

UNITING FOR PEACE

UN, Great Powers and World Peace



Speaker

Vijay Mehta

vijay@vmpeace.org

www.unitingforpeace.org

Chair, Uniting for Peace, Author, How Not To Go To War: Establishing
Departments for Peace and Peace Centres Worldwide

Venue:

UK Parliament
Attlee's Suite, Portcullis House
1 Parliament Street, Westminster
London SW1A 2JR
United Kingdom

Date and Time:

Wednesday
30 October 2019
18:00 – 20:00

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Introduction

Distinguished speakers, chair and delegates, welcome to the UN, Great Powers and World Peace meeting.

Since its inception in 1945, the United Nations has played an instrumental part in global affairs. It has served as a platform as resolving international disputes, maintaining peace in turbulent areas across the globe and played host to altruist diplomats and despotic dictators alike. It has not, however, being free of controversy. Criticism directed at the supposed ineffectiveness of the United Nation's Security Council and accusations of abuse towards members of the peacekeeping corps, demonstrate that it is not a perfect organisation. As we delve deeper in the 21st Century, the future of United Nations especially its funding requirements and authority remains uncertain. Will it buckle and break under the pressure created by rising nationalism among its member states or will it thrive in our ever more technological and connected world?

Major power rivalries

Dear friends, while we meet for this lecture, lots of changes are taking place in the world. Everywhere from Hong Kong to the Beirut, from Quito to Santiago, from Barcelona to London and Paris, frustration and violence is spreading throughout the world. Experts have spotted a pattern: these mass demonstrations are against elites in countries where democracy is a source of disappointment, corruption is seen as brazen and a tiny elite political class lives lavishly while the younger generation struggle to get by.

UK is engulfed with the Brexit crisis and the US President, Donald Trump is flouting most of the international treaties like the INF (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces) treaty and agreements like the Paris Climate Change Accord. The world seems spinning out of control. West-Russia relations deteriorating with NATO threatening extension to Georgia and Ukraine. The Israel-Gaza border crisis festers with many protestors killed, and no just solution for Palestinians in prospect. US sanction on Iran and trade war with China and Turkey further destabilises the already volatile region. Major power rivalries and proxy wars in the Middle East prevent the vitally needed peace in Syria, Yemen and Iraq undermining the UN System.

China, Russia and USA are dominant major powers and each influences the world in very different ways. China seeks dominance in the Far East by economic power. The US sustains its global military power by huge arms spending, its network of bases, policies of interventionism, alliances such as NATO, sanction regimes against perceived enemies such as Iran. Russia safeguards its frontiers against NATO expansionism in the West and Islamist forces by its military strength, keeps close links with most ex-Soviet states and has a de-facto military and political alliance with China.

It's difficult to argue that any of these three powers see the United Nation as a primary forum for its diplomatic influence and global role – though all will use the UN to try to build allies on key issues. As permanent members of the Security Council, they are at the forefront of decision making on World Peace and Security. It is also noteworthy that the five permanent Security Council members (USA, UK, China, France, Russia) are also the leading global arms exporters which shows contradiction at the heart of the UN system, since tensions and conflicts bring them economic benefit.

UN's Role of Global Governance is Slipping Away

Another troubling fact is global governance is slipping away from the United Nations – whether managing the internet, tackling climate change, rising inequality or global conflicts. Another recent development is while in the past NGOs were the largest on state entities attending the UN meetings, and now trans-national corporations have become the biggest players changing the UN agenda of trade, development and Human Rights Council and the high level political body following up **SDG (Sustainable Development Goals)**, according to what suits them. As UN is being starved of cash and around 60 countries have failed to pay their dues, corporate takeover of the UN has started which could severely restrict implementation of effective multilateralism, a founding principle of the United Nations. Where democracy fails, history tells us that violence, wars and conflicts usually follows.

All these argues for urgent restoration of the authority of UN as world's leading and most representative forum for global conflict resolution and peace building. However the million dollar question is how 200 countries which are UN members including permanent 5 members of the Security Council (P5), USA, UK, China,

Russia France, China can work together to solve some of these intractable problems facing the world today?

Dear Friends, What is UN? The UN is the institutional expression of the international community. The corner stone of our international system and the key factor of the effective multilateralism. It is the essential instrument of member states to confront common challenges, manage shared responsibilities and exercise collective action, in an enduring course for peaceful, inclusive and sustainably developed world, in which the international law and the dignity and worth of the human person are fully pursued.

