World Chronicle

UNITED NATIONS

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Giving Voice to the UN Experience

Scholars of the United Nations have often focused on the power politics between its member states, or on the mechanics of its bureaucracy. Rarely has anyone seen the UN secretariat as a collection of unique individuals, many of whom have made significant intellectual contributions in their own right.
A new book in the UN Intellectual History Series, entitled "UN Voices: The Struggle for Development and Social Justice", attempts to change all that -- with a collection of essays based on interviews with some of the individuals who have devoted their lives to the pursuit of international cooperation. Thomas Weiss and Tatiana Carayannis of the City University of New York, two of the book's co-authors, discuss their research in this special UN 60th anniversary edition of World Chronicle.

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ANNOUNCER: From the United Nations in New York, an interview programme on major global issues. This is **World Chronicle.** And here is the host of today's **World Chronicle.**

JENKINS: Hello, and welcome to this special UN 60th anniversary edition of World Chronicle. I'm Tony Jenkins. It's been said that there are two UNs. The first is the forum in which governments debate and make decisions based on their vital interests and the second is the UN of international civil servants. A big, impersonal bureaucracy to some…but also a unique collection of individuals – of people who've devoted their careers to the pursuit of international cooperation, and whose ideas have sometimes had a real impact on the world we live in. This second UN – one in which individuals and their ideas matter – is the focus of this new book…UN VOICES: THE STRUGGLE FOR DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL JUSTICE, and I'm very pleased to have as my guests in the studio two of its authors: Tom Weiss, Director of the Ralph Bunch Institute for International Studies at CUNY – the City University of New York, and Tatiana Carayannis, Research Manager for the UN Intellectual History Project. Welcome to World Chronicle. Tom tell me what is it…why should be people be listening to UN VOICES? What is it that you heard when you were interviewing these people that you thought – wow! That's interesting; people out there need to hear this?

WEISS: Our motivation in doing this book was simple. In dealing with the U.S. public, or publics around the world, or with my mother – there is this image that this house if filled with useless paper pushing bureaucrats.

JENKINS: Like all bureaucrats.

WEISS: …Yes, and there certainly are those but there are also people who make a difference. And our purpose here was to breathe life into what is usually seen somewhat cynically as a parasitical bureaucracy. These voices do make a difference. The proposition that we had from the outset is that people matter and ideas matter and the stories in this book demonstrate that fact.

JENKINS: If that's true, if that's the case, if these voices are so important, why hasn't this been done before Tatiana?

CARAYANNIS: Well the UN, unlike the Bretton Wood Institution has no historical section. So history has not been taken as seriously in this house as some of us would have liked. Few staff members who when they leave the UN, few of them write their memoirs, few of them leave archival material to the archives.

JENKINS: Are there any archives for that material to go to? If they do, are there archivists trained to take care of the material? Is there a way for people like you to gain access to that material?

CARAYANNIS: There are UN archives and there is a chief UN archivist who struggles with her and her staff – it's an under-resourced department at the UN. What we have found during the process of researching this book and also others in this project is that each agency has its own standards and rules and regulations of how they deal with their own archives. So it really runs the gamut of whether or not they're well taken care of or not.

WEISS: In effect, the UN does not have a historical memory of what it has done, what it has done well, what it has done poorly. And part of the explanation is that the Secretary-General is highlighted but every body else below him is not. So if you want to go to the archives all of the Secretaries-Generals papers are nicely archived others are not. This I think has something to do with the anonymity of the civil service and the fact that we don't want too many stars shining.

JENKINS: Alright, let's cut through some of that anonymity and see if we can't bring some of these voices to life. Give me an example of somebody who had something important to say that otherwise, if you hadn't come along to interview them, what they had to say would be lost. What's one of those pearls of wisdom that we need?

WEISS: Well, amongst the people we interviewed as well as amongst the people we were unfortunately unable to interview – like Mahbub ul Haq**,** who died before the project got going. Our purpose was to let their voices tell us what may or may not be present in the international arena. So part of these stories relate to personal lives, but part of them relate to international relations and ideas. So for example, something recent if you like – John Ruggie – telling the detailed stories

behind the construction of the Global Compact and how to bring private voices – both civil society and corporations – in international dialogue as a story that should be in the public domain. Or for if we go back 25 or 30 years before that, Dharam Ghai, talking about the notion of basic needs or Gamani Corea talking about redistribution and the integrated programme of commodities. These stories are not in the public domain.

JENKINS: That sounds like a perfect moment to take a quick look at this clip from the UN film archives which speaks precisely to that sense of common purpose that defines the founding of the UN.

UN ARCHIVE FILM

VIDEO BEGINS:

NARRATOR: Delegates representing 46 nations came to San Francisco on April 25th 1945. Representing almost two thousand million people – more than eighty percent of humanity. All at war when the conference was begun, they came with hope, borne of common struggle. They came to design together machinery to end war – a curse which in 30 years had killed 40 million human beings.

