



## WHAT IS YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE UNITED NATIONS?

**A response from the UN Association to the BBC Two documentary, 'The Whistle Blowers: Inside the UN', aired on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2022, 9pm**

*"Did you see that programme about the UN programme last night? It was a disconcerting documentary about the sexual harassment & abuse and corruption in the UN. Such wrong doing was going on in well-respected agencies such as the World Food Programme and UNICEF and, as we've seen before, in UN Peacekeeping. According to the whistle blowers in the programme, several Secretary Generals know about it, but have not yet done much to stop it."*

This was one of several emails I received from colleagues in the United Nations Association (UNA), which caused us to painfully relive our concern and frustration about how the UN is portrayed to the public. Once again, after struggling to survive the sexual abuse among some UN peace keepers, we now face more denigration for supporting such a seemingly degraded UN.

But we will face up to it. As one of my colleagues said in his email, this BBC Two documentary just goes to show how it is all the more important that we follow through with our plans to offer a better and more comprehensive education to people of all ages about what the United Nations is, how it works and, more importantly, how it is supposed to work.

Let's begin by taking a critical look at the BBC's own description of their documentary<sup>1</sup>.

"For more than 70 years, the UN has been at the forefront of work to uphold human rights and promote global peace. But what happens when the fixer of the world's problems is itself face with allegations of wrongdoing and corruption? What happens when UN staff try to call their own managers and colleagues?"

Told by insiders with decades of experience working at the world's top diplomatic institution, the Whistle blowers: Inside the UN gives first-hand accounts of what happens to staff when they report allegations of wrongdoing. Their stories reveal a culture of untouchability that reaches the highest levels of the organisation."

The UN is in its 77<sup>th</sup> year, but it has been severely inhibited from being at the "forefront of work to uphold human rights and promote global peace".

Two years after they founded the UN in 1945, the 'highest level' of all - the five permanent members of the UN Security Council - the P5<sup>2</sup> - started the Cold War and consistently worked against each other both in, and out of, the Council. Then, contrary to expectations, hostilities between the P5 became worse after the Cold War ended in 1991. This led to a rise in the number of wars with escalating levels of violence & destruction in many of which, the P5 were directly or indirectly involved. And so in effect, the UN has been dislodged from the 'forefront' and prevented from 'up-holding human rights and promoting global peace'. This has caused catastrophic social, economic and environmental distress & damage and has led to record numbers of refugees.

<sup>1</sup> Ref: Short publicity notice on the BBC website about BBC Two The 'Whistle Blowers: Inside the UN', documentary Tuesday, 21.06.22 at 9pm

<sup>2</sup> A Note about the P5: Under the terms of the UN Charter, the UN General Assembly appointed the main victors of the Second World War, namely: the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (now the Russian Federation since 1991), the Republic of China (now the Peoples Republic of China since 1971) and France, as the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. Known as the P5, they each have a veto vote on the Council.

Meanwhile the UN remains misunderstood and under resourced as shown by BBC Two when it went on to say in its publicity blurb.....

“... The UN has a budget of more than £50 billion a year....”

That makes no sense because the UN has not been a single organisation for many years and is not funded as such. I've re-checked this and now quote from the UN's website

“The United Nations is part of the UN system, which, in addition to the UN itself, comprises many funds, programmes and specialized agencies, each of which have their own area of work, leadership and budget. The programmes and funds are financed through voluntary rather than assessed contributions. The Specialized Agencies are independent international organizations funded by both voluntary and assessed contributions. The UN coordinates its work with these separate UN system entities, which cooperate with the Organization to help it achieve its goals.”

[\[Source: UN System: the United Nations https://www.un.org › about-us › un-system\]](https://www.un.org › about-us › un-system)

Furthermore, whatever the stated £50 billion a year refers to, when compared with the annual cost of NHS England<sup>3</sup> - £136 billion - it just goes to show how greatly underfunded the UN must be. However, we are only trying to explain and not excuse wrong doings in parts of the UN, as demonstrated by our response to BBC Two going on to say in its blurb .....

“... At great personal cost, the people in this film reveal their accounts of what happened when they tried to take on the UN's hierarchy and the Organisation's culture of silence.....”

We in the UNA are, of course, greatly alarmed and concerned about these dreadful stories of how the UN staff in some places in some agencies are being mistreated and would join whole heartedly, with the general call for this to be put right, right now. So much so, that we would like to share our knowledge about just how difficult this can be. And how it becomes even more difficult when the richest and most powerful member states block the righting of wrongs. This happened in the case of the sexual abuse among UN peace keepers that we referred to above.

