

**Committee: Economic and Social Council**

**Issue: Conceptualizing and measuring social cohesion**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Humans have been deemed as social animals and one does not need to look very far to find evidence supporting that. In being social however and in seeking being part of groups, it is important for humans to consider what are the ways to ensure that said groups can be productive, beneficial for all members and allow for the best possible life. This is where the concept of social cohesion comes in, one which we will later define and explain with great detail. Why is it however that social cohesion is desirable? As put by professor Mike Kyrios, the president of the Australian Psychological Society, “Greater Social Cohesion equates to greater individual and community wellbeing” (APS).

One of the issues the ECOSOC is tasked with tackling is that of “conceptualizing and measuring social cohesion”. The mentioned issue is a rather delicate matter, the very meaning of which could be approached in a variety of ways. The economic and social council will primarily focus on the ways social cohesion impacts societies and economies, with particular focus on what the UN can do to implement resolutions for positive impact in the sector.



## **DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS**

### **Social Cohesion**

As told by the UN it is “The glue that holds society together” (United Nations), but in working with the issue at hand, more adequate definitions will be needed.

### **Conceptualize<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup>Merriam Webster, “Conceptualize”, © 2017 Merriam-Webster, Incorporated

To form concept of

**Social<sup>2</sup>**

Of or relating to human society, the interaction of the individual and the group, or the welfare of human beings as members of society

**Cohesion<sup>3</sup>**

The act or state of sticking together tightly

**Labor<sup>4</sup>**

Human activity that provides the goods or services in an economy

**Society<sup>5</sup>**

An enduring and cooperating social group whose members have developed organized patterns of relationships through interaction with one another

**Productivity<sup>6</sup>**

The rate per unit area or per unit volume at which biomass consumable as food by other organisms is made by producers

**Security<sup>7</sup>**

The quality or state of being secure: such as

- a) freedom from danger (safety)
- b) freedom from fear or anxiety
- c) freedom from the prospect of being laid off (Job Security)

**Segregation<sup>8</sup>**

The separation or isolation of a race, class, or ethnic group by enforced or voluntary residence in a restricted area, by barriers to social intercourse, by separate educational facilities, or by other discriminatory means

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

**The importance of social cohesion**

Understanding social cohesion takes us back to the roots of the most primitive human civilisations. From the very first moment a group comes together and forms a system within which labor is divided, it becomes a society, for the continued existence of which cohesion within its members

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<sup>2</sup>Merriam Webster, "Social", © 2017 Merriam-Webster, Incorporated

<sup>3</sup>Merriam Webster, "Cohesion", © 2017 Merriam-Webster, Incorporated

<sup>4</sup>Merriam Webster, "Labor", © 2017 Merriam-Webster, Incorporated

<sup>5</sup>Merriam Webster, "Society", © 2017 Merriam-Webster, Incorporated

<sup>6</sup>Merriam Webster, "Productivity", © 2017 Merriam-Webster, Incorporated

<sup>7</sup>Merriam Webster, "Security", © 2017 Merriam-Webster, Incorporated

<sup>8</sup>Merriam Webster, "Segregation", © 2017 Merriam-Webster, Incorporated

and institutions is of vital importance. Conceptualizing and measuring cohesion, thus is the first step in maximizing it and ensuring the optimal conditions within which a society can reach peak productivity and offer the best circumstances for the lives of its members.

### **Theory of solidarity in conceptualising cohesion**

To conceptualise social cohesion, we will be looking at the work of philosopher and sociologist Émile Durkheim who introduced the concept of social cohesion as we come to know it. In looking at what holds a society together Durkheim came up with the idea of “solidarity” which is a substitute term he used instead of cohesion. In organising the theory of solidarity in his book “The Division of Labor In Society” Durkheim focused on what he identified as the two ways it may manifest itself, namely Mechanical Solidarity and Organic Solidarity (Durkheim).

