

**Conference in reverence of the 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
of the United Nations Charter,  
October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010, Palais des Nations  
“YOUTH EXPECTATIONS REGARDING THE UNITED NATIONS ”  
Impressions by Inger-Luise Heilmann**

“Youth deserves our full commitment– full access to education, adequate healthcare, employment opportunities, financial services and full participation in public life.”

These words by Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, stress the importance of young people between 15 and 24 years who will have to cope with the challenges of the future being decided today. Today, the youth represents 18% of the global population or 1.2 billion people. They will have to face difficult problems such as those concerning the climate, poverty, resources, health care, unemployment and others linked to the world economy.

The young adults attending UN Day on October 22<sup>nd</sup> have understood the gravity of these challenges as you can see from their faces; although this feeling is also mingled with the excitement of being in the United Nations Office in Geneva, in a conference room and listening to the speeches given by important representatives at the Opening Ceremony. These young people have come because they are concerned about issues that are of central importance today and that will be in the future, such as youth unemployment, the spread of HIV/AIDS or climate change.

This is why the conference in reverence of the commemoration of the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations Charter dating from October 24<sup>th</sup>, 1945, organized by the fully student run NGO “Geneva International Model United Nations(GIMUN)”, was centered around the topic of “Youth expectations regarding the United Nations”. Young people have the opportunity to express their beliefs concerning the UN Security Council reform or on gender related illiteracy and to discuss them together with experts such as Program Officers and UN-Correspondents, or representatives of Missions. The conference has to be seen as a forum, where everyone can express their different views on prevailing subjects regarding the UN. In the opening ceremony Mrs. Warakulle, Chief of Political Affairs at the United Nations Office in Geneva, wondered whether the youth can have positive expectations about the Charter, whether it wasn't time for the Charter to retire, now that it was 65 years old. She however stressed that it was still relevant and that its visionary content about the creation of a better world for everybody concerned us more than ever today. But she also made the point that the UN also had expectations towards us, the youth, expectations that we take an active interest in the UN and inspire them by our engagement. “The UN is indispensable” stated Mr. Heckner from the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. As its major aim is “to prevent hell on earth, not create heaven on earth”, the youth representatives Mrs. Schramm and Mrs. Gasser stressed how much the UN has already accomplished but also how much there still remains to be done. Following this long introduction, the curious young were invited to join their different panel discussions to debate under the leadership of one expert for each forum.

My chosen topic was “UN Security Council Reform”, with the expert Jan Dirk Herbermann, a UN-correspondent who writes for different German media about the UN and Switzerland. After a short introduction about the history of the Security Council and its functioning he asked us about our personal opinion: should there be a change in the operation methods of the Council?

We concluded, that the system in charge at the moment favored the big powers. In our opinion, the slight reforms in the 60s after decolonization, to accept a number of non-permanent participants, still weren't enough. Furthermore, the power structure from 1945, which reflected the post-war reality, no longer accurately reflects current power structures. As the UN is still the most important institution in the international arena and the Security Council needs to be regarded as the body that has to make the UN and the peacekeeping process work, it has to be made applicable for today's challenges. We asked ourselves: Why isn't India represented? What about Brazil, Japan, an African state?

Why is it the case that nothing has changed in the number and criteria of distributing the seats? One answer is that the permanent five just wanted to maintain their privileges. The debate about this and other difficult questions was held vividly and a lot of different views were expressed. It was impressive how the 30 participants were very polite and stuck to the rules of discussion. The arguments were meaningful and concise. Even extreme points of view could be expressed and afterwards, every member had a deeper insight into the topic. The attitudes differed from whether there should be no enlargement because of the size of the Security Council or whether it should undergo a drastic change in the number of participants. Nevertheless, everybody agreed on the fact that the veto was necessary, but still stressed, that the problem with it was that it could often be used for own economic interest only. Mr. Herbermann stated that the veto was essential for superpowers like China and the US and if it was abolished, they would leave the Council. He always brought us back to the initial questions, but nonetheless left enough space to develop a creative way of arguing.

Another controversial topic was about the criteria, according to which a country should be granted a permanent seat. As none of them were judged as appropriate, together with our expert we agreed on the most objective on our list: the population. Military power, democratic system or not, contribution to the UN budget or economic power were neglected and considered inadequate.

This topic of discussion led to the most interesting part of the session: a vote about what the reform should look like. It was our panel leader's idea to express our beliefs in votes to different questions concerning the reform, so that we could illustrate a common result. We agreed that if there was a war in the making, the Security Council would be too slow to decide if it had too many members, so we opted for a total of 15 members and for maintaining the veto. By our vote, new countries were elected as members and others lost a seat as permanent member, such as Britain and France. In our case this meant that the US, China and Russia stay, and the new members would be Brazil, India, Japan, Nigeria, South Africa. In addition, we gave a seat to one Middle East country as well as one EU seat. Later there was another argument whether to enlarge the Council for 10 non permanent members and 10 permanent members.

The fact that we had come to an actual result was particularly appreciated by the participants of the panel. Everyone liked to have played a role and to have had the opportunity to express their view. Also greatly appreciated was the informal nature of the meeting and the panel leader: an expert with much to contribute who nevertheless allowed much discussion by the participants.

What several participants regretted was the fact that in their panel, they didn't have the time to come to a conclusion. In particular, this was due to a too-long introduction compared to the discussion time. It may have been better to really discuss solutions to their topics rather than just deliberating about the subject. On the whole, everybody seemed pleased and was willing to talk about his experiences at the apéro afterwards.

Our expert, too, appreciated the role he had in our discussion which he referred to as a “vivid and extraordinary discussion, held in a natural way what pleases me in particular, with a remarkable result and participants from all over the world”. Mr. Herbermann emphasized the nature of the event, that young people should make use of this opportunity and highlighted how important a global conscience was for younger generations living today in a world threatened by hunger, conflicts and destruction of nature. In his opinion, young adults should show commitment to the UN in order to acquire this “global conscience” he spoke of before. It is therefore very useful to participate in organized discussions like UN-Day and to show implication at GIMUN or similar organizations. Furthermore, he added that when he pursued his studies in Germany, he didn't have the same facilities to acquire such broad knowledge about today's issues and greatly values the work GIMUN does.

Time passed quickly and by the end of the day, the participants were full of new impressions and motivation for the future. Thanks to GIMUN for the organization! The youth has shown on this anniversary of the UN Charter, its engagement in contemporary issues. By doing this, the participants acknowledged Ban Ki-moon's view: “As we expand our efforts, we must do even more to reach out, to listen and to learn from young people.”

The youth of today has a voice and can make it public. UN-Day is a perfect way to do so and everyone should get involved and contribute.

Happy Birthday UN-Charter!

If you want to read more about the Security Council Reform, check out this article : <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?id=115580>

If you want to read more about the UN-Charter, check it out here: <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/index.shtml>