



HOUSE OF LORDS

Revised transcript of evidence taken before

The Select Committee on International Relations

Inquiry on

UK PRIORITIES FOR THE UN SECRETARY-GENERAL

Evidence Session No. 3

Heard in Public

Questions 35 - 43

WEDNESDAY 20 JULY 2016

11.45 am

Witnesses: Professor Sir Adam Roberts and Andrew Whitley

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Members present

Lord Howell of Guildford (Chairman)
 Baroness Coussins
 Lord Grocott
 Lord Hannay of Chiswick
 Baroness Helic
 Baroness Hilton of Eggardon
 Lord Inglewood
 Lord Jopling
 Baroness Smith of Newnham
 Lord Wood of Anfield

Examination of Witnesses

Professor Sir Adam Roberts, Professor of International Relations, University of Oxford, and
Andrew Whitley, Interim Chief Executive Officer, The Elders

Q35 The Chairman: Good morning, and thank you very much for being with us. Please take off your coats if you so wish; we are all formal but informal. Air-conditioning technology has not yet reached this Committee room, and may never do so. I remind you that this is in public, and a transcript will be made available to you afterwards, if you want to make submissions or change it. That is the procedure. We are very grateful to you for being with us. You may have heard that we have just held a session on Commonwealth issues, but our main interest at the moment is in moving towards offering a coherent agenda from the UK point of view to the incoming Secretary-General not of the Commonwealth but of the United Nations—whoever that may be. So those will be the purposes behind our questions. I am going to start with a rather simple one to Mr Whitley. Can you explain what The Elders do?

Andrew Whitley: The Elders was a group founded in 2007 by Nelson Mandela. It is an independent organisation of rather distinguished global figures who are brought together to promote peace, justice and human rights. It is also a UK-registered charity based in London. Madiba gave us a rather magnificent—I would say almost impossible—mission, asking the group to tackle some of the most intractable conflicts and asking us to be bold and fearless in doing so. Given the composition of our group, which includes five Nobel Peace Prize laureates, you will not be surprised to know that we are fortunate enough to have access at the highest political levels. For example, last year we had an extremely interesting and in-depth conversation with President Putin in which we took up the issues of Ukraine and the Middle East conflicts at the time.

We work on a small number of geopolitical issues, both publicly and privately. I can mention the examples of Iran and its influence in the region, as well as Myanmar—Burma, if you prefer—and Burundi. In the past, we have dealt with conflicts in Sudan, South Sudan and Cyprus: those are examples. At the same time, we also work at the grass roots, trying to amplify what we call the voice of the voiceless and supporting the aspirations of young people worldwide. We take up big thematic issues of universal concern, such as climate change and gender equality. The global campaign against child marriage was our initiative. Our newest initiative involves the promotion of universal healthcare as a means of achieving the health sustainable development goal. The topic of today's inquiry falls under our strengthening of the UN initiative, launched last year to coincide with the UN's 70th anniversary. We believe that it has had some catalytic effect and helped to galvanise momentum for change.

Q36 The Chairman: Thank you. That was very clear—and it covers an enormous and very important range. Can I ask both of you, starting with Sir Adam, about the priorities for the UN Secretary-General? I believe that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has been asking possible candidates what their vision is. What do you think the major challenges are in this thoroughly unsettled world in which we are now living?

Sir Adam Roberts: First and foremost, it goes without saying that it is the capacity to address conflict in the world. If the UN is seen to be failing in that in a general way, it is in serious trouble. At present, we should not be pessimistic on account of the fact that there are some really serious failures going on—of which Syria is perhaps the central example. That is a reflection of a situation quite familiar to the UN. Civil wars, which have been its main concern for much of its existence—all peacekeeping operations in one way or another have borne some relationship to civil wars—are a tough problem for any international organisation. They always have been and are likely to continue to be, but at the same time we should note that the problem of international war for the whole of the UN period has been somewhat reduced compared with earlier eras. The UN has had some part—it is not the sole explanation—in the process of reducing international conflicts. At the same time as we recognise the seriousness of the challenges now facing the UN, we should at least show respect for its achievement in addressing in many ways the problem of international war—or at least as an organisation whose principles have been compatible with a reduction in international war.

There are many other areas that the UN needs to tackle to be fit for the 21st century, such as development, which is a long-standing one, the environment and human rights. One could go on. A key issue is the importance of constitutional government in different states. I would like

to see at least as much emphasis put on constitutional government as has been put on human rights as such, because that is a critical factor. For example, in our responses to the Arab spring not enough attention was paid to how difficult it is to get constitutional government in states that have gone through the experience of a sudden change of regime.

The Chairman: Mr Whitley, what is your vision of the UN in the 21st century? Do you agree that it is about addressing conflicts, if they can be addressed?

