

# **Trips: Trips - 78**

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ACC meeting, Geneva 1953

May 26

Speech delivered by the Sec. Gen. to the Staff Assembly

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to the Staff Assembly, Geneva, 26 May '53

Members of the Staff at the Geneva Office,

You have seen my statement to your colleagues in New York. I had a talk with your Staff Committee. And I met you all in your offices. Is there anything more for me to say?

Yes, I think there is.

Most of you, certainly, have been to the museum arranged in this house, with collections commemorating the days of the League of Nations. There we see the portraits of the Nansens and Cecils, the Stresemanns and Briands of the decades between the two wars. The memory of these men is justly honoured by us. They were pioneers for an internationalism, universal in scope and with world peace as its aim, which - whatever its shortcomings - represents one of the elements in our world of today on which we have to base what hope we may have in the future.

The Organization whose life and contribution is reflected in our museum belongs already to the past, but many of those who worked in it are with us. From personal experience they can tell of the change which has taken place between the days of the League of Nations and the days of the United Nations. Although perhaps profiting from wider support of the common man than our predecessors, we have to work in a much harsher climate. Where our predecessors dreamt of a new heaven, our greatest hope is that we may be permitted to save the old earth. Behind that hope, however, are now rallied all peoples of the world.

You may not agree with me, but it is my personal conviction that in order to keep alive that internationalism of which I spoke, in order to translate it into action, we must work harder and hope for less than those who built the League. The museum is not a tomb. The memory it celebrates is a challenge and a source of strength for those who have the privilege of serving the organizations which now embody the hope for peace. We are expected to succeed where our predecessors failed. We remember their selflessness and courage, but we know that even more may be required of us, if only in order to save what they achieved.

Why do I stress this? Why this theme of blood, sweat and tears? Don't we read in the newspapers of developments towards greater understanding between the nations? In other fields of activity than ours, don't we meet a spirit of optimism and faith in steady, quiet progress? And around us, is not the early summer just as brilliant as ever?

Well, all this is true, but it is just for these reasons, so tangible in this prosperous, peaceful and highly civilized part of the world, that I feel that I should give you as true an expression as I could of my reaction to our situation. I felt it to be my duty to do so on this occasion, when I face for the first time as Secretary-General of the United Nations the Geneva tradition and all that it represents of great and challenging international history.

What I have said may also serve as a background to a few words about your duties and rights as members of the staff of the organizations in the United Nations family. When we speak about the status of the staff member, we argue too often as if there were no differences between this service and the service of a private interest.

As a private citizen the staff member is, of course, entitled here to all the security that any private enterprise could give him and to fair recompense for his work, but he must not forget that over and above those rights of his are other rights, as well as obligations, which derive from the character of the work in which he is engaged and the expectations which the world has for the success of that work.

On many occasions I have had reason to stress the independence of the Secretariat and of the staff member. This independence is both a right and a duty. It represents a right to freedom from political pressure from the outside, but it also represents a duty to remain individually independent in the political fights of today, between nations and within the nations.

You have probably seen in the papers what importance I attach to the rule that every staff member should be free from engagements in political activities which might reflect unfavorably on his status as an international civil servant and on the status of the United Nations Secretariat as a whole. Experience has shown that the only interpretation to this rule, possible in practice and valid as a long-term policy, is that staff members should abstain from all political

activities which do not follow from their duties to the United Nations.

My view of this problem means that I feel that I have to ask of the staff members to sacrifice part of their normal rights as private citizens. I feel that I am right in doing so, as the public interest which they serve just by their sacrifice is one which must guide both you and me in our posts in the United Nations Secretariat; that is the interest of preserving the Secretariat as a body enjoying the full and unreserved confidence of all the Member nations. We have to choose in which way we want to further social and political progress. If we <sup>have</sup> chosen the way of an international civil servant, we have to abstain from alternative ways of action.

To sum up, the right of the Secretariat to full independence, as laid down in the Charter, is an inalienable right. But it can only be defended on the basis of the full recognition by every staff member of his own unlimited obligation to remain politically independent.

I should like to draw your attention also to the independence of the staff member in another sense. I think of the independence of mind and the independence of character. In all sports where a group is acting, be it football or mountain-climbing, success requires perfect team-work. But team-work does not reach perfection without independent individual initiative, disciplined by loyalty but free in its expression. The same is true of our work. The kind of team-spirit which should be fostered and which will make us strong is the one where everybody feels the significance of his contribution and is given full possibility to express his ideas and initiatives in that contribution. In practice this means that sound criticism between colleagues and from senior officials to junior officials, but just as well from any staff member in relation to those who carry the final responsibility for our operations, is a welcome, indeed a necessary part of our life. Just as welcome and necessary, indeed, as on the other hand a mutual lack of confidence, slander or cheap ridicule would be harmful.

I have not mentioned here any one of the specific problems which interest you today in your capacity as staff member. Some of them are under active

consideration by special committees or other bodies in the U.N. family. Others are sub judice. But I hope that, although what I have said has been put in very general terms, it may have given you an idea of the philosophy which will guide me when taking my part of the responsibility in the solution of those various problems.

One of the conclusions you may draw from what I have said is that I will be eager to learn of your viewpoints and observations on questions concerning the Secretariat, and that I will do what I can to maintain an open discussion between us on all points of mutual interest. I hope that this attitude will find a response in a willingness on your side to give me the benefit of your doubt also in cases, where I have had to go against what you might have liked.

In concluding, I wish to say once again, as I have said privately to several of you, how glad I am to have had this opportunity of coming here and of meeting you all at this very early stage of my time in office.

I wish you all success in your future work and I hope for close and fruitful co-operation.