

Commentary

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ECONOMIC INVESTMENT AND ACTUARIAL RESEARCH

The United Nations: A New Direction

The appointment of Ban Ki-moon as Secretary-General of the United Nations provides an opportunity to assess the future direction of the UN in relation to its functions and objectives as set forth in the United Nations Charter. Recent years have witnessed appeals for significant reform of the UN and efforts by certain member Nations to influence and control UN activities. Ban Ki-moon took the oath of office with his left hand firmly placed on the UN Charter; this gesture represented a new practice at the UN and is significant in emphasizing his commitment to the provisions of the UN Charter. His recitation of the oath of office included a commitment “to discharge the functions of the UN with the interests of the United Nations only and not to accept or seek instructions from any government or other authority external to the United Nations Organization.” One of the new Secretary-General’s first actions in office was to appoint Dr. Asha-Rose Migiro as Deputy UN Secretary-General; the appointment of Dr. Migiro is of great significance, particularly as the Secretary-General noted in announcing her appointment that he intended to delegate much of the management and administrative work of the UN Secretariat, as well as socio-economic affairs and development, to the Deputy Secretary-General. It is of interest to note that Ban Ki-moon was formerly the Foreign Minister of Korea and Dr. Migiro was the former Foreign Minister of Tanzania.

In a recent address to the Academic Council of the United Nations System in New York, Dr. Migiro chose the theme of the “United Nations and Development” and described development as the greatest challenge confronting humanity today. She appealed for research and ideas on how to achieve the Millennium Development Goals as a vision for a better world, with less

poverty, hunger and disease, greater survival prospects for mothers and infants, better educated children, equal opportunities for women, and a healthier environment. Dr. Migiro noted that although some progress has been made and there are clear signs of hope, there is still much to be done to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Sub-Saharan Africa remains the epicenter of the poverty crisis; the number of people on the continent living in extreme poverty continues to rise; child mortality rates are disturbingly high. In Latin America, overall progress is offset by the existence of large pockets of inequality. The Central Asian republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States have not fully recovered from social and economic difficulties following the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Small island developing nations and landlocked countries face their own special challenges, including high vulnerability to natural disasters. East and South Asia still have the largest numbers of poor and malnourished people in the world. Much more can and must be done to advance human development and security around the world. To achieve the Millennium Development Goals it is essential to ensure the effective implementation of a global partnership between rich and poor countries for the betterment of all. Technology and science form the basis for modern economies and are fundamental drivers of long-term economic growth. Countries need to invest in science and technology and higher education to develop the next generation of world leaders. Climate change has become a major development challenge; it is a matter of urgency that requires sustained high-level attention at both the global and national levels; the world urgently needs action to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions; the role of research is critical to address the chal-

lenge of climate change.

While the UN needs to adapt to changes in the world’s social, economic and political conditions, the provisions of the UN Charter remain paramount. The drafters of the UN Charter understood the need for global economic formulation to be a prime responsibility of the UN and, for this reason, the Charter assigns to the UN the central role for global macro-economic policy and strategy formulation and guidance. Article 1(3) of the UN Charter includes among the purposes of the United Nations, achievement of “international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character.” There are different agendas attempting to influence the future direction of the UN; one agenda is to make the UN more effective consistent with the UN Charter in meeting human needs in response to social and economic challenges; other agendas seek to make major reforms to the UN and its agencies. The World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization have a mandate to operate within the UN system and have become significant entities operating in the global development and economic policy arena. A challenge for any UN reform proposals will be to establish a clearer definition of the relationships between the UN and these three agencies and how their policies and strategies are implemented.

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