

## 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNITED NATIONS MEDITATION ROOM



*A programme commemorating the 20th anniversary of the "Room of Quiet" Meditation Room at United Nations Headquarters.*

*15 November 1977  
United Nations, New York*

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UNITED NATIONS MEDITATION ROOM

15 November 1977  
Conference Room 4  
United Nations, New York

Opening meditation:  
Sri Chinmoy, Director (LEADER / TEACHER)  
United Nations Meditation Group

Six Songs:  
United Nations Meditation Group Singers

*Speakers:*

Monsignor Giovanni Cheli  
Permanent Observer of the Holy See  
to the United Nations

H.E. Dr. Carlos P. Romulo  
Secretary of Foreign Affairs  
Permanent Mission of the Philippines  
to the United Nations

Dr. Robert Muller  
Deputy Under-Secretary-General  
for Inter-Agency Affairs and Coordination

Ms. Judith Hollister  
Representative of the Wainwright House

Front and back cover photos: United Nations

Inside photos: Lloyd Hart

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*"The United Nations' hope for success rests on its  
thought and action being guided by the spirit that  
the room symbolises."*

*— Dag Hammarskjöld*



*Before the programme in Conference Room 4, a brief meditation was held in the "Room of Quiet" U.N. Meditation Room located in the General Assembly Lobby. Leading the meditation are Dr. Robert Muller, Deputy Under-Secretary-General; Sri Chinmoy, Meditation Group Director; and Monsignor Cheli, Permanent Observer of the Holy See.*

*Monsignor Giovanni Cheli, Permanent Observer of the Holy See:* Thank you very much for your kindness in inviting me to be present and to record together the importance of the meaning of the United Nations Meditation Room, a room of silence, where only thoughts should speak. You have asked me to share with you some of my thoughts on this occasion.

May I remind those of you who have been in Rome that there is a very significant statue in the Church of St. John of Virana. It is called a statue of silence, and it depicts an old man with his finger over his lips beckoning us to be quiet. Of course, the sculptor is not speaking to us of external silence only but, more importantly, of the interior silence.

This pearl of great price brings us to the interior joy, the hope and the encouragement to persevere in the difficult task of peacemaking. But silence does not come to us just because we ask for it. Silence is like a friend. It must be cultivated. We might say that the Meditation Room created twenty years ago by the beloved Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld, is a great house of silence. It is a place where silence is encouraged, stimulated and developed. If we wish meditation to flourish within us, we need to help it to grow. We can do that only by setting aside times in our day when we can pay attention to the quiet within us so that we renew our awareness of its beauty and its grandeur, when we communicate with God, and when we, of course, can fill our minds and our hearts with



*Monsignor Giovanni Cheli  
Permanent Observer of the Holy See  
to the United Nations*

thoughts from good readings and conversation which will enhance our appreciation of quiet and silence.

It is always a great source of joy and peace for me to recall the message of the Psalms, which I would like to leave with you as my final word today: "Think of the Spirit and know that I am God."



*H.E. Dr. Carlos P. Romulo  
Secretary of Foreign Affairs  
Permanent Mission of the Philippines  
to the United Nations*

*H.E. Dr. Carlos P. Romulo, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Permanent Mission of the Philippines: My friends, the Meditation Room, whose twentieth anniversary we observe today, is in a sense a memorial to that complex and extraordinary man, our esteemed friend, the late Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld. Poet, mystic and man of practical affairs, Mr. Hammarskjöld symbolized the dual character of the twentieth century man. Most of us remember him most clearly as the embattled international civil servant who, in seeking to preserve the integrity of the United Nations, became a strong centre in the darkest days of the Cold War. Yet no one, neither friend nor foe, ever doubted his unwavering sense of duty or his deep commitment to the interest of the entire human community.*

This was the public aspect of his life. Only after his tragic death did his rich interior life emerge to public view. The other side of his nature was that of a contemplative man infused with the poetry of vision, seeking to reconcile the opposing demands of the life of action and the life of the spirit. In reading his writings one is struck by the numerous references to stillness: the stillness at the centre of things from which we renew our resources of energy and vigour. "We all have witnin us," he wrote in one of his memorable utterances, "a centre of stillness surrounded by silence." Nothing to my mind more accurately described the Meditation Room than those words of Dag Hammarskjöld, whether one takes them literally or metaphorically. It is in

that sense that the Meditation Room can be said to be a memorial to Secretary-General Hammarskjold. The United Nations is a centre for harmonizing action, as the Charter continually reminds us. But the process of harmonization is a difficult one. All too often passion and conflict rule the day. It is at such moments that we need the Meditation Room to look into ourselves and to encounter our God so that we may cleanse our spirit and gain needed strength. This I have done many times.

