of a healthy influx of younger staff to achieve an age distribution to mirror the world. A close observation of the UN Secretariat reveals an alarming trend in terms of age-diversity: The 25-29-year age category has seen a decline of 80% (from 3064 to 612) and the 30-34-year category's decline of 62% over the past 10 years. The age mobility was in favour of the 45-65-year category (See Figure 2).

This explains to some extent the rising average age in the UN System to 45.9 years in 2020, with 46.8 years for male staff and 44.7 years for female staff. In the UN Secretariat, the average age has risen 0.5 years each year reaching 46.8 years in 2020.

#### *What are the challenges for including Generation X and Y in the UN System?*

Many observers have offered various reasons, one of which is the increase of the mandatory retirement age to 65 and amendments to pension benefits has translated into a decrease in the number of separations in the UN system and thus creating less space 'at the bottom'. Furthermore, cuts of P-2 positions have been a repeating trend in the UN system and primarily driven by Member States in the 5th Committee.

There has been a steady shift over the years to the current recruitment and selection process favouring applicants

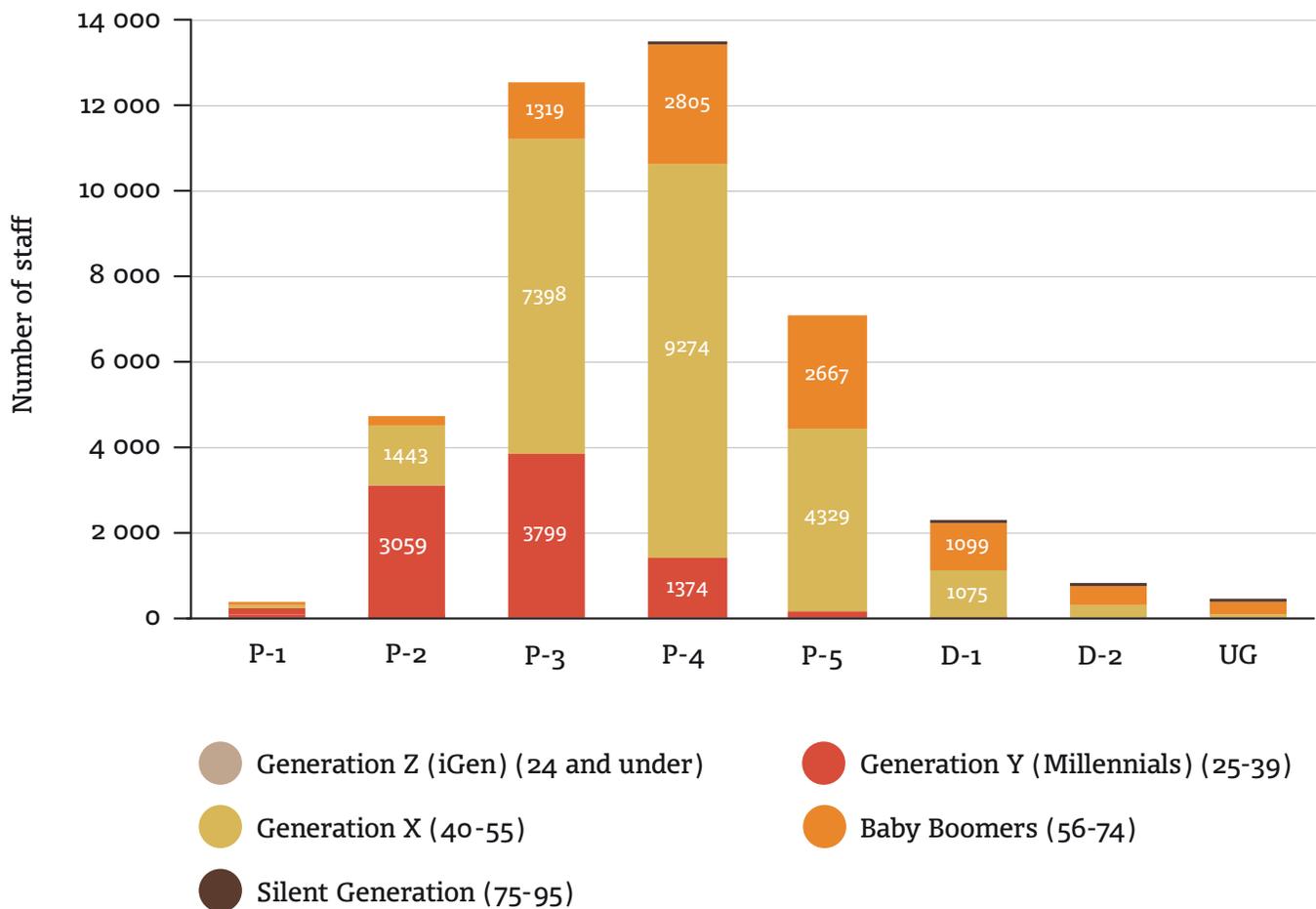
with more experience, distorting the idea that P-2 positions should be entry-level. As a result, the possibilities for young talented professionals to join the organisation as staff have diminished and this has lessened their chances of shaping the leadership from within.

We stated two years ago (in the previous edition) that an aging UN workforce will make it challenging to connect with the world's youth. In Africa the current median age is 19.7 years and in the Arab countries, young people are the fastest growing segment of the population with at least 60% of the population under 25 years old. The median age in Latin America and the Caribbean is 31-years. In this publication several contributors in Chapter Three highlight the need for raising the bar on intergenerational leadership, and they also plead for a stronger connection

to the youth at the country level. However, the prevailing UN trends, incentives, and structures push towards a more aging workforce posing challenges for leadership between generations, and leadership more generally. As the UN seeks to reverse these strategies in terms of staff recruitment, retention, and management it places a bigger responsibility on changes in the way the current leadership operates. It would have to be open to non-staff voices or create platforms to informally rejuvenate the UN.

Future thinking should consider making youth leadership part of the organisational diversity and inclusion strategy in line with a long-term leadership vision. Member States are the key in this effort to make this rejuvenation possible and advocating for the funding decisions that will enable the creation of more entry-level positions.

Figure 1: Generations making up the professional grades. Source: CEB.



### Gender: Leading the UN workforce to parity

The concept of gender equality has long been a core guiding principle of the United Nations. Articles 8 and 101 of the UN Charter underline that there should be no restrictions on the eligibility of men or women to participate in any capacity and under conditions of equality in the principal and subsidiary organs of the organisation.

The Beijing Platform for Action, adopted by the World Conference on Women in 1995 called for overall gender equality in the staff of the United Nations by 2000.<sup>xiii</sup> It urged for the full participation of women in all leadership positions and the principle of shared power and responsibilities. This was reaffirmed by General Assembly resolutions calling for gender parity to be a priority and to be achieved in all UN professional categories by the year 2000. Yet, the 2020 political declaration commemorating the 25th anniversary of the fourth World Conference on Women still expressed concern about the overall slow progress and recognised that more efforts are needed to achieve gender parity.<sup>xiv</sup>

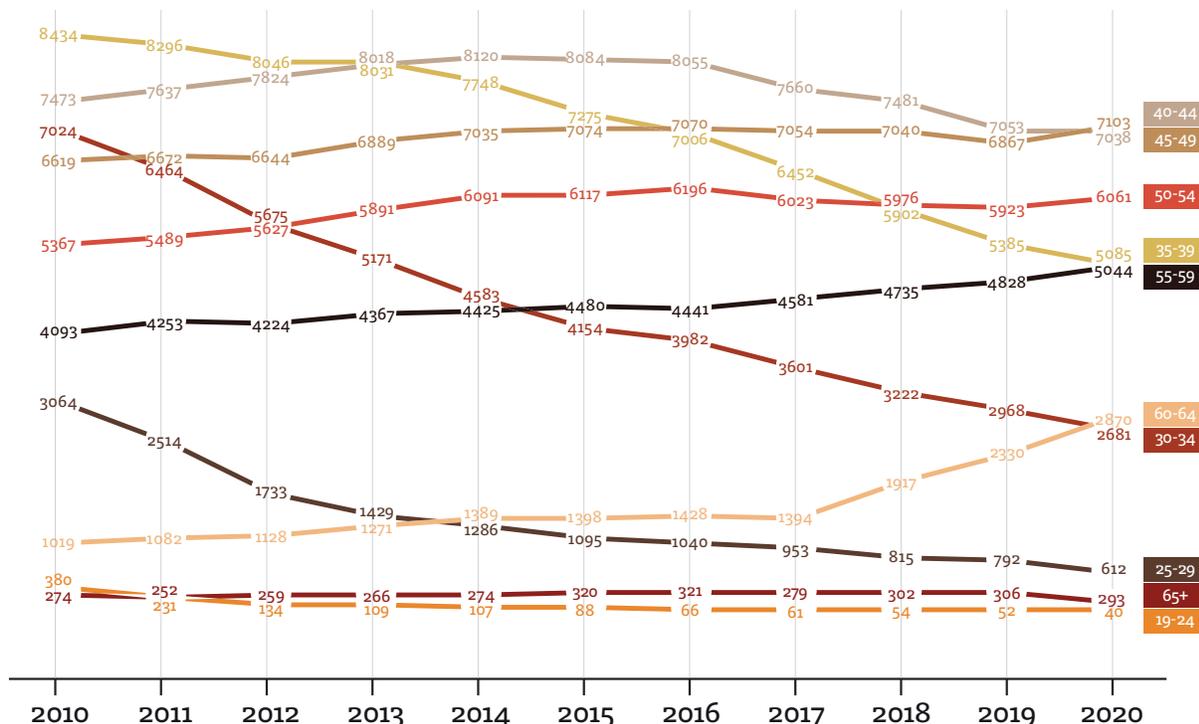
The system-wide gender parity strategy launched in 2017 was a renewed effort and roadmap to reach full gender parity by 2028. In November 2020, all entities were requested to update their implementation plans.