END OF VIDEO:

JENKINS: Interesting because clearly in that clip at least, we were given to understand there was a common sense that bound everybody together – coming out of World War II, the deaths of 60 million people, a fairly common sense that they had to put an end to colonialism. Is there a similar unifying – did you find when you were talking to all these people – did you find a similar unifying sense of purpose? Or is that one of the problems that the UN has today? Tatiana, that there is no common ground.

CARAYANNIS: There isn't the same kind of common ground - at least we didn't find it while interviewing these 73 individuals. But I'd like to add that it wasn't only the war experience – which was a major formative experience for all of our interviewees. But also the experience of the Great Depression, so the two combined led to this idealism that we so often hear in these voices about the founding of the UN, the New Deal, FDR and the hopes attached to international cooperation.

JENKINS: That's interesting because you talk about the formative experiences of war and of an economic crisis – the great depression. And a message that one picks up on throughout the course of the UN's history, and there constantly seems to be being rediscovered – is that you can't have peace and stability without economic and social development. Each new Secretary-General seems to find the need to phrase that in a new way. That's precisely what Kofi Annan is trying to do with the Special 60th Anniversary Summit. Did you see the same sort of thing when you were talking to these people…the book is subtitled, THE STRUGGLE FOR DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL JUSTICE, so clearly you wanted to focus on that and not on the peacekeeping side. Why was that?

CARAYANNIS: Well I think Tom mentioned a short while ago there's been a lot of focus on the peacekeeping side, the peace and security side of the UN and the peace and security side tends to get all the headlines. One of the things that came out loud and clear out of these voices - especially those in and around the 38th floor – was that they're constantly putting out fires and the fires are usually related to peace and security. So even the most well intentioned Secretary-General and 38th floor staff interested in economic and social development issues for example, Dag Hammarskjöld himself was an economist – few people know that - spends most of their time fighting and chasing the headlines related to security.

WEISS: During the interview with Perez De Cuellar for example, he said, ironically here I am the first third world Secretary-General - I came into office thinking I was going to do something about the struggle for development and social justice. And I spent 95 or 97 percent of my time on international peace and security putting out those fires. So one of our purposes here was to look at what actually is the bulk of the business of the United Nations – the economic and social developments...

JENKINS: You have a book open to a page there, is there a reason for that?

WEISS: Yes, I had wanted in response to the earlier question about the passion of some of these people and the motivation that resulted from the war and depression. Just to read a couple of things because it seems to me that there was an idealism and a common purpose – as you said – that is distinctly missing now. For instance, Janez Stanovnik**,** who was head of the ECAE and also the first president of an independent Slovania, told us "that everybody in the UN Secretariat at that time (1945) had a war time story of his own. Therefore, whoever wrote the Charter and wrote that first paragraph, was mindful of the scourges of war". Or in Enrique Iglesias, who is now head of the Inter-American Development Bank. "As an adolescence, I lived through the horrors of war as well as the hopes for peace. The United Nations emerged in that time as the new world's institution". It seems to me that one of the problems at present, is that there is very little agreement on the common purpose. And it seems to me really, that the only common purpose anyone seems to come up with these days is

how to control the United States in terms of UN politics. And it seems to me that that's really going to get...

JENKINS: What do you mean by control the United States?

WEISS: Well if we look at the Security Council, to try to make the Security Council a way to exert some influence over the use and the projection of U.S. military power - and that is a recipe in my view. And I actually think in many peoples view in this book, as the end of the institution. It's important to keep the United States involved, it's important to keep all major powers involved and that comes through loud and clear.

JENKINS: I asked earlier if there was a moral issue and it's no secret of course, that we're dealing at the moment with an American administration which I think it is fair to say looks at the UN with some skepticism. Was that reflected in the state of moral? Especially if you're suggesting Tom, that people are thinking that much about the United States and about how to influence the way that the U.S. approaches the building. Did that then contribute Tatiana to some sense of a lack of moral?

CARAYANNIS: Well there's a sense amongst most of the interviewees that there has been a systematic undermining of the international civil service. Both in terms of staff moral as well as in lowering of standards and that has been largely due to the systematic attacks on the international civil service that began not only with this administration but go back to the cold war – McCarthyism in particular – there are some very graphic stories about the impact of the McCarthy witch hunts on UN staff members including that of Abe Feller who committed suicide. And so there is a...if we can call it a consensus – there is a growing sense among the 73. And example of...

