

The Case for a United Nations
Parliamentary Assembly

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The Case for a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly

Dieter Heinrich

COMMITTEE FOR A DEMOCRATIC U.N.

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Preface

This brochure was first published almost twenty years ago, in October 1992. The time then was characterized by the profound upheaval and transformation of the world order that followed the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Optimism was in the air. Humanity had managed to avert the danger of a Third World War and nuclear self-destruction. In Eastern Europe and elsewhere, peoples that were suppressed for decades managed to shake off the yoke of autocratic elites and their dreaded state security services. The inhuman apartheid regime in South Africa was overcome through negotiations and Nelson Mandela was released after 27 years in prison. Democracy and the right of self-determination finally prevailed. The American philosopher Francis Fukuyama attracted extraordinary attention by announcing that "the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government" had come. On the occasion of the commencement of Operation Desert Storm to expel Iraqi troops from Kuwait which invaded the country five months before, US President George Bush proclaimed in January 1991 "the opportunity to forge for ourselves and for future generations a new world order, a world where the rule of law, not the law of the jungle, governs the conduct of nations." The optimistic spirit of the time was echoed by the high-level Stockholm Initiative on Global Security and Governance which proposed that a "World Summit on Global Governance be called, similar to the meetings in San Francisco and at Bretton Woods in the 1940s" at which the United Nations and the international financial institutions were established. The need for a new world order and a strengthened world organization became apparent very quickly in the face of the international community's inability to cope effectively with the conflict that erupted on the territory of the disintegrating Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia.

After decades of stagnation it seemed that a window of opportunity had opened for a general overhaul of the UN and the system of international institutions. The time was ripe for world federalists to promote the old idea of a citizens' chamber at the UN more seriously and it was Dieter Heinrich, serving as Chair of the World Federalist Movement's Policy Committee at that time, who attended to the task.

Although the proposal of adding a parliamentary assembly to the UN is as old as the UN itself and was floated occasionally in UN and NGO circles,

there was actually no thorough analysis publicly available that specifically dealt with the subject. In most cases it was only briefly discussed in broad blueprints for UN reform such as the one presented 1970 in the 20th Report of the Commission to Study the Organization of Peace chaired by Louis B. Sohn. It was the merit of Dieter Heinrich and the World Federalist Movement to discuss the idea for the first time in a more comprehensive manner.

The Case for a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly has established a couple of important principles that are valid and generally recognized to this day. The approach taken is pragmatic and realistic in that it is modelled after the progressive development of the European Parliament. It is argued that the long-term goal of a directly elected world parliament can only be achieved by a staged, evolutionary process. This makes the idea better acceptable to policy-makers and governments. At the same time, the brochure compellingly shows the far reaching ideological and strategic implications of a UN Parliamentary Assembly. Its mere existence would signify, as Heinrich puts it, "the emergence of a planetarian ethos."

The brochure had some immediate and important impact. The 8th Report of the Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade of the Canadian House of Commons in Spring 1993, for example, recommended that "Canada support the development of a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly and that we offer to host the preparatory meeting of the Assembly in the Parliament Buildings as the centrepiece in our celebration of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations in 1995." Influenced by this Canadian move, the European Parliament included support for "a parliamentary consultative assembly" within the UN in a resolution on UN reform adopted in February 1994. To my knowledge this was the first official support ever expressed by a parliament. The brochure was prominently quoted in Erskine Childers and Brian Urquhart's well-known study *Renewing the United Nations System* in which they took up the proposal in 1994. Maurice Bertrand and Robert Muller are two other long standing UN staffers who took note and supported the proposal. It is said that when Robert Muller came all the way to Victoria, British Columbia, to speak at a conference of the World Federalist Movement-Canada, he said from the podium that he had read Dieter's brochure which was included in the conference kit and added, "Now I know why I was meant to come here. It was to read this marvellous booklet."

The idea eventually was favourably mentioned in 1995 in the famous report of the Commission on Global Governance, although without any sources. Many more examples could be provided. To put it briefly, Dieter Heinrich's brochure was a milestone in the promotion of a UN Parliamentary Assembly. Not at last, it created the political and theoretical starting point of our Committee's work on the subject since 2004.

This paper by Dieter Heinrich had a deep impact on me. I think I read it first in 1997 when I was twenty-one years old. Ever since I am deeply convinced that a UN Parliamentary Assembly truly is what Dieter claims it to be: Maybe the "single most important step to saving the planet from destruction." This conviction is the main reason why I chose to concentrate much of my career thus far on the subject.

Of course, as we know today, the optimism at the beginning of the 1990s with regard to a new world order was unwarranted. The UN and the system of international institutions has not seen any relevant structural reform. The only major development, in my view, even if outside the system, was the breakthrough at the Rome conference on the International Criminal Court in 1998 and the rapid establishment of the Court subsequently. Otherwise, the system of nation-states whose deficiencies are so well exposed by Dieter in this brochure has successfully resisted change despite of the unprecedented revolution going on in the world, for example in the field of information and communication technology — and despite of the fact that it has become fairly obvious and almost universally recognized that the system is not able to cope with major global challenges such as climate change or the root causes of the global financial crisis.

In the meantime, an abundance of UN- and government-sponsored high-level panels, expert commissions, policy groups and other initiatives has been producing an endless stream of smart reports on UN reform, the Millennium Development Goals and the need of global governance. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, however, recently regretted in a resolution adopted in October 2009, that "so far, there has been no reform proposal aimed at improving the democratic character of the United Nations." Tellingly, the report of the "Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations–Civil Society Relations" that was published in 2004 (and came to nothing), devoted only around 16 paragraphs out of a total of 187 to the topic of "engaging with elected representatives."

Any way, I want to make a different point: What most policymakers and advocacy groups have been failing to recognize due to their limited focus on specific issues is that without a reform of the system as such, fundamentally different policies will not be viable at the global level. A new world order cannot be created within the framework and structure of the old.

The crux of the matter is that there is no institutional transformative force within the system that could push for reform in a sustainable and politically relevant way. That's exactly what a UN Parliamentary Assembly would be suited to do. As Dieter pointed out in the brochure, the UN needs a parliamentary body to drive the process of the UN's own transformation.

This brochure by Dieter Heinrich is a classic that hasn't lost any of its topicality and strength. It's highly recommended to anyone interested in the future of humanity and clearly a must read for all those engaged with global democracy and the global order. We hope that this republication will arouse new interest in it.

Andreas Bummel

Chairman, Committee for a Democratic U.N.

Summary

The problems facing humanity as the world's population swells toward 10 billion on a planet that is already nearing ecological exhaustion are truly unprecedented in complexity, scale and urgency. To solve them will require not only a new level, but a new kind of international co-operation based on a strengthened and democratized United Nations.

The UN must be strengthened to enable it to more effectively govern relations between nation-states, leaving them free to govern themselves in peace. It must be strengthened to deal with vital global concerns – from the world ecological crisis to humanitarian relief to disarmament – that can be treated in no other reliable way.

To strengthen the UN, it must also be democratized through more direct representation of citizens. Opening the UN to the involvement, imagination and energy of all people, not only those who speak for the institutions of national government, would make the UN more effective. We can afford nothing less. Citizens have a right, as well as a responsibility to become equal participants in the governance of their common global home.

Above all, citizen representation at the UN is essential to help propel a major reform and strengthening of the organization. Experience shows that governments, preoccupied with the national interest, cannot be relied upon to undertake this with real commitment.

The single most appropriate and important institution for enabling citizens to be represented at the UN, as in any government, is a parliament.

The European Parliament of the European Community provides an important example of how a supranational parliament can be organized, and how such a parliament can help propel the evolution of inter-governmental organizations.

The experience of the European Parliament suggests that the first stage of a UN parliament should be a consultative Parliamentary Assembly made up of representatives elected by the national parliaments. This would enable a UN parliament to be created easily and inexpensively in a way which nevertheless creates a valid democratic link between the UN and the world's citizens through their representatives in the national legislatures.

A Parliamentary Assembly would bring into being a very different kind of voice within global politics. Whereas the General Assembly is composed of representatives of governments who ultimately represent institutional interests within the nation-state system, a parliamentary assembly would be made up of individuals who would speak for citizens. A parliamentarian would be able to take positions of individual conscience, ultimately accountable only to constituents. Parliamentarians would be free of instruction, free from the constraints of *raison d'état*, free to take a global perspective – free, among other things, to exhort the governments in the General Assembly to take action in the way they think citizens would want them to.

A Parliamentary Assembly could be established at the UN relatively easily, without UN Charter reform. Once established it could campaign to have governments convert it into a genuine parliament, the members of which would one day be directly elected. In this way, the process of the parliament's evolution, and the evolution of the UN itself, would no longer have to be driven by citizens' grassroots action alone. The parliamentarians themselves, who would have many resources to bring to the cause, would help. A relatively small initial effort from citizens groups could, therefore, bring huge returns in speeding up the process of the UN's evolution by creating a powerful new ally.

