**Don’t Go It Alone: Response of the Better World Campaign to the Administration’s Draft Executive Order on the UN**

This afternoon, *The New York Times* reported that the Administration is considering issuing an Executive Order calling for “at least a 40 percent overall decrease” in funding for international organizations, and changing the UN funding system from assessed to voluntary contributions. We do not have any information as to the status of the draft Executive Order or its timing. If the press reports are correct, the Better World Campaign believes that such proposals would be counter-productive and may actually increase costs to American taxpayers.

**Proposed 40% Cut to Voluntary Funding for International Organizations**

Slashing voluntary funding to the UN by 40% would have devastating consequences for a number of programs and initiatives that support critical American foreign policy priorities, national security interests, and long-held values. These initiatives have enjoyed bipartisan support across multiple administrations.

* **Key UN Agencies:** The major UN agencies receiving U.S. voluntary contributions are the UN’s World Food Program (WFP), UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), UN Population Fund (UNFPA), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Through these agencies and with strong American financial support, the UN delivers lifesaving aid to people around the world affected by famine, extreme poverty, conflict and natural disasters every year.
* **Important Deliverables**: Through these agencies, the UN:
  + Provides food and nutrition assistance to 80 million people in 80 countries;
  + Vaccinates 40% of the world’s children to protect them from deadly diseases;
  + Promotes maternal health, saving the lives of 30 million women;
  + Coordinates the global response to health emergencies, including the recent Zika epidemic,
  + Promotes democratic governance, poverty reduction, crisis prevention and recovery, and provides electoral assistance to emerging democracies.
  + Assists more than 65 million people who have been forced to flee their homes by war or persecution, and
  + Prevents transmission of HIV, providing care and support to those already living with the virus, and alleviating the epidemic’s impact on vulnerable communities.
* **American Leadership:** Since the U.S. provides a significant amount of funding to these relevant agencies i.e. 35% of funding to the World Food Program, 40% to the UN Refugee Agency, 13% to UNICEF and 17% to WHO - cuts in U.S. funding would have devastating consequences to the provision of lifesaving services.
* **Sharing the Burden**: In terms of the global refugee crisis specifically, cuts to agencies like WFP and UNHCR would place an immense burden on major refugee-hosting countries like Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon, threatening the stability of our allies and our ability to protect our national interests.

**Proposed Switch of Funding for Core UN Programs from Assessed to Voluntary**

Proposals to move from assessed to voluntary UN funding have been bandied about in Washington for years, but successive Administrations and Congresses have wisely never moved forward on enacting them. This is because proposals to switch funding for core UN programs from assessed to voluntary are fundamentally out of touch with reality: they fail to take account of how the UN actually works and how it serves U.S. interests.

* **Assessed Funding Structures Get Other Countries to Pay Their Fair Share:** Currently, the U.S. pays 22% of the UN Regular Budget and 28% of the peacekeeping budget – rates that largely based on America’s GDP. These are not insignificant figures. At the same time, the U.S.—due to its generosity—pays an even higher proportion of the budgets of voluntarily-funded UN humanitarian agencies like WFP and UNHCR. As a result, the argument that voluntary funding arrangements save the U.S. money is a red herring: on the contrary, under these types of scenarios, the U.S. actually ends up paying more. The beauty of assessed funding structures like the Regular and peacekeeping budgets is that they require other countries—by virtue of their membership in the UN—to support the organization at a specific level. This actually leads the U.S. to save money in the long-run.
* **U.S. Leaders/Experts Agree Voluntary Funding is Ineffective.** The 2005 Congressionally-mandated Newt Gingrich - George Mitchell report on UN Reform notes that voluntary funding schemes are often slow, causing under-funding even for Member-State priorities. In June 2005, the House passed The United Nations Reform Act of 2005 which would automatically withhold dues from the UN unless certain specific reforms are met, including switching to a voluntary system. The Bush Administration issued a Statement of Administration Policy (SAP) which said that it has “serious concerns” about the legislation because it “could detract from and undermine our efforts,” and “asks that Congress reconsider this legislation.”
* **Voluntary Funding Proposals Compromise U.S. Influence and Power.** A voluntary funding scheme would severely compromise U.S. power and influence within the UN and the nation’s ability to set the agenda of the organization. It would also hurt the U.S. ability to obtain UN help and support when needed. Most issues that the UN deals with, particularly those of a political nature, are unforeseeable or happen with little notice. The U.S. cannot expect to seek the UN’s help in the middle of an unforeseen crisis if the country has not made a permanent commitment to be a full standing member of the organization and comply with the responsibilities that entails.
* **Voluntary Funding Proposals Will Not Make the UN More Effective.** It is invalid to say that voluntarily funded organizations are more effective than those that are not. Voluntarily funded organizations usually tend to have humanitarian, program-oriented missions delivering products, and therefore have more quantifiable results (tons of food delivered, numbers of children vaccinated, etc). The programs funded through assessed budgets, such as those at the United Nations, tend to be more political in nature and therefore harder to quantify requiring budget flexibility. This is one reason why the U.S government itself has an assessed funding scheme. Relying on donors/taxpayers to choose their amount would undoubtedly lead to underfunding of key priorities.
* **Voluntary Funding Proposals Compromise UN Stability and Budget.** Any large organization needs stability and predictability in its budget. In particular, planning for massive logistical operations like peacekeeping efforts require significant lead time and preparation that can only happen with assured funding streams. There are also certain operational costs that must be funded in order for a large bureaucracy to function, such as translation and meeting costs, which are not likely to be appealing to a voluntary funder.

**UN Agencies Affected by Proposed 40% Cut Executive Order**

UN Children's Fund

World Food Program

UN Development Program

UN High Commissioner for Refugees

World Health Organization (Substantial Voluntary Funding)

International Organization for Migration

Pan-American Health Organization

Food and Agriculture Organization (Substantial Voluntary Funding)

UN Relief Works Agency

UN Population Fund

UN Office for Project Services

UN Environment Program

International Atomic Energy Agency

UN Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women

International Fund for Agricultural Development

UN Office on Drugs and Crime

UN Program on HIV/AIDS

UN Human Settlement Program

Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty Organization

Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons