

“In a Time of Peace Which is No Peace”

Peace and Development – 50 Years After Dag Hammarskjöld

Annual Erskine Childers Lecture 2011

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It was D-Day exactly 67 years ago, when the allied forces landed on the shores of the Normandy. The offensive marked a turning point in the raging Second World War. On the ashes of Europe and Japan the founding fathers - with hardly any mothers, apart from Eleanor Roosevelt - established the following year in San Francisco the United Nations. The UN Charter was signed on 26 June 1945. Article 1.1. declares as its first purpose: “To maintain international peace and security, to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace.”

Eleanor Roosevelt reportedly played a major if not decisive role in the drafting of the Charter’s Preamble, which presumably with the best of intentions but unfortunately misleadingly so opened the declaration in the name of “We, the peoples...” with the following commitment “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind.” She became in April 1946 the first chairperson of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and co-drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The document she called “the Magna Carta of our time” was adopted on 10 December 1948 in Paris by the members of the UN General Assembly. Its Article 3 states plain and simple: “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.” In summary: Article 1.1. of the UN Charter and Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights say it all. - Alas, in the history of humankind, we have never managed to live up to the noble statements.

On June 5, 1958, almost the same day 53 years ago, the then Secretary-General of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld, was awarded an honorary doctorate by Cambridge University. His address, with reference to the work of the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, had the programmatic title “The Walls of Distrust”. Allow me a quote from this speech:

“We meet in a time of peace which is no peace, in a time of technical achievement which threatens its own masters with destruction. We meet in a time when the idea evoked in

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our minds by the term 'humanity' have switched to a turbulent political reality from the hopeful dreams of our predecessors.”

“The widening of our political horizons to embrace in a new sense the whole of the world, should have meant an approach to the ideal sung in Schiller’s ‘Ode to Joy,’ but it has, paradoxically, led to new conflicts and to new difficulties to establish even simple human contact and communication.”²

Ever since then, the last half a century was marked by an increased arms race, and the trend continues. According to a recent factual overview presented by researchers at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the volume of international transfers of major conventional weapons for the period 2006-2010 was 24% higher than for the period 2001-2005. The United States, Russia, Germany, France and the United Kingdom remained the five biggest arms suppliers, in total accounting for 75% of all exports. The volume of German arms exports almost doubled (96% more than in the previous period).³ The data released by SIPRI on military spending for 2010 showed a continued (albeit slower) growth, topping US\$ 1,630 billion. – While there is a lot of talk on (not least nuclear) disarmament, we continue to produce more sophisticated and efficient weapons for mass violence and destruction, which absorb massive investments into the further promotion of technology serving the purpose to protect through posing a threat. The language of power has not changed. We remain captives of a mindset, which bases a pseudo-security on the ability to create insecurity, danger and destruction.

The achievements of human creativity and modernity result and are reproduced in an obsession with technological innovation considered to secure protection by being able to destroy. Our knowledge and the applied instruments are at best a double-edged sword. Hammarskjöld reminds us of this too, when stating that, “through these achievements, doors that were locked have been broken open, to new prosperity or to new holocausts. Warning words about how the development of social organization, and how the growth of moral maturity in the emerging mass civilizations, has lagged behind the technical and scientific progress, have been repeated so often as to sound hackneyed – and to make us forget that they are true.”⁴

² Dag Hammarskjöld, “The Walls of Distrust”. Address at Cambridge University, June 5, 1958. In: Andrew W. Cordier/Wilder Foote (eds), *Public Papers of the Secretaries-General of the United Nations. Volume IV, Dag Hammarskjöld 1958-1960*. New York: Columbia University Press 1974, pp. 90-94 (here: pp. 90f.). Hammarskjöld was deeply inspired by Martin Buber’s philosophy. See on their interaction Lou Marin, *Can we save true dialogue in an Age of Mistrust? The encounter of Dag Hammarskjöld and Martin Buber*. Uppsala: The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation (Critical Currents, no. 8), January 2010; and Manuel Fröhlich, *Political Ethics and the United Nations. Dag Hammarskjöld as Secretary-General*. London and New York: Routledge 2008, pp. 103-116.

³ See for this and further details Paul Holtom/Lucie Béraud-Sudreau/Mark Bromley/Pieter D. Wezeman/Siemon T. Wezeman, *Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2010*. SIPRI Fact Sheet, Stockholm, March 2011.

⁴ Dag Hammarskjöld, op. cit., p. 92.

Hammar skjöld had no illusions about the risks of such notion of progress and its shaky grounds for any lasting peace: “Deep-rooted conflicts which have run their course all through history and seemed to reach a new culmination before and during the Second World War continue. And destructive forces which have always been with us make themselves felt in new forms. They represent, now as before, the greatest challenge man has to face.”⁵ At the same time, such ever more sophisticated armament does not help us at all to come effectively to terms with the real challenges humanity faces in our world of today.

All arms in the world can be directed to the melting ice caps in the Arctic circles and the melting nonetheless continues unabated - without even feeling intimidated. There is no weaponry, which could protect us from the effects of climate change, or allow us to force nature to stop the further environmental decline, ultimately threatening the survival not only of the human species as a result of man-made consequences. The ultimately most devastating and far-reaching weapon of mass destruction is our so-called modern civilization with its reproduction patterns in the industrialised world and its way of life, which is nowadays a habitual privilege among elites the world over. Our notion of “development” is at the very root cause of a track killing daily innumerable forms and varieties of life and bringing us every day closer to extinction. Human security is in our current world less threatened by conventional arms than by the devastating results of our excessively opulent consumerism in the world of the relatively privileged, who as universal values share the latest communication gadgets and designer brands to be purchased in airport shopping malls from Adelaide to Addis Ababa, from Bahrain to Berlin, and from Cape Town to Chicago, as the ABC of global jet-set trends could randomly read.

This way of life is if not among the root causes of structurally embedded inequalities in our world, then at least the flip side to mass poverty, hunger and destitution. As Sir Richard Jolly stated in last year’s Erskine Childers Memorial Lecture: “The levels of inequality in the world today are a scandal. (...) in mainstream thinking and policy making, inequality has been ignored in recent decades, nationally and internationally.”⁶ Instead, the neoliberal era has exacerbated the greed culture and a form of unscrupulous Social Darwinism, which disrespects and erodes further fundamental principles of human well-being. The new trends to re-define human well-being in more than merely socio-economic terms of relative security draw our attention to the fact that we need more than food and housing for a better life.⁷ But, on the other hand, we cannot be well without something to eat, clean water, shelter and some other basic ingredients, which are pre-requisites to feel somewhat secure. It should therefore not come as a surprise, that well-being corresponds to some extent with wealth. As an article in “The Economist” concluded: “Money may not buy you happiness. But it can

⁵ Ibid., p. 94.

⁶ Sir Richard Jolly, *Inequality and the MDGs*. The 2010 Erskine Childers Memorial Lecture, p. 1.

⁷ See the latest OECD initiative for a “Better Life Index” on occasion of the organisation’s 50th anniversary, which complements and reinforces other similar initiatives taken in recent years at: <http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/>.

buy a strong correlation with a fancy new index that aims to put a number on contentment.”⁸ Poverty, in contrast, provides not a high degree of satisfaction and is often a root cause for despair. Poverty prevents us from living in peace, as peace is supposed to be more than the absence of war.

Hammarskjöld was aware of the dialectics and inter-relationship between peace, security and human rights, as his address to the American Jewish Committee in New York on 10 April 1957 testifies: “We know that the question of peace and the question of human rights are closely related. Without recognition of human rights we shall never have peace, and it is only within the framework of peace that human rights can be fully developed.”⁹ He was also aware that the notion of human rights has an explicit socio-economic dimension, which requires measures to redistribute wealth.

In his appeal to give weight to the social and economic tasks of the United Nations he stressed as early as 1956 in one of his few mainly extemporaneous speeches during a visit to India, “that the main trouble with the Economic and Social Council at present is that, in public opinion and in practice, the Council has not been given the place it should have in the hierarchy of the main organs of the United Nations. I guess that we are all agreed that economic and social problems should rank equal with political problems. In fact, sometimes I feel that they should, if anything, have priority. While the Security Council exists primarily for settling conflicts which have arisen, the Economic and Social Council exists primarily to eliminate the causes of conflicts by working to change these conditions in which the emotional, economic, and social background for conflicts develop.”¹⁰

