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STATEMENT BY SECRETARY-GENERAL DAG HAMMARSKJOLD

AT A GENERAL MEETING OF THE STAFF

FRIDAY, MAY 1, 1953

Members of the UN-staff:

Slowly but steadily we are getting to know each other. Slowly but steadily, I hope, shall we be able to develop a solid feeling of mutual respect and confidence.

I hope? No, I feel sure about it. You have had my confidence from the very beginning. And the first thing I have to do here today is to thank you for the way in which you, on your side, have received me.

You have made me feel that I had the benefit of your doubt, had it in a very friendly and positive sense of the word, somehow already expressing a budding confidence.

Thank you. You do not know how helpful this has been.

But I am not blind to the difficulties. Nor, certainly, are you.

Let me start with one of the most obvious threats to a happy collaboration.

In my position it is easy for me to talk about dedication to the task and singlemindedness in the pursuit of our common purpose; to say it -- and to mean what I say with all of my being. It is easy because my responsibility seems to me so great and so immediate, that all other interests and all private concerns are reduced to insignificance.

But the farther somebody considers himself from essential responsibility and the less tangible he feels the immediate importance of what he does, the more difficult it may be for him to find inspiration and support in the ideals for which we are all working. Don't believe that I am saying this without some very personal experience of my own in the past.

This perspective, however, is false. The reaction is easily bred in a big administration, but -- none-the-less -- it is false.

In an organization like the United Nations, which has a staff of thousands and widespread and highly differentiated activities, it is easy to lose the feeling of unity, of partnership in a common venture and of the significance of the personal contribution. But don't let it happen.

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I told you that I was happy that we were getting to know each other. One day we shall get to know better how in detail also -- and in both directions -- our different pieces of work fit together in mutual interdependence, as parts of the contribution of a united team. And the way to gain this knowledge will be continued and repeated contacts in your offices of the kind which have been initiated. On this very first round I have, to my regret, had too little time at my disposal to make the contacts more than rather modest courtesy calls.

The second question which I wish to raise today is, on the surface, of a more difficult nature.

It is, as you know, my duty to see to it that our administrative organization functions with the highest efficiency possible and with as great economy as circumstances permit. This duty of mine may sometimes bring differences of view on the administrative needs, the methods of work, or the qualifications of individual staff members.

The very best I can hope for is that I shall be able to convince you that whatever action I may take will be taken always with the interest of the United Nations and its staff solely in view, on the basis of as full and objective information as I can get, in accordance with the best of my judgment and in complete independence of influences from outside -- or from inside -- the Organization.

I shall need also your trust in this respect, for an element of discretionary judgment must necessarily be accorded to anyone in my position.

I hope that you will trust me.

One thing I have to stress. You have lately been troubled and worried by some special personnel problems. In substance the cases I am referring to should, of course, be judged on the same basis and in the same spirit as all other cases where action has to be taken for recruiting or terminating staff members in order to make the Secretariat that perfect instrument we all wish it to be. The controversial problems of a legal nature, raised in some of these cases, are at present sub judice and, therefore, it would not be appropriate for me to discuss them here and now, except to make this clear:

The principles, on which the independence of our Secretariat is founded, will be staunchly defended and firmly applied.

On my arrival I spoke of the challenging task -- which all of us share -- of developing the Secretariat into the most efficient possible instrument. There is always room for improvement, for greater economy and efficiency, in every administration. This challenge, in the case of the United Nations, is all the more

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compelling because the cause we serve is so significant for the whole world.

I have too long a Treasury experience to believe in the wisdom of a policy of revolutionary changes in administration.

The words "economy and efficiency" signify what must always be in our minds and what should be one of our main aims in the administrative field. But no rash steps should be taken. And any reforms should be made only after a most thorough study and prior discussion with all of those concerned. It is necessary to move slowly in order to give the results achieved a solid basis.

I do not envisage any changes of significance this year. Nor, on the other hand, do I intend to institute a "freeze." But, naturally, I want to keep doors open during this time of review and study. For this reason I consider that, until further notice, vacancies should be filled only where there is an immediate and obvious need to do so. I also feel that where a staff member normally would retire under present rules, because of his age, it should be considered whether his term of office could not be prolonged in those special cases where he can continue to render essential services in a post that cannot be left vacant.

But I must not speak any longer. This day is that of my predecessor. Before concluding, I wish to say this to you, Mr. Lie.

It would not be fitting for your successor to tell you about the merits of your work. You, the creator of this vast administration, have said that the job of the Secretary-General is the most impossible job in the world. If so, you have done the impossible. And you have made it possible for your successor to carry on your work into the future, inspired by your optimism and your high ideals.

As the new Secretary-General I feel myself entitled to speak on behalf of the entire Secretariat assembled here in assuring you of our admiration for your great services to the United Nations. Our best wishes will be with you in the fruitful and happy years that lie ahead for you and your family.

Adlai Stevenson has said that the only lasting reward for a public servant is the confidence and respect of disinterested men and women. I am sure that you feel that this reward is yours.

May I also, in time, deserve it.