

UNITED NATIONS INTELLECTUAL HISTORY PROJECT
The Graduate School and University Center, City University of New York
365 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10016

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW OF

VIRENDRA DAYAL

BY

THOMAS G. WEISS

New York, 15 July 2002

THOMAS G. WEISS: This is 15 July, 2002, and Tom Weiss is interviewing Virendra Dayal in the Graduate Center, as opposed to New Delhi. Welcome. Unlike some of our interviewees, you actually haven't gotten around to writing your autobiography or memoirs. So I would like to spend a few moments here, anyway, and ask you whether you could tell me a bit about your early life, your parents, your schooling, and how you think these contributed to your own interests in international affairs and international cooperation.

VIRENDRA DAYAL: Well, I guess growing up in India at roughly the time of independence, I was influenced by [Mohandas] Gandhi and [Jawaharlal] Nehru, as my entire generation was. We were instinctively in search of our place in the world and of ideas that contributed to a world that made sense to us as we came to independence. There was something about my generation that felt the need to be linked to the rest of the world because our country was emerging, as it were, into a new world itself. So it was perfectly natural that all through my school and college days, I was keenly interested in what was happening outside, especially in the United Nations.

There is another reason, which I learned then, and which I came to respect even more now—and I am now sixty-seven going on sixty-eight. It is that when we were writing the constitution of India—we became independent in 1947, but our constitution came into effect only three years later, in 1950—our constitution was greatly inspired in many of its important respects by the work being done at the time on the writing of the Charter of the UN and the writing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. India was a curious case of a country being a member state of the UN before it was independent. India became independent in 1947, but it was a signatory to the Charter in 1945—a very unusual case.

The interesting thing is this, that many of the ideas that are an inherent part, a central part of our constitution—the constitution of our republic—find equally strong expression either in the Charter or the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It's a fascinating proposition this, but I think one reason was that there were—and this again is the interesting thing—there were Indians involved in the writing of both the Charter and the Universal Declaration who also were involved in the writing of the constitution of India—Sir Benegal Narsing Rau, who was later permanent representative at the UN. They were an admirable group of people. They were intellectually gifted. They had remarkable integrity, and they had a view of the world and of the role of their own country in it, which was singularly appropriate to the times and to the future of this extraordinary organization—the United Nations. These were the origins of my love of the organization.

But as I grew a little older, I came to watch my Uncle Rajeshwar Dayal, my father's younger brother, who was India's permanent representative here when he was still in his early forties. He succeeded Sir B. N. Rao, and he was a very good friend of Dag Hammarskjöld. Hammarskjöld and he had an immediate rapport and an understanding of each other's minds and ways of thinking—something which is brought out most vividly in Brian Urquhart's biography of Hammarskjöld, and in my uncle's own memoir, called *A Mission for Hammarskjöld*, when he was a special representative of the United Nations and of the Secretary-General in the Congo. It is a wonderful book. When I look at the telegrams exchanged between Hammarskjöld and my uncle, they were telegrams exchanged between people who were friends. The telegrams are witty, they have jokes and literary references in them, they express the most profound ideas in the most conversational and friendly manner, day after day. This struck me because I felt that, in many ways, by the time I came to the 38th floor and served on it, we had lost something of the

intimacy and vivacity of the exchanges between the 38th floor and those who served the Secretary-General in difficult missions abroad in its earlier years.

TGW: You mentioned independence. But before we get there, I just wonder whether you recall what kind of impact the Second World War and the end of the Depression actually had on India or on your family and on your own thinking.

VD: You see, for us in India the end of the Second World War promised independence. Therefore we were immensely happy when it was over because we felt that the reward for our participation in the war would be independence and that we would be able to have an independence which would be unchained. In other words, it would be an unfettered independence. We started with dominion status, but the republic was established within three years. We knew that at the end of the war we would be politically free.

So the end of the war in India was very much—and even as a child, I remember vividly—we had a clear sense of wonderful things around the horizon. I might just say that I was still in school at that time, in the mountains, in the Himalayas. The principal of our school was an Englishman called the Reverend Alwyn Earnst Binns. He was unenthusiastic about the prospect of India's independence. I remember on the 15th of August, 1947, he banned the students of my school from participating in Independence Day celebrations in what we called the “flats”—the sports fields and the playgrounds of the small town where the school was, in the mountains. Needless to say he left at the end of that year. I don't think he was very welcome in India after that, nor did he wish to stay.

TGW: What do you recall from the partition, which many people—from Salman Rushdie, Shashi Tharoor, and others—have written up in fairly picturesque terms? But do you recall this, as a young man of twelve, as terribly unsettling?

VD: Indeed it was a deeply unsettling affair. While my own family was in Uttar Pradesh and didn't need to go anywhere, my wife's family—I didn't then know her—were based in Lahore, in what is now Pakistan. They had been there for generations. So for her family, as for many others, it was an enormous upheaval. But of course, the worst of it was—and this is, I think, another reason why the UN came to mean so much to me—the violence that erupted on partition. It was deeply painful and is so even now. It was a cruel, cruel consequence of partition—very cruel. And I remember, even as a child of twelve, when in the small town where we went to school, a town which was conspicuously peaceful, some homes were set on fire, including those of some Muslim aristocrats whom my family knew. It was something which we had never, ever thought possible.

