

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

7 November 1983

Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Delegates,

Once again I have the honour and pleasure to make a statement before this Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, on behalf of the United Nations University. First, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Ambassador Dietze on his election as chairman of this body. I am certain that the deliberations of this Committee will greatly benefit from his wisdom and guidance.

I have spoken before this Committee on three occasions, the first of which was in October 1980, soon after I assumed office as Rector of the United Nations University. These three statements concentrated successively on, first, the broad ideas the University had developed toward its future direction, second, how these ideas had crystallized in the Medium-Term Perspective (MTP), and, third, the initial steps taken toward implementation of that perspective. I am pleased to be able to say that the Annual Report of the Council, covering the period July 1982-June 1983, which I am presenting today, shows how the University has moved beyond this planning and initiation into the first year of actual programme work under the Medium-Term Perspective. This progress is a manifestation of the efforts that have gone into translating the Medium-Term Perspective into action. It is also evidence of the University's commitment to the policy of continuity and change that has guided its thinking over the last few years.

In his recent Report on the Work of the United Nations to the United Nations General Assembly, the Secretary-General reinforced the views he presented last year on the state of the world by emphasizing how little progress had been made toward solutions and that the "great international turmoil" has produced a "stalemate on all horizons". Again, he lamented the waning political usefulness the United Nations had experienced after its early years. If we recall the world at the time the United Nations was established, we remember a world quite different from that we know today.

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Today there are many more nations, all with greater political consciousness, striving to find an appropriate place in a world that is growing increasingly smaller. The result has been alterations in linkages between various parts of the world and even changes in the nature of change itself. Out of this has emerged a world in transformation, with profound and rapid changes and extremely painful transitions at all levels of society everywhere, and increasing interdependence among nations who still do not understand the often contradictory processes of change and the implications that it has for their future. Overall, therefore, we see more conflicts and many more problems to solve.

Because we do not have adequate understanding of these processes of change we have not been able to find solutions to problems of global dimensions. Accordingly, our obsolescent analytical concepts often leave us at a loss in making choices among possible courses of action. The resulting drift and paralysis of the collective capacity for moral and political judgement have added to the distortion of patterns of the generation, application, and distribution of knowledge whereby an inordinate proportion of science and technology is being devoted to military purposes while efforts for solving the problems of poverty, hunger and injustice, to which science and technology can contribute, remain neglected. Unfortunately, the continuing knowledge explosion has contributed little, as yet, to our understanding of how to approach these pressing global problems of human survival, development and welfare more effectively.

Looking broadly at these complex and interlinked issues and concerns, and at our collective incapacity to respond adequately to them, one sees that the need for new intellectual responses to the deteriorating global situation is even greater than when I spoke of this need here in this Committee a year ago. The Secretary-General observed in his Report that we are "... more than ever in need of a fresh collective look at some of the major problems of the world."

I believe that in this situation the United Nations University, positioned as it is at the intersection of the international academic community and the UN system, has a special opportunity and responsibility to provide fresh and relevant inputs into the process of creating a new framework for appropriate and effective political action. I would therefore like to present the work of the University, outlined in the Annual Report before you, as a contribution - modest at this point, but not insignificant, I think - to the process of harnessing the collective

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and integrated wisdom of the world's scholars to the world's needs, to the creation of a truly global perspective which recognises the reality that just and lasting solutions to global problems will only be found on the basis of the ultimately inescapable fact of the solidarity of all humankind.

Thus, in the second year of implementing its Medium-Term Perspective, the University has brought together scholars from many parts of the world to begin to take a fresh look at the global problems embraced by its five themes: (1) Peace, Security, Conflict Resolution and Global Transformation; (2) The Global Economy; (3) Hunger, Poverty, Resources and the Environment; (4) Human and Social Development and Co-existence of Peoples, Cultures and Social Systems; and (5) Science and Technology and Their Social and Ethical Implications.

I should emphasize that while the research activities under these themes represent a reorientation of its work, the University continues to concern itself to a very significant degree with development problems generally and with poverty and underdevelopment and the global structural disparities in which they are set. This is a commitment made in the Medium-Term Perspective, and it is reflected in the titles of the major programme areas such as the Global Economy; Energy Systems and Policy; Resource Policy and Management; The Food-Energy Nexus; Food, Nutrition, Biotechnology; and Poverty and Human and Social Development. Most of the more than 50 projects in these areas are directly relevant to poverty and development and flow from the earlier work of the University. Beyond such projects as these, the University also considers it important to be able to respond to other, still-emerging, problems such as climate changes brought on by human activity in tropical forests, and the equitable sharing of the world's natural resources and of developments in microprocessors and biotechnology.

