

Fortieth Anniversary of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library : Legacy of a Secretary-General

*United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld Library, New York
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Morning session: **Opening ceremony and a panel "Dag Hammarskjöld and the United Nations Library as a library promoting peace"**

Panel discussion (summary)

Tharoor: Mr. Grunberg did say that the Library is a place where differences are respected. To kick off the discussion among the panellists, I turn to Brian Urquhart. The great difference at the time of Dag Hammarskjöld's Secretary-Generalship was the cold war. How did he manage the balance between the two superpowers of the cold war and through that process become the effective Secretary-General he was and make the United Nations the institution it became?

Urquhart: It may be quite difficult now to remember what the feeling was in the cold war period, what extraordinary restraints it put on ostensibly common sense actions, how you had to work around this vast ideological hole in the middle of world affairs.

Hammarskjöld started out with an encyclopaedic knowledge of capitalism and Marxism; he was not a one-sided person. He felt that in the service of his overriding objective, which was world peace, it was necessary to deal with east and west completely equally, no matter what he might think about one or the other -- he needed to be respected and not being seen as taking sides. [When he was negotiating the release of the American airmen], Hammarskjöld told Chou Enlai that he had overriding responsibility for world peace when it appeared to be threatened. That was the strength of his position. In 1954, he had expressed extreme disapproval of the role of the United States in toppling the Government of Guatemala; the U.S. was furious. Chinese had noted this and said it meant a great deal to them. But the United States also recognized at this time, as did the Soviet Union, that it was to their advantage to have an independent Secretary-General. This was helpful during Suez crisis, when the biggest threat was the possible involvement of the two superpowers. In the Congo, as well, initially both the United States and the Soviet Union welcomed presence of the UN because they thought that would stop the other from invading.

As I said, during the cold war the Secretary-General was operating in a completely different kind of environment than that of today. In one way it gave him an unusual strength. In some situations he was virtually the only person in the world whom both sides would trust to do something; through his action neither side would lose face. It takes a very determined, extremely thoughtful person to exercise that kind of usefulness, and it takes an intellectual who is capable of figuring out the stages of how the thing is going to develop and also to figure out the principles on which he is going to act and from which he will not deviate.

Tharoor: That opens up to the panel the question of the extent to which we are in a position to fulfil Dag Hammarskjöld's hope that the United Nations Library would become a centre for peace. Many of you have alluded to the extent to which libraries serve the purposes of peace. What do you believe that this library, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, can do to strengthen this mandate, this responsibility for promoting peace?

Thorén: Libraries are very important peacekeepers. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library has an extremely important role to play by spreading information about UN activities. In my work, in Sweden, I can see the extension of that work. We get that information through the documentation and through your website. Our users today, not only students but also researchers and teachers at the University, journalists, parliamentarians, are extremely interested. The activities of the United Nations today influence our daily life to such an extent, it is important that we have access to that information. We as librarians play an important role in disseminating the information, and we also have to act as teachers and help students understand how the UN works.

Tabb: A major concern for all libraries now, if we're hoping to promote peace, is that our libraries are becoming increasingly difficult to get into. The most notable change in librarianship today is the degree to which libraries have become fortresses. What librarians have to do, if we're going to make our work useful, if this library, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, is going to help in some way promote peace -- is to find ways of getting the library outside the walls. This is why it is so important to take advantage of technology to try to make collections available to which people would not otherwise have access. Even more important, we have a responsibility to educate people to want to see and use things they didn't even know. What role this library, the DHL, has to play in that depends on what the Organization wants its library to be. For libraries in general the most exciting thing to think about is how can you get your collections into the hands of people who didn't even know they existed and had no idea they would be useful to them. This is one of our biggest challenges and a lot of fun.

