

## **Interactive Session with Ambassador Vijay Nambiar**

*Question:* UN wastes most resources on protection and on army. Can't the UN do something to let the health and the lives of the people be bettered instead of precious resources being wasted? As Mahatma Gandhi said can't the UN step in and stop all tensions and start on a new slate?

*Response from Ambassador Nambiar:* Perhaps, in an ideal world the UN could do it. But as it stands today the UN is actually the sum of its membership, and, it is therefore, a reflection of what the members are willing to do. At successive meetings, in fact, virtually at every General Assembly Session, sentiments such as what you have just expressed are expressed uniformly by many delegations. But it is these same delegations that when it comes to Committee Work and where the adoption of the Resolutions are to be done, work for the pursuit of whatever is more narrow and whatever is in their own national interests. Unfortunately, that is, actually, the name of the game as far as the real situation is where the States are concerned.

*Question:* Your speech imbued a sense of hope about UN; I am sure in our collective consciousness. You did say that some critical questions need to be asked to the UN. In that spirit I would like to ask about two aspects. One, through the inter-governmental processes and through the multi-lateral approaches the UN through its various functional commissions does arrive at a consensus. But because of the nature of programmes which are loosely donor-driven the priorities laid down by the functional commissions and various organs of UN are hijacked by the donors. I had seen because I work in the areas of drug, crime, terrorism, they see that there are agreed priorities, there is consensus, but yet the programmes are not undertaken and they are mostly in the directions mandated by the interest of the donors. In drug programme the budget constitutes 10% of the regular budget and 90% donor Budget. Thereby, one loses faith whether UN will be able to deliver on what is agreed and whether the inter-governmental multilateral process will ever see the

conclusion. One classic example being terrorism is an agreed urgent priority on the part of UN and yet UN is not able to come to a definition of what is terrorism. The Bill piloted by India is still to see the light of the day, though it is under discussion. The second aspect is the UN seems to have lost its teeth in getting its priorities implemented by the member states. Again, the classic example being Iraq. The UN did sense there are no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, still the war was waged. Under these two circumstances how do you think the UN will shape, either systemic in improving its delivery or may be functionally how it could alter so that it can be seen to be delivering what it is promising.

*Response from Ambassador Nambiar:* You made a reality check, yes I probably placed my statement more at an idealized level, but I have also stated that ultimately the UN is the totality of its membership. And if you are to look at even the regular budget, the major contributions that are made by the principal donors like the United States and Japan, make it necessary for us to consider that even to get the payment of what is budgeted, requires a conscious cultivation of some of the important member states. I think it is probably unrealistic to think that by merely taking principled stand adopted by the General Assembly you will be able to eventually convert them in some way. One has to consciously work with the more powerful states on sub-optimal solutions and that's where one has to count eventually on being able to mobilize the domestic media in these powerful states, as well as mobilize civil society organizations. This is true in both the cases you mentioned, that is in the case of various programmes which are donor-driven as you said; here, increasingly the emphasis for ensuring better implementation has been on getting civil society organizations to do a better monitoring of what is being done and how much is being done for the interests of the countries concerned rather than driven by the interests of the donors. We are increasingly seeing this kind of mobilization taking place in many of the funds and programmes. That I think is what provides a corrective. Of course, it is a gradual process; one does see that in

many cases the interests of donors do continue to predominate. But it is changing, in many of the funds and programmes, whether it be the UNFPA, UNICEF or even the UNDP, one is seeing a change generated mainly by the pressures of the civil society organizations. As far as the question you asked concerning Iraq, here again it is not that the United Nations has done nothing or that it has decided that what is happening in Iraq came about in spite of the United Nations. As we have seen, the approach of the earlier (US) administration had been that you adopt a multi-lateral position where you can, but you adopt a unilateral position only when you must. In the present administration the position is that you adopt a unilateral position when you can and a multilateral position only when you must. That is in fact the approach that is being taken by the present administration rather than the other way round in the Clinton administration. And in many ways what you are seeing now is that in a deteriorating situation, there is a gradual reversion to looking at the possibilities of an increased role for the UN. In fact, just two weeks ago there was an article by the Permanent Representative of the United States to the UN, who was formerly US Ambassador in Baghdad, saying there is a need for greater activism on the part of the United Nations. How do we address these questions? Obviously, the UN is playing a major role in Iraq even today. In fact the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) has, along with the UN Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) played a role in constitution building, in political facilitation and even in the economic reconstruction to an extent, what is called the International Compact on Iraq. But these are peripheral at present to the overwhelming security situation. faced by the UN. After having faced the attack on the UN office three years ago, one has to be conscious of the need to ensure that, when the UN is playing a role in a country like Iraq, there is at least minimal security assurances for the UN personnel. This can be only ensured when you do not seem to work against the interests of the local population. Today, unfortunately, the perception even of the UN in Iraq is that it is working with the coalition powers. A change has to

take place. I think it is ultimately a question of how you are able to work towards a reorientation of the role the UN should play in Iraq. I am afraid these are questions which, as an institution the Secretariat cannot act upon independently of member states. And where you work with member states, the interests of the most powerful member states naturally predominate. In the Security Council you cannot really achieve very much without the permanent members being on your side.

**Question:** What I wanted to ask you, taking on from the previous question, with the high and mighty taking on itself to invade any country as and when it feels like on whatever grounds, is it not becoming a threatening situation for the world's survival as such? Do you think day by day the UN is becoming powerless and hapless in tackling the mighty powers?

*Response from Ambassador Nambiar:* Well, as I said there are many people, in fact the previous secretary general said you speak of the UN as if it is separate from its member-states, including the powerful member-states. In an ideal situation, of course, you would probably see the moral authority of the General Assembly assert itself. But you are not in an ideal situation. The power relationship in the actual world is different from the concept of sovereign equality among member-states. I think that is the reality which even the UN has recognized when in the Security Council the Charter recognized the rights of permanent members. While you say this, you have to admit also that there has been change over the years and there is now a continuous appeal to world public opinion. There is a role that individuals can play. The role the Secretary General plays as the conscience of the world, as it were, consciously voicing this change, the mobilization of civil society, of the media. Eventually in addressing these issues, that is the only way you can get the powerful to change their ways. There is really no other way. This is the way the world is today, unfortunately.

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