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UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSITY

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Introductory remarks by the Rector of the University,  
Soedjatmoko, to the address of the Secretary-General of  
the United Nations, Mr. Javier Pérez de Cuéllar

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY THE RECTOR OF THE UNIVERSITY, SOEDJATMOKO, TO  
THE ADDRESS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS, MR. JAVIER  
PEREZ DE CUELLAR.

Your Excellencies

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honour for the United Nations University to welcome the Secretary-General of the United Nations to its headquarters. I am sure that everyone in this distinguished audience is looking forward to hearing the Secretary-General's address.

Before becoming Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar had been a university professor, a diplomat of wide experience and the holder of important and testing assignments in the United Nations. His experience and perspectives are thus particularly relevant to a forum provided by the United Nations University and to an audience of distinguished representatives of the diplomatic corps, of the Government of Japan and of local authorities, and of the academic, business, media and other leading communities in Japan.

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I believe that I may correctly describe Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar as a scholar-diplomat and it was with this in mind that I invited him to address from here the global intellectual community and to suggest ways in which scholars and intellectuals throughout the world might better serve humankind. The United Nations University was brought into being to mobilize world scholarship to help solve the pressing global problems of human survival, development and welfare. Several hundred scholars and researchers in more than eighty countries, working together in networks, form the UN University of which the premises here in Tokyo are the planning and administrative centre.

Throughout the short time that the Secretary-General has held office, the world has been in a dangerous state, with armed conflict actually taking place or being threatened. At the same time, behind the headlines, the problems of poverty and hunger, of the abuse and depletion of our natural resources, of a deeply troubled world economy and, above all, of the senseless, suicidal nuclear and conventional arms race, have persisted as debilitating viruses in the international body politic.

We have all admired the sensitive and sure touch which the Secretary-General has shown in dealing both with the immediate crisis issues and with the longer term, but no less pressing, problems.

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It is not, I think an exaggeration to say that the hopes of humankind for peace and a decent life rest, in a considerable measure, on the shoulders of the person who occupies the position of Secretary-General of the United Nations. It is an awesome responsibility - the more so because the Secretary-General's freedom to take such action as he thinks necessary to deal with crises is circumscribed. The recent report on Disarmament and Security Issues by the Palme Commission, of which I had the honour to be a member, made proposals which would give the Secretary-General a greater measure of freedom in initiating action to reduce the possibility of conflict between states. These proposals and others of a similar kind need very careful study which I hope will lead to a strengthening of the Secretary-General's right to take action to prevent international disorder from spreading and to secure peace.

In just over ten years from now, half a century will have passed since the United Nations began its twin tasks of peacefully managing the tensions that could lead to a catastrophic and possibly terminal third world war, and of eliminating the endemic inequalities and injustices and human suffering that plague more than half of humankind.

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When we come to review this half century, what is our judgement likely to be of the UN's achievements? I believe we will conclude that they have been considerable - but insufficient. Putting aside the regrettable paralysis that has resulted in certain important areas from disagreements between major powers, a provisional analysis of the UN's achievements might show that it has been successful when the considerable intellectual impetus - and idealism, one should add - of its early years was sufficiently strong and relevant, but that it has been less successful in refreshing itself intellectually to deal with new, unfamiliar and complex problems - problems arising often from factors that were largely unknown in the 1940's.

I think, therefore, that it may not be too early for the UN to begin thinking now about the problems that will face it in its second half-century and the solutions they will need. As Rector of the United Nations University, I am convinced that this institution has a particular responsibility to help in this task. Indeed, when the General Assembly of the UN created the University in 1972 I think it did so because it wisely saw the need for a link between the UN system and the academic communities of the world and for the intellectual refreshment that this could offer; as a result the UNU stands today at the inter-section of the UN system and the world's scholars - a unique institution within the UN system and within the academic community.

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It has so far been natural that an inter-governmental body such as the UN should find itself concentrating on relatively immediate issues of high political content and that member states should take a primarily national view of these issues. On the other hand the world of the university strives for the longer and more detached view, but is often remote from every-day realities. It is, I believe, the job of the UN University 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 scholars' study - and, as a result of this convergence, to encourage the formulation of ideas and policy options that will contribute to the solution of existing and future issues before the UN.

A university has, as one of its primary tasks, the creation and dissemination of knowledge. From this perspective I see three challenges in the search for solutions to the persistent, multiplying, and seemingly intractable problems that face humankind. First, are those problems which existing knowledge could solve but where the political will to apply it is lacking; second, are those problems which existing knowledge could solve but where we do not yet know how to make it available to those who need it; third, are those new problems of our time and of the foreseeable future for which existing knowledge is inadequate and new ideas are urgently needed.

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More broadly, one senses that the great innovative ideas that shaped the world during the past century have now run their course, but are not being replaced. Can the United Nations University now help to mobilize the world's community of scholars and intellectuals to provide the great synthesizing ideas that are intellectually viable, globally relevant and that can also capture the imagination of ordinary people?

Mr. Secretary-General, it is a formidable task and we need your wisdom in suggesting what might be our priorities. I would like to take this opportunity of pledging the best efforts of this institution, and of the scholars and researchers throughout the world with whom it is linked, to the service of the United Nations and the peoples of the world which it serves. We are very grateful to you for so graciously accepting the invitation to speak here today. May I now ask you to address us?

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