

Rector's Statement

at the Tenth Anniversary Ceremony of the United Nations University

Tokyo

8 July 1986

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. I would like to thank our speakers for giving us a most thoughtful view of both the promise and the pitfalls of scientific and technological development. To hear two such distinguished scientists speak of the social and cultural-- even spiritual-- dimensions of the challenge of science and technology gives me greater confidence that humankind will not just blunder ahead unthinkingly into the unknown realms to which science is leading us.

Both of our speakers have made it clear that each technological development carries its own set of social and ethical questions. Now that the human environment is so largely a man-made environment, shaped by technology, the interface between technology and society has become a central issues. We must constantly keep asking ourselves whether science and technology are being used to take us in a direction in which we want to go.

Science and technology have produced powerful tools for the betterment of the human condition. But only a small portion of their potential has been put to use, especially for the needs of the developing countries. Much greater scientific and technological resources have been devoted to military conquest and coercion than to the conquest of poverty, illiteracy, ill health, injustice and so forth.

The explosion of human knowledge and power has not been matched by a commensurate increase in our judgement, wisdom, compassion or empathy. This imbalance has allowed science and technology to be used in ways that are useless or even destructive. We have only to look at the crisis in Africa to realize the extent of the problem. In relation to the size of its own population, Africa has had more outside technical experts come to work there than any other continent. But the problems of Africa have just continued to grow worse.

It has always been true that knowledge and power can be used for good or evil-- and have been used for both. The problem is that in the modern scientific age, the ethical questions that have arisen from humankind's slowly growing mastery over the forces of nature have been treated as side-effects of progress. The failure to resolve these residual problems has not been permitted to stand in the way of further progress-- even when the side-effects dwarf the intended benefits of scientific work. The ultimate manifestation of this effect is the development of nuclear weapons. The stated purposes of nuclear weapons, to deter aggression and in the event of war to achieve certain strategic objectives is made absurd by the growing realization that the side-effects of a nuclear war could mean the end of civilization on this

planet, and perhaps the end of human life. As scientists and laymen, we are now reaping the consequences of having failed to develop a scientific code of ethics, based on a broad consensus among scientists in all countries.

The United Nations University has been concerned with science and technology and their social and ethical implications since it began its work ten years ago. The main thrust of our programmes of research and training and dissemination of knowledge is directed toward increasing the availability of physical resources for a satisfactory standard of living, and helping to develop the knowledge and the tools that people need to use resources wisely and well. This necessarily involves us scientific research in fields such as nutrition, energy and land use.

The work of the UNU is aimed at many different audiences. These include scientists and scholars and technicians, of course, but they also include the poor, the illiterate and the uneducated people. Part of this University's task is to try to reach the less privileged people with scientific knowledge that will be useful to them in their daily lives.

The United Nations University was created to do research, provide training, and spread knowledge in those areas that are of greatest concern to the United Nations-- that is, human survival, development and welfare. In positioning itself, the UNU has had to learn to live with certain internal tensions arising from the varied needs, demands and perspectives of its multiple constituencies. How, for example, is it possible to reconcile the different interests of the developing countries, which have a special status among the constituencies of the UNU, with the interests of the industrialized countries, which are the major actual and potential donors to the University? How can the UNU retain academic credibility and relevance in the eyes of both?

The UNU also must constantly weigh 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 in 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.

The United Nations University is a worldwide community of scholars but one without a permanently fixed institutional or personal

membership. Its constituent elements are constantly shifting in response to the emergence of new tasks, issues and needs. The UNU is a creation of the United Nations, which is an inter-governmental body, but the University is governed by individuals acting in their own right and composed of scholars and academic institutions rather than governmental bodies. The fact that it is funded primarily through an endowment fund, the majority of which was generously provided by the government of Japan, gives it additional independence.

The United Nations University is not a place, though it has a Centre here in Tokyo. It is disembodied in the same sense that international financial or commodity markets are disembodied, involving many actors and having multiple centres of activity at any one time.

Further development of the University's networks gives added importance to a central physical presence. The Japanese government is planning to build a permanent headquarters building for the UNU on the splendid site on Aoyama Dori provided by the government of Metropolitan Tokyo. This is not only an administrative necessity for the efficient management of the University, but also a crucial psychological necessity for the consolidation and recognition of the identity of the United Nations University.

