

THE 2008 DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD LECTURE

Can the International
Community Meet the
Challenges Ahead of Us?

Martti Ahtisaari

*This is the text of the 2008
Dag Hammarskjöld Lecture given by Martti Ahtisaari at
Uppsala University on 18 September 2008.*

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Preface

On 18 September 2008 – exactly 47 years after Dag Hammarskjöld’s death in a plane crash near Ndola (then Northern Rhodesia) – Martti Ahtisaari presented the 10th annual Dag Hammarskjöld Lecture to a large audience in the main auditorium of Uppsala University. His speech followed those given in previous years by Mary Robinson, Brian Urquhart, Joseph Rotblat, Kofi Annan, Lakhdar Brahimi, Mamphela Ramphele, Noeleen Heyzer, Hans Blix and, in 2007, the presentations by Sture Linnér and Sverker Åström. The festive and solemn event was preceded during the morning by a lively seminar on conflict mediation at the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation.¹

The guidelines for the organisation of the Dag Hammarskjöld Lecture stipulate: “The privilege of delivering the Lecture will be offered to a person who has promoted in action and spirit the values that inspired Dag Hammarskjöld as Secretary-General of the United Nations and generally in his life – compassion, humanism and commitment to international solidarity and cooperation.” The choice of Martti Ahtisaari was therefore easy and obvious – and more than timely.

Three weeks later, on 10 October 2008, the Norwegian Nobel Committee announced its decision to award the Nobel Peace Prize for 2008 to

¹ The presentations to this seminar, which was organised in collaboration with the Department for Peace and Conflict Resolution of Uppsala University, will be published separately.

Martti Ahtisaari “for his important efforts, on several continents and over more than three decades, to resolve international conflicts.” The reasons offered for this decision speak for themselves and obviously also motivated our earlier decision: “Throughout his adult life, whether as a senior Finnish public servant and President or in an international capacity, often connected to the United Nations, Ahtisaari has worked for peace and reconciliation. For the past twenty years, he has figured prominently in endeavours to resolve several serious and long-lasting conflicts.”

Martti Ahtisaari was crucial in bringing about Namibia’s transition to Independence: he served as United Nations Commissioner for Namibia from 1977 as well as the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Namibia, before being put in charge of the United Nations Transitional Assistance Group (UNTAG) during the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 435(1978) in 1989/1990. He considers his role in this long and difficult but ultimately successful decolonisation process to be his greatest achievement. With this mission he was able to accomplish what was denied to the Swedish diplomat Bernt Carlsson.²

Martti Ahtisaari’s further contributions to solving conflicts, including the dispute between the Aceh region and the Indonesian government, as well as his involvement in seeking an end to violence in Iraq, Northern Ireland, Kosovo, Central Asia and the Horn of Africa, are likewise

² Bernt Carlsson served as Assistant Secretary-General to the United Nations and as the United Nations Commissioner for Namibia. He was on his way to New York to sign the agreement for the implementation of the UNSC resolution 435(1978) when he perished in the Lockerbie plane crash on 21 December 1988.

testimony to his dedication to seek lasting peace for people affected by war and indiscriminate mass violence. Not surprisingly, therefore, his lecture places strong emphasis on the need for the European Union to renew its role in actively supporting the conflict resolution activities of the United Nations. But Ahtisaari also stresses the need for greater involvement on the part of both international and local civil society agencies in such efforts.

We can be confident that Dag Hammarskjöld would have very much agreed with the substance of the lecture presented by Martti Ahtisaari, especially when the latter criticises the tendency to equate state-building with institution-building and calls instead for more attention to be paid to the social and political contract between state and society, as well as “less tangible but very important aspects of legitimacy”. He emphasises that only a “resilient and vibrant society – not a strong state – makes people secure”. He also warns of pseudo-solutions which, because they are imposed rather than negotiated, have so often proved to have no lasting effect, and points to “the centrality of effective coordination between international actors and the local society”. Last but not least, he argues that economic development is a crucial element in peacebuilding and the quest for lasting solutions.

