

Rector's Extemporaneous Remarks
Before the UNU Centre Staff

1 September 1980^{x/}

Ladies and Gentlemen, Colleagues,

Let me begin by apologizing for the delay in starting this meeting. I have just come from meetings with the Prime Minister and with Mr. Miyazawa, the Cabinet Secretary, as well as with the Director General of the Prime Minister's Office. We had some very good discussions; I think the foundations were laid for useful and constructive co-operation in the future. I was especially struck by the fact that the Prime Minister had instructed his Director General not so much to talk about the UN University, but to review some of the plans now under consideration with regard to a possible North-South Centre in Okinawa. Well, this is hardly the place to discuss that idea in any detail, but I am simply saying this by way of explanation for the delay..

What I would now like to do is to share with you some of the ideas with regard to the United Nations University that are developing in my mind, even though the process is by no means finished. I am not going to speak to you about the policies which I intend to follow. That would be premature. It is much more important at this initial stage of my work here to listen to you all, to get some sense of how you feel the UN University is doing, and what directions it should pursue, rather than for me to say well, I have all the answers and you'd better listen to me. I don't think that that is the right way to go about things. Still, I believe that you are entitled to know the kind of philosophy I am bringing to this job, although I do want you to realize that you should not draw any operational conclusions from this broad philosophical statement that I am now going to make.

x/ Corrected tape transcript of an oral presentation.

Let me first then express my appreciation for the attainments of the UN University so far. To have made the beginnings of a visible impact in this very short period of the existence of the United Nations University is no mean achievement. It is, of course, in the first place the leadership of my predecessor, Jim Hester, which has made this possible, but he couldn't have done this without you all, and the energy that you have given it. I am very much aware of that. At the same time, in any process of institutional growth we should not only look at the internal dynamics of the organization, we should also look at the environment in which we operate. And we should continue to ask ourselves the question, 'how relevant are we'? How great is our capacity to respond to the needs and the expectations that exist in the world around us? What are the pressing global problems of the 1980's in relation to which the United Nations University will be judged? Quite apart from the directions that we have taken, quite apart from the attainments that are beginning to be visible and to be increasingly understood by the outside world, there is this other question that we will have to address, and that we will have to continue to ask ourselves - how relevant are we to the expectations and the needs of a rapidly changing world?

It is in a way a function of the disjunction between the necessary preparatory work that the UN University has had to do in the first five years and the expectations that exist in the world that we now are confronted with all kinds of plans and ideas like the establishment of a University for Peace, notions about a University for the Future. There are ideas about centres of various kinds, including technology and the humanities, which are emerging in a number of countries. We should be aware that these ideas, these notions, these efforts that are now underway reflect the disappointment that is being felt in a number of countries with regard to the role that people had expected the United Nations University to play. Saying this does not imply on my part any criticism of the work of the UN University so far. I really don't see how much differently anyone could have played the cards that were dealt to the UN University in its initial stages, considering the limited resources that were available and the tremendous difficulties that had to be overcome before the UN University could really begin to

/...

operate in any significant intellectual and scientific sense. Still, we must realize that we will, in the end, be judged not by how promising our beginnings were, but by the question to what extent we have been able to deal with the needs of the 1980's and the spectre or the beginnings of the 21st century. We will be judged by what intellectual contribution we have made to the world's and humankind's capacity to move into the 21st century with some reasonable degree of confidence and sanity. The state of the world at the moment is not a very promising one; the degree of fragmentation in the international system which set in ten years ago seems to be continuing. No one is in control of the international system, be it in an economic sense, a monetary sense, or politically. There are tremendous forces at work not only of drift and fragmentation, but also of new movement. In many ways one might say many of the problems that now arise and that are faced by governments are problems that are not the result of government policies but are the result of the movement of people and of shifts in the perceptions of people and commitments of people. The whole liberation movement that has led to the emergence of so many independent states, the women's movement, the civil-rights movement in the United States, the human rights movement, are all movements that came about outside the calculated policies of governments. They are developments of people from below. We will have to be able to relate to those movements in the world if we want to be relevant at the turn of the century. We will have to be able to contribute to the understanding of the scientific and the intellectual community in the world, at the various levels of national and international existence, in regard to these very fundamental changes that are taking place, that affect the role of nation states, the capacity of nation states to deal with these problems. A large part of these problems already are beyond the capacity of nation states to govern or to control. The movement of capital, the movement of labour, and the movement of large masses of people across national boundaries, often as refugees, are some of these problems. They are impelled by forces that are beyond the control of national systems. Also, the movement of knowledge is affected. The breakdown of the processes of transplantation and transference of knowledge because of the economic pressures on university

/...

systems in the United Kingdom, in France, and in the United States makes it increasingly impossible for people in the Third World to partake in the process of knowledge creation. However, on top of these economic pressures, there is also the growing intellectual and even moral parochialism of the major nations in the world. The United Nations University must address these problems and must be able to find alternative ways through which the collective capacity of humankind to deal with the problems it faces keeps increasing despite these regressive forces that are also at work. It almost seems that we may have to go against the mainstream or, if one prefers, the drift of history if we want to keep alive the flame of rationality in humankind's collective capacity to maintain civilization and civilized life, against the tremendous pressures of increasing population pressure on resources, against real and perceived threats, and against fear. The kind of primordial fear that arises from the new awareness of the total interdependence of all countries in the world. Nations which, because of their strength or size, have always felt themselves almost above history and above dependency on other countries now, for the first time in their history, are faced with the realization that they too can no longer unilaterally define their own security. The problems that a new sense of insecurity creates for the maintenance of the stability of the international system or for its replacement by a more viable, more just and peaceful one, are quite formidable, and the United Nations University must contribute to the collective capacity of humankind to deal with those problems.