In a society exhibiting mechanical solidarity, cohesion and integration of the members stems from the homogeneous character of the group (Collins). The society’s members feel connected through similar types of work, religious beliefs, moral and ethical codes as well as well as similar values (Collins). Overall the sheer fact that they are so much alike in the strictest sense is what brings them together in a cohesive manner. Mechanical solidarity can successfully operate in societies of smaller scale and closer to what we’d identify as traditional societies, or as referenced by sociologists: “Pre-modern societies” (Collins). “Pre-modern Societies are economically based in the extraction or cultivation of natural resources: agriculture, mining, forestry, fishing, ranching and related activities” (PSP). Generally, people in these societies are bound together by “Commonalities, similitudes, and likenesses” (Pope), or what Durkheim calls “Collective Consciousness”. Examples of pre-modern societies may be those of the first humans, those of the tribal cultures throughout the world, and those of religious groups like the Amish.

On the other end of the spectrum, the majority of societies nowadays are described as “modern societies” (Collins) the characteristics of which differ depending on the approach one has towards them. Modern societies exhibiting organic solidarity, which is based on “inter-dependence” (Durkheim), unlike pre-modern societies, the mechanical solidarity of which is, as we have already established, based upon the principles of their collective consciousness. (Durkheim). The basic idea of interdependence is that the members of a premodern society are held together due to necessity, and dependence of one onto another. The very nature of complex social functions present in a modern society is what deems an individual ultimately incapable of being fully self-sufficient, and having to pursue his place in a confined social order supposedly looking after everybody. In the case of organic solidarity collective consciousness is a less important part of the equation however it is still a factor. As Durkheim puts it, in modern societies collective conscious is confined to “general and indeterminate

ways of thought and sentiment, which leaves room open for a growing variety of individual differences”.

### **Cohesion and the economy**

An important concept for economics is efficiency. Efficiency is one of the most desirable qualities in any economic system and cohesion has a distinct impact upon it. In previously discussing of modern society we introduced the term of organic solidarity; the metaphor there was the idea that much like a biological organism, different organs are tasked with different functions, the collective aptitude of which allows the organism to perform much more extraordinary feats than any of the sole organs would on their own. The analogy to a modern society (and a modern economy in particular) is spot on. Different roles and different functions are all of imperative importance. When there is conflict, the state of the economy in general is disrupted. This can be further illustrated through thinking of an assembly line in any factory. Unless all parts of the line are coordinated and working well in a synchronized manner, it does not matter how well separate parts of it are operating, even here what matters is cohesion. In looking at how to conceptualise social cohesion it is worth considering the ways in which such cohesion can be maximised, and its benefits (like efficiency) thereby more cherished.