To date 89% of the entities in the UN system developed plans to achieve gender parity. Over the last two years it was evident that the need for gender equality as both a condition and a measure of good leadership was further reinforced. During the COVID-19 pandemic female national leaders tended to be seen as more effective and trustworthy than their male counterparts.<sup>xv</sup>

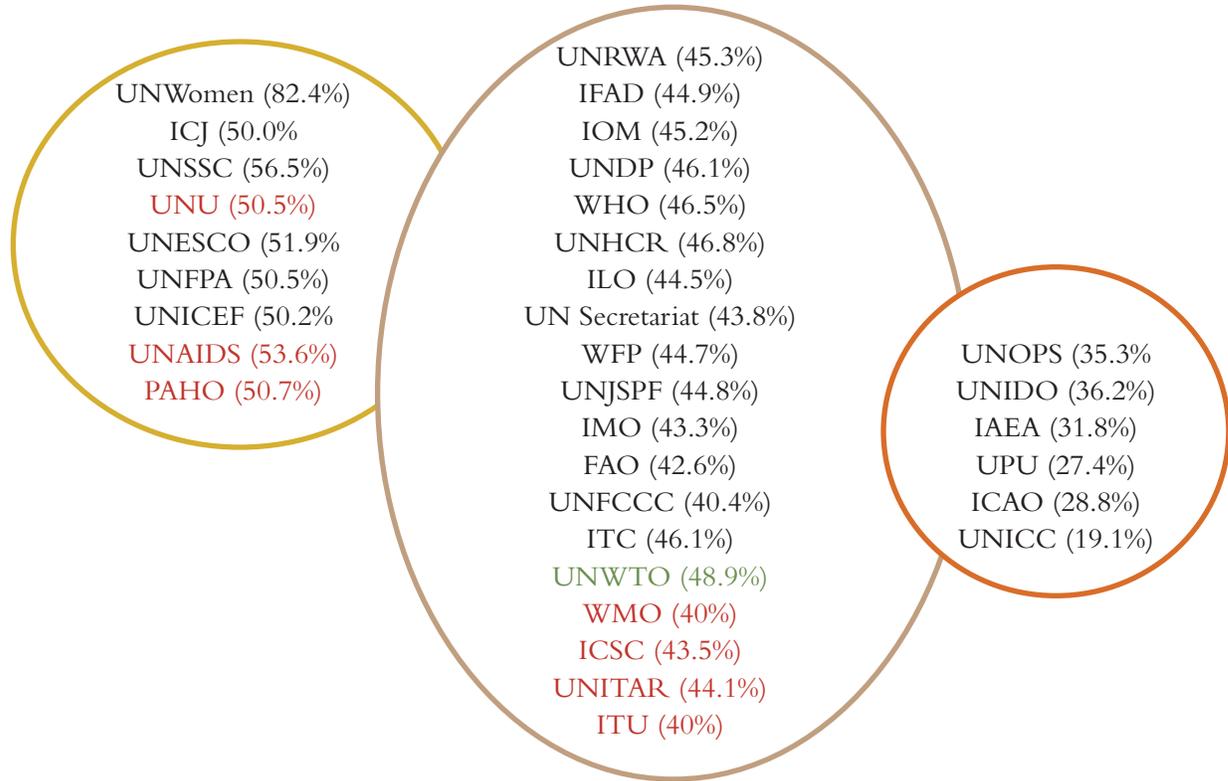
This reality, once again validated our decision in the 2019 edition to examine gender related data as an indicator of a healthy leadership culture and practice within the UN. At the time, the assumption was fairly straightforward and posited two main ideas.

First, the closer and the faster the UN gets to gender parity, the better its overall leadership will be functioning, particularly because gender parity would infer raising the

Figure 2: Distribution of all staff of the Secretariat, by age, 2010-2020. Source: Secretary-General report on the Composition of the UN Secretariat, 2010 – 2020.



*Illustration 1: Percentage of women in professional and higher categories with permanent, continuous, and fixed term appointments, by entity, as of 31 December 2019. Source: A/76/115. The entities listed in red moved one category up, and the green moved one category down.*



level of the overall leadership. Secondly it means that the UN would be meeting its own commitments which can in itself be seen as a measure of healthy leadership.

This report once again gives us the chance to revisit the data. Has there been any progress on gender parity goals? And do the basic gender parity numbers tell the whole story?

#### *More UN entities are within reach to achieve gender parity*

Since our 2019 report, two additional entities reached gender parity raising the number to 21 entities that are within reach of achieving gender parity. Six entities are currently below the 40% mark compared to 11 entities two years ago and all but one has made a slight improvement

upwards, suggesting that there are efforts underway to reach gender parity.

The representation of women has increased, but it is slow and uneven across grades. Since 2007, the representation of women has increased every year, but at the very slow pace 0.4% per year. Furthermore, while women are particularly well represented at the lower ranks such as in the General Service/P1-P2, the drop in representation is particularly steep at P3 level.

This highlights the overrepresentation of women at entry levels and shows that it does not translate into proportional representation at higher levels (Table 2). It is also reflected in Figure 3 which shows senior management at D1-D2 levels at the UN Secretariat.

*Table 2: Female representation in the UN system in %, by grade, 2009-2019.*  
 Source: A/76/115.

Grade level	2009	2019
P1	54%	71%
P2	57%	58%
P3	45%	47%
P4	38%	44%
P5	32%	39%
D-1	29%	38%
D-2	27%	38%

### *Gender parity in reach*

Gender parity at USG and ASG level at the UN Secretariat is within reach for the first time in the 75-year history of the UN. While female representation in the UN increased, albeit slowly, is this increase at the right level to make an impact?

Our analysis shows a positive result at the ASG/USG level, but there is still little movement at the middle and senior management levels. For the first time in the UN's history, the Secretary-General's senior management group has almost reached full parity (Figure 3). His commitments to improve gender parity at the highest level have been fulfilled despite attempted Member State influence and pressures on the selection persons for these posts.

However, the female leadership numbers at D1/D2 level show less progress: the gender imbalance in D1 positions has steadily improved, but the number of women in D-2 positions has actually decreased between 2019 and 2020 after a growth period.

In a survey conducted by UNWomen, several impediments have been identified to achieving equal representation between women and men at senior positions.<sup>xvi</sup> These

included: A low number of available female candidates in traditionally male dominated sectors, hardship duty stations, low staff turnover, fewer openings for senior positions, challenges in retaining women, mobility requirements and inconsistent implementation of support programmes for professional and personal life integration.

### *Gender and crisis-affected countries*

Female representation is lowest in crisis-affected countries where the UN's reputation is shaped and where the majority of resources are spent. Closer examination of the data also sparked the question whether women were adequately represented where it matters, otherwise put, where is the influence? There are many ways to look at this issue. One proxy indicator is to look where the UN has influence, and/or where the UN comes under scrutiny?

In a recent interview with the Foundation, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) Bintou Keita indicated that for women to have an impact on the UN's organisational culture, they need to sit 'in the room where it happens'.<sup>xvii</sup> And the most visible room within the UN is the Security Council. However, it is in the crisis-affected countries that are on the agenda of the Security Council that women leaders are underrepresented.

This is where the UN spends most of its resources on a mix of Humanitarian, Development and Peace (HDP) interventions.

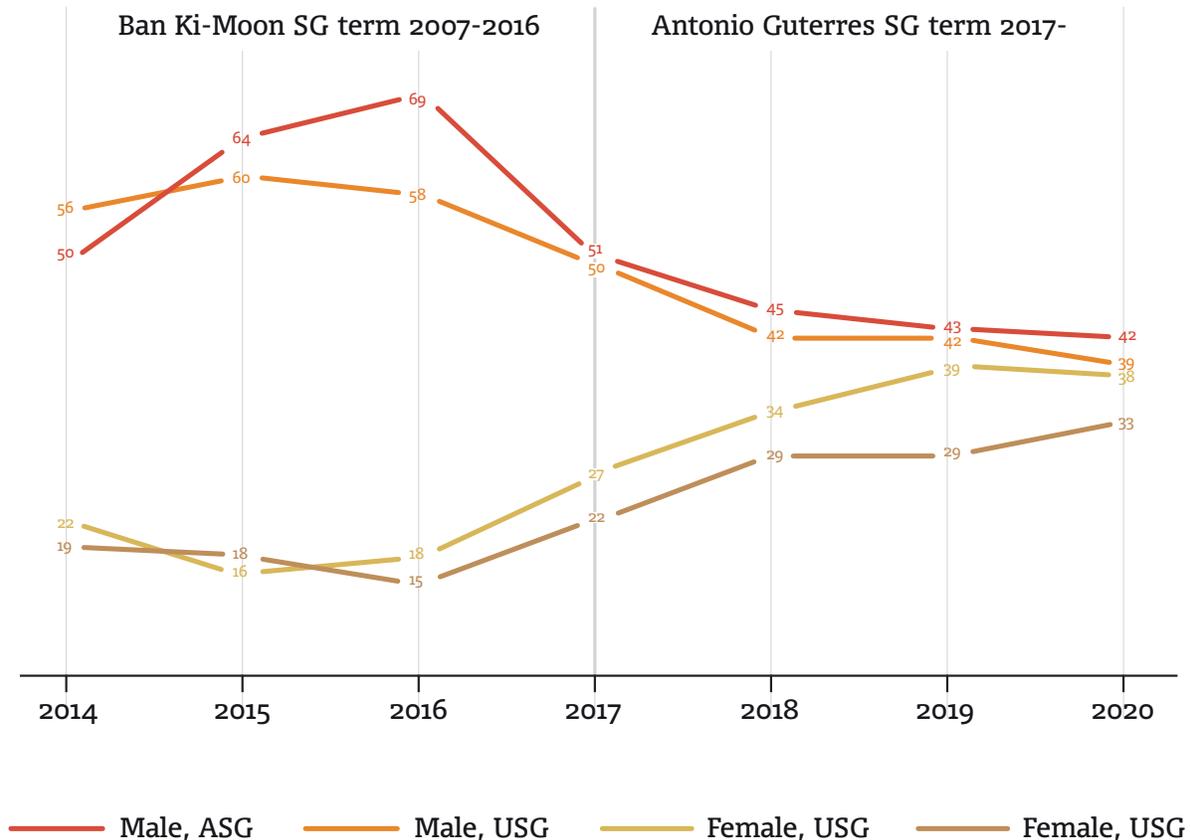
For the analysis we looked especially at the gender balance in the five high HDP countries, with US\$11.7 billion in combined expenditure in 2019 and the 13 medium HDP countries at US\$ 13.1 billion combined expenditure in 2019.<sup>xviii</sup> This represents close to 45% of overall UN expenditures for that year.

