

Statement by Mr. Soedjatmoko

Rector of the United Nations University

Before the Programme and External Relations Commission

of the UNESCO Executive Board

Paris

14 May 1986

Mr. Chairman, the Representative of the
Director-General, Distinguished Delegates of the
Commission.

It is my pleasure and honour to appear once again before the Commission of the Executive Board of Unesco to present the Report of the Council of the United Nations University for 1985. Please allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate Ambassador Blague on his appointment as Chairman of this Commission, and Ambassador Margan on his appointment as Chairman of the Executive Board. I would like to assure them of the United Nations University's full support and co-operation. This is the first annual report to be prepared by the UNU Council that conforms to the full calendar year, and, thus finally brings the University's reporting period into conformity with the recommendation of ECOSOC which was accepted by the UNU Council in 1984. I believe that this will make it easier to follow the progress of UNU through annual reports.

The 1985 report was prepared at the 26th session of the UNU Council in December, and presents the full picture of the University's activities for the year past. I would, however, like to focus my statement on the position the University has achieved after ten years of programme work. Thus, I have divided my statement into two parts. The first gives some highlights of the 1985 report and cites a few activities that have taken place since the report was written. The second part briefly reviews the University's progress during the past ten years and indicates how the University has evolved a distinctive institutional identity.

Let me begin then by highlighting some of the activities described in the annual report and then present a sampling of events from the past four and a half months. At its twenty-sixth session in December 1985, the Council of the University elected Professor Walter Joseph Kamba, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Zimbabwe, as its Chairman for 1986. He succeeds Professor Victor Urquidi, former President of El Colegio de Mexico.

It may interest the Commission to know that at its most recent session the Council held a colloquium on the United Nations University at the end of its first decade. Both retrospective and prospective views were presented. The main speakers were Dr. Roger Gaudry, first Chairman of the Council and a member of the UNU Founding Committee; Dr. James M. Hester, the first Rector;

and Mr. C. V. Narasimhan, a key figure in the establishment of UNU and the first representative of the Secretary-General on the Council. Director-General M'Bow, another key figure in the University's establishment, was invited but was unable to attend. The Director-General's greetings were presented to the colloquium by his representative, Dr. Marco Antonio Dias. The University has published the colloquium presentations.

The programme activities of the UNU proceeded at a rapid pace during 1985. In July 1985, UNU held a meeting jointly with UNICEF to bring together the final reports of a project on the effects of nutrition and primary health care programmes on the health-seeking behavior of families. A monograph reflecting the work of social scientists in 16 developing countries is in preparation and three topical books are in press with commercial publishers.

A pilot biogas digester inaugurated on a farm in Guyana in July 1985, was the first step in the implementation of a project to introduce to Guyana biogas technology that was developed in China. Four technicians from the institute of Applied Science and Technology in Guyana have undergone training as UNU fellows at the Gangzhou Institute of Energy Conversion in China. The Gangzhou Institute is an associated institution of the UNU. In addition, two Chinese engineers from the same institution went to Guyana to train local masons in the construction of digesters using local materials, and to advise on the modification of equipment to operate on biogas.

A novel aspect of this project has been the use of a Chinese videotape production about the construction and use of biogas digesters. The videotape is a product of the UNU "Village Video Network". It was shown, together with detailed written material and technical advice, first to decision-makers and then to users: in this case dairy and pig farmers. At the inauguration of the pilot digester, the Prime Minister, Mr. Desmond Hoyte, emphasized the importance attached by his government to the kind of South-South technology exchange that can increase the self-reliance of Guyana and decrease its need for foreign exchange.

UNU work in biotechnology continues to expand in scope and coverage. In August 1985, a meeting of policy-makers discussed the need to strengthen research capacity in developing countries and also to strengthen implementation of research results so that the potential benefits of biotechnology can be realized. In October 1985, scientists from food research institutes and universities in 14 African countries attended a UNU workshop in Cameroon to review the role and status of traditional fermented foods in Africa. They made plans for scientific co-operation in research to upgrade the most important or promising traditional fermented foods. Another research network, on brucellosis (undulant fever), met in November to discuss research priorities and the establishment of computerized communications links for exchange of information among members of the network.

The East Asian Perspectives project, which is examining political, economic and social issues in the region, held a meeting in October 1985 in Japan, at which the research teams from the Republic of Korea, China and Japan

presented their first results. For the first time, a research team from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea also attended a meeting of this project.

As described in detail in the Council report, the African Regional Perspectives project, involving 250 researchers from 35 nations, moved toward completion in late 1985, with a series of workshops in Senegal, Tanzania and Tunisia. The results of the studies on the crisis of African agriculture, industrial strategies in Africa, and Arab-African relations, among others, are being readied for publication.