Even in its initial stages, with a largely symbolic and consultative role, a Parliamentary Assembly has the potential of having a profoundly beneficial impact on international relations. It would be a vital new link to national parliaments and would increase support among the world's nations for all aspects of United Nations activities. It would be a new source of proposals and a new source of initiative within the international system for the solution of global problems. It would also become an essential source of guidance to, and leverage on, national governments for strengthening the UN.

Most importantly, a UN Parliamentary Assembly would become a symbol with which to change the outmoded ideological mindsets of the nation-state world we live in. In place of today's state-centric ideology, which makes a virtue of national selfishness and exclusivity, a parliament would advance the idea of the world as a democratic community of citizens who share common vital interests and values. The world depends on such a new earth- and citizen- centred perception, because it provides the essential moral basis for any real political co-

operation on the critical problems of our age.

A Parliamentary Assembly may well be indispensable to the further evolution of the United Nations system as a whole. It may be the single most important next step to saving the planet from destruction.

1

Sovereignty, the Citizen, the Global Crisis

Whether or not we believe there is a purpose to history, there is an observable direction. The world is moving toward increased interdependence and integration. Drawn by opportunity, propelled by necessity, we are inexorably becoming a world society. Over the course of this century, we have made strides in forging a global consensus around common norms and institutions — a process that has gathered new energy since the end of the Cold War.

Through the United Nations, where much of that effort is focused, humanity has become united for the first time within one organization, in affirmation of a universal code of principles, as embodied in the UN's Charter. Whatever may be its limitations, the United Nations has endured for half a century as an example of international co-operation and society-building. It stands even now as the possible beginning of a political superstructure or government for our emerging world society.

It does not take a Nostradamus to predict the broad shape of the UN of tomorrow. As the need for global coordination and co-operation becomes ever more stark, governments will find themselves turning to it more and more. Over time, the UN will have to grow in authority. In the process, it will necessarily also be democratized; for if its decisions are to be authoritative, they will need greater legitimation than the present voting system provides.

The great unknown is when and how quickly this evolution of the UN will occur, and how much more damage and suffering the world must sustain before the inevitable steps are taken.

The problems facing humanity as the world's population swells toward 10 billion on a planet that is nearing environmental exhaustion are truly unprecedented in complexity, scale and urgency.

With each passing day, tens of thousands of human lives are lost to poverty. Uncounted millions of young minds are permanently damaged by malnutrition. Thousands of hectares of irreplaceable rainforests are destroyed.

Hundreds of species of life are forever extinguished. Atmospheric ozone is further diminished while greenhouse gasses accumulate, threatening to alter the climate of the planet. Every day adds to an inventory of continuing destruction that is horrendous almost beyond belief. Meanwhile, national governments daily spend more than US\$2 *billion* on their militaries, all the while protesting the lack of funds for global problems.

Nation-states acting in isolation cannot solve these problems that are international in scope. Solutions will require a new *level* of international cooperation, certainly — but more than this, they will require a new kind of cooperation.

The world needs a better method of making decisions and taking collective action in the common interest. We need, in fact, a system of world law, and we need a way to make those laws in a timely and democratic fashion. We need effective implementation of those laws, and a means for their enforcement. And, finally, the whole process has to be adequately funded. What this amounts to is government.

To achieve it, two basic premises of the nation-state system will have to change. The first concerns the distribution of sovereignty. The second concerns citizen representation in international decision-making.

Absolute state sovereignty remains the most fundamental premise of the present world order. Although it is under increasing pressure and has begun to admit exceptions, the general rule still is that a nation-state cannot be subjected to, or made accountable to, the decisions of any authority beyond itself. The direct consequence of this doctrine is that we cannot have law-making by majority decision within international institutions, including the UN. What we have instead is a slow, laborious process of treaty-making in which the resolutions of the UN General Assembly count for very little. The result is what we see: non-decision, leading to non-action, leading to deepening crisis.

Majority decision-making at the UN would mean that, on some global issues at least, the will of the world's majority could be binding on the minority. The behavior of states toward each other would become governed by decisions made supranationally. States, then, would no longer be absolutely sovereign, a prospect many governments resist. Still, this is in the end the only equitable and workable way for humanity to collectively make decisions and take effective action on global problems.¹

¹ World federalists would only qualify this by saying that the questions upon which the UN has sovereignty must be constitutionally limited to specific, agreed-upon areas of international or global concern, leaving states full sovereignty to govern their own internal af-

But for the UN to acquire a real decision-making authority, its way of making decisions must be democratized. This is the second major premise of today's international order that must change: that citizens have no place in global governance; that it is a process of deal-making between governments alone.

The UN can never become equal to the problems of our age as long as it remains closed to all but the most indirect participation of the world's citizens. Our crises have reached such proportions that governments can no longer hope to resolve them without engaging directly the will, the ideas, and the initiatives of the world's citizens as responsible participants in the solutions. Governments implicitly recognized this in the preparatory process for the UN Conference on Environment and Development, which saw unprecedented consultation between governments and citizens groups. Global governance must be opened up to take advantage of the best efforts of all the world's people. We can afford nothing less.

The participation of the world's citizens is needed not only in the design of lasting solutions to world problems, but also in the "retooling" of the UN itself into a more effective instrument. Citizen representation may well be essential to propel and oversee any process of real UN reform.

The most suitable vehicle for bringing the citizen voice to the UN, in the view of the World Federalist Movement, is a United Nations parliamentary body. Modeled on the European Parliament, it could begin as a consultative parliamentary assembly — not yet a real parliament, but the precursor of one — with its members chosen by the peoples' representatives in the existing legislatures of the world, a procedure both simple and easy to implement. Through a gradual, phased process (but more quickly, we would hope, than was the case with the European Parliament) it could become a citizen-elected body with a real role in the governance of international life.

Such a parliamentary body would bring not just a new voice, but a fundamentally different kind of voice to bear on the issues before the UN. Where the voices in the General Assembly today are the voices of the institutions of national governments speaking through diplomats, the voice of a UN parliamentarian would be the voice of a citizen speaking for citizens. Where the positions a diplomat takes are decided in the national capitals by people often far removed from the give and take of debate, a parliamentarian would be able to take positions of individual conscience, ultimately accountable

fairs. Sovereignty, in other words, would be divided between two levels of government, the global and the national, each sovereign within its jurisdiction — the essence of the federal model. Not only does the nation-state continue to exist under federalism, it is actually fortified in its security and ability to govern its own affairs.

only to constituents. Parliamentarians would be free of instruction, free from the constraints of *raison d'état*, free to take a global perspective — free, among other things, to exhort the governments in the General Assembly to take faster action on issues and in ways they think citizens would want them to.

Both voices are needed, but only one now exists. As a result, the apparatus of the UN is bent to the interests of governments -as-institutions in ways that may correspond only indirectly to the real needs of citizens. The needs of citizens are to have problems solved quickly and fairly. But with so many governments convinced that their first interest is to preserve unfettered national sovereignty, they cannot be relied upon to consider all the possible solutions to world problems. They especially cannot be relied upon to take the initiatives needed to strengthen the authority of the UN, the single most important step in the solution to many problems.

The voice of citizens, heard through a UN parliament, is therefore essential to provide a different perspective on the problems before the UN, to act as a counter-balance to governments, and to overcome the institutional inertia of governments in the pursuit of UN reform.

The transformation of the UN into a democratic governing authority for humankind is one of the single most important political tasks of our times. But, while states may be making greater efforts to cooperate than before, and using the United Nations more regularly to do so, they seem as indifferent as ever to the need for real systemic changes on behalf of greater UN sovereignty and democracy. Some of the biggest states have justified their resistance to change by claiming — in astonishing denial of our worsening predicament — that the UN is finally working well.

Nevertheless, it is the UN's member governments that will ultimately decide the pace of the UN's evolution. Will they be driven by a succession of calamities into restructuring the UN? Or can we, as a thinking species imbued with intelligence and foresight, act in advance of further suffering and tragedy by setting out and rationally working toward this goal? The present complacency of governments can only make us afraid.

Clearly, the initiative for change will have to come from somewhere, and if not from governments, then where else than from citizens? But how can a campaign of citizen pressure on governments be organized and sustained around something as abstract as the reform and strengthening of the UN?

What if citizens' organizations could have an ally within the UN structure itself to promote the citizen interest in the UN and its transformation? Ideally, it would be an official UN body through which citizens could be directly represented. Fortunately many states have had experience with such a body

— with an institutional structure that enables citizens to be represented in government. That structure is called parliament.

A parliamentary body at the UN would have a tremendous potential, even as a consultative body, to make the UN a more effective organization. From its earliest days, a UN Parliamentary Assembly could help in:

- fostering international co-operation;
- drafting treaties and conventions;
- building support for the UN back in national capitals;
- reinforcing the trend toward democracy in the countries of the world;
- fostering a new planetarian ethos by symbolizing the idea of the world as one community.

