

The Right War

Too often, our world seems to careen from one crisis to the next: violence in the Middle East, disease in Africa, soaring food and fuel prices around the globe, the threat of climate change. When people are buffeted by one shock after another, it's not uncommon for them to grow pessimistic, to see the world's problems as too intractable to solve. The temptation is to throw up our hands, retreat from the world and tend our own gardens.

Yet from where I sit, on the 38th floor of the United Nations building, the view is rather different. My perspective is of cautious but resolute optimism. Every problem of the world finds its way to the UN, our global crossroads of politics and diplomacy. But if the problems come together at the UN, so do the often hidden connections among them – and through those connections, the ways to real solutions. Nowhere is that more apparent than in our approach to climate change. Many of the challenges we face, from poverty to armed conflict, are linked to the effects of global warming. Finding a solution to climate change can bring benefits in other areas. A greener planet will be a more peaceful and prosperous one too.

The UN was founded, famously, to “end the scourge of war.” We often confuse that with the dispatching of peacekeepers to this or that zone of conflict. I see it differently. The basic building block of peace and security for all peoples is economic and social security, anchored in sustainable development. It is a key to all problems. Why? Because it allows us to address all the great issues – poverty, climate, environment and political stability – as parts of a whole.

Consider Darfur, where I've put considerable diplomatic effort during my first year as Secretary-General. It is, of course, most immediately a challenge of peacemaking and peacekeeping. But Darfur's violence began with the onset of a decades-long drought. Farmers and herders came into conflict over land and water. If this root problem is not addressed – if the challenges of poverty alleviation, environmental stewardship and the control of climate change are not tied together – any solutions we propose in Darfur will at best be a temporary Band-Aid.

More than ever before, solutions must bridge the local and the global. Hunger in Africa will be solved partly by helping farmers get the improved seeds, water pumps and soil nutrients they need for a good harvest. It also requires the traditional UN development effort – coupled with a new attention to the environment. Since problems spill across borders, security anywhere depends on sustainable development everywhere.

That brings us back to climate change. No place is immune, neither the arid Sahel of Africa nor the grain-exporting regions of Australia nor the drought-prone Southwest of the US. To fight it, the UN family, including the Nobel Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, has begun tapping into a pool of global resources – scientific and engineering expertise, corporate engagement and civic leadership. We have begun to appreciate more fully how the world’s dazzling know-how can solve the seemingly unsolvable when we view our problems through the right perspective.

This year at the UN, as we link the crucial agendas of poverty reduction and climate change, we must remember that among the best minds are the farmers, doctors and community leaders at the local level who have worked out ingenious solutions to urgent challenges. They tell us that there are indeed pathways, at modest cost, to clean and sustainable energy systems, high-yield agriculture in Africa and improved water management in drought-prone regions of Asia, Africa, the Middle East and the Americas.

This year could mark a watershed at the UN. We will undertake climate-change negotiations in earnest and accelerate our efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals to fight poverty, hunger and disease. As we embark on this great undertaking, we might recall the historic importance of American leadership in this fight. In 1963, President John F. Kennedy told the UN General Assembly, “The effort to improve the conditions of man...is not a task for the few. It is the task of all – acting alone, acting in groups, acting in the United Nations. For plague and pestilence, plunder and pollution, the hazards of nature and the hunger of children are the foes of every nation. The earth, the sea and the air are the concern of every nation. And science, technology and education can be the ally of every nation.” Let us heed that sound advice.

By Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, *Time*, April 16th, 2008.

1. TEXTUAL COMPREHENSION

A. Carefully read the text and answer the following questions in English. Use the information given in the text but do not copy the sentences.

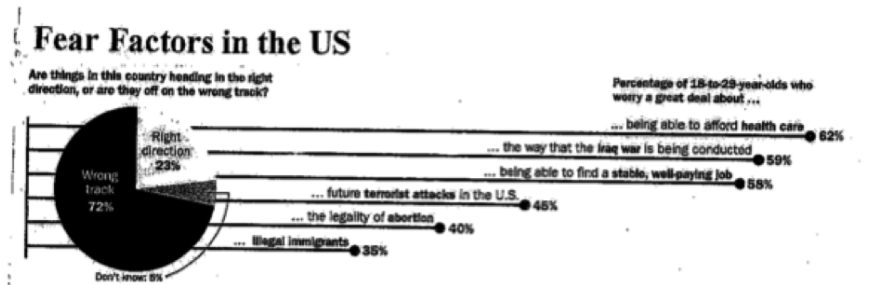
1. What is the basic mission of the UN according to Ban Ki-moon?
2. What kind of resources has the UN used to fight climate change?
3. What is the point developed in the conclusion of the text?

