



Vision Statement

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Candidate for the Position of the
Secretary-General of the United Nations



UN VISION STATEMENT

The United Nations is a flawed institution but also an essential one.

The flaws are inherent in an organization that represents every country in the world and that, in its core mission of peace and security, has to accommodate the positions of powers as diverse as the P-5. The job of any Secretary-General is to keep the UN's flawed structures working in the interests of the member states and the universal goals of peace, development, and a sustainable environment.

I also hope that the next Secretary-General will work to make the United Nations a less flawed institution.

I saw the United Nation's shortcomings first hand in my own country during UNPROFOR, the first UN mission of the post Cold War and the largest and possibly most controversial peace keeping mission that the United Nations ever undertook. There was much to criticize: peacekeeping troops that didn't keep the peace, safe areas that weren't safe, and a peace process that involved multiple and revolving mediators who often seemed to have divergent agendas.

I was an academic and human rights activist trying to build civil society institutions in a country emerging from Communism, at war itself, as was the neighboring Bosnia-Herzegovina. We wanted United Nations to do more: to prevent grave war crimes and violations of human rights, to protect civilians, to enable refugees and displaced persons to return home and, above all, to bring peace.

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The UN did none of these things but I think it is important to focus on what the UN actually did: By admitting Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the UN gave the new states international legitimacy and made it more difficult for those who wanted to change the borders by force. UN peacekeepers in the UNPAs (UN Protected Areas) brought a measure of stability to Croatia that enabled the new country to get on its feet. In Bosnia, the United Nations enabled Sarajevo to survive by making possible the humanitarian airlift. The UNHCR took care of over two million refugees, most of whom passed through my country. And, after the war, the UN sponsored International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia which has brought a measure of justice to our region, an essential step in the process of reconciliation that I sponsored as Croatia's foreign minister.

While it was the great powers—and not the UN—that brokered the peace talks that brought the Croatia and Bosnia Wars to the end, they could not have happened without the UN. In 1994, for example, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Vitaly Churkin negotiated a ceasefire for my country in the Russian Embassy in Zagreb. But, without the UN providing transportation and a guarantee of safe conduct, he could not have gotten the Serb participants to the negotiations. And, he relied on UNPROFOR — with its detailed maps—to determine the cease fire line and on UN peace keepers to enforce it.

Thus, even at its most flawed, the United Nations is the indispensable institution.

Today, the United Nations is at the center of the major threats to peace and security. In Syria, Secretary Kerry and Foreign Minister Lavrov brought together all the major regional and international players to support renewed peace talks. But, it is Staffan De Mistura and his team that actually are conducting the talks. No doubt, Russia, the United States, Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia will be needed to push through the necessary compromises but it is the UN that is doing the basic work of the negotiations.

The Secretary-General is, of course, the servant of the Security Council when it comes to threats to international peace and security. However, a Secretary-General with the right temperament can help the Security Council reach agreement and can, once a decision has been taken, help keep the Council on side with how it is being implemented.

The next Secretary-General should focus on maintaining and enhancing the quality of the United Nations diplomacy. This means appointing representatives of the caliber of Sergio Vieira de Mello (whom I got to know during the war in Croatia), Lakhdar Brahimi (from whom early on I heard the most insightful analysis of the Syrian crisis) and Staffan De Mistura (whose positive energy and creative tenacity I saw during the war in my country and now in Syria). I would like to see some women on this list. It means maintaining a superb professional staff that can work with our top diplomats. And, the Secretary-General should always be concerned personally about the safety of UN staff when so much of the UN's work is in the world's most dangerous places.

It goes without saying that peace keepers must adhere to the highest standards of personal conduct. We owe it to the many UN peacekeepers who have served honorably and heroically—some at the cost of their lives—to make sure that the recent misconduct never recurs. Given the UN's ongoing role in mediation, I would like to strengthen the Department for Political Affairs (DPA) and, especially, its Mediation Support Unit. I also want to enhance the peace and development advisers (PDAs) and the other parts of the UN system that contribute to the UN mediation efforts, including the Electoral Assistance Division (EAD).

Finally, the next Secretary-General must be candid with the Security Council about what the UN can and cannot do. Too often, the United Nations is given an impossible mission that is then under-resourced. This was the case of the UNPROFOR mission in Bosnia where 25,000 lightly armed Blue Helmets couldn't keep peace in the midst of a war. Such missions destroy morale, cost lives and discredit the United Nations itself.

