

24 April 2013

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić,
President of the 67th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Tribute to Oscar Niemeyer and the UN Board of Design**

Mr. Secretary-General,
Mr. Under-Secretary-General
Excellencies,
Mr. Goldberger,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Permanent Representative of Brazil, H.E. Mrs. Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti for the invitation to organize this gathering in the General Assembly to pay tribute to the man and his architectural legacy including this very chamber.

Oscar Niemeyer, who passed away last year at the age of 104, was the youngest of ten internationally renowned architects who sat on the Board of Design, the body which conceived the United Nations headquarters here in New York City.

The UN, and particularly the Secretariat building, is an instantly recognizable feature on the iconic New York skyline. It has not only left an imprint on the architectural heritage of this great metropolis, but continues, in the words of the Secretary-General, to generate a “powerful sense of humanism and global engagement.”

Speaking in 1947, as the Board assembled to begin work on this historic project, Oscar Niemeyer admitted that it would be challenging to encapsulate in “steel and stone” the ethos of the United Nations, an organization which, he said, sets “the nations of the world in a common direction, and gives to the world security.”

Excellencies,

Unlike the Palais des Nations in Geneva, which housed the League of Nations, and was built following an international competition, the plan for the United Nations headquarters was based on an innovative approach.

The ten architects of the Board of Design considered close to 50 plans during their four month-long cooperative effort attempting to translate the hopes and ideals of a fledgling international organization into an architectural landmark. Lacking a common spoken language, they communicated not principally with words but mostly through the sketches and plans that they exchanged with one another.

There were, so it is said, many opposing points of view during those days of collaboration. Ultimately, they were able to transcend cultural and architectural differences and agree on a blueprint on how to use modern design to convey confidence in an organization whose mission is to maintain international peace and security, while promoting development and human rights.

Explaining his approach to designing this complex Niemeyer said: “I created it with courage and idealism, but also with an awareness of the fact that, what is important, is life, friends and attempting to make this unjust world a better place in which to live.”

Today, our headquarters remains a universally recognizable symbol of the United Nations.

Excellencies,

As we prepare to close the General Assembly Hall for the Capital Master Plan renovations, we can reflect on the role our buildings have played in promoting mutual respect and sovereign equality in multilateralism, encouraging us to “live together in peace with one another as good neighbours,” in the words of the Charter.

For over six decades, world leaders have come here to debate critical issues. This Pantheon of mankind has seen confrontation and compromise, triumphs of justice and tests of will, purposefulness and perseverance. These walls have echoed through the years with the words of statesmen dedicated to advancing the quest for peace.

In honoring the life and legacy of the last member of the UN Board of Design to pass away, we, in truth, pay tribute to them all.

It is those ten architects, who in creating a physical presence for the United Nations, fashioned an edifice to lift the spirits, stir the soul, and promote the belief that the progress of mankind can be achieved without recourse to war, whilst leaving no nation behind.

Thank you for your attention.