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HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE WORK FOR PEACE

(The following is the text of an address by UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld at the Fiftieth Anniversary Dinner of the American Jewish Committee to be held tonight in the Starlight Roof of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel.)

Early during my time of service at the United Nations I had the privilege of meeting with this Committee for a discussion of human rights. May I say how highly I appreciate your invitation today and your wish to have me take part in this 50th anniversary observance, where again you are devoting attention to the development of human rights.

We in the United Nations know well the significant contribution that the American Jewish Committee, through the Consultative Council of Jewish Organizations, has made since 1946 to the work carried on through the United Nations for the advancement and protection of human rights and we pay honor to the spirit of dedication to universal principles which you have shown on so many occasions.

This is an anniversary observance for you. It happens also to be an anniversary for me. And so I hope you will forgive my sharing with you some personal thoughts which also have relevance to the broader issues with which we are all of us concerned.

Four years ago today, I was inducted into my present office, to which I had been catapulted without previous soundings, indeed, without any pre-warning. I felt that it was my duty to accept it, not because of any feeling of confidence in my personal capacity to overcome the difficulties which might arise, but because, under the conditions then prevailing, the one to whom the call had come seemed to me in duty bound to respond.

The situation that faced me at the very outset has proved not to be unique. It has been repeated several times in the past few years, most recently in relation to problems of the Middle East. The other day, returning from the latest visit to that area on a UN mission, I read a book by Arthur Waley -- certainly well known to many of you as one of the great interpreters of Chinese thought and literature and as one of those great Jewish students of humane letters who have so splendidly enriched our

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cultural tradition. In his work Waley quotes what an early Chinese historian had to say about the philosopher Sung Tzu and his followers, some 350 years B.C. To one who works in the United Nations, the quotation strikes a familiar note. It runs as follows:

"Constantly rebuffed but never discouraged, they went round from State to State helping people to settle their differences, arguing against wanton attack and pleading for the suppression of arms, that the age in which they lived might be saved from its state of continual war. To this end they interviewed princes and lectured the common people, nowhere meeting with any great success, but obstinately persisting in their task, till kings and commoners alike grew weary of listening to them. Yet undeterred they continued to force themselves on people's attention."

Is this a description of a quixotic group, whose efforts are doomed to failure? The wording, with its tone of frustration, may lead us to think so. However, I believe that this interpretation would be wrong. The historian tells us about a group engaged in a struggle he considers very much worth while and one which will have to go on until success is achieved.

The half ironical, half sad note which he strikes indicates only his knowledge of the difficulties which human nature puts in the way of such work for peace. His pessimism is tempered by the mild sense of humor and the strong sense of proportion of a man seeing his own time in the long perspective of history. We can learn from his attitude, both in our efforts to move towards peace and in our work for universal recognition of human rights.

We know that the question of peace and the question of human rights are closely related. Without recognition of human rights we shall never have peace, and it is only within the framework of peace that human rights can be fully developed.

In fact, the work for peace is basically a work for the most elementary of human rights: the right of everyone to security and to freedom from fear. We, therefore, recognize it as one of the first duties of a Government to take measures in order to safeguard for its citizens this very right. But we also recognize it as an obligation for the emerging world community to assist Governments in safeguarding this elementary human right without having to lock themselves in behind the walls of arms.

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The dilemma of our age, with its infinite possibilities of self-destruction, is how to grow out of the world of armaments into a world of international security, based on law. We are only at the very beginning of such a change. The natural distrust in the possibility of progress is nourished by unavoidable set-backs and, when distrust is thus strengthened, this in turn increases our difficulties.

The effort may seem hopeless. It will prove hopeless unless we, all of us, show the persistence of Sung Tzu and his ^{immediate} followers, and unless peoples and Governments alike are willing to take smaller risks in order to have a better chance to avoid the final disaster threatening us if we do not manage to turn the course of developments in a new direction.