The Secretary-General is the CEO of a vast organization with four headquarters (New York, Geneva, Vienna, Nairobi), 16 peace keeping operations, more than 30 special political missions and good offices engagements and other components. The Secretary-General must coordinate with the specialized and affiliated agencies, some with vast budgets and broad responsibilities. All this work is done in six official languages by a staff that represents the planet's diversity, including different legal systems and work cultures.

In short, running the United Nations is a management challenge unlike any other in the world. To make matters worse, the Secretary-General is inevitably pulled away from the task of running the UN to dealing with the crisis of the day as well as the many protocol and ceremonial functions that go with the job.

The Secretary-General inevitably must rely on a quality management team. But, I think she must also find the time to resolve the key management issues that otherwise get compromised or are left unresolved. I would make a meeting on management and administrative questions part of the SG's daily schedule at least while she is in New York. With so many missions in dangerous places, the Secretary-General must personally concern herself with the safety of UN personnel. And, in addition to appointing quality people to senior positions, she must have the courage to remove poor performers.

Over the years, there have been many proposals to improve UN management. Were this easy, it would have been done. Some systemic reforms are essential, including shortening the time period for hiring new staff, making it easier to remove staff, cutting red tape when moving staff around, flexibility in hiring, and better protections for those willing to take risks.

Major reform is worth pursuing. But, there is no substitute for a hands-on Secretary-General deeply and personally concerned with the successful operation of the organization.

Development

For the first time in all of human history, a majority of the world's population is not poor, although there are far too many poor people. Countries that were once recipients of development assistance—India and Republic of Korea, for example—have transformed themselves into economic power houses that now provide development assistance. Development assistance is no longer just the transfer of resources from North to South but a much more cooperative venture.

I see the role of the Secretary-General as supporting development goals established by the member states in conjunction with the UN agencies. For me, however, two points are critical.

First, that for all the progress that has been made, too many people have been left behind. This is morally wrong but it is also a threat to peace and security. The poor of the poorer countries not only threaten the stability of the places where they live but they are the migrants that have overwhelmed Europe in the last year. There are also many left behind in the developed countries. Poverty does not cause terrorism but terrorists thrive in the isolated immigrant communities of the affluent countries, the left-behind places that harbored the Brussels and Paris attackers. Development is not a gift from the well off to the less so, but something that benefits the affluent as well as the poor.

Second, I believe economic development in both the North and South must be environmentally sustainable. Global climate change is as serious threat to our survival as a civilization as are nuclear weapons, the main difference being that nuclear weapons risk instant destruction while climate change is a long term threat.

The Secretary-General has no executive power or resources to fight extremes of inequality or to save our planet's environment. But, she has a moral authority to keep these issues central to the global agenda.

Humanitarian Issues

As a human rights activist during the Croatia and Bosnia Wars, I heard first hand accounts of stunning depravity inflicted on men, children and especially women. And, I was part of the civil society that tried to meet the needs of more than 2 million refugees who came to Croatia—a country of just 4.5 million—in the years 1991 to 1995. Anyone who was in Croatia in those years will always remember what it was like: our coastal resorts were full of refugees, our schools overwhelmed, and signs of the mental anguish were always there from the vigils kept by the mothers of the disappeared to the vacant eyes of those who had nothing left to live for.

So, as foreign minister, I pushed the government to be as welcoming as possible to those fleeing war in Syria and Iraq, as well as migrants taking enormous risks to find a better life in Europe.

In contrast to the mixed record of UNPROFOR, the humanitarian agencies—UNHCR, ICRC, UNICEF among others—performed excellently in the former Yugoslavia. But, those wars presaged a more general problem: the decline in respect for the neutrality of agencies whose role is to help the victims of war. Today, Daesh, the Taliban, Jabhat al Nusra, Boko Haram, and al-Qaeda all treat the humanitarian agencies as if they were the enemy. Indeed, part of their strategy is to ensure that no help gets to civilians in the areas where they operate.

The humanitarian agencies are identified with the United Nations that is itself not neutral in these conflicts. In addition, the nature of war has changed from inter state conflict to war between states and non-state actors, even between states and transnational non state actors like al-Qaeda and Daesh. There is also the donor fatigue problem, which has limited the supply of basic human needs to refugees including those coming out of Syria.