It is obvious from this view, that Hammarskjöld could not have agreed more with the passionate appeal by Erskine Childers, to give more weight and influence to ECOSOC as organ of the UN – an appeal he for the final time with his usual fighting spirit and rhetorical vigor articulated on 8 September 1995 at a Colloquium in the European Parliament in Brussels on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations. He combined this emphatic plea once again with the similarly passionate challenge of the inherent flaws when it comes to the execution of the so-called power of definition, which distorts the decision-making processes within what is euphemistically called the family of nations. As Childers diagnosed in his fierce criticism of ‘Realpolitik’, which he labeled the School of ‘Realism’:

⁸ “Well-being and wealth: The pursuit of happiness”. *The Economist online*, 24 May 2011: http://www.economist.com/blogs/dailychart/2011/05/well-being_and_wealth.

⁹ Quoted in Kaj Falkman(ed.), *To Speak for the World. Speeches and Statements by Dag Hammarskjöld*. Stockholm: Atlantis 2005, p. 154.

¹⁰ Dag Hammarskjöld, “The UN – Its Ideology and Activities,” Address before the Indian Council of World Affairs. New Delhi, India, February 3, 1956 (UN Department of Public Information Pamphlet, April, 1956). In: Andrew W. Cordier/Wilder Foote (eds), *Public Papers of the Secretaries-General of the United Nations. Volume II, Dag Hammarskjöld 1953-1956*. New York and London: Columbia University Press 1972, pp. 658- 673 (here: p. 668).

“ Its adherents argue that the only ‘sensible’ approach to international relations is that the economically mighty and the militarily most powerful will always determine the conduct of world affairs and the conditions of our United Nations. Not ethics, not norms of international law; not the principles of democracy; not the wishes and views of the other 180 or so nations and of the huge majority of humankind – ‘realism’ dismisses such references as the irrelevancies of ‘idealists’ and ‘starry-eyed utopianists’ and insists that traditionally measured power is the arbiter of our destinies. And all the ordinary rest of us might as well accept this. I refuse to.”¹¹

Hammar skjöld, as second Secretary-General of the very same organisation, would most likely – though in a rhetorically different way – have articulated a very similar concern and sentiment. At the core of both their convictions was the notion and true meaning of solidarity. In an address at the University of Lund on May 4, 1959, he clearly dismissed any superiority claims based on a kind of naturalist concept of dominance rooted in some biological advancement over others and also questioned the legitimacy sought by dominant classes to justify their privileges: “The health and strength of a community depend on every citizen’s feeling of solidarity with the other citizens, and on his willingness, in the name of this solidarity, to shoulder his part of the burdens and responsibilities of the community. The same is of course true of humanity as a whole. And just that it cannot be argued that within a community an economic upper class holds its favored position by virtue of greater ability, as a quality which is, as it were, vested in the group by nature, so it is, of course, impossible to maintain this in regard to nations in their mutual relationships.” He therefore concluded: “We thus live in a world where, no more internationally than nationally, any distinct group can claim superiority in mental gifts and potentialities of development. (...) Those democratic ideals which demand equal opportunities for all should be applied also to peoples and races. (...) no nation or group of nations can base its future on a claim of supremacy.” For the United Nations he confidently claimed that, “the Organization I represent ... is based on a philosophy of solidarity”.¹²

This conviction he reiterated in his last address to ECOSOC in 1961, when he linked the principles of national sovereignty in the times dubbed “the winds of change” with the belief that international solidarity and social consciousness have to go hand in hand by “accepting as a basic postulate the existence of a world community for which all nations

¹¹ Erskine Barton Childers, *An Agenda for Peace and an Agenda for Development*. The Security Council and the Economic and Social Council on the front line. Remarks presented to the Colloquium “The United Nations at Fifty: Whither the next fifty years?” at the European Parliament, Brussels, 8 September 1995. In: Marjolijn Snippe/Vijay Mehta/Henning Melber (eds), *Erskine Barton Childers – For a democratic United Nations and the Rule of Law*. Uppsala: The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation (Development Dialogue; no. 56), June 2011, pp. 79-86 (here: p. 79).

