Ms Lise Grande is the UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in India. Ms Grande has worked for the United Nations since 1994, serving in Armenia, Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, East Timor, Haiti, Occupied Palestine, South Sudan, Sudan and Tajikistan. She worked for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for seven years and was involved in some of the United Nations’ largest humanitarian operations. She then served as Resident Coordinator and Resident Representative for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Armenia. Following this assignment, she served for three years as Chief of the Integrated Office for the United Nations peacekeeping operation in the DRC. In her last assignment she served as the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in South Sudan. Here in an exclusive interview with DSA she expounds her views on the three pillars of UN operations: Peace and security, social and economic development and human rights.

Defence and Security Alert: The original Charter of the United Nations was signed at San Francisco on 26th June 1945 “To save succeeding generations from the scourge of war ... To reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights ... To promote social progress ...”. Please enlighten our readers how the UN has evolved over the years and how truly it has been able to implement the Charter and how successful it has been in achieving its mandated goals?

Ms Lise Grande: There is no simple answer to this question. Although many critics both within and outside the UN system would differ, in my view, the United Nations has been more successful in achieving its mandated goals than it has been given credit for. Allow us to share our reasoning.

First, the United Nations is the only global body of its kind in the world, no other institution is tasked with protecting the lives of the world’s citizens, irrespective of nationality, ethnicity and religion. The UN Charter, which guides the work of the UN, is a remarkable universal framework for the advancement and protection of human rights. Wide-ranging political, economic, social and cultural rights have been defined in relation to the Charter and numerous international conventions and treaties have been agreed. As evidence of its influence and reach, the majority of the UN’s 193 Member States have signed or ratified human rights conventions and treaties and are implementing rights-based legislation in their own countries.

Second, the United Nations has played a significant role in promoting international peace and security. When the UN was founded almost seventy years ago, the world was emerging from a devastating global war. Although we are still far from seeing a conflict-free world, or securing one for future generations, the UN has played a decisive role in preventing, managing, containing and resolving conflicts since 1945. In support of regional security, the UN Security Council has mandated nearly 80 peacekeeping missions, as well as a growing number of smaller political missions whose mandates range from preventive diplomacy to facilitation, mediation and post-conflict peacebuilding.

On the question of how the UN has evolved to meet its Charter obligations, allow us to share two points.

One, since 1945 the UN has undergone several waves of reform, its membership has risen from 51 to 193 countries; its scope of operation has expanded across the three pillars of peace and security, social and economic development and human rights and involves tens of UN organisations, treaty bodies and subsidiary organs; and its mandate has evolved to respond to emerging challenges including new forms of conflict and terrorism, global financial crises, environmental disasters and climate change and global pandemics.

Second and this is a key point, the world is changing in ways which the UN is working rapidly and diligently to address - this is particularly the case when we discuss security. Today, the security of every one of us is linked to that of everyone else. Insecurity in one state can easily spread across borders to impact other countries, often unpredictably. The UN’s approach to insecurity is based on the now widespread recognition that there can be no peace without development and no development without peace and that both peace and development depend on respect for human rights. This approach is well articulated, for example, in several of UNDP’s Human Development Reports which have explored the links between global insecurities and global inequalities, expanding our collective understanding of the drivers and root causes of violence and instability.
The UN is serious about reform. There’s no question about this. Professor Edward Luck, a former special adviser to the UN Secretary General, said “by the sheer quantity of deliberations, debates, studies and resolutions devoted to it, reform has become one of the endearing paradoxes and primary products of the UN system.” The changes that are occurring globally make further reforms in UN structures both urgent and necessary. Allow us to highlight three points.

One, no one will disagree that the UN Security Council was established at a time when the balance of global power was profoundly different than it is now. Changing the composition of the Security Council to reflect new global realities is one of the most sensitive and complicated questions facing the UN today. Also at stake is the role of the veto, a privilege currently accorded to the five permanent members of the Security Council. Previous efforts at reform have run aground on the issue of who should have the right to this veto and under what conditions it should be exercised. These are difficult questions and to date, they remain unanswered.

