Introduction: Global Governance

In the 1990s special attention is being paid to the question of 'global governance'. This is a term almost no one used a decade ago, but which is now generally held to refer to the institutions for managing relations between states across a range of issues, from security to human rights and the environment. 'Governance' in its simplest sense refers to the art of governing, to ensuring that it is morally defensible and efficient. It does not imply that there should be any one institution, but rather, in the present context, refers to a set of interlocking but separate bodies which share a common purpose. Thus it covers the activities of states, but also those of inter-governmental organisations, most notably the UN, and the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and transnational movements: all of these combine, not least through influencing each other, to produce the system of global governance. The argument is not whether such a system is desirable or not: we already have a many-layered global governance system, and indeed one of the central issues is to overcome, through reform, the defaults of a system that has been up and running for several decades. The question is how to make this governance system more effective, more just, and more responsive to the changing international situation.

[...] The discussion on global governance has [...] acquired an importance and an urgency [...] The case being made is clear and powerful: that the problems facing the contemporary world cannot be solved either by leaving everything to the actions of individual states, or to the workings of the market, and that the existing mechanisms are insufficient to deal with them. Some proposals do suggest that existing institutions be wound up: the Economic and Social Council of the UN (ECOSOC), and the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), being favourite candidates. But the majority of proposals speak of developing existing institutions and, where appropriate, adding on new ones. [...]

The proposals for reform also tend to reflect ways in which the philosophies of global governance, and the concerns uppermost in the minds of the drafters, have shifted over the past fifty years [since the UN was established]. This is evident above all in three respects: first, there is much greater awareness of the importance of unspecific, 'global', problems, of which defence of the environment, an issue almost ignored up to the mid-1980s, is one; secondly, many recognise the importance, for social and economic reasons as much as for reasons of equity, of promoting the interests of women:
The role of the great powers

Continuous Issues: Five Examples

[Text continues on the next page]