Above all, it could provide impetus, leverage, and oversight in the complex and highly political process of reforming the UN.

The Example of the European Community

The most instructive experience of recent times with the evolution of an organization that unites sovereign governments within a progressively developing supranational decision-making process is that of the European Community (EC).

In the early 1980s, the EC was floundering, suffering from a complex of paralyzing problems that had come to be known as "Eurosclerosis." Western Europe's crisis stemmed from its own obsolete institutions, especially its decision-making. With each of twelve sovereign governments able to block a consensus, decisions were not being made and progress had ground to a halt. While governments were frequently frustrated, they seemed incapable or unwilling to do anything about it. The inertia of governments was finally overcome through outside pressure from citizens. Citizens organizations of various kinds, including the business sector, campaigning for the "European idea" had a powerful ally in another kind of citizen organization — one that proved able, working from inside the structures of the EC, to provide the needed impetus for change. That organization was the European Parliament.

The European Parliament, after its beginnings as a parliamentary assembly, had become directly elected in 1979. Although it still had few powers, it was a chamber of politicians whose role it was to think about Europe. In response to the disarray of governments, the parliament, led by the Italian federalist, Altiero Spinelli, wrote and presented to governments a draft constitution to create a federal Europe with a real legislature. This action by the

parliament coincided precisely with the needs of the people of Europe for more effective representation within EC politics.

It was an audacious move, but one that could not be altogether dismissed by governments. Forced to respond, governments developed, and later adopted, a set of counterproposals that dramatically reformed and strengthened the structures of the EC. In many areas, consensus decision-making among the governments was replaced with binding, weighted voting. No longer could one or two governments stall all progress. With decisions starting to flow again, the European Community was re-invigorated and began moving energetically toward greater political and economic integration. Moreover, the parliament was also given additional powers.

The point to note is that it took the European Parliament to provide the impetus for institutional change. Governments well knew that change was needed, but seemed unable to act until spurred by the constitution effort of the European Parliament. While the European model cannot, obviously, be applied wholesale to the UN, this one point, at least, is relevant and intuitively right: that the UN, too, may need a parliamentary body to intercede in the process of the UN's transformation. This may be the most important lesson to be drawn from the European experience by those who are today working on behalf of reform of the UN.

Overcoming the limitations of nation-state sovereignty

If we are right that the world needs the UN as an instrument of governance, vested with real authority to act on global problems, and if it is true that the nation-states cannot be counted on to move on their own to transform the UN, then the establishment of a UN Parliamentary Assembly may be nothing less than vital to global survival. It may be, on this account, one of the single most important political proposals of our time.

Without a UN Parliamentary Assembly to influence events, there simply may never be enough political will to deal with what is, in the end, the core issue in building a more effective international order: redistributing sovereignty by limiting the sovereignty of the nation-state while expanding the sovereignty of democratic world bodies. By the term "sovereignty" we mean simply the authority to make and apply law.

Until the UN (or, conceivably, some new, unforeseeable world body superseding the UN) has sovereignty to make law for the world community, many of our worst problems will remain unsolvable and we will slip deeper

into crisis. Our problems will remain unsolvable because the world suffers from a condition similar to that of Europe in the early 1980s. In the face of the world's many and urgent needs, the process of international decision-making of today, consisting of treaty-making among sovereign governments, is starkly inadequate.

The doctrine of national sovereignty means that, in its external affairs, a state is bound only by the treaties it signs — it cannot be subjected to the terms of a treaty adopted by others, even if they are the vast majority. Being voluntary, treaties tend to reflect the lowest common denominator because their negotiators want to ensure enough signatories, especially among the major powers, to give them a chance to be effective. Then, major treaties on the most important subjects (for instance, the Law of the Sea Convention) can take decades to negotiate, by which time the situation may have changed. When the text of a treaty is finally agreed, the states that negotiated it don't have to sign it, and even if they do, they can always opt out again later since most treaties have escape clauses. The result is a patchwork legal order with different states living by different rules, usually only the ones they like, and then only tentatively.

The problems of rule by treaty-making are compounded by the lack of the other institutions of effective international government. There are, for instance, few mechanisms to enforce treaties or to adjudicate disputes. The UN's "civil service" is too small and too weak in its authority to implement many programs. Taken together, the nature of the negotiating process and the lack of implementing mechanisms conspire to make otherwise logical and necessary proposals on many things seem so unlikely of acceptance that they are never even ventured.

The idea of unfettered national sovereignty, with every state a law unto itself, may have been tolerable in the days of the steamship, the telegraph and the cavalry. It is disastrous in an age of jet travel, telecommunications, and ballistic nuclear missiles. Technology has made us materially interdependent and given us vast powers to affect — even destroy — one another. What can justify a doctrine that pretends the world's nearly 200 states can have unrestricted freedom with no requirement to co-operate or respect the needs or the opinions of others? In whose interest is this doctrine perpetuated? Not in the human interest, or the global one.

National sovereignty has long ceased to be synonymous with control of one's own affairs. If every state is sovereign, all must endure the random effects of the sovereign decisions of others. The most powerful, by bullying or buying off others, may sometimes have less to endure, but there are some consequences of state sovereignty that even the strong cannot escape: a case in point is the "tragedy of the commons." The commons in this case is the

global biosphere. In the absence of a world authority to make and enforce regulations universally, the biosphere is being relentlessly degraded as each state, evaluating the matter from its own viewpoint, concludes it is more in its interest to abuse the environment along with everyone else than to take measures unilaterally to protect it (see box).

Escaping the tragedy of the commons: mutual regulation for mutual benefit

The "tragedy of the commons" describes a situation of contradiction where sovereign individuals or groups are "rationally" led to destroy a free, renewable – but finite – public resource through over-use. The original commons was the village pasture, but today the concept applies to such global public resources as the atmosphere or fish stocks in international waters.

For each user, the situation is as follows: if they use the resource – for example, by taking another catch of an endangered fish stock from the ocean – they will get all the benefits, while any costs (further damage to the stock) will be spread among the whole community of users, of which they are only one. From the point of view of each user, the costs to them of their own use of the resource are vastly offset by their immediate benefits.

If all the users think this way, however, and continue exploiting the endangered resource, the ultimate costs of everyone using the resource may outweigh the benefits. The ruin of the resource for all, perhaps for all time, may mean costs far greater than all the individual benefits combined – and therein lies the tragedy. The result is a situation that is in no one's interest and which all would have wished to avoid.

Yet, while all the users might prefer to save the resource, all are trapped by the logic of the situation. While the users may see the tragedy unfolding, they may do nothing to change course if they cannot be sure that other users will do likewise. Users that do try to improve matters, in this case by not fishing, would find that while they bore alone the loss of not using the resource, the benefits of their sacrifices would be spread equally to all, including those who irresponsibly continue fishing.

The way out of the predicament lies in finding a way to link benefits to sacrifice. That can only be done through social organization, for instance, by a system of regulation of the use of the resource.

Further analysis will show that, in many cases, effective regulation of a commons finally requires a central sovereign authority (ideally, of course, one established democratically by the users) that has powers of enforcement. For a regime of mutual regulation to work, it must be nearly universal. Too many non-participants or free-loaders and the regime will unravel as participants come to feel their sacrifices are being unjustly exploited by others.

The logic that leads to regulation of the commons is compelling, and is one of the main forces driving global political integration at a time of increasing interdependence.

It is no revelation that governments and their officials have, in addition to the interests of the country, another set of much narrower interests — those of their own institutions as self-perpetuating entities. If national governments drag their feet on strengthening the sovereignty of international organizations like the UN, it is in some part because of an inherent conflict of interest: it contradicts their institutional imperative to preserve the privileges and prestige of national power.

Under the pressure of necessity some governments, however, are softening their views on the absolute nature of national sovereignty. They are increasingly willing to compromise the principle in practice, by interceding against South Africa's apartheid laws, for instance, or by sending UN police to protect the Kurds in Iraq. But as we saw in Europe, even if governments should come one day to agree that the principle of national sovereignty should be more generally restricted in favor of collective approaches, it still may not lead to action to enhance the sovereignty of international institutions in ways that could make collective action possible.

The world has seen many examples of a head of government saying one thing while his or her foreign ministry passively subverts the politician's vision by endlessly overlooking opportunities to act on it. Initiatives for change, then, fail to follow rhetoric. Then there are times when governments welcome, even need, some outside pressure compelling them to do something they actually want to do, but can't be seen to be wanting to do — like compromising national power. In this case, governments may respond positively to initiatives coming from elsewhere, but do not want to appear to be too keen by making pro-

posals themselves. To look to national governments to strengthen the UN, therefore, is like looking to a committee of foxes to design a more secure hen house. Their hearts just won't be in it. This is not to say governments will never yield — they are slowly yielding, because other interests also come into play — but it does help explain why they are unlikely to champion spontaneously the cause of UN reform and why, in consequence, some other impetus is needed.