A UNU task force met in Switzerland in November last year to develop a definition and concept of geophysiology, a new systems science for the integrative study of living things and their physical support systems. It is the first step toward what we hope will be an important theoretical advance. The task force prepared a position paper outlining both the concept of geophysiology and the potential applications of it.

The UNU Special Committee on Africa held its final symposium last November on the theme of science and technology in Africa in relation to development. The committee is now preparing its final report. As a result of this project, some of the participants, who have reflected collectively on the African crisis from an African perspective, have decided to continue deliberation along the same lines through their own means and with the cooperation of interested organizations.

Also in November, an expert group reviewed the results of a pilot study which was designed to apply to specific problem areas the concepts and methodologies developed in the University's project on complexity. The purpose was to generate new insights and devise new methods for better management of complex systems. The pilot study, which involved the Université Libre de Bruxelles and Bedford Institute of Oceanography in Halifax, Canada, took one complex system as a case study, namely, the North Atlantic fishery off the coast of Nova Scotia. The study generated interest in further comparative studies in national fisheries-research institutes in Iceland, Morocco, Peru, the Philippines, Portugal and the U.S. A book entitled The Science and Praxis of Complexity based on a UNU theoretical seminar was published in 1985.

The fourth and last seminar in a series on Regional Peace and Security was held in Austria in May 1985, to discuss Europe's role in the security of other regions. Together with previous seminars in Latin America, Africa and Asia, the aim was to provide scholarly background material for the regional, intergovernmental meetings that were organized by the United Nations in preparation for the International Year of Peace in 1986. A selection of the papers prepared for the UNU seminars has been published in the journal Alternatives, and complete volumes for each region will be published this year.

The project on New Social Thought completed its activities in June. Three volumes are now being edited for publication.

Since I reported on the University's first research and training centre, the World Institute for Development Economics Research (WIDER), in May last year there have been a number of developments in this new institution. The report covers most of these so I would just like to point out that although WIDER began programme operations less than one year ago, it has already initiated research under three themes. They are: I.) Hunger and Poverty-the Poorest Billion, II.) Money, Finance and Trade: Reforms for World Development, III.) Development and Technological Transformation: the Management of Change. WIDER has also hosted or sponsored several significant meetings. One of these, for example, in March 1986, addressed issues concerning the governance of the world economy, bringing together a mix of leading academics and policy makers. WIDER is already beginning to publish its first research reports. One of these is a study on "The Potential of the Japanese Surplus for World Economic Development".

WIDER's method of work emphasizes comparative research. In order to pursue this, macro-level studies must first be carried out to establish the basis for comparing different experiences. The WIDER networks include scholars from Africa, Asia, Eastern and Western Europe, Latin America, and North America. A modest start has been made in training, by providing fellowships to four or five young scholars for participation in major conferences and workshops that will be held at WIDER in the summer of 1986.

Further progress has been made toward the second research and training centre that the University hopes to establish, the Institute for Natural Resources in Africa (INRA). In addition to the 20 million francs that has been pledged initially by the Government of France this year to INRA, the OPEC Fund has approved a grant of \$175,000 for equipment for the INRA mineral-resources unit to be located in Zambia. We also recently received the World Bank's endorsement of the concept of INRA and its commendation for donor support. You may recall that the governments of Cote d'Ivoire and Zambia led the way on funding for INRA with pledges of \$5 million and \$2 million, respectively. Both governments have also offered to provide premises and facilities for the Institute.

The UNU took a major step toward the eventual establishment of a research and training centre in Japan, in the form of an institute for advanced studies, with the convening of a Japanese Scientific Advisory Panel. This group of eminent scholars will advise me on strengthening the programme activities in Japan. The first Panel meeting in mid-March, chaired by Dr. Takashi Mukaibo, former President of the University of Tokyo, has provided us with some indications of how the University could develop further co-operation with the Japanese scientific and academic community. I will consult with individual members of the Panel in the coming months.

A study on the feasibility of establishing a research and training centre on employment creation and new technologies got underway last autumn, with financing from the Government of the Netherlands. Dr. Charles Cooper has been appointed as Director. Staff working with Dr. Cooper on the feasibility study at the University of Limburgh are elaborating the detailed workplan for the

study, which will involve collaboration with institutions in a number of developing countries.

