

ORAL STATEMENT BY SOEDJATMOKO

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BEFORE THE SECOND COMMITTEE OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

15* OCTOBER 1986

Mr. Chairman and distinguished delegates,

The year 1985 marked the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations University. I would like to devote some of my remarks here to the position the University has achieved after ten years of effort. Thus, I have divided my statement into two parts. The first gives a few highlights of the 1985 report and cites some activities that have taken place since the report was written. The second part of my statement will briefly review the University's progress during the past ten years and indicate how the distinctive institutional identity of the University has evolved.

The programme activities of the UNU proceeded at a rapid pace during 1985. Three seminars on Regional Peace and Security were held in conjunction with the United Nations Secretariat for the International Year of Peace.

* UNU's appearance, originally scheduled for 15 October, was rescheduled to 16 October.

In February, 1985, the UNU convened a conference on Climatic, Biotic and Human interactions in the Humid Tropics at the Institute for Space Research in Sao Jose dos Campos, Brazil.

A closely related conference on the theoretical level met in Switzerland in November to develop the 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.

UNU work in this extremely important field of natural resources continued in 1986 with, among other activities, a conference on the developing environmental crisis in the Himalayan-Ganges region. It has led to the development of a new concept of trans-border ecological zones in particularly fragile areas, in the application of which the countries of the Himalayan region are showing serious interest.

The second of a series of regional training colleges in microprocessor technology was held in Bogota, Colombia in June, 1985. The first such college took place in Sri Lanka in 1984. These five-week courses complement the training programmes at the International Center for Theoretical Physics in Trieste and Trinity College, Dublin. So far, more than 700 scholars from Africa, Asia and Latin America have participated in UNU microprocessor programmes -- and this is outside of the regular fellowship programme of the University, to which I will refer later. The microprocessor training is not simply in the use of equipment, but is aimed at the mastery of microprocessor techniques, so that those trained can adapt and creatively apply the technology to locally defined development problems.

Some time before Africa hit the headlines as a continent in crisis, the United Nations University had brought together a group of senior African scholars as the Special Committee on Africa. The activities of the Special Committee on Africa drew to a close in 1985. The Special Committee has been adopted by the newly formed African Academy of Sciences, and will continue its work under the sponsorship of the Academy as the Commission for the African Crisis.

In October, a UNU workshop met to formulate guidelines for studying the effects of chronic dietary deficiency. The report of that workshop is undergoing final editing for publication.

As a result of its work in this area, the UNU has accepted lead-agency responsibility, with support from the Sub-committee on Nutrition of the Administrative Co-ordinating Committee, for the organization of a Consultative Group on Dietary Energy Deficiency.

Seven Japanese universities collaborated with the UNU in organizing a six-day seminar in September, 1985, on the theme of international organization. The theme was chosen partly in observance of the 40th anniversary of the United Nations. The lecturers included staff of the UNU, the United Nations Headquarters, UNDP, ESCAP, and UNFICYP in addition to professors from other universities. This seminar was undertaken by the UNU in preparation for the eventual establishment of a research and training center in Japan.

The dissemination activities of the United Nations University continued to develop in 1985, making use of an expanding variety of techniques. Nineteen books

were published or co-published by the University, along with twenty-one issues of three scientific journals: the Food and Nutrition Bulletin, ASSET, and Mountain Research and Development. Many other titles resulting from UNU research projects were published by co-operating institutions. A number of audio-visual activities were initiated in connection with UNU research projects.

At the end of 1985, there were 125 UNU fellows in training programmes. Eighty-two fellows completed their training in 1985. The fellowships awarded during 1985 were related to seven of the nine UNU programme areas, and the results of UNU research projects were increasingly related to the training activities. Progress was made during the year in developing new kinds of training, and in formulating new guidelines for implementing this part of the University's mandate. As of September 30th, 1986, seven hundred and two scholars had completed UNU fellowships: 197 from Africa, 320 from Asia, 177 from Latin America and the Caribbean, and 8 from Europe and North America. One hundred and seventy-six additional fellows are currently in UNU training programmes: 47 from Africa, 74 from Asia, and 55 from Latin America and the Caribbean.

The first research and training centre to be established by the United Nations University, the World Institute for Development Economics Research, known as WIDER, began its operations in 1985 in Helsinki, Finland.

Dr. Lal Jayawardena was appointed Director and took up his post in Helsinki in April. The first Board meeting was held in May under the Chairmanship of Dr. Saburo Okita. The Board adopted three research themes for the initial programme of WIDER. They are: i) Hunger and poverty: the Poorest Billion; ii) Money, Trade and Finance: Reforms for World Development; and iii) Development and Technological Transformation: the Management of Change.

Further progress was made in 1985 toward the second research and training centre that the UNU hopes to establish, the Institute for Natural Resources in Africa (INRA). The concept of INRA responds in a very practical manner to the long-term needs of the African continent, which were articulated at the Special Session on Africa of the General Assembly. INRA addresses particularly the need for scientific institutions capable of leading the break away from relief and recovery to independent, self-sustaining development.

The very great political and economic uncertainties of the current period, which affect the entire UN system, call for a high degree of caution in our plans for the future development of the UN University. As you are well aware, the final months of 1985 brought a dramatic strengthening of the Japanese yen, which has continued throughout 1986. The University's programme and budget for 1986-87 have been somewhat protected by administrative steps which we took early in 1985. Subsequently, we have taken a number of cost-cutting measures to compensate for the higher value of the yen. Nonetheless, the maintenance of the University programme in the future will require substantial new additions of income.

In December, 1985, the Council of the UNU decided to initiate a comprehensive external evaluation of the first ten years' work of the University, to assess the extent to which the University since its establishment has fulfilled the objectives

of its Charter, with a view to strengthening its future performance and to contributing significantly to the preparation of its future plans. An independent committee of five eminent scholars has been named by the Council to carry out the evaluation, and it has already begun its work.

My written statement to the Committee goes into considerably more detail about UNU projects and other activities. The statement concentrates on the collaborative links of the University with other agencies of the UN system. I have not placed much emphasis on the growth of our collaboration with universities and scientific organizations, but you will find this elaborated in the Report of the Council. The University has steadily gained in visibility and credibility over the past several years.

I would like to comment now on the specificity and identity of the United Nations University. After ten years of existence I think 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 ten years the University has moved closer to becoming a worldwide community of scholars, but one without a permanent membership of either institutions or individual persons. Experience has shown the importance of pluralism and 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.

The UN 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.

The problems that the UNU must address are complex and closely interlinked. 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 United Nations 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 dissemination activities of the UNU are aimed at diverse constituencies. These include decision-makers and academics, 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 commonsensical wisdom.

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. In this way, it can help to decrease the continuing gap between theories of development in the North and the realities of 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, which has guided the University's work since 1982, 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-sectoral and trans-disciplinary clusters, thus making concentration possible in the next medium-term perspective period.

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 inter-relationship 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 a rapidly growing labor force; 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 starting in 1986.

At this time, when the United Nations system as a whole is faced with great difficulties, it is the responsibility of each member organization of the system to contribute its utmost to the collective effort to attain the goals of the United Nations Charter 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 complementary approaches. Thus it is important for the United Nations system to maintain its own research capacity so that it can analyze issues independently of the interested parties. It is equally important that the United Nations maintain the capacity to mobilize and tap scholarly resources outside of its own system, so that it can understand and benefit from the multiple analyses that shape the worldview of its global constituencies. 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 it is the task of the United Nations University to concentrate on building, through the instruments of scholarship, the