GLOBAL SEMINAR '85 ON INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Opening Address

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Distinguished colleagues, students, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the UNU Global Seminar '85 which is opening this morning in this mountain resort city of Hakone. I am sure that your week of discussions will be stimulating and rewarding. On behalf of the United Nations University, and personally, let me express warm greetings to the students and lecturers who have assembled here to discuss the question of international organizations-- and particularly those of the United Nations system.

Some of our lecturers have travelled from abroad to join us in this seminar, and I am most grateful to them for having agreed to share with us their knowledge about and experience in different UN agencies. I should also like to express our deep gratitude to the seven collaborating Japanese universities-- Aoyama Gakuin University, Chuo University, International Christian University, International University of Japan, Keio University, Sophia University and Tsuda Juku College. A number of professors from these universities have generously agreed to deliver lectures and lead discussion groups. In addition, some of them participated in the preparatory meetings and took care of the arrangements at their respective universities for the enrolment of students in this seminar. Thanks to their efforts, the announcements about the seminar were given wide exposure among students, and, as a result, we are pleased to see that a surprisingly large number of students, both at undergraduate and post-graduate levels, are participating in the seminar. I mention this because I believe it is a reflection of the enthusiasm both professors and students have about this kind of inter-academic undertaking in Japan.

It is precisely with this idea of collaboration with the Japanese academic community in mind that the United Nations University decided to launch a series of UNU Global Seminars. The UNU has, of course, already collaborated with a number of Japanese scientific institutions. But with Japan as our host country, we consider that further contacts and co-operation with the universities and research institutions in this country will further strengthen our work. And, while we have had some contacts with the students in Japan, this meeting is really the first occasion for us to engage in direct dialogue with them.

As some of you may know, the United Nations University was established with the adoption of its Charter by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1973, and began its operation in Tokyo in September 1975-- so we are marking our 10th anniversary this year. We are, therefore, one of the newest members of the United Nations family.

Moreover, compared to the great traditional universities of the world, the UNU is a newcomer indeed. But 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 is unique, in the first place, in that it is the academic arm of the United Nations. Therefore, it has one foot in the academic world and one foot in the UN system. We are protected by our Charter, by our governing Council, whose members participate as individuals and not as representatives of governments, and by our independent financing, which acts as a buffer against the interplay of political pressures that operate within the United Nations. We also enjoy a more activist mandate than most universities: our Charter specifically instructs us to use the instruments of scholarship to address the "pressing global problems of human survival, development and welfare".

The University's research, training and dissemination efforts, which are co-ordinated through the Tokyo Centre, are carried out through extensive networks of scholars and research institutes throughout the world. Added to these are the research and training centres that the UNU itself is establishing. The first UN University research and training centre, dealing with the international economy, has been set up in Finland. We are well along in our planning for two others, one in Africa devoted to natural resources, and one in Latin America on biotechnology. We are also planning a research and training centre in Japan which would be an institute of advanced studies. It may interest you to know that this Global Seminar, in fact, is part of our efforts towards the establishment of such a centre in Japan.

The idea for a United Nations University was first put before the UN by the late Secretary-General U Thant. His original vision of a United Nations University was of an institution devoted to peace and progress. The UNU Charter reflects this vision in its instruction that the University focus its research on "survival, development and welfare". During the first five years of existence, the work of the University concentrated heavily on the second of these-- development. Under its current Medium-Term Perspective, the UNU has moved more strongly to address issues of survival and welfare, in addition to its standing concern for and experience with development. The current programme of research reflects the larger concept of development that has evolved in the last decade and a half-- a concept that includes political and social as well as economic and technological change.

I think I should make one distinction clear at this point, in case some of you are wondering how the UNU differs from the specialized agencies of the UN, such as the Food and Agricultural Organization, the World Health Organization, the World Bank, and so forth. These are all action-oriented agencies that are basically involved in field work. The UNU is not an

action-oriented agency. It is involved instead in academic research and in developing the knowledge upon which the design and implemention of action programmes can be soundly based.

The theme of International Organizations has been selected for this Seminar '85 in recognition that this year is the 40th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. The realist has to conclude, in observing many signs today, that this anniversary comes, ironically, at a moment when the commitment to multilateral co-operation is at perhaps its lowest point since the founding of the United Nations following the end of the Second World War. Given the present state of the world, it is most urgent that we seek to reverse the tide that is eroding multilateral co-operation. To do this, we must try to understand some of the forces that impel this tide, and it is for this reason, I think, that this examination of international organizations is so important and so timely. The Global Seminar lectures are structured to help students understand the role of international organizations within the broader international environment-- which is in a state of rapid and profound change. The UN system has been deeply affected by these changes-- and is itself something of an agent of this vast process of transformation.

