

United Nations

Press Release

Office of Public Information
Press Section
United Nations, New York



HQ/369
29 April 1977

SYRIA PRESENTS BAS-RELIEF OF GODDESS ISHTAR TO UNITED NATIONS

A replica of an 1800-year-old sculptural relief depicting Ishtar, the Babylonian and Assyrian goddess of love and fertility, was presented to the United Nations today by Mowaffak Allaf, Permanent Representative of Syria.

The gift was accepted by Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim at a ceremony held at 12:30 p.m. in the second-floor corridor, where it has been installed on the wall.

The reproduction in plaster shows Ishtar, also known as Ashtarut or Astarte, with an attendant and a dove. The original bas-relief was discovered a few years ago in Palmyra and is now on display at the national museum in Damascus. It is believed to date back to the first or second century A.D.

In accepting the gift, the Secretary-General said the work recalled vividly the continuity of civilization in the Middle East. It also brought to mind the pressing responsibilities of the United Nations to find lasting peace in that part of the world so the peoples could go forward into a more prosperous and happier future.

Mr. Allaf said it was only fitting that the ideals for which Ishtar was worshipped more than 25 centuries before Christ be pondered again today. There was no more appropriate place to exhibit the sculpture of the goddess of love and fertility than the Headquarters of the Organization which represented for today's nations the same ideals and principles that Ishtar embodied.

Ishtar, the Syrian representative observed, was the great goddess of the ancient Assyrians and Babylonians who prospered in the regions around the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, today covered by the countries of Iraq, Syria, Jordan and Palestine. That region was the cradle of civilization and the crossroads of commercial and cultural exchanges between three continents.

(more)

Press Release HQ/369
29 April 1977

"Unfortunately, this region is subjected today to the worse forms of alien invasion, racism and aggression", he said. He was confident, however, that "our people will know how to get rid of the new alien invaders in order that our region returns to what it used to be through the ages: a land of love, tolerance and fraternity".

Since Ishtar was also the goddess of fertility, he said, Syria's gift symbolized humanity's hopes for a more prosperous future, "a future in which abundance shall replace poverty and economic development shall be the substitute for the arms race and the proliferation of savage means of destruction".

* *** *