The United Nations finds itself in a difficult stage of its development. It is still too weak to provide the security desired by all, while being strong enough and alive enough effectively to point out the direction in which the solution must be sought. In its present phase the Organization may look to many like a preacher who cannot impose the law he states or realize the gospel he interprets. It is understandable if those who have this impression turn away in distrust or with cynical criticism, forgetting that set-backs in efforts to implement an ideal do not prove that the ideal is wrong, and overlooking also that at the beginning of great changes in human society there must always be a stage of such frailty or seeming inconsistency.

It is easy to say that it is pointless to state the law if it cannot be enforced. However, to do so is to forget that if the law is the inescapable law of the future, it would be treason to the future not to state the law simply because of the difficulties of the present. Indeed, how could it ever become a living reality if those who are responsible for its development were to succumb to the immediate difficulties arising when it is still a revolutionary element in the life of society? The history of the Jewish people offers some of the most magnificent examples of how ideals and law may be brought to victory through courageous assertion of new universal principles which the wise call folly when they are first introduced in a society shaped on a different pattern.

The thoughts I have tried to express apply to practically the whole field of United Nations activities, but in particular to the work of the Organization for the implementation of the principles of the Charter in the fields of international security and disarmament and in the field of fundamental human rights. They apply likewise to the United Nations itself as an experiment in international organization.

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But is not an experiment something tentative and passing? And should not the United Nations be regarded as something definite and lasting? I think it is important to be clear on this point. Certainly the experiences and achievements of the United Nations as it is today are helping us to build the future. The United Nations is something definite also in the sense that the concepts and ideals it represents, like the needs it tries to meet, will remain an ineluctable element of the world picture. However, that does not mean that the present embodiment of the groping efforts of mankind towards an organized world community represents a definite shape for all time. The United Nations is, and should be, a living, evolving, experimental institution. If it should ever cease to be so it should be revolutionized or swept aside for a new approach.

The growth of social institutions is always one where, step by step, the form which adequately meets the need is shaped through selection, or out of experience. Thus an effort that has not yielded all the results hoped for has not failed if it has provided positive experience on which a new approach can be based. An attempt which has proved the possibility of progress has served the cause of progress even if it has ^{had} to be renewed again and again, and in new forms or setting in order to yield full success.

When we look back over the experiences in the United Nations over the past few months, we may differ amongst ourselves as to the wisdom of this or that particular stand and we may have doubts about the end result of this or that step. But I think we all can agree on the value and historical importance of certain developments.

First of all, it proved possible in an emergency to create for the first time a truly international force. This Force, although modest in size and, for constitutional reasons, also modest in aim, broke new ground, which inevitably will count in future efforts to preserve peace and promote justice.

I think we can likewise agree that the fact that the United Nations could undertake and carry through a major field operation like the clearance of the Suez Canal, where no government was in a position to accomplish the task, indicated possibilities for international organization which, once proven, cannot in the future be disregarded.

Finally, deeply regrettable though the conflicts of views and interests were, it should not be forgotten that those who now feel they had to sacrifice for the maintenance of a principle, in a different situation may be the first to profit from the fact that the principle was maintained. As individuals we know that the law which restrains us likewise protects us. The same holds true in international life.

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Some moments ago I referred to the fact that lasting peace is not possible without recognition of fundamental human rights and that human rights cannot reach their full development unless there is peace. The United Nations cannot lay down the law for the life within any national community. Those laws have to be established in accordance with the will of the people as expressed in the forms indicated by their chosen constitution. But just as the United Nations can promote peace, so it can, in joint deliberations, define the goals of human rights which should be the laws of the future in each nation. Whatever the distance between these goals and the everyday reality we meet all around the world, it is not vain thus to set the targets as they present themselves to the most mature political thinking of our age.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly nine years ago, is not, of course, a treaty and has in itself no force of law, but as "a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations" it crystallizes the political thought of our times on these matters in a way influencing the thinking of legislators all over the world. The relationship of man to society is a relationship for which every generation must seek to find a proper form. In a world where the memory is still fresh of some of the worst infringements on human rights ever experienced in history, the Declaration should give direction to those who now carry the responsibility for a sound development of society.

You well know that the United Nations has for years struggled with the problem how to translate the Declaration of Human Rights into the text of an international convention or conventions. It is not surprising that in a world with very different cultural traditions, and among countries showing very different degrees of advancement of social institutions, such a translation has proved difficult. But the failure so far to reach agreement over the whole field should not lead us to believe that the work to realize the fundamental human rights has come to a standstill. The decisive fact in the end will not be the translation of principles into the text of an international convention, but the transformation of society through growing recognition of the principles in the life of the peoples.

You have put "the pursuit of equality at home and abroad" as a motto of your anniversary. Interpreted in a broad sense these words reflect a basic human right, equal in significance to the right to security and freedom from fear.

I had, last year, the privilege of visiting a couple of kibbutzim in Israel and of talking to people coming from many lands, who were devoting their lives to these courageous experiments in practical and total democracy. I looked upon them as fellow workers in an "experiment in progress." Through such experiments alone can progress be achieved.

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I also remember experiences of experiments in community development in India. There I met the same enthusiasm, the same devotion, the same idealism as in the kibbutzim. Yet, how different a situation it was! In one case there were people, stepping out of their Western societies of highly organized and specialized industrial life in order to create new collectives, pioneering in the building up of a strong economic life on a barren soil. In the other case, communities which, although living in a rich land, so far had remained poor for the lack of the revolutionary development carried to fruition by Western individualism, but the members of which now devoted all their energy toward taking the giant step into the economic and social world of today.

In both cases we meet a realization in practice of basic human rights. The difference, however, indicates the diversity of the problem and this calls for great flexibility in our approach and in the choice of the ways in which the various societies may become integrated into a world community.

The underlying problems now making the Middle East such a troubled area, should be understood partly in the terms of which these two experiments in community development may serve as illustrations. They lend special weight to the undertaking of the Member Nations in the Charter "to practice tolerance."

The words just quoted from the Charter are among those which link its text to a great ethical tradition. They are often overlooked, sometimes brushed aside as empty ornaments without political significance, sometimes honoured by lip service. However, they represent an element without which the Charter and the system it creates would disintegrate. Both the work for peace and the work for human rights must be anchored in and inspired by a general approach which gives balance and substance to the results. Peace cannot be enforced for selfish reasons, equality cannot be imposed as an abstract concept. In fact, attempts to do so account for some of the darkest episodes in history.

The work for peace must be animated by tolerance and the work for human rights by respect for the individual. A student of the growth of human rights through the ages will recognize its close relationship to the development of tolerance inspired by intellectual liberalism or, perhaps more often, by ethical concepts of religious origin. Attempts are made to link the development of human rights exclusively to the liberal ideas which broke through to predominance in the age of enlightenment. However, to do so means to me to overlook the historical background of those ideas. It means also cutting our ties to a source of strength that we need in order to carry the work for human rights to fruition and to give to those rights, when established, their fitting spiritual content.

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To some, the word "tolerance" may sound strange in a time of "cold war" and of negotiations "from positions of strength;" it may have an overtone of meekness or appeasement. And yet, have we reason to believe that what was true in the past is no longer true? It is not the weak but the strong who practice tolerance, and the strong do not weaken their position in showing tolerance. On the contrary, only through tolerance can they justify their strength in the face of those counter-acting forces that their own strength automatically sets in motion.

I am sure that this holds true of all those in the present world situation who may be, or may consider themselves to be "strong," be it the industrialized West in relation to the under-developed countries, be it the Powers whose military resources give them key positions, be it those who have achieved a state of democracy and of recognition of human rights toward which others are still groping.

I remember in this context words from another translation by Arthur Waley -- this time from Tao Te Ching. Its paradoxical form and mystical background should not lead us to overlook its realism: "Heaven arms with pity those whom it would not see destroyed."

Over the ages and over the continents, these words join with those of the Psalmist: "There is mercy with Thee; therefore shalt Thou be feared."

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