CHAPTER 8

Practice Norm 8
Strengthen the United Nations and International Efforts for Cooperation and Human Rights

Definition

It is necessary to strengthen the United Nations (U.N.) and other such organizations so that these groups can develop the capacity to identify, prevent, and, if necessary, intervene in situations of conflict within and between nations. Once conflict is stopped, these organizations must also work to ensure peace and reconciliation. In the twenty-first century, security concerns of states are simultaneously internal, regional, and transnational. At the same time, the evolution of the idea of human rights has also given these international efforts a vital role. As U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan has stated, state sovereignty necessitates responsibility, first to prevent internal conflict and human rights abuses, second to respond to such situations with appropriate measures, and finally to rebuild areas that have been harmed by such clashes. Empirical data show that the more nations are engaged in supporting U.N. actions, the fewer wars they experience.

Introduction

On the evening of November 13, 2008, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted a consensus resolution reaffirming the world body’s firm commitment to promote universal respect for all fundamental freedoms and human rights. In adopting the “Promotion of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace” resolution, the General Assembly affirmed the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion as a central element of the establishment of tolerant societies and durable peace. More than 80 member-states cosponsored the 2008 resolution, which calls on member-states to establish initiatives that identify practical actions for
promoting interreligious and intercultural dialog, tolerance, and understanding at all levels of society. The vote was ironic because many of the nations that voted for it are hardly noted for their own respect for human rights, but their vote signals the worldwide pressure to avoid being known for opposing U.N. work for human rights, and this in turn adds persuasion power to those who prod governments to support U.N. and international efforts for human rights.

Humankind is called to work for understanding and peace not despite our various religious traditions, but because of our traditions. Asif Ali Zardari, president of Pakistan, which cosponsored the text, said that, as the chosen representative of 180 million Pakistanis who were suffering from “the menace of hatred,” he rejected those who promoted division and rallied around those who would unite the creations of the one and only God.

The U.N. recognizes that faith can motivate people to work for peace and that developing religious tolerance across lines of difference may go a long way toward establishing such peace. People of faith must also acknowledge that the U.N. is a valuable world body, necessary for the mediation of global conflict and postconflict development. If our faith mandates that we work for peace, the U.N. should be a central means by which we conduct this work.

Yet it is also important to realize that the United Nations is a human institution that badly needs reform in a number of ways, as contributors to this chapter argue.

Muslim Reflection

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*Rule of Law in Primary Texts*

While there are diverse schools of thought that relate to both law and politics within the Muslim tradition, Islam gives a clear deference to the notion that a society should be ruled by some form of authority that has a method of integrating citizen engagement into its governance. At the very inception of the Prophet Muhammad’s mission, the Qur’an commanded him to utilize sound methodology for governance, and even though he was in possession of a divine message, he should reach out to others for consultation. Thus his authority could not be unchecked.

And their rule is by counsel among themselves. (Qur’an 42:38)

Allah commands you to make trusts to those worthy of them, and that when you judge between people you judge with justice. (Qur’an 4:58)