

Oral Report of the Rector

to the 28th Session of the United Nations University Council

Tokyo, Japan

1 December 1986

Please allow me to begin, Mr. Chairman, by adding my own words of welcome, as well as those of the staff of the United Nations University Centre, to the members of the Council and the observers present here.

We have a number of special guests here for this session of the Council. The members of the Committee for the Ten-year Evaluation of the UNU will be present today; they meet for the second time at the University Centre and have chosen this time in order to have an opportunity to consult with the Council. In addition, I would like to draw your attention to the presence of Dr. Roland Fuchs, who will take up the post of Vice-Rector of the Development Studies Division in January. As you know, there has been a long gap in the leadership of that division, which Dr. Nevin Scrimshaw has helped us to fill at great sacrifice to himself. We are deeply grateful to Dr. Scrimshaw, who will be here tomorrow.

Present with us also is Dr. Ines Wesley-Tanaskovic, who is here at the Centre temporarily as senior advisor for global learning. She has been closely involved with a number of the projects in the global learning division and, as you may know, is a former member of this Council who served for two years as Chairwoman of the Council.

Dr. Wesley's stay in Tokyo is partly the result of the absence of Vice-Rector Ploman. I am sorry to report to you that Mr. Ploman suffered two heart attacks while on mission to Europe in September, and has been ordered to convalesce before attempting to travel back here. He is recovering and doing well. I hope that you will allow me to convey to him your best wishes for a full and speedy recovery.

Dr. Lal Jayawardena, the Director of WIDER, is attending this meeting. This is the first opportunity for the new members of the Council to meet him.

Apart from the pleasure of welcoming all of you here to the UNU headquarters, I must begin my oral report to you with an apology for the delays in delivering the documentation for this meeting to the members of the Council. I apologize and take full responsibility for our tardiness, and I hope you will allow me a few words of explanation. There were two major reasons for the delay in producing this meeting's documents. One is the shortage of staff at the centre and the second is the demands of at least

four extraordinary tasks in addition to the always heavy workload of the Centre staff. At the moment, two of the four Vice-Rectorships at the Centre are vacant; two of the five Directorships are vacant; and another six professional posts are vacant in anticipation of a freeze on recruitment to a certain number of posts. With this shortage of staff-- which is in part a result of the financial difficulties we are facing-- the University Centre staff has had to carry on the same workload as before, in addition to preparing the draft second Medium-term Perspective, servicing the very important work of the Ten-year Evaluation Committee, re-tooling the biennial budget of the University to make up for the higher value of the yen, and preparing the ground for the possible establishment of the Institute for Natural Resources in Africa. We have all been sorely pressed to accomplish all of this. Thus, while apologizing to you, I would also like to express my profound appreciation to my staff, many of whom have doubled and tripled their work-loads, for their extraordinary efforts under difficult circumstances. I would especially like to thank Mr. Bernard Ponnette, who is in the interpretation booth this morning, who has worked under supreme pressure to translate these documents into French at the very last minute.

We have a very full and interesting agenda for this Council session. We have set aside two hours this afternoon for consultations with the Committee for the Ten-year Evaluation. Tomorrow, the Council session will be interrupted for the visit of the President of Mexico, His Excellency Miguel de la Madrid, to the

United Nations University. He will deliver an address on "The Growth of the World Economy: How to Restore Equilibrium" to an invited audience in the Toho Seimei lecture hall on the first floor of this building. Immediately afterwards, in this room, he will have an informal discussion with a group of Japanese scholars and others including the members of this Council. This event is not a Council event, and it will take some time away from our business agenda. However, after consultation with Professor Kamba, we went ahead to schedule the President's visit at a time when it would be possible for the members of the Council to take part in what we feel is a very exciting occasion and one that brings honor to the United Nations University. This is the only such address that the President will give during his brief state visit to Japan, and he specifically chose the UNU as the setting for it, after my discussions with him at our Council meeting in Mexico City in July, 1985.

One of the important items of business for this Council session will be the discussion of the revised budget for the 1986-87 biennium, on which the Finance and Budget Committee will report to you. This budget has been cleared by the Administrative Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) at United Nations headquarters.

Another major feature of the present session will be our consideration of the establishment of the Institute for Natural Resources in Africa as the second research and training centre of the United Nations University.

Finally, there will be a discussion of the draft second Medium-term Perspective of the UNU for 1988-1993. As you know, the adoption of a final version of the MTP is planned for the next Council meeting, which will be held in Helsinki in July.

There are papers on each of these subjects before you, as well as a paper on the institutional framework of the UNU system. There is also a conference room paper on some of the achievements of the University. Conference room papers, as you know, are for your information rather than for discussion in the formal session. I asked the staff to give me their views on the achievements of the UNU, and the paper was written on the basis of their submissions.

Before going into greater detail on these points, I would like to give you, as customary, some highlights of the programme activities of the months that have passed since the last Council session.

The first five research projects at WIDER culminated in five major research conferences which were held in Helsinki in July and August. One dealt with the paradox of rising food production and persistent hunger; a second dealt with constraints on growth and development from a macroeconomic perspective; the third was on stabilization and adjustment policies and the role of international financial institutions; the fourth focused on the debt problem of developing countries; and the fifth was on technological transformation in traditional societies. In total, eighty-nine papers were presented at these conferences, and I sincerely hope that you will have a chance to read some of them, for they are of impressive quality and relevance. Dr. Jayawardena will describe these conferences in greater detail along with the many other activities of WIDER when he presents his report.

A UNU workshop on "Crisis, conflicts and the Non-aligned Movement" was held in conjunction with the eighth summit meeting of the Non-aligned Movement, in Harare, Zimbabwe in August. This workshop took place within the context of our programme area on Regional Perspectives. It was hosted by the African network of that programme but involved researchers from the other regions as well. It was co-sponsored by the Third World Forum, the African Association of Political Science and the Government of Zimbabwe.

The first of the Regional Perspectives projects to conclude its work, the Arab Alternative Futures project, held its final symposium in November in Cairo, Egypt. More than one hundred scholars from all over the region who have participated in this project attended, as well as other Arab experts and scholars from regional and international organizations. The final report of the project was discussed along with other reports from the participants.

In October, the UNU co-sponsored what we think to be the first international workshop on the problems of mountain and highland ecosystems in Africa. The workshop was held in Ethiopia at the University of Addis Ababa, the University of Ambo, and at several field sites in the Ethiopian highlands. The themes of the workshop were drawn from our longstanding co-operative research project on "Highland-lowland interactive systems", which is carried out by scientists from the University of Berne in Switzerland, Addis Ababa University and the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture. Out of this workshop came a new organization, the Association for African Highland and Mountain Research, which is open to all scholars interested in this field. The new organization resolved to work with the UNU along with other international scientific organizations. The proceedings of the workshop will be published in the UNU journal, Mountain Research and Development.

Looking at another crucial area of tropical ecology, our project on the effects of deforestation and different kinds of land use on soil, water, micro-climate and productivity is proceeding well at the UNU field station at Okomu in southeastern Nigeria. The experiment, which is under the direction of the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture, is generating very basic scientific data on precisely what happens when tropical soils are disturbed by different kinds of human intervention. The second harvest on the field site has now been completed, with a full complement of associated measurements. From this point onward, the project moves into unknown territory as the effects on soil, water, climate and productivity are monitored during the traditionally disastrous third consecutive harvest.

The report of a UNU workshop to provide methodological guidelines for studying the effects of chronic dietary energy deficiency was completed this autumn and is about to be published. As a result of our work in this field, the UNU has accepted lead-agency responsibility, with the support of the United Nations Sub-committee on Nutrition, for the organization of an "International Dietary Energy Consultancy Group". This group will summarize available information and gaps in the knowledge of human adaptation to chronic energy deficiency-- including both

the physiological adaptations and their social and economic consequences.

The second meeting of the International Food Data Systems project, which we call INFOODS, was held in Budapest, Hungary, in November. At that meeting, a regional INFOODS group for Eastern Europe was also formed. INFOODS is now well on the way to becoming a comprehensive international network of scientists. The LATINFOODS and the ASEAN subgroup of ASIAFOODS also met during this autumn.