That small town—I am reminded of e.e. cummings's poem, "anyone live in a little how town, with up so many floating bells down" because it had a lake cradled in the mountains at about 6,500 feet. On the banks of the lake, there was the Hindu temple with its bells. There was a church. There was a mosque. There was a gurdwara for the Sikhs. And all of us lived in perfect harmony. The school in which I studied was an Anglican school. But there was never any strain or competitiveness or violence between the religious communities when I was a child. That's why, at the time of independence—fortunately, there was very little violence where I was a child, but still I saw two homes being set afire. It was something very painful.

TGW: I don't know if you recall, but how did the possible independence of other colonies appear at the time? Brian, for example, mentions that the notion in the Charter, other than for India and Pakistan, was that it would take fifty, or seventy-five, or a hundred years for independence actually to occur. Did you think that there would all of a sudden be a gush, so to speak, of independence?

VD: I think it really depends on where you sit, the way you see things. I think as a young fellow, I had an instinct. I had a feeling that there would be a gush. I felt that the dam had been breached, that the walls of empire were collapsing. You can't have a quarter of a wall, or half of a wall. You saw that with the Berlin Wall later. It is either there or it's gone.

In fact, it is very interesting here again that before our own independence, when we had a constituent assembly, before the republic was formed—I think it was even before independence—Nehru organized a conference in New Delhi, which had to do with the future independence of Asian states, and Indonesia in particular. I know this because my father's youngest brother, Harishwar Dayal, who was also a brilliant man, and an ambassador of India who died quite young, sadly, was Nehru's principal secretary dealing then with foreign affairs. In 1947, Harishwar would have been thirty-two himself. But Nehru organized this conference on Indonesia's independence even before our own independence.

So we felt that the world was going to be changing dramatically, and we didn't really think it would take forever. Or maybe that's just my impression now looking back on it. But if I try to place myself back in 1947, at the end of the war, I think we felt that a brave new world was around the corner. I think we did have that feeling.

TGW: In school, starting at St. Stephen's, was the role of the UN or international institutions, even the history of the first experiment—the League—and then the new experiment, were these in the curriculum? Did you study about them?

VD: Not really. I, myself, read history in college. But everybody knew about these things, and everybody followed their progress and their activities. I don't think there was anything particularly remote about the United Nations while I was growing up in India. It was very much part of our daily bread in terms of what we read about, what we heard about. Then of

course, quite early on we got entangled at the UN on the Kashmir issue. But apart from that, I think that there was a general keenness—a very keen pro-UN feeling in India—both when I was still in school and certainly when I was in college. So there was a considerable awareness about it even though it was not in any curriculum as such. But I think anyone who read modern history and the history of the interwar period knew about the League and its catastrophes, and knew why the UN was needed and why it had to be careful to avoid the same mistakes. I think all of that was in our bones.

TGW: How did you select St. Stephen's, and how did you then get to Oxford?

VD: I selected St. Stephen's because it was the best college in the country, and I was lucky enough to be admitted into it. It's a very fine college started by Anglican priests, which somehow had Indian principals for many, many years even before independence. It had some remarkably fine Englishmen associated with it, including C.F. [Charles Freer] Andrews, who was a very good friend of Mahatma Gandhi and a great advocate of India's independence. So it was a curious institution because it was Anglican, associated with Cambridge University, had plenty of Englishmen on the staff, and the finest of them were sympathetic to India's independence. And there were Indian principals to head it many decades before independence.

It had an outstanding reputation, both academically and in every other way. And it was in the capital of the country, which itself was going through a tremendous transformation. In 1945, it was changing its character altogether. From a small town it was turning into a great, bustling one. So it was a natural place to go to.

I was the first of my family to go there. All of my other cousins, who were older than me, and my father's generation, had studied in Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh. But I felt that this

place was far more interesting and exciting, and seemed to be at the center of the country. I thought I was going to say the center of the world. So I wanted to come to Delhi.

But my going to Oxford was—I had a sense of guilt about it for many years after. I got a Rhodes scholarship. There used to be one for India every year, and somehow I got it. But I came back to India inadvertently, after taking my degree, because I was very keen on rural development and I wanted to work in the districts. I didn't want to work abroad. For many years, I hid the fact that I had been the beneficiary of Cecil Rhodes's will because of his rather strange role in imperial history. But the truth came out and no one held it against me.

TGW: What was it like as a young man to encounter the metropole for the first time? I know you had been educated by Anglican priests, and there were obviously huge traces of mother England roaming around India. But it certainly was not England. What did it feel like when you arrived?

VD: It was very interesting. I think partly it was the auspices under which I went—I got that Rhodes scholarship. Then I did go to the oldest college in Oxford, which is University College. It had a wonderful master, Dr. Arthur Goodheart, an American, a brilliant scholar of law who was related to many of the great New York families of Jewish intellectuals and philanthropists—the Antchuls and others, great contributors to Columbia University and Barnard. He was a man of tremendous, superb intellect and a very gracious manner. His wife was English.

The auspices under which I went to Oxford were quite charmed. Therefore, for me, it was a soft landing. When I would have holidays in England—again because I was a Rhodes scholar, and through that circle of friends—I used to always stay with a wonderful lady who was a member of Parliament, Dame Joan Vickers, who was later a member of the House of Lords.