Thousands have visited the Meditation Room and no doubt thousands of others will do so in the future. They will sit there in silent communion, seeking refuge from the turmoil and, more important, seeking guidance and light and refreshment of the spirit. The Meditation Room is, or should be, the "other United Nations." Thank you.

*Dr. Robert Muller, Deputy Under-Secretary-General:* Dear friends, on this day of anniversary, our thoughts go back to Dag Hammarskjold, who had devoted so many of his thoughts and so much of his personal opinion to the creation of the Meditation Room. I want to read a few passages from what he said on the 27th of April 1957 when the gift was made by the Laymen's Association towards the establishment of the Room.

"We had, as I said, a very small space within which we sought to achieve a room of stillness. This house must have one room, one place which is dedicated to silence, dedicated to silence in the outward sense and stillness in the inner sense. We must do everything possible in creating such a room to create an atmosphere where people could really withdraw into themselves and feel the void. We had one difficulty: that in a room of this kind, in a house of this character, we could not use any of the symbols with which man has been used to link his religious feelings; we had to work on the basis of symbols common to all. In a sense, what I think we had at the back of our minds was something which is said, I believe, in one of Buddha's scriptures—that the significance of the vessel is not the shell but the void. The significance of a room is not the walls but is in what is framed by the walls; that is to say, we had to create a room of stillness, a room of stillness where nothing intrudes on those who want to find stillness. In a way that was a help, because it meant that we could perhaps do away





*Dr. Robert Muller  
Deputy Under-Secretary-General for  
Inter-Agency Affairs and Coordination*

with symbols, if on the other hand, we achieved purity. Finally, we felt that if within the framework we could achieve an absolute purity of line and color, we could realize all we wanted, a room of stillness with perhaps one or two very simple symbols, light and light striking on stone. It is for that reason that in the centre of the Room there is this block of iron ore, glimmering like ice in a shaft of light from above. That is the only symbol in the Room—a meeting of the light of the sky and the earth.”

I would like to add to this beautiful statement by Dag Hammarskjöld another passage by U Thant in chapter two of his memoirs, which is also a source of great revelation to us: He says, “The concept of Buddhist meditation is very much misunderstood both by Buddhists and non-Buddhists. The word ‘meditation’ is generally associated with a particular posture or musing on some kind of mystic or mysterious thought, or going into a trance. The reason for this misunderstanding is mainly due to the lack of a suitable English word for the original term *bhavana*, which means mental culture or mental development. The Buddhist *bhavana* aims at cleansing the mind of impurities such as ill will, hatred, and restlessness; and cultivating such qualities as concentration, awareness, intelligence, confidence, and tranquillity, leading finally to the attainment of the highest wisdom.”

U Thant has left us here the definition and the philosophy of meditation, which can be of great value to us in our daily lives and which offers a way in which we can see our work at the United Nations. I cannot resist adding also a few words of my own, which I have expressed already, when we paid homage to the rediscovered Meditation Room

on 10 August 1977 at the Wainwright House. This is part of what I said:

There are many of us in the United Nations for whom the co-operation of all nations around common goals and values is a new form of religion, a supreme path or way. The United Nations is a place of convergence for the dreams and prayers of all peoples for a better world.

After thirty years of international service, I cannot help noticing that we see in the U.N. the same perennial human dream which has obsessed all great religions and philosophies, namely the establishment of a peaceful, happy and brotherly human society on Earth. But there is one difference: while in the past, all religions and philosophies were born within specific local, cultural contexts, today we witness the birth of a new philosophy or ethics which originate from a central place of synthesis where all dreams, aspirations, claims and values of mankind converge and are tested against the limits and constraints of our planet. This is entirely new. It constitutes one of the greatest and most exciting attempts at total human fulfilment in the entire evolution of the human species. Yes, every conceivable dream, idea and problem finds its way to the U.N. or one of its specialized agencies. There has never been anything like it. It is a magnificent story, a profound transformation of the human society, a new paradigm of the coming age.

