

## The Case for Global Democracy

Published by  
Committee for a Democratic U.N.  
Berlin, Germany, 2010

Copyright © by the authors

2<sup>nd</sup> extended edition, March 2010

The first edition was published in September 2007  
by Bagehot Publishing, United Kingdom,  
and was compiled and edited by Christine Gilmore

Cover based on a design by Jeannette Lee

Cover picture: UN photo by Joao Araujo

[www.kdun.org](http://www.kdun.org)

ISBN 978-3-942282-06-2

# **The Case for Global Democracy**

Advocating a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly

Piia-Noora Kauppi

Jo Leinen

Graham Watson

Gérard Onesta

With an introduction by Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali  
and a foreword by Graham Watson

COMMITTEE FOR A DEMOCRATIC U.N.



# Contents

Foreword by <i>Graham Watson</i> .....	1
Introduction by <i>Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali</i> .....	5
 <i>Piia-Noora Kauppi</i> Establishing a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly.....	9
 <i>Jo Leinen</i> Creating Participation Possibilities within the United Nations .....	15
 <i>Graham Watson</i> Advocating a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly .....	21
 <i>Gérard Onesta</i> From a European to a World Parliament.....	29



# Foreword by Graham Watson

## Foreword to the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition

**I**t is rare for a political pamphlet to be re-printed. By their nature, such publications are launched to make their point and soon disappear into the mists of time. If this pamphlet is an exception it must be because the strength of the idea it promotes can be measured by its growing appeal.

Three years on from the first edition, the case for a parliamentary assembly for the United Nations seems stronger than ever. The impact of the western financial and economic crisis of 2008 left hardly a single country untouched. The persistence of poverty, disease and environmental degradation continues to stain human society, as does continuing armed conflict. Population growth and migration remain global challenges. And the failure of the global climate change talks in Copenhagen in December 2009 leaves a major threat to the sustainability of life on our planet unresolved.

The power structures of today's world are over-rewarding the rich, depriving the poor and destroying our planet. There is concern in rich countries about obesity amongst the young, while the distended stomachs of children suffering from malnutrition are too often hidden from view.

I perceive a growing recognition of the need for more effective and inclusive forms of global governance. The United Nations, which does such valuable work in so many places, is ruled by a structure designed fifty years ago. It is based on a concept of national sovereignty which, taken to its logical conclusion, creates global anarchy. This will no longer do.

Let us reform the most effective global structure we have to represent all the world's people equally. Let us reinvent democracy at a global level. Since the need is so pressing, let us act now.



*March 2010*

## Foreword to the 1<sup>st</sup> edition

The idea of producing a pamphlet on the need for a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly first came to me after participating in a press conference on the issue with Gérard Onesta and Jo Leinen in early 2007. It was clear to me then that there was a persuasive case to be made for encouraging more effective, transparent, and democratic world governance at a time of rapid globalisation and its attendant challenges — and that this view is shared by parties across the political spectrum. This pamphlet, produced by Members of the European Parliament's four major political groups with the support of former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, is an attempt to demonstrate the depth of this consensus in Europe. I hope it provides you with some food for thought. I would like to thank Piiia-Noora Kauppi, Jo Leinen and Gérard Onesta, as well as the Committee for a Democratic UN, for their support and encouragement. My thanks go also to Christine Gilmore who has assisted me in realising this project.

*September 2007*







### **Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali**

Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Egypt, was Professor of International Law and International Relations at Cairo University. He was Member of the Central Committee and the Political Bureau of the Arab Socialist Union (1974-1977) and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs (1977-1991), before becoming the sixth Secretary-General of the United Nations (1992-1996). He is currently President of the International Panel on Democracy and Development at UNESCO and is a long-time supporter of the Campaign for a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly.

## **Introduction by Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali**

**O**ver the past decades, democracy has spread continuously throughout the world. Sixty years ago, after the Second World War, a third of the world population lived in countries with democratic systems of government. Until today, the number has almost doubled. International polls show that a large majority of people in all world regions consider democracy to be the best system of government. This gratifying development should not divert our attention from the structural crisis democracy is facing in the wake of globalization.

The challenges of our time are enormous. Problems which can only be solved effectively at the global level are multiplying. The requirement of political governance is increasingly extending beyond state borders. Climate change, environmental devastation, social disparity, terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, population growth and the growing shortage of fresh water and basic foods are just a few of the pressing issues. Yet, the current economic crisis is at the top of the agenda. The global economic slowdown and price disruptions magnify the impacts of the other problems. In this globalized world, no country or individual will be left untouched by its consequences.

The last time an economic crisis of such magnitude occurred, it led to the rise of dreadful anti-democratic trends and social upheaval. It contributed to the rise of fascism, the outbreak of the Second World War and genocide. During the current global economic crisis, we should not turn a blind eye to this lesson.

Thus, while world leaders ponder governance reforms now, they must not lose sight of the importance of strengthening democracy. Measures to sustain the stability of the financial system and to absorb the immediate shocks of the crisis are, of course, in focus. However, the crisis should also be used as an opportunity to address a largely ignored aspect of democratization: Democracy within the state will diminish in importance if the process of democratization is not extended to the system of international governance as well. Applying democratic principles to international institutions must be an essen-

tial component of any reform of global governance. It was overdue to include the emerging powers from the South in major international deliberations as signified by the last G-20 meetings in Washington D.C. and London.

However, what I am referring to is not international democracy among states. The reform of the Security Council, for example, has kept legions of diplomats busy over the past decades. By contrast to this, however, a third dimension of democratization is almost completely neglected: Developing global democracy beyond states.

This project includes the task of giving the world's citizens a more direct say in global affairs. A direct link between global institutions and the people on the spot needs to be established. But how could such a project of global democratization be approached?

One indispensable means to this end is the establishment of a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly. A growing international movement advocating this goal has gained impressive political support over the last years. The endorsers of the proposal include the European Parliament, the Pan-African Parliament, the Latin American Parliament, the Senate of Argentina and over 700 members of parliament from around the world.