She used to live in [William] Thackeray's house. She had bought Thackeray's town house, not far from Marble Arch. I used to spend my holidays in her home, and she treated me like a young friend. I was very fortunate and privileged. I had the most wonderful tutors—David Cox, who was a great Alpinist, a mountaineer; Tom Parker, who was a doctor of divinity who taught me all about the Reformation and who sort of looked like a cross between G.K. Chesterton and Father Brown; and Tony Firth, who sadly died just two months ago, who was a Catholic who schooled at Ampleforth, and then he studied at University College, Oxford, and who was a person of tremendous charm and ability. He was very, very kind and helpful to me and then to my younger brother, who also went to University College after me. Let's just say I had a very protected and happy stay in England.

But for all of that, I was very homesick. And I was very keen on getting on with my life, partly because the woman I loved was in India, and I was alone in Oxford. Partly, I just needed to get on with doing things. I had something called senior status. I did my honors course in one year less than normal and got on with the business of earning my bread and butter and doing my work in the districts, which was what I wanted to do. I wanted to work in development.

TGW: What books do you recall from that period that really struck you? And the second part of the question is what kinds of things were preoccupying students in the pub in those days? What kinds of issues preoccupied you?

VD: On the international affairs side, it was roughly the time of Hungary, 1956. Then what happened, of course, was the position that India took, which seemed to lean towards the Soviets a little bit. It required a lot of understanding and trying to explain. The tilt of India's policy there was widely perceived as being pro-Soviet. But then it was soon after the Suez

affair, and there was a great deal of the aftermath of Suez in terms of the tensions in the air— [Anthony] Eden's collapse, and [Harold] MacMillan coming in and all that.

There was a certain tension there between, should I say the *ancien régime* of Britain, and those of us who came from what used to be British colonies or other parts of the world. I remember once meeting someone at Rhodes House who talked about friends of his who had served in the Indian civil service. He said, "How unfortunate India's independence is—all those brilliant careers were aborted." It seemed a rather odd way of looking at history, as far as I was concerned.

On the other hand, I remember meeting very fine Englishmen who had served in India, including Sir Percy Marsh. He actually was written about subsequently in Philip Woodruff's two great volumes on English administration in India. The first was called *The Founders* and the other was called *The Guardians*, if my memory is correct. And Percy Marsh is mentioned in *The Guardians*. He served in Uttar Pradesh, which was my home state. He was a very keen pig-sticker and all the rest of it. I came to learn he had a foster mother who was an Indian village woman. He remembered my father vividly. He remembered my family vividly from his stay in India before independence.

When I met him in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, he was sitting over there, still studying and making notes on the amount of *taggavi* which had been issued in a particular district in Uttar Pradesh to farmers. Now *taggavi* is agricultural credit. He was making studies of the agricultural credit patterns in his former districts where he had served in India. And he would have left India perhaps twenty years earlier. India was very much in his bones, and I dare say in the milk that he drank as a child. But that's how it was. It was interesting.

TGW: Was there a foreign students club, a Commonwealth club, or a colored faces club, or something?

VD: There may have been something, but it really wasn't at all important in my life. I had my own circle of friends—some Indian, some very dear friends like Ved Mehta, the writer. He was my contemporary. Ved was there. The Indian poet Don Moraes was there. He was not so much a friend of mine as of Ved's. But my friends—these were young Englishmen—and some from Africa, from Ghana, who had just joined the Ghanaian foreign service and come for training to Oxford from South Africa—both English and Afrikaans—and a brilliant black South African, Xuma. There were youngsters from all over the world. I had very good friends from America and Canada who were Rhodes scholars.

One of my closest friends was from South Africa. He was a white South African Rhodes scholar. With him and two others—all of whom read greats; that is, classical Greek and Latin—I had my first holiday in Europe. We traversed the perimeter of the Roman Empire, along the Rhine Valley, all the way to Heidelberg. But it was interesting because, you see, Dennis Saddington was South African. We kept in touch for some years after I left Oxford, and when I got married he sent me a very sweet present. Then I couldn't keep in touch with him anymore. There were no relations between India and South Africa. When I came to the UN, South Africa was anathema.

But curiously, when many years later I was serving as *chef de cabinet* to the UN Secretary-General and I went through Johannesburg on my way to Windhoek, working for the independence of Namibia. From my hotel I just looked up the phone book. I saw "Saddington, Dennis" and I rang the number. Mrs. Saddington picked up the phone. I said, "I'm a friend of Dennis. My name is Viru Dayal." She said, "Oh, yes, Viru, of course. How nice to hear your

voice. Dennis will be so happy.” It was 1956 to 1958 I knew Dennis. By now it was 1988—thirty years later. There wasn’t the slightest strain in our meeting, nor the slightest surprise in Mrs. Saddington’s voice when I picked up the phone and spoke with her.

After that, we met many times because of the Namibia undertaking. Then when I was the special envoy of the Secretary-General to South Africa in 1992 I met them again. And just last year, when I went on behalf of the National Human Rights Commission of India to Durban for the conference against racism, I spent a few days in Jo’burg. There were Dennis and his wife, and we had a fine time together. But it’s interesting because friendships manage to survive the vicissitudes of politics, and that is a relief to know.

TGW: Amongst the things that were on your plate at that time—it’s always difficult to answer these questions without looking back with today’s lenses—but how did Bandung (Asian-African Conference) appear to you when you were a student?

