



OUR VISION:

We envision a future in which countries work together to abolish war, protect our rights and freedoms, and solve the problems facing humanity that no country can solve alone. This vision requires effective democratic global institutions that will apply the rule of law while respecting the diversity and autonomy of national and local communities.

OUR MISSION:

We are a membership organization working to build political will in the United States to achieve our vision. We do this by educating Americans about our global interdependence, communicating global concerns to public officials, and developing proposals to create, reform and strengthen international institutions such as the United Nations.

TOWARDS A WORLD PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

Joe Schwartzberg, President, Minnesota Chapter

Several months ago, Andreas Bummel, the young, dynamic and exceedingly capable Secretary-General of the Berlin-based Campaign for a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly (UNPA), requested that I write a monograph setting forth my views on how such a body might be established and function. I was happy to agree. That work, approximately eighty pages in length, is now nearing completion and should soon thereafter be published by the UNPA Campaign under the title *Creating a Democratic and Workable World Parliamentary Assembly: An Evolutionary Journey*. An abridged and edited version of the Introduction follows:

The will of the people shall be the basis of government: this shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections, which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent voting procedures

**Universal Declaration of Human Rights,
Article 21, Clause 3**

A United Nations Parliamentary Assembly - a global body of elected representatives - could invigorate our institutions of global governance with unprecedented legitimacy, transparency and accountability.

Boutros Boutros-Ghali

Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.

Reinhold Niebuhr

The United Nations Charter begins on a deceptively promising note. "WE THE PEOPLES" are its opening words. One will seek in vain, however, for any clause in that document that specifies a means by which ordinary people—or "peoples"—can play a role in the organization's deliberations and decision-making. The UN, as is well known, is presently an organization of States, not of persons. Its democratic deficit is

profound. How best to progressively minimize that deficit forms the subject of the present work.

What are the implications for the United Nations, of Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, cited above? Since the Article clearly stipulates that "[t]he will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government," some will argue that the Article is simply not relevant. The United Nations, after all, was not intended to be a world government. Nevertheless, there can be no denying that many decisions taken by the entities comprising the United Nations system, whether or not they are regarded as binding, contribute to the governance of masses of citizens of the UN's 193 member States. Whatever the intentions of the UN's founders may have been, governance decisions taken within the organization over the decades since the UN's creation have significantly impacted the lives of virtually the whole of humanity; and they are certain to do so increasingly in the decades ahead. Thus, a powerful case can be made for greater citizen input into the UN decision-making process.

While various systems for ascertaining citizens' views outside the UN are feasible I firmly believe that a

World Parliamentary Assembly (WPA) would be the optimal vehicle for achieving this objective and for imparting to the UN, the “unprecedented democratic legitimacy, transparency and accountability” which former Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, among many other forward thinkers, believes it should have.

The time has come for the UN General Assembly to assume a greater role in making binding decisions in respect to a limited range of matters of truly global concern, i.e., in respect to problems that cannot possibly be adequately addressed by nations acting on their own. In short, the GA should evolve from what many believe to be a generally ineffectual “talk-shop” into a viable legislative body. And if there were to be a United Nations legislature, its decisions would be substantially more acceptable if it represented people as well as states. The UN’s democratic deficit can and should be overcome. A more democratic UN would inevitably become a stronger, more legitimate body.

In what follows, I shall first examine the constitutional evolution and composition of various democratic legislatures, with particular attention to that of the European Union, to see what lessons they hold in regard to a global legislative body. I then set forth and evaluate a diverse menu of proposals for giving ordinary citizens the voice they presently lack. We will next consider various organizational issues that will have to be addressed (or hurdles to be overcome) if a viable parliamentary body is to be brought into being. Further, I shall specify a set of desiderata that might guide decisions on the type of “people’s house” best suited to the evolving needs of the world as a whole.

With this conceptual platform in place, I shall suggest possible evolutionary paths towards what would eventually become a maximally democratic and viable World Parliamentary Assembly (WPA). I stress the word “possible” because I recognize that human creativity is capable of devising many workable ideas in addition to my own.

The recommended beginning of our journey—Stage One—would be the establishment by the UN General Assembly, under Article 22 of the Charter (which allows the GA to “establish such subsidiary organs as it deems necessary for the performance of its functions”), of a Parliamentary Assembly open to the participation of all member nations, in which parliamentarians are chosen by their respective governments, wherever possible through the nation’s own legislature and in proportion to the strength of various parties in the legislature itself.

To make the WPA in its initial form acceptable to the more powerful members of the UN, it would be necessary to apportion representation not solely on the basis of population, but also with a view to national contributions to the UN budget. Additionally, in deference to the vast majority of UN members who are neither populous, nor economically strong, the apportionment formula would take account of the persistent notion of the sovereign equality of nations.

As in the present GA, WPA resolutions would be advisory, rather than binding. That does not mean, however, that they would lack moral force. Many would, in fact, resonate with worldwide audiences, be taken up by civil society organizations and individual activists, and significantly influence national, as well as global, politics.

An important function of the WPA in its formative phase would be to establish a set of procedures for carrying out its parliamentary duties. It would institute a system of committees, create a body of norms for interacting with the GA, the Secretariat and other components of the UN system, and devise a set of rules on debating and voting.

Whatever its merits, from a democratic perspective, a WPA created in the manner just described would be far from optimal. While it would enable spokespersons from various parties, including minority parties, to articulate diverse ideological positions and put forward proposals that his/her government might not be willing to propose in the GA, there would still be no guarantee that decisions taken by parliamentarians beholden to their respective national governments would truly reflect the sentiments of their constituents.