A United Nations Parliamentary Assembly — a global body of elected representatives — could invigorate our institutions of global governance with unprecedented democratic legitimacy, transparency, and accountability. Initially, the assembly could have a largely consultative function. Over time its authority and powers could evolve. It could be complementary to the UN General Assembly and its establishment, in the first step at least, would not require a cumbersome reform of the UN Charter. President Barack Obama recently stated that the absence of oversight is one of the major problems we are facing with regard to the international financial system. A global parliamentary assembly could play an important role in exercising genuine and independent oversight over the global system's array of institutions.

On the economic front, a Parliamentary Assembly at the UN could facilitate the alignment of the Washington-based Bretton Woods Institutions and the World Trade Organization with the policies of the UN, in particular the Millennium Development Goals. The assembly could monitor the impact of the policies of the international financial and economic institutions in fields such as sustainable development, food security, education, public health, human rights and the eradication of extreme poverty.

Establishing a global parliamentary body, of course, is a complex matter. One of the most frequent arguments brought forward against the proposal asserts that such an assembly would be dominated by a majority of delegates from large countries, many of them undemocratic ones to boot. Due to the impressive expansion of democracy in the world, however, this is no longer

true. Quite on the contrary, a UN Parliamentary Assembly could be a strong tool to support national democratization. After all, it would allow minorities and opposition forces to be represented.

Citizens expect a response to the financial crisis which goes beyond simply restoring the financial viability and profits of the banking and securities sectors. They want a system which is more responsive to the needs and concerns of ordinary people. What more meaningful way to facilitate this than by establishing a direct, democratic connection between the world's citizens and the world's governance through a global parliamentary assembly?

Without the democratisation of globalisation to counteract the progressive curtailment of national democracy, nation states will lose their independence and world citizens will find themselves dominated by a new imperialism. The creation of the United Nations Parliamentary Assembly is a way to promote global democratisation, on the condition that the assembly not only be comprised of representatives of states but also of representatives from non-state actors like NGOs, multinational corporations, specialized organisations, and others.

In my Agenda for Democratisation, which was presented to the United Nations General Assembly on 20 December 1996, I concluded by saying, "While democratisation must take place at all levels of human society — local, national, regional and global — the special power of democratisation lies in its logic, which flows from the individual human person, the one irreducible entity in world affairs and the logical source of all human rights." Myself, and the authors of this pamphlet, work towards those ends.

The first part of this introduction was originally published in June 2009 in the independent online magazine [www.opendemocracy.net](http://www.opendemocracy.net). It was added to the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.



## Piia-Noora Kauppi

Piia-Noora Kauppi was a Member of the European Parliament from 1999 to 2009 where she represented the National Coalition Party from Finland. She was the Head of the Finnish Delegation in the EPP-ED Group and a Member of the Committees on Economic and Monetary Affairs, Legal Affairs, Women's Rights and Gender Equality. She was also a Member of the inter-parliamentary delegation with China and a substitute Member of the delegation with the USA. She represented the European Parliament in the Convention which prepared the EU Constitutional Treaty.

Mrs Kauppi is one of the founding Members of the Campaign for Parliamentary Reform which advocates increased transparency in the European Parliament. In Finland, she is Vice-President of the Women's League of the National Coalition Party and Fellow of the Finnish Business and Policy Forum EVA. She is also a newspaper columnist. Prior to her career in the European Parliament, she worked as Legal Adviser of the Parliamentary Group of the National Coalition Party in the Finnish Parliament.

# Establishing a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly

by Piia-Noora Kauppi

**A**t the dawn of the 21st century the world is a very different place from the days when the United Nations was born. In the aftermath of World War II, this permanent forum of inter-state cooperation was assigned two major tasks: to prevent further wars and to seek trans-national, win-win solutions to humanity's problems.

Today very few subscribe whole-heartedly to this dual idealism. While nearly everyone agrees on the importance of upholding the former, many people doubt the ability of inter-state cooperation to address, let alone resolve, all of our other challenges. Put simply, no other forum has come close to replacing the UN in terms of brokering peace between nations. But a vastly more potent alternative has sprung up to respond to the world's socio-economic problems: globalisation.

Free markets have proven an unbeatable way to generate equitable and expedient solutions to a host of pressing global problems. Globalisation is the reason absolute poverty will be halved by 2015 from 1990 levels, according to World Bank estimates. Open competition generates economic opportunities and enriches those willing and able to grasp them. Civil servants, even those with the very best of intentions, can seldom manage to engineer an outcome in committee that would substitute for the power of open markets.

In so far as the expectation that inter-state cooperation would promote world peace has proved illusory, international cooperation has fallen from its sacred pedestal. Yet it is more necessary than ever before. States never did, nor will they ever entirely control their fate. But they continue to be the building blocks of the world order. Globalisation has partly undone their capacity to act, even together, but it has not eliminated it.

We are confronted, therefore, with a dual challenge. On the one hand, we have to let globalisation run its course, to let it continue to feed, clothe and shelter the world's population. Trade needs to become freer and therefore by definition, fairer. This means that tariffs and other trade-distorting measures

in developed nations, particularly those on goods necessary to help alleviate immediate poverty like agriculture and textiles, should be lowered dramatically — or scrapped altogether. However the same holds true for tariffs levied by the developing world on western goods and services, which will help them build a dynamic, modern economy.

Globalisation is the great enabler of our time. Equality, freedom and democracy are contingent on the material wealth it generates: dictatorships crumble as markets advance. It is illustrative that among the 47 countries ranked lowest in terms of human rights and the rule of law, not a single one is either a democracy or a market economy.

Furthermore, consider this. Emerging economies as a whole, with China, India, South-East Asia, Brazil and Russia leading the pack, now account for approximately half of the world's total GDP. They consume over half of its energy and produce 43% of its exports. They represent 80% of the world's population who, without free trade, would be lingering in poverty while the western world marched on. Now they influence all the key economic drivers in developed countries: production patterns, inflation, interest rates, wages and profits.