VD: Bandung at that time was a great affair. It was a tremendous affair, and all of us were tremendously enthused about it. All of us, all of Asia, were talking about the five principles of *panch shila* and the five principles of peaceful coexistence. Bandung meant a very great deal. It meant a great deal to me. It’s interesting that many years later, again when I was *chef de cabinet* to Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, he asked me to represent him at the commemoration of the twenty-fifth, or a subsequent anniversary—well, it was one of those commemorations—of Bandung. It was a big affair, and I went there representing the Secretary-General of the UN. It gave me a lot of pleasure to read the message of the United Nations there and to remember and recall those wonderful days of the Bandung conference. It was a time of great promise, actually. The problems come later, with the war between India and China, for

instance. But at the time of the Bandung conference, there was this feeling of fraternity, unquestionably.

TGW: You mentioned there was the small matter of being in love and also rural development. But was it always your intention to go into the civil service in India, or did you think about the private sector?

NS: I never thought about doing anything but working as it were in government, partly because my own family had been associated with government for many generations. India is a strange place because, even if you don't believe in the caste system, there is a tendency for people of certain communities to do certain things. I belonged to a community called the *kayasths*. And the *kayasths* have always been associated with government and with the professions, particularly the law and with administration. All through the centuries there have been *kayasths* of one kind or another who have been involved with government.

At that time, of course, the private sector in India was not very developed. The private companies that were there—like Shell and Imperial Tobacco and Caltex, and ICI and so on—just didn't interest me. They seemed to have nothing to do with my life and nothing to do with my vision or my future of India. I must say that some of my close friends and my family went into these companies, but I always viewed them as—we used to call them “box-wallahs,” people who went around with boxes selling their wares. It didn't seem quite the right thing to do at my age. It wasn't intrinsic enough to the future of the country.

As to serving in the districts, I had seen after independence that my father's family—three of the brothers were away as ambassadors of India. They were abroad a lot of the time, and at that stage I was just very, very keen on working in the villages, which I did for about seven or eight years in rural India. Then I came to the UN, fortuitously, because one of the things that I

did was that—at the ripe old age of twenty-four or twenty-five—I settled tens of thousands of refugees from what used to be East Pakistan, that came to be known as Bangladesh. They were being settled in what we call the Terai in the foothills of the Himalayas in the district where I was stationed. We opened virgin land and, sadly as I see now, had to cut down forests to make a place for them. But we had to do it because they needed to be provided for. The price we paid was the loss of some of our beautiful forests and wildlife. The place was adjacent to “Jim Corbett territory,” and had lots of tigers, and leopards, deer, panther, and a certain amount of mosquitoes. But we settled tens of thousands of Bengali refugees there.

I was asked to help in this way. So when, circa 1965, the UNHCR (UN High Commissioner for Refugees) asked for somebody from India—because they had nobody from Asia at that time at all in the office in the organization, nobody—they wrote to the government of India and asked for names, and mine was one of three or four names that were sent to them. So I was interviewed and asked to come along and serve in Geneva, which I then did.

It was far-removed from my love of rural development, but it was related to the settlement of people. So I always have the Bengali refugees to thank for my life in the UN—something which I have never forgotten. In fact, it came up again recently because I am serving on the Human Rights Commission in India now, and the question arose of the *refoulement* of some refugees, including some who had come from what is now Bangladesh. I dug in my heels and said, “No, this violates international law and practice and everything I have stood for and worked for in my life. We must not allow these things to happen.” And I said to my colleagues in the commission, because they are all justices of the Supreme Court, including a former chief justice, I said, “You know, I owe my entire life, my whole career, to refugees whom I helped to settle when I was a young man.”

TGW: In this first position, before we slide into the UN when you went back and confronted rural development and village life, what surprised you most? Presumably, sitting in Oxford thinking about rural development must have been somewhat different from the real thing. Which of your ideas changed most after you got home and began working?

VD: I think the greatest change in my thinking was a realization that our society had been warped by privilege and by language. And I had a terrific advantage, in considerable measure unjustified, because I spoke English well. All kinds of doors of opportunity had opened to me. And persons of equal mental ability and acumen were stuck in the lower regions of administration, or nowhere, because they hadn't had a proper education. They had also been denied access to the language of governance. It struck me again very forcefully because it meant, then, that not only had the whole question of education to be faced, but also the question of the democratization of education.

I was struck by the fact that vast responsibilities had been given to me at a very young age, when people of far greater ability than me had not been given such opportunity. I, of course, was very happy to be doing what I did, but I did feel sometimes a little ridiculous because all kinds of people were calling me "sir," whom I should have been thanking for helping me to learn the ropes. It was a strange feeling, actually.

TGW: So you arrived in Geneva—this was a short-term contract?

VD: Yes.

TGW: What then made you think you wanted to spend more time in the United Nations?

VD: You know, Tom, there is a certain luck of the draw in the UN—whom you work with and what you might be asked to do. Sometimes you are lucky to work on the right things with the right people, but there is an element of good fortune in things. I was fortunate to work

with extremely fine people in UNHCR. The high commissioner when I got there was Felix Schyder, who was a very fine Swiss diplomat and later served as Swiss ambassador to Washington, D.C.; he remained a lifelong friend. His deputy was Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, who was later a great high commissioner for refugees, and the director of operations was Thomas Jamison, a remarkable Scotsman, who constantly proclaimed he was born on the wrong side of the street in Glasgow and did not have much formal education. But he was a brilliant man with a terrific sense of humor and a great passion for doing the right thing. There was a Belgian called Gilbert Jaeger, who was outstanding, and a French colleague, Pierre Coat, who had a fine Cartesian mind and has been a close friend ever since.

