

UNITED NATIONS
Department of Public Information
Press and Publications Bureau
United Nations, N. Y.

(For use of information media--not an official record)

CAUTION: ADVANCE TEXT

Not to be used by Press or
Radio before 5 p.m. (EDT)
Sunday, 13 June 1954.

Press Release SG/388
11 June 1954

TEXT OF ADDRESS BY SECRETARY-GENERAL DAG HAMMARSKJOLD
AT COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES OF AMHERST COLLEGE,
AMHERST, MASSACHUSETTS, SUNDAY, JUNE 13, 1954 AT 5:00 P.M. (EDT)

In one of the poems of Walt Whitman, published after his death, he said

"that in the Divine Ship, the World, breasting
Time and Space,
All Peoples of the globe together sail, sail
the same voyage, are bound to the same
destination."

It is a disturbing, but revealing commentary upon our times that these words from a spokesman for a young and vigorous democracy -- so expressive of everlasting truth -- nevertheless have a strange sound today. Our ears have been too much accustomed to a different message, repeated over and over. This is the assertion of the inexorable and hopeless division of mankind. We hear these days far more about a world divided than of the world indivisible -- the one world of all humanity that Whitman recognized. Indeed, we hear so much about two worlds that we are in danger of coming to accept as part of our creed that the nations are to be forever divided into opposing camps.

Yet we know that this is not so. We know that the struggle for the souls of men between freedom and tyranny, between idealism and materialism, does not recognize national frontiers. Though one or the other may be dominant in a society at any one time, such dominance is a passing phenomenon. For the struggle belongs to all humanity and it is going on all the time in all the societies of man. Thus the divisions that we see today between the nations should not be considered as fixed, or eternal, or even as basically significant in the geographical sense.

If we accept the idea of the essential unity of a humanity sharing the same fate, the same essential needs and the same fundamental hopes, there is a conclusion to be drawn of significance for our attitudes and our choice of action in international affairs, just as much as in local and national politics.

(more)

The conclusion is, simply, that it is wise, in our planning and in our activities, to recognize that the other party may have similar pride and similar fears and is likely to defend his own interests in very much the same way as we do. It is also wise to remember that we never have any monopoly of insight or idealism. The moment we forget that and refuse to admit the same qualities in the other party, we are, in a dangerous way, restricting our chances of success. We too often forget that the warnings of the Gospels against pharisees have a bearing also on our own times, a bearing of great practical significance, and not least in the sphere of politics. Nor should we forget the words: "when they believed themselves wise they became fools."

Self-righteousness and intellectual self-sufficiency produce a rigidity which is the best ally of our adversaries because it blinds us both to our own weakness and to their strength. But it is also a source of conflicts. If we go beneath the surface we will find as a basic element in political tensions the clash between the flexibility of true idealism and the rigidity of self-interest, whether the latter be openly materialistic or dressed in the mantle of false idealism. Have we not seen the ultimate results of such rigidity: cruelty, resort to armed force, dictatorial tyranny? And have we not seen time and again the failure of such rigidity in contests with the flexibility of freedom? Thus, those who are inspired by idealism to work for freedom should first of all -- as an expression of their faith and in the interest of their ideals -- have the strength to admit their own limitations and the possible justice of the cause of others. Ultimately this flexibility is but a reflection of our insight into the essential unity of all mankind.

We learn in order to know, and we wish to know in order to master, not other men, but the tools put in our hands for establishing a satisfactory life for ourselves and for all men. Too often our learning, our knowledge and our mastery are too much concentrated on techniques and we forget about man himself. We may know a lot about the structure of the atom, or about the body of man, or about the organization of production or banking, without knowing much about the man whom the forces in the atom should serve, for whose body we find cures and for whose needs our productive and financial arrangements provide.

When I speak of knowledge in this context I do not mean the kind of knowledge which you can gain from textbooks, but the knowledge which you can derive only from a study of yourself and your fellow men, a study inspired by genuine interest and pursued with humility. The door to an understanding of the other party, with

(more)

whom you may have to deal in business, in politics or in the international sphere, is a fuller understanding of yourself, since the other party, of course, is made fundamentally of the same stuff as you yourself.

Thus, no education is complete, in a world basically united, which does not include man himself, and is not inspired by a recognition of the fact that you will not understand your enemy without understanding yourself, and that an understanding of your enemy will throw considerable light also on yourself and on your own motives.

It may seem to you that what I have said is very far, indeed, from the sphere which you might expect to be covered by one who holds my office. That is not so. In the United Nations our efforts would be useless, if it were not for that unity to which I have referred. And there would be no way forward, if it were not for the fact that greater insight is bound to lead to greater understanding and that greater understanding may open doors where previously there has seemed to be only a wall.

The United Nations is an instrument for negotiation where the parties meet, irrespective of national interests and irrespective of different creeds and ideologies. When I speak of negotiation, I am thinking of serious negotiation -- of the process of working out a mutually satisfactory arrangement with someone we have to live with and with whom, after all, we must have some common denominator since, as in Whitman's words, we "sail the same voyage, are bound to the same destination." To negotiate seriously with someone does not, of course, in any way imply that we must accept all his views or be willing to give in to his ambitions when that would require a sacrifice of essential principles or what, to us, are basic values. But serious negotiation does imply a genuine belief that the overriding considerations which unite humanity against all the divisive differences will, given patience and wisdom, provide a sufficient basis for peaceful accommodation.

As you see, the thoughts I have wished to share with you concerning the message of abiding truth that Walt Whitman's words carry for our world of today, are at the very heart of what must be the philosophy of the United Nations. The United Nations -- as an organization -- is only an instrument for diplomatic negotiation and for the solution of international problems -- an instrument available for use by the governments and peoples, but neither self-starting nor self-executing. The responsibility for upholding and acting upon our belief in the essential unity of all mankind cannot be delegated or shifted.

(more)

In fact, every one, at least indirectly, has some share in determining the fate of mankind. Every one, however, indirectly, shares responsibility in those matters which are of direct concern to the United Nations. The United Nations itself, being only a tool of the governments, ultimately serves the peoples and its relative effectiveness will be influenced by the reactions and views of every single individual among the peoples. Thus, we cannot expect the United Nations to succeed unless it has the support of the governments and, through the governments, of peoples who share a genuine understanding of the basic nature of these problems.

For that reason the future of the United Nations rests in a special way in the hands of all those who, by virtue of a liberal education, can help to give to new generations a greater knowledge of man, thus preparing them for a wiser approach to the problems of national and international life.

We are passing through a dangerous stage in the history of human society. Terrible experiences have robbed too many people of their faith in the future and have caused them, too often, to look upon their neighbors as potential enemies. Fear and suspicion have spread wide and deep their poisonous influences among us. As always, these are prime causes of irrational behavior.

The moral crisis in which our civilization now finds itself is not a new experience in human history. But our crisis has been complicated by the fact that scientific knowledge has so far out-distanced our knowledge of man. It is often pointed out that no previous generation ever had a capacity for physical self-destruction in any way comparable to our own. Our fearful preoccupation with that fact, when the very same scientific knowledge has given us a possibility of improving human life equally beyond any previous experience, reflects in itself the source of our special danger.

I firmly believe that we shall survive the crisis, both morally and in the literal physical sense, only if we give full recognition to the fundamental and overriding unity of mankind. In that spirit we must seek a fuller knowledge of man himself -- a knowledge that will more nearly match our mastery of science and of techniques. Only in proportion as we close this gap shall we be able to diminish the dangers of fear and suspicion and of the irrational behavior that follows from them.

This will be no affair of a few months or a few years, of course -- a kind of war against fear and hate ending with conclusive victory as the reward of successful effort. Only if we should fail in our faith in human brotherhood might there be something resembling a conclusive end of the struggle -- and that would be the destruction of our civilization. No, the signal of success will never be a final victory. It will be found rather in the stamina to continue the struggle, and in the preservation and strengthening of faith in the future of man.

We must have "life" in that sense of the word which Edgar Lee Masters once gave to it when he had an old woman say in his Spoken River Anthology: "It takes life to love life."