An increasingly interconnected world cannot withstand enormous inequality. An overhaul of the UN system is in order or the international body will be marginalized, warn prime ministers from Pakistan, Mozambique and Norway, who were charged by the UN secretary general to offer recommendations on improving policies in three key areas: sustainable development, response to world crises and international action on environmental protection. The UN must work to improve coordination by eliminating internal competition for funding, fragmentation in management and program duplication while pursuing accountability by measuring results against millennium goals. The authors write: “Our vision is a system where the UN delivers as one on all levels, whether country, regional or headquarters.” – YaleGlobal

Unifying the UN
Shaukat Aziz
Luísa Dias Diogo
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*The International Herald Tribune, 9 November 2006*

On Thursday we are presenting proposals to Secretary General Kofi Annan on how the United Nations can greatly improve its effectiveness in the fields of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment. The secretary general asked us six months ago to co-chair a high-level panel. After consulting with numerous stakeholders around the world, listening to their concerns and suggestions, we have devised a strategy to strengthen and reform the UN.

The UN has the noblest of all mandates: peace and human progress and prosperity. It has set high standards for itself, as expressed in the millennium development goals, including cutting poverty in half, reducing child mortality by two thirds and improving maternal health.

International cooperation has been and still remains the key for dealing with an increasingly interdependent world beset by enormous social and economic inequalities.

The UN system needs to be radically overhauled, however, if it is to keep up. If not, the UN will find itself increasingly marginalized. And the ones to suffer most will be the world's poorest and most vulnerable.

To maintain its legitimate position as a leader within the multilateral system, the UN system needs drastic changes. This is imperative for the UN to be effective in supporting sustainable development, in providing more decisive responses to humanitarian crises and natural disasters.
and in mobilizing international action for the protection of the environment.

The UN and its specialized agencies have much to offer in the way of expertise, knowledge, resources and practical experience. But the system is failing widely through the lack of institutional effectiveness, cost efficiency and focus, encouraged in many cases by poor governance and unpredictable funding. Inadequate cooperation has been hindered also by internal competition for funding, mission creep and outdated practices. Furthermore, the UN’s presence in countries and regions is often fragmented and weak.

Much of this is the result of policy incoherence, program duplication and vested interests in the status quo. There is no shortage of highly professional and dedicated people within UN ranks, but many find their efforts thwarted by inappropriate administrative procedures, mediocre management and ill-conceived loyalties.

Seeking to remedy such weaknesses, the panel has proposed a set of clear recommendations that could radically strengthen the UN. Our vision is a system where the UN delivers as one on all levels, whether country, regional or headquarters.

At country level, for example, the "One UN" approach means appointing a single leader to coordinate and represent the work of all UN agencies as part of a single overall budget in coordination with national governments. By consolidating programs, the UN can reduce project duplication and ensure that each agency does what it does best. In this manner, the UN can also help the host government reach its own priorities more effectively. Starting with an initial five pilot countries in 2007, the panel has proposed a progressive unifying of all UN country programs by 2012.

To reflect the "One UN" concept at country level we propose the establishment of a UN Sustainable Development Board and a development coordinator at headquarters responsible for coordinating, funding and overseeing all activities in individual countries.

For such a system to be effective, we have recommended the establishment of a set of more appropriate governance, managerial and financial mechanisms. This includes a multiyear financing mechanism of UN country programs, complete overhaul of UN business practices and the systematic measuring of results against the millennium development goals.

These reforms will ensure national ownership of the development process and challenge donor countries to provide funding based on developing countries' own priorities.

The panel has also proposed a stronger voice for women through the creation of a single and independent UN entity. This new entity will replace existing, important but weak structures to ensure gender equality and the empowerment of women.

As the panel’s consultations have shown, there is a strong desire worldwide for a far more effective and efficient UN. But the UN will only ever be as good as its member states allow it to be. And for a better UN to be achieved, drastic reforms need to be implemented as soon as possible. The most radical and dramatic thing we can do, is to do nothing.

Shaukat Aziz is prime minister of Pakistan, Luísa Dias Diogo is prime minister of Mozambique and Jens Stoltenberg is prime minister of Norway.

Source: