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TRANSCRIPT OF PRESS CONFERENCE BY SECRETARY-GENERAL JAVIER PEREZ DE CUELLAR,
HELD AT HEADQUARTERS ON 19 DECEMBER 1984.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: ladies and gentlemen, I am glad to be with you all today. Let me begin by expressing my appreciation for your serious, accurate and objective coverage of United Nations activities over the past year. Let me also express my thanks to Mrs. Sanaa Youssef for the very helpful co-operation I have enjoyed from her and her colleagues on the Executive Board of the United Nations Correspondents' Association, together with my congratulations to next year's officers under President-elect Ted Morello.

These last 12 months have brought their share of tragedy, frustration and suffering, but there have also been reasons for hope in regard to some of the main questions before the international community. We will need to proceed with calm and perseverance to build upon these possibilities for progress. If they set their minds to it, Governments can indeed use the great potential of this Organization to maintain the peace and to further economic and social development. A year ago, for example, I voiced my alarm over the impending African crisis. Multilateral co-operation is now playing an increasingly important part in relief and development of that continent.

Indeed, as we survey the plethora of international problems and consider the United Nations role in dealing with them, I think we have to ask ourselves one fundamental question: do we really have to be reminded by disasters, present or looming, of the need to use this Organization? We cannot afford to succumb to this habitual human nearsightedness, shaken and sobered by the extraordinary suffering of world war. The international community has twice constructed a global instrument for peace and security. It appears that we tend to neglect the new enterprise when it looks too difficult and the passage of time softens our memory of the last catastrophe. But in this nuclear age, time is not on our side.

Next year is the fortieth anniversary of the United Nations. As Secretary-General, I would make one request of our Member Governments: that they reassess the commitment they undertook in signing the Charter in San Francisco 40 years ago. At that time the new international Organization seemed humanity's last best hope. If we have to undergo another conflict to rekindle such enthusiasm, there will be nothing left to rebuild. I hope that all of us -- Governments, Secretariat, commentators from the media and indeed the peoples of the world -- will take a long and searching look at the United Nations on next year's anniversary. We owe nothing less to succeeding generations, especially during International Youth Year, which we are also about to observe. Where there are complaints and inadequacies we must try to rectify them. Our overriding objective must be to strengthen this global Organization. I firmly believe that is absolutely essential to all the peoples of the world.

Let us work to ensure that 1985 will witness a return to the vision and courage that led to the founding of the United Nations 40 years ago. May it be a year of renewed confidence in multilateral co-operation and of combined efforts to bring help to those afflicted by hunger, poverty and deprivation. Let it truly be a year of the United Nations, in which we unite our strength for the common security and prosperity, and may the new year bring peace and a life of dignity and justice to all.

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I am pleased that my dear friend and colleague, Brad Morse, is here this morning. As you know, I have asked Brad to assume important responsibilities in relation to the crisis in Africa. I am most grateful to him, as he is adding to his already heavy responsibilities, and he is once again helping humanity.

I am now open to your questions, ladies and gentlemen.

The PRESIDENT of UNCA: Mr. Secretary-General, I should like to express my thanks to you for the kind words you addressed to the press and UNCA and to thank you for your help and support and co-operation during the past year. I hope that that help and co-operation will continue in the future. Meanwhile, on behalf of my colleagues and myself, I wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

My first question is this: given the responses of all parties concerned in the Arab-Israeli conflict to your proposal about using the machinery of the Security Council in a new way to find a solution to that problem, would you consider the proposal as an alternative to the International Peace Conference on the Middle East that might lead to a solution? If so, what are you waiting for in order to start putting things in motion?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: You know very well that we the United Nations are open to all suggestions and are prepared to consider all initiatives. But what is absolutely indispensable is to have a forum for discussing the Middle East situation in a comprehensive way. We need a forum; we need an umbrella which deals with the problem in a continuing way. That is what we consider important. As you know, we are working very hard on the specific Lebanese problem, but we never lose sight of the Middle East problem as a whole. That is why I am open-minded and prepared to consider any suggestion coming from any side.

QUESTION: A week ago you delivered an extraordinary, very important speech on disarmament, which met with high recognition all over the world, including my country, the German Democratic Republic. What prompted you to voice the alarm that you did? Secondly, does the record number of disarmament resolutions at the thirty-ninth session of the General Assembly reflect to a certain degree your concern and the need for measures to prevent a nuclear holocaust which you expressed so clearly in your statement?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: My concern -- and it is not only my personal concern but a reflection, I think, of the concerns of all human beings, who are really interested in their survival -- my concern as Secretary-General of the United Nations, representing the membership of the United Nations, all Governments and non-governmental organizations interested in finding ways and means of putting an end to the arms race, was only to do what I considered to be my duty, namely, to express my alarm, which is the alarm felt by so many countries and by all human beings.