Andrew Whitley: I fully agree with Sir Adam that the primary task of the United Nations is the prevention of conflict and the maintenance of peace. In this regard it is evident to most observers that the United Nations has increasingly been marginalised in recent years, both as a forum for debate and as an instrument to bring conflicts to an end. In this regard, certainly the main challenge of the new Secretary-General is to address that by restoring the authority and legitimacy of the United Nations as the place to deal with conflict. In that regard, reform of the Security Council ought to be a high priority. Our organisation feels that the new Secretary-General should make it a priority to tackle Security Council reform, which has been deadlocked or postponed for decades. We hope that the new Secretary-General will take it upon himself or herself to take soundings in capitals and find ways of finding a compromise out of the deadlock in which intergovernmental negotiations have been for some time.

In a world in which sovereignty is no longer absolute and sovereign states jostle for power with multinational corporations and increasingly powerful civil society organisations, we feel that one of the biggest challenges for the next Secretary-General will be to find meaningful ways of incorporating the voices of non-state actors into intergovernmental deliberations, in what remains a club of sovereign states. Many recognise that the tinkering of the past has only been tinkering and that the old model is broken and a new one has yet to appear. We feel that the struggle of the Security Council to adapt to the changing nature of armed conflict, with the decline of interstate conflict and the rising importance of non-state actors, is a matter that will be of increasing concern, with growing disregard for the rules of war and notably the Geneva Conventions.

Some of the other issues, perhaps on a secondary level, that the new Secretary-General will have to look at will be the damage done to the responsibility-to-protect doctrine that was adopted at the 2005 summit, partly as a consequence of the Libya conflict in which the participants took one side of that conflict and thus did some damage to the credibility of the doctrine. The direct corollary, as many know, is the obdurate refusal of Russia to contemplate anything that looks like regime change in Syria.

Finally, we would be wrong to miss out the increasing impact of climate change and the growing pace of irregular migration to richer countries as causes of conflict and issues that the UN will have to take up—as it is doing at the summit in September.

The Chairman: In due course, we ought to come to rules of war and who is going to observe them and not observe them in this world. Lord Jopling, do you want to put a more specific question on the Secretary-General's in-tray, as it were?

Q37 Lord Jopling: With regard to the UK's interest in this, if you were advising Ministers, what would you suggest to them are the most important matters to the UK in the appointment? I noticed that this morning *The Times* and other newspapers quoted the Archbishop of Canterbury. When asked about the possibility of a woman becoming Bishop of London, he said, "In my view, for a job like this gender is not a priority"—which means that if anybody is good enough to do it they should. Would you also agree that talk of it now being Eastern Europe's turn is rather foolish and against British interests, and that we ought to be going for who is best, regardless of where they come from?

Andrew Whitley: You raise an important issue, Lord Jopling. In the coming days the Security Council will begin the task that it takes up every 10 years or so of conducting straw polls among the unusually large field of candidates this year to determine who is a suitable candidate. Here the UK has an important role to play. I fully agree with what you suggested: Buggins's turn is not an appropriate way to appoint someone who should be chosen on the basis of merit. We believe that that is the primary consideration, regardless of gender. It happens to be the view of The Elders that it is time for a woman to have the position, but we feel that that consideration should be overruled by the credentials and the leadership that the next Secretary-General should be able to provide. Rather than someone who is simply a malleable tool of the major powers, we hope that the person selected—whom the UK would press for—would be someone who has the ability to get on with people. He or she must be able to work with the P5;¹ that is a prerequisite. In addition, he or she must be an excellent communicator. These days, the Secretary-General needs to be someone who at times can go over the Heads of Government and represent the particular concerns of the people of the world.

The selection process over the coming weeks, although it has been more open than in the past, in that the General Assembly has held public hearings, now enters its crucial phase. It is going to be the moment when the membership as a whole, and the UK, without whose support a candidate cannot be chosen—the UK cannot dictate but as a permanent member it can of

¹ The UN Security Council's five permanent members; namely China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States

course insist on the criteria—should be in a position to say, “This time around, let us make sure that we really do get the best person for the job”.

The Chairman: Sir Adam, do you have any thoughts to add on the Secretary-General’s schedule?

Sir Adam Roberts: I largely agree with what has just been said, but geographical representation is not an absurd notion; it is an important principle, among others, and it has always sat uneasily next to the principle of choosing the best person for the job, with the best professional qualifications. It so happens that some of the Eastern European candidates are very impressive, so we should not view this as a contest of regionalism versus expertise; it is a more complicated picture than that.

As regards Lord Jopling’s question about British interests, it is impossible to have a shopping list of criteria when we know that the selection of the Secretary-General is a matter where, even with the more open procedure we now have, enormous power is in the hands of China, for example. All the permanent five have to approve it and there are a number of very different criteria in very different countries.