In these cases, the gender gap remains wide with women comprising only 28.5 % of all staff in the high and medium HDP countries. However, this number increases from 34 to 36 % when we look at the mid-level professional staff (P3-P5) but drops again at the senior-level (D1, D2 and UG) and it shows that at this level women are less than one third of the leadership at this level.

Further investigation shows that the influence of senior-level female leaders can also be expressed in financial terms. A senior leader in the five most difficult crisis-affected countries will, on average, have a budget that is eight times higher per position than colleagues working in headquarter locations or programme countries unaffected by crisis.

More generally, and despite the overall increase of female representation, women remain largely underrepresented at non-headquarter locations. This is especially true for mission settings where the scrutiny afforded by a Security Council mandate provide ample opportunities to exercise leadership and acquire visibility that fuels future leadership prospects (Figure 5). We can therefore conclude that the UN is making real progress towards gender parity, but the advancement is uneven with some uncomfortable questions lingering.

Figure 3: ASG and USG posts, 2014-2020. Source: Secretary-General report on the composition of the UN Secretariat 2014-2020.



The link between the fundamental gender parity based on the numbers and aspects of ‘power or influence’ raises difficult questions for the UN. From a developmental point of view absolute gender parity is essential, but it is not sufficient in itself. It may in fact be deceiving, by concealing lingering, if not increasing, gender disparities that undermine the UN’s overall leadership condition.

Gender balance in countries under UNSC mandates and where the UN spends the most, are some of several factors that the UN should explore monitoring in the coming years. These monitoring tools are fairly blunt and other issues may require more nuanced analysis. For example, while it is important for the UN to reach gender parity at all grades, we also suspect that not all functions on the same grade are created equal. Some hold more influence than others. In future iterations, we may therefore need to unpack specific functions by power and influence and

explore whether the UN is also ensuring that parity can move beyond the raw numbers to affect the real means through which the organisation shapes real outcomes across the world.

### Mobility: The key to better leadership?

The idea of mobility has been deeply embedded almost from the inception of the UN system. It has been described as one of three pillars of the common system, along with a common salary scale and pension fund in order to facilitate an interchange of personnel among organisations.

In 1949 the first version of the Inter-Organisation Agreement concerning Transfer, Secondment or Loan of Staff among the organisations applying the United Nations Common System of Salaries and Allowance, came on the table. It was revised in 1963, 2003, 2005 and 2012.

Figure 4: Senior leader representation at D1 and D2 level at the UN Secretariat, by gender, by year from 2014 - 2020. Source: Secretary-General report on the composition of the UN Secretariat 2014-2020.

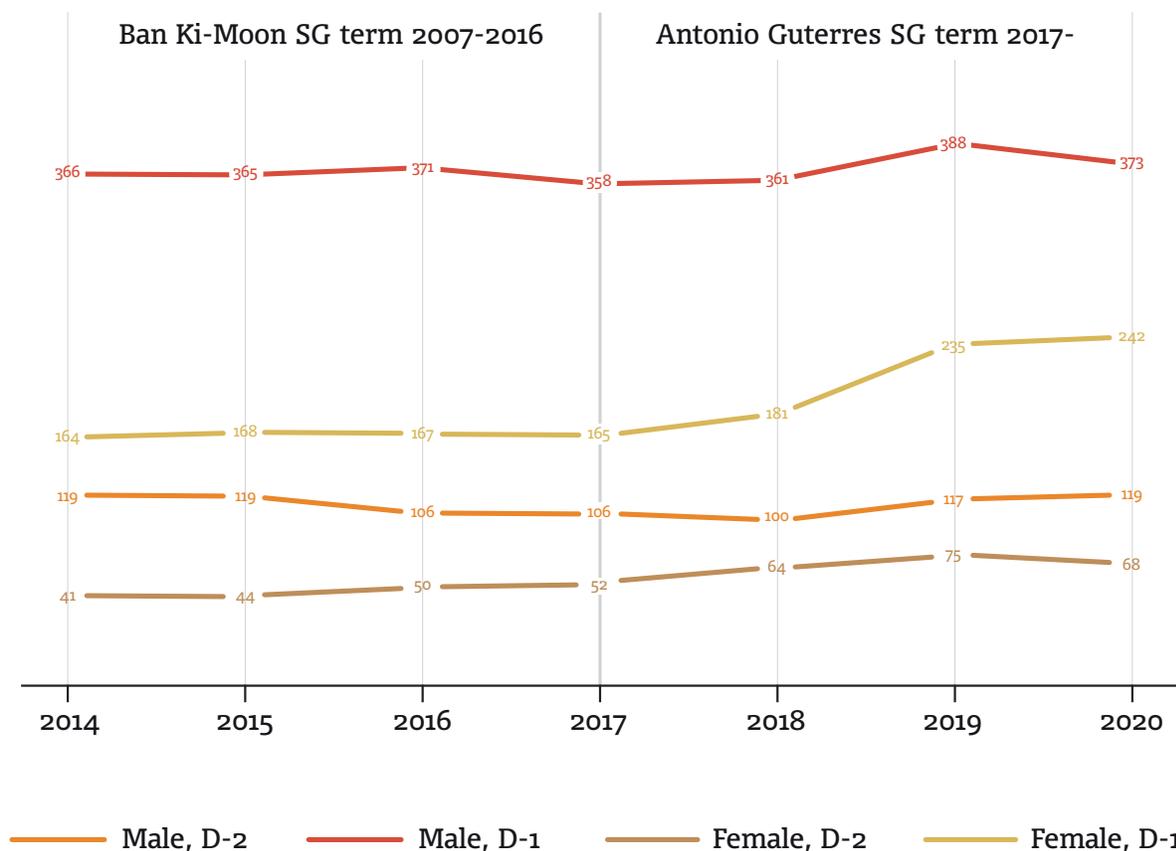
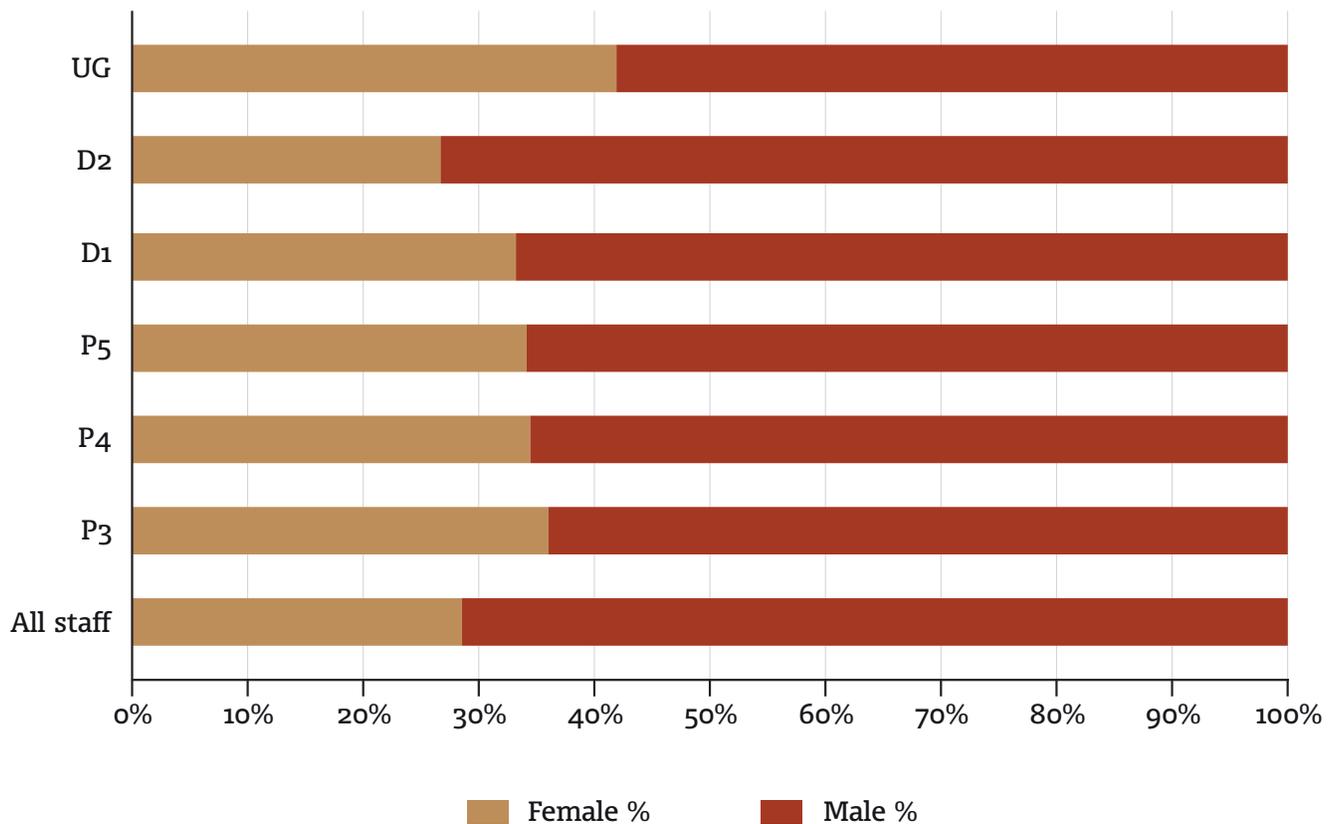


Figure 5: Gender balance of UN staff in HDP high & HDP medium countries. Source: CEB, 2020.



