

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan's blueprint to restructure the world body -- as spelled out in a landmark 62-page report released Monday -- has received mixed reviews from diplomats, human rights activists and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

"Millions of people are dying because of conflict and poverty while rich countries are busy jostling for Security Council seats," says Nicola Reindorp, head of Oxfam's New York office.

She said the U.N.'s 191 member states must come together later this year to specifically focus on the two real tasks before the international community, namely ending poverty and protecting innocent people caught in deadly conflicts.

A Southeast Asian diplomat told IPS that Annan "seems to be bending over backwards" to please the United States -- as evidenced in his call for a new council on human rights, a fund to promote democracy worldwide and his plans to rid the organization of "traditionalist" senior staffers by "buying out" their contracts...

In discussions of the need to settle on a definition of terrorism, Bennis said, Annan's report calls for abandoning even the discussion of "state terrorism", most often identified with military strikes by Israel and the United States, and other countries like Russia

Reindorp's fears about an over-emphasis on the expansion of the Security Council have been reinforced in the new report where Annan says: "Two years ago, I declared that in my view no reform of the United Nations would be complete without reform of the Security Council. That is still my belief."

But for the first time, Annan attempts to link development aid with the expansion of the Security Council.

He says that developed countries running for permanent seats in the Council, including Japan and Germany, should "achieve or make substantial progress" towards the internationally agreed level of 0.7 percent of gross national product (GNP) for overseas development assistance (ODA)

Oxfam's Reindorp said that Annan's report sets out "a bold agenda" to be endorsed by governments at the U.N. Millennium Plus Five Summit in New York in September 2005.

One of its key calls, she said, is for the international community to agree that it has a "responsibility to protect" civilians caught up in warfare, and, as a last resort, to use military force to do so.

Oxfam believes that by agreeing governments' responsibilities to protect civilians, and clear criteria for U.N.-authorized military intervention as a last resort, the international community could make significant strides towards ending the obscene levels of civilian suffering in today's conflict zones.