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Some Major Issues
before the United Nations

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Secretary-General, United Nations

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I certainly feel it a privilege to have this opportunity of addressing the Economic Club of New York and I am most grateful to this important organization for the opportunity thus afforded to me.

The subject of my talk today is “Some Major Issues before the United Nations.” It is obviously a topic of very wide range and interest, and it will be hardly possible for anyone to deal with it adequately in the space of 25 minutes or so. But I shall attempt to deal with the more important aspects of the major issues confronting the world organization today.

As you are no doubt aware, the functions of the United Nations can be broadly classified into three categories: political, economic and social, and trusteeship activities. Before I deal with these main functions, I should like to comment briefly on the United Nations financial problem which, I believe, has been widely publicized, but little understood, over the past few years.

The financial difficulties of the organization had their origin in the Organization’s undertaking to maintain peace in the troubled area of the Middle East between Israel and Arab countries, and as a result of its efforts to help the Government of the Congo, amongst other things, to maintain the

territorial integrity and the political independence of the Republic of the Congo, to prevent the occurrence of civil war and to maintain law and order in that country.

In essence the problem is a political one which reflects on the one hand the dissatisfaction of some Member States with the basic objectives of these peace-keeping operations or with the manner in which the directives of the Security Council and the General Assembly have been carried out and on the other hand the dissatisfaction of some other Members with the method that has been employed to apportion the costs of large scale peace-keeping operations among the Member Governments. There was also uncertainty in the minds of some Governments as to whether the assessments for these activities represented legal and binding obligations for the Governments concerned.

As a result, a considerable number of Governments have thus far failed to pay their assessments to the budgets for the Middle East and Congo operations with the consequence that the Organization's deficit has grown steadily during recent years.

At the beginning of this year this deficit, representing the difference between the Organization's current obligations and its current resources, stood at approximately seventy-two million dollars and may be expected to increase to about \$127,000,000 by the end of June. The deficit would have been far greater had it not been for the sale to forty Governments during 1962 of \$120,000,000 worth of United States bonds.

While the financial position of the United Nations has been a matter of deep concern to me, I have high hopes that we will find it much improved during the course of the present year as a result of the following four factors. Firstly, the general Assembly's decision last December to accept the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice which was to the effect that expenditures authorized for the United Nations peace-keeping operations in the Middle East and the Congo constitute "expenses of the Organization" within the meaning of Article 17, paragraph 2, of the Charter of the United Nations.

Secondly, the decision last December of the General Assembly to appoint a committee of twenty-one Member Governments, which is currently meeting, to consider and report to a Special Session of the General Assembly on methods of financing large scale peace-keeping operations such as those in the Middle East and the Congo and on means of dealing with the problem of the arrears in the payment of past assessments.

Thirdly, a determined effort to collect contributions that are now in arrears and to sell additional United States bonds up to the limit of the \$200,000,000 authorized by the General Assembly. For this purpose I have requested Mr. Eugene R. Black, former President of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, to serve as my Special financial Consultant and he has kindly consented to act in this capacity without remuneration.

And fourthly, a sharp reduction in the costs of the United Nations operations in the Congo, which should be possible now that the military phase of that operation may be considered at an end.

We must, of course, anticipate some continuing costs in both the Middle East and the Congo for some time to come. It should not be beyond our capacity, however, to find the means to cover these costs if Governments give the problem their most earnest and urgent consideration. For, in the final analysis, their success in finding a common measure of agreement or future action will help determine whether the United Nations can continue to be an effective force for peace.

Now, coming back to the three main functions of the United Nations let me take up the Trusteeship activities first.

One of the most remarkable achievements of the United Nations has been its contribution to the emergence of a large number of independent countries particularly in Asia and Africa. The present membership of the world organization is 110, compared to the original membership of 51, and the United Nations played a significant note in the birth of many of these new members, particularly from Africa.

