

40th Anniversary of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library

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It is an honor and a pleasure to be here today, on behalf of the Ford Foundation, on the 40th anniversary of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library. Unlike Sir Brian Urquhart, I was not fortunate enough to know Dag Hammarskjöld personally. But I certainly do remember him as a public man. I remember the skill and tenacity of his extraordinary leadership, to making real the highest ideals of the United Nations in a world divided into two hostile camps. I remember his posthumously-published journal, "Markings." Its profound, austere spirituality illuminated a life of disinterested international service – a spirit that remains as compelling today, amidst the new wars and struggles of our times.

For more than half a century, the Ford Foundation has understood its philanthropic mission in global terms. Its goal of promoting international cooperation obviously expresses that. But so, too, do its other goals – of strengthening democratic values, reducing poverty and injustice, and advancing human achievement. In its many programs the Foundation has recognized that pursuing these goals effectively in the United States requires complementary work in other societies around the world. We know that we all inhabit a common globe, where injustice and violence in one place may have effects far distant. We must act on this knowledge.

This conception of its mission made the Ford Foundation a natural partner with the United Nations in building the Dag Hammarskjöld Library. It was not, as we know, a partnership immediately consummated. Already in 1952 Trygve Lie made a first request to the Foundation for support to build a U.N. library. The response was negative, as were those to subsequent overtures made by Dag Hammarskjöld in 1958. The Foundation's view in those early days was that this task was properly the responsibility of the U.N.'s member states, a response fortified by a standing Foundation policy against building projects. But Hammarskjöld persisted and eventually the Foundation supported four distinguished consultants from U.S. libraries to study the feasibility of the idea and make recommendations. This then led to architectural studies for this large project and, subsequently, the Foundation grant of \$6.2 million in June, 1959.

Hammarskjöld's report to the General Assembly about the United Nations library, in September 1959, makes edifying reading today. It is largely a practical document, concerned with architectural characteristics of the building, the utility it would have for the Secretariat and particularly the smaller member states, the nature of the collections and the place of the new library among the research libraries of the world. But it is striking that Hammarskjöld already identified the library's importance for representatives of what were then 300 international non-governmental organizations, in their consultative status. He recognized their "contribution to the cause of economic and social progress both in terms of advancing public understanding of issues and in terms of material assistance given to specific social and humanitarian projects." He did not live to see the later flowering of what is called today "international civil society," but he seems

to have anticipated – correctly – that NGOs would become increasingly critical to creating more enlightened international policies and better governance across our world.

Today NGOs are the majority of the Ford Foundation’s partners around the world, in the 15 fields in which we work. And we remain firmly internationalist in our mission. That was unusual 50 years ago and unfortunately – despite the rapid growth of philanthropic wealth in the United States in recent years – remains more unusual than we would like.

Let me close by noting how that internationalist commitment under-girded the decision of the Foundation Board of Trustees in June 1959 to provide funding for the U.N. library. The Foundation was properly concerned in the first instance with how the library would strengthen the work of the United Nations. The docket of that meeting records how the Foundation believed it would contribute to “sounder programs and wiser decisions by the U.N. and its specialized agencies.”

But the Trustees also had to confront their policy against funding construction and decide why it would be fitting for the Foundation to breach it in this case. They considered and accepted several reasons for doing so. One was the argument that a grant for the library would be in harmony with “the Foundation’s over-all objectives” – with its programs emphasizing “measures to reduce tensions and increase international understanding” and those complementing the U.N.’s own “extensive activities” for “economic, social, scientific, and cultural development.” But they were clearly swayed also by another argument that I would like to quote in closing: funding the library would give “impressive evidence of support by a major private American institution for the United Nations.” That is an argument that still resonates deeply today, when the United States is clearly – even starkly – challenged to find a larger and more generous international vision.