Globalisation cannot be reversed, nor even tempered. But it can be made to work better: i.e. accelerated. This the second challenge. We need to enable public authorities to legitimise the irresistible forces of globalisation where appropriate and also empower states to act in the interests of their people when global markets go awry. According to the Greek philosopher Epictetus, wisdom is the ability to distinguish between what is within our control and what is not. Today, too many states continue to jealously guard obsolete functions, resist change and nurture economic sectors in which they lack a competitive advantage. This is unwise and unproductive as the fruits of human labour, freedom and progress are stifled by their actions.

Today the world is marked by an unprecedented and growing consensus in support of global capitalism. The peoples of the world stand united in their yearning for the freedom and material well-being that only globalisation can provide. Governments, however, too easily fall prey to short-term demands and fail to see what is in the long-term interest of those they represent. Naturally, the question arises: how can we empower governments to avoid succumbing to short-term goals and steer a steady course in the wider interests of their people?

The answer is to democratise that hallowed meeting ground of states: the United Nations. By establishing a UN Parliamentary Assembly, the collective will of the world's people would be elevated above the pettiness of much international decision-making.



Accelerating globalisation is a means to a noble end. A UNPA could ensure that the big picture prevails when demands for scaling back market freedoms periodically return. Other global issues, such as climate change, could also be dealt with more effectively. Right now people are demanding action against global warming, but their governments are unable to deliver much because the first mover will necessarily take a short-term hit.

As the opportunities for individual nation-states to act effectively on these issues have declined, cooperation at global level needs to become more efficient and creative. One of the current problems preventing this kind of development from occurring within the United Nations is a lack of leadership, transparency and democracy within its institutions. Too often, the big picture is lost and joined-up thinking bypassed.

Tackling these deficits within the United Nations would strengthen it overall. This is essential if it is to deal with the problems of this century as effectively as it did with those of the last. Currently, as we have seen, the efficiency of the United Nations is undermined by conflicting national interests that often prevent the emergence of optimal compromises for the benefit of all.

Moreover, mere intergovernmental decision making does little to raise interest in or involve citizens, who, at present, are largely excluded from debates on global issues. Politics continues to be too local, while humanity's problems are increasingly international. A degree of democratisation and a more direct representation of the citizens within the UN framework could both balance conflicting interests, and make the UN a more effective and legitimate institution.

As such, the establishment of a Parliamentary Assembly for the United Nations could both act as a reform in its own right and provide the initial push for further internal reorganisation. The greater transparency brought about through the establishment of this parliamentary body would open up the United Nations to the media and the general public. This is an essential prerequisite for tackling problems such as corruption and accountability, which have plagued the organisation in recent years.

However the UNPA should not be allowed to constitute an additional layer of bureaucracy. Increasing the transparency of the UN, making it more accountable to the public, and making sure global decisions are informed by the guiding will of the people is of little use if democratic debate doesn't lead to action. It is therefore important to ensure that the Parliamentary Assembly makes the UN system as a whole more dynamic instead of becoming an institutional white elephant. Representation and participation should not mean inefficiency. The net effect of the United Nations Parliamentary Assembly must be faster reaction times and a strengthened ability to act. For the UN-

PA's *raison d'être* is that of a unifying force, not another obstacle to implementing decisions.

On the positive side, popular representation within UN decision-making structures would lend it greater legitimacy and strengthen its claim to act on behalf of all its members. A more equal representation between some of the currently enfeebled, populous member states and those with greater financial muscle could also be achieved through a parliamentary body, thus making the UN reflect a more hopeful world-order in the 21st century. Currently, many of the UN's actions and inactions are viewed through the prism of the Security Council's activities, particularly the tactical and strategic manoeuvres of the five permanent members.

Through a parliamentary consultation process even the non-binding recommendations of the United Nations General Assembly would have more compelling force on UN Security Council members than present arrangements. Greater media attention will impact public opinion, leading to better-informed, better-organised citizens who can exert significant leverage on their governments to comply with UN decisions.

The European Parliament demonstrates how parliamentary processes can be efficiently implemented on a supranational level. Moreover, the European experience suggests that a prudent course of action should be adhered to when establishing such an institution. The initial step in the creation of the UNPA should be limited to establishing a consultative body under the UN General Assembly consisting of members of national parliaments.

Even as a consultative body the UNPA could have a significant impact on making the UN more transparent and legitimate. Representatives with no direct loyalty to national governments would establish a direct link with citizens and thus provide real global leadership on internationally sensitive issues.

As the UNPA matures, it could be vested with more powers, and direct elections introduced. Ideally, it would later become an essential part of UN decision-making, with the power to influence decisions and call those charged with their implementation to account. Many of the UN's current problems like inefficiency, corruption, and excess bureaucracy could be minimized and controlled through greater transparency and accountability to citizens. A better-informed media and public would have improved chances to discuss these problems and many of the power abuses in the UN could be avoided.

Many problems related to practical implementation would need to be overcome before the UNPA could fulfill its potential. What system of representation would be used? Would China get a fifth of all seats in accordance with its population or would something more indirect need to be devised?

What would its exact powers be? Where would it stand in relation to the Security Council? Who would have the final say?

This article has not dealt with these problems for the simple reason that we are nowhere near having to resolve them. For now, the debate remains philosophical. Can the UN be made a more potent force for good and if so, how? My opinion can be summarise as follows: by harnessing globalisation; by making its development a collective expression of the will of the people through a UN Parliamentary Assembly that brings together representatives of all the world's states; and by giving public authorities the chance to take hold of the reins of global governance once again, we can create the kind of democratic consensus and legitimacy necessary to respond to the gravest international challenges of the modern age.



## Jo Leinen

Jo Leinen was born in the Saarland on the Franco-German border. Before becoming an MEP he was Minister of the Environment in the State Government of Saarland, Germany from 1985-1994. From November 1994 until September of 1999 he played the triple role of Chairman of the Committee for European Affairs in the State Parliament of Saarland, and Member of both the Committee of the Regions and Congress of Regions of the Council of Europe.