My own view as to the British interest is that it is important to have somebody who is willing to see change at the UN in areas where it is needed. One particular example that strikes me is that the UN is very poor in regard to whistleblowing. That is an issue where a Secretary-General with some courage and authority could assist in developing a better procedure. It is in significant part an internal management issue within the Secretary-General’s purview.

More generally, I happen to think that any Secretary-General whose job is to articulate globally a vision of what the United Nations stands for and is doing has to be able to speak intelligently about the unavoidable selectivity of what the UN does and does not do, and about the way in which it has to share burdens, peacekeeping arrangements and other tasks with other bodies. It is particularly complex at the moment, for example, with the African Union—whether peacekeeping in Africa should be a task of the AU or of the UN. The answer may differ in every single conflict, but some underlying principles need to be worked out—and perhaps some financial support for the AU. So those are the kinds of areas where I think we could make a useful contribution.

The Chairman: Let us focus first on organisational form. Baroness Hilton, would you like to pursue that?

Q38 Baroness Hilton of Eggardon: That leads very neatly to my question about what changes you would like to see at the United Nations. We have been told by a number of witnesses that it was ponderous in response to the Ebola crisis and it has departments with

overlapping responsibilities. There are something like nine separate departments dealing with refugees, international aid and so on. Are there organisational issues that the new Secretary-General should be sorting out?

Sir Adam Roberts: Some things need to be tackled. One is to do with the culture of the UN. I fear that it is going to be very difficult to change. I am sure that many of you have been at UN meetings or conferences where everybody speaks to a prepared text and nobody listens to them at all. I found Baroness Scotland's remarks on that just now very refreshing. She said that sometimes it is necessary to get away from that format, and she is surely right in a UN context.

At a structural level, there are issues that certainly need to be looked at, including what one might call stovepiping—the separate functions of separate departments and the lack of communication between them. My own experience—I have been involved mainly with security-type issues in the UN—has been that there are some serious problems there. I defer to Lord Hannay's judgment, but one such problem that has struck me is the separation between the Department of Political Affairs and the Department for Peacekeeping Operations. On many issues—although not all—they tackle the same problems in the same country, if by slightly different approaches. What struck me as most absurd about having almost Chinese walls between those departments was one occasion when I visited the DPKO's situation centre. I met a very senior person from the Department of Political Affairs the same day who expressed surprise that I had been able to go there because he had never been allowed in. Whether that is normal or has now been overcome, Lord Hannay can tell us—but it struck me as an example.

There are also areas of the UN system that are dead wood. Visiting the headquarters of UNCTAD² is like visiting the cathedral church of a failed faith. You do not feel that it is doing anything very much—but, as with any failed faith, it has fervent adherents and it would be very difficult to abolish, so one has to approach all these things extremely carefully. But I think that a spirit of a certain amount of change is needed.

The Chairman: Mr Whitley, what do you have to say about the UN and all its agencies?

Andrew Whitley: I spent 16 years at the UN in various professional capacities: at headquarters and in the field in peacekeeping, in development and in humanitarian areas. I thoroughly endorse what Sir Adam has just said. He picked on two of the points that I would have made. The arguments over the merging of the Department of Political Affairs and Department for

² The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

Peacekeeping Operations have gone backwards and forwards for decades. Fashions change. The current Secretary-General at the start of his term split up DPKO and created a new Department of Field Support. I think that was a good practical step, but I fully agree that the silo effect that happens because of the rivalries and tensions between the Department of Political Affairs and DPKO needs to be addressed by bringing together the two. That is essential, and it can be done. At the moment the competition is really unfortunate.

I served at UNCTAD for four years as the chief of staff to the Secretary-General. I can say with all honesty that it was a great pity that back in 1995 a report into reform of the UN development sector, led by Gro Harlem Brundtland, a former Norwegian Prime Minister and currently one of The Elders, was never properly adopted. UNCTAD—as I know because I was part of it—fought off the attempts to abolish it and went in for a modest reform of its role vis-à-vis the WTO,³ but in practice it was merely postponing the inevitable.

I would go further and say that the entire developmental sector of the UN has far too much overlap between UNIDO⁴ in Vienna, the International Trade Centre, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in New York and UNCTAD, and there needs to be a proper rationalisation—but that is easier said than done. There are indeed powerful lobbies, notably the G77⁵ and the non-aligned movement, which have consistently blocked the abolition of UNCTAD, which they see as their fiefdom. But it does not serve a useful purpose these days and there is no doubt that there needs to be a far-reaching reorganisation.

Q39 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: I declare an interest as co-chair of the UN all-party parliamentary group. I shall disappoint Sir Adam, I am afraid, by not taking a position on the Department of Political Affairs and the Department for Peacekeeping Operations merger or not, except to observe that if you merged them a huge proportion of the politically sensitive issues that the UN has to tackle would be in one department—so it is not entirely straightforward. Could I ask the two witnesses to go back to peace and security in two ways? First, the Security Council found itself in recent years in a quasi-Cold War situation with regard to some parts of the world, which have become no-go areas. That was true over Ukraine and Crimea; it is true over Syria; and it is true over the South China Sea, which is becoming ever-more sensitive following the ruling of the Court of Arbitration last week. Of course, that is a UN ruling because it is a court of arbitration set up by the UN under the Convention on the Law of the Sea. Would you suggest, therefore, that the new Secretary-

³ World Trade Organisation

⁴ The United Nations Industrial Development Organization

⁵ The Group of 77 is a loose coalition of developing nations, designed to promote its members' collective economic interests and create an enhanced joint negotiating capacity in the UN

General ought to be trying to roll back some of those no-go areas and move to a situation where the Security Council can seriously discuss these issues again?

The second point is completely different and it is on peacekeeping. There is a huge amount of peacekeeping going on worldwide, but principally in Africa. Some of it is being done brilliantly, some not so brilliantly, and some of it is hovering on the edge of genocide. These are really difficult problems. Can you suggest any specific ways in which the new Secretary-General could make the peacekeeping mission of the UN, which I think cannot be avoided, more effective? The three principles that the UK is promoting in the context of the peacekeeping summit here in September are pledges, planning and performance. Can you say something about how you think a new Secretary-General could make the peacekeeping mission of the UN work a bit better?

The Chairman: Can we try to divide those issues? The first question is enormously important. I was hoping to come in a moment to peacekeeping in all its aspects and the problems today, if that is all right. Can we deal with Lord Hannay's first question briefly?

Sir Adam Roberts: On the first point about merger or not of DPKO and DPA, I do not think that any discussion should start from the assumption that the only possible solution is formal merger. It may be that there are means of getting them to collaborate more closely. Indeed, forcing people from the different departments to share the same rooms and the same desks rather than being physically separated might achieve a valuable result with less upheaval and risk of the kind you pointed out. I take it you also want us to comment at the point about the Security Council and the post-Cold War situation.

The Chairman: I would like to keep all aspects of peacekeeping to a separate section for the moment, if that is all right.

Sir Adam Roberts: That is not a question entirely confined to peacekeeping.

The Chairman: Go ahead.

Sir Adam Roberts: I think that it is a condition of the existence of the UN—and it has been a condition for its success—that it is so structured as to be acceptable to the major powers of the day. It started with the five and it is still, formally speaking, the five. One cannot expect the UN to resolve all great power conflicts on its own. It may have an important contribution to make, as in the Arbitration Court's decision over the South China Sea, without being able to deploy or authorise the use of force to give backing to decisions such as the one you mention. One needs to accept that the UN operates within certain limitations; there needs to be some expectation management.

Having said that, plainly the UN's existence and principles had some involvement in the ending of the Cold War. It had a significant effect on great-power relations at that time, and one can also expect the UN principles and practices to be able to work in various ways in regard to some of our contemporary problems, including Ukraine and the South China Sea—but there will not be a direct deployment of force. We have to accept that as a fact rather than yearn for a UN that cannot really exist.

The Chairman: If the People's Republic of China takes not a blind bit of notice of the UN Law of the Sea ruling by the permanent court in The Hague, what does it say about the P5 set-up when one of its members is simply not playing?

Sir Adam Roberts: It says that it is limited today in ways that it was also limited in the Cold War. There are issues which it can tackle and issues which it cannot. It is a departure from the great aspiration of the UN to address the problem of war overall, but I think it is wiser to accept the limitation than to place a load of expectation on the UN which it is incapable of meeting.

Andrew Whitley: Lord Hannay's expression that certain conflict areas have become in effect no-go areas for the United Nations—for the Security Council—is perhaps an unfortunate reality. That has happened almost by default, first, because of the inabilities of the Secretary-General to be able to find consensus—it is the Secretary-General's job to be able to do so—and, secondly, by virtue of the unwillingness on the part of certain major countries to tackle particular issues. Lord Hannay mentioned some of the most glaring examples. One of the lesser known ones is the inability of the Security Council to agree on what should be done about what most members would like to see: an arms embargo on South Sudan. That proposal has been put forward and sponsored, but currently the Russians, out of bloody-mindedness, are refusing to see it go along, and certain neighbouring African countries would also not like to see it happen, notably Uganda, possibly Sudan, and the Israelis behind them who are also arming the South Sudanese army. This is an example where, with more proactive leadership from the Secretary-General, who has not been using his good-offices role as fully and effectively as he could, some of these issues could have been nipped in the bud before they went too far.

