

Why the United Nations needs restructuring

THE first tribe that survived on Earth was most afraid of wild animals and beasts, which continually threatened them. The world's population expanded as technology and innovation improved safety. But the world's development was accompanied by a propensity for mutual destruction. This was demonstrated by the world's failure to avoid the First and Second World Wars. Because of these wars, the world built a system to maintain peace and prevent conflict escalation.

The world looked to the UN for a better tomorrow. The world today is more interconnected than at any point in history. Conflicts, climate shocks, pandemics and economic crisis travel across borders with ease, demanding collective responses. The United Nations was created in the aftermath of World War-II precisely to manage such interdependence and prevent future global catastrophes. Yet, despite notable successes, the organisation increasingly appears misaligned with contemporary global realities.

The UN's contributions to development and human welfare are substantial. Through agencies such as the UNDP, it has supported poverty reduction strategies in more than 170 countries. By introducing the Human Development Index, the UN redefined progress beyond economic output, emphasizing health, education and living standards. As a result, global extreme poverty declined significantly between 1990 and 2019.

"Despite major achievements in development, health and decolonisation, the United Nations' outdated power structures and weak enforcement mechanisms have limited its effectiveness, making comprehensive institutional reform essential for credible global governance."

In global health, the UN's role has been transformative. The eradication of smallpox stands as a landmark achievement in human history. Coordinated international efforts against polio, HIV/AIDS, malaria and COVID-19 have saved millions of lives, expanded access to vaccines and primary healthcare and contributed to a sharp decline in child mortality since 1990.

The organization has also played a central role in climate governance. Agreements such as the Paris Climate Accord reflect their ability to bring states together around shared existential threats. Similarly, the UN has mainstreamed gender equality within the Sustainable Development Goals, contributing to rising women's political participation and improved access to education and legal

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protections worldwide. Perhaps the UN's most enduring legacy lies in decolonisation. When the organization was founded, more than 750 million people lived under colonial rule. By embedding self-determination into international law and providing diplomatic platforms for colonized peoples, the UN helped dismantle the legitimacy of empire. The supervised transition of former colonies and the eventual closure of the Trusteeship Council symbolized the formal end of colonial rule in world politics.

Despite these achievements, the UN has struggled to fulfil its primary mandate: maintaining international peace and security. The Security Council, designed as the organisation's enforcement arm, has become paralysed by geopolitical rivalries. The veto power of permanent members has repeatedly blocked action, even in the face of humanitarian catastrophes and clear violations of international law. Longstanding disputes such as Palestine and Kashmir illustrate the gap between UN resolutions and real-world outcomes. In more recent conflicts—from Ukraine to the Middle East—the organization has largely been reduced to issuing statements and appeals. International law, without enforcement, remains vulnerable to power politics.

Climate governance reveals a similar weakness. While global targets are articulated through UN frameworks, implementation depends on voluntary national commitments. The absence of binding enforcement mechanisms undermines credibility at a time when climate impacts are intensifying across vulnerable regions.

These shortcomings do not negate the UN's relevance; they underscore the urgency of reform. Global power structures have evolved since 1945, yet institutional authority remains concentrated in arrangements shaped by a

post-war order. The mismatch between contemporary realities and outdated governance structures has weakened the organization's legitimacy. Meaningful reform must begin with making the UN more representative and democratic. True democracy will be reflected when the poorer states will have more autonomy in the decision making in the UNO. For instance, developing states hardly have a say in the decisions that decide the fate of the world. The world's developed states hold much influence, with only a few states possessing veto power.

The Security Council requires restructuring to reflect regional diversity and emerging geopolitical realities. Excessive reliance on veto power must be reconsidered, while the General Assembly's role in global decision-making should be strengthened.

Financial reform is equally critical. Cutting reliance on major funders could decrease outside control and boost institutional independence. The UN's financial reliance on certain nations could be reduced if resource-rich regions contribute more than those with fewer resources. Oil-rich states should give a percentage of their income to fund the UN. Likewise, every resource-rich nation has to give the UN a set percentage of its income.

Serious debate is also warranted for arming the UN with greater peacekeeping and mediation capabilities, backed by member nations. UN-supervised regional conflict-resolution could better manage long-lasting disputes. The general assembly must vote on regional conflicts. The decision must be made mandatory for the states in the conflict. For example, the world knows that the decision will be in favour of Kashmiris and Palestinians in the cases of the Kashmir and Palestine issues. A democratic UN could have made this happen, leading to world peace now.

Admittedly, reforming the United Nations is politically difficult. The states that benefit most from the current system are often the least inclined to change it. In an era of escalating conflicts, climate insecurity and economic fragmentation, a weakened multilateral system poses a threat to global stability. The United Nations was created to save future generations from the scourge of war. Preserving that vision now requires courage, compromise and structural reform. Without it, the gap between global challenges and global governance will continue to widen—at a cost the world can no longer afford.

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