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ADDRESS BY SECRETARY-GENERAL DAG HAMMARSKJOLD TO A MEETING
OF MEMBERS OF BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT UNDER THE AUSPICES
OF THE BRITISH GROUP OF THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

London, 2 April 1958

(The following text is being released simultaneously in London.)

The pioneering work upon which the United Nations is engaged in international life owes much to those, who in these precincts of Westminster, generation after generation, sought to establish and apply the principles of orderly government in the life of the British nation.

Over the centuries your ancestors pioneered in the development of the parliamentary system, in the defense of human rights and in the techniques of peaceful adjustment of your institutions to the changing needs of peoples. In that process your kingdoms became united, borders within this island ceased to divide and the individual interests of your different peoples were left to express themselves individually within a common framework. And then the principles which your nation had learned to apply were exported and transplanted throughout an empire, carrying with them the seeds of self-government and of the structure for a commonwealth of nations that is a unique achievement in the history of man.

Now that the cycle of growth can be seen within its perspective of several centuries, it is easier to see that it had to be a slow process, that a pragmatic development served your interests best, and that periods of conflict did not stop the process of growth. It is more difficult to study the conditions of growth for the United Nations in the same perspective and with the same detachment. As contemporaries we are apt to be too much swayed by the immediacy of danger and conflict and to lose sight of the positive responses that are also evoked by the underlying need for more effective world organization.

(more)

108

2 April 1958

These developments come at a time when we are still far from being prepared for world community. It is because world community does not exist at a time when world interdependence has become a reality, that world organization has become a necessity as a bridge which may help us to pass safely over this period of transition.

The United Nations, despite some formal resemblances, has none of the powers of a world government or parliament. It is a framework for diplomatic operations. The power of decision remains, in almost all cases, with the member governments. Beset as we are with what often seem to us to be the truly desperate anxieties of our age, it is easy to be impatient with both the evident weaknesses of world organization as thus constituted and the new complexities of international relations which it reflects.

Some are tempted to seek for a solution in constitutional reform which would turn the United Nations into a world authority enforcing the law upon the nations. While respecting the goal of those who advocate such a course, most of us would agree that the political realities with which we live, rooted as they are deep in the disparate histories and cultures of many peoples, make this course impracticable for the foreseeable future.

Others are tempted to go in the other direction. World organization sometimes seems to be more of an added complication than an agent helping to resolve the procession of harassing problems with which they are faced. So there is a natural temptation to direct policies and programs through familiar channels that avoid the interposition of world institutions and, in the short term, seem to be more manageable or to be more in accord with what are thought to be realistic politics. Such a course, if it were to be persisted in, would consign the United Nations to the fate suffered by the League of Nations.

I think most of us agree that between these two extremes lies the sensible and truly realistic course. We should recognize the United Nations for what it is -- an admittedly imperfect but indispensable instrument of nations in working for a peaceful evolution toward a more just and secure world order. At this stage of human history world organization has become necessary. The forces at work have also set the limits within which the power of world organization can develop at each step and beyond which progress, when the balance of forces so permits, will be possible only by processes of organic growth in the system of custom and law prevailing in the society of nations.

(more)

Since a universal collective security system which can enforce peace is not yet within reach, since the nations in the meantime are maintaining systems of alliance for collective self-defense against armed attack, as they are authorized to do under Article 51 of the Charter, what is the role the United Nations can and should play today and in the immediate future as a contribution to the national security and well-being of its member states?

It seems to me that the Organization has a unique and vital role to play in this respect.

The present systems of alliance, reflecting as they do the prevailing balance of forces in the world, are, in the opinion of many, necessary expedients for a period of transition. But they do not lead directly toward solutions. To move toward solutions which will make the future of the nations more secure than it is today, we need to take whatever steps we can toward reducing the tensions and toward blunting the sharp edges of conflict.

I believe, as I said in my last annual report to the members, that, "If properly used, the United Nations can serve a diplomacy of reconciliation better than other instruments available to the member states. All the varied interests and aspirations of the world meet in its precincts upon the common ground of the Charter. Conflicts may persist for long periods within an agreed solution, and groups of states may actively defend special and regional interests. Nevertheless, and in spite of temporary developments in the opposite direction under the influence of acute tension, the tendency in the United Nations is to wear away, or break down, differences, thus helping toward solutions which approach the common interest and application of the principles of the Charter."

It is quite true that the United Nations cannot assure even-handed justice in the settlement of disputes, mainly because it does not have power to enforce its recommendations. But what the United Nations can do, if wisely used, is to help us to move forward in the direction of that goal. A diplomacy of reconciliation -- I use the term of the Charter -- practiced under the Charter, must be guided toward the goal of justice, and it is not only a pious phrase.

(more)

Press Release SG/668
2 April 1958

On the contrary, whatever success that can be achieved in this direction would be the greatest contribution that could be made to the reality of national security for the member states.

It is sometimes said that the system of one vote for one nation in the United Nations and the consequent preponderance of votes by the middle and smaller powers damages the usefulness of the United Nations for the purposes to which I have just referred. It is certainly not a perfect system, but is there any proposal for weighted voting that would not have even greater defects?

In any case, this criticism seems to reflect in part the illusion that the United Nations, because the form of its legislative processes resembles a national government, is in fact like a government. Of course it is not. The General Assembly, for example, is not a parliament of elected members but a diplomatic meeting of delegates of member states who represent governmental policies. These policies are subject to all the influences that would prevail in any case in international life, where all nations are sovereign but the minority of greater powers obviously exert more influence than the majority of smaller powers.

It is also sometimes said that the representation in the United Nations of the nations of Asia and Africa, many of them newly independent, is out of proportion to their power and tends to exacerbate the many problems of transition in the relationship of these continents to the West, especially to Europe.

I believe a careful appraisal of the realities of our time would lead most of us to the opposite conclusion in both respects. In the United Nations we see reflected the political rebirth of Asia and the awakening of Africa. But the United Nations, of course, is in no sense a cause of these great changes. Indeed, the conscious policy of the United Kingdom has played a very large part indeed in the appearance upon the world scene of so many newly independent states. And I believe that the role of the United Nations, like the policy of your government, in the evolution that has occurred over the past 12 years has tended, on balance, to ameliorate rather than to exacerbate conflicts that would have occurred in any case.

As to the future, a more effective and increasing use of the United Nations as a diplomatic instrument, in which the functions of debate and vote are used more frequently to further a diplomacy of reconciliation in the sense of the Charter rather than merely to score propaganda points, or to defend against them, offers the best hope, I believe, for a peaceful evolution in the relationship of Asia and Africa with the West, just as it should do in the relationships of the West with the Communist countries.

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Criticism has been directed against the great emphasis which I have in recent years put upon the adaptation of private diplomacy to the multilateral framework of the World Organization in pursuit of the goals of the Charter. But, whether you call it private diplomacy, or quiet diplomacy or something else, I believe it is in the interests of the member states that we move in this direction.

I would not for a moment suggest that the functions of debate and vote do not have their essential place in world affairs today. Nor would I suggest that any step be taken that would retard the development of an increasingly influential role for a well-informed public opinion in the making of foreign policy. But the United Nations is subject to the same principles as apply to diplomacy in all its forms. Long experience has shown that negotiation in public alone does not produce results. If the United Nations is to serve as an increasingly effective instrument of negotiation, the principles and methods of traditional diplomacy need to be applied more fully alongside its public procedures.

There are many opportunities for the greater use of private diplomacy in the United Nations in conjunction with its parliamentary procedures. Let me give you a few examples drawn from the experience of recent years. Some of them have a direct relevance to the relationship of the West with the Communist countries, some with the relationship of the West with the Middle East. All of them have served the aims of UN and have been used to reduce the tensions and dangers of conflict.

The first example is the follow-up to the Atoms-for-Peace plan adopted by the General Assembly in 1954. One part of that plan was to bring the atomic scientists and engineers of the world together for an exchange of information on the peaceful uses of atomic energy, as distinct from its military applications. To help in planning the first such scientific conference, the General Assembly created an Advisory Committee on Atomic Energy to advise the Secretary-General. On this Committee of seven, outstanding nuclear scientists like Sir John Cockcroft have served as governmental representatives of the three major atomic powers, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

This Committee, which always sits in private, contributed a great deal to the success of the first Geneva Conference in 1955 on the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy and is making a similar contribution this year in the preparation for a second such conference to be convened in Geneva next September 1st. We already know enough about the scope and character of the papers which will be presented at the coming Conference to assess the remarkable extent to which barriers

(more)

have been and are being broken down in this important field.