By publishing Martti Ahtisaari’s Dag Hammarskjöld Lecture in the series established since 1998, we are able to add another valuable contribution to the range of informed insights presented on this occasion.³ We

³ Previous lectures have also been printed and are – like many other publications – accessible on the web site of the Foundation (www.dhf.uu.se).

trust that readers share with us a sense of great satisfaction and pleasure at the choice of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, in awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to Martti Ahtisaari on 10 December 2008.

Henning Melber

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Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation

Peter Wallensteen

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Martti Ahtisaari delivering his lecture in Uppsala University Main Hall

Can the International Community Meet the Challenges Ahead of Us?

Martti Ahtisaari

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to thank the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation and Uppsala University for inviting me to present this year's Dag Hammarskjöld Lecture. It is both a privilege and a pleasure for me to be here in Uppsala today and to be the 11th person to deliver this lecture. I fully agree with the words of Kofi Annan in his 2001 lecture when he emphasised the importance of Dag Hammarskjöld in laying down the foundations for the work of the United Nations. For my generation, Dag Hammarskjöld's thoughts are continuously guiding our work.

For me personally, it is always a pleasure to be in Sweden. I have 12.5 per cent of Swedish heritage and the same amount of Norwegian heritage and I see myself of course as a Finn but also as a Scandinavian, a European and a citizen of the world. I was born in the city of Viipuri, then still part of Finland. We lost Viipuri when the Soviet Union attacked my country. Along with 400,000 fellow Karelians I became an internally displaced person in the rest of Finland. With my mother we moved from one household to another before my family settled in the eastern part

of Finland, in the city of Kuopio. This experience, which millions of people around the world have gone through, provided me with sensitivity, which may explain my desire to advance peace and thus help others who have gone through similar experiences to mine. This experience also made me believe that a better world can be found as long as we find concrete solutions to the problems we are facing. My background led me to work in and with the United Nations where I have served under five Secretary Generals of the UN over a period of 30 years. My international work started in 1960 when I was employed by a Swedish NGO – the Central Committee for Swedish Technical Assistance in Pakistan. It was an excellent learning experience.

It is good to remind ourselves about our Scandinavian and European roots and values, such as the rule of law and respect for human rights, which should have become global. The justification for advancing our values is based on their universal nature. At the same time, we should keep in mind how these values are being challenged in today's world. My career has been intertwined with conflict resolution and development cooperation and my work has always been guided by the common values laid down in the UN Charter.

Today I'm speaking as the Chairman of Crisis Management Initiative (CMI), a Finnish NGO working in the field of conflict resolution and peacebuilding, and a Co-Chair of the European Council of Foreign Relations, an organisation that was launched in October 2007 to promote more integrated European foreign policy. The need to find concrete results is still the driving force of my work and it has led me to

become involved in the work of several non-governmental organisations. I have witnessed on many occasions how well-functioning civil society organisations can help the international community to become more efficient.

I wonder if Dag Hammarskjöld would be happy today if he had witnessed how the UN and the international community have handled different problems of our time. There have been successes – such as bringing the colonisation process to a decent end, and increasing awareness of the environmental challenges and their link to peace and security. There are also examples of successful peacekeeping operations in which the UN can take pride: UN peacekeeping aided the transition to democratic rule in Namibia and supported similar transitions in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala. The Millennium Development Goals – which are supported by all major development actors, have laid a foundation for development.

I am, however, especially concerned about the large number of conflicts that the international community has not been able to solve. We should never accept the fact that some conflicts remain frozen. Each conflict is to be seen as a vital challenge requiring immediate attention from the international community. Conflicts in the Middle East, Cyprus, Sri Lanka, Kashmir, Burma/Myanmar, Somalia and Darfur are affecting the credibility of the international community. These conflicts have led to widespread devastation and regional instability, as well as large numbers of refugees. The international community remains unable to prevent the outbreak of war and the scope of action of many organisations

is confined to limiting the negative effects of violence. We all know that solving these conflicts is central. The credibility of the West is badly eroded because we have allowed these conflicts to become frozen and not tried seriously enough to solve them.