Jo Leinen was elected to the European Parliament in 1999 and has been a member of the Convention for the Elaboration of a Charter of Fundamental Rights for the EU. From 2004 to 2009 he served as President of the Constitutional Affairs Committee. In 2009 he became Chair of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety. He is also a member of the EP's Working Group on EU-UN relations.

He is the Honorary President of the Union of European Federalists (UEF) and member of the steering committee of the European Movement.

Since October 2009 he is Co-Chair of the Parliamentary Advisory Group of the Campaign for a UN Parliamentary Assembly.

# **Creating Participation Possibilities Within The United Nations**

by Jo Leinen

## **The need for reform and the lessons from the EU**

**T**he acceptability and legitimacy of the United Nations and its impact on international cooperation have to be improved. The newly designated UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, said as much in his inaugural speech, where he pointed out that trust between all stakeholders had to be rebuilt if the UN was to function effectively. In my view, forging this trust should not be the job of nations alone but should be expanded to include the citizens as well.

At present, the world's peoples are only indirectly represented in the General Assembly by their respective governments. As a result, votes cast do not adequately reflect the political spectrum that exists in each national parliament, from government to opposition parties. International governance is therefore, first and foremost, an intergovernmental process since neither direct citizen representation at international level or parliamentary control of international governmental action and international organizations, exists.

In order to increase people's trust in the UN, create a worldwide sense of ownership of the institution, and restore its legitimacy, the very foundations of the UN need to be reconsidered and, ultimately widened. To this end, citizens of UN member states should be better and more directly included in the activities of the United Nations and its international organizations. They must be allowed to participate if we are to reverse discontent, secure acceptance of the legitimacy of the United Nations and strengthen its ability to act.

The establishment of a UN-Parliamentary Assembly would be a decisive step towards the introduction of new quality and impetus into international governance whilst simultaneously ensuring stronger citizen representation in the UN system, thus linking it more effectively to national parliaments and civil society.

This is particularly necessary at this juncture, when citizens are standing up and demanding to be counted on critical global challenges like climate

change. It's time their voice was heard on the level of the United Nations as well.

The development of the European Parliament (EP) is an instructive example for the future development of a UN-Parliamentary Assembly. Emerging out of the Parliamentary Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community, founded in 1952, the consultative function of the early European Parliament, as established in 1962, was later widened to include the right to be heard in legislative processes. Since 1977, the EP has been given powers of codecision on the Union's budget.

In the beginning, the EP consisted of representatives from national parliaments. As the duties of the European Communities (EC) widened, however, a growing demand for greater democratic legitimacy at European level likewise emerged. As such, in 1979, direct election of EP parliamentarians in their Member States was introduced. This politically strengthened, parliament rejected, that same year, the draft budget of the Commission for the first time. Today, the European Parliament enjoys the same powers as the European Council on most legislative issues and ensures a direct democratic connection to the peoples of the European Union.

Nevertheless the European Parliament's struggle for equal status with the Council is not yet over. Indeed, the road to its current powers has been long and winding. Nevertheless, the fact remains that it was only through the introduction of direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979 that the EP was able to become a significant force in its own right and make an impact on the Union's development and integration.

Without denying the differences between the European project and the creation of a worldwide Parliamentary Assembly, the lesson is clear: only by creating a direct link between citizens and the UN, can we give it a real democratic character and get people more involved in the formulation of UN-policies.

In June 2005 the European Parliament welcomed a resolution on UN reform, highly recommending the creation of a United Nation's Parliamentary Assembly (UNPA). The EP underlined, as in a previous resolution from 1993, that this Assembly should have the unrestrained right to information, participation and control.

Members of the European Parliament are also prominently represented among the supporters of the current campaign to establish a UNPA. Together with parliamentarians and NGOs from the world over they have created a global network that is lobbying hard for stronger citizen representation at UN level. The aim of the campaign is to establish a global coalition that unites parliamentary and civil society activities under one common roof.

## **Adding a democratic dimension to the UN system**

For decisions taken by the UN to gain real acceptance and legitimacy, its decision-making processes must be democratised. Global developments now affect daily life to such a degree that issues can no longer be addressed without taking into account the will, ideas and initiatives of citizens worldwide.

The UN Security Council decides on the fate of countries without providing any opportunity for those most concerned to make their voices heard. Decisions are made on wars and conflicts while opposition leaders and civil society representatives can only stand by and watch from the sidelines, with no real power to influence decisions.

The participation of the people is not only needed to plan lasting solutions to the world's problems, but to transform the UN into an effective instrument of global governance. Experience has shown that, people do not feel ownership of issues unless they are actively involved in addressing them. Only if citizens see that they are involved in the decision making processes will they more actively support and take part in the implementation of decisions or of such ambitious projects as laid down in the Millennium Development Goals.

Thus, several international actors have come to the conclusion that it is necessary to create a parliamentary dimension in the United Nations system. The challenge now is to examine in which areas such involvement would be possible and in what way it could be created. Then the question of the most suitable institutional form arises. A Parliamentary Assembly, acting as a citizens' chambers on world issues, should be set up.

Such an assembly would provide a much-needed link between the United Nations, national governments and civil society, and could act as a political catalyst for the development of global cooperation and international law, and thus contribute to shaping globalisation in a positive way.

It should be authorized to establish inquiry commissions and to question staff and officials of the United Nations.

As outlined in the Council of Europe resolution of January 2006 (Resolution 1476 - 2006) the step-by-step strategy could inter alia include the following stages:

- Setting up a network of regional parliamentary assemblies to discuss emerging UN priorities, with consultative functions for one or more General Assembly committees;
- Setting up a parliamentary committee to discuss issues of special global or regional importance and/or the UN budget;
- Adopting clear rules for the involvement of parliamentarians in its work, setting out their rights and responsibilities, as well as the obliga-

tions for parliamentary delegations to ensure a fair representation of the political parties or groups in their parliament.

