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SPEECH TO BE DELIVERED BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
IN SAN FRANCISCO ON 26 JUNE 1970
On giving the Charter a chance

All of us who work in the United Nations are deeply grateful for the opportunity which the Mayor and citizens of San Francisco have so generously given us to celebrate here the twenty-fifth anniversary of the signing of the United Nations Charter.

To return to San Francisco is not only to come back to a beautiful, gracious and civilized city; for us in the United Nations, it is also to return to the birthplace of the Organization and to the congenial and forward-looking atmosphere in which the Charter was created. It is good to remind ourselves of the sense of dedication and urgency, tempered with realism and with a vivid awareness of the horrors of war, which inspired the authors of the Charter who met here twenty-five years ago. If we have not yet succeeded in realizing their vision of a world at peace, we can still take inspiration from the ideals and objectives which they set out for us with full support from the people of this great city. We can also recognize with gratitude and deep respect the lasting value of the work they did here. Our best tribute to them is to increase our efforts to strengthen the United Nations.

This is the third time that the representatives of the United Nations, national ambassadors and international Secretariat, have come back to the Organization's birthplace, at the generous invitation of the Mayor and citizens of San Francisco, to celebrate the most important event in the Organization's history, the signing of the Charter. Fifteen years ago, in 1955, this ceremony took place in an atmosphere of cautious optimism at a time when the world seemed to be awakening from the tribulations of
the post-war period and the long winter of the Cold War. Five years ago we gathered here again in a less happy mood to speak of a world where new problems and new conflicts had dimmed the hopes of a just and peaceful world order—hopes encouraged by the great political emancipation of decolonization and the possibility of emancipation from drudgery made possible by science and technology. At that time the United Nations itself was in the throes of the deep crisis which had arisen over the fundamental issue of financing peace-keeping operations. Now we meet again in a mood of uncertainty and anxiety, with the knowledge only that we are moving at increasing speed in an uncertain direction, and that time is running short. I hope we can make use of this opportunity, so generously afforded by the City of San Francisco, to turn the tables on the forces of doubt and gloom, and to survey calmly, but yet with a sense of urgency, the course we must take in the next twenty-five years.

Twenty-five is a good age for taking stock of the past and making decisions for the future. It is, or should be, an age at which some of the exaggerated hopes and simple assumptions have begun to be tempered by experience and to give way to a clearer and more determined vision of the future. At twenty-five, the years ahead should be years of growing wisdom and achievement. I hope that we can all help to make this true of the United Nations. If so, these anniversary celebrations, of which our pilgrimage to San Francisco is the high point, will not have been in vain.

Like many institutions, the United Nations is today facing a crisis of confidence and disillusionment. It has been the lot of institutions...
throughout history to have their usefulness and integrity called in
question from time to time, by those who are not yet part of the
establishment, and on the whole this process serves a useful purpose in
keeping institutions up to the mark. But in our time, this disillusionment
has undoubtedly reached a new pitch, and the United Nations, as a
relatively young institution, faces a crisis of confidence without ever
having emerged, as some older institutions have, from relative impotence
to a position of accepted power and authority. If we are to respond to
nations, especially the great nations, this challenge, we must improve and, where necessary, change the quality
and performance of the United Nations and the way we use it. There can be
no question, as some irresponsible extremists have suggested, of taking the
easy but suicidal way out and consigning the United Nations, along with
other institutions, to the garbage heap of history. In an age where
physical conservation has become an urgent issue, a degree of institutional
conservation may also not come amiss.

Institutions by their very nature tend to be out of date, for by the
time they are set up the situation with which they were designed to deal with
has usually changed. Institutions must constantly adapt themselves and
develop in response to new challenges, or die. In our time the inherent
out-of-dateness of institutions has been emphasized by the extraordinary
rate of change in the way we live. I scarcely need to remind you of examples
of this phenomenon. In the United Nations, the membership has grown from
fifty-one in 1945 to 126 today. The world's population has increased from
under two and a half billion in 1945 to well over three and a half billion
today and is likely to double itself again in the next thirty-eight years.
Of the present population of the world, more than one half were not born when
the Charter was signed here in San Francisco twenty-five years ago. In this quarter century we have seen the advent of thermonuclear weapons, inter-continental missiles, space exploration, computer technology and comparable advances in medicine, biology, biochemistry and other branches of science, accompanied by revolutionary advances in the techniques of communication. These, and a hundred other developments, have changed our lives and our prospects on a scale and at a speed never experienced before in history. It is small wonder that those of us who grew up in the twenties and thirties may sometimes be regarded as antediluvian by the young, and that they are tempted to reject many of the habits and ways of doing things which we have always taken for granted. This reaction should not dismay or surprise us. It should rather encourage us to adapt our ideas and our institutions to meet the challenges which we ourselves have very largely created, bringing in the younger generation to help us to the maximum possible extent.