Statements at the time emphasised three purposes for mobility that still resonate today. First, by instilling shared values and a common culture, mobility improves the entire system's effectiveness in responding to global challenges. Second, mobility creates more efficient talent acquisition, development and management and, third, it enables staff to pursue professional development and enhance their *leadership* skills.

In a recent Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation interview on UN leadership, Peter de Clercq stressed that while mobility is essential for leadership it is not an end in itself.<sup>xix</sup>

He argued that it is more of an enabler, and he particularly talked about understanding mobility as a mindset to enrich and broaden one's UN identity, and to build on each experience. Mobility needs to take place vertically, but also horizontally. It should be mobility in all of its dimensions: between headquarters and the field of course, but also between agencies, between Secretariat entities and

agencies, and between different functions, and across the four pillars of the UN.

SRSB Bintou Keita also emphasised the value of mobility in broadening perspectives, to better understand other views, which in turn helps in one's leadership functions.<sup>xx</sup> Under Secretary-General Izumi Nakamitsu, in her contribution in Chapter One argues for mobility as a key conduit to effective leadership.

Several recent initiatives within the UN also point to mobility as a key success factor in enhancing the leadership capabilities of the UN workforce: Commitments made by the UN in support of the Agenda 2030 are centred around how the UN system can act together and increase the agility of its cooperation with others. The UN System Leadership Framework encourages multi-dimensional leadership skills that should be acquired through mobility within and outside the system. The recent Secretary-General's report 'New Approach to staff mobility' reiterates

that the future workforce needs to acquire leadership skills vertically and horizontally to fulfil all mandates, proposing a mandatory mobility scheme in the UN Secretariat as of 2030.<sup>xxi</sup>

The case for mobility to enhance leadership capabilities has been repeatedly and eloquently made. With this in mind, is mobility taking place in the UN system, and if yes, where? The level of mobility in the common system varies and in 2019, the average number of assignments within the UN system was 1.73, compared with 1.75 in 2015, ranging from 1.00 for UNOPS to 3.46 for the WFP. Among specialised agencies with a field presence, the average assignment number ranged from 1.00 for IFAD to 1.65 at the ILO.<sup>xxii</sup> Field-based organisations like WFP, UNHCR and UNICEF with a mandatory mobility scheme for staff have the highest number of re-assignments.

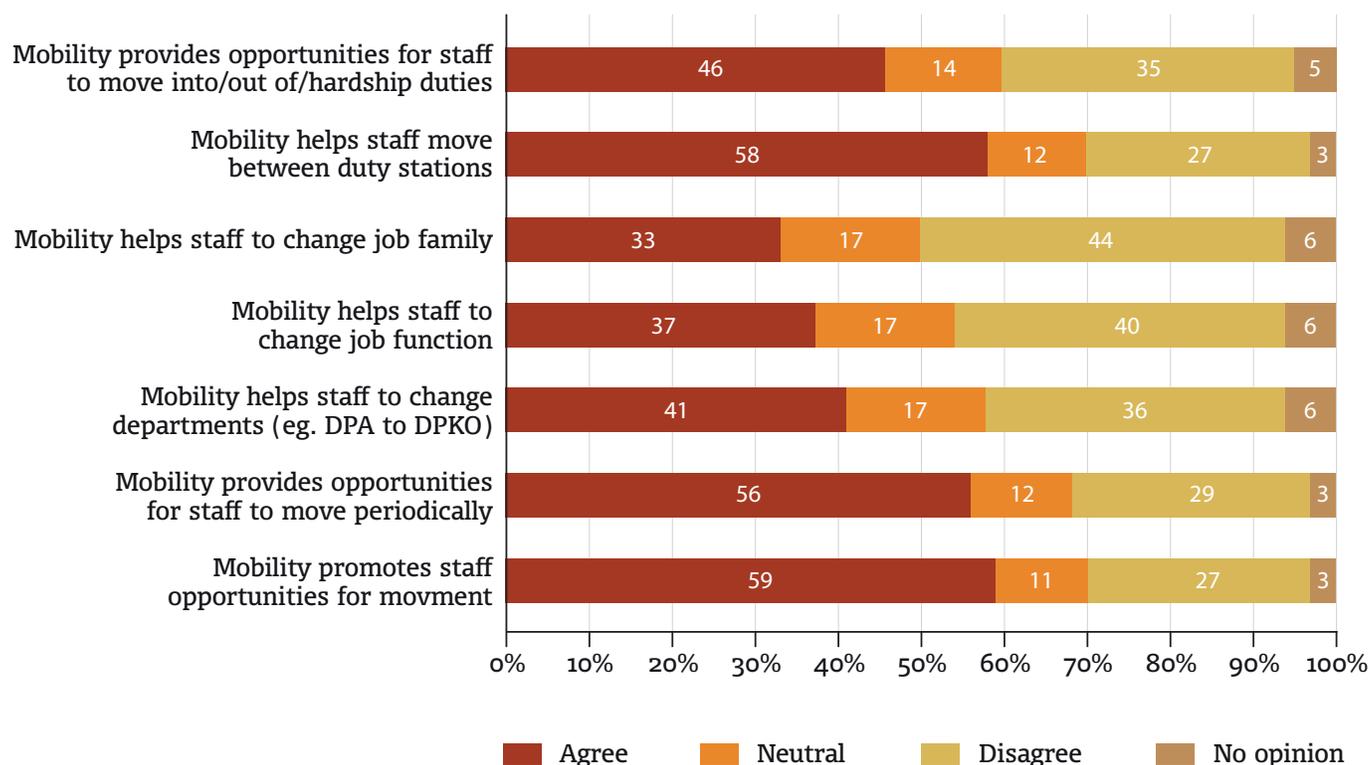
*The UN merely administer, but does not manage mobility...*

A recent Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) report pointed out that mobility supports the effectiveness of the organisation, and performance and efficiency of programme delivery. It is also a good tool to attract, manage, develop, deploy and retain leadership talent. Despite this recognition, the report highlights a disconnect between statements of overall support and actual actions taken by organisations. In reality, the UN system merely administers mobility, but does not manage it collectively. In this respect, as the report points out, not much has changed.<sup>xxiv</sup> A staff survey conducted by the UN secretariat on mobility and career development substantiates this claim (Figure 6).<sup>xxv</sup>

*... unless the stakes are high, such as with the re-invigorated Resident Coordinator system*

The level of formal inter-agency mobility for non-HQ duty stations (through secondments and transfers) increased in 2019 with the de-linking of the Resident Coordinator system from the UNDP and integrating it within the UN Secretariat system. While in the period 2016–2018, the total of inter-agency mobility of professional staff stayed

Figure 6: The mobility and career development framework - staff survey, 2018. Source: A/73/372/Add.2.



roughly the same at around 180 per year, the number surpassed 300 in 2019. Female staff, who made up only 46 % of professional staff, formed the majority (52%) of staff that made an inter-agency transfer or secondment in 2018-2019. The most remarkable gender difference was at the D1 level, with 33 moves in the period 2018-2019, when women were about twice as likely as men at that level to make an inter-agency career move. This was, undoubtedly, also a main factor that enabled the UN Secretariat to rapidly increase its contingent of D1 female staff, as we saw before in Figure 4; and to retain gender parity at the Resident Coordinator level.

### *Why data on mobility matters when it comes to understanding leadership?*

The 2019 JIU report also addressed the issue of the lack of system-wide data on mobility. It points out that incidence of inter-agency mobility is low, but how much there is, ‘is hard to know as data are not published’ consistently and across the UN system.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Furthermore, presenting the key findings of the JIU report, Inspector Jeremiah Kramer stated that ‘*Despite the CEB comments to the effect that the annual collection by CEB of data on personnel statistics already comprises a range of pertinent data, we point out that the 140-odd pages of HR data published on the CEB website do not include even a single data point about inter-agency mobility. The recent emphasis in CEB mechanisms on a more agile, integrated and mobile workforce to support the 2030 agenda and to respond to the evolving future of work would link this body of work to inter-agency mobility.*’<sup>xxvii</sup>

The lack of specific, disaggregated, and comprehensive data on mobility may speak to the need for ever greater advocacy on the link between mobility and leadership. It will be important to first measure, and then foster, mobility across functions, entities, and across pillars. As of now, in the UN Secretariat a shift in assignment between, for example, country desks within Department of Peace Operations (DPO) counts as much as a transfer as a move from DPO to the UNDP or vice versa.