At the same time, serious efforts are being made by members of the Security Council to make the Council a more transparent and democratic body by changing the way it conducts its business. The Council has recently expanded its dialogue with non-Council members and other bodies, improved its cooperation with troop- and police-contributing countries and established channels allowing for greater internal communication and access.

Second, the global financial crisis, because it has reduced the resources available to the UN, has spurred administrative and organisational reform. Faced with having to scale-down operations, the UN secretariat and the UN agencies, funds and programmes are streamlining business practices across the globe with the aim of reducing costs whenever possible, and achieving greater efficiencies and effectiveness. The UN system is actively looking for ways to do more, with less, by working more closely together. The reform of the UN coordination system is a good example. Rather than less, by working more closely together. The reform of the UN system is actively looking for ways to do more, with

The Security Council is a very active body. Only last year, it has tracked over 700 peacekeeping missions and a further nearly 500 missions dealing with country-specific and regional situations as well as diverse thematic issues. The Council also held informal meetings with non-Council members, civil society and non-governmental organisations as a part of a broad effort to open its doors to diverse views.

In hindsight, we can always see where they were opportunities for course correction. What’s important now is to learn from the past. Already, we are seeing a new consensus emerging on the best way to help fragile and conflict-affected states become more stable. Many of the UN’s organs are now supporting a two-pronged strategy aimed at building security and rule of law institutions in fragile states while also helping to accelerate development.

This approach recognises that fragile states are characterised by an absence of rule of law, lack of effective governance structures, political fragmentation and a breakdown of social compacts. Helping to rebuild and reform security and justice institutions, while also helping to rebuild confidence in the local population, is a cornerstone of the UN’s efforts in constructing and equipping schools and hospitals; restoring religious and cultural institutions; and ensuring access to basic services are increasingly seen as important roles for the UN to play.

The UN General Assembly created the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (OCT) in 2010. The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre (CTC) was established in 2004. What strategies and mechanisms has the UN devised to counter global jihadist terrorism and which are the disturbances that are disturbing world peace and stability?

Ms Grande: The UN is a major factor in stamping out terrorism, and it has been joined by international organisations such as INTERPOL and the UN’s affiliated organisations such as the UN counter-terrorism and the role of the UN in combating terrorism, and the role of the UN in promoting human rights.

Ms Grande: The UN advocate for human rights, the High Commissioner for Human Rights is the person who is the main coordinator of human rights issues at the UN. The UN are working to ensure that human rights are respected and protected around the world.

Ms Grande: The UN General Secretary gives high priority to the Arctic region. Just this month he visited Greenland with the Prime Minister of Denmark and Premier of Greenland now working to protect the region.

Ms Grande: The UN have to preserve Arctic region as a zone of peace?

Ms Grande: How much has the situation improved? How is the UN addressing human rights violations now?

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Ms Grande: Human rights are foundational to everything the United Nations stands for. As one of the three pillars of the UN, in addition to development and peace and security, Member States are recognising that much more can and should be done to protect rights, particularly accountability for gross violations of human rights. Whether it is the UN Human Rights Council’s investigations into alleged human rights violations or the referral of situations to the International Criminal Court, the promotion of human rights is central to international engagement.

The UN has a number of entities with specific responsibilities for promoting human rights including the UN advocate for human rights, the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

DSA: Global jihadist and terrorism are spreading their tentacles around the world with a menacing alacrity. UNSC Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) came into existence in 2004. What strategies and mechanisms has the UN devised to counter global jihadist terrorism and which are the disturbances that are disturbing world peace and stability?

Ms Grande: The UN’s work on counter-terrorism involves a number of UN entities. The UN Security Council has formed the Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC) and its Executive Directorate (CTED) focused particularly on the monitoring and implementing of relevant Security Council Resolutions. The Security Council has also established sanctions committees linked to Security Council Resolutions 1267, 1999 and 1988.

