

## **Chicago Opportunities to think and act internationally – Just Say No To John Bolton**

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I was recently taken aback when a friend of mine opined that "everyone basically thinks the UN is useless and ineffectual" and didn't I agree? No, I said, I did not agree and in fact, the more I learn about the United Nations, the more profoundly I have come to respect it and the people who work in the varied institutions that comprise the international political, social and economic arena we blithely label "the United Nations." Does that mean that change and growth aren't necessary in the UN system? Of course not, but it does mean that we must look at calls for UN "reform" with care, and we must forcefully distinguish between those who want to see effective international work done under the auspices of an empowered and more transparent United Nations and those who want to "reform" the UN out of existence.

It is difficult to know where to begin to describe the critical work being done under our noses, as it were, but just out of our sight. We easily forget that there are thousands of individuals representing many nations who work on the most intractable and horrific problems facing humanity while we worry about where to take the kids for a holiday weekend.

For example, every year millions of children die totally preventable deaths. The world knows what it takes to improve child health and survival but millions still die everyday from malnutrition and disease. Reducing infant and child mortality is the work of UNICEF and other agencies. Want to learn more? Go to [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org).

Did you know that about 1.2 billion people currently have no access to safe drinking water and some 2.4 billion people lack proper sanitation? More than 3 million people die every year from diseases caused by unsafe water. Many dedicated scientists and humanitarian workers are working to solve complex environment and development issues under the auspices of agencies such as UNEP, UNDP, WHO, and the FAO. Go to [www.undp.org](http://www.undp.org) to learn about how these institutions - which are staffed by the best and brightest altruists in the world - struggle to make a difference in the lives of others.

As our kids prepare for summer activities, more than 250 million children between the ages of five and 14 are exploited for cheap labor, according to the International Labor Organization (ILO). Many of these children work under appalling conditions and are denied their basic right to education. If you care about how your clothes were made and want to learn more, go to [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org).

It can be tempting to think that the world's problems are so terrible that there is nothing that we, as individuals, can do about them. But there are many ways that we can play a part in finding and implementing solutions to these - and the myriad other - problems facing our planet and our species. Right here in Chicago, there are many people and

organizations working to support the work of the United Nations and to foster improved international relations in the government, business, educational and social sectors.

For example, you can help improve the climate between Americans and others by joining with your neighbors to host foreigners visiting Chicago under the auspices of the International Visitors Center of Chicago (IVCC). For over fifty years, the IVCC has been Chicago's official host of U.S. government-sponsored international visitors. The IVCC is dedicated to improving international relations by enhancing respect and understanding of different world cultures through citizen-based diplomacy. To learn more about the IVCC and its programs, visit [www.ivcc.org](http://www.ivcc.org).

The Growing Connection is an extraordinarily innovative project that is linking school children in Illinois with their counterparts in Ghana, Mexico and other parts of the US through common hunger-fighting, educational and entrepreneurial activities. By teaching low-cost, water efficient and sustainable food-growing techniques and linking school communities through wireless IT technology, The Growing Connection is not only making a difference in the lives of our children but helping to break the cycles of poverty and food scarcity that prevent other children from growing to their full potential. Participating Illinois schools include Carl Schurz High School, Chute Middle School, Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences, Gunsaulus Scholastic Academy, Kellogg Electronic Research Academy, Morse Tech Elementary School, John B. Murphy Elementary School, Perspectives Charter School, High School for Entrepreneurship, Wells Community Academy High School, and the Irving Park YMCA. Want to learn more and perhaps get your school - and your kids - involved? Go to [www.thegrowingconnection.org](http://www.thegrowingconnection.org).

We all want to contribute to positive change in our world, and it can be a challenge to figure out how best to make a difference in the lives of our own loved ones, much less have an impact on the millions and millions who live beyond our shores. We look to our leaders - both elected and appointed - to represent us and exemplify the best we have to offer the world in the fight against poverty, disease, environmental degradation and despair. Let your elected officials know that you want our ambassador at the United Nations to be someone who values the incomparable work being done all over the world by the dedicated scientists, humanitarians and field workers of the United Nations and its related agencies. In these dangerous times, with the spectre of terrorism as well as unprecedented strife and misery at the global level, we need to send the world community our best and brightest internationalists, not someone like John Bolton, whose personal and professional track record reads like an anti-UN manifesto.

- Lydia Lazar.