QUESTION: To follow up on the first question: the Naqoura talks seem to have hit a snag. Since your office initiated those talks, I wonder whether you see the possibility of an early breakthrough and, if so, would you agree

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to a greater role in south Lebanon for the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) following Israeli withdrawal should the Naqoura talks succeed?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: As you know, we at the United Nations are very proud of having helped organize those talks in Naqoura. You are all aware that there is an agreement on the objectives -- that is, the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from Lebanon, the full sovereignty of Lebanon in the southern part of its territory and an enlarged United Nations presence in the southern part of Lebanon. Now, what we -- or the parties -- are trying to work out is the ways and means of implementing these objectives. As you know, we have already had 10 meetings in Naqoura, and one more meeting is taking place tomorrow, I think, and then they are considering a recess. All I wish at this stage is that nothing be done that will undermine the efforts taking place in Naqoura. I think that both sides should exert maximum restraint in order not to undermine this forum that has been created in Naqoura. That is extremely important, and I really make an appeal to the parties to exercise restraint and to protect this shelter, as it were, in which the two parties are discussing something so important: to achieve peace in Lebanon -- which is, as I told you, part of what we consider to be the overall solution of the Middle East problem.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary-General, you spoke about the need for multilateral co-operation; yet we see now two Member States announcing their intention to withdraw from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and we also see members of your own Staff Union complaining about the political weight that is being brought to bear on decisions in the Fifth Committee and elsewhere in the Organization.

Is it your sense that there is indeed a threat to multilateralism? How do you explain a phenomenon like the threats to withdraw from UNESCO?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: First of all, I think we all have to admit that there is a kind of a decline in multilateralism and that in some countries there is a trend back to bilateralism. But at the same time I think that most of the countries of this Organization have a preference for any assistance which goes to them through multilateral sources and not through bilateral sources, because all the assistance we provide to Member States -- not only the United Nations, but all the organizations in the United Nations system -- is assistance with no pre-conditions -- with no strings. I think that is extremely important, mainly for the developing countries.

Developing countries want assistance with no political motivations. That is why I think we have to keep fighting for multilateralism as the best way of assisting the developing countries. As for the possibility of some countries withdrawing, for instance, from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, I think my position is very clear. I have made it public, directly and indirectly. It is that, first, as Secretary-General, I am in favour of the universality of international organizations and, secondly, if it is considered that something is wrong with an organization, please stay inside and fight from inside. I think if you want to correct what is wrong, well, keep fighting and try to correct what is wrong in the organization.

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QUESTION (interpretation from Spanish): Sir, you said, with respect to the withdrawal of the United States from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, that it could have a negative impact on the entire United Nations system. Would you say the same thing about the position of rejection taken by the United States about the International Court of Justice in the case of Nicaragua?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL (interpretation from Spanish): I am in favour of the use of the international agencies. The United States, of course, is a sovereign country which can take its own decisions, but I consider that the channels of the United Nations should always be used, since they are the best way of providing an impartial solution to international problems.

QUESTION: Sir, since the launching of the new international economic order and the subsequent sixth and eleventh special sessions, that legacy has been left to global negotiations now regarded as a total failure and seen as put on the slow back-burner. Do you share this view and how do you comment, bearing in mind that failure to act has brought the developing countries to near-bankruptcy and to their easing along from one crisis to another?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: One of my great disappointments is that there is no progress in this very important enterprise, which is to launch global negotiations. As Secretary-General of the United Nations, I would say that, though we are not part of the global negotiations, we are the appropriate, indispensable forum for those negotiations. At the same time, I have always been involved in all kinds of discreet, quiet activities trying to get the two parties, the North and the South, together. Let me repeat that it is one of my biggest disappointments that there is no real progress towards global negotiations.

QUESTION: This is a kind of follow-up on previous questions. On the eve of the fortieth anniversary of the United Nations, we are witnessing various attempts to put pressure on the Organization, as, I would say, reflections of the rather tense state of international relations. My question is, how do you envisage further international development and the future of the Organization at the end of this millennium, at the end of the year 2000?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I think this Organization is, as you very well know, in the hands of its Members. The United Nations is not a superstructure. It is just a forum in which Member countries try together to discuss problems related to peace and security. But, of course, as far as we, the United Nations Secretariat, are concerned, we are constantly trying to improve our efficiency and trying to make this instrument -- the United Nations -- as efficient as possible.