Wilde: As a client of libraries, I would echo what several people have said already. What I was particularly struck by -- it went through all of the presentations -- is a kind of wonderful, large vision of their own responsibilities and of the social functions of libraries for society. We all live in a world where it is not difficult to feel a sense of a rising tide of irrationality, intolerance, prejudice, violent actions taken in the name of exclusionary visions of the world -- not inclusionary and tolerant visions. It seems, in that sense, the challenge that all of you have put out is how you can become more active in assuming this public voice.

McKee: It's about having marvellous collections but also providing good access to those collections and making the contribution we can make visible. Somebody said to me, the problem with information is that it's critical but it's invisible. Librarians are critical but invisible. We really need to work hard to make what we contribute, the value that we add as people who manage information and knowledge well, we really need to make that added value much more visible. Underpinning that -- visibility, collections and access --

what we need is investment, we need investment in the development of those collections, in the properties, the buildings, the places that house those collections. One thing that impressed me about the Dag Hammarskjöld Library is space -- you must not lose the quality space you have. You've got space to expand your collections, you've got space to enjoy those collections; the periodicals reading room impressed me with the sense of space, the sense of quiet and relaxed study, which is exactly right. It's about investing in collections, investing in physical spaces, inside and outside, investing in preservation, investment in automation, of course, but also investment in mediation, the people, the staff. The reason that libraries are so much more effective than heaps of information like the Internet is that libraries have librarians. It's also recognizing the added value of the staff. But underlying it is exactly your point about the need to be much more assertive, much more visible, about the value of what we contribute.

Grunberg: I'm less optimistic. The Internet phenomenon is very positive in a way but it also has some negative aspects. Many people think they will find everything on the Internet and that libraries are no longer necessary. This is a big challenge, a big problem we have to face. Probably the most important job we have to do now, through cooperation between different libraries, is to restore the necessary function of mediation. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library can help other libraries make the work of the UN better known. People don't know it very well; they have no idea of the tremendous work carried out by the Organization.

Tharoor: I was struck by a couple of comments that raise an intriguing question. In a world in which security concerns mean that libraries are becoming more and more like fortresses and in a world where more and more people think they can get the information they need off the Internet, to what degree are libraries as institutions under threat? Is there a risk, such as we are facing in the UN when, in our case, the Member States say you don't need so much money for the Library because the way to go now is to have people go on the Internet? Or the security preoccupations themselves, where you have to spend resources on security and electronic means of protection, and so on, to where you spend almost as much as you used to spend for subscriptions.

Tabb: The answer is different for different kinds of libraries. When the Library of Congress announced its plan to launch the national digital library, the head librarian of a major university library was called by the provost, who said now there was no longer any need for the plan for the new library building in Chapel Hill. We need to do more educating. We've tried to make it very clear that we see digitisation as a means of strengthening the artifactual library and not the opposite. Our success has been quite amazing -- we have been able to show that using the large artifactual collections that Congress has supported, funded for over 200 years, to reach out into the country, into the schools, has actually had the effect of generating more funds for those kinds of things. We have received more funds to do more storage. It is not automatically the case throughout the library world that funders will see that this is a proposition of one or the other. Not that we can be relaxed about it either. There is still the possibility that people who don't want to, who don't understand, don't have the money to fund libraries, which are very expensive, will try to make these kinds of trade-offs. So what we have to do is

show that we are not an either/or type of operation, but really a both/and. And that if you don't do the core library functions, including collecting, you will not have the assets, the material with which to do this kind of outreach. I am optimistic that we are clever enough and have been at this business long enough to be able to explain that our public missions really do require both physical places and virtual ones.

Thorén: There is a tremendous amount of information available on the Internet, but we can't abandon our clients; we must help them to judge the quality of the information and help them to understand where to look for it. I have found that more and more we have to act as teachers. It is extremely important that we guide the users. The Internet can be quite confusing with all the new information resources.

Tharoor: As T.S. Elliott said 50 years ago, "Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?"