Another point: while it was the General Assembly which voted in public session for the creation of an International Atomic Energy Agency within the United Nations' family, agreement on the statute for this Agency was reached only after months of patient and private negotiation among the member states named to prepare the way.

The United Nations Radiation Committee established by the General Assembly is another organ on which "East" and "West" are represented which also has met consistently in private in the preparation of its forthcoming report. There has been, in this committee of specialists, a consistent effort to arrive at conclusions which will represent the consensus of the best scientific thought of the whole world, regardless of political considerations, about a problem which deeply concerns all the peoples of the world.

My second example concerns the establishment and operations of the United Nations Emergency Force which has done/much to bring quiet to the Armistice Line between Egypt and Israel and to act as a stabilizing influence in the entire area. You will recall that the General Assembly decided to establish UNEF and gave the Force its terms of reference by an overwhelming vote within a couple of days. This was, of course, an emergency situation, but it was possible to achieve this result only because the informal procedures of private diplomacy had been very intensively exercised during the short time available. When the Assembly created UNEF, it also established a UNEF Advisory Committee to advise the Secretary-General on the many questions that arose concerning the operation and functioning of the Force. This Committee, meeting in private, has continued to play a most valuable role ever since. We have, in this case, an example of a three-stage operation which is natural in the United Nations and can be very helpful in getting constructive results: private diplomacy preceding public debate and then employed again to follow through.

I believe that a greater use of private diplomacy in the work of the Security Council might also yield fruitful results. There is an unused paragraph in the United Nations Charter, Article 28, paragraph 2, which reads: "The Security Council shall hold periodic meetings at which each of its members may, if it so desires, be represented by a member of the government or by some other specially designated representative." In his commentary to Parliament at the time the Charter was being considered, the then Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the United Kingdom said of this paragraph, "It is by these meetings in particular that governments

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would be able to carry out the fourth Purpose of the Organization." This fourth purpose is "to be a center for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends."

I do not suggest any move at this time to give formal effect to this paragraph, but I do think that its application from time to time to the negotiation of appropriate questions might contribute not only to the processes of conciliation but also toward developing in a new direction the important role that the Security Council is intended by the Charter to play in the task of peace-making.

Another example relates to the special responsibilities borne by the United Nations for the Armistice Agreements between Israel and her Arab neighbors and in encouraging a course of development that we hope will lead in time to conditions more favorable to the peaceful settlement of the Palestine question than now exist. This United Nations responsibility is, as you know, shared by the Security Council and the Office of the Secretary-General. Each has its part to play in upholding the Armistice Agreements and its obligation to seek, whenever opportunity presents itself, to move toward restoring these agreements to their full application and toward lowering the temperature -- even if it be by only a few degrees -- in an area where, as you well know, the temperature has fluctuated wildly.

It so happens that the Office of the Secretary-General has a place in many of the examples I have cited. But this need not be so. There are many opportunities open to the member governments and to their representative organs in the United Nations which do not involve my office for the greater use of private diplomacy of a traditional kind side-by-side with the public procedures of parliamentary diplomacy, either through the use of additional formal procedures or on a purely informal basis.

Let me now turn briefly to two questions with which all of us are deeply concerned: first, the problem of disarmament and, second, the problem of economic development for Asia and Africa.

It is obvious that controlled disarmament will be possible only through the United Nations, because any disarmament system has to be adopted and administered by a world organization whose members include practically all nations of the world. However, that does not exclude the use of private diplomacy both within and outside the United Nations. Indeed, such diplomacy is necessary in preparation of decisions in the UN on disarmament.

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How it can best be exercised is a matter for the governments principally concerned to decide. What is of the utmost importance and, indeed, of the utmost urgency, is the exercise of diplomacy at whatever levels, within or without the United Nations, may be necessary to win agreement upon some first step or steps which would put some brake upon the armaments race and contribute to the real national security of all concerned.

