

THE FOURTH DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD LECTURE

# Dag Hammarskjöld and the 21st Century

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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

THE DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD LECTURE

## “Dag Hammarskjöld and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”

Uppsala, Sweden, 6 September 2001

Mr. Vice-Chancellor,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

As Secretary-General of the United Nations, I have to give many speeches, and even quite a few lectures. But I can think of no invitation to speak that is a greater honour, or a greater challenge, than this one.

It will not surprise you to hear that Dag Hammarskjöld is a figure of great importance for me – as he must be for any Secretary-General. His life and his death, his words and his action, have done more to shape public expectations of the office, and indeed of the Organisation, than those of any other man or woman in its history.

His wisdom and his modesty, his unimpeachable integrity and single-minded devotion to duty, have set a standard for all servants of the international community – and especially, of course for his successors – which is simply impossible to live up to. There can be no better rule of thumb for a Secretary-General, as he approaches each new challenge or crisis, than to ask himself, “how would Hammarskjöld have handled this?”

If that is true for any Secretary-General, how much more so for one of my generation, who came of age during the years when Hammarskjöld personified the United Nations, and began my own career in the UN system within a year of his death.

And how much more true, also, for one who has the special relationship that I do with this, his home country!

So you see, it is quite a solemn thing for me to give this lecture, especially so close to the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hammarskjöld's death. And I feel all the more solemn about it coming here, as I do, directly from the part of Africa where he met that death - and where, 40 years later, the United Nations is again struggling to help restore unity and peace to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

I can tell you that the Congolese have never forgotten Dag Hammarskjöld. Four days ago, during my visit to the Congo, I met with the parties involved in the Inter-Congolese Dialogue. Their spokesman began the meeting by telling me how much they appreciated the late Secretary-General's dedication, and the fact that he gave his life for peace in their country. And he asked us to pay tribute to Hammarskjöld's memory by observing a minute of silence. I found it very moving that people could feel like that about him after 40 years.

In Zambia, too – which, as you know, was where he actually died – Hammarskjöld's death is commemorated annually. The Zambian government, together with your own and with the United Nations system, has launched a “living memorial”, which includes a programme to educate young Africans as “messengers of peace”, as well as a Centre for Peace, Good Governance and Human Rights. There could be no better way to commemorate him than by promoting these ideals, which he held so dear.

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If Dag Hammarskjöld were to walk through that door now, and ask me what are the main problems the United Nations is dealing with today, I could easily answer in a way that would make him think nothing much had changed.

I could talk to him not only about the Congo, but about the Middle East, or Cyprus, or the relations between India and Pakistan, and it would all seem very familiar.

But I could also tell him things that he would find very unfamiliar - though some would surprise him less than others, and some would gratify him more than others.

He would probably be relieved, but not surprised, to hear that China is now represented at the United Nations by the government that actually governs the vast majority of Chinese people.

It would surprise him much more to learn that the Soviet Union no longer exists. But he could only be pleased to find that there is no longer an unbridgeable ideological difference between the permanent members of the Security Council.

He might be struck by the number of conflicts the United Nations is dealing with today that are within, rather than between, States – though the experience of the Congo would have prepared him for this – and also by the number of regional organisations that have developed as partners for the UN in different parts of the world.

I feel sure, in any case, that he would be pleased to see the way United Nations peacekeeping has developed, from the model that he and Lester Pearson so brilliantly improvised in 1956 to something much more diverse and complex, which is often more accurately described as “peace building”.

And I imagine he would be equally impressed by the wide range of issues that the United Nations is now called upon to face outside the traditional security arena – from climate change to HIV/AIDS.

He would be gratified, and perhaps not all that surprised, to hear that human rights and democracy are now generally accepted as world norms – though he might well be distressed to see how far, in many countries, the practice still falls short of the rhetoric.

He would definitely be distressed to learn that, within the last decade, genocide had again disfigured the face of humanity – and that well over a billion people today are living in

extreme poverty. I think he would see preventing the recurrence of the former, and putting an end to the latter, as the most urgent tasks confronting us in this new century.

He would no doubt be impressed by the speed and intensity of modern communications, and momentarily confused by talk of faxes and sat-phones - let alone e-mails and the Internet. But I'm sure he would be quick to grasp the advantages and disadvantages of all these innovations, both for civilisation as a whole and for the conduct of diplomacy in particular.

What is clear is that his core ideas remain highly relevant in this new international context. The challenge for us is to see how they can be adapted to take account of it.

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One idea which inspired all his words and actions as Secretary-General was his belief that the United Nations had to be a “dynamic instrument”, through which its Members would collectively “develop forms of executive action”.

During his time in office he became increasingly sensitive to the fact that some Member States did not share this vision, but regarded the United Nations as only “a static conference machinery for resolving conflicts of interests and ideologies with a view to peaceful coexistence”.

In the Introduction to his last Annual Report – a magisterial work, which reads almost as if he was consciously writing his political testament – Hammarskjöld argued that those who regarded the Organization in this way were not paying adequate attention to certain essential principles of the Charter.

He showed that the Charter clearly implies the existence of “an international community, for which the Organization is an instrument and an expression”. The overriding purpose of this community was to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, and to do this it had to follow certain key principles.

These were:

- First, “equal political rights” – which encompassed both the “sovereign equality” of all Member States, in Article 2 of the Charter, and “respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”, in Article 1.
- Second, “equal economic opportunities” – spelt out in Article 55 as the promotion of “higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development”, as well as “solutions of international economic, social, health, and related problems”.
- Third, “justice” – by which he meant that the international community must be “based on law ... with a judicial procedure through which law and justice could be made to apply”.
- And finally the prohibition of the use of armed force, “save in the common interest”.

These principles, Hammarskjöld argued, are incompatible with the idea of the United Nations as merely a conference or debating chamber – as indeed is the authority the Charter gives to its principal organs, and particularly to the Security Council, which clearly has both legislative and executive powers.

The context in which he put forward these arguments was, of course, the Cold War, and particularly the Soviet campaign against him during the Congo crisis of 1960-61.

That campaign is happily long past. But we still face, from time to time, attempts by Member States to reduce the United Nations to a “conference mechanism”.

Those attempts no longer come systematically from one particular ideological camp. Instead, they tend to vary according to the subject under discussion.

Broadly speaking, industrialised countries remain reluctant to see the United Nations act on Hammarskjöld's second principle – the promotion of “equal economic opportunities”. And the governments of some other countries are equally loath to see it actively promote “respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all”.

In both cases, I believe the Secretary-General has no choice. He has to follow in the footsteps of Hammarskjöld, upholding the right and duty of the United Nations to pursue the aims laid down for it by the Charter.

Of course there is always a need for negotiation and discussion on the appropriate forms of action. But the United Nations will fail in its duty to the world's peoples, who are the ultimate source of its authority, if it allows itself to be reduced to a mere “static conference”, whether on economic and social rights or on civil and political ones.

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The same applies to Hammarskjöld's exalted view of the “international civil servant”, which he also pursued in that last annual report, and in a lecture given that same summer at Oxford University.

His argument here was that the people charged with carrying out the executive functions of the United Nations could not be neutral in relation to the principles of the Charter. Nor could they be regarded, or allowed to regard themselves, as nominees or representatives of their own nations. They had to represent the international community as a whole.

Here too, Hammarskjöld based his argument on a very careful reading of the Charter itself – in this case Articles 100 and 101.

Article 100 forbids the Secretary-General or any of his staff either to seek or to receive instructions from States. And Article 101 prescribes “the highest standards of efficiency,

competence, and integrity” as “the paramount consideration in the employment of the staff”.

Once again, Hammarskjöld was arguing in the context of the Cold War, in which first one side and then the other had tried to insist on the right to be represented, within the Secretariat, by people who were loyal to its political or ideological point of view.

Again, the context has changed, and I am glad to say that States today, while extremely keen to see their nationals appointed to senior positions, no longer seek – or at least, not in the same way – to exercise political control over them, once appointed.

But the principle of an independent international civil service, to which Hammarskjöld was so attached, remains as important as ever. Each successive Secretary-General must be vigilant in defending it, even if, on occasion, changing times require us to depart from the letter of his views, in order to preserve the spirit.

To give just one example: Hammarskjöld insisted that the bulk of United Nations staff should have permanent appointments and expect to spend their whole career with the Organisation.

That may have been appropriate in his time. It is less so now that the role of the United Nations has expanded, and more than half of our employees are serving in missions in the field. This is a development which Hammarskjöld would surely have welcomed, since it reflects a transition from the “static conference” model to the “dynamic instrument” model which he so strongly believed in.

But what is clear is that his ideal of the United Nations as an expression of the international community, whose staff carry out decisions taken by States collectively rather than bending to the will of any one of them, is just as relevant in our times as in his.