I worked with them, and it was extremely congenial company and a very fine group of people. I felt extremely comfortable in their presence and working with them. I saw, actually, within a few years of joining UNHCR that we were capable of doing wonderful things together. When I joined UNHCR, you know, its annual budget was just about \$4 million. Then during the refugee crisis in 1971, at a time of the Bangladesh affair, the UNHCR was asked to serve as a focal point of the UN for the great humanitarian undertaking that was required to assist refugees, some ten million of whom arrived in India. We suddenly had to handle a program of many hundreds of millions of dollars.

We were able to do it, with a small staff, with just a few people added. Sadruddin did a wonderful job, and I felt extremely proud and happy to be one of his close collaborators and friends working on this. I was in India with Thomas Jamison, my friend Pierre Coat, and others, and we did a monumental amount of work. It was tremendously energizing, and we did it all seemingly quite well. I just felt in very good company, doing things that were close to my heart.

After the independence of Bangladesh, I continued serve in New York for the High Commissioner for Refugees. Sir Robert “Jacko” Jackson was setting up what was, at that time, called UNROB (UN Relief Organization in Bangladesh). It had various acronyms, but basically it was a great humanitarian effort of the United Nations in Bangladesh after the end of the war, at the end of 1971. Jacko was setting up what then turned out to be the largest UN humanitarian undertaking until that time. There was a great one in the Congo, when my Uncle Rajeshwar Dayal was there. That was at the end of the 1950s, start of the 1960s.

And then at the start of the 1970s, there was this monumental one in Bangladesh. Sir Robert Jackson was putting together the UN team there, and the head of the UN team was Victor Umbrecht, the Swiss businessmen, who was then a director of Ciba-Geigy and almost everything Swiss. He was a very fine man. He had the kind of a passion of a medieval monk. He was absolutely determined, and single-minded, and dedicated. So Jacko asked me to serve as his special assistant. We had a wonderful opportunity to do everything I wished to do at a time of tremendous excitement politically, and a huge humanitarian challenge. And the UN came out of it all very, very well. And mercifully, so did Bangladesh, which was much more important. But it was an extraordinary action of the UN that made all the difference to the future of that young country.

When we got there, at the end of the war, everything had been destroyed. Everything had been destroyed. The rivers and the waterways were clogged with sunken vessels. There were no roads. There was no currency. The currency had all been destroyed. It had become worthless. I remember we had fresh currency printed, and I used to go off on the short landing and takeoff aircraft—tiny box-like things that would fly with hardly any runway and land pretty much on a

soccer field or tennis court. We would disgorge the currency for the different treasuries in the districts of Bangladesh.

But everything had to be created from scratch. There was no drinking water. There was no food. There was no currency. All the arteries of communication were clogged, or broken, or destroyed. The bridges were gone. The waterways were choked. But it was a wonderful experience to work there for the United Nations to help a new state.

The UN was increasingly learning how to improvise—grandly—when it came to humanitarian operations. Sir Robert Jackson was certainly, on the humanitarian operations side—he was to that what Ralph [Bunche] was to the peacekeeping side. He was a kind of founding father of large humanitarian operations. It was a splendid, complex affair.

TGW: You've mentioned some giants. There was Sadruddin, and Jacko, and Ralph Bunche. How would you characterize leadership within these situations? How much of this was operational savvy? How much of it was intellectual prowess? Or is it different for each?

VD: I think they come in different combinations in different people. I think that the essential quality was a capacity to do great things, to do big things, to not be intimidated by them, or not get overblown and out of hand, out of control while doing them. There is a need for measure in all things. But you certainly did need both the diplomatic savvy and the capacity to organize. Now Sadruddin had a lot of diplomatic savvy. Jacko had a great capacity to organize. But I think the skill of leadership always is to be able to put together the right combinations of people to work with and to create teams that can do extraordinary things. The aggregate is greater than the sum of the parts.

I think that whenever the UN has done great things, it hasn't been just because of one person. It isn't the capacity of one or a few people to organize things properly, important as that

is. I must confess that I have always been slightly skeptical of solo players, of prima donnas, because there are elements there sometimes of vanity and sometimes of an exaggerated expectation of reward, which warps their efforts. I have always felt that the strength of an organization must be in its capacity to play as a team.

TGW: One of the themes that has come up occasionally during these interviews is the capacity report (*A Study of the UN Development System*) that Jackson did. Did he ever talk about the very “fond” reaction he got from the UN system to this document?

VD: Yes, he did. I remember I was a young fellow then, and I was working with the UNHCR when Jacko’s report came out. He got an awful beating, as usual. That is neither here nor there. I found that is invariably so. Wherever there has been a path-breaking report of the UN, you can be sure there will be some people telling you how awful it is. It has been so every single time. When the capacity study was written by Jacko it happened. Take more recent examples—when *An Agenda for Peace* was written, people wrote commentaries four times the size of *An Agenda for Peace* saying how bad it was. When the Brahimi report (*Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations*) came out, there were plenty of people jumping around saying it has terrible ideas.

