



U.N. REFORM WATCH no. 15

Analyses from Associates of CENTER FOR U.N. REFORM EDUCATION

The Center does not endorse any particular reform proposal and has no affiliation with any governments. All expressions of opinion contained in its publications are the sole responsibility of the author or authors.

South Korea's Candidate Talks about his Plans for the United Nations by Ayca Ariyoruk

June 20, 2006

Some historians called it an act of collective security, while others said it was pure cold war politics. Labels aside, the United Nations Security Council, in an unprecedented move, authorized its first coercive action on June 27, 1950, against North Korea (the Democratic People's Republic of Korea), two days after the North attacked the South (the Republic of Korea). The U.N. operation planted the seeds for a new democratic country. Two military coups and several decades of authoritarian rule later, South Korea grew to become one of the largest economies in the world, with "fully blossomed democratic political institutions", according to Ban Ki-Moon, the country's minister of foreign affairs and trade, and a candidate for the post of U.N. secretary general. Mr. Ban declared his candidacy in February 2006, joining Sri Lanka's former Ambassador to Washington Mr. Jayantha Dhanapala, [view interview at U.N.ReformWatch No. 7]; Mr. Surukiart Sathirathai, Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand [view interview at U.N.ReformWatch No 9]; Latvia's president Mrs. Vaira-Vike Freiberga, an undeclared candidate who has expressed interest in the position, [view interview at U.N.ReformWatch no 12]; and United Nations Under-Secretary General Shashi Tharoor of India who has only recently thrown his hat in the ring. Secretaries-general of the United Nations have so far been chosen by the fifteen members of the Security Council. The ten non-permanent members of the Security Council this year include Argentina, Congo, Ghana, Denmark, Greece, Japan, Peru, Qatar, Slovakia and Tanzania.

Our interview, which took place on May 31, 2006 at the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations, began with the direct question of why Mr. Ban wanted the job of U.N. chief. Ban Ki-Moon replied that South Korea desired to pay back the United Nations for the military and economic assistance it had received during and after the Korean War. Minister Ban believed that there was a "special relationship between Korea and the United Nations." South Korea, having made the transition from a military-run to a free-market system, can apply its experience and know-how to the United Nations. "We know that we are positioned to play a crucial role between developed and developing countries. We have started from virtually nothing – from the ashes of the war to become one of the major economies of the world. From an authoritarian dictatorial rule we became a free democratic country, respecting the principles of democracy and human rights. All these aspects of our experience could be a model for many members of the United Nations. In fact, a number of developing countries would like to emulate the process of our economic and political development."

South Korea is also the third largest coalition partner in **Iraq**. There are thirty-three hundred soldiers assisting with the reconstruction of Iraq's economy, but Ban said "they are not there for combative purposes". "South Korean soldiers have become part of the communities they are assisting and have been much appreciated by the local communities for their medical services and for their contribution in building schools and hospitals. That's what we've been doing in Iraq."

A humble civil servant

Ban Ki-Moon, sixty-one years old, graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in International Relations from Seoul National University in 1970 and entered the Foreign Service that same year. In 1985, as part of a foreign ministry-training program, he obtained a Master in Public Administration degree at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. Minister Ban described his years at Harvard as 'golden'. After stints as 'chef-de-cabinet' to the 56th President of the United Nations General Assembly and as senior aide to South Korea's President Roh Mu-hyun, his dream of reaching the highest post in the Foreign Service was realized in 2004 when he was appointed South Korea's minister of foreign affairs and trade. Ban speaks English and French.

Iran and North Korea

In May 2006, Minister Ban called on North Korea to return to the six-party talks, and referred to the incentives that Libya received for voluntarily forgoing its nuclear weapons program. The talks have been stalled since November 2005 due to a dispute between the North Korea and the United States over financial sanctions imposed by Washington for

Center for U.N. Reform Education 211 East 43rd Street • Suite 1801 • New York, NY 10017

(212) 682-6958 • FAX (212) 682-6959 • E-mail: inquiries@centerforunreform.org

Internet: <http://www.centerforunreform.org>

U.N. REFORM WATCH no. 15

Analyses from Associates of CENTER FOR U.N. REFORM EDUCATION

The Center does not endorse any particular reform proposal and has no affiliation with any governments. All expressions of opinion contained in its publications are the sole responsibility of the author or authors.

alleged illegal counterfeiting activities in North Korea. North Korea denies charges and says it will not return to the talks unless the U.S. lifts its sanctions. Minister Ban has been cautious not to link any non-nuclear issues to the six-party talks and faced criticism for overlooking North Korea's human rights violations. Current U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan avowed last month during a visit to Seoul that nuclear security was by far more important of an issue and "should be given priority as compared with human rights and other activities."

