

“COMMENTS BY VIJAY MEHTA ON A PROPOSAL FROM UNA SUDBURY BRANCH FOR REFORMS OF THE UNITED NATIONS”

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9th October, 2010

UNA Sudbury proposals for the reform are primarily of General Assembly and Security Council, main organs of UN. Both reforms proposals for GA and SC are based on the representation of the world community on the bases of its population.

The **General Assembly** has 192 members. The proposal is to have one representative for every nation with the population of fifty millions or less, two representatives of population between 50 and 100 million and three representatives for over 100 million. It is calculated that there will be 268 representatives and decision will be taken by two-third majority. It is deemed that by adopting this proposal there will be fair representation of the world community in General Assembly.

The General Assembly is already a democratic organisation with all the members of the World having one seat and one vote. How changing it to 268 representatives based on the population will make it any more democratic? All decisions by General Assembly in the Sudbury Proposal are to be taken by two third majority. There is no change as the present General Assembly also takes decisions by two third majority. So the merits of Sudbury Proposal as to how it is an improvement on the present setup needs to be explained.

What we do require is General Assembly enhancing its power by foregoing the limitation imposed on it from Article 12 which lies down that when the Security Council is exercising its functions in dealing with matters of peace and security the General Assembly shall refrain from making any recommendations. What we need is a General Assembly with “teeth” drawing on genuine global democratic representation. For this, the Security Council is required to be reformed.

At present, **Security Council** has 15 members, 5 permanent and the rest are elected on a 2 year rotating basis. The Sudbury Proposal is based on population of the entire world which is to be divided into 12 regions, with each region having one member. Regions with 500 million will have two members; with over 1 billion will have three members. With this proposal; India and China with more than 1 billion populations each will have a field day as they will be entitled to have three delegates each influencing major decisions. There have been similar proposals on the enlargement of Security Council based on geographical and population balance. One such proposal is to give permanent seats to India, Brazil, Japan and Germany, emerging giants of the 21st century.

The reality of the UNA Reforms is that in the last over 60 years, no substantial changes have taken place. In 1965 during the cold war years the superpower rivalry and competition made the enlargement of the Security Council membership from 11 to 15 possible. No other major changes have taken place after that despite Kofi Annan (former Secretary General of UN) giving the task to a High Level Panel composed of 16 prominent people from all around the world to come up with recommendations for UN reforms. The High Level Panel could not agree on a single

approach to expansion, offering two possible models instead – for enlarging the SC to 24 members, one by adding six permanent and three non permanent seats, the other by creating a new category of eight four year, renewable seats and the ninth two year non renewable seats. They did not foresee veto power for the new permanent members and urged the current once to exercise restraint in its use as they did not see any possibility of P5 members relinquishing their veto powers. But that has not materialised as other countries had different ideas. African countries for example rejected both the proposals and offered their own draft to bring the Council to 26 members giving Africa two Non permanent seats as well as two permanent seats. They also insisted on having full veto powers.

In the absence of major reform, particularly dramatic Security Council reform, any optimism in respect of the UN satisfying its' potential, global effectiveness and satisfying the fundamentals of its Charter would be misplaced. The UN Member States in control of the Security Council were then and remain now more inclined to feed warfare rather than show warfare to be an unthinkable option. Surely, experience has shown that non-violent and peaceful solutions can be rational, moral and lasting. Peace unfortunately is vastly less profitable than warfare itself and the lucrative international arms trade. A trade dominated by the five Permanent Members of the Security Council. This tragic situation is reflected in the unwillingness of "western" democracies to dialogue and seek peaceful solutions.

To accomplish Security Council reforms, long overdue North-South representation and proper geographical and population balance must be established. The somewhat quaint and dangerous veto must go. Genuine equality of membership is overdue. Democratic representation in decision making is essential. Prolonged demands for consensus and unanimity should be shelved if they do not arise naturally because when forced they may lead to ineffective compromises and decisions that are themselves incompatible with provisions of the Charter. One simple example is the genocidal consequences of UN Sanctions on the people of Iraq when the Security Council tossed aside basic human rights and maintained conditions for 13 years responsible for civilian deaths.

On a positive note, the Security Council has over the years adopted a number of revisions to changing circumstances to become more accountable and transparent. Some of these are:

- The Council invites and meet people from civil society and experts for a frank exchange of views before making a decision.
- The Council members go and visit areas of concern to the Security Council.
- The president of the Council briefs non-members and the media about the deliberations of the Security Council.
- Monthly forecast and provisional agenda is provided to non members.

However this is not enough as the other 177 members seek enlargement of Security Council. Also we have a problem with the interventionist and enforcement decisions of the Security Council on major issues of the day. So the dialogue on Security Council and General Assembly reforms continues.

I am highly thankful for Sudbury UNA to put forward the proposals about UN reforms. My suggestion would be to send these proposals along with the report of the discussion today to UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office for their comments. UK is one of the five permanent members of the Security Council and is in a unique position to initiate reforms of the UN.