As to economic development, particularly in Asia and Africa, the role of the United Nations and the specialized agencies has been small compared with bilateral aid programs. It has been natural for the governments of the industrially advanced countries to proceed cautiously in the direction of multilateral aid while the United Nations and the specialized agencies were gaining experience in the administration of such aid programs. But there have been political reasons, as well, for the somewhat secondary role assigned so far by the member states to the United Nations in this field.

I was, therefore, glad to observe during the last session of the General Assembly evidence of a growing recognition of the political value of the multilateral United Nations approach, as reflected in the unanimous votes to establish a Special Projects Fund and a new United Nations Economic Commission for Africa.

The Special Projects Fund, if carried through as intended, will more than triple the present Technical Assistance program of the United Nations family and tie it more closely to basic economic development projects. The new Economic Commission for Africa will strengthen the influence of the United Nations in an area where political tensions are likely to become higher in the years immediately ahead, and it can help to a considerable extent in reducing these tensions.

I hope that the industrially developed countries, both western democracies and communist, will give increasing weight to the United Nations approach in their economic relationships with Asia and Africa. The dominant mood of the peoples of these continents is often described as nationalism. This is a fair enough description. But the real basis of this great change goes deeper, I think. There is back of it also a desire of countries of Asia and Africa to see applied what the Charter calls "the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small."

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These peoples are inclined to resent economic aid offered with political strings. When this happens they sometimes tend to shop around in an effort to take whatever advantage they can of the competition for political influence. But they do not like it. Nor do they like to be placed in the position of recipients of charity. They would much prefer a hard-headed system of technical assistance, carried out mainly through the United Nations family of agencies.

So much attention has been paid to the need for greater capital investment in economic development that the pressing need of most of the newly independent countries for trained administrators has tended to be overlooked. Here, again, it seems to me that the United Nations can perform a useful service.

It will take many of the new countries 20 to 30 years to train enough administrators. If they are to carry out their development plans, what are they to do in the meantime? They do not want to be directly dependent on other nations. But the main sources from which they can draw trained manpower for administration are the industrially advanced countries.

I have suggested the creation by the United Nations of an International Administrative Civil Service as a way of solving this problem. Under this plan the United Nations would recruit the administrators, but they would then serve as seconded members of the national administrations of the countries requesting them, in much the same way -- but in reverse -- as national civil servants are seconded for service for a period of years to the international civil service of the United Nations.

I am sure there are many thousands of able men and women who would be glad to dedicate part or all of their lives to such a service. And I am equally sure of the need for their service and of the welcome they would receive if they went under the auspices of the World Organization.

The relationship of the economic and social programs of the United Nations to the problem of increasing the national security of its member states is too often overlooked in practice. An increasing emphasis on the multilateral approach -- in economic as well as in political matters -- offers many difficulties, as I have noted earlier. But it also offers more hope than any other method I have heard advanced for dealing with some of the gravest dangers of our times. The political and economic goals of the Charter need to be integrated with the policies of governments if the possibilities for relaxing tensions and increasing security are to be more fully exploited.

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Those who fought here in these precincts in past centuries for the rights of men belonged to the world and not only to England. Across the earth many lands can fairly boast of such champions of freedom through the centuries. In this sense, the United Nations is not a new idea. It is here because of centuries of past struggle. It is the logical and natural development from lines of thought and aspiration going far back into all corners of the earth since a few men first began to think about the decency and dignity of other men.

Now the lines between national and international policy have begun to blur. What is in the national interest, when truly seen, merges naturally into the international interest.

I am reminded of a memorandum written in 1907 by Mr. Eyre Crowe for the British Foreign Office. He advised then that Britain's best safeguard for the future would be a national policy that is "so directed as to harmonize with the general desires and ideals common to all mankind, and more particularly that . . . is closely identified with the primary and vital interests of a majority, or as many as possible, of the other nations."

This seems to me to be a policy -- and a principle -- which it would be both right and wise for all nations to seek to follow. It is, in effect, the policy and the principle of the United Nations Charter.

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