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And that, of course, has very important implications for the role of the Secretary-General himself.

Hammarškjöld pointed out that Article 99 of the Charter - which allows the Secretary-General, on his own initiative, to bring matters to the Security Council's attention when in his view they may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security - makes him clearly a political rather than a purely administrative official.

In practice, successive Secretaries-General, including Hammarškjöld, have invoked this article very sparingly. I myself have never yet found it necessary to do so. But the fact that the Secretary-General has this power crucially affects the way he is treated by the Security Council, and by the Member States in general.

Few people now question the responsibility of the Secretary-General to act politically, or to make public pronouncements on political issues.

In fact, the boot today is if anything on the other foot: I find myself called on to make official statements on almost everything that happens in the world, from royal marriages to the possibility of human cloning!

I do my best to satisfy this demand with due respect for the decisions of the Security Council and General Assembly. But those bodies would find it very strange if on each occasion I sought their approval before opening my mouth!

Their members can, and do, take exception to some of my statements – and thank goodness they do. There must be freedom of speech for governments, as well as for international officials! But they do not question my right to make such statements, according to my own understanding of the purposes and principles of the United Nations as set out in the Charter.

No doubt Dag Hammarškjöld would also disagree with some of the specific positions I have taken. But I suspect he would envy me the discretion I enjoy in deciding what to

say. And I have no doubt he would strongly endorse the principle that the Secretary-General must strive to make himself an authentic and independent voice of the international community.

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What he might not have foreseen is the way our concept of that community has developed in recent years. In his time it was essentially a community of separate nations or peoples, who for all practical purposes were represented by States.

So if we go back to the things about today's world that we would have to explain to him, if he unexpectedly joined us now, probably the most difficult for him to adjust to would be the sheer complexity of a world in which individuals and groups of all kinds are constantly interacting - across frontiers and across oceans, economically, socially and culturally – without expecting or receiving any permission, let alone assistance, from their national governments.

He might well find it difficult to identify the precise role, in such a world, of a body like the United Nations, whose Charter presupposes the division of the world into sovereign and equal States, and in which the peoples of the world are represented essentially by their governments.

He might find that difficult – and if so, he would not be alone! But I am convinced he would relish the challenge. And I am sure he would not stray from his fundamental conviction that the essential task of the United Nations is to protect the weak against the strong.

In the long term, the vitality and viability of the Organization depend on its ability to perform that task, by adapting itself to changing realities. That, I believe, is the biggest test it faces in the new century.

How would Hammarskjöld approach that task?

First of all he would insist, quite correctly, that States are still the main holders of political authority in the world, and are likely to remain so. Indeed, the more democratic they become - the more genuinely representative of, and accountable to, their peoples – the greater also will be their political legitimacy. And therefore it is entirely proper, as well as inevitable, that they will remain the political masters of the United Nations.

He would also insist, I am sure, on the continuing responsibility of States to maintain international order – and, indeed, on their collective responsibility, which their leaders solemnly recognised in last year’s Millennium Declaration, “to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level”.

And he might well say that, with a few honourable exceptions, the more fortunate countries in this world are not living up to that responsibility, so long as they do not fulfil their longstanding commitments to much higher levels of development assistance, to much more generous debt relief, and to duty- and quota- free access for exports from the least developed countries.

But then he would also see that his own lifetime coincided, in most countries, with the high watermark of State control over the lives of citizens. And he would see that States today generally tax and spend a smaller proportion of their citizens’ wealth than they did 40 years ago.

From this he might well conclude that we should not rely exclusively on State action to achieve our objectives on the international level, either.

A great deal, he would think, is likely to depend on non-State actors in the system – private companies, voluntary agencies or pressure groups, philanthropic foundations, universities and think tanks, and, of course, creative individuals.

And that thought would surely feed into his reflection on the role of the United Nations.

Can it confine itself, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to the role of coordinating action by States? Or should it reach out further?

Is it not obliged, in order to fulfil the purposes of the Charter, to form partnerships with all these different actors? To listen to them, to guide them, and to urge them on?

Above all, to provide a framework of shared values and understanding, within which their free and voluntary efforts can interact, and reinforce each other, instead of getting in each other's way?

Perhaps it is presumptuous of me to suggest that this would be part of Hammarskjöld's vision of the role of the United Nations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century - because it is, of course, my own vision.

No doubt if he were alive today he would offer us something nobler and more profound.

But I like to think, Ladies and Gentlemen, that what I have just described would find some place in it.

Thank you very much.