

United Nations

Press Release

Department of Public Information • News Coverage Service • New York

SG/SM/5255
6 April 1994

SECRETARY-GENERAL'S STATEMENT TO RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF NATURAL SCIENCES

The following is the text of the statement of Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali on becoming a Foreign and Honorary Member of the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences, delivered on Sunday, 3 April, at the headquarters of the Academy in Moscow:

I should like first of all to express to you my emotion at being received among you as an honorary member of your prestigious institution.

Being myself by profession and vocation an academic, I fully appreciate the opportunity and the honour of sharing with you what I always feel, above countries and disciplines, to be my community of choice. This loose-knit scientific community made up of men and women inspired simultaneously by the thirst for knowledge, for research and for passing on knowledge.

But I know also that it was not only to my person, but to the United Nations of which I am today the Secretary-General that you wished to pay tribute.

And, at a time when, often, the world Organization is the subject of doubt or criticism, it is, for me and for the institution I represent, a real encouragement to receive this honour from an assembly as eminent as yours.

I see this as an official way of recognizing everything the United Nations is trying to do to bring about progress in international society and thus to improve the situation of the women and men of which it is made up.

But may I be given an opportunity to tell you in return how much you, in the context of your activity, in the field of your labours, through the scientific approach that is yours, are contributing to the world Organization and to the international community as a whole.

If I had to sum up that contribution in a few words, I would say that it is wholly contained in the following three requirements: the universality of knowledge, the triumph of reason and the pursuit of order.

(more)

The universality of knowledge is, no one doubts, the essential driving force of scientific thought. When the great European thinkers of the seventeenth century -- among whom Russian scientists figured prominently -- reaffirmed the great idea that there are no truths that are not universal, they were already establishing the principle of common membership in a single society. They were in a sense prefiguring a community of mind which transcends oppositions and differences. They were prefiguring the "civilization of the universal", to use a term taken from Teilhard de Chardin.

Thus they were already laying the ideological foundations on which a general reflection about the world Organization could rest. This universality of spirit is at the very heart of the underlying philosophy of the United Nations Charter.

It serves as a foundation for the conception of international law that we all have today. It places the seal on our common aspiration for peace and development.

At a time when, in all parts of the world, perils rooted in intolerance and exclusion are mounting, it is good that the scientific values underlying your community should be highly and loudly exalted and serve as examples for the conduct of world affairs.

However, I consider that your contribution goes much further. An academy, a house of scientists, is primarily a place where reason triumphs, inasmuch as rationality is an attribute of the researcher's method and the procedure of the scientist.

That is particularly true today. We cannot but be concerned at the resurgence of those irrational urges that are rooted in exacerbated micro-nationalism or religious fanaticism and favour all kinds of excess and fundamentalism.

We are aware that the contemporary world is often characterized by the loss of traditional landmarks, a rise in uncertainties and the dilution of basic values.

That is the meaning of what I just called the third contribution of scientific procedure, which is, in my eyes, the pursuit of order.

It is your role to arrange the fleeting aspects of life in intellectual categories. That is also the role of international law.

If I have wished to reflect thus in your presence for a few moments on the link between the scientific community which you represent and the international community which I, through my functions, represent, my purpose has been to tell you, as clearly as possible, how touched I am by your reception, how flattered, and, most of all, how thought provoking it is for me, at a time when I have the onerous burden of implementing the diplomacy desired by the United Nations.

(more)

However, perhaps this dialectic of reflection and action that I have tried to outline today will enable you to find me not entirely unworthy of the honour that you have bestowed on me.

Be assured that I very much appreciate your welcome and that I am proud yes, proud -- why deny it? -- to belong, if only in an honorary capacity, to your Academy.

I hope that the links thus forged may, in some way, be the symbol of the international community that we so fervently desire.

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