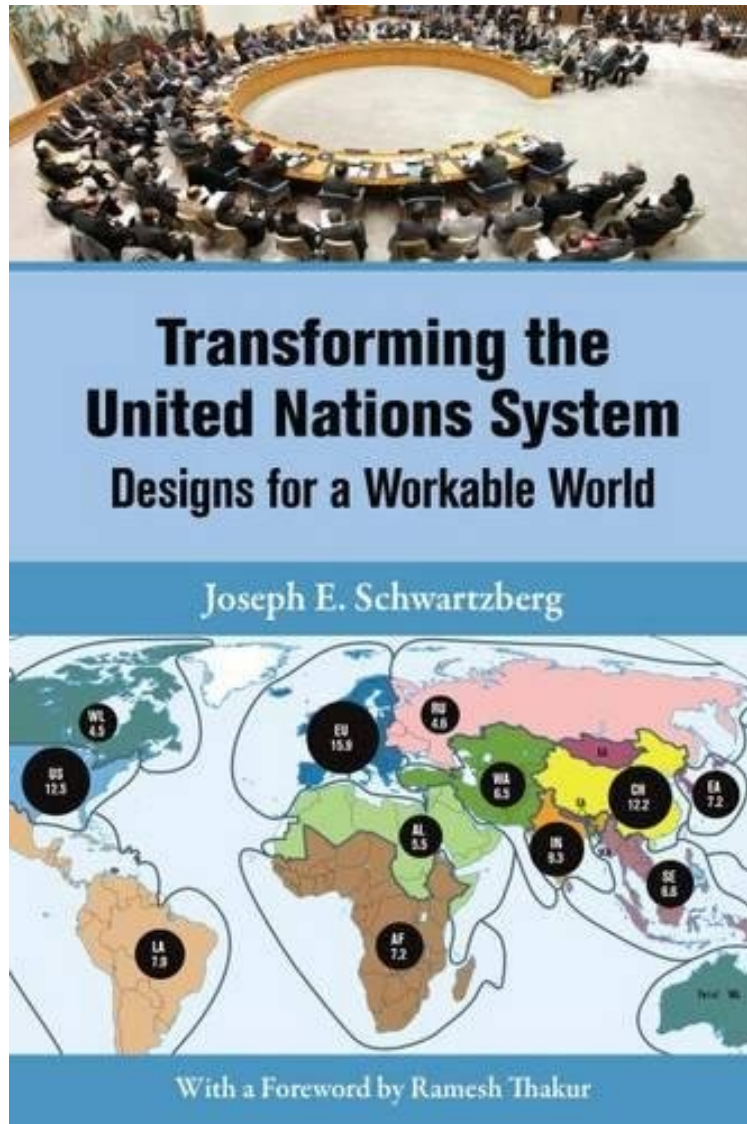


# Transforming the United Nations System: Designs for a Workable World

Joseph E. Schwartzberg

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**Joseph E. Schwartzberg** : **Transforming the United Nations System: Designs for a Workable World** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Transforming the United Nations System: Designs for a Workable World:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. A great book for learning about the United Nations System, its history, its present, and its potential.By DickLike most of my fellow citizens, I have limited knowledge of the United