We the Peoples . . .

The United Nations Charter begins with the words: "We the peoples of the United Nations." But in practice, the UN is not a meeting place of the peoples but of their governments — and even this is an exaggeration. A country's permanent representative at the UN may not even represent the whole government of a country, if in the definition of government we include the legislature or parliament. Instead, he or she may represent only the *executive* branch of government. In the United States, for instance, it is the White House, the executive, that is represented through the State Department in the UN General Assembly, not the full government, which includes Congress, the legislative branch.

And yet, while parliaments are not represented at the UN, in many countries they do have responsibilities with respect to the UN. They are the final legislative authority needed to ratify UN conventions, implement many UN resolutions, and approve other aspects of a government's policy toward the UN, including the payment of a state's contributions to the organization's budget. A link between parliaments and the United Nations could help consolidate the support of member states for the UN and for decisions taken there. But, instead of interacting directly with the UN, parliaments are largely limited to reacting to what is reported to them by their executives or by government officials.

The United Nations still fulfills an important role as a meeting place of those who hold executive power in the world (even if in practice it is a meeting place of their ambassadors). It provides a world forum where these powers can discuss and negotiate. But it puts the authority for global decision-making on our biggest problems in the hands of an impossibly small group of politicians.

The ability of national leaders also to be global decision-makers is seriously compromised by the competing demands of domestic responsibilities. Moreover, even the most conscientious leaders operate within a confining ethical matrix: by virtue of their office, they are sworn to promote and defend national interests ahead of global ones.

The present UN suffers, consequently, from both a lack of *capacity* for decision-making and the lack of an appropriately global frame of reference on the part of those who hold the ultimate power of decision on global matters. Many ideas that could save the planet simply never get into the system; or if they do, they fail because those who can approve them are not working from a concern for the whole earth.

The right of citizens to be represented as directly as possible in the political decisions that affect their lives is fundamental to democracy. Today the most critical decisions affecting the lives of all citizens are international ones — the agreements, or non-agreements, about disarmament, the world economy, the protection of the global biosphere, and, bearing on all of these, the agreements concerning the workings of the international system, including the United Nations.

Having citizens only indirectly and distantly represented in dealing with these great issues, their voices filtered through intervening layers of government and bureaucracy, has serious consequences for political culture worldwide. It leaves most citizens estranged from the global political process, and from the UN. It induces passivity as people conclude that they cannot affect what happens in the world, or that the problems in the world are not their personal responsibility, or that governments will solve them. It discourages public initiative and cuts off global decision-making from a vital source of ideas and energy.

Whatever the historical reasons for this, the situation can no longer be justified at a time when democratic movements are sweeping the world and the world itself is so greatly in need of radically improved international institutions of governance.

Human experience, especially in the latter half of this century, teaches that democratic government is the most effective and acceptable way to organize the management of public affairs. While democracy may not guarantee good government, the absence of democracy is a fairly reliable indicator of bad government. This is no less true in our largest human community, the world. Lack of democracy in world politics has the same consequences as lack of democracy in domestic politics: poor decisions, decisions that serve the decision-makers, wasted resources, and lack of effective action.

If it is true that the world is in serious need of better governance, then we should not have to re-travel the painful learning curve of national politics to arrive at the inevitable conclusion that citizen-based democracy is also the most enduringly reliable — not to mention the most just and legitimate — way of organizing planetary society.

2

Establishing a Parliamentary Assembly

The idea of a world parliament is not in itself new. Tennyson, in his poem "Locksley Hall," referred to a supranational "parliament of man" as long ago as the last century, and he was not the first. More recently, since the founding of the UN, there have been numerous proposals to provide the organization with a people's chamber, some of them not unlike the one being presented here.

What is new today is that a parliament at the UN has quite suddenly become feasible and achievable, not only because of the ending of the Cold War, but also because of the increasing tempo with which states are adopting parliamentary democracy at the national level. This provides more than ever before a basis in national politics to support citizen democracy in international politics. As well, there is the increasingly successful European experiment itself, which has matured to the point where it can serve as an inspiration and a model for a similar process at the United Nations.

Another encouraging recent development is the establishment of a parliamentary assembly within the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE). The 50 or so countries in the CSCE span the northern hemisphere from Vancouver to Vladivostok. They represent most of the world's economic and military power, and they include four of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. If they have decided that the fledgling institutions they are now establishing under the CSCE umbrella would benefit from a parliamentary assembly, it gives us a reason to hope, and indeed expect, that they would also support the establishment of an assembly at the UN. Their numbers, combined with the other democracies of the world, could virtually assure its success.

There is good reason to be optimistic that the necessary support for a UN Parliamentary Assembly can be found among governments, particularly if citizens' groups are able to organize an effective international campaign in support of such an initiative. Still, we have to expect the proposal will also

attract its share of opponents. The UN is well established, and many people whose minds are cast in the old state-centric way of looking at the UN, or who have careers invested in it, will not want a change. It is important, then, to propose the idea in its most persuasive possible formulation, one that is least vulnerable to attack and enables potential supporters of the idea within the UN and the world's foreign ministries to speak on behalf of the idea within very conservative environments.

Representation: a question of strategy

There are many ways of conceiving of a world parliament, and there have been over the years many proposals for achieving one. Some of the proposals, propounded in the days of the Cold War when government support for the idea was far less likely, call for citizens to get around governments by organizing a parliament themselves. There are proposals, for instance, for people to declare themselves world citizens and elect provisional world parliaments from among their numbers. Other proposals would create citizen chambers based on representation drawn from non-governmental organizations.

Whatever the merits of such do-it-yourself approaches may have been, in the circumstances of today there are good reasons to prefer a strategy that gets governments themselves to establish a UN parliamentary body. It avoids many of the pitfalls of the direct citizen-action approach, especially problems to do with the legitimacy and effectiveness of the resulting body and with its cost to citizens' groups.

The citizen-action approach would take a heavy toll in both organizational energy and money. If it did succeed on any scale, it would divert resources from pressuring governments on thousands of specific issues, which citizens are good at, into the operation of a pan-global institutional structure, which citizens' groups are ill equipped to do. The result could be less pressure on governments for change rather than more. And the resulting assembly would always be of doubtful legitimacy (who does it really represent?) and of unlikely value as an evolutionary starting point for a real world parliament. These and other problems may explain why citizens' groups have not responded keenly to such an approach in the past.

An approach which has already proven its credibility with governments is the gradualist one followed by the European Parliament. This approach requires that governments themselves establish the parliamentary assembly, something that is essential anyway if it is really to function within the UN.

The recognition and legitimation of a parliamentary assembly by governments is vital to its usefulness as an influence on those governments, to its power as a symbol, and to its potential to evolve into a bona fide parliament.

Any plan that aims to have the governments themselves establish a Parliamentary Assembly must necessarily be credible in the eyes of those governments. Yet it must also possess credibility in the eyes of the public and citizens' groups, whose efforts will be needed to move governments to act. There is a dichotomy here: the modest proposals that governments might find credible may seem so insubstantial that they may fail to inspire citizens' groups to campaign for them, whereas proposals bold enough to interest citizens' groups risk being seen by governments as unrealistic.

Nowhere does this dichotomy come into sharper focus than over the issue of how to select the members of a government-sponsored parliamentary assembly. To have legitimacy as representatives of the people, the members of a UN Parliamentary Assembly must be chosen in a way that gives them a valid democratic link to a citizen constituency. But to be acceptable to governments the process of selecting representatives must also be "realistic" and manageable, here and now. It must be simple and not costly. The dichotomy between "democracy" and "realism" arises because as procedures become more democratic they also become more complicated and expensive, and hence raise more objections from those who must implement them.

The need, therefore, is to find a compromise method of representation that has democratic legitimacy and yet is simple and inexpensive enough that governments will accept it. This, in fact, is the key to establishing the overall acceptability of any proposal for a UN Parliamentary Assembly that has a hope of winning sufficient political support among both governments and the public. The proposal will likely live or die over the issue of representation.

Of all the things citizens groups might want most in a UN Parliamentary Assembly, the most difficult to defer in the name of strategic compromise is the idea that representation in an assembly should be by direct elections. It would be a fatal mistake, however, to insist on direct elections as anything other than a goal for the future. World elections, while democratically desirable, would require canvassing the preferences of billions of individuals. Such an electoral process would also be full of unknowables of the sort politicians and bureaucrats abhor.

Although there is no technical reason why it couldn't be done, it would be logistically complex, expensive and politically difficult to establish a world election apparatus for an unproven institution that governments may not want in the first place. World elections would require not just the minimal consent of hesitant governments, but their enthusiastic conviction, backed by an unflinching political will to see them succeed. If such a political will ex-

isted we might hope for bigger steps to be taken sooner, but the problem with a proposal like a parliamentary assembly is precisely that we are beginning to press for it in an environment where the political will is low. If there was a great coalition of social forces to bring to bear on governments, we might reasonably hope to move them from low to high political will at an early stage, but no such coalition of forces yet exists.