On the other hand, the Secretary-General, as I have told you since I took over, is always prepared to play the role of a channel of communication between Member countries for the solution of their problems, to express what the international feeling is, how the international community feels about the main problems. That is why I made that rather long speech on disarmament.

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because I thought that as Secretary-General of the United Nations I had to express my alarm and to alert the international community about a problem which is of concern to the whole of humankind.

That, I think, is the way in which we, the Secretariat, can work: making our United Nations more efficient, on the one hand, and, on the other, the Secretary-General being a kind of conscience of the international community and expressing the concern of the international community on the main political, economic and social issues.

QUESTION (interpretation from Spanish): To return to the subject of the Middle East, when you propose alternative mechanisms to the international conference, because the proper conditions for such a conference have not come about, what do you have in mind -- something like Contadora?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL (interpretation from Spanish): No. In one of my reports to the General Assembly I have proposed a completely different option of which, being new here, you may not be aware. It is to use the Security Council as the forum for discussions on all aspects of the Middle East problem, naturally with the presence and co-operation of all the parties involved.

QUESTION (interpretation from Spanish): In other words, the permanent members of the Security Council who refuse to hold such a conference would continue to be present during such discussions?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL (interpretation from Spanish): You had asked me what my alternative was, and I was telling you what I had proposed. We must keep on working and we must try to use our imagination to come up with other formulas. But the main point is that we must tackle the Middle East problem in order to initiate a negotiating process which would lead to a solution of the problem. This will not happen in 24 hours or 24 days or even 24 months, but we have to get it going.

QUESTION: I presume that you have seen today's edition of The New York Times. There is a story there which says that you quietly opposed the approval of over \$73 million for the new ECA [Economic Commission for Africa] headquarters in Addis Ababa. If it is true that you did oppose it quietly and that you were not happy with the vote yesterday, why is this so? But if you did not oppose it, could you tell us your impression or opinion about the vote yesterday?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I do not oppose the idea. I opposed the timing.

QUESTION: Next week will be the fifth anniversary of the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. What are the prospects in 1985 for a settlement of the problem resulting from that intervention?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: Since you are a very well-informed journalist, you know that next February a new meeting of the two parties with my personal representative will take place in Geneva. I hope very much that both sides will show enough flexibility for some progress to be made. I should like to

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take advantage of your question to say that I think it is high time for us to make real progress on this particular issue.

QUESTION: The tragedy at Bhopal raises once again the question of the relevance of the United Nations. That tragedy you did not comment on, and there has been no move to gather together the forces in the world which should get together and vote a code of conduct on the transfer into developing countries of hazardous wastes. This point, I think, needs some elucidation, since eyebrows have been raised in many places.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: Well, as perhaps you know, in the United Nations system, we have appropriate bodies to deal with this problem. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is preparing a report on that particular subject, and our Centre on Transnational Corporations is also considering this problem. The United Nations is, through its appropriate bodies, dealing with the problem.

QUESTION: I should like to follow up on yesterday's vote on the conference centre in Ethiopia. You have been to that area and seen the suffering yourself. What, sir, in your opinion, is more important: a multimillion dollar conference centre for the country or food and medicines for the famine-stricken Ethiopians? What do you think are the priorities?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I have already answered the question. It is, of course, not for me -- I am not a Member of the General Assembly -- to cast a vote. But I thought the idea was correct, but the time not appropriate.

QUESTION: Is there any way in which you can circumvent the decision of the General Assembly yesterday, perhaps by delaying this operation and the expenditure of so much money in this untimely way, as you yourself have just said?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I am the humble servant of the General Assembly, my dear friend.

QUESTION: What is your assessment of the response of the international community to your appeal for more aid to relieve the African economic crisis, and also what are the prospects for more assistance next year?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I am extremely encouraged by the first reaction I got from the international community, and I think that, under the chairmanship of my colleague, Mr. Morse, we are going to get still better results.

QUESTION: Do you feel that there is any contradiction between the purely reporting and informational functions of DPI and the increasing number of advocacy tasks allotted to it in Assembly resolutions every year?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I shall call on my colleague Mr. Akashi to answer that question.