If the end of the Second World War heralded a new era of nuclear terror, with its tragic twin symbols in this nation-- Hiroshima and Nagasaki-- then the emergence of a number of newly independent states after the war equally set in train new configurations in international relations. The process of decolonization has been greatly facilitated by the existence of the UN which has served as a forum for world public opinion against colonialism. As the former colonies became independent and began to swell the ranks of the non-aligned in the UN, political patterns within that world body began to change-- and bipolarization was increasingly challenged. The three-fold increase of the UN member states in the span of 40 years eloquently reflects the sharp change in post-war international relations.

The emergence of the new states added a new axis of "North-South" relations to the hitherto predominant "East-West" power relations in international policies, adding to it a complex set of interrelations between the two areas. Nation-building and development became a paramount concern not only for the newly independent countries but for the industrialized countries as well, in the 1960s, when the First Development Decade was proclaimed. The entire UN system began to devote much of its energy and resources to social and economic development in the Third World.

This new emphasis on development, particularly in light of the demonstrated needs of the new members, was natural because the preamble of the UN Charter enjoins its work for, among others, "the promotion of economic and social advancement of all peoples". Although development, as such, was not a direct goal of the United Nations when it began its work, the growing realization that interdependence, particularly in the areas of peace and security and international economics, was more pervasive than was previously realized and that existing mechanisms were not capable of dealing adequately with it, drew the UN into the development field. Several UN specialized

agencies followed this move. The rapid expansion of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in particular, was an indication of the role and services expected of the UN system, given this new focus.

However, the initial optimism that development could be achieved by simply following the path of the Western countries gave way as the years passed and the evidence piled up that this simply was not happening. It came to be realized that development was a far more complex process, in which international factors played a much greater role than had been originally anticipated. Many Third World countries became frustrated and disappointed with prevailing development strategies and what they promised to achieve. The call for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) in 1974 was an expression of the realization that national economic efforts would remain marginal unless the structure of the international economy changed to accommodate them. The present debt crisis in many countries might be seen as a dramatic confirmation of the price paid by the Third World for the persistent disparities in the international economic system. The world is still groping to redress these disparities through a workable alternative economic system.

The primary goal of the United Nations is, as its Charter clearly states, "to maintain international peace and security" (Art. 1). The UN Charter further stipulates that "all members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations" (Art. 2). Despite member nations' lip service to this principle, many of the provisions regarding the role of the UN in maintaining international peace and security have not been implemented because of differences among permanent members of the Security Council. Armed conflicts have continued and, in fact, since the end of the Second World War some 150 wars have been fought throughout the world, mostly in the Third World. On the other hand, progress in disarmament has been minimal and funding for peace-keeping operations constitutes only a small fraction of the UN budget.

We are also painfully aware of the nuclear threat to human survival. Man has produced a divide that can annihilate his own species-- and possibly all other forms of life on earth. Combined with the vast processes of change now under way, this constitutes a veritable mutation in the human condition. And now that we know of the horrifying possibilities of the "nuclear winter", the Third World can no longer remain indifferent to the threat of atomic war. It is no longer just a matter of exchange of nuclear war heads somewhere in the North between the superpowers, it is a survival for all humanity.

Recalling the high hopes that many people had in those heady days of 1945, when the United Nations was born, and aware of the present reality of the world, it is not easy to be optimistic about the dawn of the twenty-first century. Tensions between the superpowers remain taut, despite the resumption of arms control talks; the prospects of some kind of arms control, not to speak of disarmament, remain dim; the nuclear arms race continues unabated and threatens to spill over into outer space; and the conventional arms trade

has recently experienced a sharp reduction only because of the impact of the world economic recession; the world economy is in dangerous disarray; millions of people are poor, homeless, hungry, with no prospect of improvement in their lot; throughout the world, and particularly in the developing countries, the structures of societies are showing themselves incapable of adjusting to changed conditions quickly enough to ensure their continued growth.

