

## **“The U.N.'s Most Serious Issue is its Credibility”**

IPS Columnist Service

SEOUL, Oct (IPS) "The most serious issue facing the UN is the credibility gap," says Ban Ki-moon, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Republic of Korea since January 2004, and one of the contenders for the post of U.N. secretary-general. Excerpts from his recent interview with IPS:

### **How should the UN be restructured to meet the needs of the 21st century? What is the vision you envisage for a future UN?**

The UN is the only organization that brings together all countries of the globe. We would not have the world of today, with its complex web global norms to guide international, national, and even individual life, without the hard work of the UN over the past sixty years. The emergence of new threats and challenges renders the UN all the more necessary. The greatest challenge facing the UN at this juncture is reform, which is essential to cope more effectively with today's global challenges. Scandals such as the Oil-for-Food Program make such reform all the more necessary. The most immediate task in reform efforts is to overcome the crisis of confidence permeating the UN. What the UN needs is greater determination on the part of the member countries to restore its authority and efficiency. The member countries need to rededicate themselves to larger causes beyond their narrowly defined national interests. Efforts to restore the vitality of the Organization must continue. To this end, it is imperative to restore the UN's moral standing and accountability through institutional reform and changes to the Organization's working culture. The UN must strengthen its capabilities to confront the challenges of the 21st century. The criticism that it is too quick with promises but too slow with delivery has often been leveled at the world body. The UN must be redesigned so that it can talk less and act more.

### **What significance does your nationality hold to qualify you to lead the UN?**

Korea has a unique place in UN history. In a relatively short period of time, Korea achieved the ideals and goals of the United Nations. Korea fostered a special relationship with the world body in the process of establishing its government and fighting in the Korean War. And with UN assistance, Korea succeeded in making the transition from a country in ruins to an economic powerhouse and a mature democracy. I believe that Korea's experience of achieving economic development and democracy within a mere 60 years will serve as a solid basis to contribute significantly to the UN's work of promoting international development and democracy. Furthermore, Korea has accumulated extensive experience ensuring peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. This will serve as an invaluable basis with respect to the UN's activities resolving conflicts and maintaining international peace and security. The "Korean experience" may prove of great benefit in the implementation of the UN's own initiatives. It can help to bridge the developing and industrialized worlds, mature and aspiring democracies. I believe that during my almost forty-year career in the foreign service, I have gained the extensive experience and diplomatic capacity necessary to lead the UN as it reaches further to its ideals and values. A decade of my service in international relations has been related to UN affairs. As Chef de-Cabinet to the President of the 56th Session of the UN General Assembly, I was able to gain first-hand experience mediating the differing interests of diverse Members and UN agencies. This

experience would be invaluable in fulfilling the duties of Secretary-General. Perhaps the most important of the tasks for the next Secretary-General is seeing through the UN's reform efforts. Minimizing bureaucracy and inspiring professionalism within the Secretariat is a tall task indeed. During my watch, I successfully pushed reform measures through the Korean Foreign Ministry. And I have confidence that my experience as Foreign Minister would be of great benefit in efforts to reform the Secretariat.

**In a 192-member organization based on the principle of one-nation, one-vote, do you think the 15-member Security Council is a political anachronism? If so, how should it be revitalized and reformed to reflect the realities of today?**

The UN is a unique universal multilateral forum comprised of 192 sovereign states with equal say. The democratic nature of the UN -- that Members enjoy equal representation -- is both an asset and a liability to the institution. The most serious issue facing the UN is the credibility gap resulting from the Organization's inability to handle the complexities of the issues it faces. The initiatives currently being debated demand not only the creation of new organizational structures within the UN, but also a general improvement in services through reform of the operational methods of its various agencies. Member States need to modernize the UN system and its working methods so that the world body can better address new threats and challenges that differ from those of the time the Charter was drawn up sixty years ago. To cope with these fresh threats effectively, it is vital that the Security Council, which holds primary responsibility for maintaining peace and security, be able to adjust to a rapidly-changing global security environment. In this sense, a reformed Security Council should be more effective and efficient, able to act promptly in response to emerging or ongoing conflicts. I also believe that reform must make it more representative of the underlying international realities as well as more accountable to the general membership. However, as we have witnessed, reform of the Security Council is no easy task. The reform process must be based on the broadest possible consensus among the membership if the institutional vitality and credibility of the UN is to be maintained. I hope that Member States will be able to agree on a desirable formula on the basis of the broadest possible consensus. Should I be elected as the next Secretary-General, I will do whatever I can as an impartial mediator to facilitate such consensus.

**If elected, what would be your priorities for the UN? Would you place more emphasis on the world's social and economic problems and less on political problems?**

The UN is now facing a crisis of confidence. To overcome the challenges before it, I believe that a comprehensive effort among the Member States and Secretariat, and indeed throughout the UN system, is vital. If selected as UN Secretary-General, I would concentrate on the following tasks: -First, the current divisions and confrontations among the UN Member States are very worrisome. To achieve the key goals of the UN, I believe it is of paramount importance to galvanize the political will of the Member States by rebuilding trust between them. I would strive to play the role of a harmonizer who can mediate not only conflicts between Member States but also invisible conflict within the Secretariat. -Second, I would devote my most sincere efforts to the role of Chief Administrative Officer. I would spearhead the necessary reform in the institutions and culture to minimize bureaucracy within the UN Secretariat, thereby maximizing the expertise and ethical standards of international civil servants. -Third, the UN is simply overstretched considering the resources available: it is addressing too many agendas. There is a need to identify the relative advantages of various functions of the UN and pursue a process of consolidation and coordination. This will serve to enhance the efficiency and coherence of service delivery by the UN bodies and programmes that perform these functions. -Last, the newly-established Human Rights Council (HRC) and Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) are significant achievements in

terms of UN reform. Yet, the capabilities of the UN cannot be judged simply by the establishment of new mechanisms. What is truly important is that these new mechanisms achieve progress in pursuing their targeted goals. I will do my best to galvanize the political will of the Member States so that the HRC and PBC can indeed make substantial contributions to the protection and advancement of human rights, and peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction.

**Do you think the international community will meet the 2015 deadline for the Millennium Development Goals? If not, why not? And why is it that despite all the assistance provided by the UN over the last 60 years, it has still failed to help eradicate poverty?**

The MDGs are the most ambitious development goals the UN has pledged to the world. At this point, their attainment is not assured. Moreover, the UN cannot solve all the problems the world faces. The UN offers an alternative, not a panacea; a direction, not a blueprint. As the parliament of humankind, it is not the UN that has failed: it is the countries that constitute the body. The UN remains no more, and no less, than what we make of it. Although the UN has set the right agendas in eradicating poverty and has pointed countries and people in the right direction, it is open to question whether the world body has fully utilized its resources. As the active debates on UN reform have revealed, the UN can, and must, mobilize its entire system to maximum efficiency. I therefore welcome the launch of the High-Level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence. It is my sincere hope that the Panel will come up with bold yet realistic measures to revitalize The UN into an Organization that delivers better and faster. Despite some shortcomings, we still have the time and opportunity to realize the MDGs by 2015. The most crucial element in this will be the political will of the international community to do justice to the world, to transform our hopes for peace and prosperity into reality.