My title today is ‘Can the international community meet the challenges ahead of us?’ My aim is not to give an all-embracing description of different challenges and solutions, but to focus on the field I know best – conflict resolution and peace mediation – and to outline the questions I see as vital. I will begin by describing the problems faced by the UN and the EU. I see that the role of these organisations is fundamental in conflict resolution. However, in the current setting, neither UN nor EU can act alone. Civil society, both international and local, brings added value to the work of these organisations and this will be the second point of my lecture today. Furthermore, the international community needs to move beyond the theoretical discussion on what is needed in successful conflict resolution and focus on the preconditions for it – cooperation, sustainable leadership and political imagination. As a third point of my lecture, I will present an innovative initiative and an example of how the international community can meet one crucial challenge ahead of us, which is the youth employment and entrepreneurship. First and foremost, my aim today is to raise awareness and promote discussion among all of us.

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Ladies and Gentlemen, the United Nations is still globally the most present ‘peacemaking’ body – there is no real alternative. It can combine ‘influence’ and ‘persuasion and pressure’ from a large number of member

states. It also has the ability to support and further legitimise the engagement of regional actors and organisations.

However, I believe we are all aware of the constraints on the United Nations and the tendency of the international community to give the UN assignments without supplying it with adequate resources and political support. For these reasons, regional security organisations are vital. Regional arrangements, such as the EU, OSCE and NATO complement and support the UN's capacity. Furthermore, I think it is extremely important that not only the European or transatlantic regional organisations are active in peace and security cooperation, but also organisations such as the African Union are looking for a more active role in peace-keeping and peace-support operations and increasing their capacity to act.

I have always firmly believed in the potential of the European Union in conflict resolution. The EU has played an important, if often unnoticed role in stabilising regions threatened with insecurity by using the economic, technical and political means available to the European Community. The EU has the biggest single market in the world, the largest aid budgets, tens of thousands of peacekeepers that are active all over the world, and a corps of 50,000 diplomats. It has seen through the process of enlargement and could make a real difference by showing leadership and abandoning its introspection, for serious engagement with the rest of the world. But this takes unity, courage, vision and greater coherence. I think that there is a real opportunity for Europe to begin shaping global events. Together with well over one hundred fellow-Europeans

from across the EU I have convened an organisation called the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) that will promote this goal.

The European Union has the potential to support the conflict resolution activities of the United Nations. The UN is a key actor in conflict resolution and the EU should focus on making it stronger and more effective. Therefore I have followed with great concern how the EU has considerably lost its influence in the UN. The values represented by the EU are continuously being questioned at the UN and it is increasingly difficult for the EU to get support for its views in the UN context.

The ECFR has recently made a study of the voting pattern on human rights issues within the UN. The starting point of the study is the slow-motion decline Europe is suffering in the United Nations. The problem is not a lack of internal cohesion within the EU. As we all know, Europe has become increasingly coherent in human rights issues since the nadir of the Iraq War. The problem of the EU is that it is losing power to shape the rules of the game in the UN. Thus, the rest of the world is increasingly preventing the EU from realising its vision of international order. According to this particular study, the EU needs to become aware of following things shaping the current international scene. Firstly, the EU must adapt to an increasingly hostile environment at the UN and acknowledge the aggressive diplomacy used by some emerging powers and blocks of states. Secondly the EU needs to recognise that a number of its former allies in the UN system, including many African and Islamic countries, have been drifting away from it during the last decade. Thirdly the EU needs to realise that simply keeping the

Europeans together is not enough. The EU needs to find new ways of advancing its agenda outside the European countries. Fourthly, the EU should understand the cost of its own double standards and avoid the image of being ready to preach but unready to address its own weaknesses. In all, it is high time for us Europeans to recognise that we also have been the architects of our own misfortune because of our inaction in many important issues.

The ECFR study shows support declining for EU positions in the General Assembly, Human Rights Council and the Security Council. While the EU has lost political credibility alternative poles like Russia and China are emerging as more attractive. As the EU is now united in over 80 per cent of votes at the General Assembly, the frequency with which other states have voted with us has dropped from 75 per cent 10 years ago to just over 50 per cent today. The US is doing even worse. At the same time, China and Russia are supported by other states in 80 per cent of the voting.