From the literature and the contributions to the Foundation’s work on the issue, both are important, but they do not have the same impact on leadership skills. In a world where political, economic, and social factors shape each other, where the strategic and the operational need each other, a reasonable assumption is that UN staff need

to be exposed to and hone their skills across all of these dimensions. But first, all UN entities need the right, and the same data in order to advance collectively on their commitments. The case for better data and its links to leadership extends beyond mobility, age and gender.

### **Better data for better leadership**

The business case for better and more systematic use of Human Resources (HR) data for analysing and assessing the health of UN leadership starts with a look at the current system underpinning the UN’s system-wide HR statistics, and its flaws.

Statistical tables on the composition of staff of the organisations in the UN common system have been around for at least three decades.<sup>xxviii</sup> The key data source is the personnel statistics that individual UN entities report annually to the CEB Secretariat using a list of mandatory and voluntary data fields to be completed for each staff member. Once the data is compiled and quality assured, a selection is published as reports in pdf-format, focusing on staff with contracts of one year or longer. In addition, the UN system carries out an annual ‘headcount’ that results in an overall number for the UN workforce, ie staff and non-staff, on 31 December of the given year.

### *The HR statistics system has gradually improved over time*

The CEB Secretariat has expanded the coverage to include the majority of UN entities and enhanced its efforts in improving the data quality of the personnel statistics after 2015, eg through the use of automated data validations.

This has been complemented by a move towards an additional, more user-friendly format of presenting the data. For the period 2015-2020, key staff data is also available in an online version with data visualisations and the capacity to download specific data cuts in excel or csv-format for further data analysis.<sup>xxix</sup> The data collection on separations and recruitments,<sup>xxx</sup> previously collected on a stand-alone basis by UN Women, was integrated in the CEB’s data management platform.

The current system underpinned by agreed definitions of variables provides an essential basis for UN system-wide data analysis. It also informs exchanges between the leaders of different UN organisations on strategic HR matters.

Still, there is a strong business case for better data if one wants to understand or uncover important dimensions of leadership effectiveness. Better publicly accessible UN workforce data is important for transparency and facilitates independent analysis of the actual numbers versus what can be found in UN policy statements of intent or in comparison to those of other multilateral institutions.<sup>xxxI</sup>

*Identifying the data gaps*

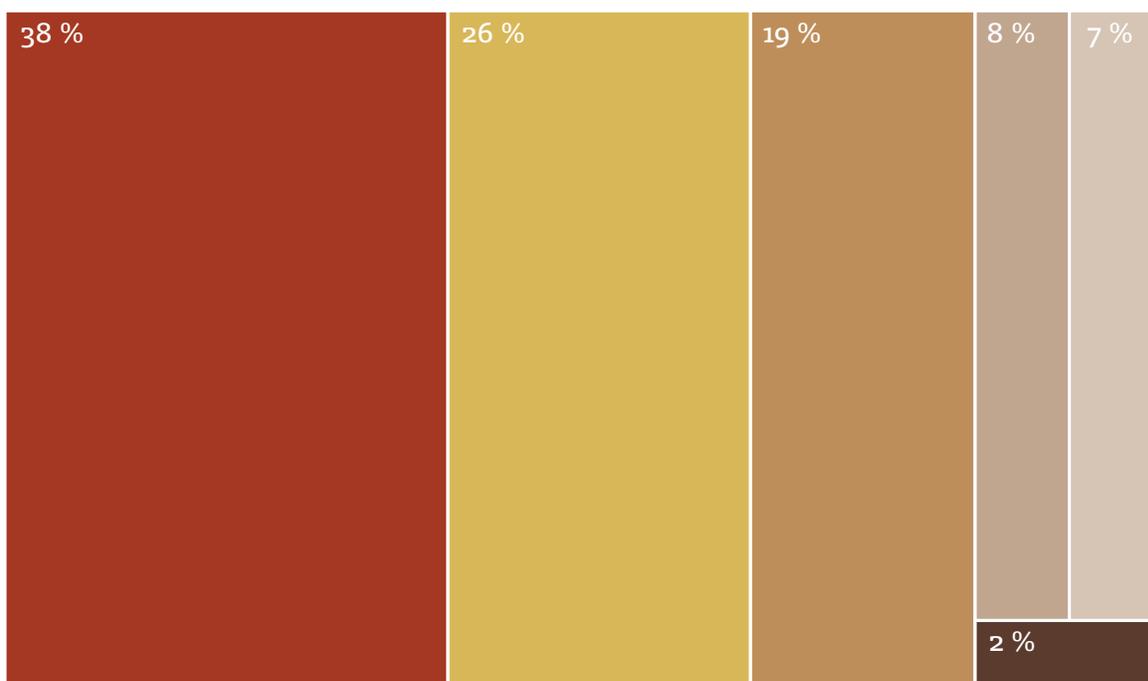
The first and by far the largest gap is that the current UN system-wide data systems do not provide details including age, gender and mobility on large parts of the UN workforce.

Figure 7 gives an overview of the total 2020 UN workforce that stood at more than 200,000 and its different segments.

<sup>xxxII</sup> In our data analysis above, the focus has been on UN staff with contracts of more than one year that make up roughly 55 % of the total UN workforce and on the International Professionals, ‘the Ps and Ds’, that make up less than 20%. Granular information on two other large segments of human resources is however missing, namely the 38 % of the total workforce who are consultants, service contract holders, UN volunteers or interns and who are also known as ‘non-staff’; and the 7 % with staff contracts of less than one year.

Would the challenges around rejuvenation and gender parity look differently or easier to address maybe, if the data of this 45 % had been included? How effective are UN entities in using these talent pools about whom much less is known to deliver their mandates and develop future UN leaders?

Figure 7: UN workforce in total, as of 31 December 2020. Souce CEB.



- Non-staff: Consultants, service contract holders, volunteers and interns (38 %)
- Staff with contracts < 1 year (7 %)
- International Professionals (19 %)
- Field Service (2 %)
- National Professionals (8 %)
- General Service (26 %)

Second, the UN system-wide data masks large variations between groups of UN entities. One element that we preliminary explored is the correlation between the workforce profiles of UN entities and the UN functions on which they focus.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

One example is the issue of rejuvenation. It seems to affect UN entities differently. The average age of a female staff member working at organisations with a humanitarian focus is almost five years younger than her colleague working at UN entities focusing on global agenda and specialised assistance which is 42.3 years compared to 47.2 years.

Another example in the context of contractual modalities. More than 80 % of the workforce in the UN Secretariat are regular staff with contracts of more than one year. This is also the case for the group of smaller UN entities focusing on the global agenda and specialised assistance. This number drops to less than 50 % on average in those entities focusing on development and/or humanitarian assistance.

It raises the following critical questions: How do senior UN leaders in humanitarian and development organisations adapt their leadership culture to engage a workforce that might require a different mix of incentives than the one used for staff with long-term contractual commitment to the UN? What lessons can be drawn from this that could be used by other UN leaders in similar situations?

Third, the personnel data is siloed between UN entities which makes it difficult to carry out data analysis on issues such as formal inter-agency mobility through secondments or transfers and the more informal reality of inter-agency moves. The latter may come about when a staff member or a non-staff resigns from one UN organisation to join another one, or simply waits for a contract expiration to do so. From the data we know that resignation is more common at the lower levels, with about 5 % of the P2 staff resigning in the 2018-2019 period, 4 % at P3 and 3 % of the P4 respectively.

However, does resignation mean the end of their UN adventure? Or rather a move with the intention to join another UN organisation, either immediately or at a later stage in their career? And, given this reality, what is, or would the leadership rationale be for prioritising the

investment of time and resources in a young, agile and mobile UN workforce? Is the hope to build future UN leaders, but not knowing which share of the fruit will actually ripen outside the UN?

Finally, more should be done to facilitate the dissemination and use of the existing personnel data, while ensuring full respect for data privacy and security. This can create more insights and raise the demand for better data. One approach can be to consider making the data available in more manipulatable formats. Such as sharing the current annual human resources statistics report pdf-tables in an Excel format, similar to the model used for the tables annexed to the report on the Improvement of Women in the UN system.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Further, the information provided on the CEB website could possibly be expanded to respond to the JIU comments above and other data needs that may have surfaced in exchanges with other data users.

The most promising, long-term solution to the main data challenges listed above seems to lie in the recently started UN Unified ID project. 'The UN Digital ID is a transformative UN solution to provide its workforce with a universal, system wide identity'.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Designed as a data exchange platform using blockchain technology, the UN Digital ID is meant to allow UN staff and non-staff like consultants from participating organisations to share any of their human resource and other personal information. This would reduce data fragmentation within the UN system and underpin a simpler and more secure exchange of human resource data between UN organisations. Moreover, the use of a single platform will reinforce the alignment of reporting standards and overall data quality. This project is currently only in a pilot phase, with the active participation of WFP, UNHCR, UNDP, the UN Pension Fund, and UN Department of Security Services.

As of now, the UN leadership will have to do with the current, far from perfect UN system-wide HR data to drive strategic decision-making on its current and future workforce.

However, by interrogating the existing data with leadership questions that really need answers we can get a better sense of the crucial elements that should be covered in the future UN's system-wide workforce data.

## Conclusion

In this piece, we attempted to take stock of the UN's leadership 'health' by stress testing statements of intent, commitments, and policy declarations against what the available data says. To do that, we used three data variables as proxy indicators for various constituents of sustainably effective leadership: youth, gender parity and mobility.

Across all three, we see a mixed picture. The UN is progressing towards gender parity, and our assumption is that this will strengthen the overall leadership culture and practices. But the UN is not getting younger, and a UN that fails to reflect and incorporate the aspirations of younger people may not be listened to and may not inspire as it should or could. And if fewer UN staff members move, geographically, functionally, and, as Peter de Clercq said, 'mentally', the organisation may risk intellectual atrophy, with its leaders failing to grasp and manage the interconnectedness of today's challenges.