B. Find the English synonym of each word (adequate for use in context).

1. soaring.
2. scourge.
3. worked out.
4. watershed.

C. Writing exercise

After a brief description, comment on the following graph in English.



2. ESSAY

After selecting one of the two questions, write a two-page essay with a clear argument. Circle the number of the question you have selected.

1. Do you think the UN is an appropriate institution to fight the effects of climate change?
2. “Finding a solution to climate change can bring benefits in other areas. A greener planet will be a more peaceful and prosperous one too.” Discuss.

Proposition de correction

1. TEXTUAL COMPREHENSION

A. Carefully read the text and answer the following questions in English. Use the information given in the text but do not copy the sentences.

1. What is the basic mission of the UN according to Ban Ki-moon?

According to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the basic mission of the UN is to meet the world’s challenges by connecting local and global solutions. Peace and prosperity can be achieved by diplomatic approaches to war, political instability and poverty and above all to climate change.

(45 words)

2. What kind of resources has the UN used to fight climate change?

In order to combat climate change the UN has drawn on its world-leading expertise in fields such as engineering, science and local governance. At the same time they are endeavouring to connect fighting climate change with reducing poverty on the local level, by applying smaller-scale solutions to issues like water management and clean energy.

(54 words)

3. What is the point developed in the conclusion of the text?

In the conclusion of the text, Ban Ki-moon reiterates the ethos underlined by JFK in 1963, namely that the great scourges afflicting humankind – disease, poverty, famine and so on – cannot be beaten if we see them only as local problems. They are global issues and the scientific and technological solutions have to be global too.

(55 words)

B. Find the English synonym of each word (adequate for use in context).

1. soaring; *going up high, increasing sharply*
2. scourge; *cause of suffering, curse*
3. worked out; *devised, invented*
4. watershed; *dividing line*

C. Writing exercise

After a brief description, comment on the following graph in English.

This pie chart represents the results of an opinion poll of 18-to-29-year-old Americans about the way things are heading in the US. While 5% have no opinion, 72% say that the country is on the wrong track, and only 23% believe it is going in the right direction. They mostly worry about not being able to afford medical care (62%). The other sources of anxiety are the Iraq war (59%), finding a stable job (58%), terrorist attacks (45%), the legality of abortion (40%) and illegal immigration (35%).

All this goes to show that young Americans are, on the whole, pessimistic both about their own future and that of their country.

(110 words)

2. ESSAY

After selecting one of the two questions, write a two-page essay with a clear argument. Circle the number of the question you have selected.

1. **Do you think the UN is an appropriate institution to fight the effects of climate change?**

Analyse du sujet

Le sujet pose la question de l'efficacité d'une institution internationale telle que les Nations Unies pour combattre les effets du changement climatique. Il ne met pas en cause la réalité de ce bouleversement ni celle de ses effets, mais propose de réfléchir au meilleur moyen de les combattre.

Proposition A

Climate change is one of the most critical threats facing the world today. Some scientists predict that global temperature shifts over the next one hundred years could trigger widespread ecological disasters in the form of rising sea levels, violent weather patterns, desertification, famine and water shortages – all of which could lead to political instability, economic disruption and armed conflict. So, to what extent can it be said that the UN is an appropriate institution to fight the effects of climate change?

In 1992 the UN adopted the Framework Convention on Climate change, an international environmental treaty that requires cooperation among governments, international organisations and world leaders, and sets binding limits on greenhouse gas emissions for each country. Since then, it has organised an annual Climate change conference with a view to assessing what progress has been made. In 2015, 55 countries, representing 55% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, ratified the Paris Agreement on climate change signed during the COP 21, even though notable exceptions included the United States, Brazil and Australia.