The diminishing influence of the EU is all the more disappointing considering the fact that the EU states finance the lion's share of the UN budget and have strong representation in the UN. The EU holds four or five seats on the Security Council at any given time. Despite this fact, the EU has been forced to witness the watering-down of the resolutions concerning peacekeeping in Darfur and sanctions against Iran. To my great regret, a resolution on the status of Kosovo could not be settled in the UN. Now, in the case of Georgia the Council seems to be paralysed again. So what should the EU do? According to the ECFR the EU

needs to mobilise all political and financial resources it can to persuade other countries to support an international rule of law based on human rights and justice. Human rights are the core of the EU's commitment in developing an ethical and international foreign policy and if the EU cannot win the backing of the UN, it will certainly lose influence in global politics. If the EU wishes to become a regional power with global influence, it needs to go beyond reaching merely European unity.

In practical terms the ECFR suggests four solutions for the EU to overcome the current situation. The EU must become better at rewarding allies and strengthening the hand of those countries willing to advocate a similar approach to human rights and sovereignty at the UN. In this respect the EU should encourage and reward the countries willing to support the global values of the UN Charter. The EU should also create coalitions of like-minded countries. This means both using the existing channels like the Francophonie or the Commonwealth as well as establishing new ways of action such as campaigns run by NGOs or engaging a new generation of human right resolutions. In addition, the EU should come to terms with the fact that it is understaffed at the UN and lacks resources for the bureaucratic efforts necessary to reverse the decline of European power. To overcome this, the ECFR suggests appointing Human Rights Representatives to the UN or establishing teams to support smaller member states with temporary seats on the Security Council. Lastly, the EU should live up to its own standards in human rights questions. This means that the EU should lead by example and review the individual foreign politics of each of its member states.

Based on the findings of this ECFR study, it seems that the UN founded on the democratic values and the notion of universal human rights is no longer representing this vision as we know it. The EU, as all other actors, is facing challenges in its relations and actions with the changing world. As the challenges are novel and complicated, the tools created to respond to these challenges should accordingly be innovative.



Ladies and Gentlemen, a fundamental precondition of any successful peace and rebuilding process is inclusivity. There is a growing need for cooperation and coherence between the United Nations, the European Union and civil society organisations to ensure sustainable and participatory peace and reconciliation processes. The traditional approach towards civilian crisis management emphasises issues such as police training, border control, peace-monitoring etc. There is a tendency to equate ‘state-building’ with ‘institution-building’ rather than with the fundamental questions of a ‘social and political contract’ between state and society, and with less tangible but very important aspects of legitimacy. As we all know, institutions are not the same thing as society and we have to make sure that we have adequate resources and the right means to empower people and strengthen civil society. Only a resilient and vibrant society – not a strong state – makes people secure. A healthy civil society is key to making democracy work. However, sometimes short-term and long-term intervention strategies conflict with each other. There is tremendous institutional pressure on international organisations to demonstrate short-term results. But ‘short-termism’ limits the effectiveness of international intervention, in particular by preventing the adoption of long-term projects to cultivate civic engagement.

Not only can civil society nurture trust and reciprocity, but also it fosters tolerance for diversity – a crucial aspect for societies torn by civil conflict. Affiliations and social status promote ‘bridging social capital.’ By participating in civil society organisations, individuals learn how to confront divergent opinions and tend to develop greater tolerance for different interests and views. It does not matter what type of group or

organisation individuals belong to as long as they follow the democratic ground rules. Social capital and toleration can develop regardless of the goals and aims of these groups and organisations.

Not only can civic organisations increase trust within and between different communities, but also they are key to providing public goods when the state is too weak, divided or indifferent to do so – which is often the defining condition of regions torn by civil strife. Groups and organisations can patrol neighbourhoods in the absence of a functioning police; they can organise a rudimentary judicial system when state courts are unable to administer justice; and they provide education to young people when schools are not working.