UN and its various agencies like World Health Organisation (WHO), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR), United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) among many other have done tremendous amount of good work in alleviating diseases, poverty and providing education to hundreds of millions of people. Not many people know that UN World Food Programme provides food assistance to an average of 104 million people in 80 countries every year. It supplies vaccines to 45% of the world's children helping to save 3 million lives a year. UNCHR for the first time since 2nd World War has to take care of higher number of refugees and displaced people (over 65 million), one in every 122 people alive are refugees. UN feed people in warzones, natural disasters, health emergencies and poor countries.

After 74 year of its formation, has UN become a talking shop, a toothless tiger or irrelevant to the formidable challenges of the 21st Century? Certainly it has not been able to fulfil its preamble goal of ...

"...to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war which in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind." (Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations)

It is evident from continuing wars in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan before and genocide in Myanmar now, the UN has no power to prevent conflicts, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Dag Hammarskjold, 2nd UN Secretary General said, "The UN was not created to take humanity to heaven but save it from hell."

There is another group of people who are of the opinion that UN is a showcase or a front for the Western powers, corporations, elites and the military who have set up the UN to delude the majority of world population for its own gains. The 5 permanent members of the UN Security Council (US, China, Russia, France, UK) are also the biggest arms makers and war mongers. If that was not the case why there is continuation of wars, also why in a world of plenty in the 21st Century, 3 billion people are forced to live on \$2 a day while according to a report by Oxfam, 8 rich people own as much wealth as 3.6 billion or half of the humanity. 20,000 people die of hunger every day, while at the same time \$4 billion is spent on weapons, armaments and other military expenditure on a daily basis.

Strengthening the Role of the United Nations and its Secretary General for Building a Peaceful World

Dear Friends, for building a peaceful world, we need UN Reforms in areas of:

International Peacekeeping and Security, Security Council, General Assembly, Human Rights, Climate Change, Poverty Reduction, Combating Terrorism, Gender Equality, Media and Public Relations and Funding of the UN.

Any plausible UN reform starts with compromise. The Security Council needs to be large enough to be representative, but small enough to do business. It should reflect real power in the world which means countries not represented in decision making like India, Brazil South Africa should be given a Security Council membership which will legitimise decision making.

The UK plays a key role at the UN. It is one of the 15 strong security council's 5 permanent members, which means it can play a key role in the decision making process of the united nation. In that respect it can help establish peace keeping mission and place sanctions on countries. Being a Security Council member of the UN it can help to make an effective and strengthened UN for ending wars and interventions, maintenance of international peace and security. It can set an example by actively helping to implement the newly agreed Sustainable Development Goals, work for nuclear disarmament and also for the recently concluded Paris Climate Agreement.

UK must put its values at the heart of its foreign policy. It cannot be silent at the cruel Saudi war on Yemen, while continuing to supply arms to Saudi Arabia or the crushing of democracy of Egypt or Bahrain or the tragic loss of life in Congo, and fail to condemn the violence committed against the Rohingya in Myanmar. So let Britain's voice be loud and clear for peace, justice and cooperation.

The Secretary General Antonio Guterres should as a matter of urgency implement the following recommendations for reform to strengthen the United Nations:

1. The UN Secretary General should adopt United Nation's General Assembly draft resolution: 'Building Ministries or Departments for Peace' within governments to strengthen the culture of peace (draft resolution ref 4/26/10).
2. First and foremost, different parts of UN should work in unity in coherence for the same purpose without duplicating efforts in its agencies, programmes and funds.
3. UN should strengthen the role of developing countries (the South) over the industrialised states (the North) to eliminate the status quo of marginalisation of developing countries.
4. The UN should provide a friendly forum where politicians who have galloped away in their belligerent rhetoric can lower their tone, diffuse the tension and discreetly withdraw without losing too much face as in North Korea, Syria and Iran.
5. The Secretary General should tackle propaganda of war. The prevalence of belligerent rhetoric, sabre-rattling and war-mongering, including irresponsible media-hype and blatant propaganda for war have been responsible for many armed conflicts. It happens because of incitement by politicians and the media, pursuing a logic of war and rejecting other options for the solutions of international disputes by negotiation and diplomacy.
6. The SG should work to deter the undemocratic impact of the Military-Industrial Complex on governments and the general lack of budget and fiscal transparency in most countries which constitutes a major problem. Few people know, in 2018, the world spent \$1.82 trillion in armaments. US on its own spend \$700 billion every year in engaging in foreign wars and maintaining military bases. As the former UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon has famously said, "The world is over-armed and peace is underfunded."
7. The SG should use his unique moral authority to uphold the rule of law which is a vital element of conflict prevention and peacekeeping as the rules - based international system is enshrined in the Charter of United Nations. The breach of peace by aggression constitutes an international wrongful act giving rise to state responsibility, the obligation to make

