

CITY A.M.

Trump is right about the UN – and the UK should follow him

Ryan Bourne

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As Britain leaves the EU, is it time to re-examine our membership and funding of another international institution – the United Nations (UN)?

Asking such a question will no doubt rile those who see the UN's existence as inherently virtuous. A genuine forum for sovereign nation states to discuss international affairs and cooperate is a worthy aim.

Yet the UN is increasingly toothless when needed, and its bloated bureaucracies pollute policy debates with socialist platitudes, all funded by taxpayers. With President Donald Trump promising major cuts to US funding, it is surely time for Britain to support a robust reform agenda.

Just last week, a UN committee sharply criticised the UK government's failure to fulfill its commitments under the convention on disabled people's rights. Theresia Degener, who leads the UN's Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, went further, describing welfare reforms here as a "human catastrophe".

Whatever one thinks of the Conservative government's record, it is reasonable to hope such UN employees would be more careful with language. In some UN member states, such as Ghana, disabled people are beaten and chained. In others, such as Venezuela, people of all mental and physical capabilities are dying of starvation.

But no matter – a lack of prioritisation and hysterical incursions in UK domestic debates are nothing new. In 2013, a former Brazilian housing minister was sent by the UN to collect some anecdotal evidence, and in turn declared the so-called "bedroom tax" "shocking". Presumably the existence of shanty towns in other member states (including Brazil) was a second order concern.

Highly partisan reports like this, which always tend to be particularly critical of major Western capitalist democracies, are commonplace.

According to the UN, Britain is ranked 156th out of 165 participating countries for "kids' rights".

If you think this is a genuine reflection of the welfare and rights of children here relative to other countries – including Venezuela and Saudi Arabia – who are ranked higher than us, then I have a bridge to sell you.

Then again, what are we to expect from an organisation whose Human Rights Council recently appointed a representative from Saudi Arabia to its 2018-2022 “Commission on the Status of Women”, which is “exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality”? In Saudi Arabia, women are still banned from driving.

But no doubt we can look forward to that Commission criticising Britain’s so-called “gender pay gap”, as representatives from Sudan and Algeria did in our 2012 Universal Review. This featured other delights, such as Russia criticising “police brutality” in the UK, Vietnam denouncing our “austerity”, Cuba urging us to protect economic and social rights, and China discussing the freedom to protest.

Then there’s the UN’s often bizarre incursions into economic debates.

In 2014, its Conference on Trade and Development published a report which seemingly argued in favour of protectionism and significant industrial policies, rather than trade liberalisation.

In 2015, Christiana Figueres, who was then the executive secretary of UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, appeared to announce her belief that to combat climate change we needed to “intentionally... change the economic development model” which has produced untold prosperity in the past 200 years.

This is not even to mention the UN’s repeated anti-Israel bias, and its failures in the field of foreign policy.

Why are British taxpayers funding this nonsense?

Though only on the hook for around £100m per year to the regular budget (and additional funds for its peacekeeping one), what exactly are we getting out of this?

That’s certainly a question the Trump administration is asking for US taxpayers, and with the US paying out a whopping \$8bn per year, who can blame him?

It’s high time the UN’s activity was critically evaluated.

No doubt there are some worthy projects. But we need to be honest about the organisation’s opaque and inadequately robust performance management, high costs and overheads, not to mention the lack of accountability for UN staff (with rumours circulating of a major scandal expected soon), and the culture of agencies creaming off funds and replicating work unnecessarily to the detriment of taxpayers.

Any international body which incorporates as many non-democratic countries as the UN is by construction always going to be imperfect. But that makes it all the more important for countries such as the UK and US to continually review their roles.

At the very least, government ministers have a responsibility to ensure UN funds are spent on worthy areas of international cooperation, rather than the left-wing virtue signalling we have seen in recent years.

In Trump’s administration, the UK may find an ally willing to countenance more meaningful reform.

Ryan Bourne occupies the R Evan Scharf Chair in the Public Understanding of Economics at the Cato Institute in Washington D.C.