JENKINS: …Of what you're describing, the way that people are reacting to you…

CARAYANNIS: Well, it's interesting. There's a sense that the international civil service has been under attack and there's a lot of deadwood – and I think the Secretary-General's High Level Panel report has acknowledged some of that. But there is also a sense that there are a lot of hard workers. Brian Urquhart for example, made reference to a group of really terrific UN staff members who work within a large group of coupon clippers [all laugh].

JENKINS: On the occasion of the 60th anniversary year of the United Nations, I'm talking with Professor Thomas Weiss and with Tatiana Carayannis of the UN Intellectual History Project, about their recent publication "UN VOICES". Now as we mentioned before, the

book's subtitle is the Struggle for Development and Social Justice, and it's this challenge that I want to talk about a little more after this.

VIDEO BEGINS:

NARRATOR: The Social and Economic Council of the United Nations Organization gives the peoples of the world an instrument with which to promote a higher standard of living everywhere. Through their delegates at San Francisco, the member nations pledge to use that instrument. They pledge too to stimulate the exchange of culture among peoples and in the words of the Charter, to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours. At San Francisco, 50 united nations re-affirmed their faith in the dignity and worth of the human person without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion. The representatives of two thousand million people pledge to promote freedom from fear and freedom of expression, freedom from want and freedom of worship.

VIDEO ENDS:

JENKINS: Very interesting. You know that that clip ended with those images from Norman Rockwell, especially because they… that face of that man, particularly as he was looking up – that look of hope – he was an American citizen with that look of hope. We were talking earlier about the current day skepticism in the United States. It's interesting because the cover of your book I noticed, happens to have Norman Rockwell images on it as well. Did you choose that deliberately? Why did you choose those images? And am I right in saying that they represent something optimistic and perhaps in today's context, something somewhat naïve about people's attitude towards the United Nations.

WEISS: Well, we hope not too naïve. The reason we chose this actually powerful mosaic is that it – in our view – sort of reflects the range, the diversity of voices that's in the book from around the world – different races, cultures and language groups. We also – although this is not publicized - found it slightly ironic that this powerful image was brought to the United Nations thanks to Nancy Reagan and Norman Rockwell, which very few people know. But the sentiments here, this modest notion of maybe occasionally doing onto others as you would like done unto you, is absolutely what's presently behind Tony Blair's initiative on Africa, it's what's happening in trying to push Bush and even the Canadians, to make good on modest commitments to development assistance. And we hope that's captured in this mosaic.

CARAYANNIS: We often think of Norman Rockwell - or at least art historians think of Norman Rockwell – as being a big sentimentalist and therefore dismiss him. But we often find

this political commentary in a lot of his paintings, especially if we look the ones that he did during the civil rights struggle in the U.S. So the publisher initially had wanted us to have some representation of the 73 people that we interviewed and we wanted to go beyond that scope.

JENKINS: A much better way to go – of course. Tell me, was there anything – you could have chosen from presumably a cast of thousands. So you must have had in the back of your minds an idea of what you were hoping to get from this project, or what you thought you would hear. Was there anything that particularly that surprised you as you were interviewing these people? Something that came up which you had not anticipated that came up again and again.

CARAYANNIS: Well I think we were surprised one – that there were so many common experiences, personal experiences in their formative years. Both in their younger years as well as through their college and university years and then how they found themselves in international careers. And in large part, that is why we call that section…chapter – Serendipity in International Careers most of them as we see in the book, stumbled into international careers. Didn't plan it that way, so I think…

JENKINS: Do you think the connection with their upbringings, from where they came from seems obvious. In other words do you think it fell automatically – or was it?

CARAYANNIS: It wasn't entirely obvious, it wasn't entirely obvious….Tom…

WEISS: In fact, I was going to say that what I was struck by was the fact that it's very difficult to generalize about silver spoons yes or no. It didn't seem to really make any difference whether one had come from a privilege or unprivileged background. Early on we thought ah! there's going to be a direct correlation. But this notion that there was a longing to do something in these careers, brought on by sometimes religious things, sometimes watching your mother being shot by the Nazis, what ever it was, the first step in an international career was not always obvious. For instance, the Secretary-General's story here, that he was going to work for Pillsbury and unfortunately Mr. NKrumah swung to the left, Pillsbury pulled out the investment and Annan was obliged to respond to a vacancy notice at the WHO, and the rest as we say is history.

JENKINS: So to speak…yes. [all laugh]. You've talked about how this book is the outcome of oral history of interviews with 73 different individuals who've all contributed to the evolution of the United Nations. I think I would be remiss in my duties as host of World

Chronicle if I didn't mention that many of these individuals have appeared as guests on this show in the past, and here's a very partial sample.

VIDEO BEGINS:

SIR BRIAN URQUHART:

2005: Hammarskjöld I think in the first place was…he was a tremendous student of the UN Charter. He knew it backwards and he thought that it was actually an extremely important and useful document, even in some ways if it was slightly out of date. He thought that the UN would make progress especially when everybody was scared stiff.