The widespread disillusionment of the young with institutions is now more important than before for another, and encouraging, reason. The younger generation of today is in general more widely conscious of what goes on in the world than their predecessors, and, much to their credit, they are also far more concerned and demanding about it. It is thus increasingly difficult for institutions which do not fulfil their declared objectives to command respect. An acute observer of the international scene recently wrote that "All institutions provide a temptation for their members to clothe selfishness in the language of idealism." Our twenty-fifth anniversary is a most appropriate occasion to ponder this uncomfortably shread comment.
I do not think that responsible people anywhere doubt the need for a world organization or the validity of the basic ideals and objectives of the United Nations which were set out here in San Francisco twenty-five years ago. On the contrary, the world has never before so urgently required a universal organization which can build and maintain a constructive and balanced international society, and the United Nations is undoubtedly the best - in fact the only - existing organization with the potential capacity for that task. What we should be asking ourselves in this twenty-fifth anniversary year, therefore, is how we can make the United Nations the organization we need, and what changes in attitudes, priorities, and if necessary in organization, are imperative for this purpose.

In this search we shall not find much help in clever formulations which give the appearance without the substance of improvement and progress. Nor will much good come of unrealistic general declarations, which may salve our consciences or serve our wish to rise to the occasion with statesmanlike utterances, but will have little or no real impact on the problems which it is our job to face.

This evening I can only attempt the briefest outline of possible new approaches. First let me say that an immediate and indispensable prerequisite of any progress is to resolve the two existing war situations, in the Middle East and in South-East Asia. In their different ways these two situations exemplify the worst futilities of the past made far more terrible by the destructive techniques of the present. If they cannot be solved by statesmanship, by international agreement, and through common sense and human decency, the future is dark indeed. There is no room for defeatism in facing these two immediate problems. We have to prove to ourselves and to the people of the
world that, even in such complex and highly charged situations, peace can
triumph. Another important prerequisite of progress is to achieve universality
for the United Nations, so that the world Organization truly represents the
governments and peoples of the world, no matter what their system of government
or ideological preference. The United Nations can never be fully effective while
nearly one third of the world's people on the Chinese mainland have no voice in
its councils.

Even if these immediate issues could be settled, it seems to me that our
main problem is still, in a world that is increasingly interdependent and
crowded, to make decisive progress from nationalism to internationalism.
By this I do not mean giving up old loyalties and allegiances - on the
contrary these are the bedrock of the world society we hope to build.
I mean, rather, an extended patriotism starting in national allegiance and
spreading out to the international community of which all nations are
increasingly an integral part. Such a development requires changes in both
political and emotional attitudes, but without it a responsible world
community, for which the authors of the Charter wrote such an imaginative
and flexible blueprint, cannot come into effective existence.

I need not remind this audience of the extraordinary institutional variety
and possibilities which the Charter offers, and of which the United Nations
system provides examples. Internationalism has in fact already reached
a high state of development in some areas where common interests outweigh
political rivalry. I think, for example, of the oldest international
organization of all, the Universal Postal Union, or, at the other end of
the scale, of the extraordinary, though discreet, powers vested by sovereign
governments in the International Monetary Fund. To make the necessary
progress toward internationalism we have to find ways of making the common
interest outweigh the forces of rivalry and hostility in the more difficult areas, where large interests are still in a state of uncontrolled conflict.

In the area of power-politics we have made lamentably little progress. For all the persistent efforts of the last twenty-five years, disarmament is still to a large extent an abstract objective, and yet without disarmament we cannot proceed to the development of a reliable and orderly international system based on law and commonly respected principles. Even in the confines of a small national state, law, administered impartially by the courts and enforced where necessary by the police, has always had to await the dissolution of private armies and the submission to a central authority of large interests which previously could defy the law at their pleasure by force or intimidation.

And yet we all know perfectly well that, with modern weapons, our present anarchy and the absence of the rule of law on an international level is a constant invitation to disaster. The arms race between the super-powers is also insanity from the economic point of view, and can only end, if nuclear disaster does not come first, in a bankruptcy which will affect the whole world.

