

STATEMENT BY SOEDJATMOKO
RECTOR OF THE UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSITY
BEFORE THE SECOND COMMITTEE OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

5 October 1982

Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Delegates,

I once again have the honour, on behalf of the United Nations University, to refer to the Annual Report of the Council of the University which I hope you would have read in conjunction with the report of the Joint Inspection Unit. But at the outset let me offer my warmest congratulations to Ambassador Fafowora on his election to the chairmanship of this body. The deliberations of this Committee, I am sure, will greatly benefit from his guidance and wisdom in its affairs.

This year's Annual Report of the Council, covers the period July 1981-June 1982. In compliance with the Secretary-General's request for brevity in documents, the Report this year is considerably shorter than in the past.

When I first addressed this Committee in September 1980, shortly after I had assumed office as Rector, I presented to this Committee some of my thoughts and broad ideas about the future direction of the University. A year later, I was able to report on how our thinking had crystallized into the Medium-Term Perspective for the years 1982-1987. Today, I want to discuss the steps we have taken toward implementation of our Medium-Term Perspective.

While consolidating the gains made in our initial six years, and building upon what has been accomplished so far, we have begun trying to put in place the necessary instruments and working relationships for dealing with pressing global problems, as defined in our Charter, with the emphasis on both the multidisciplinary and multidimensional approaches set out in the Medium-Term Perspective. While it

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will naturally take some time and more experience to work things out satisfactorily, there is no doubt in my mind of the appropriateness of the Medium-Term Perspective.

Naturally, we did not attempt to begin work on all of the concerns noted in the MTP, but were selective about beginning new activities. In a sense, our own process of evaluation was thus under way; at the same time, we have also begun an external evaluation of two recently completed projects, in addition to our training programme as well as of our institutional relations. The projects I am referring to were developed under the original programmes of the University, and their evaluation therefore might be taken as evidence of our continuing intention to draw lessons from the early programmes of work of the University as we move to broaden the scope of our activities.

In widening our perspective, we hope to ensure that work already under way, or now coming to completion, will become more relevant in its practical application. This underlines the importance we attach not just to relating local or national problems and their possible solutions to their global dimensions and vice-versa. It is now recognized in a world grown increasingly interdependent, that the only true "practical" solution to a developmental problem is one which takes into account its local, national and international implications.

The world today is living through sad and dangerous times, confronted by what the Secretary-General, in his Annual Report to the General Assembly terms the threat of "a new international anarchy." The crisis, as he points out, is aggravated by the threat of nuclear war and extinction of all life, the devastating violence that sophisticated conventional weapons are capable of wrecking (whose frightfulness has been particularly evident in recent weeks and months) and the continued poverty of hundreds of millions around the world seemingly ignored, as the Secretary-General warned, by "the technology and funding of violence and war in

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the name of national security." Adding to the general sense of malaise is the deepening international economic disorder, the continued failure of science and technology to ensure economic growth and employment.

In the context of this deterioration of the human condition, the University's new programme of work has taken shape. With its particular approaches and methodologies, the new programme will, I am confident, bring out the specificity of the United Nations University. While some of the activities are more advanced than others, certain basic contours help to give shape and direction to our work, cutting across the five themes that guide our efforts and the three divisions which implement them. These basic contours help to answer the very legitimate question: What is now the central focus of the work of the United Nations University?

The first of these contours is a concern with peace and conflict resolution. What gives our focus here its freshness is, first, its concern with better understanding of the roots of violence down to the level of local societies and ethnic, religious, linguistic and racial groups. But beyond that, we are actively searching, at these various levels, for mechanisms that, in a time of rapid political and social change and increased competition for resources, will enhance the capacity to resolve or manage conflict in less violent ways.

A second major priority cutting across a number of our activities is our continuing concern with poverty. This is, of course, closely linked to our studies of peace -- for overcoming poverty and meeting basic needs are fundamental to the improvement of the quality of life, without which it would be difficult if not impossible to resolve conflicts and maintain peace.

