



9 February 2015. Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Gro Harlem Brundtland, former Prime Minister of Norway, call for the United Nations to be strengthened by reforming the Security Council and changing the election of the UN Secretary-General.□

In an opinion piece written on behalf of the Elders, an independent group of global leaders who work together for peace and human rights, they outline four ways to make the organisation more effective.

4 ideas for a stronger UN.

Seventy years ago, the United Nations was founded “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war”.

Looking around the world today, the least one can say is that it is not fully succeeding in this mission. From Nigeria through the Middle East to Afghanistan and Ukraine, millions are dying from that scourge, or imminently threatened by it, and the UN seems powerless to save them.

We have four ideas for making it stronger and more effective.

A big part of the problem is that the Security Council, which is supposed to maintain world peace and security on behalf of all member states, no longer commands respect – certainly not from armed insurgents operating across borders, and often not from the UN's own members.

Throughout the world, and especially in the Global South, people struggle to understand why, in 2015, the Council is still dominated by the five powers that won World War Two. They are more and more inclined to question its authority, and the legitimacy of its decisions.

We ignore this threat at our peril. Times have changed since 1945, and the Council must adapt.

Almost everyone claims to favour expanding the Security Council, to include new permanent members, but for decades now states have been unable to agree who these should be, or whether, like the existing ones, they should have the power to veto agreements reached by their fellow members.

Our first idea aims to break this stalemate. Instead of new permanent members, let us have a new category of members, serving a much longer term than the non-permanent ones, and eligible for immediate re-election. In other words they would be permanent, provided they retained the confidence of other member states. Surely that is more democratic?

Secondly, we call on the five existing permanent members to give a solemn pledge. They must no longer allow their disagreements to mean that the Council fails to act, even when – for instance, as currently in Syria – people are threatened with atrocious crimes.

Let the Five promise never to use the veto just to defend their national interests, but only when they genuinely fear that the proposed action will do more harm than good to world peace and to the people concerned. In that case, let them give a full and clear explanation of the alternative they propose, as a more credible and efficient way to protect the victims. And when one or more of them do use the veto in that way let the others promise not to abandon the search for common ground, but to work even harder to find an effective solution on which all can agree.

Thirdly, let the Council listen more carefully to those affected by its decisions. When they can agree, the permanent members too often deliberate behind closed doors, without listening to those whom their decisions most directly affect. From now on, let them – and the whole Council – give groups representing people in zones of conflict a real chance to inform and influence their decisions.

And finally, let the Council, and especially its permanent members, make sure the UN gets the kind of leader it needs. Let them respect the spirit as well as the letter of what the Charter says about choosing a new Secretary-General, and no longer settle it by negotiating among themselves behind closed doors.

Let us have a thorough and open search for the best qualified candidates, irrespective of gender or region; let the Council then recommend more than one candidate for the General Assembly to choose from; and let the successful candidate be appointed for a single, non-renewable term of seven years. He or she – and after eight “he”s it’s surely time for a “she” – must not be under pressure to give jobs or concessions to any member state in return for its support. This new process should be adopted without delay, so that it can be used to find the best person to take over in January 2017.

These four proposals are spelt out in greater detail in a statement [issued today by The Elders](#). We believe they form an essential starting point for the UN to recover its authority. And we call on the world’s peoples to insist that their governments accept them, in this, the UN’s 70th anniversary year.