Drawing on the Annual Report of the Council, I would like to refer to some of our activities to make two important points. First, to show the distinctive approach that the University has evolved in addressing global problems that other scientists, scholars and policy-makers are involved with. Second, to delineate the emerging profile of the University as an institution centred on three core concerns: 1. peace and conflict resolution; 2. development in a changing world; and 3. science and technology for human welfare.

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I need not dwell on the significance of the first element of this profile. One of the most important research undertakings of the University is devoted to the study of Peace and Conflict Resolution; an important component of this is a project on Peace and Global Transformation which will attempt to relate the fears and tensions caused by the little understood forces of change, to which I have referred already, to the potentiality and actuality of conflict. We hope particularly to contribute to the enhancement of the capacity to deal with causes of conflict and to explore further regional security problems. We shall also be examining possible new concepts of security and vulnerability and of non-violent social and political order in different societies, problems and processes of demilitarization, and conflicts over natural resources, linking peace to human rights in a changing, pluralistic world.

We have planned joint activities on regional security and peace studies with the International Association of Universities (IAU) and the International Social Science Council. We will also be collaborating with the United Nations Secretariat in preparing for the International Year of Peace and, in addition, are now actively preparing for a Tokyo Seminar on Peace, Science and Technology, the third in this series of annual seminars on peace and conflict resolution. The Secretary-General's Report called attention to "the longer-term prospect of the militarization of outer space and the computerization and automation of warfare, which could eventually escape political control altogether." Recognizing the need for independent studies of the conditions essential for maintaining outer space for peaceful purposes, the University, in consultation with the UN Outer Space Affairs Division and in collaboration with the International Institute of Space Law and the Hague Academy of International Law, will conduct studies with a view to recommending legal measures designed for more effective control of uses of outer space and to providing inputs to deliberations by governments and concerned international bodies such as the UN Committees on Disarmament and on Outer Space.

The second element in the emerging profile of the University is "Development in a Changing World." The many aspects of our activities in this area are included in the Annual Report. I would like here to concentrate on just one: the serious malfunctioning of the international economic system and its debilitating effect on all development efforts.

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Many voices have called for a serious review and re-appraisal of the continuing economic disorder; they have come from inside and outside the UN system and have included groups of Member States, like the Non-Aligned Movement, and other organizations such as the Commonwealth Secretariat, the North-South Roundtable of the Society for International Development, and from many other quarters. The University concluded, in the course of the preparation of its Medium-Term Perspective that a sustained research effort was required in this area to find a fresh focus on the problems of the global economy. Intensive efforts, involving many leading economists, led to the concept of the World Institute for Development Economic Research, known now as WIDER, which would help identify and analyze global economic issues and problems and assist in evolving policy responses to them and new modes of international economic co-operation and management. We are optimistic that the institute will soon be established because of the offer of two governments in Europe to host it and contribute substantially to its funding. We believe that its establishment will be a major step in the evolution of the United Nations University and that, in time, it will make a significant contribution to a common diagnosis and consensus on the concerted action that may be needed to solve problems that, otherwise, will increasingly plague the economic health of the world and, particularly of the Third World.

In a different way the University has also begun to contribute to the debate on global economic disorder. A "brainstorming" session organised here in New York in February examined the implications for Third World countries of the prospects of continued low growth in the OECD countries even after the recession has ended. Participants included leading scholars from North and South and East and West. There was general consensus that the impact of the recession on the South would be long-term and was already devastating, and that de-linking from the North might not be a viable strategy because of, among a number of reasons, the South's need for access to science and technology. It was further recognised that we lack the conceptual framework for linking the impact of the present economic crisis on the Third World with the question of economic restructuring in the North and the need for structural reform in the South. Lastly, the role of effective South-South co-operation was emphasized. We believe that, from time to time, sessions of this kind can serve the United Nations community by bringing together distinguished members of the world academic community to focus on emerging global problems.