So it goes on all the time. I think that one should just expect it. The fact of the matter is that the capacity study did make a difference, just as I think in a strange way *An Agenda for Peace* did make a difference, as did many other of the great reports. I remember when Mahbub ul Haq wrote his first *Human Development Report*, it was trashed by everybody. But Mahbub ul Haq touched on an idea which nobody had ever thought of before and one which has absolutely transformed the way development is looked at now. It is truly a seminal report. I remember when the first one came out. Mahbub was given a terrible time by the UNDP (UN Development

Programme) governing council. Many delegations, whether belonging to the so-called North or the so-called South, fell on his head as if he had committed a crime, saying, “No, no, your indices are all wrong. You haven’t taken this into account. You haven’t taken that into account.”

It was a brutal affair. Not many spoke for it, and few wrote for it. But fortunately he had strong shoulders and could take that kind of rubbish. He persevered and the *Human Development Report* of the UNDP is, at least in my estimation, probably the most powerful bit of economic thinking that has come out of the UN system since it was created. But certainly if Mahbub had decided to fold his knees and pack his tent and go away after the first report, we wouldn’t have had this.

TGW: Actually, I would like to open a parenthesis here. Much of this project is about ideas. Frequently ideas are hatched in a report. What makes the difference? Is it the quality of the idea—in this case a new idea, frankly, about how to think about development? Is it the timing? Obviously at certain moments governments, and intellectuals, and NGOs (nongovernmental organizations), and everyone else are more susceptible or more likely to pick things up. Is it the packaging? Is it the people who are selling it? What makes the difference in these reports?

VD: You know, that’s a difficult one. I think there are probably elements of all of these things. I think first of all the ideas have to be worthwhile. I don’t think you can package and sell rubbish for any length of time. So you have to have ideas that are worthwhile. But timing is very important. Set aside for the moment work like Mahbub ul Haq’s on human development, but if you take any action on the development or political side, timing is of the essence. Pérez de Cuéllar had a charming phrase, which he frequently used: “Don’t dive into an empty pool.”

And he was right because you must have some water in the pool if you are going to dive. Otherwise you will surely get a concussion of the brain and nothing else.

Timing is important, but without a great idea forget about timing and packaging. Now packaging, I think, in a manner yes. But I sometimes think that even more important than packaging—though I don't deny the value of things being presented properly—more than packaging you sometimes need tenacity to stand by a good idea. Invariably, the first reaction is one of resistance, sometimes even of hostility. There is a great chance that you will be cursed out. So you pretty much expect it. Sometimes a great idea succeeds better the second time around, or in the second year around. It shouldn't necessarily be abandoned after the first cold shower because it will survive the second much more successfully and perhaps thrive by the time of the fourth hearing of the issue, or the third hearing of the issue.

So I think first the idea, second the timing, and third, rather than the packaging, the tenacity to hang on to something which you are convinced is a good idea. I say this for another reason. You see, when you talk about good ideas, we have a great mix in the UN. If you take, for instance, the ideas on human rights, there you can hardly say that the timing was perfect, and nor could you say that there was a great deal of packaging that was done. In fact, the ideas managed to survive in spite of the bad timing and in spite of the third rate packaging. They survived in spite of the Cold War and the apprehensions they caused among despotic regimes the world over. And the circumstances, in a sense, could not have been worse.

Yet, because the ideas themselves were so remarkable, we have a body of normative law the likes of which the world has never seen before in respect of how human beings should be treated. Never, ever before has there been this range of scope and depth, in spite of the adverse circumstances in which a lot of the human rights law was written.

TGW: You have spent a lot of time with human rights recently, but is this perhaps the biggest and most revolutionary thought that has come through these last fifty-five years of UN history?

VD: You know, Tom, I am inclined to think it is certainly one of the biggest thoughts. I think that if there are two things that sort of got drilled into my own head and consciousness in nearly thirty years at the UN—and that is not a great number of things, just two—one was the basic premise of the Charter, that you really can't have peace unless the rights of nations great and small are equally respected. The other is the basic premise of the Declaration of Human Rights, that you can't have peace within a country or a society unless the rights of all, great or small, are equally respected. I think these are the two key ideas that have come from these two great instruments. I think there is a complementarity there, and I think they are absolutely the pillars of the temple.

TGW: During this time in which you are still focused on refugees from the mid-1960s to the late-1970s, to what extent were East-West differences the main thorn in your side, and to what extent did what were becoming called North-South differences enter into calculations made in UNHCR? I guess I am asking whether the work on refugees can be circumscribed. But all of these events, starting with UNCTAD (UN Conference on Trade and Development), and the New International Economic Order (NIEO), and all kinds of sparks from the North-South dialogue—did they have an impact on your work in UNHCR?

VD: I tell you, it's very interesting. I think the UNHCR was greatly helped by the clarity of its purpose, and by its definition of who was a refugee. The idea that it required a well-founded fear of persecution, on certain very clearly-specified grounds, and then the compulsion to have left their country of origin was an idea that was so strong, so clear, that it wasn't pushed

around by other things. It was a very clear and demanding definition requiring a very clear and demanding response. I mean, you had to shape up. The essence of the convention and its protocol was that under no circumstances should a person fearing such persecution be sent back forcibly to where his life or liberty would be in jeopardy.