The rights and tasks of this newly created Parliamentary Assembly could include:

- Submission of its own opinions/resolutions to the General Assembly, ECOSOC, the Secretary General, the Security Council, and the organs and other institutions of the UN system;
- Consultation by the General Assembly, by ECOSOC and the other institutions of the UN system with regard to important questions;
- The right to address questions to the Secretary General, the Presidents of the General Assembly, to ECOSOC and to the Security Council as well as to the heads of other institutions in the UN system;
- Rights of information and participation in relation to the activities of the institutions of the UN system including the still independent Economic and Financial Institutions;
- Readings of draft resolutions of the General Assembly and of ECOSOC with the right to submit suggestions for amendments;
- The right to submit to the General Assembly and to ECOSOC draft resolutions for further negotiation and adoption;
- Co-decision with regard to the adoption of the UN budget;
- Co-decision with regard to the election of the UN Secretary General;
- The right to be integrated into all treaty negotiations which are conducted under the auspices of the United Nations to found or modify international institutions;
- The right to be integrated into the remaining multilateral treaty negotiations at international level and
- The right to submit, in accordance with Article 65 of its Statute, legal questions to the International Court of Justice.

Democracy is one of the highest values promoted by the United Nations; a value shared by the European Union and the majority of countries around the world. However, the UN itself suffers from a lack of democracy when it comes to allowing citizen participation in its decision making in the UN and that of its various international organisations.

There is an internal contradiction between this reality and the fact that the UN actively promotes the development of civil society, even setting up funds accordingly. This strategy acknowledges that civil society is crucial for participation in legitimate and well-rounded political decision-making processes. The interests of society groups and actors, ranging from labour



unions to youth or sport organisations, must be formulated and articulated via representative or participative structures.

Which brings us back to the need for UN reform. Currently the UN system is based on the supremacy of the nation-state; an entity mainly formed in the 19th century and on some continents the main driver for incessant fighting and bloodshed. The nation-state and thus national governments are represented in the UN's most important bodies while parliamentary structures have no platform.

In democratic countries this system is legitimised on the basis that national governments are usually elected by free and fair voting arrangements. Undemocratic countries however present an entirely different picture. Political leaders, in the worst cases representing only a handful of followers but by no means the majority, are invited to the decision-making tables of the UN to negotiate on behalf of people whose interests they do not even represent.

Consequently, the biggest criticism of the current UN set up is that there is no direct or representative democratic element within the decision-making structures. This deficit has been criticised several times by the EU and the European Parliament in particular: a demand for the establishment of a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly (UNPA) has ensued. It should be followed up swiftly if we are to render the UN fit for purpose at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

## **Conclusion**

The advantages of such a citizen's chamber are obvious. With the establishment of a UN Parliamentary Assembly the UN has the potential to become more transparent and democratic and thus garner broad political support across the world. Global public opinion could exert pressure on political decision makers and add a new power to counterbalance national interests.

A parliamentary body within the UN system could force national governments to act more swiftly and with greater political will in solving pressing global problems like climate change. The chamber would have control over international organisations such as the WTO or IMF. These organisations currently have a very wide range of power and influence over the fate of entire nations but next to no democratic control. The UNPA could overcome this democratic deficit while making those organisations closer to the citizens, ensuring decisions are more transparent and thus lending them, and the entire UN structure, more credibility.



## Graham Watson

Graham Watson was born in March 1956 in Rothesay, Scotland. From 1983 to 1987 he served as Head of the Private Office of the Rt. Hon Sir David Steel MP, the then Leader of the Liberal Party in the UK. Before entering Parliament, Graham Watson worked for the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking.

Graham Watson was the first British Liberal Democrat to be elected to the European Parliament. From 1994 to 1999 he was a member of the Committee for Economic and Monetary Affairs and Industrial Policy and of the Budgets Committee. From July 1999 to 2002 he served as Chairman of the Committee on Citizens' Freedoms and Rights, Justice and Home Affairs.

In January 2002 Graham Watson was elected Leader of European Liberal, Democratic and Reform Group in the European Parliament. After the European Elections in 2004, Graham was re-elected as President of the newly formed Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

Graham stood down from this role after the European Election in June 2009 to return to the back benches. He sits on the Foreign Affairs Committee. He is a member of the European Parliament's delegations to China and India, the latter of which he chairs. Beyond Parliament, Graham is chairman of the global e-Parliament and a member of the Parliamentary Advisory Group of the Campaign for a UN Parliamentary Assembly.

He represents the South-West of England and Gibraltar.

# Advocating a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly

by Graham Watson

**N**ever has effective supranational decision-making been so necessary. By 2020 the world could have 8 billion people, of whom three out of every four will live lives of poverty and ill-health if governments do not act now to promote development. Population explosion in the developing world, combined with increased desertification and salinity, could exhaust much farmland and make feeding the world an ever greater challenge. Meanwhile, reserves of oil, coal and gas are likely to reach their tipping points, exacerbating competition for remaining resources and fuelling violent conflict. Due to the effects of climate change, a quarter of all nations risk drought, famine and water shortages of biblical proportions, with others facing submersion by rising sea levels and accompanying outbreaks of disease. Such is the view of the world's leading scientists. And such is the reality we must legislate for now, before it is too late.

As the newspaper columnist George Monbiot put it, “The question is not whether global decisions need to be made. The question is how to ensure that they are made democratically”. Ensuring the future well-being of our people, as well as the capacity of our planet to sustain life, requires a level of global cooperation never before seen. For challenges such as population growth and migration, climate change and energy security, and internationally organised crime linked to terrorism cannot be tackled by nations acting alone, or even bilaterally. Indeed, insistence on national sovereignty simply fans the flames of global anarchy. Issues of this kind can only be addressed by bodies which represent the interests of the world's citizens in a democratic, fair, and proportional manner. That will require a step change in the way we view global governance, still dominated by a select few developed nations through rule books written by the victors of the Cold War, that strangles the whole process of multilateral governance.

