



Staff Committee BULLETIN

UN ST /SCB/281
28 December 1971

Staff pays farewell tribute to U Thant

On Friday, 17 December 1971, members of the staff at Headquarters attended a ceremony in the General Assembly Hall to pay tribute to Secretary-General U Thant, whose term of office ends this year.

The Chairman of the Staff Committee, Dr. N.G. Rathore, made a statement on behalf of the staff and presented the Secretary-General with a gift from the United Nations staff of a Vermeil Bamboo pattern six-piece place setting for eight from Tiffany. In his statement, Dr. Rathore called the Secretary-General "a great universalist" and cited the Secretary-General's contribution to world peace and in areas directly affecting the staff.

The Secretary-General also made a statement in which he stressed the need for the recognition by Member States of the independence of the international civil service as called for by the United Nations Charter.

At one point during his statement, the Secretary-General departed from his prepared text and spoke movingly about the four qualities of man -- physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual -- and singled out man's spiritual qualities as the most essential for his and his neighbour's well-being.

The complete texts of the statements of the Secretary-General and Dr. Rathore are reproduced in the following pages.

STATEMENT BY CHAIRMAN OF THE STAFF COMMITTEE, DR. N.G. RATHORE

Mr. Secretary-General and fellow staff members, this is an occasion of emotion for me, and, I am sure, for all gathered here to-day to pay tribute to the Secretary-General.

As spokesman of the United Nations Staff Union, I am honoured to have this opportunity to express the staff's deepest respect and admiration for you, Mr. Secretary-general.

We know that a man with your well-known sense of modesty may not wish to hear the things I am going to say about you this afternoon. I shall, therefore, out of consideration for your feelings, make this tribute as brief as our own strong feelings will permit.

Mr. Secretary-General, your personal life and your personal qualities are not only a source of inspiration and encouragement for those of us who have been in contact with you, but are also, and justly, world renowned. Your great moral sense, your high and uncompromising concept of right have been noted by many of your associates. Those who know you and have seen you at work over the years know you have never compromised this standard. Another of your personal qualities that has meant much to the office you hold is your deep sense of equity and fair play. We have always known, even when you have made decisions with which we have disagreed, that you reached your conclusions without favour to anyone, and with justice in mind.

We have greatly admired the modesty of demeanour, attitude and conduct you have always shown both in official business and in personal relationships. You are as much at home with a group of visiting children as you are with a Head of State, and you treat both with equal courtesy and careful attention.

You have set a vigorous tempo for all of us. We never cease to marvel at the steady pace you maintain through the longest days and nights of heavy responsibility. Even in what are for us relatively quiet periods, the pressures of your position are constant and unending. While you toil endless hours in many crises without ever losing your composure, your concentration has a calming and strengthening effect on those around you. We know what sacrifices you and your family have made in order to permit you to bear this heavy burden. Above all -- to me at least -- your vast tolerance and compassion in every official act and every personal relationship is most reassuring in a world too prone to intolerance and indifference. I cannot claim to know much about Buddhism, but I hope you will permit me to say with the greatest sincerity that your conduct, your example and your personal life are a tribute to that great religion and philosophy.

On the official level, on your conduct in office, we can add little to the impressive tributes paid you by many Heads of Delegations in recent weeks. They reflect the high regard in which you are held by the governmental representatives with whom you deal and with whom you must sometimes disagree. You have kept the respect of these men and their governments even when duty has led you to speak out against the national interest of Member States, including the great

powers. We have admired your courage and we trust you have derived strength from the loyalty with which we have supported you.

The patience and strength of your philosophy has permitted you to face some of the failures that occurred despite your most strenuous efforts. We are well aware, as are others, of how much you have achieved in the preservation and strengthening of world peace. Your skill and your tireless efforts have not always met with success, but they have been an outstanding contribution to the peace of our planet and are eloquent testimony to you and your devotion. As Secretary-General you have been a great internationalist and a great universalist. You have bent every effort and talent to the cause of peace.

I should like to conclude my remarks on your contribution to world peace by reminding the staff members gathered here of two statements of yours which to me epitomize the moral leadership you have offered the world during these past 10 years. As recently as two months ago you wrote the following:

"I have always believed that efforts to achieve a better world can only succeed if they spring from deep faith and a strong moral and spiritual commitment to the basic principles of love, compassion and understanding which are the foundation of all the great religions".

Earlier, in 1965, at a lunch in honour of the Prime Minister of Canada, you spoke the following inspiring words which, to me, show an unshakable optimism that must have provided you with the strength you needed to bear the burdens of your position:

"...my reading of history leads me to one conclusion among others: humanity is marching towards a great synthesis. The trend is unmistakable. Let us look at the religious aspect of the human situation throughout history. History abounds with religious strifes and struggles. Wars of crusades are a glaring testimony to the total absence of religious tolerance in the early days of history. Even as late as the nineteenth century, religious tolerance was regarded in many parts of the world as not only a sin but as a colossal crime. However, humanity has moved a long way from those closed religious societies to much more open and much more tolerant societies. Now in the second half of the twentieth century, religious tolerance is not regarded as a sin or a crime but as a very desirable attitude in civilized societies. So, all great religions are beginning to coexist peacefully.