We are continuing to give particular attention to the problem of world hunger and specifically to the food and energy problems of the poor. We are doing so through

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studies or rural energy systems, of food and energy technologies which could enable the poor to meet their needs better, and through studies of the ways to communicate more effectively and more directly the available scientific knowledge to the poor that could help in raising agricultural productivity. Our expanding training activities through our fellowship programmes also continue to devote increasing attention to the problems of world hunger. One of our major efforts is concentrated on the convergence of food and energy demands and its implications for government planners. We also hope that these studies will help to develop policies that will meet the special needs of the poorest of the poor who have no secure access to food or energy sources. The plight of the poor is in addition an important consideration in the research we are undertaking in the area of human rights.

A third priority is our search for more relevant integrated theories of development that would make structural change possible in a more democratic manner. We are concerned here both with the macro-sociological and historical changes in civilizations as well as with the micro-level, down to the household and its actors - women, children, the aged. In these studies we are taking into account dynamic factors which have proven to be of so much greater magnitude than expected, such as massive migration and technological change. The interplay of these various dynamics forces us to think afresh about the whole development process in various cultural contexts and in radically changed international settings socially, economically and politically.

We are moving into new areas here, but doing so with the benefit of research now accumulated in various University projects over several years. This contour thus provides a good example of our adherence to the philosophy of continuity with change.

A fourth major contour is marked by the University's concern with attempts to increase learning capacity -- not only of individuals, but of groups, institutions and societies - and with the sharing of knowledge in new and non-traditional forms.

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Many of the studies here come under the aegis of the Global Learning Division. These are grounded in the increasing awareness that the fears of common people -- about nuclear war, environmental damage, and economic insecurity -- are beginning to express themselves in demands that pose new challenges to the political, social and economic management capacities of governments and other institutions. Human kind's abilities to manage these complex interacting problems will hinge on our capacity to cope with these demands and incorporate them into our scientific and technological planning. This in turn requires the development of new forms of public education -- of social learning -- as an important element of planning.

Problems of peace, poverty, development or information needs are not, of course, exclusive to the United Nations University. Many organizations, within and without the UN system, count these problems on their work agendas and annually expend much more than we can toward their solution. At the same time, no single organization can cover the whole ground or do it alone. It is not the topic -- it is the approach, the methodology, the outlook that we have adopted, that I believe gives the University its very specific character.

The University is located at the intersection of the world's international organizations and the world's scholars -- and thus can provide valuable service to, and draw insight from, both the UN system and the academic community.

It is only natural, in the clash of everyday affairs, that the UN and its various intergovernmental bodies should be forced to concentrate on relatively immediate issues of high political content. From that perspective, issues very appropriately are often dealt with in the time frame of terms of office -- that is simply the way the world of international and governmental affairs works. The world of the University, on the other hand, strives for the longer and more detached view, but is often remote from everyday realities.

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The contribution that the UN University could make, I believe, is to help these differing approaches to converge to mutual benefit: to bring the longer, detached view into the international council chambers; to illuminate the complex interactions between the sub-national, national, regional and global dimensions of problems; and to bring political and other realities of this rapidly changing world into the quiet of the scholar's study and laboratory.

From these crossroads, a number of responsibilities would seem to flow quite logically. As far as the UN system is concerned, I think the University might be thought of as a kind of research "eye" -- an early warning system -- helping to define the potential relevance or irrelevance of particular problem areas and in formulating policy options.

Along the academic highway that leads from the crossroads, our responsibilities are clearly assigned us by our Charter -- the mobilization of the world scholarly community and the co-ordination of its research programmes with those of the University and the activities of the United Nations and its agencies.

Over the past years, we have increasingly turned our efforts to performing both these roles -- interacting more effectively with the UN system and with the world scholarly community. Let me cite a few concrete examples.

Within the UN system, we developed closer ties with a number of agencies. We participated in an ACC Task Force meeting here at headquarters on Science and Technology for Development; the University will be a core member of three of the four working groups established at the meeting to plan joint activities concerned with endogenous capacity building in the Third World.