For far too long decisions affecting billions of people — particularly the world's poor — have been made by bodies which are spuriously representative at best, and flagrantly unrepresentative at worst. The demands of globa-

lisation have ensured that the mandates of international bodies like the G8, UN Security Council, NATO, WTO and World Bank have broadened dramatically without any parallel development in global democracy to counteract the progressive curtailment of the power of individual nation states. As the influence of elected governments diminishes, the world's citizens find themselves increasingly voiceless and disenfranchised, contributing to a worryingly high level of political apathy amongst mature democracies and a slowing of democratisation across the world as a whole.

In matters such as economic development and environmental degradation which affect each and every one of us the voice of the many is sacrificed to that of an elite few. Africa's 700 million people, for example, exert a minimal influence on world decision making, although they are amongst the most affected by its decisions. A case in point is the issue of national debt and IMF loans, which have forced many countries to restructure their economies and export many commodities much needed at home to meet their obligations. This simply goes to corroborate Canadian Senator Douglas Roche's observation that globalisation "has tended to increase the power of the executive branch while marginalising the legislative branch".

Even in the EU — which is perhaps the most developed example of supranational governance — the absence of parliamentary involvement in key legislative areas means that proposals from the Executive branch pass with little scrutiny, instead of being debated, criticised and clarified by the people's representatives. How much greater the problem at global level where no democratic structures yet exist to scrutinise the policy process? This democratic deficit must be addressed if global institutions are to secure continued legitimacy and acceptance in the eyes of the world's citizens. Represented at every other level of governance people in democratic nations cannot continue to be deprived of a voice in an organisation which claims to speak for the whole planet.

In a world where global governance lacks even the thinnest veneer of democratic legitimacy the need for the UN as a powerful player is greater than ever before. The breadth of its current mandate reflects this growing necessity, with the UN delivering more services in more places, at greater cost, than at any time in its sixty two year history. In the last nine years alone, the number of civilian and soldiers deployed on peacekeeping missions has increased from 20,000 to 80,000, while the overall financial resources managed by the Secretariat have doubled to a staggering \$1.8billion per annum. Yet democratic oversight lags far behind this growing operational mandate. Operating through the bargaining of unelected diplomats instead of the deliberations of elected democrats, the UN is too often deprived of clout, legitimacy and ability to act. Failure to achieve unanimity, for exam-

ple, led to a catastrophic lack of intervention in Bosnia and Rwanda. The same could hold true for Darfur and even Iran, if the UN Security Council does not succeed in winning Russia round to sanction Tehran's nuclear tests.

Ironically, two of the world's biggest conflict areas — Palestine and Taiwan, both with democratic governments — are not even represented under the UN banner. Whatever the reasons for inaction, the lesson of these failures is clear: without reform of existing structures the UN could be relegated to the backbenches of international diplomacy, enmeshed in a stifling web of bilateral agreements which lack the force and legitimacy of global decision making. Recognising this danger, proposals for a fundamental overhaul of the United Nations Secretariat were presented in March 2006. Yet despite adopting a resolution affirming their 'faith in the United Nations', UN Members have consistently failed to think past national interests to address the bigger picture. As Kofi Annan wryly noted, "The UN General Assembly has heard enough high-sounding declarations to last us for some decades to come". The challenge is now to translate these words into actions.

Liberals and Democrats, preferring to see the glass as half full rather than half empty, have enthusiastically welcomed the creation of a UN Peacebuilding Commission to help countries make the transition from war to peace, and international agreements to protect people from genocide, war crimes and ethnic cleansing, condemn terrorism "in all its forms" and uphold the Millennium Development Goals. Likewise, we stand firmly behind the new Human Rights Council which should ensure a more prominent position for UN Human Rights Work — a major EU priority. This area has been further reinforced by decisions to establish a Democracy Fund and to double resources for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

In other spheres, however, progress has slowed to first gear — or even stopped completely. Measures to combat major threats like nuclear proliferation and weapons of mass destruction were sabotaged in a disgraceful display of international brinksmanship, while far-reaching proposals to reform the UN Security Council were blocked by Member States. From a Liberal perspective, it is particularly disappointing that France and the UK continue to veto the idea of a single, permanent EU seat on the UN Security Council from which to conduct negotiations. Lack of progress thus far does not mean, however, that the public sees no place for the UN in meeting global challenges.

Surveys repeatedly show that the UN — despite its current faiblesse — is the only multinational organisation to enjoy high levels of trust from the world's citizens. Indeed a BBC World Service poll of 23500 people in 23 countries — the largest yet carried out — has revealed strong popular support for both democratisation of the UN system and a more powerful

mandate for the organisation. The UN is the natural locus, therefore, for efforts to create a world Parliamentary Assembly which would allow people from all countries to become involved in the global decision-making process. It is my view, and indeed the view of all those who support the establishment of a UN Parliamentary Assembly, that such a step is indispensable to strengthening the UN's capacity to act.

Linking UN organisations, governments, national parliaments and civil society a UN Parliamentary Assembly would provide people with a voice on matters of international concern and act as a catalyst for reform — notably in areas like international law. It is also essential to ensure that non-democratic international bodies — like the World Bank or WTO — are held to account. While a Parliamentary Assembly would have no powers of enforcement in those organisations it would at least provide pervasive public scrutiny of their activities that could put a break on excesses and encourage internal reform. The current informal Parliamentary Network on the World Bank has already shown that accountability can be demanded and improved. The more democratic and legitimate other institutions become, the greater the pressure to democratise and legitimise the rest.

Experience from supranational bodies like the European Parliament, suggests that many lessons should be learned. Despite the EU's success, it suffers from a perceived lack of legitimacy amongst ordinary citizens. We have European democracy, but no European demos. Paucity of public debate and media exposure on legislative issues means the public have felt ignored, if not excluded from decision-making. A world parliament risks suffering that, and worse, if we cannot create a real platform for debate which can ensure that global politics, and not national diplomacy, with its attendant focus on strategic interests, wins the day. Global public consciousness will be necessary to the practice of establishing the UNPA's legitimacy and certain basic collective norms and standards from which policies can proceed.

