

25 May 2004

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Julian Robert Hunte,
President of the 58th Session of the General Assembly,
at Talks with Master Programme Students**

I believe that if there is a place where we should strive to leave a lasting impression, it ought to be an academic institution, and more specifically, a university. In universities the world over, such as this Freie Universitat Berlin, faculty and staff daily take up the critical challenge to provide education and training of a kind that would make young people not only academically proficient but visionary, objective, analytical, and realistic about their own world and the world beyond their borders.

It is in universities that young people break down barriers - to knowledge, to information, to other people, and to other cultures - and learn to see the world through different eyes. Universities help advance the process whereby young people learn to accept that others can have widely divergent viewpoints, but that collaboration and cooperation can bring all to a common position.

I was told a long time ago that if you want to leave a lasting impression, you must do more than speak - you must make a case. I could use this occasion to speak to you about the immense challenges confronting the United Nations each day, among them abject poverty, lack of, or slow socio-economic development, deadly disease, conflict, war and terrorism, to name just a few. But I would be telling an all too familiar story - instantaneous communication and the media are bringing world events to your very doorsteps.

I might tell you that globalization and trade liberalization are proceeding at such a pace that a majority of developing countries, in particular, are having grave difficulties keeping up. Some are losing faith that globalization and trade liberalization are going to bring improvements in their socio-economic situation, since so far, such improvements have simply not materialized.

I could point to grave inequalities that persist in the global economic system, that in many instances further impoverish the poor and enrich the rich. I could say that developing countries want empathy, not sympathy. But many of you many know that official development assistance (ODA) has not been forthcoming at the 0.7% level, and the implication this has for support of the development objectives of developing countries.

I might also tell you what the United Nations is doing to confront these myriad challenges and to accomplish the ideals set out in its Charter and in international law. I could, for example, point to the General Assembly over which I preside, and emphasize its significance as the platform from which leaders of nations large and small enunciate the positions of their governments on critical issues on the international agenda. But many of you would have seen your leaders on that world

stage at United Nations Headquarters in New York, and would fully comprehend the nature of the issues that they addressed from the perspective of your national interest.

I could point to the essential work that United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) are each doing in their special fields of competence. But many of you would be aware of these through your studies, civil society connections and perhaps through the interaction of your government with the United Nations system.

Time has been allotted to us at the end of my presentation to have an open exchange of views on matters pertaining to the General Assembly and to the United Nations generally. During that time, I will welcome your questions and comments on any issues you may wish to raise. Issues such as sustainable development, revitalization of the United Nations General Assembly, reform of the Security Council, peace and security issues including developments in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Middle East - I very much appreciate that all these matters and more are of interest here in Germany, a country whose government is an active and proactive participant in the international arena.

I want to use this time, therefore, to make a case, and hopefully, to leave an impression. Let me begin by emphasizing a point - I have a deep and abiding belief in, and commitment to, the United Nations and to multilateralism. The internationalization of major perils in this the twenty-first century - transnational organized crime, international drug trafficking, terrorism and disease, to name a few - makes it virtually impossible for any nation, no matter how powerful, to solve problems on its own. Multilateralism provides the framework for the resolution not only of the myriad dangers that loom large in this the twenty-first century, but in all matters of a global nature.

There are many regional and international organizations and arrangements in the world. None, however, deals in the same way with the full range of global issues. From development to peace and security, from health to trade, from terrorism to weapons of mass destruction, from passport issues to stamps - virtually all areas of human endeavours are addressed by the United Nations system. In short, the United Nations is the world's premier multilateral organization: in accepting the ideals of the Charter all nations agree that it is.

We live in a world of nation states, each having in mind its own national interest. The imperative of peaceful co-existence, however, compels us to agree on common standards. The United Nations has been in the forefront of global standard setting, codifying international law in areas such as human rights, including the rights of women, children and refugees, climate change, crime prevention and criminal justice and combating terrorism. The United Nations has also, from time to time, established new bodies to address emerging challenges. Bodies such as the Commission on Sustainable Development, for example, are of recent vintage.

The United Nations has been given responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. No other international organization has been given such authority. All 191 Member States of the organization confer responsibility on the United Nations Security Council to act in their behalf in peace and security matters, and in that regard, the Council's decisions are binding.

So, what is the specific case I wish to make? It is a case for your support for the United Nations, and if I might be a little biased, for the General Assembly over which I preside. Speaking especially to young people - to the student body of this University - I urge you to commit yourself: to uphold the ideals Charter of the United Nations; to help raise consciousness to the critical work that the United Nations does on behalf of all the world's people; to mobilize youth groups in support of the United Nations; and to give your support to national and international initiatives to ensure that the United Nations remains relevant, is effective and is better able to fulfill the principles and purposes of the Charter. For the many of you who are already active supporters of the United Nations, I say let us continue to make our constructive contribution.

Why is my case one of support for the United Nations? It is because the organization stands at a critical juncture, in times of great challenge, in a rapidly changing global environment. But this is also a time of great opportunity that must be seized by all the peoples of the United Nations. The United Nations is a "one of a kind" organization - there is nothing else we can put in its place. Importantly, the commitment of young people is our best hope - the future of the United Nations, and indeed of our world, is in your hands.

I thank you.