

# **Trips: Trips - 76**

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Transcript of the Press Conference held by the Sec. Gen.

at the Palais des Nations, Geneva.

INFORMATION CENTRE  
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TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRESS CONFERENCE HELD BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL  
AT THE PALAIS DES NATIONS ON MAY 22nd 1953

(The introductory statement was spoken in French; replies to questions were given, with a very few exceptions, in English).

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Permettez-moi quelques mots d'introduction à cette petite conférence de presse.

A notre rencontre hier, à quelques-uns d'entre vous, j'ai déclaré que j'avais peu à dire qui puisse vous intéresser comme journalistes. Tout de même, comme tel était votre désir, j'ai arrangé cette conférence pour vous donner la possibilité de discuter avec moi parce que, naturellement, il y a quelques points sur lesquels vous désirez des éclaircissements que je puis vous donner.

Avant de vous donner la parole, je voudrais vous répéter ce que j'ai dit à mon arrivée ici, c'est-à-dire le grand plaisir que j'éprouve d'être à Genève. Pour moi, Genève a toujours été - c'est une question de tradition et même de famille - le centre classique de la coopération internationale, et ce centre classique de la coopération internationale, je le trouve très justement exister en Suisse. La Suisse est un pays que j'admire et que j'aime. C'est un pays que j'ai vu étant jeune étudiant, que j'ai visité bien des fois après - j'ai été un visiteur "assidu" à Berne pendant les dernières années.

Je trouve qu'en général, l'importance des activités, ici à Genève, n'a pas toujours été suffisamment soulignée. Genève et les activités des Nations Unies ici à Genève représentent une tradition tout à fait spéciale. C'est le "embodiment" de ce qui a été établi pendant les jours de la Société des Nations et nous vivons ici dans une atmosphère où les grands noms de la coopération internationale sont encore vivants, noms qui présentent pour moi des exemples à suivre, des exemples à étudier, de grands exemples de noblesse, de dévouement et d'un véritable esprit international. Je n'en dirai pas davantage car j'estime que ce que j'ai dit doit inspirer les travaux d'ici et c'est certainement suffisant aussi pour vous donner une impression générale de la manière dont j'envisage l'équilibre entre les activités de Genève et les activités de New-York.

Si vous me le permettez, après avoir parlé en français, je veux passer à l'anglais. Il m'est naturellement un peu plus facile de répondre en anglais. Mon temps est assez surchargé et ce changement continuuel entre deux langues, dont ni l'une ni l'autre n'est ma langue maternelle, présente quelques difficultés. Auprès de ceux qui parlent ici le français, je m'excuse d'un français qui, parfois, présente des erreurs assez amusantes sans doute.

Questions and Replies

Q. What is your opinion of the suggestion made by Judge Sandström of the Red Cross Societies, concerning the submission of the Korean prisoners problem to the Court at the Hague ?

R. I learned of that proposal from the newspapers and so far I have not seen the details. I must say that it struck me as an interesting suggestion which I should like to study carefully. As I have not had the time so far to do this, you will certainly excuse me if I confine myself to this expression "interesting".

Q. Have you any comment on Senator McCarthy saying that US contribution to UN should be cut in view of the great expenditure in Korea ?

R. I think, you see, that in my present position I should carefully avoid to make any comments on domestic policy in any country. That applies also to this case.

Needless to say that what is happening in Korea is to a major extent United Nations responsibility. I have a very strong hope that the UN responsibilities and activities will not be cut short by lack of co-operation from any single member country.

But I repeat what I said in the very beginning. This is a general statement which is quite natural and quite obvious and I should not like to make any comments on domestic policy moves in member states.

Q. What is your opinion on the power of initiative of the Secretary-General ?

R. Well, in a general way I would willingly try and tell you how I look at that problem. Of course it is a problem. You will excuse me if my response will be a repetition of what I have already said to your colleagues in New York because the same question was asked there.

Now, the right of initiative of the Secretary-General is fairly well defined in the Charter. There is nothing very much for me to say on that point. I feel very strongly that the rights entrusted to the Secretary-General are rights which should be used when the situation calls for it. But I replied to your colleagues in New York something which goes beyond what I have just said. I replied that I feel that it should be recognized that there exists a right of initiative which goes beyond the Charter, subject to the condition that any such initiative - which is not based on any explicit rulings in the Charter - is an initiative which has to be exerted with the greatest tact and judgment. If it is not done in that spirit, it may do more harm than good and that of course is something which should not be permitted to happen.

To sum up: What I feel is that there is, first of all, the right of initiative established in the Charter, but that there is also a moral right of initiative which

goes beyond the Charter. It is, however, entirely the responsibility of the Secretary-General that such a moral right of initiative can be exerted and what he does has to be done with the greatest tact and considerable judgment.

Q. How do you define the status and the position of a staff member of UN ?

R. First of all, let me stress, what you know, that the members of the staff are international civil servants. It starts from the Secretary-General and it is true of all the rest. That means that there is one loyalty and that is one to the international organization and not to anybody else.

In the oath of the Secretary-General it is said and this applies to the staff in general that he must not accept instructions or advice from any government. Of course this applies also and in a very strong sense to his own government.

There is also a ruling in the staff regulations which says that a member of the staff must not in any way act so that it may have an unfavourable reflection on his international status. It is again ... if I may repeat what I have already said ... a question of tact and judgment. It is a question of judgment considering what is proper and not proper for the members of the staff to do.