Although political debate is largely conducted at national level, it is clear that the development of regional affiliates, from Mercosur in South America to ASEAN in the East, and the African Union (itself modelled on the EU's continental approach) has been instrumental in generating a common stance on various economic and social issues. A world parliament would take this logic one step further and promote adherence to common norms and practices with respect to collective goods like fresh water, fish stocks, or the ozone layer which are truly the property of humanity. Taking the right decisions on global issues demands that states look beyond — or even against — their national interest at times. Kyoto and the Doha Development Round are prime examples of this principle in action. Although neither has been as ambitious

or successful as we could have wished, both have demanded differential levels of solidarity in pursuit of global change.

As Director General of the WTO Pascal Lamy said in his treatise ‘Towards World Democracy’ “when globalisation in all its aspects makes arbitration between interests and values necessary, democracy has to be the arbitrator”. Only a UN Parliamentary Assembly would have the legitimacy and public trust to act as arbiter in situations where national interest and global interest collide. Where various Earth Summits and WTO Trade Rounds have failed to win consensus, or made minimal progress on targets, a UNPA could demand greater concessions. Of course, if it were instituted tomorrow, that level of agreement would not be possible. As was the case with the European project fifty years ago, building consensual democracy requires gradual adhesion to a blueprint for a common future: the European Free Trade, the Schengen zone, and the Euro, all envisaged long before they came into being, are testament to this power.

Support for establishing a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly has existed as long as the United Nations itself. However it was widely dismissed during the Cold War era as the fantasy of peaceniks, just like European Union before it. It took the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 to bring about the conditions in which the dream of generations of Liberals and Democrats could take on a concrete form. A 1992 Report of the Liberal International first suggested that a directly elected second chamber of the General Assembly should be reconsidered in the light of new global challenges. Since then, Liberals have worked together with allies in other political groups, national governments, and NGO’s to make this a reality. The European Parliament lent crucial weight to our movement in 2004 when it adopted a resolution calling on the Secretary General to develop, in close cooperation with the International Parliamentary Union, a democratic dimension of the UN which would bring global decision making closer to the citizens concerned.

Now, through the Committee for a Democratic UN, that idea has germinated into a full-scale international campaign with the backing of 550 political leaders, 57 NGOs, and hundreds of public personalities from across the world. Although we are united in our desire to establish a UN Parliamentary Assembly, its future shape is by no means set in stone. Much depends on practical considerations, ranging from financing to political concessions and details like the number of, and direct election of, Assembly Members. Personally, I believe that distribution of delegates should be proportional to population size (to ensure blocking majorities cannot be garnered from the least populous members) and that Members should eventually be elected directly by the people. However, in the first instance — as with the European Parlia-

ment — I am prepared to see intermediary solutions like indirect election of MPs as a necessary stage in its construction.

A crucial first step, however, must be establishment of the UNPA under Article 22 of the UN Charter and its immediate affiliation to the UN General Assembly as a secondary body or special organisation with consultative capacities. As such — and from the beginning — it would have a mandate to draft and pass resolutions on the issues that matter which could be submitted directly to UN decision-makers, who could be called directly to account for their actions. All member states of the United Nations with constitutionally embodied parliaments should be entitled to join. The former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali will chair a conference under the auspices of the Campaign for a UN Parliamentary Assembly to work towards that end.

Once this has been accomplished we envisage that the UNPA's influence would extend outwards to encompass all the institutions of the United Nations, thus helping overcome the fragmentation that currently dogs much of the system. Our final goal is and will remain incorporation of the UNPA as one of the main bodies of the UN. If it is going to be effective, it needs to have teeth. That means providing its Members with a mandate for information, participation and control vis-à-vis the UN Secretariat and the organizations of the UN system. And giving them the capacity to criticise, not kowtow, to countries which violate fundamental freedoms.

Who knows, perhaps with time the United Nations Parliamentary Assembly could develop into something resembling a world parliament. Much depends on the developments — whether political, economic or technological — which mark the twenty-first century. Whatever happens, it is important to remind those naysayers who claim that global governance is a pipe dream, or that the time for global representation has not yet come, that nothing is impossible. Back in 1907, who would have believed that one hundred years — and two world wars — later, a continent scarred by centuries of internecine warfare would be a bastion of peaceful cooperation between 27 different countries? As a Liberal and a Democrat I believe in the importance of democratic global governance. I've made a first move in this direction through my participation in the e-parliament project, an experiment in on-line democracy linking democratically elected representatives world-wide. I've campaigned for it at EU level, and will continue to campaign for it at UN level. I urge others to do the same.







## Gérard Onesta

Gérard Onesta was a Member of the European Parliament from 1991 to 1994 and from 1999 to 2009. He is one of the Green Party's experts on institutional questions involving all aspects of democracy and electoral systems. A federalist, with deep regionalist convictions, he was a member of the European Parliament's Constitutional Affairs Committee and a staunch supporter of the Constitutional Treaty. In his parliamentary work he has brought forward a number of reports designed to make European democracy more transparent and participatory, with a particular focus on the need for greater public involvement in decision making through petitions and consultations. At international level, he has pressed for the adoption of Green values, notably the rights of indigenous minorities. He is a long-time supporter of the Campaign for a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly. He served four terms as one of the European Parliament's Vice-Presidents.

## From a European to a World Parliament

by Gérard Onesta

Where would the European Project be today if it had remained in the hands of Heads of Government? What would the European Union have achieved if its institutional mechanisms were reduced to a lone assembly in which each Member State, regardless of its size or population, was represented by a single seat? I would be willing to bet that such a strictly intergovernmental system would have withered and died. For proof, we need look no further than the European Council, whose difficulties in generating consensus on key issues has meant that policy-making operates too often at the level of the lowest common denominator. Precisely such a system, in which blocking forces are quasi-permanent, operates within the United Nations.