The drive towards independence, which in our time has swept dramatically through so many parts of the world, is an irreversible process parallel to other great historical events of the same character, particularly those which occurred in the American Continent - North, Central and

South - at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. Then as now, a large group of colonial territories - one of them the United States - became independent nations in a relatively short period of time.

As the experience of practically every country has shown, accession to independence is not enough by itself to make such independence meaningful. Many of the states emerging from dependent status are lacking in adequate numbers of trained personnel, whether at the administrative or technical levels; their economic and financial life is generally precarious; their educational advancement is far from high and they are often plagued by political instability. This is true of many newly independent nations but such a situation was not unknown to countries which are now powerful and developed but whose backwardness in many respects at the time of their emancipation did not, and in fact could not, have prevented their emergence as free nations.

The task ahead in this increasingly inter-dependent world of ours is clearly to help the new countries in resolving their main deficiencies. To this end, the United Nations and its family of Agencies can play and in fact have been playing for many years now a constructive role. They provide assistance to the developing countries without strings attached and offer channels which can be used in such a way as to avoid injecting political issues or subjecting the assistance to conditions other than the benefit of the recipient countries.

The emergence of many newly independent countries in Asia and Africa and the absence of democratic trapping in the set up of many of them disturb some older members of the United Nations. In this connection it is worth remembering that all the independence movements in Asia and Africa are led by a class of people who are staunch nationalists. Through a variety of circumstances these nationalists fight at the vanguard of independence movements, and the transfer of power in most cases goes to this class. It will be a mistake to assume that the political institutions in most of the newly independent countries will be of the same type as those prevailing in the United States or in Britain, nor that there will necessarily be two main parties competing against each other for the votes of the people. In many newly independent countries it is most unlikely that there will be a two-part system for many years to come. The nationalist movements are going to be very powerful indeed; they will control the government without there being any effective challenge to them from within and any challenge from outside will only strengthen them. It will take time before any issues arise in the new countries on which it will be possible to build a real opposition organization. It is worth remembering that the democratic system of government, though most desirable, is at the same time a highly sophisticated and difficult form of government to operate, particularly in newly independent countries.

I wish I could dwell at some length on the economic and social activities of the United Nations. But considerations of time at my disposal and of more pressing and urgent political issues compel me to be very brief in dealing with this category of UN activity. The issues confronting us in the economic and social fields are not less important than the ones which are labeled political.

Indeed, they are more fundamental. The peoples determined to “Save succeeding generations from the scourge of war”, as our Charter goes, are not merely asserting their will to preserve the mere existence of the species but also their aspirations to a better life. They fear less the loss of what they have obtained than the loss of what they hope to achieve.

Regardless of our political credo, religion or philosophy, a peaceful world is not one in which we can have peace of mind as long as some are affluent and others destitute. True, the problem of wealth and poverty among individuals and nations is as old as mankind itself and, in fact, one may feel that its very existence bears witness to one of the major forces driving the world, namely, the desire to everyone to improve his lot.

The Charter of the United Nations explicitly states that one of its primary functions is “to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples”. With this in view the United Nations General Assembly has launched what it terms Development Decade.

We are now entering a new year of the United Nations Development Decade. Some of you may recall the proposals which I put forward last summer, and which were endorsed by the economic and Social Council, outlining a program of action by the United Nations family of organizations for the attainment of the objectives of the Decade. This work was carried forward during the recent General Assembly meetings in New York.

Since then a number of important steps have been taken. As an integral part of the expanding endeavors of the United Nations in the Development Decade, the World Food Program was launched on January 1st this year. It is a joint program of the United Nations and the Food and Agriculture Organization, with the cooperation of other United Nations agencies.

In January, the Governing Council of the Special Fund approved 42 new projects with a total cost of over \$96,000,000. These projects, geared to priority goals of the Development Decade, may be expected to make major contributions to the economic development of countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The new United Nations Committee on Housing, Building and Planning has outlined a future plan of work which should enable the United Nations to provide stronger and more specialized leadership for the expansion of housing and related programs in the low income countries during the Development Decade.