Mr. AKASHI (Under-Secretary-General for Public Information): Indeed, there is a serious problem between the two different functions that are thrust

upon DPI. One is, as you pointed out, the task of reporting and the coverage of events and activities of the United Nations as objectively as possible. This has been the mandate given to us since 1946.

But at the same time, as you have pointed out, the General Assembly keeps calling upon us to promote or advocate causes of disarmament and development, the humanitarian causes and political matters that preoccupy the Assembly itself. We try our best to reconcile and harmonize these two functions that are thrust upon the Secretariat. But the Secretariat is not a completely independent body. We have to carry out the mandates given to us and to obey them within these constraints, and it is indeed sometimes a very narrow path to tread between these different constraints. But we try to do our best.

QUESTION (interpretation from Spanish): We know your moderate and preventive diplomacy, which is reflected in your recent report on the Central American situation. However, we wonder whether you feel that the time has come to abandon that course so that you might produce some new initiative to propose to the Contadora Group in order to find a definitive solution to this serious problem.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL (interpretation from Spanish): I believe the Contadora Group is carrying out a very important mission. First, it is thanks to the work of the Contadora Group, its constant work, that it has proved possible to prevent the situation from becoming worse. The fact that that effort is being made all the time has been a deterrent to those who might have wished to aggravate the situation, so we can give the Contadora Group credit for that important point -- its containing influence.

I recognize the complexity of the problem. Any initiative by the Secretary-General or any other person or institution should not be considered to indicate a lack of confidence in the work of the Contadora Group. That would be very unfair. It has been working very hard. So I think the Contadora Group should be allowed time, and certainly it will come up with a solution.

QUESTION: The General Assembly has given you a new mandate to use your good offices to try to bring Britain and Argentina to the negotiating table on the Falklands (Malvinas) conflict. Do you have any ideas or prospects of getting Britain to accept the General Assembly resolution, or will you just let this lie until the next General Assembly?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I have already sent a letter to the two parties renewing my disposition to be of help to the two sides in order to help solve their differences peacefully. I am always hoping for a positive, constructive reaction from the two sides.

QUESTION: You have repeatedly extolled the usefulness of quiet diplomacy in problem-solving. In the context of the Middle East, would it not be reasonable to assume that quiet bilateral negotiations between Israel and its

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neighbours would be, at this point in time, the most useful approach to at least getting something in motion as regards peace in the region? Would you be willing to endorse that sort of approach?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: As Secretary-General of the United Nations, I am always in favour of any solution that is a negotiated solution. If there is any initiative in that sense, if any of the parties are prepared to have discussions among themselves, that is bilaterally, it is not for me to be against that. But I think we must be very careful, and to try to help solve the problem in a global manner. Perhaps it would be wrong to try to disperse the efforts. I think it is in the interest of the common cause, which is the solution of the problem, to try a kind of global approach to the solution of the problem.

QUESTION: Do you intend to take any particular action as Secretary-General for the fortieth anniversary of the United Nations, or to make a particular plea on a problem you consider crucial, apart from the African crisis?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I have already said that I expect Member countries to recommit themselves to the United Nations Charter, the United Nations principles, which they signed 40 years ago. If I could secure the observance by countries of what they signed in 1945, and other countries signed when they entered the Organization later, it would be a tremendous achievement. If Member countries really were committed to the implementation of the United Nations Charter in all its aspects, that would really be a tremendous achievement.

QUESTION: Although this question was asked by a colleague, may I impose on you to update in English, for the benefit of English-speaking listeners, the Central American situation as you see it, and tell us what prospects there are for solutions.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I think you don't trust our interpreters.
(Laughter)

What I said is that I think the Contadora Group has already achieved something very important. It has contained the crisis in some ways, because although they have been negotiating for such a short time they have been able to stop the deterioration of the crisis. That, in itself, is very important. As you very well know, they keep trying, in a very democratic manner, to solve the problem in agreement with all parties concerned. It is a very complicated problem; you cannot expect the Contadora Group to produce miracles in just a few months. As I have said before on other occasions, it is a structural problem that needs a very comprehensive solution. That, I think, is why one has to be patient and maintain confidence and give all credit to the four Contadora countries.

QUESTION (interpretation from French): Given the result of the Addis Ababa summit and in view of the resolution adopted by the General Assembly with regard to Western Sahara, do you think -- on the political level -- that

there are opportunities for a process that the United Nations could embark upon?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL (interpretation from French): By definition, the United Nations is available to the parties. It is my impression that at present the parties are considering the possibility of having recourse to the Organization for the solution to the problem you mention.