Wilde: Let me pick up Mr. Grunberg's term of mediation. Librarians have a critical role in evaluating information, evaluating quality. This is something that has not penetrated, on the whole, the Internet world. Bad information that gets into the Internet is recycled back into, for example, the print media. This has really changed the way people do their work. There is a concept in economics in which bad money drives out good. There is a parallel with information: we should be concerned that bad information can drive out good, that people will tune in more and more to things that serve their immediate purposes, their prejudices.

McKee: Media are always saying: surely, the Internet means the death of the book. And of course that is not the case. The librarians in this room know that as soon as you put your catalogue on the Web, your reservations of books go up by about 40%. Which proves Winston's point, the two are complementary, they are synergistic. What we've done is widen choice; different types of use require different media. My 16 year-old daughter thinks in sound bites because she gets her information from the Web. And she can't do that thing which is second nature to most of the people in this room, which is collating information from five different sources in order to come up with aggregated information. Youngsters, by using the Web, have lost some of those information literacy skills that we all take for granted. The president of the Library Association will make information literacy her theme in the coming year, because of the need to re-learn what used to be natural. However much the Internet evolves, there will still be a need for the book, the physical space, the social interaction. An article in the *New York Times* last Sunday said the use of the New York public libraries has gone up by about 20% since September 11th. And that's something to do with people needing human interaction, and so on. Of course, I got that information from the website version. There is wider choice and that's a good thing, but there are some dangers, particularly with respect to young people and information literacy.

Grunberg: Today, to continue our work, which is to add value to information, we have to be very inventive. We don't [yet] know how to do it with the web. Example: in our library [Bibliothèque publique d'information], we have selected about 2000 of what we

consider the best reference websites in each of the various fields of knowledge. It's a tremendous work because you have to follow very carefully, to update the information about the websites, the changing URLs, etc. It takes a lot of human resources and money. What do we observe? Our users -- 90% of them -- go straight to the free access stations and do their own searches. Only 10% make use of the library's "selected" websites. Before the Internet, everybody knew what a library was -- a place with some selected items. The Internet is completely the basis of our work. It means that we have to be very inventive, to treat information in a different way. One way to do it is to develop our reference services on the Web, as it is done more and more by more and more libraries -- with live services. But that is also something that requires a lot of human resources. So we need to find money to do it.

From the floor

Audience (New York Public Library): Bob McKee pointed out that post September 11th there has been a 20% gain in library use, which represents lots of those people who weren't found in public libraries in the past 15 years. They're coming back. In my 25 years with the Library, the thing most asked for, in terms of UN publications, is human rights. It is still the thing most frequently asked for. The most wonderful thing that the UN has done over the last year and a half is to provide access electronically to information in multiple languages. New York is a city of multiple languages. That's the direction in which I think we need to go.

Audience (World Federation of United Nations Associations): I wonder if I could remind this audience of a third Dag Hammarskjöld Memorial Library, which is also celebrating its 40th anniversary, or just about. That's the Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation's Hammarskjöld Memorial Library in Zambia, a library funded through the generosity of the Swedish people, situated and up and running remarkably quickly after the tragic plane crash. Dag Hammarskjöld would have been pleased by this flourishing library, I think, for three reasons. First, along the front of the library, texts have been engraved, taken from his book *Markings*. One of them is his saying that in our generation the path to holiness necessarily passes through the road of action. Secondly, I think Hammarskjöld would be especially pleased because Zambia is the first country in Africa, as far as I know, that managed a peaceful transfer of power when President Kaunda lost the election and President Chiluba took over -- a mark of democratic wisdom. Thirdly, this library is situated in Zambia, in southern Africa, a region of a very strong concentration of least developed countries, an area of poverty. I'm sure he would feel it's good for a library bearing his name to be a focal point for developing education as fast as possible in that region. Some of our distinguished panellists might like to recall that this library exists and it certainly needs their support.

Tharoor: I have my own Dag Hammarskjöld quotation up on a wall: never for the sake of peace and quiet deny your own experience and convictions.