reparation and personal criminal liability. There has been countless wars and aggressions since the Nuremburg and Tokyo trials and whereas tribunals have produced significant case and law on war crimes and crimes against humanity, there has been no progress with regard with the prosecution of the crime against peace.

Way Forward

Today, it is urgent to overcome authoritarianism, destructive neo-liberalism which depresses the elderly, frustrate so many young people and ends up setting fire to our cities, pushing us into plutocracy, kleptocracy, replacing democratic norms.

In an age when more and more problems facing humanity are global and the world has more and more need for a global institutions through which to forge and implement global strategies, it is more than ever necessary for the United Nations to live up to the promise of its Charter – and, above all, the demands and hopes of future generations.

What has changed is that the permanent members of the Security Council are realising that they are no longer the superpowers of the world as they were once after the Second World War. Countries such as India, Brazil, Japan, Germany, South Africa and others are playing a very important role in the 21st century and should be members of the Security Council. It is increasingly being realised that if proper status and inclusion is not granted to the emerging giants, they will bypass the UN Security Council and take their own decisions as they will be the one who will be running the show in the 21st century. It's time the UN becomes more representative of the people of the world, reflecting the importance of emerging countries of the world.

What else has changed is that the threats and challenges of today are increasingly global, like terrorism, climate change and financial crises. They are so vast and huge that it cannot be tackled by one single country no matter how powerful it may be. We are living in an interdependent world, a global village in which co-operation and not rivalries will work for the survival of mankind.

The future of the UN lies in it as a major contributor of people, ideas and bringing new and invisible issues to the forefront. I believe UN benefits the world, it creates a global forum for discussion, dialogue, communication for the progress of

mankind. UN should mobilize international civil society and global public opinion to carry forward a vision for a just and fairer world. Its strength is evident from the fact that when the United Nations passes a resolution, it is seen as speaking for humanity as a whole, thus giving it unique legitimacy and support for an action to be taken by a country. 193 member states should embark on a reform agenda for security council which will make UN accountable, transparent and democratic decision making body, an organisation fit for facing challenges and threats of 21st Century successfully.

Dear Friends, do we still need the United Nations? The answer is YES. It is the only inclusive global institution suitable for bringing a peaceful future and offers a common vision for a safer and better world which includes peace, respect, tolerance, unity, friendship, diversity and inclusion as all of us have a desire to protect the planet and advance the welfare of the humanity

The bottom-line is how we can make a better place for ourselves and for future generations. We can start today, in this room. How? By some of you taking up the mantle and working for strengthening the United Nations to realise the aims of its founders – which are International Peace and Security, Environmental Protection, wiping global poverty, Respect for Human Rights, Economic and Social Justice and The Rule of Law. You can do so by joining United Nations and its Agencies and the best place to look for choosing a career in the international field is to check out the UN Portal (careers.un.org). Be a diplomat, travel the world and change it for better for yourself and others.

Positive actions all us can take are to invest in peace education and Culture of Peace, promote the diversification of arms industries, swords into ploughshares. UK should lead by example through dialogue, diplomacy, building trust and work for maintaining peace and security by mediation and conflict resolution. A reformed, democratic, transparent and accountable UN, along with the cooperation of the international community and a strong civil society, can produce the result in consigning war to history and making the dream of achieving peace a reality.

‘Where nations work together, hope prevails and collective solutions can be found.’ Said Secretary General of UN, Antonio Guterres. History demonstrates that if multiple stakeholders NGOs business community, regional and local leaders and individual citizens work together global risks can be addressed effectively. The adoption of Ottawa Convention creation of millennium development goals, the

coalition which created the International Criminal Court and the Paris Climate Agreement are such examples of the UN success.

Conclusion

Remember there is no challenge that is beyond our capacity to achieve as human beings. People like you in this room and across the world have the capital, knowledge and technology to implement changes for not only to eliminate extreme poverty, bring peace and justice but also realise the UN Charter Preamble Goal of “...to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war which in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind.”