I don't have answers to these dilemmas. But, as we witness human suffering on a scale not seen since World War II, the continued effectiveness of the UN's humanitarian agencies must be a top priority of the next Secretary-General.

I see two litmus tests for the health of a society and the quality of the human rights protection: the treatment of religious and ethnic minorities and the role of women.

On entering politics immediately after the war in Croatia, I advocated for encouraging the return of ethnic Serbs and for eliminating procedures intended to make returns difficult. In a country where the Yugoslav army and Serb paramilitaries started the war and drove over two hundred thousand Croats from their homes, this was not a popular position. But, this is precisely what we did. Over 100,000 Serbs have returned to Croatia. This was the basis for the rebuilding of the Croatian society, but also for a broader regional reconciliation – a key to the long-term stability and security.

Intolerance of minority ethnic groups is at the center of so many conflicts throughout the world, including the devastating one that is tearing apart the UN's newest member, South Sudan. But, this is not just a problem for developing countries. Consider the language of religious intolerance that has entered the political discourse of some of the western democracies.

Promoting and empowering women is another theme of my career and my tenure as Foreign Minister. Unleashing the economic potential of women may be a society's most effective development strategy. The United Nations has – through its resolutions, treaties, and conduct--shaped global norms on the equality of men and women. Having a woman as Secretary-General will send a powerful message of our commitment to equality, but it will only be meaningful if the woman so selected is in fact the most qualified person. Regardless of gender, the next Secretary-General must continue the UN's work on issues of paramount importance to any society that primarily affect women, including access to education, access to jobs, sexual violence, child marriage, genital mutilation, sexual slavery, human trafficking and poverty.

As with the rights of minorities, the role of women in society is not just a human rights issue. In fact, it is a peace and security issue of the first order. Surely, it is no coincidence that the most peaceful and democratic societies are those where women participate fully in all aspects of society including public life. And, conversely, that the most violent and tyrannical places on our planet are those where women have the fewest rights.

The next Secretary-General will lead an organization that has yet to live up to the dreams of its founders. But, in its seventy years of existence, the United Nations has transformed our world. I want to see a Secretary-General motivated by the idealism of the UN's founders but realistic enough to produce results from the organization as it is, and not as we wish it were. For all its flaws, the United Nations is an extraordinary force for good.



Prof. dr. sc. Vesna Pusić

Vesna Pusić is a leader with a distinguished national and international career as a politician, scholar and social activist. She excelled in all these fields, often leading the way and opening the door for change and progress. Ms. Pusić has been actively involved in Croatian and international politics for more than two decades; co-founder and long standing leader of Croatian People's Party - Liberal Democrats, she held the office of First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, served as Deputy Speaker of Parliament and chaired the Parliamentary Committee on monitoring Croatia's accession to the EU. She was also elected Vice - President of the European Liberals (ALDE Party) in three terms. At the moment she is serving as Deputy Speaker of Croatian Parliament in her second term. Throughout her political career, in both legislative and executive branches, Ms. Pusić was widely recognised as a leader advocating freedom, human rights, human dignity and democratic political culture based on dialogue and tolerance. During her term as Minister of Foreign and European Affairs she put focus on those values, pushing for and supporting a number of initiatives in the fields of development cooperation, peacebuilding and human rights.

In her academic and scientific career Ms. Pusić was elected to Full Professor at the University of Zagreb, teaching Sociology and Political Theory. She led or participated in numerous studies and research projects and is the author of several books and approximately 50 scientific and professional articles. Not limiting her career only to the University of Zagreb, Ms. Pusić lectured at numerous universities including Georgetown University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cornell University and many others.

As a social activist Vesna Pusić was a co-founder of the first feminist group in the former Yugoslavia which, in 1979, was a very controversial concept, both politically and socially. The group was the seminal women's and feminist organisation in Yugoslavia and Croatia for years to come. In 1992 Ms. Pusić co-founded and became director of the Erasmus Guild, a nongovernment, non-partisan think-tank for the culture of democracy. All of the activities of the Erasmus Guild focused on advocating dialogue and finding peaceful solutions for the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, fighting extreme nationalism and providing critical analysis of authoritarian regimes in the region.

Widely experienced in politics, academia and social activism, with a life-long commitment to strengthening peace and democracy, and promoting and defending human rights and human dignity, Vesna Pusić has been able to move borders in achieving these goals throughout her career.



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