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We had a joint meeting with UNESCO in March to discuss areas of future co-operation. We also co-sponsored two important symposia with UNESCO -- one on the Promotion, Dissemination and Teaching of Fundamental Human Rights of Refugees at our Tokyo headquarters in December with the participation of UNHCR, another in Warsaw, also in December, on Early Identification of Imminent Dangers in Social Life. We also participated in the UNESCO meeting on Tasks and Challenges of the Social Sciences in the 1980s in Mexico City last September.

We will be collaborating with the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development and the International Food Policy Research Institute on research on food systems and policies for which we have received support from UNDP. The Council of Ministers of Health for the Arab Gulf States decided in March to conduct a feasibility study of the proposal we made jointly with UNICEF for a Regional Food and Nutrition Centre in the Gulf area.

The Secretary-General delivered an address to the scholarly community of the world at the University's Tokyo headquarters in August during the course of his recent visit to Japan. His remarks focused on the role of the Academic community in Peace, Survival and Development.

The year witnessed increasingly closer contacts between the University and the world's academic and scientific communities. We co-sponsored and participated in meetings and symposia of several of the important international scientific associations, including the International Union of Nutritional Sciences, the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, and the International Political Science Association. We have also been exploring areas of mutual collaboration with ICSU, the International Council of Scientific Unions.

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In the last 12 months we have signed agreements of co-operation with the Association of African Universities, and a memorandum of understanding for co-operation in research and advanced training with the Federation of Arab Scientific Research Councils. The Soviet Academy of Sciences and the Bureau of Education of the Arab Gulf States have both indicated interest in co-operating with us.

These are a few examples of how, over the year, we endeavoured to broaden the outreach of the University to the international academic community. These should be viewed as part of our response to the general goal of the Medium-Term Perspective to make the University a more decentralized and multicentred global institution. Another element in this response were developments both in the matter of associated and incorporated institutions. With the former, we are exploring ways to make greater use of the full range of academic resources available at some of those existing institutions with which we have had programmatic associations in the past.

The progress on Incorporated Institutions is noted in the Report of the Council. We were greatly encouraged by the Council's endorsement of our continued exploratory work, particularly on a proposed International Economic Policy Research Institute on which we held a fruitful meeting at the London School of Economics last March, and an institute for Natural Resources in Africa. The proposal for the latter institute arose out of wide-ranging consultations in Africa (including the Economic Commission for Africa and the Organization of African Unity), and is urged by several distinguished African scientists working in various natural resources sectors who have pointed out that there is a great need to develop the expertise in African national institutions on the basis of the research and development work undertaken by the proposed institute.

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The University has accordingly begun, with the Council's approval, the necessary feasibility study, to examine in detail the many essential issues involved in the creation of such an institute. What is envisaged is a high-powered but small institute, suitably equipped and supported, that is organically linked through a college of research associates with national institutions. Such a high-calibre multidisciplinary institute should be capable of concentrating scarce talents and resources, and of assisting national and other institutions in developing graduate courses, research programmes and consultancy services, on a selective and incremental basis, in order to make a real difference.

The two proposals have already received indications of significant interest and support from a number of governments. They illustrate how the University can fruitfully carry out the mandate of its Charter in its programme and institutional development at the national, regional and global levels.

Another important goal of the Medium-Term Perspective stressed by the Council is the enhancement of the intellectual strength of the Tokyo Centre. As the Council Report notes, a significant step in the process was made during the year with the decision taken by the Japanese Ministry of Education on a permanent headquarters site in central Tokyo; the very valuable plot of land was made available to us by the City of Tokyo. A commission has now been established by the Ministry of Education to oversee feasibility studies on construction of the permanent headquarters and advise the Japanese Government on this matter. I should like here again to record the University's gratitude to the Government of Japan and the City of Tokyo for this far-sighted gesture.

Centre activities also included the hosting of a meeting of the Palme Commission (of which I was a member) in December. In connection with this we co-sponsored a disarmament workshop for Commission members, experts and Asian scholars, which met both in Tokyo and Hiroshima.

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The workshop was one of a number of ways in which the University expanded interaction with the Japanese intellectual and government communities during the year. We also, for example, inaugurated, with Sophia University and the International University of Japan, an annual lecture series on the historical development experience of widely differing societies.