The analysis also revealed both the value of such data in exposing what can be seen as inconvenient realities and the need to continue to obtain better, more granular data if it is to help the UN think about its leadership health. For example, gender parity at any given level is good. But to know whether gender parity is in fact truly transforming UN leadership practices, we will need to dig deeper and observe parity amongst functions of equal power and influence.

Likewise, it's not just about whether the UN is or should be getting younger. What matters more is whether leadership is positively and genuinely shaped by intergenerational perspectives.

Mobility data needs to be more consistent and comprehensive across entities to get a fuller, more accurate picture of how often mobility occurs, and under which conditions. For this, a broader range of tools will be needed including better tailored and incisive staff surveys with some elements that facilitate UN-system wide analysis as well focused external evaluations.

We could only scratch the surface on non-staff personnel, retention, and resignation data. We suspect it contains a treasure trove of further interesting insights on the UN's leadership health, the extent to which the UN inspires (or not) its workforce, and the factors that lead people to stick

with, or drift away from the Organisation, at a time when it needs all the best and committed talent it can use.

We recognise that the link between quality data, the analysis process and leadership reflections is at times not straightforward, but we remain confident that certain data analysis is essential to complement, rather than substitute for more qualitative assessments and subjective reflections. This analysis is work in progress, but we are convinced that better data and improved leadership go hand in hand. ■

## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, 'United Nations system leadership framework', CEB/2017/1 (Annex), 20 June 2017, <https://undocs.org/en/CEB/2017/1>.

<sup>ii</sup> UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, 'United Nations system strategy on the future of work', CEB/2019/1/Add.2, 10 May 2019, <https://unsceb.org/united-nations-system-strategy-future-work>.

<sup>iii</sup> UN Office of the Human Resources, 'Values and Behaviours Framework', 2020, [https://i.unu.edu/media/unu.edu/page/24952/Values-and-Behaviours-Framework\\_Final.pdf](https://i.unu.edu/media/unu.edu/page/24952/Values-and-Behaviours-Framework_Final.pdf).

<sup>iv</sup> UN General Assembly, 'New approach to staff mobility: building an agile Organisation by providing opportunities for on-the-job learning and skills development. Report of the Secretary-General', A/75/540/Add.1, 19 November 2020, <https://undocs.org/A/75/540/Add.1>.

<sup>v</sup> At the time of writing, the report of the Secretary-General A/75/540/Add.1 (ibid.) was under consideration in the 5th Committee of the UN Secretariat. The 5th Committee could not agree on a Human Resource management resolution and a decision on the mobility scheme was deferred to the next session. See: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2022/gaab4381.doc.htm>

<sup>vi</sup> United Nations, 'Strategic Action Plan. Report of the Secretary-General's Task Force on Addressing Racism and Promoting Dignity for All in the United Nations Secretariat', December 2021, [https://www.passblue.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/sap\\_final\\_report.pdf](https://www.passblue.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/sap_final_report.pdf).

<sup>vii</sup> United Nations, 'Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary-General', A/75/982, 5 August 2021, <https://undocs.org/A/75/982>.

<sup>viii</sup> Veronika Tywuschik-Sohlstrom, 'Who leads the UN? What UN demographics can reveal about leadership' in *The Art of UN Leadership, Framing What's Blue*, (Uppsala, Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 2020), [https://www.daghammarskjold.se/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/un\\_leadership\\_2020.pdf](https://www.daghammarskjold.se/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/un_leadership_2020.pdf).

<sup>ix</sup> United Nations, Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere with Insight, Impact and Integrity', May 2020, [un.org/en/content/datastrategy/](https://www.un.org/en/content/datastrategy/).

[un.org/en/content/datastrategy/](https://www.un.org/en/content/datastrategy/).

<sup>x</sup> In particular see UN General Assembly Resolution 76/115, 'Improvement of the status of women in the United Nations system', 1 July 2021, <https://undocs.org/A/RES/76/115>; and the following UN General Assembly Reports: 'Composition of the Secretariat: staff demographics', A/70/605, 11 December 2015, <https://undocs.org/A/70/605>; 'Composition of the Secretariat: gratis personnel, retired staff and consultants and individual contractors', A/75/591/Add.1, 10 November 2020, <https://undocs.org/A/75/591/Add.1>; and 'New approach to staff mobility: building an agile Organization by providing opportunities for on-the-job learning and skills development', A/75/540/Add.1, 19 November 2020, <https://undocs.org/A/75/540/Add.1>.

<sup>xi</sup> The five generations are: Silent Generation (75-95 years); Baby Boomers (56-74); Generations X (40-55); Generation Y/ Millennials (25-39); Generations Z (iGen) (24 and under).

<sup>xii</sup> See UN General Assembly 'Our Common Agenda', 2021 *ibid*.

<sup>xiii</sup> Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/>

<sup>xiv</sup> UN Economic and Social Council, 'Political declaration on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women', E/CN.6/2020/L.1, 2 March 2020, <https://undocs.org/E/CN.6/2020/L.1>.

<sup>xv</sup> Jon Henley and Eleanor Ainge Roy, 'Are female leaders more successful at managing the coronavirus crisis?', *The Guardian*, 25 April 2020, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/25/why-do-female-leaders-seem-to-be-more-successful-at-managing-the-coronavirus-crisis>>.

<sup>xvi</sup> UN General Assembly, 'Improvement in the status of women in the United Nations system', *ibid*.

<sup>xvii</sup> Marc Jacquand, Johanna Mårtendal, Kate Sullivan, 'Back to basics: Living the principles of the UN Charter – An interview with Bintou Keita', Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 7 September 2021, <<https://www.daghammarskjold.se/blog/living-principles-un-charter-interview-bintou-keita/>>.

<sup>xviii</sup> For this analysis, the UN programme countries were split in four groups, depending on whether

they were crisis-affected and, if yes, the level of total HDP-related expenditures. HDP-high countries each had HDP- expenditures of more than USD 1.5 billion in 2019, for HDP-medium countries this was between USD 0.5 and 1.5 billion, and for HDP-low countries between USD 0.1 and 0.5 billion. For more information on the countries in each group, see Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation (DHF) and United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office (UN MPTFO), *Financing the United Nations Development System: Time to Meet the Moment* (Uppsala/New York: DHF/UN MPTFO, 2021), <https://www.daghammarskjold.se/publication/unds-2021/>, Figure 29 p. 66.

<sup>xix</sup> Marc Jacquand and Victoria Tywuschik-Sohlström, 'Mobility and leadership – An interview with Peter de Clercq', Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 12 April, 2021, <https://www.daghammarskjold.se/blog/mobility-leadership-interview-peter-de-clercq/>.

<sup>xx</sup> UN General Assembly, 'Improvement in the status of women in the United Nations system', *ibid*.

<sup>xxi</sup> UN General Assembly, 'New approach to staff mobility', *ibid*.

<sup>xxii</sup> United Nations General Assembly, 'Report of the International Civil Service Commission for the year 2021' A/76/30, 13 September 2021, <https://undocs.org/A/76/30>.

<sup>xxiii</sup> United Nations Joint Inspections Unit, 'Review of staff exchange and similar inter-agency mobility measures in United Nations system organizations- Note by the Secretary-General' A/75/85 - JIU/REP/2019/8, 21 May 2020, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3862827?ln=en>.

<sup>xxiv</sup> UN General Assembly, 'Statement on the Review of Staff Exchange and Similar Inter-agency mobility measures in United Nations system organisations: Statement by inspector Jeremiah Kramer', A/75/85 - JIU/REP/2019/8, 13 October 2020, [https://www.un.org/en/ga/fifth/75/statements/147\\_JIU/C5\\_75\\_0m\\_ST\\_2020\\_10\\_12\\_147\\_JIU\\_Inter-agency\\_Mobility\\_Inspector\\_JIU.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/ga/fifth/75/statements/147_JIU/C5_75_0m_ST_2020_10_12_147_JIU_Inter-agency_Mobility_Inspector_JIU.pdf).

<sup>xxv</sup> UN General Assembly, 'Global human resources strategy 2019–2021: building a more effective, transparent and accountable United Nations- Report of the Secretary-General', A/73/372, 12 September 2018, <https://undocs.org/A/73/372>.

<sup>xxvi</sup> UN General Assembly, 'Improvement in the status

of women in the United Nations system', *ibid*.

<sup>xxvii</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>xxviii</sup> UN System HR Statistics Reports for the period 1991 to 2020 are available at [https://unsceb.org/reports?field\\_mechanism%5B93%5D=93](https://unsceb.org/reports?field_mechanism%5B93%5D=93).

<sup>xxix</sup> See: <https://unsceb.org/human-resources-statistics>.

<sup>xxx</sup> This data is used for the biannual report on the Improvement of Women in the United Nations System.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Data used by stakeholders outside a given UN entity will always be restricted due to data privacy concerns. Thus, in creating specific categories for our data analysis we made sure that no individual staff member would be identifiable in the data.

<sup>xxxii</sup> This excludes the number of peacekeeping troops, which stood at 81,832 as of December 2020.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> This specific category reflected the (mix of) UN functions on which UN entities spent more than 75 % of their resources in 2019: development assistance, humanitarian assistance, peace operations, and global agenda and specialised assistance. The groups used for analysis were Humanitarian (HUM), Development and Humanitarian (DEVHUM), Development (DEV), UN Secretariat (working across all four functions), Development, Humanitarian and Global Agenda (DEVHUMGI), and Global Agenda (Global).