Thus, to insist from the outset on a full-blown parliament chosen by direct world elections would simply be self-defeating, handing governments the easiest possible excuse to do nothing. Without actually disagreeing with the proposal, they could beg off on secondary, technical issues of cost and feasibility. A directly elected parliament should remain our goal, but if we confuse goals with strategies by demanding the whole thing at once, we risk putting off the day when governments can be convinced to take the first steps toward its realization.

What is needed is a strategy whose first stage can succeed in a time of low political will and which, once implemented, can in and of itself help us build the will for subsequent, more difficult stages. On this crucial issue the European Parliament offers its most important lessons. That parliament matured into a directly elected body through just such a staged, evolutionary process, beginning as a parliamentary assembly with members appointed by and from the national legislatures of the member states. The idea of having members of a parliamentary assembly initially chosen by and from national parliaments has powerful advantages, and these advantages can work again in the context of the United Nations. It satisfies, at least minimally, the competing requirements of democratic legitimacy (the concern of citizens and activists) and political realism (the concern of governments). A UN Parliamentary Assembly composed of actual parliamentarians would have an immediate credibility. Because parliamentarians in the majority of countries are now elected, they would have a legitimacy as representatives of the public that governments would have to recognize and respect. (For countries whose parliamentarians are not elected there may be good reason to admit them anyway. This problem, which in any case is diminishing with the spread of democracy, is discussed below.)

Because the parliaments of democratic states generally include opposition parties, a country's parliamentary delegates to the UN would be more truly representative of the whole people of a country than the appointees of the executive branch of government, which may only be the choice of a minority of the electorate. In any case, and more importantly, the parliamentarians will be understood to be going to the UN as representatives of citizens rather than as representatives of governments-as-institutions. This is the beginning of a citizen-UN link.

Another advantage to basing representation in a UN Parliamentary Assembly on national parliaments is that it may engage parliamentarians as allies in the cause of getting the assembly established, and, later, helping to build the political will for its evolution. The experience of being a UN parliamentarian will galvanize many of these politicians into going home as advocates for the UN, including the need for strengthening and democratizing the UN Parliamentary Assembly itself.

There are two other issues that will require further study and exploration. One is whether candidates for election by national parliaments to the UN Parliamentary Assembly could be simply citizens-at-large rather than sitting members of the legislature. This approach would remedy the problem that sitting members of a national parliament might not be able to devote sufficient time to the world body. Their primary responsibility is to represent their constituents in national matters at home, and to be away more than a few weeks a year would become onerous for parliamentarians. Citizens-at-large, however, could serve full-time as UN parliamentarians.

In this model, the national parliament, would act as a kind of "electoral college." In the early years of the United States the electoral college played an important role in electing the president at a time when the huge size of the country made direct elections for the post impractical. The people would elect the members of the electoral college (in this case, the college would be the national parliament) which would then choose, on the people's behalf, their final representatives (in this case, the individuals to sit in the UN Parliamentary Assembly). Those elected could be drawn from the whole population. The resulting UN body would still be made up of citizens elected by citizens rather than officials appointed by governments. It is indirect democracy, to be sure, but valid within its limitations and practical as an interim arrangement pending the first direct world elections.

A second issue is the method of election of parliamentary representatives. Should it be by a secret ballot? Ordinarily, parliaments do not take votes by secret ballot. But in the exceptional case of an electoral process of this kind, it may be desirable, even essential. A secret ballot would ensure that parliamentarians are free of peer or party pressure to vote according to their conscience — to vote for the best person, regardless of political affiliation.

The problem of representation from undemocratic countries

If there is one major difference between the European example and the United Nations as a whole, it is that the West Europeans built their institutions, including their parliament, on the basis of the shared democratic values of the member countries. In the UN, however, we have countries with undemocratic governments. In the past, it was here that the irresistible logic of the idea of a world parliament met its immovable object.

With the collapse of communism, most states now either have credible parliaments or are in the process of creating them. Countries with credible parliaments will likely become an ever increasing majority of the world's states. Even so, in the near term, we must expect there will be states without democratic parliaments, or without parliaments at all. It would be a terrible and unjustifiable surrender to these dictatorships if they were allowed to stand as an obstacle to the formation of a UN parliamentary body. And yet we cannot rule out that their existence will be used as an excuse for inaction even by opponents among some of the democratic members of the UN that are more concerned with preserving state power than with advancing the cause of democracy internationally.

There are at least two ways the democratic majority, given the will, could deal with the issue of non-democratic countries while proceeding with a UN Parliamentary Assembly. First, it is conceivable that they could constitute the assembly in a way that could exclude those countries from participation. The democratic majority in the General Assembly could establish criteria for membership in a UN Parliamentary Assembly which would never need to explicitly use qualitative terms like democracy, but would have the effect of screening for democratic parliaments anyway. As an example, membership in the body could be open only to those parliaments whose powers include ratification of treaties, or approval of money for the UN in their national budgets.

This, however, may not be the most desirable course, at least not in the beginning when the UN Parliamentary Assembly's role is largely consultative and symbolic in any case. It may accomplish more to open the assembly to any country with a parliament, however constituted, in the knowledge that the majority would be democracies. Although the presence of too many pseudo-parliamentarians would risk diminishing the UN Parliamentary Assembly's legitimacy and moral authority, this disadvantage might be offset by advantages in other areas. In welcoming pseudo-parliamentarians into its midst, the assembly may well become a democratizing influence on *them*,

and in this way become a force for the advancement of democracy in the non-democratic countries.

Pseudo-parliamentarians, arriving from the non-democratic countries, would not be able to pretend they were simply diplomats doing a job. They would come claiming to wear the mantle of true parliamentarians who freely believed what they were saying. As such, they would be subject, as in any parliament, to very direct attempts at persuasion by their peers in ways diplomats would never be to join coalitions and modify their positions. Some of these parliamentarians, arriving as obedient spokespeople for their governments, might well return as advocates for positions taken by the UN Parliamentary Assembly. (The assembly may even need to consider protection for such parliamentarians, if they came to feel themselves at risk from their own governments.)

In anticipation of this, some states with undemocratic parliaments might solve the problem for us by refusing to allow their parliamentarians to participate at all, for fear that they might become infected by the contagion of democracy. This, too, might help advance the cause of democracy, undermining the legitimacy of those governments even further in the world community, and in the eyes of their own publics, adding to the pressure for change in those states.

Other matters of strategy

A parliamentary assembly could be created through a relatively easy procedure within the United Nations without having to pursue the politically difficult course of amending the organization's Charter. The General Assembly, through article 22 of the Charter, could establish it as a "subsidiary organ." Its role would initially be that of an advisory body. Its cited purpose might be to improve communication between the UN, the national parliaments, and the world public, and to contribute to a wider appreciation of the UN's work. This is the kind of rationale for creating such an assembly to which governments would be most responsive. As it established its credibility, as governments became more comfortable with it, as its own institutional roots took hold and its informal influence expanded, its formal powers would also grow.

Apart from representation, there are two additional strategic considerations which would enhance the possibility of winning the support of governments for the proposal: the UN Parliamentary Assembly should not be proposed as a replacement for any existing institution, but as an adjunct to them;

and, the UN Parliamentary Assembly, while still an unproven and unknown body, should not be proposed to have substantive powers to make decisions binding on governments or the UN.

Proposing that the assembly replace, for instance, the General Assembly, or assume any of the General Assembly's present functions, will make instant adversaries of the very diplomats at the United Nations whose assistance we need to have the idea introduced in — where else? — the General Assembly. The General Assembly, in any case, is a useful institution in its own right and has a role to play in parallel with the UN Parliamentary Assembly as a kind of "house of the national governments." In terms of the European Community, the General Assembly is the equivalent, after allowing for differences, of the intergovernmental function vested in the Council of Ministers.

Similarly, proposing that the UN Parliamentary Assembly be given immediate responsibilities also adds complications that can only raise the "barriers to entry" and make more difficult the road to the basic goal of getting it established. The most effective strategy is simply to aim at bringing the UN Parliamentary Assembly into being. The prospects of this would be improved if the proposal is kept as simple and, from a government perspective, as innocuous as possible.

The struggle with governments over whether an institution so loaded with implications as a UN Parliamentary Assembly should exist at all, even in its simplest form, will likely be the greatest battle it will ever face. The idea begins the struggle with neither established allies, nor resources, nor the luxury of time on its side. From this position of its greatest weakness, the idea must overcome the opposing ideological resistance — the state-centric prejudices, suspicions, and inertia of governments — at the time of their greatest strength.