A major step in another crucial area is being taken by the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development which met here a few weeks ago, I need scarcely underline the potential importance of that Conference or how essential it is to do everything possible to ensure its success.

Meanwhile, all the agencies of the United Nations family are cooperating with me in preparing detailed proposals for early action by the United Nations family under the inspiration of the Development Decade.

In addition to Headquarters' activities I must mention the constantly expanding activities of the regional commissions. The Economic Commission for Africa met last month in Leopoldville. This very day the session of the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East was opened by President Macapagal in Manila, and this will be followed in April by the Economic Commission for Europe and in May by the Economic Commission for Latin America. We are relying greatly on these meetings, which reflect so directly the problems and needs of the different regions of the world, for guidance in our forward planning.

Last in this brief list of activities, but certainly not least, is the United Nations Conference on the application of Science and Technology for the Benefit of the Less-developed Areas, which took place in Geneva last month. I have every hope that through this great Conference, and the intensified cooperation generated by it, a major contribution will be made over the years to come to the attainment of the goals of the Development Decade. The attainment of these goals, it is my sincere belief, is crucial to the well-being of humanity and to the peace of the world.

Now, let me deal with some major political issues before the United Nations. As you are fully aware, the world organization responded to the call of the Central Government of the Congo to

undertake certain activities, nearly three years ago. Recent events have shown the correctness of the United Nations policy in that unfortunate country. It is true to say that but for the presence of the United Nations in the Congo; the country would have gone to pieces by now and become a major arena of the cold war. Thanks to the United Nations, the sovereignty and the authority of the legitimate Central Government have been upheld and the territorial integrity of the Republic preserved. The United Nations has been able to assert its right to complete freedom of movement in the whole territory of the Congo. It has also been able to assist the Central Government in maintaining law and order over the vast territory. The success of the Congo operation has been made possible by the cooperation of the countries which provided men, money and materials required for this operation.

For the future we have to think in terms of gradually disengaging ourselves from the Congo and enabling the Republic to stand on its own feet. There will have to be a shift from military assistance to civilian assistance. The nature and size of assistance will of course depend on the availability of funds and its operation within the context of the resolutions adopted by the various organs of the United Nations.

Last year the United Nations was able to contribute to the solution of a long-standing dispute between the Netherlands and Indonesia regarding West New Guinea (West Irian). This was a major trouble spot and a potential threat to peace in South East Asia. Thanks to the spirit of cooperation shown by the two countries concerned, and the wise and patient guidance of

Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, who kindly deputized for me during a delicate phase of negotiations, it was possible to reach an agreement on the future administration of the territory, providing for a transitional stage of administration over the territory by the United Nations Temporary Executive Authority.

The period of this Temporary Executive Authority is due to end on May 1st this year, and recently Mr. C.V. Narasimhan, my Chef de Cabinet, visited Indonesia and West Irian to finalize the arrangements. I hope that everything goes smoothly between now and May 1st, and that the United Nations will be able to transfer the administration of the territory on that date in good order to Indonesia, in conformity with the terms of the Agreement arrived at between the Netherlands and Indonesia on August 15th, 1962.

That agreement is unique in more than one respect. It is the first time that the United Nations has exercised executive authority over a vast territory. For the first time also the principle was established that the two main parties to the agreement should bear the entire cost of the operation in equal parts. I am sure you will agree with me that this is a useful precedent to follow for the future.

At this moment the United Nations is directly or indirectly involved in the restoration of law and order in several other parts of the world, one of the most delicate being the border areas between Israel and Arab countries. I need hardly explain the historic role the United Nations has been

playing in that part of the world. There is a general consensus everywhere that, but for the United Nations, that area of the world would have long been a scene of ugly clashes perhaps developing into wide entanglements. The Earl of Home, Secretary of State for foreign Affairs of the United Kingdom Government, said in the House of Lords on February 20th last, “This action (United Nations’ presence in the Middle East) has really worked extremely well, and has been on the whole efficiently conducted, and, I would say, has certainly contributed to the peace in that area, in that it has prevented border clashes developing which could have led to a wider war.”