Ultimately, the function of the University Centre here in Tokyo should be that of planning and coordinating the activities of the United Nations University as a whole system operating in many different countries throughout the world. The Tokyo Centre should also initiate exploratory research projects and feasibility studies for new programmes, keeping constantly alert to the emergence of new trends and problems. A third extremely important function of the Centre, and one to which it is particularly well-suited by its location in Japan, is that of a communications centre. In this capacity it should service the networks of scholars and institutions that work with the UNU and bind them together into a coherent system. It should also help to meet the communications needs of scholars in the developing countries who lack access to international data banks and research centres.

It is hoped that the UNU will be able to continue the process of creating research and training centres in fields of study that clearly require a long involvement by the UNU. The exploratory research at the Centre should be like a moving spotlight, illuminating certain areas of inquiry for a few years. If after this it is obvious that much more work of the kind that the UNU is particularly suited for remains to be done, we should explore the feasibility of setting up a research and training centre. We have already established one centre, in Helsinki, Finland, to work on global economic development issues. Each centre that the UNU sets up must have its own endowment funding so that it does not become a drain on our central endowment fund which supports the work done in and coordinated by the University Centre in Tokyo.

There is a growing interest on the part of governments in providing substantial funding for the establishment of UNU centres or programmes located in their own countries. While pursuing these possibilities, the University will have to reinforce its primary efforts to raise more contributions for the central endowment fund.

As other centres for specialized research are developed as part of the UNU, the importance of having a strong research and training centre in Japan becomes paramount. It should be the first among equals in the system. An institute for Advanced Studies in Japan would be the intellectual fulcrum of the network of RTCs and RTPs, the place where integrated thinking that spans all the fields in which the UNU is active is the first order of business. The RTC in Japan would also be the point of contact with the UNU for many individual scholars and intellectuals from around the world, as well as the location of lectures, seminars and workshops through which the UNU could interact more fully with the Japanese scholarly community and public. A very distinguished panel of 20 Japanese scholars and scientists is advising me on appropriate steps to bring this research and training centre in Japan into reality. Another group, under the leadership of my senior adviser, Dr. Michio Nagai, is helping to raise funds for this centre and for activities in Japan that will pave the way for it.

It has always been easier to say what the United Nations University is not rather than what it is: it is not a 'conventional, degree-granting, teaching university; it is not a think tank focussing exclusively on short-term, policy-oriented studies; it is not a development research institute; it is not an international association of universities.

The United Nations University is a global network of scholars and academic institutions. It has evolved on the basis of the internal logic of its tasks and in response to a rapidly changing international environment. It is, necessarily, a decentralized organization, for decentralization is the only way to mobilize the academic community on a global scale. Its hallmarks are diversity, flexibility, and sensitivity to emerging issues. One of its major tasks is to contribute to knowledge of contemporary issues and to understanding of the dynamics and directions of change. Another major task is to augment the capacity for learning about the management of a pluralistic environment in a state of constant flux. A third task is building skills of research and analysis that are needed in specific institutional settings, but are flexible enough to remain useful as conditions change. In the course of pursuing all of these tasks, and as objectives in their own right, the UNU works to break the isolation of individuals scholars, to stimulate innovative thought, and to serve as a forum for the expression of diverse views.

The United Nations University was environed, in the first instance, as a more or less conventional international university, with professors and students drawn from many countries, offering instruction leading to

an academic degree. But the various committees, consultants and UN officials who drew the initial outlines of the new institution agreed rather quickly that what the world needed was not a new body of degree-holders but a new body of knowledge. It had to be generated through research; people and institutions capable of using it had to be strengthened through training; and the new insights and methods that were developed had to be made widely available through dissemination. These imperatives became the central elements of the United Nations University's mandate.

The UNU will have to continue to be a flexible institution. Because we cannot be everywhere at once, we must make sure that we are at the forefront, working in areas where our presence can make a real difference to the understanding of pressing human problems. We look forward to our next decade of work, and to a continuing and growing cooperation with the government and people of Japan.