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A Posit on the UN

The H1N1 flu and the Somalia pirates were only the two latest events that begged for UN leadership. As usual, there has been no UN response beyond rhetoric. The world will not continue to support such a costly, corrupt, failed political experiment."

Among 65 responses, 33 agreed, 29 disagreed, 3 undecided but with comment.

A few commentators expressed annoyance at the appearance in their magazine of a posit statement they didn't agree with. Therefore, the editors recognize that we have not adequately conveyed the central idea of posits, even though it is attached to each posit assertion. We want to do better, and hope a discussion triggered by this particular posit will promote that end.

A posit is simply the expression of an opinion; it is necessarily brief and terse. However, posits do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editors or the Board of Directors. Any member is welcome to propose a posit. Participation is voluntary. The purpose is to encourage an exchange of opinion among members.

Why opinion? Opinions are very important in a democracy, where they are the prime mover of action; logic or careful considerations are latecomers, secondary determinants of action. Therefore, exchange of ideas and opinion is critical to a healthy democratic process, particularly between those who disagree.

Please remember that any member's expressed opinion is not per se a personal attack. To the contrary, those who take on the risk of expressing an opinion trust and honor those who they know will disagree.

How? To reveal an opinion is to tacitly or innocently trust that those who disagree are able to hear and perhaps respond without offence or offending; it is an assumption that both sides of a disagreement are capable of civil discourse, which elevates and honors the adversaries.

To believe our colleagues incapable would be to belittle or insult them. There must be somewhere, a Golden Rule like this: "Hear and respect a dissenting opinion as you would have your own opinion heard and respected." In doing so, we can learn something important about Ourselves and about the Other, this is the basis of a civil society.

Two responders objected that this posit is not strictly about medicine. That is so; but our magazine has never been strictly about medicine. It has always been about the lives of physicians. Even the

practice of medicine today is not about medicine only, but about politics, economics, and culture, including ethical decisions by non physicians. We live and operate in a community, often in a family or families, in states, in nations, on continents, in a world, in a galaxy.

Our magazine is subject to change of course, and change is in the air we breathe today; so an article about changing the magazine might be very interesting. That, or making recommendations to the editorial committee, where any member is welcome.

Edited commentary on this posit appears below. - John Loofbourow, MD, Editor

"The UN commonly does not take hands-on action but it is a forum for discussion and debate of issues of international importance, which might in itself lessen the chance of armed conflict.

We all can and should express our disgust with all governmental and paragovernmental organizations in their failure to stop the genocide and civil war in Somalia and the horn of Africa. UNICEF, World Food Program, World Health Organization, and many other members of the UNDG (United Nations Development Group) perform or coordinate important functions throughout the underdeveloped world and deserve the support of the developed nations. " - Joe T. Hartzog, MD

"The United Nations is an impotent, costly and corrupt organization. When it comes to providing safety or relief for any group of people in the world, it is usually one of the major powers, chief among them being the United States, to get the job done. This is in addition to the excessive yearly dues that the USA provides and this without any public accountability or scrutiny...case in point the Oil for Food Program/Scandal. The only department in the whole UN structure I could commend would be the World Health Organization." - William W. Johnson, MD

"The United Nations is only as effective as the nations supposedly united under its umbrella are allowing it to be. After eight years of total obstruction by the Bush Administration, one should not be surprised that the UN appears less than effective. The "world" (meaning nearly every country OTHER than the US!) has seen responses that went well beyond rhetoric, and should continue to support the UN, despite the US calling it a failure. Not every organization that disagrees on certain issues with the American government is a "failure"!" - Ulrich Hacker, MD

"I visited the UN with a church group when I was a junior in high school (1963). It was impressive and had high ideals and hopes. It seemed very important during the 60's and 70's. I regret having to agree with the statement. It is a very quiet voice in a loud crowd." - Ronald A. Rogers, MD

"What the hell is this posit doing on SSVMS? It's this spurious geopolitical meddling that fuels my antipathy towards organized medicine. If my group didn't require membership, I'd resign." - Wendy W. Forrest, MD

"The UN is such a mockery! Not only does it not do any good, it delays definitive and timely action while we hold our breath in the hopes that once, just this once, they will ACT on one of their many, MANY resolutions that are routinely ignored by rogue nations and by the world at large. Have they EVER done anything to justify their existence?" - Kelly A. Sharrar, MD

"What does this have to do with medicine in Sacramento?" - Gary McLaughlin, MD

"Why SSV would ask opinions on international politics over which it has no say is beyond any good sense.... Get back to your local concerns.. Wonder why there are so few members?" - Michael H. Burman, MD

"This one is long overdue." - Deane Hillsman, MD

"What on Earth does this have to do with medicine?" - Mark Tong, MD

"Actually, it is the U.S. which is the main U.N. financial support. The majority of its members hate us and are corrupt. Move the whole thing to Belgium or Switzerland." - James Farley, MD