<sup>xxxiv</sup> UN General Assembly, 'Improvement in the status of women in the United Nations system', *ibid*.

<sup>xxxv</sup> UN Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), 'UN Digital ID - Project TOR', CEB/2021/HLCM/10/Add.2, 27 September 2021, [https://unsceb.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/2021.HLCM\\_.10.Add\\_.2%20-%20UN%20Digital%20ID%20%E2%80%93%20Project%20ToR.pdf](https://unsceb.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/2021.HLCM_.10.Add_.2%20-%20UN%20Digital%20ID%20%E2%80%93%20Project%20ToR.pdf).

# Conclusion

■ The diverse contributions in this publication explore United Nations leadership from many different angles and reflect different shades, making it difficult to end with definitive conclusions. They all reiterate the unique role and critical importance of UN leadership but some cast a shadow on the UN's potential to meaningfully impact today's world unless significant changes to its leadership culture and practices occur. Others offer a sunnier impression, finding rays of hope either by taking us back to first and timeless principles of the Charter or by offering new ways to experience leadership, ways that are gaining traction beyond the UN, and from which the UN can find inspiration.

## **From this multi-faceted picture, a few messages emerge.**

Throughout the publication one can perceive a shared sense of unease and worry that UN leadership is under severe stress and that it needs to live up to its ideals if the organisation is to survive current times. This feeling of anxiety is combined with, and perhaps explained by the continued belief that UN leadership remains instrumental to the world and to the aspiration of so many people, especially those left behind. 'The people are starving for leadership' says one piece. But '[the UN] needs to make its case', argue many others. That is done through principled, ethical and effective leadership.

UN leadership does not exist in a vacuum. It needs to be thought and practiced first and foremost in relation to the purpose of the UN, which serves simultaneously as the starting point, the reference, and the end point of UN leadership. After the purpose, UN leadership can only be understood, assessed, and strengthened against the backdrop of systems, incentives, perceptions, and expectations. How all these dimensions shape UN leadership remains misunderstood by many, an area that requires further discussions and exploration. The contributions also spark a few other unanswered questions on the type of leadership needed to design new ways to build consensus in a fragmented world, where models of governance have shifted, and where expectations of the UN may have been transformed.

It will be critical to continue exploring the behaviours or actions of Member States or civil society that either undermine or enable effective UN leadership. Thus, making it important to sensitise many of them to their influence, and the fact that their voices are needed.

However, many contributors share a warning. It is important to further discuss, above all, the UN's relevance that centres on its ability to translate UN leadership words into action, to turn declarations into deeds. Several authors refer explicitly to a growing gap between discourse and practice, one that is further exposed by the data



Upon reading these contributions, one could also agree with our initial proposition that one definition of leadership is not needed; the diversity of views and the different ways to speak of leadership matters because it helps each reader uncover a new lens, and perhaps reflect on past instances of leadership with new insights or approach upcoming challenges with fresh perspectives.

examination. This may explain why this second publication ended with perhaps less emphasis on leadership structures, frameworks, and processes than the first report, and more focus on individual decisions and choices. The UN is encouraged to ‘make it personal’, to ‘live the values’: To practice leadership rather than talk about it.

To this end, one key, common trait of practiced principled and ethical leadership to emerge is that of courage: ‘Dare to lead’. And courage is not seen just as an end in itself. Implicitly, many other contributions place courage, along with humility, as the foundation to implement new ways to practice leadership, and to democratise its experience. It is needed for example to foster entrepreneur leadership and intergenerational leadership.

It also requires courage for UN leaders to think about the future: ‘who will own the UN?’ asks one contributor. Can the UN find the resolve to pass on responsibilities to the next generation, to share and ‘hand over’ leadership roles to more diverse, younger people, and to more women? Every UN staff member is momentarily given stewardship of a piece of the organisation; no one owns it permanently, it belongs to all. Accepting that reality is humbling, but it is a condition of relevance.

It will take courage for UN leadership to remain connected with humanity at large: by venturing beyond the intergovernmental walls to ‘expose the inequalities’, to listen, and show solidarity in small and big ways with the world. That is, to demonstrate and be, through concrete actions, what principled, ethical UN leadership is.

Taken together, the contributions allow us to finish close to where we ended with the first publication. In their own specific way, they all emphasise and confirm that principled, ethical UN leadership exists in both small and

large ways. These instances of daring, courageous, humble leadership need to be known, and the Foundation hopes that this publication is a contribution to this imperative.

Upon reading these contributions, one could also agree with our initial proposition that one definition of leadership is not needed; the diversity of views and the different ways to speak of leadership matters because it helps each reader uncover a new lens, and perhaps reflect on past instances of leadership with new insights or approach upcoming challenges with fresh perspectives.

At the same time, the contributions seem to share a common sentiment that ethical and principled leadership is both hard and easy. It is hard because of the context, pressures and expectations under which the UN and its staff operate. At the same time, ethical and principled leadership is easy in some fundamental way because, as many contributors highlight, the right type of leadership is illuminated by the clarity of the UN Charter and generated from within, grounded in one’s unobstructed ethical autonomy. Considering that, the complications that we may at times refer to can be perceived as constructed to conveniently shun personal accountability. In that light, the contributions offered a collective echo for UN leadership to be viewed by all staff as a responsibility to be earned, and not a right to be claimed.■

# Featured Art

All the art featured in this publication is by artists who reside in refugee camps in Jordan. As noted in the introduction, the intent behind linking each contribution with a distinct artwork was to connect people, writers and painters, across places and perspectives. It also an opportunity to bring the heart of the UN's mission to life and the artwork of these refugees to new audiences. You can learn more about some of the artists and the message behind their paintings on the following pages.

The use of this art was made possible thanks to a collaboration with UNHCR Jordan who recently catalogued the artwork of hundreds of refugees to showcase their talents and to help them earn a small income. All artists were remunerated for the use of their art in this publication, but the paintings themselves remain for sale. If you would like to learn more about UNHCR Jordan's work or view the whole art catalogue, please visit: <https://www.unhcr.org/jo/refugee-shop>.



'Dag Hammarskjöld'  
Iyad Sabbag (Syria),  
Zataari Camp

*What is the message of this painting?*

To deliver a message through its bright colours. It is a message full of hope, bright, happiness, and joy.

*Why do you paint?*

I chose painting for two reasons. First because I have a gift and it is an ambition to grow. Secondly it is to deliver a message to my daughter who emigrated, to tell her that I still live in refugee camps.

*What does the UN mean for you?*

The United Nations helps those in need and assists in creating healthy societies.

*What do you think makes a good leader?*

Following your dream.



'Landscape',  
Majd Al-Hariri, (Syria),  
Zataari Camp

*What is the message of this painting?*  
Landscape painted with charcoal

*Why do you paint?*  
Painting is my talent, and I feel happy while I am painting.

*What does the UN mean for you?*  
The United Nations represents peace.

*What do you think makes a good leader?*  
Creativity

'Loss and Longing'  
Bara'a Al-Hamoud (Syria)  
Zataari Camp

*What is the message of this painting?*  
Snowstorms and a woman sitting next to her son's grave while holding a kite.

*Why do you paint?*  
I paint because I love painting.

*What does the UN mean for you?*  
Providing safe shelter and supporting us in education.

*What do you think makes a good leader?*  
Making the right decision during critical situations.



'Reaching Aspiration'  
Mohammad Al-Ghazawi (Syria)  
Zataari Camp

*What is the message of this painting?*  
The far-future.

*Why do you paint?*  
It has been my hobby since I was a child, and I express myself through painting.

*What does the UN mean for you?*  
The United Nations is a peace oasis.

*What do you think makes a good leader?*  
Learning from everyone.



'My Children'  
Abdo Abu Salu (Syria)  
Zataari Camp



*What is the message of this painting?*

A nation cannot be defeated if it eats from what it plants and if it wears clothes that it sews.

*Why do you paint?*

I love painting because it is my favorite hobby and through it, I deliver my messages to the world.

*What does the UN mean for you?*

The UN is a symbol of unity.

*What do you think makes a good leader?*

Being ambitious to support everybody.



'The Snow of My Country'  
Nizar Al Haraki (Syria)  
Zataari Camp

*What is the message of this painting?*

Since I was born, I haven't seen snow and I wanted to reflect snow in the desert, where I live.

*Why do you paint?*

I learned how to paint when I was 13 years old, and I took painting courses in Zaatari camp.

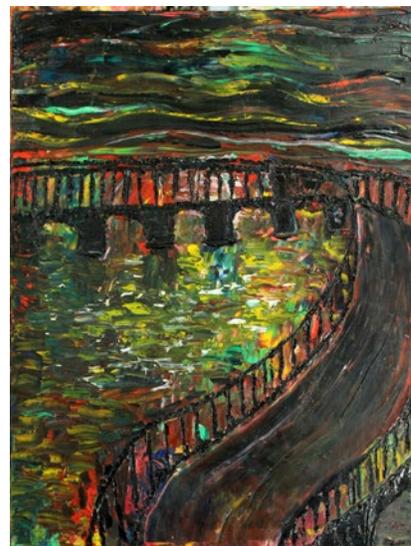
*What does the UN mean for you?*

Helping refugees and supporting them.

*What do you think makes a good leader?*

Strong determination and receiving support from everyone.

'Bridge under a colourful sea'  
Mohamed Hassan Ibrahim,  
Azraq Camp





'Portrait'  
Zaid Hussein  
Zataari Camp

*What is the message of this painting?*  
Loneliness creates weakness, fatigue, and disability.

*Why do you paint?*  
I love painting because it is my favorite hobby and through painting I have good times.

*What does the UN mean for you?*  
Helping refugees, especially children.