Mangla: I find myself in a familiar environment, talking about the Internet and the future of libraries. You have to look at it from various national and international perspectives. In most developing countries, the Internet is just a topic for discussion. As a professor

and user of libraries and a user of information, I find that the Internet plays a prominent role in the modern world, but still I will take a long time to believe that it can replace libraries. It can supplement them. We have been debating in the academic and in the library world about the need for libraries to play an important role in peace. Peace is a multi-faceted and multi-disciplinary subject. Whenever we have seminars and discussion, we find there are libraries that have collections dealing with different aspects of peace, but I have yet to find a library that is a library on peace. Is it possible for the UN, through the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, to identify certain libraries in different parts of the world that could be further strengthened in the area of peace? Creating a new library, creating a new institution, may not be that easy, but certain libraries have built up collections on the multi-faceted aspects of the concept of peace. In that context, is it possible, in order to pay homage to the memory of Dag Hammarskjöld, to identify a few libraries around the world, starting as a demonstration project and then further expanded, and in what manner these libraries could be further strengthened to serve the cause of peace in the world?

Tharoor: I know there is the University of Peace in Costa Rica, which may have its own library, so that is one example. But we'll certainly think further about your very constructive idea.

Audience (International Council of Women): I'm interested in the access and the value added aspect and the mediation point, and had a couple of thoughts I wanted to share with you. First, UN deliberations seem to me almost like a snapshot or a book or a threshold that's reached in terms of consensus, which is both the source of its strength and the source of frustration. The value added for the UN Library is, using digital information, somehow to bring that kind of coherence between layers of what we might call thresholds -- for example, human rights -- and how do those layers then play out into other kinds of content? Another aspect, in terms of the resources of the United Nations: two others which have similar "layering" aspects are the Statistics Division and the Maps Division. I see all of these areas, as areas using the Internet and digital information, are areas where, for lack of a better word, the issue of scale has a potential for perception in terms of the vast quantities of information. This is an area that libraries might assume, in terms of gatekeepers, in terms of allowing the scale to be seen. It's like a cataloguing system -- what is the new cataloguing system going to be? Is it just going to be the same thing? And, thirdly, in terms of two conferences that are going on, it seems to me that the idea of capacity-building and technology transfer, and some of the information that we just heard from developing countries, [means] what kind of pressure can libraries around the world, in terms of peace or any other kind of information, bring to bear on issues of poverty, which people say they are going to address at the Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development and the World Summit on Sustainable Development. And as a multi-stakeholder in terms of, let's say, science and technology, or education, or, for that matter, information, where do libraries fit into this when, in fact, all of us have inherited the concept that libraries are repositories of information?

McKee: That is a really interesting challenge to librarians. A number of relatively new scholarly disciplines have been raised, whether it's peace studies, whether it's human

rights, women's issues, sustainable development, and so on. What we've seen in the last 20 to 30 years is the evolution of a number of very large bodies of knowledge, which we have no taxonomy to deal with as traditional librarians. I speak as the representative of an organization that is one of the principals of the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules. Where is all this stuff in that, or in Dewey, or even in LC [Library of Congress Subject Headings]? There is a disjointedness here, a dis-functionality between these very important and very complex academic, scholarly, intellectual issues, a failure, perhaps, of our profession to address the ordering of that knowledge in our traditional core discipline of cataloguing and classification.

Audience (Dag Hammarskjöld Library): I wanted to intervene in this debate on libraries and the Internet. As some of the panellists have observed, there is a lot of trash out there. There's a lot of excellent material out there too, which has to be organized. But there is something that nobody has mentioned, which is that many of the best sources of information are not free, that many of our effective online services are in fact extremely costly. In order for our users to have access to them, they, in fact, have to walk into the library building, or at least be affiliated in a very close way with a library that has the right, through payment, to make it available to them at their desktop. What many of our funders don't realize is just how expensive this information is and how we have to have the knowledge to be selective, and also we have to have the business sense to join together in an effort to bring these costs down.