Since 1992, the UN Security Council has mandated the Department for UN Peacekeeping Operations to carry out 59 peacekeeping missions. Of the 45 now completed, most were successful. The Better World Campaign<sup>4</sup> described how decades of research had shown that peacekeeping can make a huge difference in preventing the resurgence of conflict and in protecting civilians. But such effectiveness is dependent on peacekeeping missions being appropriately mandated, sufficiently resourced and equipped<sup>1</sup>.

However, this, is not part of public knowledge because the general news media only reports on peacekeeping failures, such as Somalia (1993) Rwanda (1994) and Srebrenica (1995). During the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, increasing warfare led to even worse press including stories of how peacekeepers brought cholera to Haiti and failed to stop atrocities in South Sudan. In addition, there was a string of reports about how peacekeepers in other missions were accused of sexual and other abuses of the civilians they were supposed to be protecting from harm.

In April 2017, the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres responded to this bad press by presenting the UN with a plan for reforming UN Peacekeeping so as to prevent civilian abuse and increase the effectiveness of its missions. In order to implement the plan, Antonio Guterres proposed that the annual budget for UN Peacekeeping be increased by \$1 billion.

Unfortunately, the same bad press had quite the opposite effect on the UN member states.

On 30<sup>th</sup> June 2018, instead of accepting the Secretary-General's plan, the General Assembly succumbed to pressure from the USA and voted to cut the annual UN Peacekeeping budget by

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<sup>3</sup> The NHS budget and how it has changed, The King's Fund <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk › nhs-in-a-nutshell › nhs...>

<sup>4</sup> The Better World Campaign works to foster a strong partnership between the United States and the United Nations to promote core American interests. <https://betterworldcampaign.org/>

\$600 million. The final budget was \$7.3 billion, of which \$6.8 billion was appropriated for the current 14 peacekeeping operations<sup>ii</sup>. This budget was the lowest ever expenditure on UN Peacekeeping. It is actually 0.4 per cent of the annual global military spending of \$1,739 billion<sup>iii</sup>, which is at its highest level since the end of the Cold War<sup>iv</sup>. At the same time, there has been a revival of faith in the theory that aggressive national military defence systems, inclusive of nuclear weapons, is a deterrent against war and therefore, is the best way to ensure peace. This is contrary to the UN's approach to peace, which aims to deter war by promoting friendly relations among nations and international cooperation.

All this is to say that as well as showing such one-off documentaries as the 'Whistle Blowers inside the UN', the BBC and all TV channels should produce a series of documentaries about the full complexity of the UN, which would provide the context for describing how it works and why it fails. In this respect, Britain, as a founder member of the UN and one of the Security Council's P5, has extra weight and responsibility to ensure the UN works according to its Charter.

And therefore we ask, in this respect, how well is Britain doing?

In the midst of shocking rises in the cost of living and a struggling NHS and social care system - crushed by cut-backs and the Covid-19 Pandemic - the Johnson Tory Government increased spending on provocative military defences including a resurgence of nuclear weapons. It seems therefore, that Britain will continue to use its P5 position (along with the other P4) to make war in a variety of ways (e.g sanctions) instead of making peace, except in the spurious form of the nuclear deterrent. And then when the refugees struggle to land on our shores, traumatised and exhausted from the war zones in which the UK is involved, the Home Office blames not the British war mongering 'defence' policies, but the human traffickers (!)

And so, having addressed the reality of the UN "promoting global peace", we now turn to the reality of the UN "upholding human rights".

Certain UN member states including the P5 are quick to accuse other countries of abuse of human rights. They then use this as a reason for imposing sanctions on the supposed offending country. Although under the terms of the UN Charter, they were accepted as part of 'peaceful means' to end wars, sanctions are now so viciously 'weaponised' as to become 'warfare by other means', which amounts to war against civilian populations and consequently, a breach of human rights. And furthermore, when nations cut back on their health and welfare services, they are also in breach of the human rights of their own citizens.

### **UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) Report on the United Kingdom 2019<sup>v</sup>**

Philip Alston, the UNHCR's Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights visited the UK from 5<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> November 2018. The purpose of the visit was to investigate the extent to which the Government's policies and programmes relating to poverty are consistent with its human rights obligations. The following year on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2019, Philip Alston presented his report to the UN General Assembly.