However, once the assembly is established, the situation improves. It will then no longer fall to citizens' groups alone to fight the battle of its further development. Powerful allies and new assets would have joined the struggle. The assembly's own members can be expected to play a major role in pushing for its evolution by seeking a UN Charter amendment to make it a "principal organ" in parallel with the General Assembly. With their political know-how, their access to the highest levels of their national governments, and their credibility with the world public and the media, the politicians in the UN Parliamentary Assembly can be expected — again, based on the experience in Europe — to become a strong and persistent political force for organizing the assembly's eventual transformation into a mature, directly elected parliament. The UN Parliamentary Assembly, buoyed by the support

of citizens, empowered by its own legitimacy, will become its own best friend, the engine of its own evolution.

It would be going too far to say that if citizens' groups can succeed in getting it started, it will do the rest for us, but the truth is in that direction.

Other approaches to establishing a UN Parliamentary Assembly

People often ask whether a quicker and easier route to a UN Parliamentary Assembly might be to transform the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The IPU has existed for the past century to bring together legislators from countries with parliaments to meet, debate, and pass resolutions. The question of whether it could be brought within the UN as a parliament almost raises itself. Whether or not this could succeed as a strategy, and it doesn't seem likely, it would not necessarily be a good idea.

The IPU, while itself seeking to work more closely with the UN, could only be made into a UN body if the initiative came from the IPU itself, and at present there is no reason for thinking the organization has any interest in institutionalizing itself in this way. In becoming a UN Parliamentary Assembly, it would ultimately be so transformed in its purposes and methods of operation as to cease to be recognizable as the IPU. Such a transformation would amount to ending one successful organization in order to begin another. There is no compelling reason, apart from saving a truly small amount of money, for pursuing this course unless it became clear that this was really the only way to establish a UN Parliamentary Assembly.

There is not nearly enough activity in building international understanding among the world's parliaments. It would be useful to have both organizations. As the UN Parliamentary Assembly established itself, the IPU could develop its own unique role as a parliament-to-parliament organization, a very different role from a UN Parliamentary Assembly, and potentially as important far into the future.

There is another possible approach to creating a UN Parliamentary Assembly, one that is even more gradual, and perhaps therefore that much more achievable. This approach envisages a parliamentary assembly attached to some other organization in the UN system rather than to the UN itself. (Again, this has a precedent in the European experience: the parliamentary assembly which was the precursor of the European Parliament was first attached to a specialized agency, the European Coal and Steel Community.)

Rather than seeking to attach an assembly to any existing UN agency (UNESCO, UNICEF, etc.), which might entail the same difficulties as attaching it to the main body of the UN, we could plan now to put it forward as a component of some new future agency or authority. A new one is certain to be created for some purpose eventually, although the most likely one would be a world environmental authority.

Any umbrella convention on the world environment, when and if it is ever negotiated, could well include provisions to create new institutional mechanisms, such as an environmental authority within the United Nations system (see box). With the attention now being given to the environment by citizens' groups and governments alike, it is a fertile area, and an exceptionally appropriate one, in which to organize for a parliamentary assembly. On the subject of the environment, public interest is high, the case for direct public involvement is particularly strong, and citizen involvement, at least through non-governmental organizations, is already established at the UN.

A parliamentary assembly attached to an environmental authority would bring to that agency the same kinds of benefits as it would to the United Nations itself. It consequently deserves to be considered on its own merits for what it can do to improve the work of the environmental authority, and not only as a step toward something more.

Subsequent to the establishment of this environmental parliament, a way could be sought to either attach it to the UN as well, or to create another such assembly at the UN using the first as a precedent.

An environmental authority

An environmental authority was once proposed in a remarkable declaration issued in The Hague on March 11, 1989, by 24 heads of state and government. The declaration represents the highest possible political endorsement of the arguments made in this paper for vesting governing authority in world bodies.

Among those signing the declaration were French president François Mitterrand; West German chancellor Helmut Kohl; Egyptian president Muhammed Hosni Mubarak, as well as the prime ministers of Canada, Sweden and Norway. Other signatories of the Hague Declaration included leaders from Côte d'Ivoire, Australia, Brazil, Kenya, India, Indonesia, Italy, New Zealand, Hungary, Japan, Malta, Nether-

lands, Jordan, Senegal, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe.

The declaration begins by noting, "the very conditions of life on our planet are threatened by the severe attacks to which the earth's atmosphere is subjected.

"Solutions can only be devised on a global level. (The) situation calls not only for implementation of existing principles but also for a new approach, through the development of new principles of international law including new and more effective decision-making and enforcement mechanisms."

It calls for, "developing, within the framework of the United Nations, new institutional authority, either by strengthening existing institutions or by creating a new institution, which, in the context of the preservation of the earth's atmosphere, shall be responsible for combating any further global warming of the atmosphere and shall involve such decision-making procedures as may be effective even if, on occasion, unanimous agreement has not been achieved." The emphasis here is ours. This is a reference to binding majority decision-making — nothing less than the transfer of sovereignty to the UN.

The declaration also advocated "appropriate measures to promote the effective implementation of and compliance with the decisions of the new institutional authority, decisions which will be subject to control by the International Court of Justice."

Although this declaration was later endorsed by leaders of some 20 other countries, nothing has yet come of the proposals it makes. The fate of the declaration shows again that even when the highest political officers agree on a vision, change may not be forthcoming without sustained pressure from other sources.

The declaration's arguments will prove perennial. They represent the only known way of escape from the tragedy of the commons. When the idea of an environmental authority next re-emerges, perhaps through citizen pressure, it should be accompanied by a proposal for a parliamentary assembly as part of its structure.

Composition

In considering the composition of a UN Parliamentary Assembly, we again face a dichotomy between democratic ideals and political realism over how seats should be apportioned among countries of radically different sizes.

The ideal would be representation by population. If the parliamentary assembly had, say, 1,000 seats, which is already large for a parliament, that would be one parliamentarian per 5 million people. Many countries have fewer than 5 million people. If each country is allowed at least one parliamentarian regardless of size, that would give citizens of smaller countries disproportionate representation.

An even bigger problem arises with the largest country, China, which alone would receive about 20 per cent of the seats. Since China cannot be said to have a democratic government, that could badly compromise the integrity of the assembly (unless it was decided to take the approach of excluding participation from non-democracies altogether).

Alternatively, members could be apportioned on a sliding scale with larger and larger increments of population needed for each additional representative from a state. The smallest countries might have one member, with the largest limited to perhaps 10-20. There are many possible formulas for doing this.

This approach, although more immediately practical, has its own disadvantages. Larger countries would still have proportionately fewer representatives. More seriously, it links representation to the nation-state instead of to the citizen, thereby to some extent reinforcing the system we are trying to transform.

There probably is no perfect solution, but an acceptable solution may be to begin with the second model of the sliding scale while the assembly is in its first stage with members appointed by national legislatures, and then move to the first model of representation by population at the time the UN Parliamentary Assembly becomes directly elected.

Function

The long-term function of the parliamentary assembly is, of course, to evolve into a true UN parliament with the power to legislate. Initially, however, it would not likely have formal powers.

We could envisage that the assembly would, like the UN General Assembly, be able to draft and vote on resolutions. Officially, its resolutions could be taken as recommendations, and would not be binding on governments any

more than the resolutions of the General Assembly itself are, but they would be a source of moral suasion and direction and would help in formulating a global political consensus around issues.

In the beginning, the General Assembly might simply receive the resolutions of the Parliamentary Assembly for information. A more advanced possibility would be to empower the Parliamentary Assembly to request that the General Assembly debate and vote on at least some of its resolutions as though they had been introduced by a member government. In this way the Parliamentary Assembly could force governments to at least speak to issues and proposals that otherwise would not or could not be raised. This is particularly important on questions which governments, as governments, are in collusion with each other not to address, such as reform of the United Nations.

Additionally, the Parliamentary Assembly might review and adopt resolutions of the General Assembly. Resolutions which passed with a certain specified majority in both assemblies, regardless of where they originated, could be accorded some higher status, conceivably even the status of binding international law in some situations.

As in any parliament, there would be standing committees formed in which most of the study of issues and drafting of resolutions would take place. This in itself would be a valuable process. (It is shocking to think how few independent, internationally constituted bodies exist for considering policies for government action on the major global issues of our day. Many of those bodies that do exist, for instance UN experts groups, are made up of partisans appointed by governments because they can be relied upon to hold fast to the same rigid political positions all over again.) Parliamentary committees would provide an open-ended process of thought and discussion. This would be a new point of entry for citizens' action groups to introduce ideas into the UN process and to lobby to have them adopted.

Financial Issues

One of the main arguments we can expect governments to raise against the idea of a Parliamentary Assembly will be cost. With so many governments swimming in red ink, there is a plausibility to their reluctance to spend on anything new. But an unwillingness to spend on improving the United Nations is false economy at its ludicrous worst. The price of our international mechanisms of co-operation is by any rational calculation an incomparable

bargain next to the vast costs of inaction or misguided action on the huge problems facing the world.