The persistence of power politics in a world where they have long since become a totally unacceptable hazard has hitherto limited the role of the United Nations in matters of peace and security to, at best, one of ad hoc crisis management, peace-keeping and desperate last minute efforts at peaceful solutions, and, at worst, to the role of an anxious but impotent onlooker in a series of apparently uncontrollable conflicts. Although it is sometimes convenient to do so, it is no good blaming the Charter or the
Organization for this disillusioning experience. The machinery and
the principles for a better world order are all there. The will to
use and to develop them has, so far, been largely absent, except on a few
critical occasions when fear of disaster has temporarily overcome the
temptations of power politics, and in the comparatively rare cases when
governments have been enlightened enough to give the Charter a chance.
This myopic persistence in a dangerously old-fashioned way of life among
the nations of the earth is undoubtedly the principal cause for the general
disillusionment with the United Nations. That disillusionment will only
vanish when sovereign governments, by an act of will and a determined effort
to agree, can move forward to something better. As far as I can see, the
only alternative method of changing our ways is to await the grim
incentives of World War III, after which there may not be much left to
care about anyway.

We now face other pressing problems which cry out for a new kind of
international responsibility and a new level of international authority.
Regardless of the danger of war, our future on this planet now demands
that we move forward in this direction. There is, I am glad to say, a new
movement in the United Nations to face these problems, and through the
initiative of various governments, from the largest to the smallest, the
Organization has become concerned with such problems as outer space, the
sea-bed and, more recently, the most complex question of all, the
preservation of our environment. This is a step in the right direction,
but only a step, and it would be naïve, not to say dishonest, to pretend
that efforts to grapple with these problems of the future are not still

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seriously impeded by political difficulties and attitudes which are largely a hangover from the past. For this reason the advance from nationalism to internationalism must still have priority among our aims, for our hopes of success depend upon it even in fields which are not primarily political.

Progress on the problems of the environment may well show how far this new concern for problems of the future can lead us. A few weeks ago I suggested that urgent consideration be given to creating a global authority to study and act on environmental problems in the interest of all earth-dwellers, and that, if it was to be of real value, this authority should have powers to police and enforce its decisions. I hope that this suggestion will not be taken simply as a well-meaning exercise in idealistic talk, for I believe that our capacity to preserve and enhance life on our planet may well depend on our ability to set up a new kind of international institution and to make it work. Of course, the form and method of operation of such an institution are problems of great complexity which will take much time and effort to solve, but that is all the more reason for making an early start, and the hour is already late. I also believe that if this step could successfully be taken it might help us to find solutions to some of our problems and a way out of some of the emotional, ideological and political blind alleys in which we in the United Nations now spend so much of our time and energy.

I have left to the last any comment on the most important element of all, man himself. The phenomena which we have witnessed since the signing of the Charter have on the whole tended to diminish the status of human
beings as individuals and to increase their adherence to or dependence on large groups and categories of people. It is an irony of history that many of the developments which have made life easier for the great majority of people have also tended to reduce both their individuality and the distinguishing qualities of their particular society. It is not nostalgia for the past which concerns me here, but rather the preservation of the most precious asset of all, the mind, spirit and extraordinary possibilities of man himself. Much work has been done both in and outside the United Nations on human rights, and certainly we have a healthier attitude in the world at large to the rights and human dignity of others than at any time in history, despite the persistence of racism, oppression, persecution and even colonialism in some corners of the world. But in the United Nations mankind as such still has no direct voice. In our Organization, ideology calls to ideology; nations declaim their challenges to other nations, and great interests vie for advantage. All too often the forgotten element is man - the people who actually live and die on and around the battlegrounds of ideologies and of conflicting national aims; the people who live and die for the policies of political leaders they are unlikely ever to meet; the masses of men and women for whose hard-won earnings great commercial interests compete; and the silent, suffering millions who still go to bed hungry every night and still have no hope of sharing in the world's riches.

We have an obligation to make new steps forward here too, and I very much hope that in the years to come the place of the human individual in the scheme of things will be given the priority that it has so often failed to have in the past. It would indeed be a victory for humanity if our century were to be remembered by succeeding generations not for its wars
or its disasters or even for its inventiveness, but as the turning point when for the first time it became possible for all mankind to share the advantages of civilization. Today I feel more strongly than ever that our efforts to build better for the future should be centred around the objective of providing a framework for enhancing the life of men and women as individuals in a world where we have, if we use them correctly, the means and the resources to do this for the first time on a large scale. If that can be our central aim, we may begin to hear less talk of alienation and dropping out, which are other words for cynicism and defeatism. And we may also then begin to develop the spirit which we so desperately need to make our international institutions work, a new patriotism which is the patriotism of man.