Thus, following the developmental trajectory of the European Parliament, it would be only a matter of time before growing popular demand would lead to the establishment of a popularly elected, more politically competent WPA. But, before embarking on what would become stage two of our journey, it would first be necessary to stipulate a set of conditions for holding free and fair elections conducted in accordance with generally accepted rules (e.g., universal adult franchise) and overseen by a suitably empowered Election Commission. Among these rules would be a requirement that elections be in multi-member constituencies and held on the basis of proportional representation. Nations unready or unwilling to accept these rules should be free not to join the WPA. Better to have the WPA grow slowly than to grow badly.

In Stage Two of our journey, we shall focus on just two, among many possible proposals. Both embody the European Parliament principle of “degressive

proportionality,” whereby the average number of constituents per parliamentarian increases with increasing national population. But they differ from one another in one essential respect. In one model, all MWP’s would cast votes of equal weight; in the other, the weight of each MWP’s vote would systematically reflect the population size of his/her constituency.

A major point of similarity in the proposals thus far put forward is that they all envisage elections within the framework of existing national boundaries regulated by individual nations in accordance with an agreed-upon set of rules. This would hold true for both superpowers and microstates. Additionally, elections would not necessarily include the populations—admittedly small—of the world’s remaining dependencies

and such anomalous, politically exceptional countries as Taiwan, Palestine and Western Sahara. Democracy implies universal participation. It is not yet the global rule. Further, the one person - one vote principle, should eventually trump degressive proportionality, assigning, to the degree practicable, equal weight to the votes of all planetary citizens. Thus, I would recommend, at a Third Stage to our journey, one in which elections are organized within a set of electoral fields many of which will cross national boundaries and, in accordance with a system of proportional representation that maximizes the probability that WPA elections truly reflect the will of the electorate.

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THIRD THURSDAY GLOBAL ISSUES FORUM

Free and open to the public. Come and bring a friend.

Where? **Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church,
511 Groveland Avenue, Minneapolis (at Lyndale and Hennepin). Park in church lot**

March 15, 2012, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

AUTHENTIC HOPE: MILITARISM, SPIRITUALITY AND BUILDING A CULTURE OF PEACE

There are many good reasons to be hopeful about the future. In his recent writings, our speaker has focused on the fact that the world and nation that we’ve known is coming to an end. Nevertheless, this can be a hopeful time. It is the end of the world as we know it, not the end of the world. Effectively challenging and reversing U.S. militarization is the key to a hopeful future.

Presenter: Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer. An Associate Professor of Justice and Peace Studies at the University of St. Thomas, Jack majored in political science at St. Olaf College and then received a Master of Divinity degree from Union Theological Seminary in New York. His activism over the past thirty years has focused on the political, economic and faith dimensions of hunger and poverty. Many of his 13 published books have been used by progressive movements in the U.S. and throughout the world. Jack sought, but did not receive the DFL Party endorsement for a U.S. senate seat in 2008.

April 19, 2012, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

THE RISE OF CORPORATE POWER AND WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT

Our speaker will trace the history of the rise of corporate power in Europe and North America and note, in particular, the role of the U.S. Supreme Court in this process, indicating how corporate “persons” have become superior to natural persons (i.e., human beings). He will then indicate what we can do about it, focusing on the “Move to Amend” movement and noting other hopeful signs.

Presenter: Robin Monahan. Born in Grand Rapids, MN, Robin served four years in the U.S. Navy, including a year in Vietnam. He is currently a resident of Shoreview having retired in 1998 from 28-year nursing career. He became politically active in 2010, after the U.S. Supreme Court Citizens United decision declaring corporations to be legal “persons.” That year, from May to October, he and his brother Laird walked across the country to raise awareness of this issue. Robin is a volunteer for Minnesota Move to Amend, which promotes a U.S. Constitutional Amendment stating that only “natural persons” have Constitutional rights and that money is not speech.

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Since creating and maintaining a WPA will not be cheap, our essay analyzes, as best we can, its costs in comparison to its anticipated benefits. It concludes that the benefits would, in very little time, far outweigh the costs.

Fundamental governance reform never occurs in a political vacuum. Hence, our discussion of a WPA concludes by considering needed complementary reforms in the global governance system—especially in regard to finance—and the formation of strategic alliances of civil society, progressive governments and ordinary citizen activists to enable the creation of a maximally workable and democratic assembly.

This is doable project.

LETTERS ON IRAN

As this is being written, the world is experiencing a period of greatly heightened tension because of the bellicose rhetoric coming from the United States, Israel and Iran in regard to Iran's alleged nuclear ambitions and the possible need for a preemptive strike by Israel and/or the United States to prevent Iran from assembling nuclear weapons. This problem, however, is intentionally overblown and can and should be solved by diplomacy. The Minnesota Chapter of CGS has sent letters to that effect to our two Senators. More specifically, we have urged them to oppose the Graham-Lieberman-Casey Senate resolution that might be used to authorize military action. We invite readers of this Newsletter to do likewise. The addresses are: Senator Al Franken, 60 East Plato Blvd., St. Paul, MN 55107; and Senator Amy Klobuchar, 1200 Washington Ave. S, Minneapolis, MN 55415.

www.globalsolutionsmn.org
<http://globalsolutions.org>

Citizens for Global Solutions
(formerly the World Federalist Association)
5492 Bald Eagle Blvd. E.
White Bear Lake, MN 55110

A world that has become a single geographic unit is now groping its way, however slowly, toward global institutions as the only way of achieving common safety and common progress. A new world is waiting to be born.

Norman Cousins