

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE HONORABLE JAVIER PÉREZ de CUÉLLAR, SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS

On May 20, 1989, prior to delivering the 1989 Tufts University commencement address, United Nations Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar spoke with Forum editors Carol Hills and Christopher Shaw. The Secretary-General's comments covered a range of issues, from peacemaking and the environment to the declaration of martial law by the People's Republic of China on the evening before the interview.

FORUM: On United Nations Day, October 24, 1988, you said that the UN's "will to make peace" was no longer being bypassed and ignored. Given the subsequent awarding in December of the Nobel Peace Prize to UN Peacekeeping Forces, and your own triumph in negotiating an end to the Iran-Iraq conflict, to what do you attribute this new recognition of the UN, and how do you see the role of the UN changing in response to this?

PÉREZ de CUÉLLAR: I would first like to explain that the United Nation's peacekeeping operations are often the result of very long and difficult peacemaking efforts. We embark on a protracted peacemaking effort and we end up with a peacekeeping operation. In other cases we are asked to send peacekeeping operations to monitor conflicts which have been resolved outside the framework of the United Nations.

I will give you an example. In Southeast Asia, there are very serious efforts to put an end to the Cambodian problem through the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces in Cambodia, a Cambodian national reconciliation and the creation of a coalition government. The withdrawal of Vietnamese forces will be the result of negotiations between China and the Soviet Union, China and Vietnam, Vietnam and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, and so on. At the end of this process we may be asked to launch a peacekeeping operation. That is one case in which peacekeeping operations would come after the problem has been solved through negotiations which did not take place under United Nations auspices.

Cyprus is a typical case of United Nations peacemaking and peacekeeping efforts, and one in which I am personally involved. We have had peacekeeping operations in Cyprus for twenty-five years, and at the same time we have been continuously involved in peacemaking efforts in order to find a solution to the problem.

Another example of our dual role is the Iran-Iraq War. After the Security Council and I were able to obtain a cease-fire between the Iranians and Iraqis,

we immediately sent a peacekeeping force which was deployed all along the border between the two countries. That is a combination of peacemaking and peacekeeping. There are many other cases, but I want to emphasize the difference between peacemaking and peacekeeping. Since we won the Nobel Peace Prize for peacekeeping, people sometimes forget that the more important element in resolving international conflicts is peacemaking, and that we are intimately involved in peacemaking.

FORUM: Do you think the recognition the UN received from the Nobel Prize was in some ways a more general recognition of its expanded role, or do you think it was confined to the peacekeeping forces?

PÉREZ de CUÉLLAR: The United Nations has concerns in many fields, not only political disputes. People say that the United Nations fails because it is sometimes unable to deal with problems and solutions in the Middle East; they forget that we have economic and social concerns as well. For example, we work a great deal on solutions for economic problems. We are constantly trying to establish a dialogue in order to solve the problems between the developed and underdeveloped countries. We are trying our best to find a solution to the debt problem, and in the next General Assembly the main issue might be the debt problem.

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We also have social concerns. One of the greatest successes of the United Nations is to have brought about the recognition of human rights. At the same time we are now paying great attention to problems related to environment, drug abuse and terrorism. We want people to understand that we have other concerns.

FORUM: You made a speech at the fortieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in which you stated that "there can be no hesitation in our solidarity, and no relenting in our struggle" to combat human rights violations. After forty years, the United Nations is still trying to win that battle. How can such passion and resolve be translated into action by the United Nations and all parties, and what will be different about the World Public Information Campaign launched in December?

PÉREZ de CUÉLLAR: Human rights are a vast and all-encompassing field. Everything, actually, is human rights. If you summarize what *human rights*

means, it is the right to live in peace. Peace is not only the absence of war, but well-being and economic and social justice. That is why I feel that, apart from the Charter of the United Nations, the Declaration of Human Rights is the greatest success of the organization.

I do not want you to believe that the Declaration of Human Rights was a kind of a lyrical aspiration of the United Nations, but we now have mechanisms for monitoring, at least partially, the observance of human rights in all parts of the world. It is not an easy task, because there is a contradiction between the United Nations' role as a monitor of human rights and its role as an organization of governments. There are many instances when we can not monitor the implementation of the declaration as well as we would like because many countries say we are interfering in their internal affairs. The border between interference in internal affairs and monitoring of human rights is a very difficult one.

Many times I have tried very quiet diplomacy to obtain results which are almost impossible to achieve through intergovernmental bodies. The Commission of Human Rights in Geneva, for example, used to send special representatives to countries like Chile, but there was not much success because their governments resisted this kind of public pressure from the United Nations. In those cases I have used quiet diplomatic channels in order to obtain results, and I must say that in some cases I have been very successful.

As Secretary-General, I have considered respect of human rights a priority. All of us have to be extremely strict in forcing member countries and governments to respect human rights. Unfortunately, we are far from being totally successful because there are violations of human rights all over the world, not only in countries like Cambodia, in which we have seen tremendous violations of human rights by the Pol Pot regime, but also in the countries that are at the other extreme of the political spectrum. In South Africa, for instance, there is a constant violation of human rights because apartheid is a denial of the moral element of human rights. We have to keep trying, with tremendous patience and perseverance, to obtain a full recognition of human rights.