"The WHO, which is associated with the UN, is very active in addressing the H1N1 issue. Actually the changes that the UN and the WHO pushed for improving collaboration between countries early in pandemics improved our outbreak response and our ability to analyze the infection more quickly. I have no opinion about the pirates." - Anthony Russell, MD

"Lack of efficacy rarely results in the demise of political institutions. The more spectacular the failure the larger it grows. " - Mark Zlotlow, MD

"Such a stupid, idiotic posit I almost didn't respond." - Daniel A. Egerter, MD

"While I agree with your statement, I question whether SSVMS should be commenting on Somali pirates." - Robert C. Midgley, MD

"I can only say that the UN works at snail pace if at all, much slower than even a democracy." - Joseph Lash, MD

"I admit they have trouble taking definitive action, but I feel the world is steadily moving to charge leaders with crimes against humanity (Darfur etc.). The world can no longer tolerate such events.

Without a strong military force, the action has to be really effective sanctions and legal measures. Without the UN we have no world wide political forum where the problems can be hashed out. Eventually all nations should get the message. " - R.J. Frink, MD

"I don't see that as the role of the UN. Rather the WHO and CDC should address these things." - Thomas Curran, MD

"This is inappropriate. I am sick of right wing ignorant unrealistic editorials and will not participate and think it is an inappropriate use of Med Soc resources." - Robert P. Diamond, MD

"The UN I'm sure could do a better job, but the UN has to continue. The ideal of the UN has to continue. It is very expensive to run, I'm sure; but, as inefficient as it appears to be, it is money well spent. Hopefully, everyone remembers the League of Nations that President Wilson was involved with, and the fact that the US refused to join with the resultant result, WWII. The world, I fear, would not recover from a WWIII. The UN's strong suit is that it keeps people talking. Talking is good. The UN has done a lot of good things as well." - Maynard Johnston, MD

"What exactly is this political position doing in the medical society magazine? "Costly, corrupt, political experiment"!!! This is a totally inappropriate way to discuss the UN and its response to H1N1 flu. Is this a political journal? " - Jane O'Green Koenig, MD

"The UN folks talk good but have too weak a "police force" to do what was once expected of them. Very sad." - Byron Demorest, MD

"We need to strengthen, support, and improve the United Nations so that it can deal effectively with global problems such as these. This will require that all nations, including the U.S., give up some degree of individual sovereignty, just as when primitive tribes joined city-states, which joined larger states, which joined nations." - Robert Meagher, MD

"Move the UN to Somalia." - Michael D. Maddox, MD

"Although I agree that it is costly and relatively worthless, there needs to be some sort of global arena for discussions of global issues and the UN fulfills that purpose at the moment." - David R. Jeffcoach, MD

"Sorry; I think the topic is a bit fatuous. The UN is not in charge of pandemic influenza. The WHO monitors such things and may make recommendations but, once again, the US came through with the CDC. The Somali pirate situation is more complicated, because the situation in Somalia is so bleak that this is a lifestyle for these young men. The solution is not something that can be resolved diplomatically by asking the Somali government to please stop its citizens from doing this; it will require a show of force that makes any such attempt not worthwhile, [like] dropping fragmentation grenades on these guys when they approach each ship, and the UN isn't going to suggest any such thing." - Richard Gray, MD

"The UN needs reform, but I do not think abolishing it is a good solution." - Katherine M. Gillogley, MD

"But for a few health related activities, the UN is a worthless exercise in throwing good money after bad. It is an orchestrated anti-America forum unworthy of any dollars extracted from hard-pressed "hated" American taxpayers. Unfunding the U.N. is long overdue. Let the "Hate America" crowd foot the bills. We've paid for UN principles with excessive dollars and American blood. I was in San Francisco in 1945 when the U.N promised to succeed where the League of Nations had failed. What a bust!" - Cleve B. Baker, MD

"The League of Nations only survived 27 years.. The United Nations organization has successfully survived to date which is 64 years..We owe this success to the concerted, collaborative effort of the member nations of this organization, which numbers 150 to date, of which Somalia is a member. Somalian piracy has existed for several decades. In 2008 a multinational coalition task force formed the Maritime security patrol area (MSPA) to safeguard the coast of Aden where most of the international oceanic trading occurs, and so this activity happens, and they take the pirates to task, and the United Nations was a major part of that creation, and America did exactly what had to be done, although deadly.

The World Health Organization (one of the five bodies of the UNO responsible for the international health and wellbeing) stepped up the grade of threat of the swine flu pandemic to 5. With that global alert, all the necessary emergency needs are poised for action. Then we are responsible to act. Peace and wellbeing are expensive when there are rogues, people or bugs." - Elisabeth Mathew, MD

"And they want One World government??" - Hal Renollet, MD