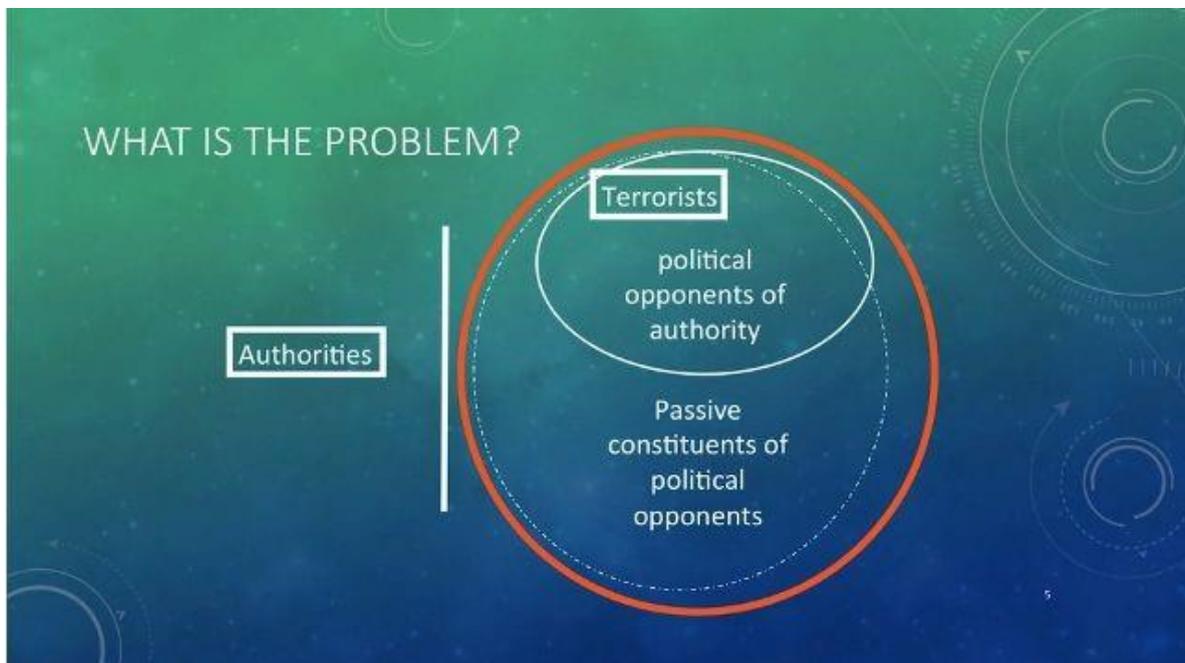


### **Cohesion and security**

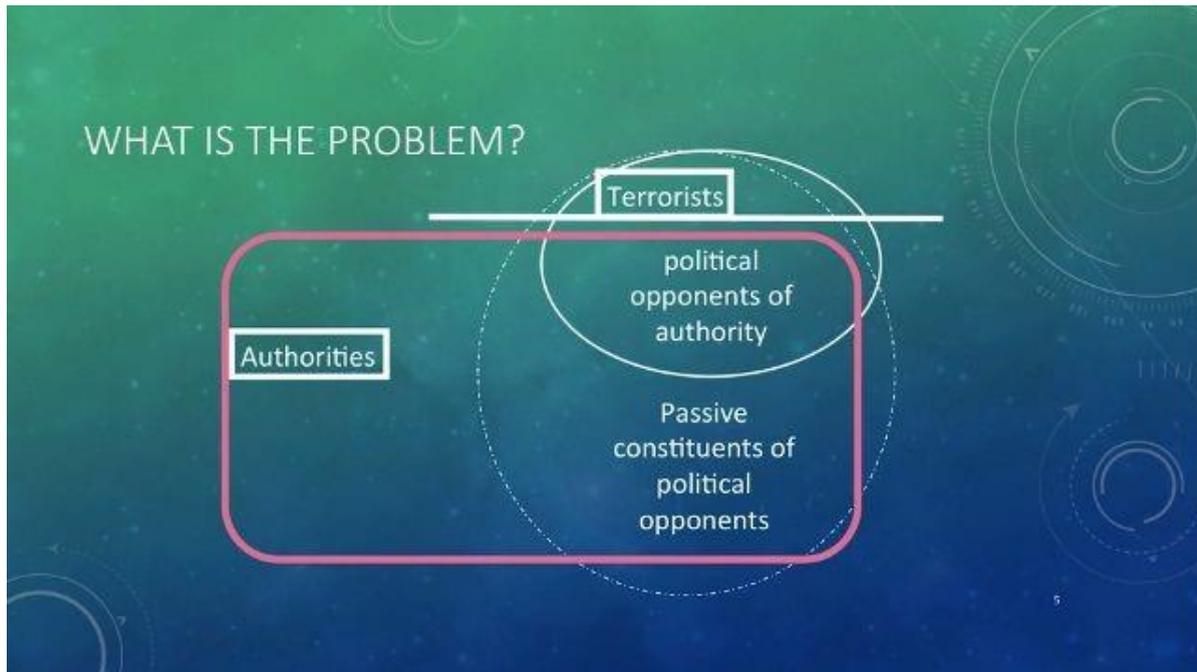
An aspect of the benefits of social cohesion we have not yet discussed is that of security. A society organises itself for many reasons, amongst which is to guarantee the greater security of each one of its members. The scenario in which members of the society become an immediate threat to others is far from a desirable circumstance. Threats like radicalisation are standing in the way of a secure society but greater cohesion can be the “cure” even in this case. To once again quote professor Mike Kyrios: “The most secure society is the most cohesive society”. Marginalisation of certain groups is one of the things pushing said groups to become a threat to the society at large through radicalisation and in the most extreme cases resort to behaviours characterised as terrorist activities. Terrorism is one of the most important issues related to the negation of social cohesion and it should thereby be addressed in some way through resolutions, of course without being the main focus and always in relation to conceptualising cohesion. By-products of poor cohesion like terrorism are threats to general security and dealing with them is important, however as put by the UN: “... the current “war on

terrorism” has in some instances corroded the very values that terrorists target: human rights and the rule of law” (Terrorism). Here we are called to take up a different approach, and one may be closely linked to cohesion.