In summary, he said that although the United Kingdom is the world's fifth largest economy, one fifth of its population – that's 14 million people - live in poverty. The cause was attributed to the policies of austerity introduced in 2010 that had continued unabated, despite the tragic social consequences. Food banks have proliferated; homelessness and rough sleeping have greatly increased. In addition, the social safety net has been badly damaged by drastic cuts to local authorities' budgets. The Special Rapporteur concluded that ...

***"The bottom line is that much of the 'glue' that has held British society together since the Second World War has been deliberately removed and replaced with a harsh and uncaring ethos."***

Britain has regressed from an NHS & Social Care world leader to a nation that has failed to provide adequate health & welfare, thus violating the human rights of its people. But instead of accepting this, the May Tory Government blamed Philip Alston for the findings of the UNHRC's Report (!)

Coming back to the present, when it has never been more urgent, action on all these problems (including the UN whistle blowers) have been undermined by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. And ever true to their post-war anti-UN form, the P5 are the main belligerents in the war in Ukraine!

So what can we do now when the world's LEAD PROBLEM SOLVERS have themselves, become THE WORLD'S LEAD PROBLEM?

There are two things to remember here. First, we stand by the whistle blowers and their stated purpose of wanting to make the UN better - the UN is, indeed, our best hope for a better future. And second, there is no 'quick-fix' solution to the complex P5 problem that has been decades in the making. The fact is, the UN Security Council cannot resolve wars, including the war in Ukraine, because of its persistence with cold war type policies and actions, which also obstructs the resolution of all other problems such as climate change.

Therefore, we in UNA-B&H have set up a programme to promote the United Nations so as to prevent the next Cold War, and thus achieve sustainable solutions for all global problems.

### **The UNA (Bexhill & Hastings) Peace & Human Security Programme**

Promoting the United Nations has always been difficult because of a widespread lack of interest in, and knowledge of, the UN. Although people have, of course, heard of it, they do not fully comprehend what the UN is, how it works and how it is supposed to work. There is even a greater lack of appreciation of how the opening words of the Preamble to the UN Charter - "*We the Peoples of the United Nations...*" commits us to responsibly support our government to cooperate with other member states to make the UN work according to its Charter. Consequently, people are unaware that as civil society, they can work with the UN to influence international decisions and actions that are taken and done on their behalf by the UN member states.

Beginning in 2018, the UNA-B&H Branch has enhanced its role in public education with a series of annual speaker/discussion & workshop meetings to celebrate UN Day (24<sup>th</sup> October). This has enabled us to build a peace policy portfolio that we now want to implement by trying something different. We suspect that the people who learn most from speaker/discussion & workshop type of events are the speakers and workshop leaders. Therefore, we plan to inspire people to want to know more about the UN by introducing an active self-learning participant-led model of education. An early notice of the event is as follows:

For our 5<sup>th</sup> annual UN DAY PEACE EVENT, against the backdrop of an informative UN Exhibition, we INVITE EVERYONE to join us in a café style roundtable to explore, analyse and discuss the terrible topical question of .....

### **If the United Nations was founded for World Peace, why is the World at War?**

Saturday, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2022, St. Peter's Community Centre, Church Street, Bexhill, TN40 2HE  
(Registration at 1.30pm for a 2 - 5pm Programme)

### **REFERENCES**

<sup>i</sup> VOA (Valuation Office Agency – Gov.UK) News, 2017, *UN Peacekeeping Budget cut by \$600 million*, <https://www.voanews.com/a/un-peacekeeping-budget-cut-by-600.../3923664.html>

<sup>ii</sup> United Nations, *General Assembly Approves Appropriation of \$6.8 Billion for 14 Peacekeeping Operations in 2017/18*, Meetings Coverage, General Assembly 71<sup>st</sup> session 89<sup>th</sup> meeting am GA/11927, 30 June 2018

<sup>iii</sup> REUTERS, June 2017, *UN States Agree \$7.3 billion Peacekeeping Budget*, Michelle Nichols, <https://af.reuters.com/article/africaTech/idAFKBN19K0QS-OZATP>

<sup>iv</sup> SIPRI Fact Sheet, *Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2017*, March, 2018

<sup>v</sup> UN Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) 23 April 2019, Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights', A/HRC/41/39/Add.1 on the visit to the United Kingdom.  
[Poverty for the UK https://undocs.org/pdf/HRC/Add.1](https://undocs.org/pdf/HRC/Add.1)