

## Big Name, Small Role

Time flies. And Un is 65. Yet this international union of nations is hardly authoritative enough to implement its own resolution. In truth the size of an organisation doesn't matter when it comes to the implementation issue. They have reiterated the international spirit of cooperation and co-existence so many times, it is repeated on different occasions and sometimes with heated exchanges, but in the end it is the same story of inaction in the field. It is more like a pious resolution making machine without any takers.

The world of 21st century is far from tranquil. UN was created for peace and development. Strictly speaking peace and development are not the defining features of this troubled era. Despite deployment of UN peace keeping forces in large numbers around the world, mostly in third world countries, peace remains elusive. Also, UN resolutions don't work. Problems continue to be resolved through war while dialogue diplomacy just attracts media attention.

When the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) back in December 1948, 58 member states voted for a historic document covering political, economic, social and cultural rights. Over the years UN has expanded horizontally but this charity basically depends on the global rich for funding. So ten years ago world leaders held the UN Millennium Summit and made the solemn commitment of making the right to development a reality for everyone and freeing the entire human race from hunger and poverty. But the hard fact is that much progress toward the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is acutely uneven in different regions. Nearer home starvation deaths and farmers' suicides continue to hit the headlines, almost regularly. The people living below poverty line are increasing and yet, their discourse on poverty (MDGs) at UN sounds fine. India apart, a large number of third world countries have been hard hit by the global financial crisis, natural disasters and volatilities in food markets. MDGs or no MDGs, the global population living in absolute hunger has increased and is increasing with every passing day.

This way or that UN Rights issue is a popular theme among academics and government functionaries. On 28 July, a widely expanded General Assembly adopted another 'memorable' resolution recognising water and sanitation as a basic human right. In all fairness, the resolution proved politically divisive, with 122 countries voting for it and 41 abstaining, but with no negatives. Still the voting pattern just reflected the North-South divide. Strangely enough, some poor countries of Africa like Zambia, Kenya, Ethiopia and Botswana sided with the rich led, of course, by America, in abstaining.

As per the latest estimates of UN 2 billion people live in water-stressed areas of the world and 3 billion people have simply no running water within a kilometre of their homes. Resolution follows drafting new law. But in countries where implementation of existing laws is already a big problem, it makes little sense to push for more laws which will only be relegated to dusty files. Governments that do not grant basic rights to their people, despite being signatories to the UN charter, are unlikely to honour one more right even if it has UN consensus.

Water justice in this globalised economy is unthinkable today because multinationals are coming in a big way to commercialise all water sources. So America cannot vote for it because American and European multinationals will lose packaged water market worldwide if right to water and sanitation is recognised as a basic human right.

Like most UN resolutions this water justice resolution too is non-binding and there ends the matter. Some NGOs working for water justice are jubilant as they see in the 28 July UN Resolution 'a crucial first step to providing clean water and sanitation to all.' For one thing it is simply next to impossible to get water justice for all unless relentless struggles are waged against water multinationals and NGOs have no anti-multinational agenda. Third World governments including Indian government are selling rivers and prime water bodies to multinationals while allowing multi-brand beverage companies to mine ground water, somewhat recklessly, causing great damage to soil, environment and people. □□□