The development of the University's training programme now has the support of a full-fledged Training and Fellowship Unit. A full-time professional Training and Fellowship Officer was recently appointed. This unit has produced a training manual to facilitate the Unit's work and to help maintain the integrity of the training and fellowship programme. We also have produced a directory of current and former UNU Fellows. The research and dissemination activities of the University are integrally linked with training, which is one reflection of the specificity of the UNU.

I think that the University's continually developing dissemination activities deserve particular attention. These include academic publications, journals, the periodical called Update and the University newsletter. The latter changed its name in 1985 to Work in Progress, better to reflect its close links with programme activities. Additional information publications, audio-visual material, as well as lectures, seminars and other events make up the outreach activities of the UNU. I would like to call your attention to the exhibition of UNU publications which has been set up outside the conference hall. I invite you to look at the steadily growing outcome of our research programmes.

As the University moves toward the end of the Medium-Term Perspective for 1982-1987 and, consequently, toward the completion of many of its programme activities, it has initiated the evaluation of some of these activities in order to determine how to build on past experience in developing future activities. Earlier this year, the University began the external evaluation of one project under each programme division. The UNU Council also decided in December, 1985 to establish an independent committee to conduct an external evaluation of the first decade's work of the UNU as a whole.

Finally, in completing the highlights, I would like to point out that a number of activities mentioned in the Council Report for 1985 involved co-operation with other branches of the United Nations, including especially Unesco. This co-operation is summarized in Annex IV, page 55 of the Report of the UNU Council. Some of it took the form of joint sponsorship and support for workshops and activities under the University's three programme divisions. The various divisions of the University have also maintained regular contacts with several Unesco sectors on various levels, ranging from the Vice-Rectors to the Programme Officers. A high-level, informal consultative meeting on possible future co-operation between Unesco and UNU under Unesco Major Programme I was held at Unesco headquarters on 17 and 18 of February this year. The University was represented by Dr. Kinhide Mushakoji, Vice-Rector, Regional and Global Studies Division, and three of that division's project co-ordinators, Dr. Ismail Sabri Abdalla, Dr. Samir Amin, and Dr. Pablo Gonzales Casanova. The report of the meeting identified several areas in which further co-operation might be envisaged or strengthened.

I would like to turn now to the University's specificity and identity. I spoke last year to the Programme and External Relations Commission about how the University's work in addressing issues of development under the Mid-Term Perspective had begun to coalesce in a distinctive manner. I also emphasized its growing capability to pursue research at the cutting edge of scientific knowledge and its willingness to take risks in its intellectual explorations to ensure that new aspects of the emerging human situation are not ignored as we move toward the 21st century.

After 10 years of operation I think that it is possible to say that the University has developed a distinctive institutional identity within the United Nations system and the international academic community.

Over the past 10 years the University has moved closer to becoming a worldwide community of scholars, but one without a permanent membership of either institutions or persons. Experience has shown the importance of flexibility in forming our networks, because the elements of the UNU community of scholars must constantly shift in response to new emerging issues and needs. While the University is a creation and a part of the United Nations, it is not an intergovernmental body. It is an organization made up of scholars and academic institutions and is governed by individuals acting in their own right.

The UNU is not a place, though it has a Centre. It is disembodied in the same sense that international financial and trading systems are disembodied, involving many actors and having multiple centres of activity at any one time.

The University does research, training and dissemination of knowledge on pressing global problems that are parallel to the concerns of the United Nations. The major thrust of its programme is directed toward achieving a better understanding of the dynamics of development - development in the largest sense of the term, which encompasses issues of human welfare and survival as well as improved material standards of living.

This concept of development involves all regions of the world, not just the third world, and it is articulated in the context of a world that is continually changing, and changing at a very rapid pace. Therefore, the concerns of the UNU must evolve in order to respond to - and ideally, to anticipate - the mutations in the shape of existing problems, the emergence of new problems, the changing perspectives on and perceptions of problems, and the shifts in the intellectual climate prevailing in different cultural settings.

The problems that the UNU must address are complex and closely inter-linked. It is no longer possible to look at development as an independent variable within the stable environment of a single state. Rather, the most critical issues arise at the intersections of traditional disciplines and fields of study: security and development; environment and population; hunger and poverty; interdependence and autonomy; integration and tolerance of diversity. The University addresses its work to practical problems, but also seeks

to illuminate the basic relationships underlying them rather than merely to prescribe short-term responses.

The University does its work through programmes and institutions. Programmatically, as you may recall, its work is arranged under five broad themes and nine programme areas. Its methodology is collaborative research, training that is closely related to the research topics, and the use of both traditional and innovative learning materials and techniques to disseminate knowledge widely.

UNU research takes place through networks that span ideological, cultural and geographical divisions. It is multi-disciplinary and multi-leveled, addressing issues in their local, national, regional and global manifestations.