The world's capacity for peace and for the peaceful structural transformation, both of the international system and of their own national societies, will to a large extent depend on a better understanding of the social processes involved in the interactions of society with technology and science on a scale that is much larger than we have at the moment. Now, this is of course an intellectual task that is much too big for the United Nations University alone or any single institution, but I do believe that the United Nations University can make a difference, that the United Nations University can provide impetus and facilitate forging the institutional instrumentalities that will be necessary in the world to develop the intellectual capacity

/...

that will add to our knowledge and understanding of these processes. Whether we can do so will depend to a very large extent on our capacity, while building on what we have achieved so far, to increase the institutional and programmatic reach of the United Nations University across the globe.

We will have to move away from the notion, the self-perception, of the UN University as a development agency. The University is not a development agency. It is a global instrument, an instrument of the collectivity of humankind's attempt to come to grips with the problems it faces. It should be able just as much to deal with the problems of development as it will have to develop the capacity to deal with the problems of the industrial countries which are experiencing equally large difficulties in the transformation and adjustment of their own societies, both to the emergence of an industrializing South and to the inherent dynamics of their own transition into the post-industrial stage. The present incapacity of the industrial world to deal with those problems rationally is quite obvious, and this is bound to have a bearing on the kind of world in which we are going to live and on the scope that there will be for the industrialization of the most underdeveloped part of the developing world.

The UN University should not be an instrument or a facility which perpetuates the perception of the world in terms of a continuing dichotomy between developed and developing countries. When it comes to the future both the developed world and the underdeveloped world are equally unprepared for that future. Moreover, there is not going to be a separate future for the industrial world and another one for the Third World. If there is a future, it is going to be a single, shared one for all. We must, therefore, be one of the instruments that will enlarge the collective human capacity to deal with the preparations for that future. This is the real challenge that faces us.

We are all immersed in our daily workload, and I am very much aware how overworked most of the staff members of the UN University are. But let us not lose sight, while we try to make do with the very limited means that we have, that there is a challenge by which we will be measured. Not by how many hours we work here each day - that is just a pre-condition. But

/...

the real measure by which we will be measured is a historical one, that is, whether we can contribute to the collective capacity of humankind in preparing itself to move into a 21st century that is civilized; that is peaceful, and that is just.

Now, of course we all know the nature of the human condition. I hope that, because of what I am saying here, I will not be perceived and dismissed as a mere utopianist. I am very much aware of the continued tension, conflict and disjunction between morality and power, between morality and politics. There will never be an ideal world. It is in the nature of the human condition that this will always continue to escape us; nevertheless, it is that search that will provide us with much of the meaning of our lives. It is in this awareness that we will have to continue to hold our vision and to develop the understanding that will give direction to our academic efforts. We will have to do so in the realization that no single nation can any longer work out its own salvation. We either hang together or we succeed together. Whether we are weak or whether we are strong, our fates are tied together. This means that we cannot hope that the answers that will help us towards the ends which I have described will come out of a single ideological perspective, out of a single civilization, out of a single culture, be it the traditional cultures of Asia or Africa, or be it the western civilization. We will have to develop answers that are viable in a pluralistic situation. We will have to find answers that are meaningful not only to the civilization in the context of which these answers will develop, but they will, at the same time, have to be meaningful to other civilizations as well. We will, therefore, have to develop the kind of knowledge that has this polyvalence, this multiple relevance for a variety of cultures. This we can only achieve if we develop the kind of sensitivity that allows us to find our answers - and to test our answers - in continuing dialogue between cultures.

Therefore, the UN University is a universal university only to the extent that it is capable of defining itself in its network. It is not the Centre with which we should be primarily concerned, although everyone knows that we will have to beef up the intellectual capability of the Centre -

/...

not because there are no people with first-rate minds here, but because they are never here. We will have to organize our work in such a way that the Centre really can provide the intellectual leadership that is required to provide the current running through our networks. The Tokyo Centre should move away from being a sort of foundation type of administrative centre and become a real community of scholars, capable of providing the spark that is needed to bring to life and give direction to the various networks that we have developed and will continue to develop. It is in that network that the real strength and significance of the UN University lies. Through the networks this inter-cultural dialogue will have to provide the answers that will be meaningful, not to a single country, not to a single civilization, but to all of mankind.

Well, I have spoken longer than I had expected. I apologize. The important thing I believe is that I open myself up to your scrutiny. I think you are entitled to that, to know what kind of a guy will be standing at the helm of this institution. This does not mean that what I have described to you is going to be the official philosophy that is going to guide the United Nations University. No single mind can encompass the complexity, the breadth and the depth of the problems that we face. I am very much aware of that. Whatever leadership this Centre can generate will have to be generated collectively, by the collective efforts of the staff. What I have said, I have said simply by way of presenting, in the good Japanese way, my calling card. I do look forward to working together with all of you. I have no prejudice against any element in the wide range of views that are represented here in this institution. Respecting this variety is the only way for this institution to function. The validity of our views and our findings will have to be tested, as I said, in the variety of conflicting ideologies and points of view. I certainly welcome that test. I now would like to end simply by asking you for your co-operation. Together we are engaged in a very important and significant effort and if, in terms of humankind's capacity to survive as continuously advancing civilizations, the UN University can make a difference, then I think that should be enough of a reward to all of us. To you as well as to myself. Thank you very much.