So there was a very clear moral compulsion in the convention and in the protocol and in the statute of the high commissioner, which gave it a lot of strength. Those who therefore served in that organization were given the strength of that statute. Here again, you see, I have often felt that we are really ennobled by what we are expected to do. It is the responsibilities that are given to us that give us the opportunity to grow and develop as human beings and to serve great causes. Sure, some grow great in the service of great causes, but it's the causes that are great. And I think that is the particular benediction that the UN gives to those who serve it.

TGW: How did you end up in New York in 1979?

VD: What happened was that Sadruddin asked me to come and serve here in the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees office first, because he felt that between UNHCR headquarters in Geneva and UN headquarters in New York, there was a very flimsy relationship and that there needed to be a far greater understanding both ways. In addition to that, he wanted me to handle refugee questions in this hemisphere. He also wanted his relationship with Washington, D.C., to be kept in order because the United States was the principal contributor and also the most powerful member of the executive committee of UNHCR.

In the early days of UNHCR, when Sadruddin first joined, there was a lot of up and down in that relationship between UNHCR and the State Department of the U.S. government. So Sadruddin wanted me to keep it in good order, to shape the relationship with UN headquarters, the 38th floor, and also to serve as the field officer for, at that time, this entire hemisphere. So

whether it was refugees going to Canada, or refugees coming to America, or refugees in the Caribbean, or refugees in Latin America, I was supposed to be on the move and be the head of the effort in that. It was quite a spread, but it was very interesting. It gave me a chance to work with fine people in Washington, D.C., and then, most of all, here at UN headquarters. That's how I came to know those who were to be my future colleagues, especially Brian Urquhart, F.T. Liu, and George Sherry.

I first came as the deputy head of the UNHCR office in 1968. When I served with UNHCR, I went on missions all over the place. Brian came to know me and introduced me to Sir Robert. Jacko asked me to go to Bangladesh. The one thing about refugees is that whenever there was a major political problem, there were refugees. And not far behind was a peacekeeping operation of some kind. I think Brian and others might have been a little surprised that a fellow who was on the "humanitarian" side of the UN seemed to know so much about the "political" side of issues. But there was nothing improbable about it because those dealing with refugees were the first to know of some terrible disaster present or looming on the political side. It was an unfailing barometer of whether the weather was good or bad and what would follow. So those of us who worked with UNHCR—the dumbest of us had the most keen antennae when it came to the evolution of political situations.

TGW: I am curious about the role of economic and social ideas in a highly politicized environment, either in the special political affairs or then very soon in the Secretary-General's cabinet. When I was preparing for the interview with Pérez de Cuéllar, I read in his autobiography something along the lines of, "There has been inadequate leadership on the part of the Secretary-General and the UN Secretariat in placing the United Nations in the forefront of economic thinking. The political and administrative demands on the Secretary-General always

come first.” I take it from this that economic and social ideas are a kind of a residual after all the fires are put out. Does that have to be the case, or could such ideas assume more importance on the 38th floor?

VD: You know, I think what Javier said is correct. But there is another reason, also. Most of the Secretaries-General have come basically from the world of diplomacy. Therefore, they have been inherently stronger on diplomatic and political matters, on matters of war and peace, than on economic and social issues. For instance, had someone like Raúl Prebisch been the Secretary-General, I dare say his instincts would have helped him take the organization in different ways on economic and social issues, even if he was Secretary-General of the United Nations rather than of UNCTAD.

Let’s just say there was a professional slant in this. But the reality is also that the exigent and the burning fires are not the kind of thing that can be ignored for five seconds. Therefore, the Secretary-General must be a master of that area and must at all times—morning, noon, and night—be able to deal with those questions. I mean, there is no sleep for a Secretary-General. Those fires burn all night, you know. So there isn’t all that much time. But that being said, that is why the Secretary-General does need to have first class people on the economic and social side working closely with him. There I think the structures of the UN and the UN system need to carefully look into—people are still experimenting with them.

I think what our present Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, has done is the closest to putting together a cabinet way of thinking on these matters. So there are various groupings of people. That is a distinct improvement and advance on the way that preceded him. I am glad he has done this. Otherwise the 38th floor was deficient in its day-to-day leadership and understanding on economic and social issues. I have no doubt about that.

I think that the UN as a whole lost some great ones because of that—the splintered character of the economic and social structures of the UN. There is far too much dispersal, too much interagency and inter-program competition. In this case, the aggregate was not greater, necessarily, than the sum of the parts. It's a pity, even though some of the finest ideas continuously came from the UN, rather than from, let's say, the sister agencies of the system, including the Bretton Woods institutions. All along, the emphasis of the UN has been on the vulnerable—the UN has always had a perspective which was remarkable, but it has taken a lot of effort to get that through clearly.

TGW: Would different kinds of people, different kinds of minds, make a difference? You just mentioned high-quality, high-powered staff. That hasn't usually been the priority on the 38th floor. I see that now we have Jeffrey Sachs, for example, being associated with them. Do we need Nobel laureates with economic thinking and status on the 38th floor? Would that help?

VD: I don't think they need to be necessarily permanent fixtures over there, but I think the Secretary-General is absolutely right in seeking more ideas from them. It can be done through just associating them with the work of the UN, or asking them to come in from time to time, or asking for their advice on specific issues. But there is a need to draw on the finest talent on the economic and social side. The UN must do it, and I am glad that this is being done. But let's not behave as if everything is being done for the first time now. Especially you, who know the intellectual history of the UN, know that from the earliest years a number of Nobel laureates have been associated with the UN in economics, and their number has been considerable. So it's not for the first time it's been done.