*What do you think makes a good leader?*  
Being strong in your decisions.

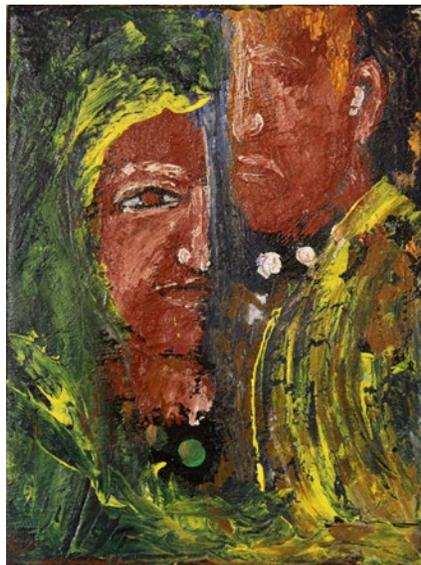
'Portrait in green and blue'  
Melad Bassam Al-Ghazali  
Azraq Camp



'Portrait'  
Ibrahim Ali Al-Abed,  
Azraq Camp



'Mother'  
Abdo Abu Salou'  
Zataari Camp



'Two faces in one panel'  
Mohamed Hassan Ibrahim  
Azraq Camp

'Three faces'  
Mohamed Hassan Ibrahim  
Azraq Camp



'Overlapping faces'  
Asim Abdul Hamid Al Ashram  
Azraq Camp



'Portrait of a woman'  
Mohamed Hassan Ibrahim,  
Azraq Camp

'The Rose'  
Iman Hariri (Syria)  
Zataari Camp



*What is the message of this painting?*  
A painting of a Jorrie rose that makes oneself happy.

*Why do you paint?*  
I paint to have fun and because it is my hobby.

*What does the UN mean for you?*  
An agency that helps refugees in everything they need.

*What do you think makes a good leader?*  
A strong leader is the person who leads everyone around towards success.



'Sweet Dream'  
Reem Diab (Syria)  
Zataari Camp

*What is the message of this painting?*

The refugee woman has dreams and determination in which she can fly.

*Why do you paint?*

I paint because I love painting and I can deliver my messages through my artworks.

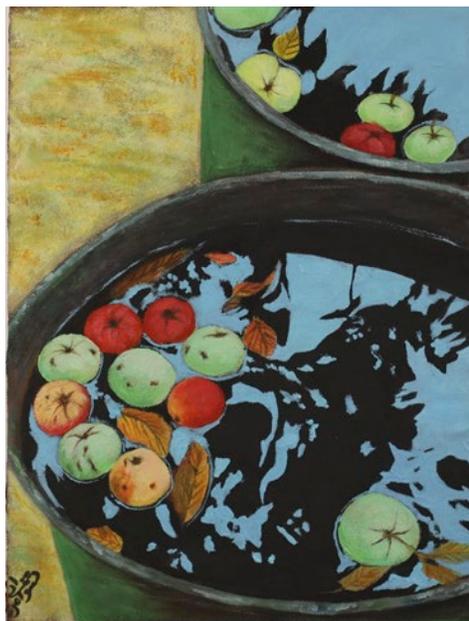
*What does the UN mean for you?*

The UN is a message that is delivered to the whole world.

*What do you think makes a good leader?*

A strong leader is the person who leads everyone towards success.

'Vase with white flowers'  
Moayad Ibrahim Al-Abed  
Azraq Camp



'Apple Season'  
Murad Al-Shawamreh (Syria)  
Zataari Camp

*What is the message of this painting?*

For all people to feel safe and secure, and for hope to rise again.

*Why do you paint?*

I started painting late, when I was 43 years old, and I have continued learning by taking several training courses. I like the apple blooming season and this when I did my first artwork.

*What does the UN mean for you?*

The UN is an umbrella for protecting refugees.

*What do you think makes a good leader?*

Knowing your flaws.

'Flowers on bicycle'  
Adham Khaled Al-Ammar  
Azraq Camp



'My Candle'  
Heba Aklofi (Syria)  
Zataari Camp

*What is the message of this painting?*

As this is my first painting it doesn't have a clear message, but I believe it represents the need for light which is the right path to go through.

*Why do you paint?*

I consider painting my personal space in which I can express my thoughts.

*What does the UN mean for you?*

The UN is an organisation that works for spreading peace globally, provides equal opportunities, and resolve conflicts.

*What do you think makes a good leader?*

Being a good listener, having team spirit, encouraging other colleagues, accepting criticism, always working towards the general benefit of everyone and achieving goals.

'Vase with flowers'  
Samir Al Ghafari  
Azraq Camp





'An apple core representing the remaining parts of Syria'  
Hisham Mohammad Al Ghafari  
Azraq Camp

'Abstraction'  
Mohammed Abdul Kafi Joukhdar (Syria)  
Zataari Camp

*What is the message of this painting?*

The message of the painting is freedom of oneself, despite the harshness of society.

*Why do you paint?*

I paint to deliver messages, to try to solve community issues, and my home country's conflict of war.

*What does the UN mean for you?*

The United Nations is a big organisation that helps vulnerable people around the world.

*What do you think makes a good leader?*

Helping the society and developing it through determination.



'Woman with two birds'  
Asim Abdul Hamid Al Ashram  
Azraq Camp

‘Abstract Integration’  
Mahmoud Khaled Al-Hariri (Syria)  
Zataari Camp

*What is the message of this painting?*

Integration. What I mean by that is the mass immigration of Syrians across the world and their inclusion in societies while still carrying their traditions, cultures, and thoughts.

*Why do you paint?*

Painting is considered my career, higher education and the language that expresses my feelings.

*What does the UN mean for you?*

An organisation that helps those in need.

*What do you think makes a good leader?*

Controlling your reactions.



‘Peace’

Murad Ahmed Al-Shawamreh (Syria)  
Zataari Camp

*What is the message of this painting?*

An abstract to combat hunger, poverty, displacement and orphans.

*Why do you paint?*

I started painting late, when I was 43 years old and I have continued learning by taking several training courses.

*What does the UN mean for you?*

The UN is an umbrella for protecting refugees.

*What do you think makes a good leader?*

Knowing your flaws.

‘People simulation’  
Nabil Jubouri (Iraq)  
Amman



# Acronym List

ACABQ	Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions
ACT	Accountability, Coherence, and Transparency Group
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
AU	African Union
BCPR	Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery
CEESP	Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy
CF	Cooperation Framework
COP	Conference of the Parties
COVAX	COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organisation
DCO	Development Coordinating Office
DESA	Department of Economic and Social Affairs
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
DPKO	Department of Peacekeeping Operations
DPO	Department of Peace Operations
DSRSG/RC/HC	Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
FRIDA	Young Feminist Fund
GAVI	Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization
GELI	Global Leadership Initiative
GEMAP	Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program
GPS	Global Positioning Systems
GSEM	Geneva School of Economics and Management
GUAM	Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICGL	International Contact Group for Liberia
IFIs	International Financial Institutions
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria and the Levant
ITC	International Trade Centre
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
JPO	Junior Professional Officer
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and gender diverse, Intersex, Queer and questioning
MAF	Management Accountability Framework
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MOPAN	Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment
MPTF	Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office
MRM	Monitoring and reporting mechanism

<b>MS</b>	Member States
<b>OCHA</b>	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>OHCHR</b>	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
<b>QCPR</b>	Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review
<b>RC</b>	Resident Coordinator
<b>RNA</b>	Ribonucleic acid
<b>RR</b>	Resident Representative
<b>SC</b>	Security Council
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SERPs</b>	Socio-Economic Response Plans
<b>SR</b>	Special Representatives
<b>SRSg</b>	Special Representatives of the Secretary-General
<b>UDHR</b>	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UN Charter</b>	United Nations Charter
<b>UN Women</b>	United Nations Women
<b>UNASG</b>	United Nations Assistant Secretary-General
<b>UNCTs</b>	United Nations Country Teams
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNDS</b>	United Nations Development System
<b>UNEL-e UN</b>	Emerging Leaders e-Learning Programme
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNIC</b>	United Nations Information Centre
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNMIL</b>	United Nations Missions in Liberia
<b>UNMISS</b>	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
<b>UNOG</b>	United Nations Office at Geneva
<b>UNSCR</b>	United Nations Security Council Resolution
<b>UNSDCF</b>	UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
<b>UNSLF</b>	United Nations System Leadership Framework
<b>UNSSC</b>	United Nations System Staff College
<b>UNV</b>	United Nations Volunteers
<b>WB</b>	World Bank
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>YPP</b>	Young Professionals Programme
<b>YWCA</b>	Young Women's Christian Association
<b>YWLs</b>	Young Women Leaders





This publication brings together diverse perspectives on United Nations leadership today. Released only two years after our first publication on the topic, it has been put together under a radically altered context, shaped by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the accelerating threats of climate change and by new armed conflicts.

Together, these developments cast an even more acute light on the need for leadership in the multilateral system and particularly in the UN. They vindicate our continued framing of UN leadership as an art, rather than an exact science, at a time when the practice of principled leadership seems so difficult, even occasionally appearing to be somewhat of a rare artform indeed.

They also explain the subtitle ‘painting perspectives, staying true to principles’. It captures both the need for diverse views and approaches, including from those who may underestimate or doubt UN leadership realities, while recognising that what unites and makes UN leadership unique is the principles offered by the UN Charter.



## The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation

The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation is a non-governmental organisation established in memory of the second Secretary-General of the United Nations. The Foundation aims to advance dialogue and policy for sustainable development, multilateralism and peace.

[www.daghammarskjold.se](http://www.daghammarskjold.se)