"I believe that similar trends are noticeable in the political field. A close analysis of modern history will reveal one fact: that political ideologies are not static but organic in that they are adaptable to the vicissitudes of time. What one considers to be a fixed political dogma at one time is no longer true at a later period. Although ideological differences and intolerance from time to time have been acute, I believe that they are also undergoing

fundamental changes like religious differences and intolerance of a certain stage in human history. Since I am a believer in the concept of the great human synthesis, I hold the view that political ideologies are also moving towards a stage of peaceful coexistence in the same way as religious beliefs are. This process may take a long time, perhaps several generations, but the trend is unmistakable."

Let me turn finally to another side of your activities, the one closest to us, your staff. Most people, seeing you only from afar, admire your outstanding personal qualities and the great contribution you have made to world peace through the UN. But we international civil servants are affected daily by your work as head of the Secretariat. In this role, you have always been sympathetic to our needs and have always shown the greatest understanding of our problems. You have not been able to grant all our requests but you have always treated them with courtesy and consideration, patiently listening to our views and giving us the benefit of your thinking and the reasoning on which you have based your decisions. I know better than most how you have worked to establish and maintain true and open communication between the staff and yourself.

Your high concept of the role of an international civil service, which you have demonstrated in word and in deed, is for us an ideal and a goal towards which in our better moments we all strive and, as the world's foremost international civil servant, you have set an example in your personal life and official actions that we may proudly follow. You have taught us that each of us must develop in himself the faith, inspiration and strength to be a true servant of peace, whatever difficulties we may face.

We have ensured universality in the Secretariat by broadening the representative character of the staff on a wide geographical basis, but not at the expense of the highest standards of integrity, efficiency and competence required by the Charter. Your abiding concern for the welfare of staff, whether here at Headquarters or in other duty stations, has been deeply appreciated by us all.

Through your leadership in the ACC, a number of substantial improvements in the system of pay and other terms of employment have been made possible. At a time when an economy drive was the pre-occupation of the day, you did not hesitate to speak out in favour of the United Nations being a good employer. At the same time, you have not lost sight of the constant need for revitalizing the Secretariat by initiating and coordinating efforts of re-organization, re-evaluation and inspection of its work.

Mr. Secretary-General, in an era of turbulence marked by trends of shifting responsibility, confrontation and challenge to authority, the fact that you have been able to steer the Secretariat with equanimity is perhaps the best testimonial of your sagacious and effective leadership. Even during periods of extreme stress, we have made a distinction between your office and that of the "Establishment". Indeed, if I may say so, we of the staff have always looked up to you as paterfamilias, never wavering in our trust and respect for you. You can be assured that the friendship and profound regard of the thousands of staff who have had the honour of serving under you will follow you wherever you go.

It is of course sad for us to see you leave, but it would be selfish to dwell on our own sense of loss to-day. We know that you must be looking forward with anticipation to all the things you wish to accomplish after your leave-taking from the United Nations. We hope the future will bring you the joys and personal satisfaction you so richly deserve. We pray you may enjoy many years of good health, happiness and continued service to mankind.

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL, U THANT

Dr. Rathore, dear friends and colleagues,

I am deeply moved by your kind words. Today is not the occasion for me to make a long statement in reply. I would simply like to share a few parting thoughts with you.

During my past 3,697 days as Secretary-General my greatest source of strength and, if I may say so, solace in difficult times has been the unswerving loyalty, commitment and devotion to duty shown by all the staff members of the United Nations.

In saying this today, my thoughts are filled with the courage and fortitude shown by so many of our colleagues in distant lands. Even as we are gathered in this hall this evening, we are all aware of the example of steadfastness and devotion to duty being shown by so many of our staff members in South Asia on this very day, at this very moment. Concern for their welfare has been uppermost in my mind during these last few difficult days.

In my expression of gratitude, I also wish to include the thousands of international civil servants who have served with us in various projects in the economic and social development fields apart from political functions, and who have also borne hardship -- but of a different kind -- in distant corners of the world. They outnumber those of us who serve in established duty stations, not only in New York, Geneva and the regional economic commissions but in the various field offices in the United Nations and its Development Programme.

I would also like to recall that the Secretariat, of which I am the Chief Administrative Officer, is a principal organ under the Charter. While the Secretariat, of course, derives its mandate and work programme from the decisions of the principal intergovernmental organs, let us remember that the Secretariat is an independent entity with a status of its own. The integrity, impartiality and effectiveness of the Secretariat are essential, very essential, if the United Nations is to survive as a lasting force for peace, justice and progress.