QUESTION: There seems to be some disagreement between the two sides to the Cyprus question about the precise nature of the meeting which is to take place here in New York on 17 January. Is this going to be a negotiating session or, in your estimation, is it something different from that?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: As you can imagine, I do not see the meeting as a mere formality. What I expect from the meeting is a constructive discussion in which the parties will present their views on my presentation. That is how I see it.

QUESTION: Namibia is a special responsibility of the United Nations. I wonder if you could give us your assessment of any progress made this year. If there has been no progress, why not?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: On Namibia, I have to express my disappointment, because I do not think we have made enough progress. I must say that this is due mainly to the fact that this pre-condition to the solution of the problem has been unduly inserted -- that is, for the implementation of Security Council resolution 435 (1978). I want to be quite clear: I am disappointed, and I think that we are not making enough progress. I think that the United Nations, as well as the parties honestly interested in the solution of the problem, should exert any pressure in order to accelerate the process.

QUESTION: Two questions, if I may, one about your role in the episode of the hijacking of the Kuwaiti airliner: what did you come up with, what conclusions or ideas might you be entertaining, to deal with such situations, particularly in that some countries have conveyed to you their readiness to co-operate on this? My second question relates to Lebanon. What is your opinion of where the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) should be deployed? The Lebanese maintain it should be deployed to the south of the Litani; the Israelis say it should be to the north. And what is the American role? Is it a supportive one, a parallel one? Does Mr. Murphy coordinate with you on these matters?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: First of all, as far as the hijacking is concerned, I think my first reaction is to condemn these exercises that put the lives of innocent people in jeopardy.

Secondly, I would like to say that, as far as the Secretary-General is concerned, I found co-operation from all sides -- Iran, Kuwait -- and I was constantly in touch with the Iranian Ambassador and with the Kuwaiti Ambassador, and indirectly with the Americans as well, in order to help in solving the problem.

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Fortunately or unfortunately, the United Nations is not a publicity office and we never say what we are doing. But I can assure you that even on Saturdays and Sundays I was working to see if there were ways in which I could help solve the problem and save human lives.

I received very good co-operation from the Iranian Government and from the Kuwaiti Government. I was a sort of channel of communication between the two Governments through their representatives here at the United Nations.

As far as your second question is concerned, I think it is extremely interesting. However, you, a person from the area, certainly understand that it is not for the Secretary-General to express his views at the very moment when there are very important and serious negotiations between the two sides, Lebanon and Israel. I think it would be inappropriate for the Secretary-General of the United Nations, which provides a shelter for the meetings, to embark upon speculations or to express ideas about how the troops should be deployed. I am sorry that I cannot give a direct answer to your question for reasons that I am sure you understand very well.

QUESTION: Was there constant co-ordination between Mr. Richard Murphy's mission and the United Nations?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: Mr. Murphy's exercise was an entirely independent one; it was not related to the United Nations efforts.

QUESTION: An examination of the arrears owed to the United Nations reveals that in 12 months' time, unless the Soviet Union makes a major contribution, under Article 19 of the Charter, it is due to lose its vote in the General Assembly. Is it your view that Article 19 should be enforced at all times against all States equally?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I think the question -- which is important -- is for the General Assembly to decide. I do not like to interfere with the decisions of the General Assembly.

QUESTION: In your round-up of the session, where would you place the decision of the General Assembly on the Convention on torture?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I think it was one of the great achievements of this session of the General Assembly. I think that Convention is one more step towards the codification of international law.

QUESTION: Would you tell us your hopes for the coming Cyprus high-level meeting and where it will take place.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: As I have said, on all issues with which I deal I am always hopeful but avoid saying that I am optimistic or pessimistic. However, I hope very much that if the parties -- as I expect -- refrain from public statements that would undermine the chances of achieving progress,

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there are reasons for hope. What is very important is that the parties exercise self-restraint and contribute to preparing the atmosphere for real progress on the Cyprus question.

QUESTION (interpretation from French): You said that the summit would last two or three days. Do you think two or three days will be enough to reach an agreement on the broad outlines that you will submit to the parties?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL (interpretation from French): We have made great progress in our talks, in the proximity talks. We have cleared a large amount of ground, and I think with the proper political will and determination of the parties we can reach -- well, we have never had the idea of concluding agreements on all the problems of Cyprus, but we want to establish a framework to provide a solution to the problem. There will be factors now to work out, particularly on the details. This is what I expect from this meeting: that a broad outline be given to the working group so that it can discuss the details of a comprehensive agreement on the problem.

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