FORUM: What is your view of the declaration of martial law by the People's Republic of China?

PÉREZ de CUÉLLAR: That is a typical case of a government exerting its legitimate authority. It is an internal problem in which the United Nations has no right to interfere, because all governments have the right to apply martial law. The issue is the way in which martial law is applied. It is one thing to preserve order, and quite another to misuse the right to apply martial law. It is possible to preserve order while at the same time maintaining respect for human rights. The Chinese government has the right to apply martial law, provided it is exerted in a legal manner with full respect for the Chinese peoples' human rights.

FORUM: The United Nations seems to be walking a tightrope on the Israel-Palestine issue. The forty-third General Assembly agreed to refer to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as Palestine, moved the assembly to Geneva to hear Yasir Arafat's address, and called again for a peace conference on the Middle East. At the same time, the World Health Organization (WHO) seems to have bowed to a US threat to withdraw funding in tabling the PLO application for membership. Is this apparent conflict in policy between two major branches of the UN real or only perceived?

PÉREZ de CUÉLLAR: As you know, the PLO wanted to become a full member of one of the United Nations agencies. That is their right and it would not be proper for me to discuss their aspirations. The problem is that they cannot be accepted as a full member of the United Nations by joining one of its organizations. The system for full membership is much more complicated than that. They first have to pass through the United Nations Security Council, which is comprised of five countries: France, the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and China. I am sure that at this stage at least two or three of these countries would veto the Palestine application for becoming a member of the United Nations.

In the specialized agencies of the United Nations the procedure is different. The PLO can win full membership if a two-thirds majority of the members of that specific organization support their application. Even if they were accepted as full members of the WHO, however, they would not be entitled to become members of all other United Nations organizations. In every case they have to apply in order to get membership. I understand that they have also applied to become members of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and I think they will face exactly the same difficulty there and their application will be postponed for one year.

The nominal status of the PLO has not changed, in the sense that they do not have a different position than they had in the fall. The only thing that has changed is that instead of being called the PLO, they are now called Palestine, which is not a great difference.

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They are fighting for recognition as a state, but I think they will have difficulties because it is a traditional position of all countries that applicants need to have a territory in order to become full members of the United Nations. I think they will find the same difficulties in smaller bodies of the United Nations organization.

FORUM: Can you see the UN playing a role in assisting the PLO in that effort?

PÉREZ de CUÉLLAR: The United Nations has to be totally impartial, because it is a decision which has to be taken by member governments. It is not for me as Secretary-General to influence one side or the other. It is for the more than 150 members of the WHO to decide. They have to take their decisions independent from any pressure from the United Nations Secretariat or from the United Nations Secretary-General.

FORUM: The world is clearly placing a new emphasis on the need to acknowledge threats to the environment. In your opinion, are conferences like the Montreal Protocol the model for future multilateral environmental policy making, or will some other organization, such as an enhanced UN Environment Programme (UNEP), be a more likely future forum?

PÉREZ de CUÉLLAR: Frankly, I am a little concerned that there are too many initiatives as far as the environment is concerned. I think that all the countries which have a real preoccupation with the environment should put their heads together and find a common position, because otherwise we are going to have duplication of effort and overlapping initiatives. I do not pretend that the United Nations should be involved in everything, but we have had UNEP for the past twenty years, and I think they should take advantage of a body like that.

With all due respect for the different initiatives underway, it would be wrong to have too many cooks in the kitchen. It would be much better if countries coordinated their efforts and then decided to set up a different body. There was the Montreal conference and then a meeting in the Hague which included the French, the Dutch and the Norwegians. I do not think that it would help us to have any more. The Montreal conference was very important but I think the governments should put their heads together to try to find a common solution.

More than all the other problems I have discussed, the environment requires a multilateral approach. The depletion of the ozone layer terrifies us because it is a tremendous danger for society as a whole. But the ozone layer is not the only problem in which the multilateral approach is indispensable. It should also be used to deal with terrorism. How can you approach the problem of terrorism without international coordination? After all, we are all more or less affected by terrorism. The drug problem also requires a global approach. Coordination is indispensable in order to avoid duplication of effort. I hate to see rivalries among countries who compete in order to be the *father* of the idea. What we really need is a whole community of efforts.

FORUM: Do you have any advice for President Bush or General Noriega in terms of achieving some sort of a resolution of the Panama crisis? Is there a United Nations role?

PÉREZ de CUÉLLAR: It is a very difficult problem. The United Nations has not been involved so far because the Organization of American States (OAS), had been involved in the case originally. This is another example of an area in which the United Nations must be extremely careful not to overlap or duplicate effort. We have to allow the regional organization a chance to solve the problem, and then we will meet with all the parties concerned if for some reason the OAS is unable to solve the problem. Then they may wish to come to the United Nations for help. In the meantime, I think we have to give the regional body a chance.

As for the first question, President Bush is my very good friend and I would not give him any advice. The only thing that I would like to remind my American friends is that the Latin Americans are very defensive of their respect for nonintervention in their affairs. For the time being, the position of their governments is a wise one. I hope that no measure will be taken which would destroy the unanimity among the Latin American countries — I should say the hemispheric countries to include the United States and Canada — or affect the principle of nonintervention which, for the Latin Americans, is an almost sacred principle.