During the summer and fall, UNU put on a four-and-a-half month training course on the production of tempeh, a traditional Indonesian fermented food. The course was organized and taught by Indonesian scientists and attended by researchers from other developing countries in Africa and Asia. The demand for this course was so great that a repeat course is being planned. The concept is being extended to include further South-South exchange on other kinds of fermented foods. UNU fellows from Africa, for example, are studying fermented-fish techniques from Asia.

The third in a series of UNU international conferences on social transformation was held in October, 1986, in Leningrad, U.S.S.R. Its subject was "The Origins of the Russian Revolution (1916-1917)". This conference focused on the preconditions of

the Russian Revolution of 1917, following previous UNU conferences on the Meiji Restoration (1868) and the Mexican Revolution (1867-1940). As the third meeting in this UNU series, the conference adopted a comparative perspective, analyzing differences and similarities among the major social transformations in Japan, Mexico, Russia.

In our project on Poverty and Welfare-resource Allocation, a research protocol was formulated during the summer and disseminated in a global solicitation of research proposals. Forty proposals were received from 19 countries. The proposals were screened by a Review Committee and the most promising research teams were visited at their own institutions and assisted in revising their proposals. As a result of this process, seven proposals from seven countries were selected for inclusion in the project. The seven research teams met with the Advisory Committee at a workshop in November, in Sao Paulo, Brazil, where they discussed the conceptual framework of the project and developed common research instruments to assure that results would be comparable and of good scientific quality. The careful preparation of this project is one that I would like to see replicated in some form throughout the UNU research programme.

Another Regional Training College for the mastering of microprocessor technologies was held in September at the

University of Heifei, China. As you may recall, in co-operation with the Institute for Theoretical Physics, we have held a number of such regional colleges, as well as training courses in Trieste. About 700 scientists have now participated in these colleges and associated activities, most of which are separate from our normal fellowship programme.

While I am on the subject of training, let me refer to our usual fellowship programme. As of December 1, 1986, 180 regular fellows and 10 special fellows have completed training and another 156 are in the midst of training.

The visit of the President of Mexico to the University Centre is certainly one of the highlights of this year. I need not say more about it since you will be able to observe it at first hand. He is the second head of government to visit the UNU this year; in November, the Prime Minister of Iceland came to the Centre and spoke to the staff. In his talk to the staff and also in his private conversations with me, he emphasized the importance of the United Nations system to small countries like Iceland, and spoke of Iceland's commitment to peace and the peaceful resolution of conflict. He also reaffirmed Iceland's commitment to the UNU and to our joint training programme in geothermal energy.

In the last two months, we have had the great privilege of hosting Ivan Illich as a Visiting Scholar at the University Centre, as well as his colleague Dr. Barbara Duden. They are working on a book on the history of the perception of the human body. Dr. Illich has given a series of weekly seminars for the staff focusing on concepts of scarcity. He and Dr. Duden have also had extensive interactions with the Japanese academic community.

I would like to turn now to the institutional developments of the past few months. The Board of WIDER met for the second time, in November in Helsinki. They adopted the work plan and the budget for 1987, which have been incorporated in the revised programme and budget of the University which is presented to you for discussion and approval at this session. The longer-term plans of WIDER are being formulated in conformity with the outlines of the draft of the second Medium-term Perspective.

In other institutional developments, I visited the Netherlands in November in order to observe the progress that is being made on the feasibility study on a possible research and training centre for the new technologies, mobility and regional development. Five state-of-the art surveys and four country surveys on the diffusion and impact of new technologies have been completed, which will form the basis of the study Director's

report on the feasibility of the research and training centre. My visit to the Netherlands was also made in order to pay my respects to the new government and confirm the degree of its commitment to a UNU centre in Maastricht. My discussions with the Minister of International Development Co-operation and the Minister of Education have reassured me of their continuing and active interest in this matter.

In October, we received an official letter from the Foreign Minister of Austria expressing the interest of the Government of Austria in financing a feasibility study on the establishment of a UNU research and training centre for outer space studies, concentrating on those applications of space technologies that are of particular interest to developing countries, such as remote sensing, meteorology, resource management, navigation and communication. The demilitarization of space and the uses of space technologies to further the cause of peace would also be areas of major concern. Foreign Minister Jankowitsch of Austria is the Chairman of the Outer Space Committee of the United Nations and is convinced that such a centre would be a useful complement to intergovernmental efforts to secure the use of outer space for the benefit of the whole of humankind. There have been a number of expressions of interest in this idea from institutions in other countries, which see the potential value of a centre in

enhancing the ability of developing countries to play a more effective role in the various developmental uses of outer space.

