



## **United Nations Parliamentary Assembly**

The United Nations Charter, written in 1945 by the victorious states of the Second World War, begins its preamble stating: “We the peoples of the United Nations”. Half a century after, we ask our selves: We? Which Peoples?

### **An academic perspective**

In a thesis, recognized in the academic world of international relations, John Ikenberry states that international organisations are a result of a transaction between the victorious countries and the defeated countries of a systematic war. He describes a systematic war as one in which the structure of the international system is replaced, thus modifying its own logic of interaction.

So, after all systematic wars, the victorious countries develop deliberate strategies to maintain their position of relative power. For example, the Great War destroyed “the concert of nations” strategically created in the nineteenth-century by Chancellor Bismarck and structures the peaceful period that followed, in accordance with the clauses of the Treaty of Versailles. Through this agreement, France tried to consolidate its situation of relative success, as compared to its neighbour Germany, by imposing war costs, forcing them to return territories over which they had historical claims, and forcefully restricting Germany’s military power.

The same happened towards the end of the Second World War. The victorious countries were the ones that pushed for the creation of an organisation with the objective of avoiding a new systematic war, based on Wilson’s League of Nations: the United Nations. Although the objective of preventing a new situation of systematic crisis was by all means ethically commendable, the effect was to perpetuate, to some extent, the immediate status quo. The victors of the Second World War developed an institutional structure for the new organisation based on the desire to maintain the power asymmetry.



In this way, they created the Security Council with two mechanisms to maintain their relative power: five permanent seats and the right of veto. The Security Council is in charge of deciding and acting on any threat to international peace and stability. Therefore, it is the only body authorized to decide on the use of force.

We have said that John Ikenberry explains the emergence of international organisation as the result of a transaction between the victorious and defeated countries in a military struggle with systematic characteristics. The question is, what drives the non-victorious countries to enter in a relation which reproduces the power asymmetry at a particular juncture? The answer is the ability to be heard by the international community, in face of the threat of potential unilateral decision-making, without the possibility of expressing their opinion.

Today, half a century after the signing of the San Francisco Charter, we have an organisation that reproduces an age old international order. Who would doubt the power of the countries of the G-8, the G-14, or the G-20 for instance?

One of the challenges that the United Nations will have to face in order not to become obsolete is its own reform. The UN is a formal institution, and in this way, it needs to find correspondence with the set of practices that, by the force of regularity, have institutionalized but haven't acquired formality yet (the G-8, the G-14 or the G-20).

### **An empiric perspective**

Returning to the beginning, we asked ourselves to whom the preamble of the San Francisco Charter refers to when it states "We the peoples"? We observed that it alluded to a much more restricted group than the current one: the 27 countries who signed the San Francisco Charter on the 24th of October 1945. Nowadays, the organization is composed of 192 countries. Nevertheless, it was in 1945 that these 27 countries created a mechanism that, 50 years later, neither constitutes nor represents the 192. But, let us think a little about this claim.

Let's see what happens in the main bodies of the United Nations: the Assembly and the Security Council.



The United Nations General Assembly is the arena where diplomatic delegations of the 192 countries members interact. It is the main deliberative organ, that formulates policy and, according to the Charter, is “representative” of the United Nations. Nevertheless, diplomatic delegations represent countries and, sometimes, merely governments, not the heterogeneity of the peoples. We should not confuse these two. The diplomatic delegations are in the best of cases representing countries, not peoples.

And this is without speaking of the representation of specific collectives, recognized by the Assembly through the so called Treaties of Third Generation. Neither are these collectives i.e. women, native peoples, etc, part of the decision-making process.

What happens at the Security Council? Here we find a selective composition: five permanent members and ten who rotate every two years. Likewise, we can see that decisions are taken by a majority of members, but the five permanent seats are the ones with the right to veto these decisions. We also find that decisions taken in the Security Council are the only ones which are binding. In this way, in accordance with the Charter’s famous Chapter VII, the United Nations Security Council is the only one authorized to call on members to apply economic sanctions and take military action.

So we can ask ourselves if these five “world police” represent the global population. What we can conclude is that little more than 25% of the global population is represented by the Council’s permanent seats. If we restrict this measure to the western population we find that, only about 6% is represented at the moment of taking binding decisions about international peace and security, decisions that affect all of us. As a Latin American I find myself obliged to ask about the “presence” of my region in this Council. And this is when I found that the percentage is 0%! To what representation do we refer if the indexes of representation are 0%, 6% and, in the best of the cases, 25%? It seems we have to be sorry that the U.S.A., China, Russia, France and the United Kingdom are not Latin American, neither Africans for instance. What continues to prevail is the logic of force over the logic of consensus and constructive deliberation.



### **Towards the establishment of a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly**

It is imperative to undertake an integral reform of the United Nations taking into account that any representative institution, that is to say democratic institution, should have an structure that honours this characteristic. We propose a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly, composed of delegates elected by the peoples represented in the international community.

To ensure international cooperation, the acceptance and legitimacy of the United Nations, and to improve its ability to act the peoples should be directly and effectively integrated into the United Nations and its agencies.

A UN Parliamentary Assembly will not be just another institution. As the mouthpiece of the citizens, it would be the expression and the vehicle of transformation of world consciousness and the comprehension of international politics in peaceful terms.

It is clear that the establishment of such an institution would be a decisive step towards the democratic consolidation in the United Nations system.

### **Actions to support the establishment of de United Nations Parliamentary Assembly**

The Congress of the Republic of Argentina was the first national legislative organ that supported the establishment of the United Nations Parliamentary Assembly. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of November 2008, the Chamber of Senators approved a draft authored by myself on this matter and on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August, 2009, the Chamber of Representatives passed a similar bill/draft, presented by MP. Fernando Iglesias.

Likewise, the Latin American Parliament was the first regional parliament which passed a declaration supporting the constitution of the United Nations Parliamentary Assembly, on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December of 2008.



These initiatives express the desire of the region to be more actively represented in the United Nations.

### **In Conclusion**

Albert Einstein, a highly revered scientist but particularly a skilled analyst of the modern world, sent an open letter to the UN General Assembly, in which he stated:

"The method of representation at the UN should be considerably modified. The present method of selection by government appointment does not leave any real freedom to the appointee. Furthermore, selection by governments cannot give the peoples of the world the feeling of being fairly and proportionately represented. **The moral authority of the UN would be considerably enhanced if the delegates were elected directly by the people. Were they responsible to an electorate, they would have much more freedom to follow their consciences"**

52 years later we are still fighting for an organisation in which "we the peoples" truly and actively participate.