That said, I fully accept the point that has been made, which is that there will always be certain conflict areas where the great powers will say, "You must stay out". I find it a pity that in the case of Ukraine, where the Russians twice vetoed resolutions, it was not forcibly pointed out that the Russians were in contravention of the charter, as they should have recused

themselves in this particular matter because they had an interest in it, and should never have been allowed a vote.

The Chairman: There is much more to pursue on this, but I am afraid that we cannot get away from the pervasive issue of Brexit and how it affects our status at the United Nations. Baroness Helic has some questions on that.

Q40 Baroness Helic: We do not have a lot of time, so if you do not mind I will put them all together in one question. I do not have much of an interest to declare, but I want to put it on the record that I have spoken to one declared and one undeclared candidate for the UN Secretary-General—not as an adviser but in informal conversation. I do not know whether that is relevant, but I have already declared it and it is probably good to mention it here as well.

Going back to Brexit, we have been assured by the Government that, despite leaving the EU, the United Kingdom will remain a very important player in the UN, and right at the heart of it. Professor Roberts, do you agree with that? What would you consider to be the likely challenges, and what opportunities might emerge from the new position in which the United Kingdom finds itself? It has also been put that, should the UK wish to raise its profile on the international stage, we should look for particular issues to focus on. Perhaps Mr Whitley would care to reflect on that. Finally, in maintaining good relationships with the EU we may have to go to New York to find a better way of dealing with our European allies rather than crossing the channel, which is 20 miles wide. It is a strange logic, but we find ourselves in a new world, so we may have to pursue that one. If Professor Roberts would care to comment on that, it would be appreciated.

Sir Adam Roberts: As you declared an interest and I have an identical interest, I had better declare it, too, having met two of the aspirants for the job of Secretary-General. The starting point for discussion of Britain's post-Brexit influence has to be that a condition of remaining influential in the UN generally is that we keep the United Kingdom together. That is absolutely basic. We all know that problems being thrown up by the Brexit vote could impact on our capacity to keep it together—whether we are talking about Scotland, Northern Ireland or whatever.

I also think that some damage has been done. The UK has a good reputation at the UN for the seriousness of its commitment: sending good people to be permanent representatives and so on, being constructive and being good at helping to draft resolutions, communiqués, et cetera. I do not think that that position is immediately challenged. I agree with what Matthew Rycroft said in London last week: the UK's window on the world will be now even more through the

United Nations. That seems to me absolutely right. Indeed, it is important, at a time when we may seem to be yielding to our own nationalism, to stress our commitment to the rest of the world.

The way in which some decisions have been presented has not particularly helped. For example, I have seen highly critical international comment on the abolition of the Department of Energy and Climate Change. It may be based, to an extent, on a misunderstanding. It was never the most glorious department in Whitehall, and its functions have been taken up by another department—without the words “climate change” in its title. That is not the kind of thing that is good for building up our reputation internationally.

If we are going to build up our reputation in the UN, there are many ways of doing it, including talking with our European colleagues, as you mentioned. One of the big issues that needs to be addressed, which we have not touched on here so far and which is really urgent, is the financing of humanitarian action. For three years, there has been an enormous disparity in what the UN has required for humanitarian work, such as refugee camps in the countries neighbouring Syria. There is a need for some creative thinking about how that might be financed. In particular, there is a case—a difficult one that needs to be discussed—for more flexibility about funds earmarked for development being usable also for humanitarian work, including in countries that may be over the limit wealth-wise that disqualifies them from development aid. Such countries—I think Jordan is one—might need to be eligible for humanitarian aid under the kind of arrangement that I have indicated with a very broad brush.⁶

Andrew Whitley: Baroness Helic, I shall pick up some of the same themes. The European Union’s collective voice at the United Nations is not a strong one, but where it has influence is on the budgetary process. It is a major actor in the Fifth Committee, which is the Finance Committee of the United Nations, and the EU normally co-ordinates its positions and can make a big difference in terms of budget. So I certainly hope that the UK will continue to co-ordinate informally with the EU; it would be sensible to do so when it comes to budget matters at the United Nations.

Unfortunately, it is true, as Sir Adam said, that the humanitarian budget of the UN is under serious stress at the moment and that there is a need to do something about it. Any cutting of UK aid—the 0.7% commitment—would be a great pity, in our view. We also agree that the abolition of the Department of Energy and Climate Change is an unfortunate political signal,

⁶ Any limits on provision of development aid to certain countries on account of their level of development are far from being absolute. The OECD classifies more than 50 states as “Upper Middle Income Countries”. Many of them, including Jordan, receive significant development aid from a variety of states and international bodies.

even if the reality is that the same work is being done. Coming immediately after the Paris agreement, it certainly sends an unfortunate signal. When combined with other steps that the UK has taken to increase fossil fuel subsidies, at a time when in our view it ought to be doing the reverse and limiting them, it is going in the wrong direction. This is a matter of sending signals to the international community that on the big issues of implementing the climate change agreement and the sustainable development goals the UK remains fully committed and that the high-standard agreements it has made with other EU countries will be maintained.