True enough, it is as yet a fragile and incomplete story, for the U.N. largely reflects the priorities and dominant values of our time. For the poorer countries the priorities are food, health, shelter and education, without which there can be no decent

life. First one must live, then one can philosophize. In the Western world too, material, scientific, technological and intellectual achievements occupy generally the highest priority. There we still live in an age of rationalism which believes that everything can be explained by scientific, rational means. This too is reflected in the United Nations. But there are increasing voices which point to other values too.

U Thant, in particular, was the first great prophet who reminded us of the moral and spiritual dimensions of life and who firmly advocated the development of our moral and spiritual values in order to catch up with rapid technological and scientific advances. For him, the solution to many of our individual, national and international problems rested in the practice of truthfulness, integrity, tolerance and brotherhood. And beyond these moral virtues he felt that each individual carried in himself a fundamental question regarding our relationship with the universe and the eternal stream of time. Hence, the paramount place he accorded to spirituality. In his memoirs he wanted to show how spirituality and philosophy could lead and guide politics.

We have not reached that point yet in the United Nations, but year after year one can observe how moral and ethical issues are being brought one after the other to the world organization. A host of codes of ethics and conduct are being elaborated at the U.N. The Charter itself is one of the greatest codes of ethics ever drafted for the behaviour of very powerful institutions: armed nations. It is the Ten Commandments of nation-states. Although its rules are still often broken, it nurtures progressively a better behaviour, a greater understanding and an



improved general moral political atmosphere. Our scientific and industrial age has yielded incredible progress to the human race and we should be immensely grateful for it. But this success perhaps led us to believe that material achievement and intelligence were the apex of civilization. There no longer seemed to be any need for ethics, purity, morality, compassion, love and spirituality. This unnecessary poverty of our age is now being increasingly recognized. Man has been able to extend tremendously the power of his hands, senses and mind through extraordinary technological and scientific achievements. It remains now for him to extend similarly the power of his heart and of his soul. This will be the great challenge of the coming age, and it has been put before us very forcefully by a younger generation tired of war, hatred, hypocrisy and injustices.

I have a Christ in my office. My colleague next door has a statue of Shiva. U Thant had a Buddha in his room. Each of us, be he from North or from South, from East or from West, has his own way of expressing faith in the human race and destiny. When conflict breaks out in any place on the globe, we are all in agreement, all unanimous that the conflict must be stopped, that people cannot be allowed to kill each other, that life must be revered everywhere, that the human person is the supreme care and alpha and omega of all our efforts.

So, for me the United Nations is one of the greatest and most beautiful places and sagas of modern times. King Paul of Greece once saw it as a "cathedral where we can worship what is best in each other." I would not have dreamt of that when I joined the United Nations thirty years ago. The

U.N. has seen its scope widen in every direction, due to the imperatives of new global, interdependent world conditions. But people do not really know how vast and vital its activities are. Every conceivable subject, from outer space to the atom, from the conservation of the past to the moulding of the future, has been brought to it. The Copernican tapestry of its work encompasses almost the total condition of mankind on this planet. During the last few years, a sequence of resounding world conferences has yielded an unprecedented knowledge of our planetary home. Never before had there been a World Population Conference, a World Environmental Conference, a Human Settlements Conference, a World Water Conference, a World Desert Conference, etc. All this is part of one of the most prodigious pages of evolution. It will require the detachment and sense of time of future historians to appraise fully what happened in the last third of our century and to understand what the real contribution and significance of the United Nations were.

Meditation, prayer, dream, hope, vision, monitoring, guidance, foreseeing and planning all go hand in hand in so many different ways at the United Nations. For me the tall building of the U.N. is an edifice of human hope and dream jutting into the universe and receiving from that universe increasingly clearer messages. Perhaps we have reached a time of cosmic evolution. Year round, people from all creeds and cultures assemble here to design a better future for the world. And in my opinion they will succeed.

Our children will know a better future, a more peaceful world, a fulfilment of individual human life and consciousness as was never seen before on

this planet. Little by little, a planetary prayer book is thus being composed by an increasingly united humanity seeking its oneness, its happiness, its consciousness and its full participation in the continuous process of creation and miracle of life. Once again, but this time on a universal scale, mankind is seeking no less than its reunion with the "divine," its transcendence into ever higher forms of life. Hindus call our Earth "Brahma," or God, for they rightly see no difference between our Earth and the universe. This ancient, simple truth is slowly dawning again upon humanity. Its full flowering will be the real, great story of the United Nations.