As you know, the UNU has over the years had a number of successful projects in China. Recently, we have had intensive conversations with the State Commission for Science and Technology, which has invited the UNU to participate in their programme of technology transfer and development, known as the "Spark programme". Out of these discussions, and out of our projects in China, there has grown a considerable interest on the part of the Chinese Government and some others in a possible UNU initiative in computer software development directed to the particular development needs of the Third World. We are looking for the right programmatic and institutional response to this and other similar expressions of interest.

We have also received a request from the United Nations, through the Secretary-General's representative on this Council, Mr. Yolah, to consider co-operating with the United Nations Secretariat in continuing the so-called "Link project" led by the Nobel Prize-winning economist Professor Lawrence Klein. The project draws on experts in central banks, economic ministries and research institutes from around the world and integrates independently developed national models into a world economic model which is particularly well-suited for short-term and medium-term analysis. I have just yesterday received a telex from Director-

General Jean Ripert in which he expresses the keen interest of the United Nations in this project and says, if I may quote him, "Placing the project under the auspices of the United Nations University seems to provide an appropriate framework from both academic and organizational points of view for the implementation of the proposal." We have now received the proposal on project Link, and will proceed to give it the serious and careful review it deserves. We very much welcome the opportunity to look into the possibility of incorporating the Link project into our activities, and will be reporting to you on it as discussions develop. I am sure that Mr. Yolah will want to make some additional comments on this matter.

I am mentioning these items which are not on our formal agenda simply as an indication of the growing interest in the United Nations University from many different quarters. More and more frequently, we are being approached with serious and worthy proposals for collaboration, or with suggestions that we enter neglected research areas. These are most gratifying as expressions of confidence in the capabilities that we have developed, and we intend to respond to them to the best of our abilities.

In this vein, I also want to draw your attention to the very favorable resolution on the UNU adopted by the Second Committee of the General Assembly in November. It is among your papers as

Conference Room Paper Number 4. During the debate on this resolution, the representatives of member states made some comments that I would like to share with you. The representative of Finland drew attention to the interesting new ideas that have been developed in WIDER's research programmes and urged that they be widely disseminated to the member states. The representative of Jamaica was kind enough to congratulate me on the administration of an institution which has made a significant contribution to the study and research of a wide range of issues in a relatively short period of existence. Finally, the delegate of Mexico said, and I quote, "We thank and congratulate all the persons who have collaborated in this task with imagination and continuity, introducing modification in the traditional concept of a university and demonstrating that methods and approaches can be innovated by means of reflection... they have shown the sceptics that international co-operation at the intellectual level in research and science can make positive contributions."

The resolution and the debate speak for themselves, and I think we can draw confidence from them about the appreciation of our work so far. Several of the interventions, however, pointed to the need for greater concentration in the UNU programme, and as you can see, the draft of the second Medium-term perspective responds to this observation.

Please allow me to say a few words about the second Medium-term Perspective, though I will introduce the subject in greater detail when we turn our attention to that agenda item. The paper that you have before you is very much a draft. It is based on a wide range of consultations both in-house and outside, but it is not a consensus document. Given the very wide range of approaches and emphases encountered in my consultations, it would have been difficult to arrive at a consensus and still retain any content! I have benefitted greatly from the inputs of my colleagues, but the judgements reflected in the document are, in the final analysis, mine, and I bear full responsibility for them.

The purpose of the draft document is to elicit your comments so that the document may be improved. The effort to reduce the number of areas of concentration and sharpen their focus has not been an easy one-- especially because, as the paper I presented in July pointed out, the next generation of problems lies at the intersection of different spheres of inquiry. A great many ideas have been considered before settling on the five areas of concentration that are presented in the current draft.

They were selected as areas that are most salient among pressing global problems, and in which the UNU has demonstrated some comparative advantage.

