



newsletter

of the Maine Chapter of the United Nations Association

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Indispensable United Nations

History in the General Assembly

The 61st session of the UN General Assembly opened with a Muslim woman as president for the first time (there have been two other women presidents, the last in 1969). Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa of Bahrain, replacing Sweden's Jan Eliasson, has promised to focus on women's issues, partnership with civil society institutions, and overall reform efforts during her tenure.

Sheikha Haya

In her acceptance speech, she said: "I cannot fail to commend the tireless efforts made by [Secretary-General Kofi Annan], during his tenure, to promote the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and to enhance respect for human dignity around the world. I commend the manner in which he is working with Member States to liberate peoples from fear, want and disease, as well as to lay the foundations for the reform of the United Nations. ... We must work to ... ensure that our planet is a safer and more suitable place in which to live. Essentially, we are all human beings who share a common fate, and that is what inspired the founders of our Organization. ..."

History by the Secretary General

Meanwhile, Warren Hoge described in the *New York Times* (10 September) some of the complexities of Secretary General Kofi Annan's "Middle Eastern marathon", concluding:



"During the trip, he mused about how he had no weapons, no troops, only the power of dialogue. That set him apart from all the leaders he was talking to, in a region where brazen show of

muscle is the normal persuader. It also illustrated a founding idea of the United Nations: that an organization with no national agenda can bring together countries with competing agendas.

" 'Individual nations have individual views and they convince themselves they are right and they are so sure of what they say, and they don't want to budge because they feel if they budge, they will lose face,' Mr. Annan said in an interview aboard his plane on[e] ... night while departing Ankara, Turkey. 'My job is to give them a ladder to climb down from the precipice.' "

Why the UN is Indispensable

will be the topic of UNA-Maine's 2006 UN Day presentation on 24 October at the University of Southern Maine, co-sponsored by the USM History Department.

United Nations Day 2006

Why the UN is Indispensable

a talk by Stephen Schlesinger



author of

Act of Creation:

***The Founding of the United Nations -
A Story of Superpowers, Secret Agents,
Wartime Allies and Enemies, and Their Quest
for a Peaceful World***

"[This] detailed account of the scheming, skullduggery and political horse-trading behind the creation of the UN is a timely reminder of what the organization's founders expected it to become."

- *The Economist*

"[This] brilliant reconstruction of the San Francisco Conference is an important reminder to Americans - both supporters and skeptics - that the UN's Founding Fathers [sic] ... knew what they were doing."

- Ambassador Richard Holbrooke

"[Schlesinger's] account of the birth of the United Nations describes in lively detail the personalities and the dramas ..."

- *The New York Review of Books*

"A fascinating history of the diplomatic dramas and political intrigues behind the launch of the United Nations."

- *Foreign Affairs*

"A superb book ... with great lucidity and ... contemporary relevance"

- *The New York Times Book Review*

Books will be available at the 24 October event;
see calendar (back page) for time & place.

Stephen Schlesinger, educated at Harvard University and Harvard Law School, is Director of the World Policy Institute at the New School University in New York City, a foreign policy think-tank that publishes the quarterly *World Policy Journal*. He has been a political speechwriter and advisor as well as an author and commentator. In the mid 1990s, he worked at Habitat, the UN agency dealing with cities.

Human Rights Day 2006

The US & Torture

a talk by Admiral John D. Hutson

In Portland on 11 December, the day after international Human Rights Day, UNA-USA-Maine will co-sponsor — with Amnesty International-Maine's Greater Portland chapter and the Maine Civil Liberties Union — a talk by retired Rear Admiral John D. Hutson, now President & Dean of the Franklin Pierce Law Center in Concord, New Hampshire, and a board member of Human Rights First. Formerly the Navy's Judge Advocate General (1997 to 2000), Admiral Hutson has been outspoken in news media, congressional testimony, and letters to the administration about the importance of adhering to international human rights standards and humanitarian law. He emphasizes the "absolute illegality" of torture as well as its impracticality, and the importance of accountability all the way up the chain of command. Of the current US administration's disdain for the Geneva Conventions he says: "It's sad, dishonorable, and must be changed."