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In the University's concern with development in a changing world, our activities through our networks of collaborating institutions and scholars cover more than 60 countries. As I hope to show in the remaining part of my statement, existing and potential collaboration is widespread. I would like, however, briefly to elaborate on what is said in the Annual Report on some significant developments in Africa - where many manifestations of the deepening development crisis are seen in their most acute form. Of course, African scholars and their institutions are part of virtually all our networks of research and training. However, we have thought that some specific responses were also needed. One major example is the proposal for a research and training centre in Africa for natural resources which would be the focal point of a network throughout Africa. The proposed institute received full support at a consultative meeting held in Nairobi in January 1983. A number of African governments have expressed interest in hosting the institute and have indicated their willingness to contribute substantial sums. A second example is a proposal for a major Regional Food and Nutrition project involving a network of African institutions which has been developed in co-operation with the Association of African Universities. We have been informed by the Commissioner for Development of the European Economic Community that this project is now under active consideration for funding. A third example is a collaborative activity with UNITAR on a project called African Regional Perspectives. This is part of a larger undertaking involving similar studies of perspectives and priorities for development in Africa, the Arab World, Asia and Latin America.

The third element of the University's emerging profile - science and technology for human welfare - is part of the fabric of the total activity of the University. Under this concern we seek to find ways whereby science and technology can be harnessed more effectively for the elimination of poverty, hunger and inequality. In two areas where scientific and technological breakthroughs of major significance are still taking place - in microprocessors and biotechnology - we are seeking through research and training to see how their benefits can be shared from the start by the Third World. In this area of emphasis, as in the previous two, the University plans to establish a research and training centre, in this case a regional institute for Latin America and the Caribbean in Bio-Technology which we expect to be based in Venezuela.

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The three proposed research and training centres to which I have referred represent a major step forward in the institutional development of the United Nations University. In the early years of the University we concentrated on establishing links with existing institutions; this policy served us well and will continue. However, in certain areas the need for new institutions has clearly been demonstrated in the course of rigorous analysis of the problems we face and the kind of response that is required. We have been greatly encouraged by the positive reaction of Member States and of the academic community to these initiatives.

Mr. Chairman, as I have already indicated, the Annual Report before you, shows that the University has made significant progress in the past year. However, we must be realistic. The University is still a small institution and through its own research and training activities it can make only a limited impact on the truly daunting problems faced by the global community. Therefore it becomes important that we involve others as extensively as possible in collaborative and associated activities. This is what I see as the catalytic role of the University and I attach great importance to it. Towards the achievement of this role a number of recent developments have been very encouraging.

The work of the Regional and Global Studies Division of the University in the search for more satisfactory development strategies has already stimulated other institutions to move into this area of research, thus bolstering efforts to bring about a more humane social sciences approach focussing more on people and their own needs and aspirations. Explorations by the Global Learning Division into questions about the management of complexity or the legal issues raised in the management of such global commons as space, radio frequencies, river basins and transborder data flows have stimulated much interest and active response. These are frontier areas of potentially great significance for Third World nations if they are to lessen and not increase their dependencies on the North.

The University's mandate to address global issues makes it imperative that the University continually undertakes a large number of exploratory activities. It is primarily in this way that it can maintain its relevance and the capacity to respond to issues of global significance. The heartening response to exploratory activities by scholars, institutions and governments with collaboration proposals, including those funded by external sources at no cost to the University, have led to promises of closer ties and greater co-operative efforts in a number of nations.

In Spain, for example, following initial activities and various consultations with government and academic leaders, a formal meeting was organized in Madrid on the 14 and 15 of September to consider in detail various proposals for co-operation between the UNU and Spain. It was a fruitful meeting and details of decisions are now being worked out.

In India, the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) has offered its co-operation on research into various scientific and technological concerns that figure in our programme. A good example of the sort of collaboration that a country like India can offer the UNU was provided last year in the training arrangements that the Central Food Technological Research Institute in Mysore, a University-associated institution, developed to build up staff capabilities at the Food Technology Development Centre in Bogor, Indonesia. A number of other institutions in developing countries have expressed interest in similar South-South "twinning" operations.

Collaborative activities with Canada took a major step forward with the signing of an agreement in Tokyo in June with the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) on co-operation and joint financing of an international energy study group that will undertake the first major review of available energy technologies and their relevance to the needs of Third World countries. We think the result will be of great value in planning and policy making.

We have already co-operated with IDRC this past year on problems on research organization and management in the Third World, particularly to meet the requirements of small- and medium-scale industries. A global workshop organized by the Development Studies Division was held in Ottawa with regional workshops held simultaneously in Bogota, Nairobi and Singapore and linked by a tele-conferencing system.

A set of agreements establishing closer academic co-operation and extending existing institutional agreements with China was signed in May when the Secretary-General of the Chinese Academy of Sciences was in Tokyo.