The Chairman: Could Brexit possibly trigger even deeper changes in the United Nations organisation? You mentioned the deadlock over P5, which it has been stuck with since 1945, and there was a picture in the past of the developing world trying to gang up on the developed world's group of 76 and, going back even further, Bandung and so on. That seems to have passed—but could this small change create an avalanche?

Andrew Whitley: It is a possibility, but I would not overstate the case for it.

The Chairman: Let us turn from that issue to the question with which Sir Adam began, which is peacekeeping and addressing all the issues round the world, which are numerous and often not between states at all but between non-state players. UN troops have had to fulfil some very unenviable roles, of which the latest is in South Sudan. Lord Hannay, would you like to dig into this?

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: I set out the terms of my question before, and if Sir Adam and Mr Whitley would like to pick it up, that would be fine. I do not want to repeat it, because time is of the essence.

Q41 The Chairman: You have in front of you the question Lord Hannay is talking about. It begins, “We have been informed that the UK can add particular value to UN peacekeeping missions by contributing niche capacity, such as training”. Is that something you would like to comment on?

Sir Adam Roberts: Peacekeeping is certainly an area in which I have taken a particular interest. The range of problems that peacekeeping has to address has expanded enormously, to the point where the real question is whether the same formula is applicable to this wide range of problems, and whether peacekeeping as traditionally conceived is applicable. Of course, there have been some striking innovations in UN practice and in the practice of states in supporting peacekeeping operations. For example, I am very struck that in Bosnia, after many disasters in the UN peacekeeping operation there and after the massacre at Srebrenica, a serious attempt was made to bolster the peacekeeping operation with the largely Anglo-French rapid reaction force outside Sarajevo, which, combined with NATO's Operation

Deliberate Force at the time, contributed to the ending of the siege of Sarajevo. That is an interesting example of the way in which, when peacekeeping has to address continuing conflict and adversaries whose aims verge on the genocidal, it may need to be backed up by force. We have seen the mandates of peacekeeping forces leaning towards force protection in many cases since.

So one of the issues that needs to be addressed is how better to think about peacekeeping and plan for it. My slight disappointment at the plans for the ministerial meeting in London in September, which is going to discuss peacekeeping issues, is that there is not enough on the changing concept of peacekeeping, on the different mandates and on how best we should think about them. I would like to see more done on that front.

The Chairman: Is it a case of generals fighting the last war syndrome? We are dealing with new kinds of enemies, hybrid warfare and maskirovka, or whatever the Russians call it, and the UN troops are in an unfamiliar situation. Is that what you are saying?

Sir Adam Roberts: I would say that they have partially adapted to the situation. The mandates have adapted quite remarkably to the situation, with a recognition that peacekeepers may need to use force. We enter a world of great difficulty when, as in some conflicts, willingness to see force used may also require willingness to take sides. That is an extraordinarily difficult issue for the United Nations. If I have any disagreement at all with what Andrew Whitley said, interestingly, about Libya and the disasters there, it is that in such a case, if you are going to protect a population at risk and you do not have large forces of your own on the ground, you tend to end up needing support from one or other of the local forces, directly or indirectly.

Two issues are not on the agenda of the London conference that ought to be. One is that some peacekeeping operations sometimes may end up having to take sides, and the other is that the legitimacy of peacekeeping operations, and their maintenance and support, depends at least as much on local legitimacy as it does on the international legitimacy conferred by the UN. That was the very clear message from a study done by one of my former graduate students, Jeni Whalan, who is an Australian, of the way in which some Australian operations have focused on local legitimacy as much as on international legitimacy and have done better as a result of that focus. That feeds into issues, with which Baroness Coussins will be only too familiar, of the importance of language, understanding and being able to talk with those involved in a particular conflict area. That issue is not on the agenda of the London conference, as far as I can see, and maybe it should be.

The Chairman: Mr Whitley, you have served in peacekeeping missions. Tell us what it is like.

