

# San Francisco Chronicle

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA'S LARGEST NEWSPAPER

## Bringing the U.N. home

Representative Tom Lantos  
September 14, 2005; Page B9

The United Nations will host today the largest-ever gathering of world leaders. As the biggest U.N. contributor by far, the United States will have tremendous leverage at this summit and throughout the week as the new session of the U.N. General Assembly gets under way. This session is crucial to the future of the United Nations and up until late yesterday negotiators were still haggling over a road map for making important changes to the world body.

Working with our friends in Europe, Asia and around the world, the United States proposes to launch critical reform initiatives. If adopted, these reforms will make the United Nations more accountable, ethical and efficient, and less vulnerable to hijackings by the rogue states and human-rights violators who have so undermined its mission. The organization's shortcomings have been underscored recently by a succession of distressing scandals involving corruption, mismanagement and sexual abuse. Nevertheless, we must recognize that in the six decades since its founding in San Francisco, the United Nations has performed magnificently in addressing some of the world's most pressing problems.

U.N. peacekeepers have traveled the globe to prevent conflicts and end wars, saving many millions of lives while relieving the United States from shouldering such a burden alone. For example, Sweden has deployed 80,000 peacekeepers in support of such missions. And in the last 15 years, more civil wars were ended through mediators than in the previous two centuries.

The United Nations acts on thousands of human-rights complaints per year and helps establish democracy and the rule of law far and wide. During the last year alone, U.N. representatives provided electoral assistance to more than 20 countries, including Burundi, Iraq and Afghanistan. And the war crimes tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia have restored respect for justice in places where it was thought to have died.

Whether impeding the global narcotics trade, promoting sustainable development or providing life-saving drugs to millions of victims of HIV/AIDS, the United Nations has done things that no individual country could ever have done. But there is much more to do.

The vast inequalities between nations and within them continue to stoke resentments that our enemies exploit in order to fuel conflicts. More than a billion people around the world live on less than a dollar a day. Genocide grinds on in the Darfur region of Sudan, violence against women remains endemic in scores of places, and tyrants continue to terrorize far too many people. All of these problems, and more, demand a reinvigorated United Nations.

This week offers a precious opportunity to recommit the world to eradicating poverty; to demand reforms of the U.N. organization, such as higher ethical standards and more rigorous financial oversight; and to replace the discredited Human Rights Commission with an effective and responsible council that shuns the violators of fundamental freedoms.

These goals were in a draft summit document that was finalized and adopted late yesterday, but without resolving some key outstanding issues.

The United States sought extensive changes to the draft document in August, and others responded by seeking further changes that obstructed rather than advanced progress. China, Cuba, Egypt and other countries from the so-called "Non-Aligned Movement" undermined agreement on a definition of terrorism. They also managed to scrap specific mechanisms for excluding from the new Human Rights Council countries that violate human rights. And in the end, there was no way to bridge the gap among negotiators from many countries on whether and how the U.N. Security Council should be expanded.

But let them take note: Even those who disagree still can find common ground. I visited the United Nations last Friday along with U.S. Rep Henry Hyde, R-Ill., chairman of the House International Relations Committee. Earlier this year, Rep. Hyde and I struggled mightily over competing legislation urging the United Nations toward reform; his bill will force the United States to withhold payment of U.N. dues if an impossibly detailed and rigid schedule of reform criteria is not met, while mine would have made withholding dues an option, not a requirement. Hyde's bill prevailed, along a mostly party-line vote.

Despite this, Rep. Hyde and I went to New York to emphasize how serious Congress is about reforming the United Nations, and how eager we are to see it succeed. I was struck by something U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan said to us about the summit document: "If member states are going to get a meaningful outcome, there will need to be more give and take."

The summit of heads of state and government in New York this week represents a chance for countries to rededicate themselves to furthering the United Nations' original purposes, and to ending such new menaces as the international financing of terrorism. The summit can present a template to strengthen and to restore credibility to a historically unique, global force for good. The Bush administration has told us that John Bolton, as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, is the right person to get the job done in New York; it's time for him to show us that he is.

*U.S. Rep. Tom Lantos represents part of San Francisco and much of the Peninsula in the House. He is the ranking Democrat on the House International Relations Committee.*