In addition to our personal concerns about this issue as US citizens, our focus as UNA members is on US compliance with the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Chapter Annual Meeting 2006

Transition at the UN

On 2 December, in addition to the annual review of the chapter's year and plans for the future, we will discuss the change of leadership at the United Nations. We are inviting someone from UNA-USA to assess the selection process, the legacy of Kofi Annan, and the personality and prospects of the new Secretary General.

Readers with internet access may wish to consult the blog <UNSG.org> for the latest developments in the search for a new Secretary General. As this newsletter is being prepared, there are seven announced candidates.

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A flyer with details of both December events
will be mailed to members later.

News Bites from UN Wire

Our selected news items from UN Wire (www.smartbrief.com/un_wire/) are chosen (by Bruce Stedman) as being of general interest but perhaps not widely known.

6/7/06 • The US often works with the United Nations in productive and diplomatic ways, but publicly it shies away from supporting the UN and instead lets domestic critics dominate the public discourse, Deputy Secretary General Mark Malloch Brown said. This lack of support from the White House for the UN does a lot of damage to the world body, which the US needs more than it admits, Malloch Brown said (*The New York Times*).

6/9 • *Financial Times* editorial: Mark Malloch Brown's speech was "a model of reasoned diplomacy" that prudently urged US leaders to balance criticism of the UN "with an acknowledgement of its benefits".

6/9 • *Wall Street Journal* editorial: Mark Malloch Brown's comments were regrettable, including his remark that most of America is not aware of what the UN is doing.

6/21 • Minneapolis-St. Paul *Star Tribune* editorial: John Bolton, US ambassador to the United Nations, has proven too undiplomatic in his approach to foreign policy and therefore should be let go or at least be forced to rein in his aggressive style. Bolton is fond of setting ultimatums, but ultimatums "usually don't work, and that is particularly true at UN headquarters, where consensus is the traditional path to action".

6/28 • In a little-noticed move by the Bush administration, two senior US officials this month asked United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan to help organize meetings between the Iraqi government and big international donors in an effort to get Baghdad to commit to political and economic reforms in exchange for major financial aid. The move shows that "once again, the United Nations is not only relevant but at times indispensable to the United States," Richard Holbrooke, former US ambassador to the UN, writes, adding that the harsh treatment the US has given the world body recently is making such requests "far more difficult" (*The Washington Post*).

6/29 • The General Assembly's budget committee lifted a cap on UN spending, thereby averting a financial crisis that had threatened to freeze some operations. The decision was made by consensus rather than by vote, but the United States, Japan and Australia disassociated themselves from the resolution, saying not enough progress on reform measures had been made (*The New York Times*).

7/11 • The next UN secretary-general most likely will hail from Asia because of the tradition of regionally rotating the top post, US President George W. Bush. Talking to reporters, Bush would not name any specific individual but he said "the criteria is to find somebody who wants to spread liberty and enhance the peace, do difficult things like confront tyranny, worry about the human condition, blow the whistle on human rights violations" (Reuters).

7/14 • A UN Security Council resolution proposed by Qatar that would have condemned Israel for its military offensive in the Gaza Strip was vetoed by the United States (Reuters).

7/19 • Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez is set to visit at least seven countries on a trip he says is aimed at promoting peace worldwide but which, according to an analysis by the *Financial Times*, also seeks to bolster Venezuela's bid for a two-year seat on the UN Security Council, which "looks increasingly likely to succeed", partly because the 22-member Arab League has said that it is likely to back Venezuela's effort.

7/31 • Thousands of tons of oil cover the Lebanese coast after Israeli bombing of the country's Jiyeh power station, spurring "grave concern" from the UN Environment Program. The oil slick, which local groups have called an "environmental disaster" is expected to impact the marine environment as well as Lebanon's fishing and tourism industries (BBC).