UNU training takes place largely in the context of institutional needs and capabilities as defined by the institutions themselves from which the trainees come. Fellowships for post-graduate training are designed not just to enhance the skills of individuals, but rather to strengthen the institutions to which the fellows belong.

UNU dissemination activities are aimed at diverse constituencies. These include academia and the UN system, of course, but also include the poor, the illiterate, the uneducated. Part of the University's task is to try to reach the less privileged with scientific knowledge that will be useful to them in their daily lives, and also to provide channels for the expression of their needs, their concerns and their considerable stock of common-sensical wisdom.

The UNU must also constantly weight the emphasis to be given to "cutting edge" research as opposed to research on the persistent, mundane problems that continue to afflict the vast majority of people. There is a constant tension between the need for a sharp focus and the obligation to maintain a global presence. Flexibility and responsiveness pull the institution in one direction, while the desire for stability and continuity pull it in another.

It is extremely important that the United Nations University acts as, and is perceived as, a global institution. This means that, although its primary concern is with development, in the broadest sense, it needs to develop constituencies, comprehension and support from the North. In fact, the UNU is well placed to assist scholars from North and South to work together to develop a common language and shared perceptions. In this way, it can help to decrease the continuing gap between theories of development that often originate in the North and the realities of development that are found mainly in the South. In this sense particularly, the UNU has avoided and must continue to avoid the trap of acting as if only the South is in need of further knowledge.

The first Medium-Term Perspective was designed to broaden the University's focus on development, to involve it more deeply in the other areas mandated by the UNU Charter, namely survival and welfare. UNU activities over the last five years have raised a whole set of second-generation questions and

have made obvious the linkages among issues. The problems addressed under the nine programme areas have begun to coalesce into a relatively few, critically important trans-disciplinary clusters.

Among these are the issues arising from the evolution of a unified global economy, which will be the subjects of research and training at WIDER; the interrelationship among bio-physical and social forces that are transforming the human habitat everywhere; the search for new rural-urban configurations to cope with the demands of increased population density and rapidly growing labour forces; the relationship between security and development at both national and international levels; the problems of governance that arise in a complex and rapidly changing system. These clusters have evolved almost organically out of the broad research front established by the first Medium-Term Perspective, and they indicate the direction that the second Medium-Term Perspective should take.

The process of coalescence will enable the UNU, over the next biennium and beyond, to reduce the number of discrete activities and to consolidate its efforts. The institution needs to move at a deliberate pace into newly defined problem areas - areas defined in large part by the findings of its previous efforts.

The University must keep sight of the fact that the nature and shape of global problems continually change. The University must, therefore, maintain a constant watch on whether or not it is studying salient issues. Its effectiveness will be measured by the quality and relevance of its work, and by its intellectual and physical presence in various parts of the world. These three - quality, relevance, and presence - define the dimensions of the challenge before the United Nations University as it prepares its second Medium-Term Perspective.

Some of the things that I have mentioned here were also discussed on the occasion of the University's 10th anniversary Colloquium of which I spoke earlier. At a celebration of this type, an organization tends to look back at its history in searching for a future course. At the Colloquium, Mr. C. V. Narasimhan, said of the UN organizations that "their paternity is so mixed that I would not like to speculate on who the true father of the United Nations University is." While the University may not be able to clearly identify its parentage, it recognizes the need for solidarity with its siblings: the other members of the United Nations family. This is particularly important at this time when the UN system is faced with great difficulties. It is my hope that the spirit that was shown at the Sophia meeting of the General Conference of UNESCO in November last year is an indication of an upward trend in the system as a whole.

On the basis of this spirit, each member of the UN family should strive to contribute its utmost to the collective effort to attain the goals of the United Nations in a turbulent and rapidly changing world. At the same time, each member must also focus on its own specific capabilities in such an effort, recognizing that the complexity of many problems facing the world

calls for different but complimentary approaches. This is certainly true of the distinct but overlapping spheres of involvement of Unesco and UNU. Both are engaged in largely intellectual endeavours. Yet each has its own particular approach. In the crisis facing the UN family, and indeed the world itself, we must see how we can best co-ordinate these approaches in order to achieve our common goals. In this the University will do its utmost to foster the spirit of Sophia. Part of this can be achieved by bolstering the co-operation and dialogue that the University has established with Unesco.

As we have seen in a number of recent events, it is not always possible to predict the problems that will arise to plague the world. I believe, therefore, that the task of the United Nations University is to concentrate on building, through the instruments of scholarship, the capacity to meet unforeseen challenges with confidence and courage.

* * *