When going through these matters I must say that I have become more and more convinced that the rule has to be applied in a very strict way, in so strict a way in fact, that I really regard it as essential that members of the staff should abstain from all participation in political activities in their own country or other countries, which are not strictly, so to say, their duty as members of the staff of the UN, that is to say what does not follow from instructions from the Secretary-General and the UN. That is a very strict rule and goes very far. Well I think you will understand this in view of the fact that what is most essential in the present world situation is that the Secretariat should enjoy the full confidence of all member-governments.

It is rather difficult for any member of the staff to engage in political activities in his own country or other countries without running the risk of getting into situations of conflict. Such conflicts will reflect on the governments view of the neutrality and objectivity of the Secretariat, and what one member of the staff does may in this way have an influence on the confidence in the Secretariat in general. In view of the vital significance of the position of the Secretariat in the confidence of the member governments, I think that it would be to pay far too high a price if through any laxity, any wish to be liberal in the approach to Secretariat members' activities we were running the risk of losing what, as I see it, should be the very basis of our operations - that is the confidence of all parties concerned.

Q. Do you understand political activity to mean political activity as it is understood by the person's own government or by the United Nations ? Is the interpretation of the words "political activity" up to the government of the official concerned or up to the United Nations ?

R. It is up to the United Nations.

Q. Is the right to vote a political activity?

R. No, because - may we draw the distinction in this way - the right to vote is the right of the citizen and it is obviously something which should be observed if the laws permit it. On the other hand making propaganda for the man for whom he is voting would, in my view, be political activity.

Q. In view of your remarks to an earlier question - this is your first visit to Geneva; is it your intention to go into the matter of international civil servants' here loyalty to their international organization?

R. I have no reason to do so.

Q. Do you consider that a foreign government should have the right to send investigators into the United Nations premises ?

R. I must say that the question you have raised is one where, I think, that on the basis of principles I should reply no. An exception from the principle can only be excused in the light of practical convenience. I take what has been done by my predecessor in that respect was just such an exception which he found called for practical reasons, really in order to help the people concerned. As to the balance between those two viewpoints, I can congratulate myself so far not having had to find it.

Q. Do you contemplate elucidating the question of the press, which sometimes experiences difficulties in attending Headquarters and is therefore prevented from participating in the task of informing the world of the work accomplished by the United Nations ?

R. This problem forms part of a wider problem, that of the legal status of Headquarters, a question which is now being considered.

Q. If only to revert to this question of political activity, could you tell us whether the political activity of a person, which preceded his employment by the United Nations, would exclude the employment of the functionary ?

R. The question certainly is a most significant one. I think that it is implied, from what I said, that I had in mind in my previous statement activities during the term of office of the functionary. As to the wider problem - the significance of political activities before the time when he joined the staff - I could not lay down any general rule at all. All would depend on circumstances and I feel that in those cases, each case will have to be considered on its own merits.

Q. What will your task be as first political initiative of the Secretary-General ?

R. That is too big an order. But may I intervene on my side, because this rather prolonged discussion and important discussion on an important issue - the one on

political activities - may perhaps give rise to some uncertainty on a point which has so far not been touched upon in the discussion. I would like to quote another part of the same paragraph in the staff regulations. That is the one that says that everybody, of course - it does not say of course, but I think that this of course is obvious - has full right to his political and religious convictions. One of those "convictions" is, of course, that one which everybody in the Secretariat may have as a very good patriot in relation to his own country. And I may add on that point, in order to avoid misunderstanding, that my experience is that the best international civil servant is the one who, while being loyal and 100 per cent loyal to the Organization, is not an internationalist in the sense that he has lost his roots in his own country. I want to stress that, because I might lay myself open to a rather unpleasant misunderstanding which would go entirely against my whole philosophy in this matter.

- Q. What, in your opinion, should be the normal procedure when a Government has lost all confidence in the national loyalty of a member - I mean in the international loyalty of a member - of the Secretariat?
- R. I think that in such a case it would be proper for the Government to make that opinion known to the Secretary-General, but to leave him his complete freedom to judge for himself what action to take.
- Q. Do you consider that the crises which have been experienced by the United Nations for several reasons which are known, are over, or what is your opinion on this point ?
- R. I do not consider them in any way as being over, but I would like to add that this does not seem to be any reason for pessimism.
- Q. Do you consider that at any stage UN Headquarters should be transferred to Geneva ?
- R. No, certainly not. I think they are exactly in the right place. I want to say again what I said in the very beginning. I think it is right and proper that with the Head Office in America, the old tradition should be maintained here. It introduces a very important element, which it would harm the UN very much if it were lost. That is to say, I want - and I am happy to see - Headquarters in the United States, but I would be unhappy if we had nothing else but Headquarters in the US. That would cut us off from contacts and immediate reactions which certainly are essential to an international body of this kind. And such contacts and reactions and experiences we can gather only outside the United States - in Europe, in Asia, in Africa and Latin America.
- Q. Have you any opinion on the tripartite meeting scheduled for 15 June ?
- R. Well, the question has been raised not in that form but has been raised, as you may guess, in the last ten days three times at press conferences and you cannot

expect to get any other reply from me than your colleagues on those occasions. I would willingly make a statement or make comments if I felt that such comments from my side would serve any useful purpose. I do not think they do and for that reason I shall just abstain and give the classic reply "no comments".

May I add that, it is not because this question has in any way scared me that I would like to suggest that we now consider the list of speakers as closed.

Q. How would you like us to pronounce your name ?

R. That is not a question that has been put to me only three times ! But I am very glad to give you a reply, which is now a definite one. Pronounce it the way you like, because as long as I understand whom you mean I am quite happy.