The present state of the international system shows that it is not adequate to deal with the crucial issues of human survival that arise from our present condition. It is clearly not capable of resolving the problems of international development. The number and magnitude of global issues have grown far beyond the dimensions that were prevalent when the UN was established. The number of actors involved has also increased dramatically since 1945, reflecting how many new countries have joined the global community of nations. This has led to a vastly complicated international environment in which questions of economic development, the environment, population, energy and resource use are well beyond the capability of even the most powerful states to control or manage. International organizations-- at least insofar as most are presently constituted along inter-governmental lines-- share certain limitations in this respect as they are naturally a reflection of the aspirations, weaknesses and capabilities of their members. The sum total is that conflict, poverty, hunger, illiteracy-- simple hopelessness and misery-- are not being adequately reduced.

The problem is compounded by an absence of consensus about the causes of this inadequacy. This is where there is a real challenge to scholarship: to keep up with, or at least remain aware of, the changing nature of the problems that confront societies today, and to endeavour to provide the knowledge base that will allow sensible responses to them to be formulated. Without an agreed analysis, concerted international action will not be possible.

Forty years have passed since the Charter of the United Nations was conceived and written. In spite of this, the principal Charter purpose, "to maintain international peace and security", is still far from being realized. The goals of the "Development Decades" also remain largely a dream. On the contrary, we all live dangerous and fear-filled lives, and far too many of us are still unable to meet basic human needs for food and shelter.

Does this mean that the UN has failed in its objectives and that it has no place in contemporary international society? Is the UN accountable in the current situation-- and, if so, to what extent? This last question, in my view, is an important one because no institution can be held responsible for an outcome of an activity unless it is empowered and equipped to tackle issues involved. In the case of the UN, it cannot be more than its member states want it to be. Furthermore, the UN cannot be blamed for the unwillingness of the major powers to accept all the implications of the process of transformation in the world. There are divergent assessments of the UN that appear to derive from the different perceptions and expectations of the UN

that people hold. More broadly, it becomes a question of how to understand international relations-- and the position of the UN within such a perspective.

In my view, the United Nations has been too often marginalized on many important occasions in international affairs, with a number of crucial negotiations that affect the whole of humanity taking place outside of the UN framework. In some cases, this has been done deliberately by the states concerned to ensure their freedom of action and manoeuvre. The bilateral arms control talks between the US and the USSR are a case in point. The UN involvement was also kept marginal in the peace negotiations over Vietnam and the Falkland/Malvinas crisis. In matters concerning global economic issues, industrialized nations prefer to deal with their own creation, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), rather than co-ordinate their economic policies within the broader framework of the Economic and Social Council of the UN which is specifically mandated to deal with such issues.

There are some who hold the view that the sole actors in international politics are the nation-states. This outlook leaves little room for other actors, including international organizations. Therefore, the UN is not considered an autonomous actor in the international scene. Others take the view that international organizations are indispensable for the functioning of the international system and should be allowed to play their proper role. There are other views, and that in the majority probably falls somewhere between these two, admittedly oversimplified, poles. All should certainly be debated during this seminar.

Any view of the UN, however, will need to be supported by sound knowledge of the system and understanding of the international political, social and economic environment within which that system operates. It is for this reason that we shall be devoting two full days to the topics of: (1) peace and security and the UN, and (2) development and the UN.

It should be made clear, first of all, that, in spite of the fact that the United Nations has not been allowed to meet its objectives as mandated by its Charter, it has achieved some remarkable accomplishments that have contributed to shaping some important advancements in the world community. For example, it has helped to keep alive the desire for disarmament among many peoples in the world. It has helped to put international development at the forefront of international concerns. It has contributed to furthering the evolution of an international legal system: the codification of human rights. It has made major contributions to improvements in health care. It still remains a forum of last resort when bilateral negotiations fail. It is, therefore, clearly not a question of the UN having a place in the world system. On the contrary, it is a question of recognizing the indispensability of the UN to that system.

It may be granted that many negotiations outside the UN system may produce better results; nevertheless, they also help to undermine the authority and prestige of the UN in the minds of many people. Recent criticism of

and even, in some cases, disengagement from UN bodies have further weakened the foundations of the system. Indeed, it may not be going too far to ask whether or not we are witnessing the beginning of a process of dismantling the UN system. Certainly, the United Nations today faces probably its most severe challenge since its creation four decades ago.

This challenge is, in essence, how to reverse the current trend against multilateral co-operation. The states have increasingly become jealous and protective of their prerogatives and short-term interests at a time when the global crisis in peace, security and the economic situation demands more, and not less, multilateral co-operation and accommodation. It is, therefore, incumbent on the governments of the member states and the peoples they represent, in the absence of such leadership by the major powers, especially those of the middle and smaller powers, to try to redress this situation, and to work towards the kind of reforms that would make the UN more effective.

