

Statement by Mr. Soedjatmoko
Rector of the United Nations University
before the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

July 17, 1985

Mr. President and Distinguished Delegates:

It is my pleasure to introduce the report of the Council of the United Nations University for the calendar year 1984. This is the first occasion on which I am reporting to the Economic and Social Council, and I will ask your indulgence to allow me to give some background information on the work of the University as well as to highlight the activities of 1984, updating some of them.

As you know, the Charter of the UNU enjoins the University to conduct "research into the pressing global problems of human survival, development and welfare that are the concern of the United Nations and its agencies". The University is defined in the Charter as "an international community of scholars, engaged in research, post-graduate training and dissemination of knowledge in furtherance of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations". The task of the United Nations University, therefore, is to enhance and complement the work of the United Nations and its agencies by providing an academic and intellectual perspective on the broad range of issues with which the system is concerned and to strengthen the knowledge base upon which responses to the complex global problems of our time can be fashioned.

It is a formidable challenge to scholarship today to keep up with or at least remain aware of the changing nature of the problems that confront particular societies and the international system as a whole today. The attempt to arrive at reasonable and effective courses of action must be able to call upon a body of relevant research and reflection. This is not only a matter of getting the facts; it also requires the mobilization of scientific capabilities. Governments and intergovernmental bodies do harness scientific talent to the pursuit of policy goals. But a full mobilization of independent scholarship would seem to require mechanisms through which scholars can organize themselves into networks of knowledge that are problem-oriented rather than discipline-oriented. The United Nations University is engaged in an effort to develop just such arrangements.

The UNU began its operations in Tokyo in September, 1975. Thus we are looking forward to the celebration of our first full decade in the autumn of this year. We are one of the youngest members of the United Nations family. But the UNU is new not only in chronological terms; it is really a new kind of University, for an international community that faces new kinds of issues. The UNU bridges the academic world and the United Nations system. The Charter of the University guarantees it academic freedom, but

it enjoys a more activist mandate than most universities to use the instruments of scholarship to address pressing global issues.

The UNU carries out its mandate through a decentralized network of scholars and academic institutions, coordinated by the headquarters staff in Tokyo. It also conducts a post-graduate fellowship programme for advanced training, in which over 500 young scholars have participated to date. Thirty-seven academic institutions in 31 countries currently have agreements of association with the UNU, under which they co-operate with us in carrying out our programme of research and training. The University Council approved two additional agreements of association at its 25th session last week, which will bring the total to 39 institutions in 33 countries.

In 1984, the UNU entered a new phase of institutional development, with the establishment of the first research and training centre to be created wholly by the University. This is the UNU World Institute for Development Economics Research, which is known by its acronym as WIDER. It is located in Helsinki, Finland, having been established with a generous grant to the UNU endowment fund by the Government of Finland. The members of the Board and the Director of WIDER were appointed in early 1985, and have held their first Board meeting in May to define the research priorities of the new Institute.

The UNU is continuing to prepare the ground for a second research and training centre, the Institute for Natural Resources in Africa, known as INRA. The Government of the Ivory Coast has offered to host INRA, and has made a generous pledge toward its establishment. In addition, the Government of Zambia has offered both to host and help finance a mineral resources unit of INRA. We are now trying to secure a financial base for INRA that will insure its long-term viability. The government of France hosted a technical meeting to review the INRA prospectus in June, 1985.

The University Council has endorsed the early establishment of a research and training centre in Japan, as an institute for advanced study, and urged that the University develop programmatic activities that would facilitate the realization of this endeavor.

Under the Medium Term Perspective, which covers the period 1982-1987, the research programme of the United Nations University is implemented under five broad themes and nine programme areas. The major activities under these headings are presented in the annual report of the Council for 1984. I would like to use this occasion to highlight and update that information very briefly.

Starting in November, 1984, the UNU held a series of four seminars on Regional Peace and Security. The seminars were organized in close consultation with the United Nations Secretariat for the International Year of Peace. Part of their purpose was to provide scholarly background

information for the regional, inter-governmental meetings organized by the United Nations in preparation for the International Year of Peace.