By "saving" money at the UN, governments must often spend many times more to do for themselves what the UN could do more cheaply on behalf of all. In a world without an adequate security system, states seek to defend themselves through national military means at a cost approaching US\$1 *trillion* a year. That's 1,000 times more than the UN's basic budget! A UN security system with sufficient credibility to be able to prevent an incident like Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait would not cost a fraction of what was spent fighting the Gulf War at a later stage, an amount estimated at some US\$50 billion, plus the unspeakable human costs, the huge costs of rebuilding Kuwait and Iraq, and the horrendous costs to the environment of oil spills in the Red Sea and 600 oil wells burning out of control for months.

Similar arguments can be made across the board. The lack of investment in the education and nutrition of the impoverished children of the third world — something that could conceivably be orchestrated through an improved and better funded UN system — will result in incalculable costs to the whole world community in the future through lost trade and lost knowledge and genius, quite apart from the personal agony of those who will not be helped.

As a last point under the heading of finances, it is *essential* that the salary and travel costs of UN parliamentarians should be paid by the institution of the UN Parliamentary Assembly from its own budget (which would be part of the UN budget), and not by the national governments individually. This is both to assure the independence of the UNPA politicians in their service to the UN and to assure equality of participation.

3

The UN Parliamentary Assembly and the Transformation of World Politics

Knowing how much change to expect in a political situation is part of the art of politics and negotiation. It helps when making such judgements to remember a basic characteristic of the evolutionary process: the apparently small initial developments in an immature system may require vastly more evolutionary "effort" than the huge strides made later within a mature system.

In biological evolution, the first simple multi-cellular creatures took billions of years to develop, whereas the path from there to the dinosaurs is measured in only hundreds of millions of years. The next steps to mammals and the infinite complexities of the human mind were accomplished in just tens of millions of years. The pace of change accelerates with complexity, something evident again today in the quickening pace of development of technology and society.

When we analyze the present international order, we see that in political terms it is an anarchical system, an immature system, almost a non-system, characterized by a lack of effective institutions of law and governance and even of a well-developed common ethos or identity. If in this primitive world order apparently small changes seem to require great energy, it may be because the changes are not so small at all. Establishing a UN Parliamentary Assembly that has no more than a consultative role might appear, next to the powerful dinosaur of the nation-state system, to be bringing forth no more than a mouse, but as with that first mammal far back in the fossil record, its significance lies not in its size, not in its strength, but in its revolutionary design.

The apparent smallness of the change represented by the UN Parliamentary Assembly proposed here masks its real significance as a breakthrough to a new paradigm — a breach, in fact, of the state-centric ideology that animates the nation-state system, a change similar to the way the parliaments of old

represented a fundamental breach of the power of the monarchies by giving legitimacy to the rights of a new political category called "the people."

The struggle against state-centric ideology

The dinosaur of the day is state-centric thinking, which sees the world not in terms of its people, its humanity, but as a collection of governments, sovereign and separate. Individuals can be citizens and claim rights only within nation-states. Strictly speaking, there are no citizens at the international level, there are only governments; there are neither citizen interests, nor global interests, only national interests; there are no citizen rights or responsibilities, there are only treaties among governments. State-centric thinking sees this as the objective order of the world — as indeed it is. But when it proceeds to say that this is how matters *should* be, it becomes ideological. State-centric thinking would hold, as a matter of doctrine, that humanity *should* not be conceptualized as a society of individuals, struggling to become free and equal, ultimately entitled as a whole people to self-government. It would add that the world *should* not strive to make progress toward such an ideal.

This ideology so often wears the clothes of empirical science, we hardly even recognize it as an ideology. We are so immersed in it, like fish in water, that we hardly know it's there — until we try to move against it and feel its resistance. The UN Parliamentary Assembly is a powerful challenge precisely to this ideological aspect of contemporary political "science" and the establishment view.

State-centric thinking is an inherently anti-democratic ideology because it refuses to acknowledge the very existence of a *demos*, a world citizenry, that could have a collective will or sovereignty that governments must serve. Democracy means people have an inalienable right to be represented in the political decision-making that affects their lives. State-centric thinking, as espoused even by governments of the great democracies, denies democracy by asserting that there is no higher law-making authority than the nation-state, and that the views of the majority outside the borders of a state can therefore have no proper claim on decisions it makes, even if those decisions materially affect them. If the people of the world could somehow vote to end nuclear weapons testing, it would not be — and state-centric ideology would say *should not* be — of any legal or even moral consequence to the countries doing the testing. Nation-state ideology would also say that the proper loyalty of the citizen is to his or her own nation-state, again denying the possibility of democratic life beyond the sovereign state.

A UN Parliamentary Assembly, however, stands for a pro-democratic view of international life. It is much more than just another institution: it is a symbol of another kind of world order. Its very existence would legitimate a set of profound political ideas, among them:

- the idea of a direct person-planet relationship not mediated by national governments;
- the idea of the individual as world citizen in addition to national citizen;
- the idea of the world as one community, not just a collection of governments;
- the idea of a world moving beyond the nation-state system toward a destiny of increasing political integration.

In the way the European Parliament has stood for a view of Europe that is not only a regional arrangement of governments, but a larger society to which the *people* of Europe belong, so a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly would stand for a whole new view of the world ... of a world whose peoples are, in some deep sense, truly one.

As a body of parliamentarians representing citizens, the assembly's members represent the idea that such a thing as a world citizenry exists and should be recognized as a political category. They confront state-centric ideology with the new idea that the world's individuals must be seen holistically as constituting a body politic, a political community whose members, the citizens, have a right to the most direct possible participation in their own self-government. And, in signifying the coming into existence of a world polity, a UN Parliamentary Assembly signifies also the emergence of a *planetary* ethos distinct from, and juxtaposed to, the state-centric ethos of national self-interest.

How does it do all this? It is in its nature as a parliament. Where there is a parliament, empowered to legislate, there can be assumed to be a community of values and interests; where there is a parliamentary assembly, there can be presumed to be the *beginnings* of a community of values — which the assembly's own existence helps advance.

But there is something else, something simple and subtle but revelatory. When the European parliamentarians are sitting — and we would expect this would be the same for a UN Parliamentary Assembly — they group themselves not according to the states they come from, but *according to their parties and political affinities*. This act, which has no explanation within the nation-state system, is the consummating step that takes us across to the other paradigm beyond the nation-state system. Sitting with their colleagues

according to shared *ideas* rather than nationality, they show that individuals can legitimately be united by identifications, values, interests, and loyalties beyond the nation-state. They shatter the idea of the supremacy of the nation-state with its separate and sovereign solitudes as the basis for organizing the world. They represent, instead, the idea of the integration of the world.

The power of a UN Parliamentary Assembly lies first of all in the power of the *ideas* which governments legitimize in the act of establishing it. And ideas, as a great philosopher once said, have consequences.

Afterword

A Personal History of the Idea

I am told that it would interest posterity to know what originally led to the writing of the booklet *The Case for a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly*.

Since that booklet was first published by the World Federalist Movement in 1992, the idea of a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly (UNPA) has been smoldering like a fire in a coal seam. Now, a decade-and-a-half later, it seems to be ablaze with fresh energy, thanks to the work of others in the intervening years. I might mention in particular Andreas Bummel and the Committee for a Democratic U.N. in Berlin. In the past few years, the Campaign for a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly which is lead by the Committee has inspired a network of individuals and organizations in over 115 countries to actively promote the idea, and some 600 current members of national parliaments have publicly endorsed it.

To what extent my initial writing of that thin booklet so far back has contributed to what's happening today, I will leave for others to determine. Here I will simply answer the above question, for what it may be worth.

In the 1980s, I was a nearly full-time, volunteer activist for world federalism, heady with the idea that I was an agent of evolution and a co-creator of the world, which is how I liked to frame the work of social activism. Activists are artists who work with people, agendas, meetings, and brochures to shape and create the future.

The 1980s was the period of Ronald Reagan's "reign of error." During this clamorous, calamitous time of heightened Cold War tension, the larger peace movement that arose was focused on arms control and disarmament. I was choosing to work with the World Federalists of Canada because its focus was on the underlying conditions that would make disarmament possible, namely the institutions that could replace war and the rule of force with the rule of law.

What the peace movement was missing was that war has a function - it is a decision-making mechanism for determining who will govern in a particular place or prevail in a conflict. World federalists reasoned there would con-

tinue to be war (and a commensurate, irrepressible demand for armaments) until humanity succeeded in replacing the decision-making function of war with an alternative, peaceful mechanism. That great mechanism is, of course, a regime of laws and courts.

Our long term vision was of uniting the world in a democratic federation, but world federalists are realistic idealists. We saw the ideal in practical day-to-day terms as a kind of polaris, rather than a goal to be imminently achieved. It was an epochal vision to be approached over generations in a maturing world. Guided by our polaris, our immediate work was around strengthening and democratizing the United Nations, where we regarded progress as feasible.