*Ms. Judith Hollister, Representative of the Wainwright House:* Before I begin, I want to say that as NGO representative for the Laymen's Movement, I have been in Conference Room 4 many times. There have been discussions on many topics from women's rights to the Law of the Sea, but this is the first time I've been in this room and been able to look at these beautiful faces in meditation and prayer. As I thought, "What a wonderful thing Sri Chinmoy has brought to this building! What this is doing for the atmosphere—charging the vibration," I got so excited about it that I almost forgot what else I have to say! I have never seen anything like this before. I think it's wonderful and bless you for that.

I am really here to speak for Weyman Huckabee. He is a perfectly wonderful person who would be here himself if he were well. He is down in Georgia. As time goes by, people often forget the original pioneers behind the Meditation Room. He and his group, called the Friends of the Meditation Room, had the concept of a holy, quiet, sacred area connected with the United Nations way back in the days of Lake Success. They struggled, and sometimes they were given a tiny corner, and sometimes they were not given anything at all. They prayed and they felt that when the time was ripe, somehow, some day the seed-thought would manifest itself.

I talked with Mr. Huckabee yesterday on the telephone and said I would try to represent him a little bit. I asked him if there had been any special



*Ms. Judith Hollister  
Representative of the Wainwright House*

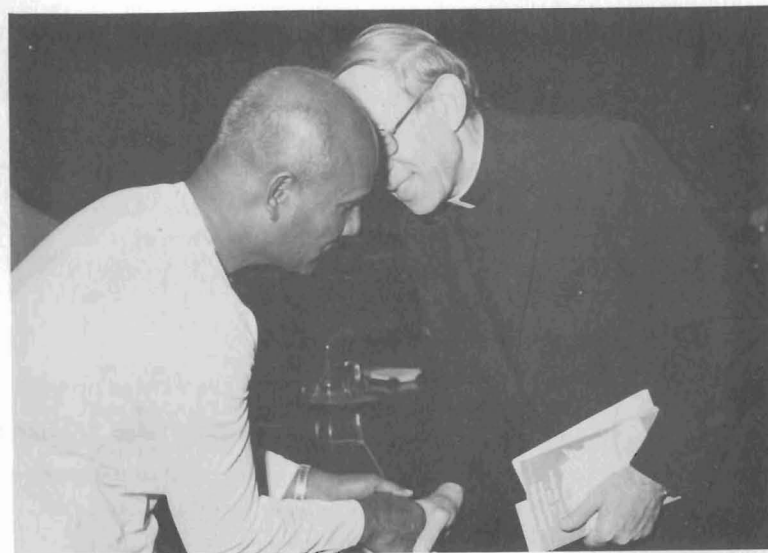
moment in the growth or the history of this Meditation Room, any magic time which he would never forget, which many people might not know about. He thought a little bit and said, yes, there was a magic time. He said back in 1950, when they were building this present building, the Friends of the Meditation Room had over and over again requested an audience with Secretary-General Trygve Lie, to ask if they could have a closet, a linen closet, or something that could be a place of quiet and meditation. The Secretary-General was frightfully busy and they could never get on his schedule. They prayed some more and meditated some more and finally, six weeks before this building was completed, they were told that their committee could see him for five minutes.

So they gathered together—they had some Hindus, Moslems, Buddhists and so forth—and approached the Secretary-General. I guess he was a little bit over-worked and maybe a little bit cross and tired; I don't know. But he said, "There's some strange group trying to get some kind of meditation centre going here, and I don't know much about it and I don't know what I feel about it.

Mr. Huckabee said that he rose up and said, "Well, Mr. Secretary-General, we happen to be that strange group." And then he went on to say, quoting T. S. Eliot, " 'We want a quiet place, the heart in the centre of the vast.' We feel that in this place, where so much profound activity is going on, where so many clear decisions need to be made, where so much is happening that will affect the whole world, that even if it's only a linen closet or a broom closet or anywhere else, there should be a spot where the quiet areas within a human being

can be reached and tapped." Whereupon the Secretary-General said, "Well, if that's what you people want, we'll see that you have it."