Moreover, even where the state still maintains some capacity to deliver services to its citizens, civil society can still complement the work of domestic institutions by helping to improve economic and political performance, control crime and corruption, and provide opportunities to former combatants de-mobilising after war.

However, supporting and working with civil society organisations is not without problems. A systemic dilemma may occur when international intervention attempts to support local, bottom-up peace constituencies. International assistance may be indispensable to guarantee the survival and further development of local civil society groups; but such assistance can result in skewed local priorities by inducing local groups to prioritise those activities likely to attract international funding.

Also in peace mediation NGOs can do things the UN and EU are politically not able to do and play a significant complementary role to the more formal, diplomatic track, particularly if they seek to be inclusive, encourage real participation, strengthen local capacities, pay attention to ‘process’ and build support and legitimacy both for the process and for its outputs. NGOs are well placed to bring parties to a conflict together to reach agreements, which reduce the humanitarian consequences of conflicts. They can provide an informal environment and use innovative mediation techniques to reach beyond territorial, legal or military issues to address the fears and insecurities, misperceptions and misunderstandings. Civil society, through its many layers and its ability to collaborate among many actors at various levels, can provide real added value to the first track of diplomacy by contributing to the process of reconciliation through grassroots engagement and by strengthening civil society in the post-conflict environment to nurture the culture of peace. A particular need for an NGO is the possibility and the ability to build strategic alliances that function, but it may also necessary sometimes to ‘borrow’ the power to reward and to coerce. Traditionally, NGOs have acted independently, with little coordination either among themselves or with governments, military forces or international organisations. All of this is changing. Organisational cultures, differences in mandates, objectives and capabilities may bring barriers to collaboration but through practice and learning many of these issues can be worked on and, if the political will exists, overcome. The strength of many NGOs is their lack of elaborate hierarchical structure, their decentralised and relatively flat authority structures and their flexible approach to management. NGOs are often willing to act at speed when needs arise and can therefore act

when there is a sudden challenge. The downside of this ability to change strategies, shift resources and quickly carry out operations is the fact that sometimes NGOs' actions can appear or even be chaotic. The Aceh experience was a learning possibility for CMI as well, when it came to the planning of the activity as well as communicating the process to various actors in the network and to the outside world. Since this experience, I believe, we have acquired better resources to be self-reflective in our work.

Ladies and Gentlemen, there is one point that I feel compelled to make at this stage. Mere project funding from the donors' side is not enough. One of my frustrations is that far too often I have not been able to respond to requests to get involved in different conflict situations because of lack of funding. I would like to appeal to all donors: without core funding we cannot be as prepared and effective as we would like to be and we could be. During the last year alone, I and my colleagues have had to say no to many mediation requests. Careful staff work needs to be done on most requests of this kind before one enters into major engagement. For this we need core funding. It is even more disappointing that sometimes donors refuse to give core funding for these purposes because they regard my organisation as a competitor. All I ask is that the donor community look at the track record of each applicant and act professionally on the basis of that.

Increasingly, actors in multidimensional peacebuilding efforts have come to recognise that the benefits of cooperation outweigh the costs. Indeed, tackling the challenges of cooperation is now widely viewed as an opera-

tional imperative. The lessons learned for mission success over the 15 years of interventionist stabilisation and post-conflict capacity-building operations, whether they were conducted by the United Nations, OSCE or coalitions of the willing, all point to the centrality of effective coordination between international actors and the local society. Moreover, while security/state-building tasks are often initiated in the context of international peace operations, they require long-term commitment. Development actors, including a subset of specialist security/peacebuilding NGOs, have demonstrated experience in post-conflict state-building and have, in practice, been at the forefront of doctrinal developments in areas such as community policing, rule of law, security sector reform and dimensions of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration.

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Ladies and Gentlemen, let me now draw your attention to one concrete example of how we can meet the problems ahead of us. This particular example is linked to poverty reduction, which is a critical element in conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction. The relation between economic development and peacebuilding is fundamental. Making conditions for sustainable peace cannot be done without securing the basic livelihood of all people. This can be done for instance by creating opportunities for work.