For most of the 1980s, I worked out of Toronto with my partner Kit Pineau, but in 1987 our commitment to this work took us to New York where I joined the staff of Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA) as a writer. This was an organization that had grown out of the world federalist movement by cobbling together the handful of extant parliamentary world federalist groups clinging to life within various national parliaments. The driving force for this was an unlikely twenty-something-year-old Nicholas Dunlop, a wunderkind world federalist from New Zealand who had come to the United States and bedazzled with his ability to speak luminously in complete paragraphs, and who could use said abilities to charm politicians and donors alike into action around global security reforms.

Originally known as Parliamentarians for World Order, this was the group that orchestrated the Six Nation Peace Initiative, bringing together leaders of six middle power countries (India, Sweden, et al) to attempt to nudge the US and Soviet Union toward better relations. The PGA was no longer explicitly world federalist, but its mission remained strongly focused in that direction, especially while Nick was Secretary General. The organization was intellectually courageous on the big questions of global system change. How do you get political reform in the global system? Who were the actors? What were the levers to start the process of moving the UN toward becoming more democratic and more empowered?

PGA, being made up of members of national legislatures and congresses, was uniquely able to get through to political leaders at the highest levels to engage them on various ideas and initiatives. My task was drafting many of the documents for this, the letters, speeches, calls to action, etc. From the vantage point of PGA, I was able to see fleetingly behind the curtain of government into the machinery that made the sausages of foreign policy, and what I saw could be quite disheartening.

It became clear that even when the leaders of government supported a proposal, it did not necessarily mean action would be forthcoming. The dip-

lomats and bureaucrats of the foreign ministries had a power of their own working for them: inertia. They could subvert the best intentions of the leaders by simply going limp.

Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, for example, was a leader PGA was close to. Nick remembers a meeting with Gandhi where, on hearing a PGA proposal, he turned to his foreign ministry officials and asked in a pointed aside, "Why can't I support this?"

Gandhi once incorporated some PGA ideas into a groundbreaking speech to the UN General Assembly calling for a global security system. PGA followed up with the Indian Mission to the UN, and got nowhere. Just dissembling, prevarication, and uncomfortable looks from the officials, co-mingled with hints of hostility at our meddling with their leader.

Gandhi had been free-thinking instead of reading from the Indian foreign ministry's script, and in response his officials were determined to miss every opportunity to implement whatever it was he had been on about. This was a big lesson, at least for me, about the institutional momentum of bureaucracies. Bureaucracies are made up of people, and people can have agendas, pride, career goals, and beliefs.

Even if the highest leaders of government, like Gandhi, were persuaded about some bold initiative, if it was too fresh and bold, and the civil service did not like it, the leaders were easily thwarted. Leaders could give grand speeches, but they couldn't flip the switch at their United Nations missions or foreign ministries that could deliver the results. Gandhi's global security system withered out. We saw other initiatives meet the same fate.

If change had to come through the agencies of foreign ministries, it could take a long time, perhaps decades, to inculcate in a civil service such a major directional shift, one which asked of them that they work toward reducing their own power by creating authoritative global institutions. People being people, they don't easily change paradigms mid-career, nor do they get motivated by shifting control to institutions not their own.

If we wanted to move the world from a war system based on national sovereignty to a rule-of-law system based on common security, that might well require in many countries replacing a large part of the foreign ministries with new people in tune with the new direction. And that too would meet with resistance from the institutions' old cultures. Change would necessarily require a sustained pressure on the foreign ministries to steer a new course. What field of force could accomplish that?

Sometime after this, in the spring of 1988, I had a fateful discussion with Saul Mendlovitz, an academic with the World Policy Institute and a leading world order thinker in the United States, going over yet again the question of how to get the United Nations reform process started. As I remember, he was

test-flying a new initiative for converging the world's non-governmental organizations into a coherent driving force on governments to act on UN reform.

And as I listened, I suddenly felt overcome by a great weariness. I may have aged a few years in those moments as a kind of preemptive despair set in. I heard myself pessimistically doubting that there were enough world-order minded people or enough resources in the NGO sector to provide for the kind of sustained campaign we knew would be needed. The NGOs, especially in those pre-Internet days, were balkanized into their various issue bailiwicks and were lacking in everything. Above all they lacked any consensus that UN reform of the kind we were talking about was even something to pursue.

That discussion set me to wondering again about the European example. How had the Europeans been able to succeed in creating their institutions?

At about precisely that time, as I was floating around with such thoughts, a European magazine happened across my desk at the PGA. An article talked about the role of the European parliament in the creation of the European Community. The light went on.

I read with new eyes about the sustained influence the European Parliament had brought to bear, even from its earliest years when it was simply made up of sitting members of national parliaments. It began with no formal powers. But by bringing parliamentarians together as it did, it allowed a kind of political alchemy to occur. Galvanized by their experience, many of these parliamentarians went home and began working for the European project. Behind the scenes or otherwise, they helped keep governments and their ministries on the course of reforming Europe's institutions, including the parliament itself.

The parliamentarians - supported also, certainly, by civil society organizations - were the real engine of change. They were the essential influence on the governments over the years, with the result that the European Union stands today as a towering achievement of supranational institution-building. It is delivering the benefits of unity that its people now welcome and support and would not wish to undo. Most of all, their work has been vindicated by a deepening confidence that enduring peace has been achieved in Europe - peace for the first time ever on a continent that has known recurring war for many thousands of years. How large an accomplishment is that?

I concluded the single best thing we UN reformers could do would be to stop dissipating ourselves in trying to promote this or that isolated policy to deaf governments and their equally unhearing, unimaginative and unambitious foreign ministries. Instead we might try uniting our meager energies behind just one common goal that would serve all our causes, that of creating

a consultative assembly at the UN. We could hope that once founded, even if only as a subsidiary body by means of a very simple mechanism in the UN Charter, it could recapitulate for us at the UN the course of events followed by the European parliament. Such an assembly of parliamentarian actors, if we could just get it established, would provide the onward momentum (and oversight of the foreign ministries) necessary to its further evolution as a house of the people at the UN.

What I saw as new in this was not the idea of a world parliament per se. That was as old as Tennyson, and there had been plenty of "people's assembly" proposals over the years, all of them blithely assuming the availability of rivers of political will in a time of drought. In fact, I was engaged during that period in batting away some of these very proposals that circulated like flies around the margins of the world federalist movement, precisely for being politically unrealistic and tactical missteps toward predictable dead ends.

What shifted for me was seeing a possible parliamentary body not as a final tree but as something able to be begun from a small seed with the most modest of steps. This made it achievable even in a time of low political will. Once established, it could be its own best advocate, generating its own creative force from within as it all the while drove the process of UN reform itself.

I went from seeing it as a goal to seeing it as a method.

I found an early friend for this idea in Keith Best, formerly an officer of PGA when he was a member of parliament in the UK. At that time we were both serving as officers with the World Federalist Movement (known then as the World Association for World Federation, the international umbrella organization of world federalists).

Keith subsequently contributed a variation of the idea, that of having a consultative assembly attached to a subsidiary body of the UN, perhaps one yet to be established, or even to the World Trade Organization, if it became apparent that attaching it to the UN was still too ambitious. Keith's support for the parliamentary assembly idea encouraged me, and helped with getting it quickly up the flag pole at WFM.

I was also interested to learn, once I began hunting through the annals of UN parliamentary proposals of yore, that an idea very similar to what I was thinking had already been proposed in the 1960s. I was just reinventing a wheel after all, but that didn't surprise me either. What was new were the times. Our contribution was seeing the new opportunity to give fresh articulation and promotion to an idea from other contexts and other times in the new environment of a post-Cold-War setting.

I left New York at the end of my stint with PGA in 1990, and returned to Toronto to continue researching and writing. After the booklet was pub-

lished, there followed a string of encouraging successes, including a commendation by an all-party committee of the Canadian government the following year.

As I write this in 2010, we dare to hope that we are building toward a "tipping point" when the idea becomes unstoppable. I continue to hope it will happen soon, and that soon does not prove to be too late in a world so beset with crisis and need.

Biographical Note

Dieter Heinrich was born in Germany in 1954 and emigrated with his family to Toronto, Canada at the age of three. He graduated with a Bachelor of Applied Arts (Journalism) from Ryerson University in 1978. In 1981 he became a committed activist with the World Federalists of Canada (now World Federalist Movement - Canada), and subsequently served the organization as president in the mid-80s. He also served around this time as Policy Chair for the World Association for World Federation, now the World Federalist Movement. He worked for two years as a writer and consultant for Parliamentarians for Global Action in New York in the late 80s, returning to Toronto in 1990. In the mid-90s, he reduced his political involvement to start a digital publishing business. He has served on the Council of the World Federalist Movement - Canada for 30 years.