The University's continued expansion of co-operative activities with other international organizations is illustrated by the series of joint colloquia with the Hague Academy of International Law. The sixth and seventh joint colloquia were held in March and November, 1984, respectively. The sixth colloquium explored proposals for strengthening international law safeguarding peaceful uses of outer space. The report of this gathering was published as a book entitled Maintaining Outer Space for Peaceful Uses, and was distributed in pre-publication form to delegates of member states during the 39th session of the United Nations General Assembly. The seventh colloquium addressed the future of international law concerning the protection of the environment.

The United Nations University coordinates the international food data systems project, known as INFOODS, which is an international network of people and institutions involved with the collection, storage, exchange and use of food-composition data. It was set up by the UNU to improve the availability of current, reliable and accessible data on the composition of foods, for use by a variety of basic food and health-related services. Regional and sub-regional working groups have been formed for Europe, Asia, Latin America, North America, the Mediterranean region, and the Nordic countries.

The result of three years of UNU-supported studies of the functional consequences of iron deficiency were reported at a meeting in Indonesia in November, 1984. Research among villagers in Egypt and West Java showed that individuals with iron deficiency even when not severe enough to cause anemia, suffered more infectious disease, impairment of immune processes, and poorer work capacity. Improvement was shown after only eight weeks of iron supplementation, with iron-deficient children showing full restoration of cognitive functions after this amount of time.

Fieldwork began in 1984 for a joint study with UNICEF in which the UNU is examining the effects of nutrition and primary health care programmes at the household level. The project, from which we already have some results, is expected to make a significant contribution to the formulation of nutrition and primary health care guidelines as part of the effort by WHO, UNICEF, and national governments to assure "health for all by the year 2000".

As part of a project that is measuring and evaluating patterns of land and resource use, the UNU convened a conference on Climatic, Biotic and Human interactions in the Humid Tropics in February, 1985, at the Institute for Space Research in Sao Jose dos Campos, Brazil. It brought together the leading tropical climatologists, soil scientists, biologists, limnologists, and so forth, to present scientific papers and exchange information on the state of current knowledge and the research that still needs to be

done. The papers from that conference have already been revised and edited for publication.

The first of a series of regional training colleges in micro-processor technology was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka in June, 1984. These five-week courses complement training programmes at the International Center for Theoretical Physics and Trinity College, Dublin in which UNU fellows participate. The second regional training college was held in Bogota, Colombia in June, 1985, and the third is planned for 1986 in Beijing. In addition, we have just started a joint project in the field of microprocessor training with Tunku Abdul Rahman College and the University of Malaya, and are discussing joint projects with the University of Addis Ababa and the University of Yaoundé.

An international directory of anthropologists and social scientists who work on food and nutrition has now been made available by the UNU. The directory, which was compiled by the International Union of Anthropology and Ethnography and the International Union of Nutritional Sciences, is stored in a computer at the MIT/Harvard International Food and Nutrition Program. It contains information about individual specialists, including their academic and field experience. It can be accessed directly by computer; print-outs are also available.

The Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues, to which the University has been lending research support, met at the UNU in June, 1985, for a three-day session whose main theme was the protection of vulnerable groups, particularly displaced persons. Following the meeting, the UNU co-sponsored with the Commission and the Japanese National Institute for Research Advancement a one-day forum on humanitarian issues for an invited audience of Japanese academics, policy-makers, and journalists; and members of the diplomatic corps and foreign press.

I am aware that this session of the Economic and Social Council is giving special consideration to a review of the immediate and longer-term aspects of the critical situation in Africa. I would, therefore, like to draw the Council's attention to the activities of the UNU in Africa. All are characterized by an effort to use the UNU's status as an international community of scholars to mobilize African expertise in a long-term, co-ordinated programme to analyze, anticipate and contribute to solutions for the continent's grave problems.

I have already mentioned the efforts of the University to establish the Institute for Natural Resources in Africa. The thrust of the activities of the proposed Institute is in practical research and training activities that can help lay the foundations for the renewed development effort that must arise out of the relief phase of response to the crisis in Africa.

Another such practical research and training activity that the UNU is ready to implement is a joint project of the UNU and the Association of African Universities, on the specific food and nutrition needs of the

region. The aim of this five-year project is to augment scientific and institutional resources for research and development, planning, training, and related advisory services. The first phase of the project will concentrate on post-harvest food conservation and food-processing technologies, taking into account the work of other agencies in food strategies and policies as well as in nutrition and health.