Addressing the similarities and the differences between North Korea and Iran's path to nuclear weapons, Ban Ki Moon explained that "both Iranian and North Korean development of nuclear programs pose a serious threat". However, "form and framework in each occasion differ." There is a formal agreement that the North Korean nuclear issue should be resolved peacefully through dialogue. Mr. Ban added, "a joint statement was adopted in September last year according to which North Korea has promised to give up all nuclear weapons and programs in return for economic and security assistance from the other five participating countries". Minister Ban was positive that the prospect of improving relationships with Japan and the United States would eventually bring North Koreans back to the negotiation table. On the other hand, there is no formal agreement that Iran will stop its nuclear program. Ban Ki-Moon believed, however, that a solution through dialogue was still possible and for that "the Iranian government must stop their uranium enrichment program and cooperate fully with the International Atomic Energy Agency resolution and the Security Council."

Reform and Mistrust

South Korea, which is the 11th largest contributor to the U.N. budget, has voted with the United Nations' rich-world financiers led by the United States, Japan, and the 25 members of the European Union against a resolution that blocked or delayed some of the proposed management reforms put forward by the U.N. secretary general in May 2006. "It is very much undesirable that the United Nations is covered behind this cloud of distrust and conspiracy. We should overcome this kind of animosity and distrust. Member states should be prepared to exercise maximum spirit of cooperation, compromise, and flexibility when dealing with all these issues. I was very much dismayed at all this divisiveness despite the calls made by secretary general Kofi Annan."

Minister Ban acknowledged there was no "magic formula" and that the role of the secretary general should be to "harmoniously" reconcile different opinions among member states. "Should I be selected secretary general I will contribute myself and my best to harmoniously organize coordination and consolidation of all different positions." Mr. Ban implied that he would approach the so-called North and South division, which currently halts reform efforts at the United Nations in the same manner in which he approached the six-party talks with North Korea. "One cannot always expect that the positions of governments in bilateral and multilateral settings will be identical. There are many differences that we need to reconcile, negotiate, and harmonize through negotiations and through the sense of compromise. That's what I am going to do." How would Ban ensure he has that authority as a secretary general? "First of all, I would try to have dialogue with representatives of the developing countries, explain my position as secretary general, and ensure implementation of management reforms... I understand that there are concerns shared by some of the developing countries that their role in managing important administrative issues might be marginalized. But in principle I believe that the role and the authority of the secretary general should have more flexibility and flexibility should be matched with greater accountability."

Can UN stop genocide?

Minister Ban visited Rwanda during his trip to Africa en route to the United States and was "saddened" by what he saw: "a solemn reminder of what the United Nations and the international community had failed to do for Africa and for humanity." What could have been done differently to stop the genocide in Darfur? Mr. Ban replied that immediate action is required to end the "enormous human suffering" taking place in Sudan, carefully avoiding the term 'genocide' as the United Nations has not yet officially recognized it as such. "I wouldn't say at this time that the Sudan is another Rwanda but if we take action we can prevent further suffering and tragedy." The Republic of Korea, a State party and

Center for U.N. Reform Education 211 East 43rd Street • Suite 1801 • New York, NY 10017

(212) 682-6958 • FAX (212) 682-6959 • E-mail: inquiries@centerforunreform.org

Internet: <http://www.centerforunreform.org>

U.N. REFORM WATCH no. 15

Analyses from Associates of CENTER FOR U.N. REFORM EDUCATION

The Center does not endorse any particular reform proposal and has no affiliation with any governments. All expressions of opinion contained in its publications are the sole responsibility of the author or authors.

strong supporter of the International Criminal Court (ICC), has judges working on international criminal cases such as Judge Song Sang-Hyun who was reelected this year to the ICC as well as justices sitting in the International Criminal Tribunals for Rwanda and Yugoslavia.

Energy Crises

Minister Ban had invited ambassadors to dinner “as part of his ongoing efforts to meet individually with all representatives and in order to make the selection process for the secretary- general more transparent”, so I wrapped up our conversation with a last question. Could he foresee any special role for the United Nations in addressing the potential scarcity of energy supplies? Mr. Ban acknowledged that the ever-rising price of oil, a main concern for the United States, was a problem to all countries. He explained that oil prices increase not only due to the scarcity of resources but also due to security threats and risks of instability in the regions those provide the world with the most oil. “The international community should seriously look at the possibilities of first of all reducing the level of dependency on oil while trying to develop the scientific technologies for alternative sources of energy. The Korean government is also looking very seriously at alternate renewable sources of energy.”

Ayca Ariyoruk is (2005-2006) larger freedoms research fellow. The Center does not endorse any candidate but works to promote a public element to the selection process.