

December 8, 2005

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rice:

We, the undersigned organizations, wish to express our continued support for reform of the United Nations, including the creation of a Peacebuilding Commission, the establishment of an effective Human Rights Council, and the institution of management reforms. As Newt Gingrich and George Mitchell, co-chairmen of the Congressionally authorized task force on UN reform, have asserted many times, an effective United Nations is in America's interests.

We are deeply concerned, however, with the current U.S. approach to achieving these important objectives. Although we agree that management reforms are critical to an efficient and effective UN, the U.S. insistence on resolving complex management reforms prior to the General Assembly's December budget vote, is counterproductive.

This strategy leaves precious little time for the U.S. to build support for its comprehensive but controversial management reforms. Moreover, U.S. negotiating tactics appear to be undermining the opportunity to complete negotiations on and implement more attainable, but equally important, reforms such as replacing the Human Rights Commission with a Human Rights Council and creating a Peacebuilding Commission.

Similarly, strategies that threaten to disrupt or delay the biennial budget process, such as Ambassador Bolton's suggestion to adopt a three-month provisional budget, could seriously undercut reform efforts and the United Nation's ability to carry out ongoing, critical activities, like peacekeeping, election facilitation in the Middle East, or earthquake relief missions.

As Secretary General Annan asserted, reform should drive the budget process, not the other way around. The United States must convince other nations, particularly the non-aligned nations of the G-77, that reforms are necessary and preferable to the status quo. It is a difficult task and one that requires careful negotiating and persistent diplomacy rather than ultimatums and U.S.-imposed timelines. Anything less will isolate the United States and weaken our ability to convince member states – including allies like Great Britain -- that we want reform to make the UN more effective and capable of working towards solving 21st century challenges.

In the past, the U.S. has been willing to commit time and resources to achieving reform at the United Nations. Previous U.S. reform initiatives included a year-long campaign to promote UN reform and reduce our assessments levels at the UN. It was through careful diplomacy and the devotion of resources, including bringing additional staff to the U.S. mission, that this goal was accomplished.

Speaker Gingrich and Senator Mitchell have echoed the need for a concerted diplomatic push for UN reform. A couple of weeks ago, in a review of the status of UN reform, Speaker Gingrich said, "I think the challenge to us now is to accelerate and increase the pressure, to reach out to other countries and make (reform) a multilateral effort, and to do everything we can to ensure that the UN continues to move toward greater accountability, greater transparency, and greater effectiveness." He said this was a cause worth spending a great deal of time and effort on.

We agree. Effective U.S. leadership in this reform effort requires sufficient resources, reasonable timeframes, and deliberate diplomacy. There is widespread support among the UN's 191 member states for revitalization and change at the UN. We encourage you to use the United States' full diplomatic force to promote this cause, but fear that the continued reliance on unilateral approaches will undermine this opportunity and will have devastating consequences for the future effectiveness of the United Nations and to U.S. interests.

Sincerely*,

Amnesty International, USA, Washington, DC
Better World Campaign, Washington, DC
Center for American Progress, Washington, DC
Citizens for Global Solutions, Washington, DC
Council for a Livable World, Washington, DC
Democracy Coalition Project, Washington, DC
Friends Committee on National Legislation (Quakers), Washington, DC
Global Action to Prevent War, New York, NY
Global Citizen's Network, St. Paul, MN
Human Rights Advocates, Berkeley, CA
International Relations Center, Silver City NM
International Rescue Committee, New York, NY
Mercy Corps, Washington, DC
Open Society Policy Center, Washington, DC
Oxfam America, Washington, DC
Peace Studies Program, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, WI
Physicians for Social Responsibility, Washington, DC
Refugees International, Washington, DC
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
United Nations Association of the USA, New York, NY
Women's Action for New Directions, Boston, MA
Women's Environment and Development Organization, New York, NY

**More organizations may be added*

cc:

Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs and Democracy, Paula Dobriansky
Assistant Secretary of State for International Organizations, Kristen Silverberg
Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for International Organizations, Mark Lagon
Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Nicholas R. Burns
Ambassador John Bolton
Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
Senator Richard Lugar

Representative Henry Hyde
Representative Tom Lantos