Andrew Whitley: I did, Lord Howell. The most successful examples were in East Timor and in Kosovo to a lesser extent, in both of which the UN was the transitional administration for a number of years. The combination of a realistic mandate given to the UN transitional administration in East Timor and a benign and supportive external environment made that a success story. By contrast, eastern Congo is an awful mess. I am a supporter of the action taken to give the peacekeeping force the robust capacity to be able to initiate military action where needed. In the case of a largely dysfunctional army in the DRC⁷ it was necessary that the UN do what it could, but it is only a stop-gap option; it will certainly not be able to resolve the longer-term problems. Often the United Nations finds itself in a situation, of which the South Sudan example is the best or worst one, where it is simply put into a hopeless position that it does not have the capacity to deal with.

There is something to be said about the choice of peacekeeping troops. Often the peacekeeping troops come from countries that are not willing to initiate action, and they are not particularly well trained. We have seen bad examples of it elsewhere in Africa. There is something to be said for not simply throwing troops and a lot of money at the problem and hoping it will go away—because it certainly does not.

The Chairman: I notice that the Chinese are contributing 8,000 troops to UN peacekeeping. They have already been involved deeply in South Sudan and are demanding a better mandate because their troops are being killed. Is that a good story that can develop in a positive way for UN peacekeeping?

Andrew Whitley: I regard it as a positive example. I am pleased to see that the Chinese are taking their responsibilities seriously there. There is a need for a stronger and better mandate for UNMISS in South Sudan.

The Chairman: If there are no more questions on peacekeeping, could we come finally to development? The story used to be that, if developing countries develop, people will stay there and that will be the end of huge migration. It does not seem to have worked out that way so far. Lord Inglewood has some questions.

Q42 Lord Inglewood: The majority of candidates for the post of UN Secretary-General have told everyone that they place a high priority on implementing the sustainable development goals and combating climate change. There are two particular questions arising from that.

⁷ Democratic Republic of the Congo

First, in what particular ways do you think the new Secretary-General can play a part in implementing both those agreements? Secondly, how can we support them in a flanking manner, other than possibly by changing the name of one of the Whitehall departments?

Andrew Whitley: I believe that the UK has an important role to play in both of the major agreements that have recently been signed. The UK can certainly help by providing the technical support that is needed for the most vulnerable countries on adaptation to and mitigation of the effects of climate change. I believe that that is a valuable role the UK can play in supporting some of those vulnerable countries. Much of the funding required for the so-called green fund has not been committed yet, and that should be a priority for UK aid. As far as the sustainable development goals are concerned, to state the obvious, unlike the millennium development goals, they apply to all countries and the UK should lead by example in this regard. If the UK was to open itself up to scrutiny about how it is meeting these international measurements, it would be doing a very good service to others.

Q43 The Chairman: In the last few minutes, perhaps both of you would give us one philosophical thought, because you are deeply involved in this. It is supposed to be the United Nations, with all the high hopes of 1945. We have reached a stage where in practice the world has never been more fragmented, with secession, rebellion, borders being abolished before our eyes, devolution of every kind and identity strengths clashing with the old, more centralised order. If we look out on the world, the “united” bit of the United Nations has not worked very well. Can you put your finger on what has gone wrong? What has changed? Why have the high hopes of the 1940s and 1950s dissolved into this fragmentary mess? It is a big question that I know will take hours, but perhaps you could give us your final thoughts.

Sir Adam Roberts: It all comes down to the fact that decolonisation and the establishment of new states, which we tended to think of as a simple process with a happy ending, turns out to be an extraordinarily difficult process. New states face problems with the legitimacy of their borders and their political system, with the interrelations between ethnic groups within them and with which languages are to be recognised and which are not. There is almost no limit to the difficulty of the problems that are faced on decolonisation.

It is true throughout the UN’s history that problems of decolonisation have led to practically all UN peacekeeping missions. They may over time be successfully addressed, but they are the main explanation for the troubles we now face. Our own experience confirms this. Where have we in Britain had the most difficulty in an area which has been, as it were, most like the decolonised world? It is in Northern Ireland, where suddenly there was a change of the system, difficult relations between the minority and majority and so on. We have problems

very similar to those that were encountered in former Yugoslavia or are encountered today in South Sudan, Congo or wherever. They are structurally difficult problems, and one of the UN's main functions has to be to assist new states in tackling these very difficult problems.

The Chairman: Thank you. You had no warning of that question.

Andrew Whitley: The points made by Sir Adam are absolutely spot on. The issue of legitimacy of states and Governments in a world in which the sovereignty of states is increasingly disputed or challenged, by non-state actors in particular, is a growing and uncomfortable one for the UN, which also has to share the global stage with other fora in which issues get resolved, whether it be the G20⁸ or other regional organisations. I continue to be an optimist and believe that the United Nations can adapt and is not on an irreversible decline. I see a lot of good work having been done and still being done in the field, which has made an enormous difference to the lives of people, and I would prefer to see the glass half full than half empty.