It was later on, as you know, that Dag Hammarskjold really took over and created the beautiful Meditation Room that we all know and love. But as Weyman said to me, to the Committee, this little story was just a miracle. I think that we don't always know the facts behind what we see. So I told him, with his permission, I would tell this lovely little story about that miracle. And today we rejoice in this miracle, and even today is a miraculous day. Thank you.



*Sri Chinmoy thanks Monsignor Cheli and H.E. Dr. Carlos Romulo for their illumining talks.*

*Statement received from H.E. Mr. Andrew Young, Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations:*



THE REPRESENTATIVE  
OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
TO THE  
UNITED NATIONS

At the United Nations, where the most tragic examples of human suffering become the concerns of all nations, there can be no greater or more meaningful sanctuary than the "Room of Quiet." For all of us who are at the United Nations to work out peaceful resolutions to the world's problems, the Meditation Room beckons us. Away from the formality and routine aspects of our diplomatic activity, there is a great need for this room where we can absorb ourselves in private meditation and prayer.

I pray that the tranquility of the "Room of Quiet" transcends throughout the world and provides the inspiration for peace and brotherhood.

Sincerely,

A large, stylized handwritten signature of Andrew Young, written in black ink. The signature is fluid and expressive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Andrew Young

*Statement received from His Eminence, Cardinal Terence J. Cooke, Archbishop of New York:*

## REFLECTION ON SILENCE

In my life, I feel a need for and value opportunities for prayerful silence. Conscious of a loving God who communicates in many ways, I listen in quiet for His voice.

In listening, I recall moments during which I experienced life intensely—times of suffering, of great happiness, of unfulfilled longing, of tender love.

In reflective moments, I am at home with my memories, for what is most precious to me is made present in them.

In silence, I realize that the values and convictions that can be easily broken by the hard experiences of life are of great importance—such convictions as: it is good to be selfless; to be sad with those who mourn; to hunger and thirst for justice; to be pure in heart; to be merciful; to be a peacemaker.

In prayerful stillness, I am aware that God is closer to me than my own heart and I ask that His Spirit will lead me to seek holiness, and to clothe myself with heartfelt mercy, with kindness, humility, meekness and patience.

*Statement received from Mr. Weyman Huckabee,  
former Executive Director of the Laymen's Move-  
ment for a Christian World:*

On 5 December 1950 a temporary United Nations Prayer Room was opened at Lake Success, New York. On 11 November 1957 the remodeled Meditation Room as we now know it was dedicated.

The chief point of interest to the casual visitor is a six-ton slab of crystalline iron ore, an altar stone, a gift of the Swedish Government. Yet one who enters to pray soon finds his attention focussed upon LIGHT.

While the room is in semi-darkness, a tiny shaft of light reflects off the altar stone. This simple study offers a symbol of man's hope for "light of understanding" to flood the "world of misunderstanding."

The project to remodel the Meditation Room was approved and supervised personally by Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld and was carried out in cooperation with the Friends of the Meditation Room, a project of The Laymen's Movement.

The alterations have resulted in a V-shaped room 30 feet long and 18 feet wide, decorated in off-white with a projecting panel at the narrow end set apart for a fresco by the artist Bo Beskow. The theme of the fresco is "infinity."

Mr. Hammarskjöld, in speaking about the Meditation Room, said: "The significance of the room is not the walls but what is framed by the walls—we

had to create a room of stillness—where nothing intrudes on those who want to find stillness. The altar is empty not because there is no God, but empty because God is worshipped in so many forms. The stone in the center is the altar to the God of all. In this house, with its dynamic modern architecture, there are very few things that give you the feeling of weight, solidity and permanence; in this case we wanted this massive altar to give the impression of something more than temporary—we want to do that by the form of our altar in such a way as to bring to everybody's mind the fact that every single one of us is faced, in his handling of the heritage of the riches of this earth, with the choice between the ploughshare and the sword."

Everyone wants a better world, no matter what his ideas of how to get one. None of us likes the present chaotic conditions filled with fear, hate, accusations, selfishness, suffering, hunger. These enslave man rather than free him to become the magnificent, loving, creative soul he is intended to be.

Man has reached a critical point in history, where he must turn to God in order to avoid the consequences of his own faulty thinking. We must pray, not a few of us, but all of us. We must pray simply, fervently, sincerely, and with increasing power as our faith grows.