Among the United Nations University's regular programme activities in Africa is a five-year project called "Nation-building or Transnationalization in Africa". It began in 1982 with the main objective of studying the question of whether actual development strategies in Africa contribute to self-reliant development, which is a necessary condition for nation-building, or rather encourage the integration of Africa into the dominant global process of transnationalization. With a co-ordinating unit in Dakar, Senegal, 36 researchers from 24 African countries are engaged in the project, working specifically on three themes: 1) the state and the peasant, 2) the state, natural resources and industrialization strategies, and 3) the state, the social components of the nation, and world conflicts.

The Special Committee on Africa is a group of senior African scholars who, under the auspices of the UNU, are attempting through collaborative research and reflection to map a more stable future for the continent defined by and for the aspirations of Africans. The Secretariat and the Project Director are based in Nairobi.

The Activities that I have just mentioned are those elements of the University programme that deal exclusively with Africa. In addition, throughout the programme of the UNU, in our projects that deal with peace and conflict resolution, food, energy, natural resources, economic issues, human and social development, and science and technology, African scholars and African problems are engaged.

In addition to these research projects, the UNU has awarded fellowships to more than 160 African scholars. The success of this training effort is marked by an unusually high rate of return of fellows to their home countries, and by a pattern of career development among them that points to the relevance of their training experiences. The UNU will build on these contacts, research findings and experiences in Africa in designing new programme activities in the future.

This very brief and partial recitation of some of the major activities of the United Nations University in 1984 and the early part of 1985 illustrates, I believe, the ways in which the University is working closely with other parts of the United Nations system. The UNU is providing academic input to the United Nations designated "years" such as the International Year of Peace and International Youth Year. It is also conducting research that is a basis for the definition and analysis of the issues that are of concern to the United Nations; its specialized agencies such as UNESCO, UNICEF, WHO, FAO, and others; and to its member governments. In most

cases, the research is planned and carried out in consultation with these bodies.

The Charter of the United Nations University calls for the UNU Council to report annually to ECOSOC, the General Assembly (through the Second Committee) and UNESCO. Up until 1985, ECOSOC had taken the position that the UNU fulfilled its Charter obligation to ECOSOC indirectly through its reporting to the Second Committee. However, as you know, earlier this year we were asked to start reporting directly to ECOSOC. At almost the same time, the General Assembly passed Resolution 39/217, which is designed to rationalize the workload of the United Nations by instituting a system of biennial consideration of reports submitted to the Second Committee. I would like to make two points about reporting requirements specifically in relation to the UNU. One is that, as of 1984, the University has moved to a biennial cycle of programming and budgeting, so it is eminently logical for its reporting to its sponsoring bodies to be consistent with this cycle. Secondly, for a small institution like the UNU, annual reporting to three bodies-- ECOSOC, the Second Committee, and UNESCO-- as well as to our governing Council at its two yearly sessions, places an enormous burden on our very small professional staff. It means essentially that we must report five times every year on our work; which is to say ten times on the single programme and budget of each biennium. The staff requirements for preparing and the attendant travel requirements for presenting these reports is disproportionate to the small increments of information that are presented on each occasion. Therefore we very much hope that the questions that still surround the implementation of General Assembly Resolution 39/217 can be quickly resolved, and that the UNU can move to a system of biennial reporting to fulfill our obligations to our sponsoring organizations. I have been informed by the Secretariat that this matter will be taken up by the Second Committee.

As the end of 1984 brought the UNU past the mid-point of its first Medium Term Perspective, this was a natural time for the University to begin to take stock of its achievements thus far, and to plan its future course. I believe that the identity of the UNU has begun to coalesce in a distinctive manner. The most important elements of it are the capability to pursue research at the cutting edge of scientific knowledge, the willingness to take risks in intellectual explorations to make sure that new aspects of the merging human situation in the late 20th century are not ignored, and the insistence that University research projects include, as an integral part of the design as well as the execution of projects, the perspectives of scholars and scientists from the developing countries. One of the most distinctive contributions of the UNU, I believe, is to provide a setting for the mobilization of indigenous scholarship in all regions, a setting in which problems are defined and approaches to them fashioned from within rather than in conformity to an agenda set from the outside.