It was in order to avoid falling into this trap in the first place that the European Union initially chose to favour its bigger Member States by introducing a preferential points system that prevented blocking forces from forming. However it soon realised that a tyranny of the majority should be avoided at all costs, since creating the equivalent of a ‘European Security Council’ would have broken the spirit of community cohesion. Indeed, what small nation would have risked joining a club in which its own voice would be drowned out and its future economic, social and environmental welfare would be predetermined by others?

Acknowledging this fact, Europe’s ‘founding fathers’ sowed the seeds of a different institutional setup which has gone from strength to strength. Ever since the creation of the European Community, the Council has been backed by a parliamentary assembly. In the beginning, this body had little official weight in terms of institutional decision-making. Nevertheless, it proved highly influential in changing the dynamic of the European project. For the first time, in that nascent European parliament, delegates chose to band together not under their national flags but instead under the ideological banners of their respective political families.

Thanks to this sea-change in political thinking the assembly was able to create majorities capable of overturning national interest in the search for

effective European consensus on key issues. Unexpected alliances were formed and complex links — previously unthinkable — forged. Little by little European cohesion was taking place in the Parliament, regardless of the deference to national interests that continued in the Council of Ministers. The role of this assembly was so instrumental to European integration that it was granted direct election by universal suffrage in 1979. For Europe's thinkers democratisation of the Parliament was a necessary step towards future EU enlargement, since it enabled transnational links to be formed through the medium of an elected assembly.

Today European Parliament deputies belong to pan-European political parties, comprising MEP's from every state in the Union. In the hemicycle (as the chamber is known), debates are conducted squarely in the name of party political values rather than under the banner of national interest. It was precisely that newfound politicisation and legitimisation which lent the Parliament extra weight in its dealings with the other European institutions. From a simple debating chamber in 1979, it has transformed, in three short decades, into an equal partner with the other institutions, and will enjoy full powers of co-decision by 2009.

It is my firm belief that Europe's parliamentary dynamic has much to teach the world, especially in this age of increased globalisation and interdependence. Notably, it throws light on the debate surrounding the creation of a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly. It would be an understatement to say that this organisation, suffocating from chronic institutional paralysis, is in dire need of reform if it is to continue to take the lead in global governance into the twenty-first century.

By adding a parliamentary dimension to institutional proceedings, by allowing elected representatives from each nation to debate matters of policy priority and make recommendations to the General Assembly, the UN's claim to legitimacy as the main instrument of global governance would be strengthened immediately. Democratising its structures would give greater credence to the rulings of the UN General Assembly, which is currently composed of faceless diplomats. That is because parliaments draw their strength from their direct links with the citizen: from the creation of political manifestos, to the public defence of policy priorities and their political record in the run-up to re-election, the process is at once transparent and accountable — all far removed from the current situation, where decisions are made resolutely behind closed doors.

However the impact of this new Assembly could go above and beyond simple democratic scrutiny of UNGA decisions: it has the potential to profoundly restructure the current geopolitical situation. As is now the case in Europe, national representation would no longer fall to a single person but

would be incarnated by a delegation whose members would cover all the major political positions within a given state. This would, in turn, alter the nature of UN debates since the egoistic confrontations that currently take place in the General Assembly would be softened both by the new pluralism at the heart of national delegations, and the internationalisation of political strategies which would result from this change.

Which brings me on to the following point. How can the UN even begin to justify its pretence that national diversity — particularly class and cultural differences, as well as those of age and gender — can be represented adequately by a lone government representative? Such reductive centralism renders all countries uniform and univocal, caricaturing their positions and creating unnecessary confrontation instead of consensus. Everyone knows that two heads are better than one. A UN Parliamentary Assembly would profoundly alter the current logic of intergovernmental agreement. It would force representatives out from the cover of national interests which has had such a negative and stifling influence on the UN's ability to act and provide a real forum for creative analysis and solutions. The beginning of wisdom, after all, is to recognise a little of ourselves and our common humanity in the stranger in our midst.

Plural representation within the UN would provide a world view that better reflects the true face of public opinion in each nation and prevent recourse to corrective mechanisms whose effects are, more often than not, perverse and unintended. It is precisely because the Principality of Monaco has the same voting stature in the UN General Assembly as China — due to the system of one member, one vote — that the existence of the UN Security Council continues to be justified. There, the world's most powerful nations (a victor's club from World War II) enjoy the right to veto any and all resolutions with which they are not in full agreement.

The Security Council's standing is the direct result of the absence of any other forum for international debate, and the direct cause of the many and bloody UN system failures over the past 60 years, from Bosnia to Rwanda. A Parliamentary Assembly at the heart of the UN system would allow us to move beyond this diplomatic stalemate while instituting — as is the case with the European Parliament today — a form of proportional representation that would balance the political and demographic weight of each State with the number of seats held in the new assembly.

It is likely that any such UNPA would be comprised initially — as was the case in Europe until 1979 — of delegates from national parliaments, who would meet several times a year to debate and vote. However, if the European example further suggests that a few short decades could be sufficient to ensure that all UNPA representatives are elected by means of direct universal

suffrage. The impact of such vibrant, global scrutiny on the progress of international decision making would be enormous. Democrats like myself can only dream of such a day.

But when that moment comes — as it must — in a world which is growing ever more interdependent, yet rendered ever more fragile by the sweeping economic, social and environmental changes wrought by globalisation, it will have a profound effect on all our lives. Finally, humanity will have learned to let go of the petty nationalisms that have caused so much bloodshed in years past. And it will have launched its best weapon in the promotion of World Peace: global democratic decision-making. Nation states now understand that by acting alone they can no longer tackle the big issues effectively. To face up to the kind of global challenges affecting the lives of all citizens — from climate change to international security — they can, and must, harness the integrative momentum of globalisation to democratic ends.