8/11 • Conservative women's groups in the US say the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is being used by feminist groups to advance a radical agenda. "This is getting the UN involved in our homes, our families, our marriages", said Wendy Wright, president of Concerned Women for America. A UN spokesman, however, said CEDAW is a valuable legal tool to promote equality between men and women (*The Washington Times*).

8/20 • Three years have passed since a bombing ruptured the United Nations Iraqi headquarters in Baghdad, killing 22 UN staffers and, following a second bombing, prompted the world body to withdraw its 600 international officials from the war-torn country. While the UN has kept a low profile in Iraq since then, it has in fact done a lot to assist the volatile country, Iraqi officials say, including supporting elections, agriculture, and a nationwide polio vaccination effort (AlertNet.org).

8/29 • Fighting AIDS in Africa was a notion that came to Bill Clinton late in his former US presidency, but since he left the White House five years ago he has worked hard and "made a lasting mark" against the disease, the *New York Times* reports. Clinton and his foundation have launched projects in two dozen African countries, ranging from financing nurses in Kenyan clinics to buying medicines for thousands of sick children.

9/7 • In what promises to be one of the most interesting foreign policy displays in some time, US President George W. Bush and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad are both scheduled to address the United Nations General Assembly on September 19 (*Financial Times*).

9/7 • India's toughest policewomen are being trained for deployment to strife-torn Liberia, where they will be the United Nations' first women-only team of peacekeepers. The women being trained say they believe they are more approachable but just as tough as men and that the women in Liberia, who are often victimized, will feel safer with women as peacekeepers (*International Herald Tribune*).

9/8 • The decision by the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee to delay the vote on whether John Bolton should be reappointed as US ambassador to the UN delivered an unexpected blow to the White House, the *Washington Post* reports. The vote was postponed when Senator Lincoln Chafee, R- RI, signaled he could not support the diplomat until the Bush administration addresses his questions on Middle East policy.

Secretary General candidate **Shashi Tharoor** of India, currently Under Secretary General for Communications & Public Information, urging reforms to restore public trust in the UN's ideals and actions (April 2006):

One of our key challenges, therefore, is to ... once again make the UN not only a symbol of our collective hope, but also a powerful instrument for translating that hope into everyday reality.

CALENDAR:

OCTOBER 21 - Anti-torture table by several organizations including UNA-USA-Maine at Maine Council of Churches conference, "How Shall We Live So That All May Thrive? Building Neighborhoods of Environmental and Economic Justice" - Augusta Civic Center; 8:30am-4:00pm

OCTOBER 24 - UN Day - Stephen Schlesinger, author of *Act of Creation: The Founding of the United Nations* - Events Room on 7th floor of Glickman Family Library, Portland campus of University of Southern Maine; 4pm, reception following

NOVEMBER 2 & 16 - UNA tabling at two performances of *Perdita*. a one-man show by Pierre-Marc Diennet, son of Perdita Huston, a Maine native who wrote and did other work around the world and served as a consultant for UNDP, UNIFEM, UNFPA, UNICEF and the Secretariat of the UN Fourth World Conference on Women - University of Maine-Augusta (2nd) and UMA Bangor campus (16th) - FMI: Wendy Hazard (495-2675 or <whazard@gwi.net>)

DECEMBER 2 - UNA-Maine Annual Meeting - watch for flyer announcing details

DECEMBER 11 - Human Rights Day (+1) - "US & Torture", a talk by Rear Admiral John D. Hutson, JAGC, USN (Ret.) - 7pm; Portland (TBA)

Prince Zeid al-Hussein, Jordan's Ambassador to the UN, announcing his candidacy for Secretary General (6 September 2006):

To succeed today, the United Nations cannot merely serve as a tool for the large and powerful countries of the world to dominate the global agenda. Nor must it be used simply as an instrument of smaller countries to delay or deter necessary change. Renewed by all and for all in the 21st century, the United Nations can fulfill its founding promise.



Maine Chapter of the UNA-USA

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