The centre's intellectual and operational strength was further increased with the appointment of two new Vice-Rectors, who took up their duties in January. The full vice-rectoral team is now in place and operating.

Since the Report of the Council gives details of the overall University programme activity, I would here like to touch on them only briefly on a divisional basis:

The Development Studies Division focused on questions of resource management, food and nutrition policy and rural energy systems -- it was in its work that the broad contours of our concern with poverty were most evident.

The Regional and Global Studies Division organized preparatory work for our studies of peace and global transformation. It was also engaged in exploration of new activities that could broaden our research on socio-cultural dimensions of development and demographic change and the social and ethical implications of technology. This division is particularly concerned that the problems we deal with are examined regionally and within their historical context.

The Global Learning Division represents a new field of endeavour -- in which the University and UNESCO logically have a number of areas of interests where their efforts can be complementary. Specific project possibilities are now being explored with UNESCO. Briefly, the division tries to respond to problems created

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by the rapid and complex societal changes which the world is now experiencing, both at the national and international levels. In particular, we have identified certain areas in the so-called "Information Society" where we believe the University could make a meaningful contribution. One would deal with the problems that arise out of the management of complex systems, and as such is a concern of both the industrialized and developing worlds. A second deals with questions of how to reach various target populations -- in particular those who have been disadvantaged -- in the Third World with scientific information that could greatly help them to improve the quality of their own lives and build up endogenous creative capabilities.

In the final analysis, of course, the University is going to be judged by what it has accomplished. In this connection, I should say how gratified we were with the conclusions on the University's activities by the Joint Inspection Unit last November. The two inspectors, Mr. J.C. Rodriguez-Arias and Mr. Earl D. Sohm expressed satisfaction with the University's progress to date as well as with a number of the specific goals of the Medium-Term Perspective which were then being developed -- including the expansion of our activities under five themes, the enhancement of the intellectual capacity of the Tokyo centre, and the aim of making the University a decentralized global institution. Both the University and the Council have, of course, studied the JIU report very carefully, and the Council comments on it in its own Annual Report. In welcoming the JIU report, the Council noted that it was positive towards the University and supportive of the new directions and broad intellectual concerns.

I should also report that several of the University's original projects were brought to a close as planned during the year. An example of this is the project on Sharing of Traditional Technology, which conducted field research in the villages of eight Asian nations and brought to light new insights

about the role traditional technologies might play in village life with appropriate modern scientific input. A publication on the results of the project is now being prepared.

A number of quantitative indicators of the University's work are cited in the Report of the Council, among which I might mention the 367 United Nations University fellowships that have been awarded to date -- 98.9 per cent of them to Fellows from developing countries. During the period of the Council's review, we issued 110 publications with a significant increase in technical reports.

All in all, Mr. Chairman, I would suggest that our efforts of the past year, while weathering inevitable challenges and reassessments, indicate that the United Nations University is beginning to be seen as an intellectually serious institution capable of offering perspectives that are relevant to today's changing, troubled and complex world.

The establishment of the University's academic credibility is an essential prerequisite of our being able to fulfil, in any meaningful manner, our Charter mandate to be an "international community of scholars." This credibility is important to us in practical terms as well. Because largely of resource limitations, the community we have been able to create so far -- if numbered only in terms of those who have some direct, contractual link with us -- is still a relative handful of institutions and scholars. I think we must be realistic about this.

This has led us to a careful examination of what we have come to refer to as "parallel or complementary activities" -- that is, the linking up of our programme activities with areas of the ongoing concern of a large number of individuals and institutions in the world's academic community.

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I believe that the concept of parallel or complementary activities speaks very directly to the Charter injunction that we should co-ordinate our work "so far as possible with research programmes of the world scholarly community." It could be a very important avenue for us in the mobilization of a sufficiently large body of scholarship throughout the world to have a real impact on those very problems which the Charter assigns to our attention. This, to me, is the real promise of the United Nations University -- and I would submit that the promise, in varying ways, is already beginning to be fulfilled.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates of this Committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to appear before you on behalf of the United Nations University.