The role of the UN system should be reviewed within this context. Much discussion has been devoted, for instance, to the rather technical question of the efficiency and management of the UN Secretariat. I would certainly agree that there is much more room for improvement in the discharge of UN functions. However, the effectiveness and efficiency of the UN Secretariat is, apart from its internal administrative policies and procedures, also a function of the political pressures exerted by individual member states on the system, national group competition within the system, and the culturally pluralistic context-- with different concepts of work, efficiency, status and loyalty-- within which the Secretariat operates. Whatever the criticism of the UN system may be, it is important to maintain the universality of the system and to ensure that improvements to it will be done from within the UN. There is little doubt in my mind and in that of many others, that a weakening of or the implicit threat of dismantling the UN would not be in the best interest of humankind as a whole. The Secretary-General of the United Nations stated in his report to the 40th General Assembly that UN member nations must decide "if they wish to co-operate in building ... a useful, coherent, effective institution or follow their own narrow interests". Mankind's most urgent challenge, he said, is to devise "a working international political system, in which all participate", and that "will not only guarantee survival and order, but will make our planet run more evenly in the interests of all of its inhabitants".

A purely technical review may, therefore, miss the larger point if it is conducted in isolation from the surrounding international environment and without proper historical perspective, including an awareness of rapid political and social change, shifts in power configurations, increase in the number of non-state actors, and the fact that increasingly more problems are escaping the power of the state. In addition, account should be taken of the different views on the nature of international organizations. One view acknowledges the essentially political character of international organizations. But much of the criticism of politicization stems from another view derived from the theory of functionalism which holds that certain things are purely technical and non-political. This leads to the assumption that advancement made in such

technical spheres will spill over into the political arena and facilitate political agreements on international peace and security.

It is true that most UN specialized agencies were established with functionalist expectations. In fact, the functionalist dream appeared to be working in the early days of these agencies when the West, sharing common values and approaches, could count on an almost automatic majority. But as the Third World countries began to express their own concerns in their own ways, our global society became more and more pluralistic and heterogeneous. The waning consensus on the global political scene was reflected-- and often magnified-- within the UN where the developing countries came to enjoy a majority of the votes.

We could all agree, at the same time, that the purposes of the UN, to encourage peace and welfare for all humankind, are no longer utopian goals for the future. It has now become desperately urgent that we ensure our human survival through effective arms control and disarmament. It is equally urgent to ensure the survival of the many millions of starving people around the world, with the tragic situation in Africa highlighting this urgency. We all share a common destiny on our interdependent planet. No one and no country can live in isolation from the rest of the world-- the bell tolls for all of us.

It is not a question of whether the UN system or other international organizations should have their roles to play-- they are already playing their roles, as manifested by the rapid expansion of both intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations in the past few decades.

It is also true that the system of nation states, whatever its weaknesses and failings, will continue to dominate international political relations. The division of roles between the nation-state system and international organizations will remain a delicate one and there will be much trial and error before stable and equitable relations can be established between them. The question of "politicization" can be better understood in this perspective.

Forty years is a rather long span of time for an individual. It is a relatively short time, however, for any institution to grow and be accepted in a society-- and a worldwide institution could well require even more time for its identity to be established and accepted. However, to help speed this process along and make the system work more effectively, we can do two things.

One is to create and strengthen local and national constituencies that could be politically effective in support of multilateral co-operation through the UN, its specialized agencies and its regional commissions. The other is to establish or strengthen regional or sub-regional organizations for security and development and to establish the political constituencies, including the young, in support of them. I am pleased to note, of course, that some NGOs and IGOs, another topic of this seminar, are created precisely for this purpose.

We need more of them, and even broader constituencies for this work, again, especially among the young people who will manage the future.

Before I close, let me say a brief word about Japan and the UN system. The growing interest in the system that Japan has shown has been manifested in a number of ways, particularly in its increased financial support. It may also be possible for Japan to extend its involvement in the area of peace by providing logistical support for its operations. Japan could at some point also contribute a satellite to a UN satellite surveillance system for peacekeeping purposes. Young people in Japan will, I hope, become more involved in the UN activities and thereby help strengthen international co-operation. I would be delighted if Global Seminar '85 could shed light on some of these issues and on the pros and cons of the various kinds of reform that should be considered. Thank you very much, and may I wish you all a week of fruitful discussion and a pleasant stay in Hakone.