Audience (Dag Hammarskjöld Library): Professor Mangla brought up two issues: 1. access to information; 2. conditions for that access. So very many don't have access and very frequently access is compromised by poor communications infrastructure--a very serious problem that we should address. Are we really meeting the needs of our users, and who are our users? Can we serve more users? How can we predict? Freedom of information and flow of information -- we should look for ways to not let security issues impose a kind of censorship on the flow of information.

Closing statements

Grunberg: More libraries could probably be more involved in the theme of peace, in relationship with the Dag Hammarskjöld Library. Valuable information, not the kind of information that everybody can access everywhere but the information that libraries have to deliver, this information is less and less free. It is more and more expensive. This is a big problem for our libraries. Many of the reference sources that libraries used to be able to provide for their clients -- in print format -- now are available only in the form of expensive online services. Libraries have to organize themselves to make this information available to the greatest number of people.

McKee: On the cost of information, when the gentleman from the New York Public Library was speaking, I was reminded of a similar situation we have in Britain getting access to publications of the European Commission. Some years ago, the EC entered into partnership with the public library service to provide free access to Commission documentation in local public libraries. And I wonder whether a similar arrangement

between the UN and the public library community might have some added value in terms of access. You mentioned specifically the cost of information on the Internet. The solution, in part, in those areas where such a thing exists, is access to the Internet through the public library -- it needs to be free. That freedom has two principles underpinning it. One is freedom from cost; the other is freedom from filtering. Which is why the American Library Association is exactly right to challenge the U.S. Government on imposing filtering on public libraries.

Tabb: Many of these issues become intertwined. We need to embrace the Internet. It is the largest publishing medium in the world today. If librarians take an adversarial role to the Internet and consider it to be an enemy, we are dead. What we must do is think about integrating it, and one of the things that we regret in many respects at the Library of Congress is that we started talking about the National Digital Library, and I think we should have been talking about is a national library that has digital aspects to it. The lead here has been shown by Harvard, which has talked about its digital initiatives and not about being a digital library. So integration or coherence is an extremely important aspect of all this. Another is to be inventive -- in the area particularly of classification and cataloguing we were talking about. One of the things we have tried to do, for example, is to say all right, classification is very useful, I consider it to be extremely important, costly but important -- but it's not an either/or. There really can be a both/and. One of the things we have been trying to do is to incorporate more and more into our bibliographic record, not only the cataloguing and structured approach that we've always had but also to include now tables of contents and even indices in the record itself, so that people who are used to going onto the Internet and using something like Google or one of the search engines, can come out and find material that way. Traditional scholars and users who want to come at it through a structured approach can come at it that way. They end up at the same place. But the result has been an incredible increase in the number of inter-library loans for us, which is a way in which these multiple forms of access really do get people back to more traditional uses of libraries. Phyllis' point about costs -- of course, this is a problem for all of us. This is one reason we need to be looking, as a community in the U.S. -- and now I know that it is much broader -- at the work being initiated by the Association of Research Libraries, to see whether we may be able to get more of the creators, particularly in the scholarly community, to take ownership of their own works, as opposed to giving it over to publishers to be bought back by the library community. I want to come back to one of the remarks of Sir Brian Urquhart about the person whom we are honouring today -- which is that if you do not speak to people you do not make progress. To the degree that librarians think of copyright owners and database producers as the enemy, the people who are doing us damage, we really will not be able to make the progress that we need. If we can be in much more constant dialogue with them, I think we are in the spirit of librarianship and certainly in the spirit of Dag Hammarskjöld. How can we work more proactively with these people on whom we depend, reminding them that they also depend on us?

Thorén: Dag Hammarskjöld was a very private person. After his death Uppsala wanted to honour his memory and contacted his family and learned that he wouldn't have liked to be a statue or a monument. I think he would have been very satisfied to know that his

legacy to the world today is a tremendous library at the UN and a worldwide system of depository libraries as a living force in international affairs, working for the ideals and the true spirit of the UN.