Professor Winnifred Louis has talked about how misguided or miscarried actions by the state “can be shown to promote terrorism and political extremism” (Winnifred), both of which are not counterproductive as far as cohesion is concerned, as well as most (if not all) other aspects of society. The mindset that puts a setback to cohesion from the part of the state is highlighted by Professor Winnifred the following way: “Authorities see terrorists and they identify them as their political opponents. And then they define them as the entire group of people that are the passive constituents of their political opponents. So, then they create a boundary between themselves and the entire group [of those who are part of the political opposition]” (Winnifred). The preceding argument can be better illustrated using Winnifred's graphic:



The solution suggested by Winnifred is that the boundary is relocated, so that it only targets those who are the problem, namely the terrorists. The following rendition depicts her desired solution:



The same logic can be applied to any group that disrupts cohesion and the same treatment could be employed to further said cohesion. However, what those disruptive groups are is up to each state to define for itself.

### **Social cohesion and different cultures**

An important aspect of any society is the concept of indoctrination which is bound to take place at least to a degree in every formally organised society. Indoctrination is valuable and unavoidable since no society that lacks all forms of collective consciousness can thrive. In going about promoting moral indoctrination however, governments ought to be extremely careful, in stating rational and functional policies. Integration and assimilation differ in their effects to the society's different functions and so do separation and marginalisation on their own right. The former however are terms that apply to ethnocultural groups (which we could describe as premodern societies for the purposes of this study guide), and not to larger societies (Modern Societies).

In modern societies, the concerns surrounding coexistence of different cultures are with regard to the type of relationships the different sub-groups will have with their counterparties in society. A society may either choose to be a segregated one or a multicultural one. Societies of the first sort seek to keep different groups happy and away from each other. Different social functions and different roles will be assigned to members of different groups and thereby informal but concrete "boundaries" will be established. For certain nations, especially in the past this had been the way to go but certain concerns regarding the morality, and overall functionality of such a society arose. Multiculturalism is a second approach, supposedly favoured by most developed nations today. In a society that embraces



while the issue of healthcare (if an appropriate link to cohesion is made) would draw the two mentioned countries together.

A resolution on cohesion in order to be truly effective needs to be adjustable to different parts of the world. With collective cultures and more individualistic ones requiring different treatment, a resolution drafted ought to be able to accommodate such differences.

Separate geopolitical areas have so far recognised different issues as the most important ones in tackling issues with cohesion and hoping to further it. Below we will elaborate on a few groups of countries and their approaches.

## Europe

In Europe, social cohesion had thus far been considered one of the most important issues, and one of many that would determine the future of the European Union as well as the world. With crises like the refugee one and multiple other issues at hand, this stance has been proven to be accurate. For this reason, the council of Europe had established the: "European Committee for Social Cohesion, Human Dignity and Equality". According to the committee's own mission statement, its aim was to:

- Secure full enjoyment of and access to all human rights, including social and economic rights, by all members of society;
- Reduce the vulnerability of people; and
- Strengthen the fabric of sustainable democratic societies.

The Committee had highlighted the ways in which they would like to tackle the issue in a 2000 addendum where it was highlighted that policy should be the focus (and in some cases, is already underway) regarding improvement in the following areas:

- access to social protection;
- access to housing;
- access to employment;
- social policies in the city;
- the rights and protection of children;
- dependent elderly persons. (CDCS)

These were the areas targeted by the European Council's committee dealing with social cohesion and generally highlight the stances of member nations. It is worth noting however that the committee was discontinued as of January 1st 2016.

## Africa

In the continent of Africa, a very important body is the African Council. The African Union, with its ultimate goal being to unite the continent cannot but have social cohesion as an important part of

its agenda. The approach they are taking is working setting up the framework within which African and foreign entities can work together on tackling major issues and promoting overall cohesiveness. As phrased by the Union in the conclusion of a 2009 report: “With the current global financial and economic crisis, we call on the International Community to support developing countries in their efforts to alleviate poverty, end social disparities and exclusion of people and to harmonize their social, economic cultural and political policies in order to achieve sustainable social integration and development”.

