

Building A Just World

Highlights of 'Non-Governmental Organizations and the United Nations Department of Public Information' Conference

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THE year 1984 has become a consciousness raising year for world's peace and development process. This three-day conference of Non-Governmental Organizations, in association with the Department of Public Information of the United Nations, had brought delegates from approximately 2400 non-governmental (NGO) groups throughout the world. These organizations, established outside the United Nations system, deal with one or more specific areas of interest that are also of concern to the international community of nations. These groups are defined by the Department of Public Information as "religious organizations, women's organizations, human rights groups, educational, professional and business associations, peace and fraternal organizations, trade union federations, environmental and consumer groups and development organizations."¹

The plenary session was opened by Dr. Deborah Wolfe, the Chairperson of the Executive Committee of Non-Governmental Organizations associated with United Nations Department of Public Information.

While discussing the theme of the conference, Dr. Wolfe stated that "feelings are facts." The welcome address was delivered by Mr. Yasushi Akashi, Under-Secretary-General for Public Information of the U.N. According to him, "In search for solutions to problems of potential danger to world peace and the well-being of nations, the U.N. must have the support not only of the governments of its member states, but also of its ultimate constituents—the peoples of the world. This necessitates the widest possible public understanding of these problems and their often far-reaching implications."² He also spoke about the unique and crucial importance of NGO groups and people working toward the development of mankind. He cited examples of the world community concept in the efforts made to combat natural calamities, hunger, disease, and poverty in the world.

Stability of Well Being

Jean-Ripert, the U.N.'s Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation, addressed the issue of the stability of well-being in the world. Mr. Layachi Yaker, Ambassador of Algeria to the U.S.A., alerted participants in the conference to the excessive wastage made by deve-

loped countries. According to Ambassador Yaker, the developed countries misuse the natural resources available to them, and these nations are careless in preserving them. He mentioned that there was a lack of financial resources that could be directed toward greater efficiency, and advocated the concept of private investments for developmental loans to the third world. As a final thought, Ambassador Yaker stressed the necessity of economic and social development through the world effort regardless of individual interest, and appealed to the international community to insure the survival of mankind through peace and security.

Sir William Arthur Lewis, Nobel Laureate for Economics, of the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University, dealt with agriculture and irrigation. He was especially concerned about dry farming and the fact that it is not fully developed. The factors for slum conditions in the world, according to Sir William Lewis, include over-population, unemployment, and the continued migration to the cities. He advocated more jobs in the towns and villages, and also proposed a balance of payment, the importance of dry farming to the economic well-being of nations, and the setting of priorities by the governments of all nations. Other measures included the need for custom unions, integrated industries, the prospect for cultural exchange, the participation of the private sector, and the continuous expansion of the world market.

The founder of Sarvodaya Shramadana of Sri Lanka, Dr. A.T. Ariyaratne, observed that contentment is the greatest wealth. He sought to preserve the so-called Old World, and asked the international community to develop the art of sharing. Other important factors to the contentment of the world community were communication and the importance of self-motivation.

Experiencing Development

The afternoon session began shortly thereafter, and had for its theme "Experiencing Development." Economic simulation exercises were the most well-received highlights of the day. The star group, acting as a simulation of the leaders of the world, set the rules of play, and proved to be true leaders by deciding to use their wealth for the benefit of the other members of this group. There were many implications of this simulation exercise, the most important being that the developed nations should act like leaders of the global family and help those underdeveloped nations who are having trouble by

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giving them support in every possible way.

The evening ended by the conference participants having a delicious dinner at "Sitar" restaurant, which served Indian dishes to suit many varying palates.

The September 6 plenary session was based on "Economic Problems and Prospects." Peter McPherson, the administrator of the United States Agency for International Development, spoke of the changing character of development assistance, the long-term goals of economic loans from the world bank, multinational corporations, indigenous private sectors, setting priorities, diagnoses before action, flexibility in posing finances, better access for import and export, and the intensification of the better use of loans.

Mr. Shahid J. Burki and Mr. Miguel Ortega then addressed the conference from the perspective of the World Bank, and discussed the concerns of the members of the Bank.

The afternoon session included an hour of music and dance from Northern South and the Ana Varona Group. The plenary session on "Human Development: New Approaches and Applications" was very stimulative. Dr. Majid Rahnema, Senior Advisor on Grassroots and NGO Matters, U.N. Development Programme, attacked the large and reputed universities like Harvard and Johns Hopkins for going to the developing countries and sucking the elements through the vacuum and concentrating them in these places. He believed that the educators dictate the systems to the developing nations and destroy their heritage and culture. According to him, these educational institutes are doing harm and creating disasters rather than helping the developing countries. Another panelist, Ms. Peggy Antrobus, Coordinator of the Women and Development Unit for the University of the West Indies, spoke about the education of women and adults in general. She was concerned about women in underdeveloped nations who were being taken advantage of financially and socially because they were illiterate.

The Vitality of Human Development

Mr. Magnus Peter Mukoko-Mokeba, Senior Liaison Officer of the Regional Commission's Liaison Offices, encouraged human development. The working sessions were on: (1) The economics of development, (2) Cultural and spiritual resources, (3) Basic Needs and Services: Food, Water, Health, (4) Population Challenges, (5) The role and responsibility of women in the development equation, (6) Disarmament and the development dilemmas and (7) Education for development. These sessions were followed by a buffet reception on the third floor of the U.N. General Assembly Building.

The third day of the conference (September 7) began with a session on 'The Impact of Energy, Science and Technology on a Changing World.' According to the speakers, there was too much emphasis on "We, the Government" instead of "We, the People." Dr. Juergen D. Wickert Friedrich-Naumann Stiftung talked about the people's initiative, and

emphasized the promotion of understanding and co-operation between peoples of a local community. He advocated the idea of using media, and of having self-help organizations, leadership, communication, and attitudes of positivity towards development. The purpose, according to Dr. Stiftung, of the Non-Governmental Organizations in any particular area is to get public support, and the role of NGOs are manifold. These include participation, clarification, education, negotiation, development of strategy to solve problems both national and international, and maintaining public constituencies on a larger scale. The Right Honorable Lord Caradan, the former representative of the United Kingdom to the U.N., said that the failure of U.N. is not of the organization, but of the fault of the individual members. The role of leadership is to find the means to set the problems right when the problems become acute, and hopefully to stem the growth of problems in the first place.

Mr. De Cuellar's View

Mr. Javier Perez De Cuellar, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, said in his address: "The success of the efforts of the United Nations will depend to a great extent on public understanding of the problems at hand, which will have the effect of either helping governments to work effectively within the United Nations or bringing to bear on them the necessary pressure to use the means afforded to them by the United Nations."³ Dr. Deborah Wolfe concluded the conference by adding: "The effort is for helping people to help themselves. It is the effort to raise the right questions and not the right answers."⁴

Mrs. Sally Shelley, the retiring staff member of NGO-DPI at the U.N., summarized the three-day conference with remarks about the use of Science and Technology with special emphasis on not to impose on people when they are doing their own projects to help themselves. She said the NGOs are playing a more active role than ever in linking the gap between the arms race and the budget, and in ending the economic violence. She hoped the developing communities would continue to preserve humanity and dignity, and hoped the leaders would help the indigenous NGOs such as the women's groups. She also pointed out that the slide-show on "What is Developed" portrayed a universal slum area found everywhere though with slight variations. She concluded by saying that violence is practised in many countries and that economic crises are present, and that the emergence of women as a powerful group is a source of development in the third world, and when discussing human well-being, we are in it all the way and we are in it together.

References

1. United Nations, *DPI*, The United Nations Department of Public Information and How It Works. DPI/792-June 1984-10M, p. 47.
1. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Conference notes.