Nations. That the UN exists is certain; that there are various opinions about it is certain as well; but even with its 70 year history and global presence, few of us, including the most vocal critics, have more than superficial knowledge of what we think the UN is. *Transforming the United Nations System, Designs for A Workable World* by Professor Joseph Schwartzberg provides a superb opportunity to learn more about the abundant problems and the even greater potential for the United Nations system in our ever more complicated world. My introduction to the book came through a book discussion group where a number of us, mostly amateurs in the topic, met to discuss the volume chapter by chapter. The key words in the book title, in my opinion, are Transforming, System and Workable. The author draws on knowledge gained from his very long career as university professor to give a basis for understanding the United Nations system, then making, in each chapter, personal recommendations for transforming that system towards a more workable world. There is much meat as well for academics and policy wonks. As one might imagine, on a planet with 193 countries and 7.3 billion people, the opportunities for criticism of the United Nations are endless, as are the opportunities for improvements in the existing framework to help make our world a more workable place on which to survive and thrive. A legitimate question, in my opinion, is Without a United Nations, what is an alternative? In my opinion, the time is long past when any person, or any nation, could suffer under the delusion that some omnipotent entity could rule the world. We live on this planet together. In *Transforming the United Nations System*, Prof. Schwartzberg expertly lays the base, and by the end of our discussion group my understanding of the system was greatly expanded. The book remains a very useful reference volume. Formed as a system of victors after WWII, the United Nations began as 51 nations, of which the five major victors U.S., United Kingdom, France, China and the Soviet Union - permanent members of the powerful Security Council held (and still hold) veto power over any substantive action by the greater body. The UN is now an organization of 193 nations, and the whole system includes numerous related organizations such as the World Health Organization, UNESCO, and many others. The Soviet Union has since been reconfigured, of course, but remains a major power. The so-called P5 (the powers listed in the preceding paragraph) are not united, and any one of them can veto anything. The largest member nation in population, China, has nearly 1.4 billion population; the smallest, Nauru, 9,300 population, is outnumbered by China 150,000:1. By no means are the two nations equal. Although all people should be represented, it is not fair for each country to have one vote regardless of its population as is now the case in the U.S. General Assembly. The problems with such an archaic structure in a greatly changed world are obvious. Prof. Schwartzberg proposes for discussion a method to transform the system. He recognizes that there are many possible pathways to transformation, and acknowledges the overarching problem of changing power relationships. Throughout the book the author provides simple mathematical formulae that would change the present irrational non-binding system of decision-making based on the principle of one nation one vote to more legitimate and binding systems that equitably balance the needs of stakeholders (those affected by decisions) and shareholders (those who pay for implementation). *Transforming the United Nations System* has been endorsed by 20 persons especially knowledgeable about the United Nations system. This book is being translated into seven major languages, making it accessible to the large portion of the planet whose first language is not English. This book represents a great opportunity to learn about an institution which, while certainly not perfect (as the world is not perfect), is absolutely essential to our survival on this planet. Much more about the book and the author can be found by search engine terms Workable World Trust and Joseph Schwartzberg. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. *Transforming the United Nations System* is a book for both beginners and scholars of the UN. By Michael Andregg *Transforming the United Nations System: Designs for a Workable World*. By Joseph E. Schwartzberg, Tokyo, Japan: United Nations University Press, 2013. ISBN = 9789280812305. 364 pages with extensive front matter, back matter (bibliography and index) and many maps, tables and diagrams. This was among the last books published by the UN University Press before it went out of business, which is testament to the book's importance to the UN system, and to the profound challenges that the UN faces today fulfilling its ideal missions with an organizational structure created in 1945 by the major powers that won the largest war in human history. That noted, Professor Schwartzberg did the best any scholar could to address obvious flaws in the current system (like five vetoes on the Security Council) and more obscure problems (such as how tiny island and municipal nations have the same weight in the General Assembly as great powers). His book is very clearly and lucidly written, unlike most academic books. But it also qualifies as path-breaking material to 20 well-known international academic endorsers and even some practitioners like former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and former US Ambassador to the UN Thomas Pickering. It includes dozens of ideas for reform, revitalized funding, and improvement of function. The most revolutionary is replacing the one state one vote principle used in the General Assembly (which makes tiny Nauru, Monaco and Singapore equal in power to China, the USA and Russia). One predictable result is that few people care what the UN General Assembly says about things. This big step is compounded in his Chapter Four on the UN Security Council where decisions are made about life, death and war issues. Here 5 victors from World War II have permanent vetoes (the USA, Russia, China, Great Britain and France) and new powers with big budgets like Japan, Brazil, India and Germany have almost no impact. That is not good when you want to get big things done, or when there are disputes among major (veto) powers. So I recommend this book for anyone who wants a solid education on how the United Nations came to work the way it does today, which is rather broken, highly politicized and very

inefficient, and especially for those who would like better, fairer and more functional forms of international governance to help solve huge global problems on everyone's doorsteps today. Review by: Michael Andregg University of St. Thomas and University of Minnesota St. Paul, Minnesota, USA.

Global problems require global solutions. The United Nations as presently constituted, however, is incapable of addressing many global problems effectively. One nation one vote decisionmaking in most UN agencies fails to reflect the distribution of power in the world at large, while the allocation of power in the Security Council is both unfair and anachronistic. Hence, nations are reluctant to endow the United Nations with the authority and the resources it needs. Extensive reform is essential. This analysis is rooted in the proposition that the design of decisionmaking systems greatly affects their legitimacy and effectiveness. Joseph Schwartzberg proposes numerous systemic improvements to the UN system, largely through weighted voting formulas that balance the needs of shareholders and stakeholders in diverse agencies. It indicates ways in which the interests of regions can supplement those of nations while voices of nongovernmental organizations and ordinary citizens can also be heard. In numerous contexts, it promotes meritocracy and gender equity. The book's aim is not to create an unrealistic utopia, but rather to establish a workable world in which the force of law supplants the law of force; a world committed to justice and continuous yet sustainable development. The author argues that, given the many existential threats now confronting our planet, the time frame for decisive action is short. The task is daunting and success is not guaranteed, but in view of the urgency of our situation, we can find ways of mustering the will, imagination, and resources to do the job.

About the Author Joseph E. Schwartzberg is distinguished international professor emeritus at the University of Minnesota and president of the Minnesota Chapter of Citizens for Global Solutions.