

Harrison, Grant (REPS)

From: Noble, Roger (REPS)
Sent: Tuesday, 16 July 2002 11:41 AM
To: Harrison, Grant (REPS)
Cc: 'P.Jones@friends.tas.edu.au'
Subject: FW: follow up submission on UN reform

Grant,

Attached is a copy of Peter Jones's email in response to your letter. For inclusion with the other written submissions. (Thanks - Peter).

regards,

Roger Noble
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 Defence Adviser to JSCFADT
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-----Original Message-----

From: Peter Jones [mailto:P.Jones@friends.tas.edu.au]
 Sent: Monday, 15 July 2002 2:29 PM
 To: roger.noble.reps@aph.gov.au
 Subject: follow up submission on UN reform

As a high school teacher who includes education about the United Nations in the SOSE syllabus and organises for students in Year 10 and Year 11-12 to take part in Model UN General assemblies organised here in Tasmania by Deloraine Rotary (Year 10s) and UNYA (Years 11-12), I share the committee's concern about ignorance over the United Nations in the Australian community.

Indeed a lot of is more misinformation than ignorance, though I am not sure if it stems from deliberate misinformation or pure ignorance !

My impression is that there are two causes: one stems from right wing conspiracy theories where the UN is portrayed as part of a global plot to take over the world and deny Australians their national sovereignty - this being a sort of continuation of the Bolshevik-Jewish-Wall Street conspiracy in the first half of the twentieth century, which appeals to people who feel that there are forces beyond their control making decisions that affect their lives, so being of a conservative persuasion politically, they blame it on "BIG GOVERNMENT" - either the Federal Government in Canberra or international institutions like the UN.

This is why leaving the UN was part of One Nation's platform just as it is part of the platform of ultra-right groups in the USA, where there are billboards in the Mid-West calling for leaving the UN. It is also a regular theme of ultra-right papers like the ones sent to MPs in Canberra, often from Queensland or rural areas.

The second perception stems from the hostility of the Howard government to the UN which has undone a lot of Australia's record as a good international citizen, feeding the prejudices of the first group. This applies particularly to the abuse offered on Human Rights inquiries that affect Australia and a tendency to support the United States government in its unilateral stand on international issues, covering its refusal to support a range of treaties - from Land Mines to the ICC and the Kyoto Protocol to the ABM Treaty.

Australia, as the report indicates, has been an enthusiastic supporter of the UN since its inception and has taken part in numerous peacekeeping operations as well as paying its dues on time. However the abuse levelled at the UN in recent years has undone much of this record and in a recent trip around the world, including a visit to the UN in New York, I found a

lot of criticism of Australia and questions about why it was taking a hostile position on a number of issues, ranging from treatment of refugees (as defined by the UN Convention and various protocols) and Human Rights issues to its uncritical support of the United States government - which is the largest defaulter on UN dues as the report notes.

The report made a number of useful recommendations but the over-riding priority is for the Australian government to work with progressive forces for UN reform rather than aligning itself with the United States government, and to get its own house in order. Along with this goes the need for more support for public education on the UN, also recommended by the report.

Here in Tasmania it is a constant struggle to raise money to support UNYA with its model general assemblies which are a superb way to raise student awareness. These are young people who are articulate and idealistic. At my school we also send interested students to UN summer schools and occasionally our Old Scholars can get a position as an intern with NGOs in Geneva and New York.

There are some people who will never understand how the UN works and nor will they ever want to. We can however reach young people who are more open-minded and less prone to right wing conspiracy theories but it needs support from the Federal Government instead of misrepresentation, and money for community education. This can be aimed at schools - kits for teachers, visiting speaker programmes, conferences, and financial grants for participation in national and international conferences.

It is particularly important for students to understand that the UN is only made up of its 191 member states and that much of its work is through agencies which we rarely hear of - the WHO, FAO, UNHCR, UNICEF, and many others,

The report rightly noted that running the UN actually costs far less than most people think - para 2:55 made some fascinating comparisons !

It will not be easy to change the UN bureaucracy which suffers from the priorities and agenda of the 191 member states, including in particular the conservative instincts of the five permanent members of the Security Council.

For Australia to have credibility, the government needs to be more positive in its support of the UN, accepting constructive criticism and offering it too. The fact that at the moment it concentrates on abusing the UN and its agencies as well as flouting international human rights protocols, will affect the current bid to become a member of the UN Security Council, just as the last attempt was a humiliating failure.

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