The Chairman: Optimism is the note to end on. I am sorry about the intense heat, but the issues are enormous and you have cast much illumination on them. We are extremely grateful to you both for coming before us today. Thank you very much indeed, Sir Adam and Mr Whitley.

⁸ The Group of Twenty is an international forum for the governments and central bank governors from 20 major economies

**Andrew Whitley, Interim Chief Executive Officer, The Elders
Opening Statement**

My Lord Chairman:

I would like to begin by thanking your distinguished Committee for taking the initiative to hold this timely inquiry, and in particular for the kind invitation extended to The Elders to provide evidence today. We value the progressive role played by the House of Lords in promoting multilateralism and upholding shared human values as indispensable elements of the UK's foreign policy.

If time permits, I would be pleased to briefly describe and provide examples of The Elders' work during the question-and-answer session. For now, I shall limit myself to explaining why we believe this inquiry is so important and express the hope that the new Government will pay attention to your findings.

Seventy years after the founding of the United Nations, the return of dangerous tensions among the major powers of our day – Russia, China and the United States – and the persistence of that moral abomination, the five year-old war in Syria, are stark reminders of why the global community must cooperate better. The Security Council has manifestly failed to live up to its responsibilities in this regard.

As a founding member of the United Nations and a Permanent Member of the Security Council, The Elders believe the United Kingdom has a special responsibility to ensure that the UN is both effective and fit-for-purpose. To its credit, the UK has taken the lead in promoting certain procedural reforms. But larger challenges related to the outdated composition of the Security Council, misuse of the veto by certain permanent members, and the politicisation of senior-level appointments in the Secretariat, among other issues, remain untouched. And the excuse often used privately for inaction, that Washington is not in favour of change, should be exposed for what it is.

Real leadership by the UK sometimes means acting alone or else working with other allies at the UN, and doing the right thing. France, for example, has taken a laudable initiative on the need for veto restraint in the case of mass atrocities. We at The Elders support the need for

urgent action to overcome the persistent deadlock seen in the Council today on so many bloody conflicts.

In our view, the most immediate challenge for the UK is to choose the right person as the next Secretary-General, to replace Ban Ki-moon next January. In the coming days, the Security Council is expected to begin the task it usually tackles once a decade: winnowing the field of hopeful candidates for the post of Secretary-General down to a credible short list. This year, so far, there has been much greater transparency than in the past. But the public hearings held in the General Assembly are no guarantee that, in the end, the P-5 will not nominate someone else, someone chosen more for reasons of malleability – and not on grounds of merit, or because he or she is likely to be a real leader.

While Britain naturally cannot dictate the choice, since no candidate can be recommended without the UK's support, this country is however able to lay down certain "red lines" which any candidate must demonstrably fulfil. In our view, the qualities that matter most in a Secretary-General are: first, good judgement, including the ability to sense which battles are winnable and which are not; second, a proven attachment to the purposes and principles of the Organization, in particular human rights; and, third, an understanding that the Secretary-General can act as a kind of mediator between governments and peoples – and must be able to reach beyond governments to civil society and world public opinion. This requires him or her to be an effective communicator

Many of the Elders, most notably our Chair, Kofi Annan, have held high office at the United Nations. Elders have also served as heads of government and state in countries around the world. But today they are free of the constraints of office and thus able to speak their minds, frankly and honestly, in the interests of our shared humanity and common global institutions.

On the Elders' behalf, I should therefore stress the enormously valuable role the UK is capable of playing at the Security Council over the coming period, to lay the groundwork for a stronger and more effective United Nations. For the Secretariat to be able to exercise the genuinely independent role envisaged by the Charter there must be a strong and independent Secretary-General. He or she – we feel it is high time to have a woman – must be able to work well with the P-5. That is a prerequisite. But, as history has taught us, it is equally essential

that the Secretary-General is able to withstand undue pressures from the permanent members and act in the larger interests of the Organisation.

Considerations of geographic rotation – the Buggins’ turn principle – must be discarded by the Security Council, leaving merit as the primary consideration when reviewing candidates for the job over the coming weeks. The Elders would like to see the Council then put forward more than one candidate to the General Assembly, to empower the UN’s membership as a whole and give it a genuine choice. If the GA does sometimes act irresponsibly, and plays political games, perhaps this stems from not being entrusted with real responsibilities.

Of greater importance, however, is the need for a change in the term of office. Instead of two five-year terms, which inevitably leaves the Secretary-General susceptible to political pressures, The Elders feel there should be a single, longer term of office, of perhaps seven years. No less a figure than that most distinguished of British international civil servants, Sir Brian Urquhart, now aged 97, favours this change – and so do we. The time to do so is now.

The United Kingdom would perform a great service to the UN by taking the lead in bringing about this change in the Secretary-General’s term of office in the General Assembly over the coming weeks.

Thank you.