In short, the UN is ideally placed to play a central role in encouraging countries to work side by side. Its 2007 Caring for Climate initiative also helps companies share their experiences and find practical solutions to the climate change problems they face. Such a respected international institution can also shape individual attitudes and bring its weight to bear on public policy, meaning that it doesn't just deliver humanitarian aid in the aftermath of environmental disasters, but attempts to play a more proactive and preventative role upstream.

However, I believe that we shouldn't just rely on international institutions or governments to solve these difficulties, but seek to bring solutions by ourselves. Every citizen of the world should endeavour to limit climate change and reduce its effects. We can learn to live more environmentally-friendly lives and adapt our routines very easily, both inside and outside the home: saving electricity and water, recycling paper and glass, shopping locally, offsetting our carbon emissions... If we all made these minor individual efforts, it would make a huge overall difference for the planet.

(350 words)

Proposition B

With 193 members, the UN is the world's largest and most influential intergovernmental organisation. Thus, it could be argued that it is the consummate institution for fighting the effects of a global problem. Indeed, Goal 13 of the UN's sustainable development goals is to "take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts". In truth, the UN has been working on such issues for longer than many governments as it created its own environmental programme, the UNEP, in 1972.

Despite UN secretary general, António Guterres, recently calling climate change "the most systemic threat to humankind", the UN has nevertheless been powerless to prevent the world's second biggest polluter from pulling out of the Paris climate accord. In fact, the USA emits five times more pollution per capita than China, which leads many to declare that rich nations control the UN. The US remains the UN's largest donor, representing one fifth of funding. Therefore, how critical can the UN afford to be? Do powerful countries pay their money and act as they please? This may be perceived as even more deleterious since smaller nations like the Pacific Islands suffer most from climate change. At the UN General Assembly, the Prime Minister of Samoa stated: "Climate change... crosses borders seamlessly... and does not discriminate between countries, rich or poor."

However, it could be argued that affording the Prime Minister of a country with barely 200,000 inhabitants access to a global audience is precisely what makes the UN effective on the world stage. In the UN, each country, large or small, has a vote and it provides much-needed funding to enable smaller nations to attenuate the effects of climate change. This is vital in zones such as the Pacific Islands, under threat from rising sea levels.

The UN's aim to promote worldwide prosperity and stability seems highly unlikely unless it concurrently tackles climate change, a global threat that must be taken on by an international organisation. If not the UN, then who?

(330 words)

2. “Finding a solution to climate change can bring benefits in other areas. A greener planet will be a more peaceful and prosperous one too.” Discuss.

Analyse du sujet

Le sujet pose la question des bénéfices autres que purement écologiques à une éventuelle solution au réchauffement climatique: conséquences politiques (conflits armés, soulèvements...) et économiques (migrations forcées, exode rural...).

Proposition A

The complex interactions of the climate, ecosystems and human activities mean that the effects of climatic and environmental change are already worryingly visible in many regions around the world: polar ice shields melting, sea levels rising, and ever more common extreme weather events such as heat waves and droughts or floods. I am convinced that the ecological benefits of finding an answer to climate change would also have hidden social and political advantages.

The mass migrations which can be triggered by climate change in developing countries can lead to major refugee crises and widespread social disruption. When herders and farmers battle for finite resources as land disappears, potentially violent conflict and the development of reactionary or terrorist movements can be the consequence. So any climate change solution, particularly in countries where there are no mediating institutions to counter tensions between groups struggling to adapt to a new environment, would have a positive knock-on effect.

For instance, some commentators suggest that the Arab Spring was triggered by climate change because it led to soaring food prices, while others (such as former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon) argue that successive droughts played a part in the build up to the wars in Darfur and Syria, with millions migrating in the search for reliable access to food, water or jobs. In this respect, mitigating climate change would lead to indirect benefits in the social and geopolitical spheres.

And while it has been argued that such climate change mitigation would put the brakes on economic growth, in the long term it might actually enhance it. This seems implausible at first sight, but once we factor in other costs, such as pursuing policies to limit greenhouse gas emissions, or dealing with the mass migrations and social tension induced by climate change, replacing fossil fuel with albeit more expensive “greener” energies could produce a net economic gain.

Once the wider picture evoked above is factored in, maybe the cost of curbing climate change can be seen as a safe bet. Moreover we will protect the poorest and most vulnerable in the world into the bargain and build a safer and securer future for our planet.

(359 words)