JAN PRONK

1985: Economic cooperation amongst developing countries cannot be debt, shouldn't be debt and it won't be debt. Increasing least developed and other developed countries come to the conclusion that it is not the alternative for North-South cooperation, but a very important compliment.

LAWRENCE KLEIN

1988: There is a presumption, a presumption that private capital will always do better than public capital and many of the things that are needed in the third world is, and especially in African countries, are not private types of activities.

MARGARET ANSTEE

(on Chernobyl) 1991: I have seen many disasters in my life. I have seen wars, revolutions and some very terrible events. But I never had quite the same impression as I had when I went there.

MIHALY SIMAI

1994: Poverty has several faces. It would be an oversimplification to consider poverty as something which is the same in every part of the world.

NAFIS SADIK

1995: People say that now the planet is over populated. I think it is not a question of the number that the planet can sustain, but it is under what conditions or in what conditions will people live?

MICHAEL DOYLE

1998: It's a product of discovering how immensely difficult it is to assist a country emerging from a civil war with all the trauma that is involved in that. And it's also a product I think of disappointing lack of support from the international community.

NOELEEN HEYZER

2004: Because the nature of warfare has changed, you will find that wars are fought in the communities, it's fought on women's bodies, weapons of war has used violence against women; violence against women is a weapon of war that is used to humiliate the other side and men of the other side.

STEPHEN LEWIS

2005: Just as we talked about the feminization of poverty, so we talk about the feminization of AIDS. I don't think anyone can dispute it, and when you look at that age group 15 -24 and you realize that all of those who are infected in those years, of all of those who are infected, 75 percent are young women and girls.

SADAKO OGATA

2005: I think recently, there is recognition that helping refugees return home is not just a question of charity, or humanitarian compassion, it is a security issue, it's a justice issue. So I would not give up.

VIDEO ENDS:

JENKINS: Interesting to end on that note because, you know, I was struck by how many of those people were motivated by a sense of social justice or injustice. You had the Hungarian Simai actually watched his mother being killed, Margaret Anstee in her very proper English accent talking about how struck she was and moved she was by these issues of poverty. And yet we end up with Sadako Ogata there talking about security concerns. Isn't that true that these days the focus is much less on social justice and much more about peace and security? Or am I wrong?

WEISS: That's correct, but I think with an interesting new twist. Beginning in the 1990's the notion of human development and then human securities are the soft underbelly of international peace and security being poverty. Being states falling apart, the threat of terrorism. Not of these things can be directly correlated I think the reach search would demonstrate this to threats of violence. But it does seem that they're linked in many ways and most of our voices were passionate about the need to do something about this. Frustrated – in Margaret Anstee's case - having spent forty one years mainly in the development business. Or Jan Pronk for whom I used to work, talking about the need for North-South cooperation, assistance, trade, preferences, etc. And we look at a world in which the gaps are growing

larger and larger. So there's both the commitment to try and do something and a realization as to how difficult the struggle is for development.

JENKINS: I wonder Tatiana if…we were talking earlier about the international civil service which you two both consider in some ways to be revolutionary. And I'm wondering if part of the problem isn't the fact that the concept or the service has in fact eroded over the years, and what we have now is a – not a technocracy which might have evolved but once you have a very energetic and dedicated group of generalists.

CARAYANNIS: Well I will quote from the book here, because Lourdes Arizpe - somebody we interviewed - had a terrific explanation about what the pressures on the civil service in fact are. "Someone once said that the United Nations is a dream managed by bureaucrats. I would correct that by saying that it has become a bureaucracy managed by dreamers….So in the end, someone who works in the United Nations has to be a magician of ideas, because working for the United Nations is like working for a government in which all the political parties are in power at the same time. You have to be a magician of ideas in order to try and find a particular idea around which you can build the greatest consensus".

JENKINS: Wow, that's a fabulous quote. We're nearly out of time on the show and that is a very good note to end on. Let me just ask you Tom, Tatiana, in just a few words, is there optimism do you think amongst the people you interviewed about the future of multilateralism?

WEISS: We actually asked that question – where are we going? What do you think are the biggest challenges? I think that there was no way to generalize across the variety of views. These people I think could not - not believe in international cooperation and multilateralism but they were searching for a way to move ahead. And the answers were as numerous as the people we interviewed.

JENKINS: Well we're all out of time. Thank you both for joining us on this special edition of World Chronicle. Our guests have been Tom Weiss, one of the Directors of the UN Intellectual History Project and the projects Research Manager, Tatiana Carayannis. I'm Tony Jenkins inviting you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle.**

ANNOUNCER: Electronic transcripts of this programme may be obtained free of charge by contacting World Chronicle at the address on your screen:

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