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Human Rights based in Geneva and a number of thematic and country specific special investigators appointed by the Human Rights Council called UN Special Rapporteurs. With the support of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Rapporteurs, who report annually to the Human Rights Council and General Assembly, undertake a number of functions including: visiting country; acting on individual cases and concerns of a broader, structural nature by sending communications to member states; convening expert consultations; contributing to the development of international human rights standards; engaging in advocacy; raising public awareness; and providing advice for technical cooperation.

**DSA:** Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were endorsed by UN in 2000, but still there are more than a billion people living in extreme poverty. How is UN helping and accelerating poverty reduction which is the root cause of many maladies that the world faces?

**Ms Grande:** In 2000, world leaders pledged to reduce extreme poverty by half. This goal has already been met, a staggering 700 million people have been lifted out of poverty, a majority of them in Asia. The international community is in the process of defining the next set of goals after the MDGs expire in 2015. The Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, which has met for most of the past year, has proposed an outcome document with 17 goals and 169 targets.

Goal 1 in the proposed framework aims to end poverty in all its forms everywhere. This is a bold goal and there is every expectation that it will be the cornerstone of the new global development compact. The Open Working Group recognises that eradicating poverty once and for all is an all-encompassing campaign requiring multiple efforts on multiple fronts. This is why the proposed framework includes targets aimed at improving food security, increasing access to basic services, fighting stigma and discrimination, improving agriculture, expanding markets and industry, reducing gender inequality and reversing the impact of climate change. The proposed compact is a major push for the anti-poverty agenda. UNDP, with an on-the-ground presence in 177 countries, has 80 peacekeeping missions. The second is the establishment of an agreement will not be easy, but delaying it may jeopardise the global environment but that within this common mandate, each country has differing roles based on historic patterns of development and current needs.

**DSA:** We understand that United Nations cannot be the panacea for all the ills that befall the world, but now with an experience of almost seven decades, do you think UN has what it takes to resolve the vexed geopolitical and geostrategic issues that confront the world?

**Ms Grande:** The UN cannot resolve the vexed geopolitical and geostrategic issues on its own. Everything that we do in the name of Member States, from peacekeeping to reducing malnutrition, requires partnerships and resources. Governments, the private sector, civil society and the media all have a responsibility and roles to play. The UN system recognises this, which is why there has been a global effort to involve all parts of the international community in formulating the new set of global development goals. Responding to the call of the UN Secretary General, more than 80 countries, including India, have held national consultations in support of the process during the past 18 months.

**DSA:** Do you think, in addition to the major restructuring, the UN also needs an image makeover? Little is known about the good work UN has been doing around the world, the milestones and turning points in the eventful journey of the United Nations.

**Ms Grande:** Spanning so many domains from peace-keeping to state-building, to development and humanitarian action, the UN has a proven track record helping to secure international peace, uphold human rights, improve living conditions and save lives. The blue flag signifies the commitment of Member States to work collectively to uphold the principles of the UN Charter. This kind of universal commitment and action is unprecedented in history – it is remarkable, truly.

In reflecting on major milestones, perhaps you’ll allow me to mention three. The first has already been mentioned – the role that the UN has played through its 80 peacekeeping missions. The second is the establishment of the UN Development Programme in 1965, which helped to put development at the top of the UN agenda. UNDP, with an on-the-ground presence in 177 countries, has coined and promoted the concept of human development, one of the great ideas of the 20th century. The third milestone is the work the UN has done on gender equality ranging from global efforts to end violence against women, end discrimination in all forms and promote women’s rights as human rights. The creation of UNWOMEN, the newest UN agency, reconfirms that no development goal can be achieved and no conflict resolved if gender concerns are not addressed upfront. Next year will mark 20 years since the Beijing Conference recognised women’s rights as human rights and 21 years since the Cairo Conference emphasised reproductive rights as women’s rights. The conference were held under the auspices of the UN and in my mind, are concrete proof of what the UN stands for, has done and can do in the years to come.