
Building a world community

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Prospects for World Federalism

The following is drawn from remarks by WFM – Canada President Walter Dorn at the organization’s Annual Meeting, November 21, 2020.

We are meeting in November, the month of Remembrance Day, a time to give honour and thank all who sacrificed their lives so we can enjoy the freedoms of today. But not only to remember. It becomes our sacred duty to build on their sacrifice. They fought so future generations would not have to struggle like they did. We still have to develop the means to create a world without war under the rule of law and justice, so future generations do not have to make such a sacrifice.

The need to develop international law and build international organizations is part of the lessons of World Wars I and II. At the end of WW I, the world realized it needed a place for nations to meet and resolve disputes. So a League of Nations was created. But it was given only weak powers and did not gain support, with the US not even joining. During World War II, the US realized its mistake and worked to create a stronger international organization: the United Nations.

US support has waxed and waned over the years, with the UN taking a beating over the four years of the Trump administration. But, since our last annual meeting, we have had the election of a new US president, and better prospects for US re-engagement in the United Nations, including paying its dues.

President-elect Joe Biden has already started to sow the seeds of healing after four years of division. Instead of Trump's America-first strategy, we have a uniter. As he said, it's a time to heal. This applies to the world and the world's premier organization, the United Nations.

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates how interconnected our world is, with disease spreading worldwide in a matter of months. As we world federalists often say, "global problems require global solutions." The World Health Organization (WHO) has been central to international efforts to respond to the pandemic. And it needs to be further strengthened. We need to "build back better" not only nationally but also internationally. The WHO needs more verification / enforcement powers, including the ability to visit hospitals without blockage arising from a national right of refusal. After the 2003 SARS crisis, the WHO created new standards: the 2005 International Health Regulations (IHR). Reporting became

quicker and better, so China reported on COVID-19 within weeks of the outbreak rather than the months taken for SARS. But we still do not have an independent system for verification through WHO inspections. That's what the next effort at IHR should include.

We know that it is not just the WHO that needs to be strengthened. Much of the UN system needs to be reinforced as the international community emerges from the pandemic. With the adoption of the UN's 75th anniversary Declaration in September, there is now some acknowledgement that a dedicated international process to strengthen the UN system is warranted. As Canadian World Federalists we should take pride in the role our staff, Fergus Watt and Monique Cuillerier, have played in the global civil society campaign that has mobilized opinion around the idea of using the 75th anniversary of the UN as an occasion to take stock and strengthen multilateralism. After four years, it's great to see that campaign gathering momentum.

Against the inertia of the current Canadian government, we Canadian federalists must keep the flame of hope and belief in our cause alive. We represent a powerful vision, the idea that humanity may one day be united in a democratic world federation. But in the meantime we can also work to realize a stronger form of global governance than is provided by the current UN. We can work in the near term to strengthen the UN, to turn

it into an organization with the ability to maintain peace and enforce international human rights covenants.

We are world citizens, and we have a right to express our citizenship through support of the United Nations and our call for a better UN, a third generation of international organization for a brighter future.