In another area of the Middle East, Yemen, there have been, in recent weeks, developments which caused us considerable concern. After consultation with the Government of the Republic of Yemen, I sent Dr. Ralph Bunche, an Under Secretary for Special Political Affairs, to Yemen to confer with Government leaders, and to report to me on his finding. He is still in that area.

In the limited time at my disposal, it is hardly possible for me to dwell, even briefly, with other issues before the world organization. However, there is one problem of tremendous magnitude standing head and shoulders above others and which in fact is the problem not only before the United Nations but one which involves all mankind -- the problem of Disarmament. I do not propose to go into the background of the negotiations now being conducted in Geneva nor to assess the respective positions taken by the powers primarily concerned with Disarmament.

However, I want to bring home certain salient points connected with this greatest of all problems facing mankind.

Just a year ago, pursuant to a decision of the General Assembly, a group of international experts from ten different countries cooperated in the preparation of a unanimous report on the economic and social consequences of disarmament. This report indicated that the world is spending roughly \$120,000,000,000 annually for military expenditures, which is equivalent to 8 to 9% of the world's annual output of all goods and services. They concluded that this expenditure amounts to almost the entire national income of all the under developed countries. An examination of the recent budgets of the Great Powers shows that this tremendous diversion of the world's resources to armaments is increasing from year to year.

Because of differences in budgetary systems and practices, it is not possible to make direct comparisons between the budgets of the different countries, but the fact emerges very clearly that each of the Great Powers is expending an enormous proportion of its national income for military purposes and that from year to year these figures are increasing. Just to cite on big Power, the United States budgeted \$47.5 billion in 1961 for national defense representing over 50% of its national budget of \$85 billion. In 1962 the military budget increased to \$51.1 billion representing 58% of the total budget of \$87.8 billion. For the current year the defense budget has been increased to \$53 billion.

It is far from my intention to pass judgment on the national policies of Member States, large and small, but I want to speak on this subject not as the Secretary-General of the United Nations, not

as an Asian, not as a Burman, but as a human being, a member of that species, the Homo Sapiens, whose continued existence is in the balance. The world is full of conflicts: racial, ideological and political. Fortunately, religious conflicts which were a feature of human society hundreds of years ago are no longer a serious problem. Human beings have successfully developed a sufficient degree of tolerance towards religious differences. If one remembers the mood of Christians and Moslems during the Crusades and subsequent religious wars in Europe between the various Christian sects resulting from proselytizing zeal and other religious conflicts in certain parts of Asia, one must conclude that in the 20th century religious tolerance is more or less an accomplished fact.

However, the spirit of tolerance is still lacking in regard to political or ideological issues. Almost everybody who is politically conscious has strong feelings about one or more of these issues. In the past 200 years or so, wars were fought not so much on religious issues but largely on non-religious ones -- mainly political or colonial. In our lifetime we witnessed two world wars. The First World War was fought mainly in Europe, but its repercussions were felt all over the globe. The Second World War, fought with weapons 20 years more modern than their predecessors, spread to three continents, Europe, Asia and Africa. It was also fought on a more intensive scale at sea and in the air. The destruction and damage done in the second was very much greater than in the first, both in absolute and relative terms.

We have already come to learn from the first two World Wars that war solves none of the world's problems; that the problems which they leave in their wake are usually worse than those which they were intended to solve. We had already begun to realize that in modern war there is no such thing as victor or vanquished; that there is only a loser, and that loser is mankind.

All these facts were realized by thinking people even before the advent of the atomic age. They would have been sufficient in themselves for man to want to outlaw war. Indeed, he tried to do so after the First World War, in the formation of the League of Nations. Even before the termination of the Second World War he was seriously thinking of a world organization which, he hoped, could prevent further wars from breaking out. The United Nations was formed immediately after the war with the primary objective of "saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind."