¹² Dag Hammarskjöld, “Asia, Africa, and the West”. Address Before the Academic Association of the University of Lund. Lund, Sweden, May 4, 1959 (UN Press Release SG/813, May 4, 1959). In: Andrew W. Cordier/Wilder Foote (eds), *Public Papers of the Secretaries-General of The United Nations. Volume IV*, op. cit., pp. 380-387 (here: pp. 383f.)

share a common responsibility (...) to reduce the disparities in levels of living between nations, a responsibility parallel to that accepted earlier for greater economic and social equality within nations.”¹³

The measured words of the Swedish diplomat and international civil servant Dag Hammarskjöld seem to have little in common with the passionate polemics of the Irish activist and firebrand Erskine Barton Childers. But both in their very individual own ways shared a fundamentally common, dedicated mission and commitment. A true belief in the necessity of a world organization like the United Nations, which should be much more than the convenient façade if not pawn for some super powers - a regulatory body enhancing peace and security as well as human rights and a better life for humanity. A body guided by the notion of global solidarity.

Like for Childers, for Hammarskjöld we were confronted with choices to make. Allow me to quote once again from his Cambridge University address more than half a century ago, which highlights the need to position oneself: “The conflict to different approaches to the liberty of man and mind or between different views of human dignity and the right of the individual is continuous. The dividing line goes within ourselves, within our own peoples, and also within other nations. It does not coincide with any political or geographical boundaries. The ultimate fight is one between the human and the subhuman. We are on dangerous ground if we believe that any individual, any nation, or any ideology has a monopoly on rightness, liberty, and human dignity.”¹⁴

In their firm belief in the power of a truly sovereign family of nations, which requires the personal choice and its consequent and rigorous translation into practical action, Hammarskjöld and Childers were with their similarly strong convictions and uncompromising commitments birds of the same feather. The outspoken and stubborn Irishman and the soft but resilient and persevere, thereby similarly strong-headed Swede shared - despite the striking contrast in their appearances - the very same ideals with similar devotion and uncompromising passion. It is by no means a coincidence that affirmative references to Dag Hammarskjöld feature in Erskine Childers interventions most prominently.

50 years after the untimely death of Dag Hammarskjöld and 15 years after the similarly untimely death of Erskine Barton Childers, it is a great privilege and honour to remember both their legacies in their efforts to improve our world for the sake of the ordinary people. As recorded in the transcript of extemporaneous remarks at the UN Correspondents Association Luncheon in his honour on 9 April 1958, Dag Hammarskjöld maintained the “belief and the faith that the future will be all right because there will always be enough people to fight for a decent future. (...) I do believe

¹³ Quoted in Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, *Poverty and Inequality – Challenges in the Era of Globalisation*. In: Sten Ask/Anna Mark-Jungkvist (eds), *The Adventure of Peace. Dag Hammarskjöld and the Future of the UN*. New York and Houndsmill: Palgrave Macmillan 2005, pp. 220-234 (here: p. 222)

¹⁴ Dag Hammarskjöld, “The Walls of Distrust”, op. cit., pp. 91f.

firmly that ... there are enough people who are solidly engaged in this fight and who are strong enough and dedicated enough to guarantee its success.”¹⁵

Erskine Barton Childers was a living proof of this extraordinary species, enriching our planet and motivating our further efforts. We owe it both, Hammarskjöld and Childers, as well as their many other fellow travellers and disciples, but also us and the generations to come, that we remain loyal to the values they relentlessly promoted and lived. To keep their belief in a better future alive by remaining engaged in their spirit. Let us carry the torch they passed on and let us hope that we come closer to the ideal, which Hammarskjöld formulated only a few months into his office on 14 September 1953 in an address at the American Association for the United Nations:

“As individuals and as groups we can put our influence to the best of our understanding and ability on the side of what we believe is right and true. We can help in the movement toward those ends that inspire our lives and are shared by all men of good will – in terms very close to those of the Charter of the United Nations – peace and freedom for all, in a world of equal rights for all.”¹⁶

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¹⁵ Quoted in Kaj Falkman, *op. cit.*, pp. 51f.

¹⁶ Dag Hammarskjöld, Address at Dinner in His Honor Given by the American Association for the United Nations in Cooperation with the New York University Institute for Review of United Nations Affairs. New York, September 14, 1953 (UN Press Release SG/336, September 14, 1953; *United Nations Bulletin*, vol. XV, no. 7, October 1, 1953. In: Andrew W. Cordier/Wilder Foote (eds), *Public Papers of the Secretaries-General of the United Nations. Volume II*, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-95 (here: p. 89).