You have referred, Dr. Rathore, to the Charter requirement that, "the paramount consideration in the employment of the staff and in the determination of the conditions of service shall be the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity ...". This, of course, is very important.

Equally important is Article 100 of the Charter which deals with the integrity of our service. Paragraph 1 of this Article states that, "in the performance of their duties the Secretary-General and the staff shall not seek or receive instructions from any government or from any other authority external to the Organization ...". This is the language of the Charter.

I would also draw the attention of Member States to Paragraph 2 of Article 100, which states: "Each Member of the United Nations undertakes to respect the exclusively international character of the responsibilities of the Secretary-General and the staff and not to seek to influence them in the discharge of their responsibilities." This is again the language of the Charter. I draw special attention to this provision because I feel very deeply that it is an essential counterpart to paragraph 1 of Article 100 of the Charter of the United Nations.

Dr. Rathore, you have also referred to my abiding concern for the welfare of the staff. I am most grateful for your kind reference. I have always felt that the United Nations should be more than just a good employer, and particularly that the conditions of service at the lower levels of the Secretariat need serious consideration. I hope that the Salary Review Committee will give due thought to this aspect of staff concerns.

I realize that, whatever might be done to improve the conditions of service there will always be a few elements in regard to which the staff as a whole, or sections of the staff, might feel that more could be done for them. This to me is quite understandable, but I would urge that the staff keep in mind at all times their special status as international civil servants. This status confers on them certain rights and privileges, and, equally certain distinct responsibilities. I regard it as one of these important responsibilities that the staff should at all times make use of the established machinery to obtain due redress of all their just grievances and demands.

Dr. Rathore, in your statement you made very kind references to my moral approach to all problems and to the tolerance and compassion shown in my approach to all problems. In the space of time available for us, I want to develop these ideas once again very briefly. One of the most important provisions of the Charter, as you all know, is the call to all Member States to practise tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours. This is the language of the Charter. To practise tolerance and to live together in peace with one another as good neighbours is in conformity with the teachings of all great religions.

Another of the objectives of this organization is that it must serve as a harmonizing centre for all Member States, as a centre to harmonize the actions of Member States with a view to the achievement of common objectives. This is again the language of the Charter. If we are to realize these objectives of the Charter we have to bear in mind one basic fact, the need to have a double allegiance.

Of course it is understandable, as I have said on several previous occasions, and it is even desirable, that all of us should owe our primary allegiance to our own state, whether this state is the United States of America, or Russia, or China, or Burma or India or Pakistan. We must have our own primary allegiance to our own state. At the same time, this primary allegiance must be harmonized with our allegiance to the international community; so this calls for a double allegiance. These two allegiances do not run counter to each other in these tense times, particularly in the shadow of the hydrogen bomb. This double allegiance is a must for all of us. We must have a global or planetary allegiance apart from our national allegiance. This is one of the basic facts I want to stress on this memorable occasion.

Another point I want to bring home is to reiterate what Dr. Rathore has just said: the spirit of compassion and love and the moral qualities. As all of you must have been aware, I have certain priorities in regard to virtues and human values. As far as I am concerned, an ideal man, or an ideal woman, is one who is endowed with four attributes, four qualities, -- physical qualities, intellectual qualities, moral qualities and spiritual qualities. Of course it is very rare to find a human being who is endowed with all these qualities but, as far as priorities are concerned, I would attach greater importance to intellectual qualities over physical qualities. I would attach still greater importance to moral qualities over intellectual qualities. It is far from my intention to denigrate intellectualism or intellectual qualities but I am just trying to define my priorities. I would attach greater importance to moral qualities or moral virtues over intellectual qualities or intellectual virtues -- moral qualities, like love, compassion, understanding, tolerance, the philosophy of live and let live, the ability to understand the other man's point of view, which are the key to all great religions. And above all, I would attach the greatest importance to spiritual values, spiritual qualities. I deliberately avoid using the term "religion". I use the term deliberately "spirit". I have in mind the spiritual virtues, faith in oneself, the purity of one's inner self which to me is the greatest virtue of all. With this approach, with this philosophy, with this concept alone, we will be able to fashion the kind of society we want, the kind of society which was envisaged by the founding fathers 26 years ago.

Once again, dear friends, I wish to thank all of you in New York and all over the world, for your fine spirit of co-operation and solidarity, and above all affection to me. You know, this feeling is mutual. I know that my successor will be able to count equally on your co-operation and whole-hearted support. It is with a full heart that I wish you all a very happy holiday season after the conclusion of this demanding session of the General Assembly. In the years ahead may you and your families enjoy the fulfillment and satisfaction of life devoted to the pursuit of peace and human welfare.
