

# Preface

When we left our respective positions in the UN sanctions system and after having spent many years on the diplomatic, field, and conflict front lines, it was with a sense of unfulfilled purpose. We considered the UN sanctions system indispensable for an effective multilateral security arrangement. We also saw its susceptibility to misperceptions and poor implementation, and we recognized its frequent failure to deliver in restoring and maintaining international peace and security while respecting underlying UN Charter principles of human welfare.

Deciding that our work was unfinished, we partnered with states and nongovernmental organizations to formulate sanctions-specific UN system-wide training and implementation skills enhancement courses. We also began to write about sanctions from our practitioners' point of view. Interested states embraced our proposals to engage in a sustained exploration of possible improvements, for example, with the High Level Review of UN Sanctions, sponsored by Australia, Finland, Germany, Greece, and Sweden (2014–2015).

We also participated in research endeavors with academic institutions and international organizations around the world. We worked with the African Union Peace and Security Council on their sanctions handbook; taught courses at major universities to undergraduate and graduate students, as well as specialized training for advanced professionals in the public and private sector. We participated in conferences with sanctions policy makers of some of the most powerful states, while pursuing projects with the most destitute and conflict-wracked communities around the world. Together with dozens of sanctions academics, we participated in a quantitative assessment of sanctions performance. All these efforts still left us frustrated with the status quo.

The fissure between intellectual and sometimes theoretical discussions and the gritty needs of the real world caused us to doubt the utility of seeking improvements in UN sanctions practices. The glaring reality is that four-fifths of the world's population are never even represented, i.e., never show up where decision-makers gather to seek enhancements to UN sanctions mechanisms. Why do the representatives of the poor and weak, the majority of the global populace and the most frequent victims of international threat actors, not participate in shaping one of the UN's most

powerful, non-violent conflict-resolution tools? Despite the preventive and protective role of sanctions, as articulated by many participants to the High Level Review of UN Sanctions, overall support for UN sanctions implementation is low. Many state representatives offered sobering insights: *We have no purpose for UN sanctions. Others make decisions that we must implement. But we don't believe that sanctions help us.*

Many foreign policy experts appear to be unfazed by the contradiction that those who most urgently need fair, transparent, and effective sanctions appear to be uninterested in taking advantage of these mechanisms. Some shunt aside their non participation as an unfortunate but inevitable consequence of third-world government officials preoccupied with all kinds of ills such as illiberalism, terrorism, socialism, nationalism, fascism, and, of course, always corruption.

In our view, these answers are too easy, and erroneous as well, built on a fundamentally flawed analysis of the political context in which sanctions are applied. To fully understand the claim often made by academics and others that “sanctions don’t work” requires an evaluation of sanctions from the perspectives of senders, targets, and innocents who suffer unintended hardships.

Does international peace and security hold the same meaning or importance to people in different parts of the world? For example, for many who live in poverty and endemic violence, their basic needs such as food, shelter, and individual security are often even more urgent matters. They and their leaders cannot be faulted for their inability to relate to the all-consuming focus of some on counterterrorism or nonproliferation. Borrowing from the brilliant insight of Pulitzer Prize-winning Viet Thanh Nguyen in his book *The Sympathizer*, for them, perhaps, nothing is more important than international peace and security.

Our book will have served its ultimate purpose if it inspires others to reexamine the UN’s conflict-resolution practices, including sanctions, from a perspective freed from the well-worn mindset that currently dominates most published work. We do not advocate against ideas of specific states or groups of states. However, we believe that if multilateral tools and the UN are expected to continue to play a valuable role in history, it is time to consider viewpoints and perspectives other than those that currently dominate the sanctions agenda.

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