Following recent visits to the Soviet Academy of Sciences in Moscow to explore the possibilities of more extensive collaboration with institutes and research centres in the Soviet Union an agreement was reached on the participation of the Soviet Academy in three University seminars later this year. As the result of a recent visit to Tokyo by the Vice-President of the Academy we are exploring further a general agreement of co-operation between the University and the Academy. A former Council member and a UNU staff member visited Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Poland and Romania to discuss with government and academic leaders potential opportunities for participation in the University's programme and institutional development.

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A valuable meeting was held in Zurich, Switzerland, in June, where we met with a cross-section of representatives of European universities and research institutions and discussed possibilities for co-operation. This is a good example of the benefit the University gains from meetings with various academic communities and of the outreach activities being developed by the Global Learning Division.

Positioned as it is at the intersection of the international academic community and the UN system, the University's collaborative activities have involved not only academic institutions but also organizations within the UN family. Considerable progress has been made in the past year in strengthening such efforts particularly as the University moved more into the implementation of the Medium-Term Perspective. A good illustration of how the University's work dovetails with the activities of other system organizations is provided in the recent statement of the Director-General to the Executive Board of UNESCO. He said "in fulfilling its role, UNESCO can now make use of the findings of the studies carried out by the United Nations University. This is exactly what is envisaged in Major Programme I when it refers to establishing an analytical and research network and making use of existing studies. Needless to say, first and foremost among the institutions whose assistance will be sought will be the United Nations University and the various bodies that co-operate under its auspices." I have shown earlier in some examples how collaborative work has also been undertaken with a number of other organizations in the UN system. Among these are activities with UNEP and UNICEF in the food-energy nexus project, IAEA and UNDP in the work of the Global Learning Division, FAO, UNCTAD, and WHO in food, nutrition and poverty, UNITAR in African regional perspectives, and many others.

In all these collaborative activities the University seeks to contribute its own distinctive approach to the research and training being undertaken. The University's involvement in such collaboration stems directly from the injunction of its Charter that it "... shall devote its work to research into the pressing global problems of human survival, development and welfare that are the concern of the United Nations and its agencies."

Finally, in reporting on the increased range of the University's collaborative activities I should mention the emphasis we are now placing on collaboration with international scientific and educational organizations such as the International Council of Scientific Unions, the International Geographical Union, the International Social Science Council and the Council for the Development of Economic and Social Research in Africa.

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I cannot, of course, leave any discussion of the development of the University without mention of our host country, Japan, which has done so much to make it a reality. There has been heartening progress over the year in the planning process of our permanent headquarters site. We have also continued to expand our contacts with Japanese institutions and scholars in a variety of ways.

Now, Mr. Chairman, with your permission, I should like to touch briefly on the financial situation of the University. Although the level of our activities has increased, it should be made clear that our income is not adequate to implement fully the Medium-Term Perspective. It has been encouraging that in the past year, we have received strong indications of substantial new support from many sources, including Member States, for research and training centres, such as the proposed World Institute for Development Economic Research and the Institute for Natural Resources in Africa, and also for operational projects. However, the central importance of the main endowment fund of the University, as the principal funding mechanism for the University, should not be overlooked in recognizing the value of other forms of funding. We are therefore very grateful to those Member States who have initiated or continued contributions to the Endowment Fund in the year under review.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, I think we can say with some confidence that the University has begun to move positively in the implementation of the Medium-Term Perspective. In addition to ongoing and new programme activities we have also begun to move in new directions in our training efforts to strengthen the interdisciplinarity of the training programme through the establishment of inter-institutional training networks. The University now has 32 associated institutions and more than 100 research and training units carrying out its work in more than 60 countries. The number of UNU Fellows presently in training is 58, and 350 have completed training. During the year, 41 workshops, seminars, symposia and specific meetings were held, primarily in developing countries. The University also published or co-published 54 titles, with a notable increase in monographs with broad appeal.

Thus in many ways, and at many levels, the profile of the University and the specificity of its approach are becoming clearly defined. We have begun to attract and stimulate the interest of other organizations, universities and individual scholars and thus the catalytic role of the University is taking effect. Additional

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links are being forged with our UN system counterparts both at the planning and operational levels, and the University Centre in Tokyo has further strengthened its intellectual capacity. I believe that the Annual Report before you shows that activities to date have confirmed the soundness of the course set by the Medium-Term Perspective for 1982-1987. Mr. Chairman, I am grateful for this opportunity to address the Committee and, as in previous years, I know that the University will benefit from the wisdom of its observations and discussion. Thank you.