Alongside these five areas of concentration we have identified four perspectives through which these problem areas can be approached. I will not discuss these in substance now, but simply point out that particular aspects of the problem areas are highlighted by looking at the problems from certain perspectives. It is in this interaction that I think we will be able to identify specific subjects for research, training and dissemination as we plan UNU activities for each biennial programme and budget period.

I should like to emphasize very strongly that the Medium-term Perspective is not a blueprint, but a guide. It is not a programme and budget and so it does not specify the particular projects that will be taken up in the three biennia it covers. There is, on page 11 of the draft document, a table that illustrates the kind of topics that may be expected to crop up at the intersection of problem areas and perspectives. This table is an illustration; it is not meant to be exhaustive.

As I have said, the document that you have before you is a draft. At this Council session, it is primarily for discussion. In terms of action, I am asking only for your approval of the five general areas of concentration. A decision on these is needed in order to make it possible for us to begin developing the programme and budget for the first biennium of the second

medium-term period, namely, the 1988-89 biennium. The 1988-89 budget will have to be reviewed by the ACABQ in September, 1987, prior to being submitted to this Council for approval in December. So the planning process needs to begin almost immediately.

In addition, I would like to call the Council's attention to a number of policy issues on which decisions will have to be taken, though not necessarily at this meeting. I would like to invite your comments on the issues raised with respect to methods of work, in paragraphs 35-39; the paragraphs on training policy, paragraphs 40-50; on institutional development, paragraphs 62-68; and on the role of the University Centre, paragraphs 69-75. This request in no way diminishes the importance I attach to comments on the other parts of the paper, but the paragraphs I have just referred to address policy issues which are the subject of lively debate in the house and in our networks, and I think that the guidance of the Council will be particularly important to us as we continue to discuss them.

Our planning and preparation for the programme and budget of the first biennium of the second Medium-term Perspective period takes place under the shadow of the sudden and substantial appreciation of the Japanese yen. I think by now you are all aware of the serious effect this could have on the University. I have

already reported to the Council the 20 percent budget cut that has already been applied and which is reflected in the revised budget that we are presenting to the Council at this session. The nature of the cuts has been discussed in the Council Committee on Programme and Institutional Development. We have undertaken a number of additional cost-cutting measures, and the Committee on Finance and Budget will report on these. However, the prevailing expectation is that the value of the yen against the dollar will not return to the earlier levels which enabled us to expand our activities relatively rapidly in the six years past. This may force us into further cost-cutting measures later on. However, beyond a certain limit, the critical mass that is necessary to sustain the productive capacity of the University will be eroded. It would be a pity if the momentum that the University has developed and the recognition that it has gained should be impeded or reduced as a result of factors that lie beyond our control, such as the fluctuations in international exchange rates. Clearly, cost-cutting alone is not the answer to our problem. We need new resources for the Centre, and to secure them we must mount a major effort.

As part of the effort to ensure the continued viability of the United Nations University and its potential for growth, I have initiated a series of conversations at high levels of Japanese government and politics. I have had discussions with

the Foreign Minister and the Finance Minister of the Government of Japan, and others, about ways in which the Japanese Government might help to overcome the financial predicament of the UNU through a renewed political commitment to the University in the form of a replenishment of Japan's financial contribution to the UNU. I have found considerable understanding and sympathy on the part of the politicians and government officials to whom I have spoken, and I am hopeful that continued conversations in the course of the next year will lead to an additional contribution.

The UNU is approaching a major period of transition. We are about to close the chapter of the first Medium-term Perspective and open the chapter of the second. We will soon have a new Rector. The change of the Rectorship coincides with a distinct generational change among the rest of the staff, which we should welcome and encourage. There should also be a significant change in the structure of the University Centre in the second MTP. Furthermore, the University is now truly in the process of becoming a system of institutions and programmes which is much more complex than a hub with spokes leading out to various networks. The governance of complex systems in an information age is one of the general challenges of our times. The specific solutions that are derived for the UNU must be able to reconcile control and decentralization, autonomy and accountability, quality and diversity.

Certainly the financial uncertainties we face make these transitions more difficult, but we must not allow them to blind us to the importance of what we have achieved or to the potential that this institution has to demonstrate the possibility of a new kind of institution of higher learning. We have come too far to lose courage now. The steadfastness of our vision of and commitment to, what the UNU can be, is our greatest resource in meeting the present challenge.