If we can fulfil the above goals, UN will not be a talking shop or irrelevant, but a global player fit and strong to tackle the challenges facing the 21st Century. Then we can proudly say everyone has the right to enjoy peace.

Thank you for Listening.

Any part of this lecture may be transcribed without permission giving credit to Vijay Mehta as the author of the article/speech and providing a link to Uniting for Peace website (www.unitingforpeace.com). Download the full speech at www.unitingforpeace.com

Notes:

The following publications were consulted and excerpts have been taken from them during the writing of this article:

1. Vijay Mehta, How Not To Go To War: Establishing Departments for Peace and Peace Centres Worldwide, New Internationalist, London, 2019
2. Vijay Mehta, Peace Beyond Borders: How the EU brought Peace to Europe and how exporting in would end conflicts around world, New Internationalist, London 2016
3. Vijay Mehta – The Economics of Killing, How the West fuels War and Poverty in the Developing World, Pluto Press, London 2012
4. Vijay Mehta, Surviving the 21st Century – Global Challenges, Threats and Prospects for Peace, May 2015, London
5. Clare Short, UN at 70: What Prospects for Peace?, 23 September 2015 speech at London
6. Federico Mayor, Building a Culture of Peace in a World of Conflicts, 6th October 2016 speech at London
7. John Smart - A 21 century United Nations? It is about time- 2010.
8. Vijay Mehta Reforming the UN for the 21 century – Royal Overseas Club, Edinburgh Scotland 2010.
9. SIPRI. “Recent Trends in Military Expenditures- 2016”.
10. Sir Mark Lyall Grant – from a talk given at APPG 2010.
11. Henry Bellingham MP, Foreign and Commonwealth office minister with responsibility for United Nations- 2010.
12. The Economist, ‘Thinking the Unthinkable.’ 11 November 2010
13. Antonio Guterres, Challenges and Opportunities for the United Nations, 2016
14. Vijay Mehta, UN Institutional Reforms, Vancouver 2006
15. Caroline Lucas, Crisis in the UN, NATO and the EU, 2003
16. Denis Halliday, United Nations: The Embarrassment of International Law, 2002

17. Alfred de Zayas, *The Human Right To Peace – Foundation for a Just International Order*, London, October 2014
18. 8 People own the same wealth as half the world, Oxfam Report, January 2017
19. Rene Wadlow, *Many Forms of Violence Against Women*, November 2016
20. Stephen Hawking, *Brief Answers to Big Questions*, Hodder & Stoughton, 2018

Vijay Mehta is an author and peace activist. He is Chair of [Uniting for Peace](#) and founding Trustee of [Fortune Forum](#) Charity. His notable books include *'The Economics of Killing'* (Pluto Press, 2012) and *'Peace Beyond Borders'* (New Internationalist, 2016). His current book is *'How Not To Go To War'* (New Internationalist, 2019)

The Sunday Times described him as a “longstanding activist for peace, development, human rights and the environment, who along with his daughter Renu Mehta has set a precedent for striving to change the world” (**The Sunday Times**, February 01, 2009).

In 2014, Vijay Mehta’s bio *“The Audacity of Dreams”* appeared in the book form *“Karma Kurry”* published by Jaico Publishing House, India with a foreword to the book by **Nelson Mandela**.

“Thank you for all you do Vijay – both the organisation Uniting for Peace and yourself are inspiration and give us all hope that both yourself and the organisation can bring a world without a war. Indeed it is possible, even in our own time.” – **Mairead Corrigan Maguire, Nobel Peace Laureate 1976**

*“Vijay Mehta proposes in his book **How Not To Go To War** that in countries and communities, in governments, private institutions and media, Peace Departments and Peace Centres be established to report on and promote peace.”* – **Jose Ramos-Horta, Nobel Peace Laureate 1996 and Former President of Timor-Leste**

“I’m happy to give my support to Ministry for Peace whose responsibility would include being a consistent voice for non-violent means of settling disputes” – **His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Nobel Peace Laureate 1989**

In 2017, Vijay Mehta’s article, *‘Reforming the UN for the 21st Century’* was included in the anthology *‘Approaches to Peace’* edited by Prof. David P. Barash published by Oxford University Press, New York. The anthology features classic and contemporary selection of work on peace which included **Leo Tolstoy, Martin Luther King Jr., Pope Francis, Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu and Noam Chomsky** among others.