A key issue to address, both in terms of poverty reduction and conflict prevention, is youth employment. Eighty per cent of young people live in developing countries. Over the next decade, the International Labour Organisation expects 1.2 billion young people to enter the labour market. Through traditional means we can employ 300 million of them.

The lack of jobs, access, education and capital all lead to a ‘hope gap’, with millions of young adults feeling disconnected, isolated and frustrated. Young people have no collective global voice and few platforms from which to influence their circumstances. The billion isolated from the job market become a recruiting ground for criminal and terrorist organisations. This can be seen in the Middle East and North Africa, the region with the highest rate of youth unemployment according to the ILO.

An innovative way to tackle this problem is supported by ImagineNations, an alliance of people committed to working with youth employment and entrepreneurship. ImagineNations promotes the need to invest in youth employment and enterprise development and to empower young people to realise their potential. This alliance uses the tools of media, technology, global finance, policy, research and moral persuasion to change the odds for millions of young adults and to help countries find the dynamic potential of their young people. Key in the activity of ImagineNations is the understanding that the problem cannot be solved in isolation and requires the engagement of diverse stakeholders who are able to offer different inputs, experience and knowledge that can then be woven together into workable solutions.

In short, we should focus on investing in the skills of young people. The founder of ImagineNations, Rick Little, has said:

There are hundreds of millions of young people who have a dream, have a vision, have a plan, know what they want to do,

have fire in their belly to do it, but lack access, resources, and connections. The primary approach to youth development is to create education and training programs to prepare young people for work. Few consider how to create jobs. Youth reach the top of the mountain (of education and training) after having worked very hard. There are no jobs, there's no capital, there's no access. They see an empty slate on the other side of the mountain. We envision a day in those countries where the other side of the mountain will be full of opportunities. So when young people get to the top of the mountain, they see job placement opportunities, they see coaching and mentoring, they see microfinance, equity and other forms of investment.

ImagineNations has already proven to be a successful initiative in the sector of youth employment and entrepreneurship and it has gained local support especially in the Middle East, North Africa and Indonesia.

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It is easy to feel desperate when thinking about the challenges facing the international community and how to meet them. But in the spirit of Dag Hammarskjöld, let's not shy away from the difficult. He gave a speech entitled, 'Do we need the United Nations?' on May 2, 1959 in Copenhagen. He noted the challenges and limitations of the organisation but concluded: 'To write it off because of difficulties or failures would mean, among many other things, to write off our hope of developing methods for international coexistence which offer a better chance than the traditional ones for truth, justice, and good sense to prevail.' I think it is



fundamental that we cherish the multilateral organisations, particularly the UN.

My countrywoman, author Maria Jotuni (1880-1943), has wisely said at the beginning of last century: 'Unless we believe in a better future, it will not come.' I fully agree with her and hope you do too.

I thank you.



Uppsala University

Uppsala University, founded in 1477, is the oldest and best-known university in Scandinavia. Famous scholars such as Rudbeck, Celsius and Linnaeus were professors at the university. Seven Nobel Prize laureates have been professors at the university, among them Archbishop Nathan Söderblom, who was also the University's Pro-Chancellor. He received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1930.

In the same year Dag Hammarskjöld completed his studies at Uppsala with a bachelor's degree in Law. He had begun his studies in 1923, received a BA in Romance Languages, Philosophy and Economics in 1925 and took a further post-graduate degree in Economics early in 1928.

In 1981, the Swedish Parliament established a Dag Hammarskjöld Chair of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University. The university's international studies library is also named after Dag Hammarskjöld.

Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation

The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation was established in 1962 in memory of the second Secretary-General of the United Nations. The purpose of the Foundation is to search for and examine workable alternatives for a democratic, socially and economically just, ecologically sustainable, peaceful and secure world, particularly for the Global South.

Over the years, the Foundation has organised over 200 seminars and workshops and produced over 150 publications of material arising from these events, among them the journal *Development Dialogue*.



Copies of this publication may be obtained from the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation,
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