No mention of the atomic weapons is made in the United Nations Charter. It was, I think, Dr. Einstein who, in reply to the question, "what weapons will be used in a third world war?" answered, "I don't know, but I know which weapon would be used in a subsequent fourth world war -- the sling." These words by the discoverer of the law of the change of matter into energy were meant to point out the almost total devastation of the earth, such as to reduce any survivors to a prehistoric state.

I have said earlier that almost everybody who is politically conscious has strong feelings about one or more of these issues; but let us set aside such feelings for the moment and consider ourselves only as members of a biological species which has had a remarkable history and whose disappearance none of us can desire. The plain fact is that all of us -- Americans, Russians, and Burmans -- are in peril, and if the character of this peril is understood, there is hope that we may collectively avert it. We have to learn to think in a new way. The most pressing question facing all of us is: What steps can be taken to prevent a military contest of which the issue must be disastrous to all sides?

I must say that most of us have not fully realized what could be involved in a war with hydrogen bombs. The general public still thinks in terms of the obliteration of cities and the destruction of installations. It is well understood that the new bombs are more powerful than the old. No doubt in a hydrogen bomb war, great cities would be obliterated. But this is one of the minor disasters that would have to be faced. For we know now that hydrogen bombs can gradually spread destruction over a much wider area than had been supposed. Most scientists agree that if many hydrogen bombs are used, there will be universal death -- sudden death only for the fortunate few, but for the majority a slow torture of disease and disintegration.

Sometime ago a worldwide controversy arose among scientists regarding Strontium 90, manmade radioactive poison released by nuclear explosions. The final effects of Strontium 90 are still in dispute, but what is not in dispute is the fact that it is eaten and drunk and is built into

the bones as a substitute for calcium. It is present in the bones of every Atomic Age child. At the United Nations Atoms-for-Peace Conference a few years ago, and in scientific publications since, concern has been expressed about the effects of such radiation on the lower organisms of which the food cycle of mankind ultimately depends. We know just enough to know that we do not know what the biological effects will be of the diffusion of radioactive substances into our environment. We do not know the actual biological chain reaction.

Here, then, is the problem, stark, dreadful and inescapable: Shall we put an end to the human race, or shall mankind renounce war? Most people will not face this alternative because it is so difficult to abolish war. The abolition of war will demand distasteful limitations of national sovereignty. It requires certain psychological adjustments to meet the greatest challenge of our time. It also requires some form of collective action within the framework of an international organization like the United Nations. The Disarmament Conference currently in session in Geneva on the banning of nuclear tests has not made sufficient progress to warrant optimism. Although concessions have been made by both sides regarding the principle of international inspection, the agreement is centered around the question of number. Surely with a little good will and a little give and take it should not be impossible to reach an early agreement on what has become a game of arithmetic!

As geological time is reckoned, man has so far existed only for a short period, perhaps half a million years. What he has achieved, especially during the period of recorded history is

something all of us should be proud of. For countless ages the sun rose and set, the moon waxed and waned, the stars shone in the Milky Way, but it was only with the coming of man that these things were understood. Man has unveiled secrets which might have been thought undiscoverable. Much has been achieved in the realm of art, science, literature and religion. Is all this to end because so few are able to think of man rather than of this or that group of men? Is the human race so destitute of wisdom, so incapable of tolerance, so blind even to the simple dictates of self preservation that the last proof of its progress is to be the extermination of all life on our small planet? I cannot believe that this is to be the end. I cannot believe that humanity is so bereft of common sense as to launch universal suicide.

What is most needed in these tense times is the will to compromise. In human affairs, no one group is 100% right and another 100% wrong. In international relationships, pure white and pure black are rare. Various shades of grey usually predominate. That is why every international agreement represents a compromise of some kind, except where the terms are dictated.

To my knowledge one of the wisest mottos for every one of us is enshrined in the UNESCO Charter. It says “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds that the defenses of peace have to be constructed.”

There is no peace in the world today because there is no peace in the minds of men.