On the same report the following recommendations were made for countries to implement on the national level:

Member States are urged to:

- a) Implement the Actionable Agenda of the African Common Position on Human and Social Development in Africa as well as the commitments in the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action and the MDGs.
- b) Develop and implement comprehensive policies to support socio- economic policies, in line with the Social Policy Framework for Africa.
- c) Improve coordination in the public sector through a multi-sectoral approach in order to overcome fragmentation and piecemeal programming to deal with social challenges.
- d) Improve public administration, including democratic governance and rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and encourage broad-based participation.
- e) Accelerate socio-economic growth and improve development indicators aimed at attaining the MDGs by 2015.
- f) Strengthen the process of integration of the marginalized and vulnerable groups in Poverty Reduction Strategy and other development programmes.
- g) Develop structures that ensure greater involvement of the community, local Authorities, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the design and implementation of social, economic and cultural projects and programmes with the aim of improving the social welfare of their populations.
- h) Collaborate closely with the Civil Society Organizations and other stakeholders in implementing the social development Agenda.
- i) Develop and produce world class products based on cultural heritage to increase their articles for world trade.

## Asia

The approach towards social cohesion in Asian countries has been particularly interesting and worth looking at historically. Countries in Asia can be characterised as collectivist societies, where the bonds of cohesion are strong and stable. The collectivist nature of Asian mentality can be observed if one is to look at the political and social history of the region, and even upon looking at the continent today, the same trends can be found present.

For all their noteworthy internal collectivism however, Asian nations show a perhaps different face towards when it comes to international cohesiveness. Countries like China and Japan have very strict immigration policies, making it hard for individuals to relocate there, and overall accept virtually no refugees whatsoever. In China, public surveys show that the overwhelming majority of Chinese Citizens (even up to 99% as some studies found) oppose the acceptance of refugees into China, showing an apprehension mostly towards middle eastern, and especially muslim ones (Jin). The same circumstances are present in Japan, where more than 99% of refugee applications are turned down by the government.

These facts, although open to different interpretations showcase the attitude of Asian countries towards international cohesiveness and highlight their values. Of course, there are many factors that make up their reasoning and result to it being the way it is, but the end result is the undisputed.

## TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Social cohesion has no “beginning, middle, and end.” It is a constant parameter of human coexistence, and tracing its roots would require us to trace the roots of the former. What is much more interesting however is to look at the ways in which human beings chose to govern the ways in which they co-exist. For the purposes of this committee we will be focusing on the economic and social aspect, as well as at relatively recent ‘events’. Below lies a timeline of operating (as of now) agreements.

Date	Description of Event
1969	Andean Community is founded: A customs union assembled by South American Countries.
1992	Creation of ASEAN Free Trade Area: A trade bloc agreement aiming to support local manufacturers of the ASEAN countries.

1975	<p>Asia Pacific Trade Agreement is adopted.</p> <p>It is a preferential trade agreement with its major focus being to hasten economic development amongst certain Asian countries.</p>
1993	<p>Establishment of the Central American Integration Systems; an economic and political organization of Central American States, aiming to further regional peace, political freedom, democracy, as well as hasten economic development.</p>
1992	<p>Adoption of Central European Free Trade Agreement between non-EU countries located in Southeastern Europe.</p>
2011	<p>The Commonwealth of Independent States Free Trade Area is founded.</p> <p>It is a free trade zone agreement between ex-Soviet States proposed after the breakup of the Soviet Union but only signed much later.</p>
1994	<p>Founding of the Commonwealth Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, which is a free trade area, replacing a preferential trade area which previously existed in the area.</p>
1995	<p>The G3 Free Trade Agreement between Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela is signed aiming to allow access to an extended market for its members.</p>
1997	<p>The Greater Arab Free Trade Area is established by the Council of Arab Economic Unity.</p>
2005	<p>Establishment of the East African Community composed of six countries in the African Great Lakes region in eastern Africa, namely Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda.</p>
1994	<p>An agreement of the European Economic Area is signed allowing for the free movement of persons, goods, services, and capital among EU members.</p>
1994	<p>The North America Free Trade Agreement is signed creating a trilateral trade bloc between Canada, Mexico, US.</p>
2016	<p>The Trans Pacific Partnership, an agreement between countries aiming to fasten development of its members, is adopted. The US was a member as well till its withdrawal under the Trump Administration.</p>

## UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

It can be successfully argued that all UN resolutions have an impact on social cohesion, but it is also true that some issues are impactful with regard to the latter. Below are the resolutions that address three different aspects of social cohesion through the UN lenses.

- Promoting social integration. The Economic and Social Council, 45th plenary meeting, 22 July 2010;
- Recovering from the world financial and economic crisis: a Global Jobs Pact. The Economic and Social Council, 49th plenary meeting, 28 July 2011;
- Resolution 6/13. The Social Forum The Human Rights Council, 21st meeting, 28 September 2007.

## PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

In conceptualizing and measuring social cohesion, the goal always is to figure out how to maximize it, and thereby reap its full benefits. The way societies have been organized thus far in human history can be generally grouped within the following categories (listed in the order that they appeared):

- Hunting and gathering societies
- Pastoral societies
- Horticultural societies
- Agricultural societies
- Industrial societies
- Post-industrial societies

To trace the attempts of humans to organize society from its beginning would be an effort entirely too ambitious for the premises of this study guide which is why we will be focusing on the events that took place after the 20th century.

The 20th century saw two world wars as well as the introduction of mass production into the scene. A consumer society was created, ultimately raising questions and posing challenges that required a major scale re-organization of society. Post-war reconstruction as well as a desire to prevent wars like the ones witnessed from taking place in the future led to the establishment of large-scale unions, with one of the most notable one being the European Union.

Such large-scale unions, partnerships, and agreements have allowed countries in all continents to better coexist with other countries, as well as to further cooperate with said countries in achieving their joint goals. Organizations like the council of Arab Economic Unity have worked to bind the peoples

of the regions that they represent and allow for hastened growth in these areas. A greater list of such organizations, partnerships, treaties, and unions, can be found in chronological order in the timeline of events.

What is worth noting however is that efforts like these are not a final solution and are even deemed by some as a condemnable effort. Two notable examples in relation to the programs mentioned in the timeline of events are: Britain's Exit from the European Union and the US's withdrawal from the TPP.

The two examples above are two rather high-profile cases and delegates are encouraged to conduct further research with regard to the causes behind both circumstances. Such an examination of the situation would shed light to several important factors that are obstacles in the way of social cohesion.

## **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

Member states could work together towards resolutions aiming to do several things;

One of the most important steps that need to be taken is for common standards with regard to social cohesion to be established and accepted by member states. Social cohesion cannot be conceptualised or measured unless such a framework exists. Another way in which the issue could potentially be addressed would be by developing a program aiming to better cohesion internally (within separate states) by focusing on issues such as but not limited to:

- A. Social Identity
- B. Mental Health
- C. Family Functioning
- D. Sense of Security
- E. Tolerance
- F. Educational Status
- G. Social Class
- H. Prejudice of All Sorts
- I. Literacy
- J. Community Leadership and Community Partnership

The way such issues ought to be handled should be outlined in a resolution, always reflecting different policies. Different countries will have different approaches as to what is good for a society and what type of relationship the many components of it ought to have in order to be cohesive; this fact should be reflected in the resolutions.

Strengthening relations and partnerships between member states, thereby improving international cohesion is another issue worth addressing. To achieve such a feat, entities like regional partnerships could be established. Additionally, through the same lens the model of global cohesion ought to be looked at. How can the general framework within which nations interact and co-exist be optimised, so that the conditions of said interaction and co-existence are bettered?

Lastly, discussing dispute settlement systems, aiming to “iron out” differences causing social disruption both on the internal and global level, is something that needs to be done. Like all things, for countries to be more adept at working together, they need to have as little as possible bringing them apart, and for this it is vital that international disputes are settled. This, although a daunting and ambitious task, should always be within the UN’s radar.

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