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## **Press Release SG/SM/6809**

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### **'INDISPENSABLE, IRREPLACEABLE' UN MUST NOT FALL VICTIM TO INDIFFERENCE, SAYS SECRETARY-GENERAL, ACCEPTING HONOURARY DOCTORATE AT SORBONNE**

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Following is the address by Secretary-General Kofi Annan, being awarded doctorate honoris causa at the Sorbonne in Paris on 28 November:

It is a very great honour to be here with you and to receive such a prestigious academic award. It is an honour I share with the entire United Nations, for I know that, through me, you are also paying tribute to the Organization.

First of all, let me express my thanks on my own behalf and on that of all the men and women of the United Nations who serve it with zeal and devotion. Your words of praise have touched my heart. I am, of course, happy to have recently contributed to the international community's efforts to defuse a crisis that would certainly have ended in real tragedy for a whole people and region. But, in the wake of this very relative success, we should ask ourselves some truly probing questions.

We very nearly fell over the brink into war. Why do the tools we possess not enable us to avoid such a crisis or stop it at an earlier stage? How can we be satisfied with the precarious balance that has resulted from mediation efforts? Professor Daudet has just said very rightly that every moment gained on war is a step forward for peace, but can we not hope for better than a reprieve? On what pillars do we truly want to establish our international security system?

In the face of these many questions, allow me to share with you some thoughts on the evolution of our Organization's role and on the parameters that determine this evolution, especially the notion of security. As I have said, it is evident that we cannot meet the challenges of the new millennium with a tool that was conceived in a totally different context, even if the fundamental principles underlying it remain entirely valid.

There is no need for me to present an exhaustive list of the battles the Organization has successfully fought. You will agree, I am sure, that although its resources have

sometimes been ridiculously limited, the United Nations has been able to meet huge and incredibly diverse challenges. You may also say that it has suffered unfortunate setbacks and even outright failures. This is true. But if I did not believe it capable of learning from its

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experience, if I had no faith in its capacity to evolve and adapt, I would not have agreed to become its Secretary-General.

Since the beginning, the keynote of my mandate has been reform. A reform which should allow the Organization to define its objectives more clearly, improve the focus of its efforts and better carry out what is expected of it. On the eve of the new millennium, I should like the United Nations to be in a stronger position to confront the extremely complex situations that characterize this era of globalization, situations which are more and more interdependent and, at the same time, increasingly fluid.

Today, it is clear that it would be useless to try to combat globalization. Useless and counterproductive, because it offers extraordinary opportunities. But, it would be just as inadvisable, and perhaps even more dangerous, to see globalization as an unmixed blessing and to ignore its damaging effects. For the innumerable opportunities offered today go hand in hand with formidable problems.

Our world is going through a fundamental transformation, as fundamental as the emergence of the nation State or capitalism in Europe five or six centuries ago. We are literally in the process of remodelling socio-economic and political structures. The barriers of time and space have fallen. All economic relations have become domestic because they are intertwined with a new and unique global system. Environmental problems do not stop at borders either -- they affect the whole biosphere on which we depend for our survival. And, to some extent, even culture is becoming globalized.

The current distortions stem from the fact that political organization has not fallen into step with this evolution. While many aspects of our daily lives are influenced by global forces, political thinking and structures retain their national character. Some international agreements do exist in the areas of economics, the environment and human rights, but concerted efforts and cooperation remain limited. In any case, they cannot be compared with the challenges we must face.

There is much talk of a "global village". Unfortunately, it is a village without a fire station, without a police station and without a mayor's office. It is a village where social services are available only to a select few. A village where the gaps between rich and poor are already too wide and could become even wider. A village where the rich may become even richer, while the poor keep getting poorer and more marginalized.

This fact is not only appalling, it is also deeply disturbing. We now know that the maintenance of international peace and security goes far beyond the settlement of

conflicts. We know that it also requires action to promote economic and social progress. Collective security and sustainable development are definitely two sides of the same coin. Seen from this angle, security

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means being able to exercise fundamental human rights -- the right to health, to education, to decent living conditions and to dignity.

Allow me to illustrate my point with two pictures. The first is a photograph taken in May 1968. It shows a student standing in the Cour d'honneur of the Sorbonne, holding up a sign that says, "I exist". The second is a poster used by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in one of its campaigns for children. It shows a young adolescent being asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?", and replying simply, "Alive!".

Both these young people are expressing a deep desire to be. But, while one is calling for full self-realization, the other is asking only to survive. I believe that the primary cause of conflicts lies in this contrast, and in the situation of billions of human beings who are still on the fringes of development. And, I say again, that it is on this front that we must begin our efforts to prevent such conflicts.

The name of a brilliant Indian economist whose work has had a great influence on economic thinking in the United Nations deserves to be mentioned here. I am referring, as you guessed, to Professor Amartya Sen, who was just awarded the 1998 Nobel Prize in economics. Professor Sen has the great merit of having managed to combine economics and philosophy in such a way as to reintroduce an ethical dimension in the discussion on the great problems of our times.

To resolve those problems, it is the responsibility of the United Nations, as the world forum par excellence, to promote the quest for agreed global solutions based on global rules and norms. But, it is the responsibility of the international community to pursue the effort to achieve the necessary agreements. It is absolutely essential to reflect deeply and realistically on how our world is developing, on phenomena that some find exhilarating and others find terrifying and with which we are surely not unable to cope.

The Millennium Assembly to be held by the States Members of the United Nations in the year 2000 and the parallel Forum that will bring together all the actors of civil society should enable us to crystallize our thoughts. In that symbolic year, all parties concerned will have an opportunity to decide in concert what they want to do with the United Nations, to consider what approaches they want it to adopt and to examine what resources they are prepared to invest in the Organization.

I spoke of civil society; let me go back to that briefly. As you all know, I firmly believe that the United Nations should be not just an Organization of governments, but an

Organization of peoples. That is why I have often said that I wanted to establish a link with civil society. Partnerships have already been established with all the components of civil

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society capable of helping to achieve the objectives of the United Nations, each in its own way and within the limits of its resources.

Sometimes that contribution is spectacular. I am thinking, for example, of the unprecedented gesture of generosity made by Ted Turner, who donated \$1 billion in support of United Nations programmes. I am also thinking about the international campaign to ban anti-personnel landmines and the establishment of the International Criminal Court. In both those cases, the changes effected are due to the fact that citizens got together and exerted pressure on governments. Other contributions are more modest, but just as valuable. Because what counts, above all, is the emergence of a new consciousness, that of the citizens of the world determined to take action, to assume their responsibilities.

The time has come for me to confess that my presence among you is aimed not only to receive the award which you so kindly wish to bestow upon me, but also to ask you to contribute a building block to the common enterprise, by assisting the United Nations to enter the third millennium.

The Sorbonne is arguably one of the most prestigious universities in the world. The number of great minds trained in that institution are legion. It is regarded as an intellectual beacon, a temple of knowledge and discernment. Yet, it is also, and perhaps primarily, the symbol of dissent. As members of that institution, you naturally belong to an anti-establishment school of thought, in the positive meaning of that term. You are people who examine things critically, who question preconceived notions, who reject obscurantism and seek to advance ideas.

I am asking you to apply all those qualities on behalf of the United Nations. If it is to reinvent itself, it needs your powers of thinking. If it is to encompass the major problems of our time and seek solutions, it needs your analytic capacity. If it is to reshape and redefine its mission and reinvent the instruments of its action, it needs your creativity.

The United Nations is indispensable, irreplaceable. Do not let it sicken and die, a victim of indifference. I hope you will be kind enough to pay it the tribute of your enlightened minds.

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