We must condition the world's leaders by asking for God's Spirit to descend upon their hearts and minds. We must condition ourselves, each and every one, by asking God's help in living so that peace may be possible. We must pray in church, at home, on the train, while driving, on the job, and keep at it. Each of us is important now. The ability of every individual to seek Divine help is a neces-

sary link in the gold chain that can bind the world about the feet of God in peace and harmony.

I conclude this communication with a quotation from Dag Hammarskjöld's *Markings*: "In our era, the road to holiness necessarily passes through the world of action. We believe that peace is the will of God. We have now only to make it the will of man."

*Statement received from Mr. Peter Stewart,  
President, the Center for World Thanksgiving at  
Thanks-Giving Square:*

Your celebration of the 20 years of prayer in the Meditation Room at the United Nations will be echoed by a celebration of gratitude at the Chapel of Thanksgiving for this landmark of the human spirit. We are thankful for the spirit of Dag Hammarskjöld and U Thant that has pioneered the oneness of the human spirit in a new and wonderful way. Your own mighty work is an inspiration to all of us. Congratulations.



# U.N. MEDITATION

$\text{♩} = 120$  Moderate words and music by Sri Chinmoy

U---- N. Me-di-ta-tion a----- soul-ful-- cry

To reach the vast-ness of----- one-ness--- sky

U-----ni-ted Na-----tions Me-di-ta-tion----- Group----

a sim-ple Truth-ser-ving all-loving trou-p-----

U-----ni-ted Na-----tions Me-di-ta-tion----- Room-----

to stop for----- good----- the----- birth-- of-----

cos-----mos doom U--- N. Me-di-ta-tion

a----- soul-ful-- cry

# THE UNITED NATIONS

$\text{♩} = 132$  Moderate words by Trygve Lie music by Sri Chinmoy

The U--ni-ted----- Na-----tions is-----

the----- Su-----preme Law----- of-----

the----- world----- (sing 3 times)

# MAY I BE OFFERED

$\text{♩} = 96$  Moderate words by Dag Hammarskjöld music by Sri Chinmoy

May I be off-----ered to----- that----- in the

of-----fer-----ing Which will be off-----ered (sing 3 times)

God took the form of man----- in the vic-tim

Who----- chose----- to----- be-----

sa---cri-ficed (sing 3 times, then D.C.)

# GONE ARE THE DAYS

$\text{♩} = 132$  Moderate words by U Thant music by Sri Chinmoy

Gone--- are the days when each----- Na-----tion

was-- an is-----land-- un-----to

it-----self----- (sing 3 times)

# IN THE WAKE OF THE MOST CATASTROPHIC WAR

$\text{♩} = 116$  Moderate words by U Thant  
music by Sri Chinmoy

In the wake of the most ca-ta-stro-phic war  
in the his-tory of----- man-----kind, hu-----ma-ni-ty  
had----- a----- new----- Vi-----sion:  
it saw the glim-----mer of----- dawn-----  
of----- a----- war--less world-----  
(sing 3 times)

# I KNOW

$\text{♩} = 126$  Moderate words by Kurt Waldheim  
music by Sri Chinmoy

I----- know----- that-----  
the----- world----- can--not-- do with--out  
the----- U-----ni-ted-----  
Na-----tions (sing 3 times, then D.C.)



Then Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld receiving a permanent visitors' record book for the United Nations Meditation Room (photo: United Nations—NB/pcd).



*Above: Former Secretary-General U Thant observing the ninth anniversary of the death of Dag Hammarskjöld and members of his party in a ceremony outside the United Nations Meditation Room (photo: United Nations—T. Chen/Ara).*

*Below: Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim marks sixteenth anniversary of the death of Dag Hammarskjöld in a wreath-laying ceremony held outside the Meditation Room (photo: United Nations—Y. Nagata/Ara).*



UNITED NATIONS:



the Heart-Home  
of the World-Body

We Believe

...and we hold that each man has the potentiality of reaching the Ultimate Truth. We also believe that man cannot and will not remain imperfect forever. Each man is an instrument of God. When the hour strikes, each individual soul listens to the inner dictates of God. When man listens to God, his imperfections are turned into perfections, his ignorance into knowledge, his searching mind into revealing light and his uncertain reality into all-fulfilling Divinity.

-United Nations Meditation Group

*The United Nations Meditation Group is an association of U.N. delegates, staff, NGO representatives and accredited press correspondents.*

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United Nations Meditation Group

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