But I think there is need to bring to the whole thing a greater sense of organization, and a greater discipline in the area of economic and social work of the UN. The fractured quality of the agencies and the programs is something we should not—and I am now slightly out of touch with things, I have been away for ten years—but the structures of the ACC (Administrative Committee on Coordination) were not quite good enough. At least they weren't. I hope they have improved and gotten better now, but I have always had a sense of us as a family not quite holding together sufficiently, doing things with enough solidarity and understanding. And there was too much shoving and pushing along the way.

TGW: Is it possible to generalize about what kinds of outsiders who were brought in for a moment, or a meeting, or a brainstorming session—which kinds of outsiders are more effective in jogging the Secretariat in trying to put new thoughts on the table in the economic and social arena? If you were going to pull in a policy thinker, or pull in an academic, what kind of person would be most effective?

VD: I think you would have to relate that to the issue that is worrying the UN. Let's just take now, if you are going to be worried about Eastern European countries and all the rest of it, then obviously someone like Sachs would be good. If you are going to be worried about the broad issues of what on earth do we mean by development, then surely someone like Mahbub ul Haq is the answer, or someone like Amartya Sen. In other words, as many purposes, so many actors. There is no singular intelligence to deal with all of the problems that go under the *chapeau* of economic and social issues.

So I think that the Secretary-General must be able to identify those of great ability across the spectrum and seek their advice and help in relation to specific issues that are worrying him. If you take, let's say, the question of African indebtedness, then obviously you must have

someone who understands that issue. If you have something like issues of famine or scarcity, then Amartya Sen is the one you should ask, or someone with a whole range of what on earth does development mean to a human being. There Mahbub ul Haq was a pioneer, with greater ideas than anybody else. So you need a variety of people, I think, which is also what makes it so difficult sometimes.

TGW: I don't know if this is a fair question. But having worked in a national civil service and then worked for a long time in an agency of the UN itself, how does the quality of the international civil service stack up in relationship to a national one or a solid university? There are lots of comments made, very positive and very negative, about the people who work in the secretariat. Is it possible for you to generalize about your colleagues in a comparative sense?

VD: You know, I think the best people in the UN are really, absolutely tops. But I think the UN often lacks depth. It often lacks depth. I think it needs that depth. Here we have a problem, of course, because it is also related to the diversity of the staff, the different disciplines and areas of interest, and work, and nationality, and region, and geography, and culture from which they come. So it is not an easy thing. But it does sometimes create a kind of a—well, it's a strength in many respects, but it is also a weakness in some.

Now, when I was in the secretariat, of course that was still very much when the Cold War was going on. It faded just towards the end of my stay in the secretariat. But there were real problems then. It certainly made it sometimes more difficult for the secretariat to do things coherently. Not everybody was in the loop in the same way. Not everybody has the linguistic skills that were required by the organization. Not everybody has comparability of training or even a comparable vision of what needed to be done. So it didn't make life any easier.

Now some of those things—it should be far more possible to overcome them now because those great divisions are no longer there. So even putting together a secretariat now of comparable talent and similar approach would be easier now, I would think.

TGW: Do you see any difference between the staff who work for the Bretton Woods institutions and the United Nations? Some people have argued they are better paid, they get more freedom, and on and on. Are they better, on average, man for man, or woman for woman?

VD: I don't know enough of them. I don't know enough people in the Bank and the Fund. Those whom I do know there, most of them are first rate. But then again, that may be an attribute of the post and the things that they were asked to do. And they may have been specially asked to deal with me in my capacities in the UN. The Bank and the Fund were likely to send to the 38th floor to deal with us people who were good, or people who were involved in discussions of interagency matters on, let's say, some horrible issue of crisis. They wouldn't send the biggest duffer in town. They would send their smartest guy. So our exposure to the Bank and the Fund people was usually to the better and more capable members of the Bretton Woods institutions. That would be my assumption.

I think though that the Bank and the Fund, you see—let's just say the Eastern Europeans and so on simply weren't there. So it was easier for them to put together a cohesive staff during the Cold War years. And their purpose was, let's just say, in some ways much more simpleminded. They could draw on people from universities, or national administrations, or academia, or from the banks, and so on. They could draw on more easily identifiable and usable people, you see. The UN had less choice and greater variety. It's a kind of paradox there.

TGW: You mentioned the Cold War. Were you, as well as everyone else, surprised at the collapse and the speed of the collapse of the former Soviet Union? How did this look from the 38th floor? Were you reacting as everyone else seemed to be to this?

VD: I think it would be really foolish for any of us to say that it wasn't a tremendously accelerated affair. It did happen very, very briskly. But since I was then *chef de cabinet*, I am glad that Don Javier called his cards correctly each time. In other words, there was this terrible moment in Moscow when [Mikhail] Gorbachev was sitting around somewhere in the south, in Crimea, and [Boris] Yeltsin was standing on top of his truck. And there were various people, shoving and pushing, trying to bring back, as it were, the *ancien régime*. It was very interesting because every day and every few hours the Secretary-General was being expected to say something on the evolving situation. I think Pérez de Cuéllar was part of the time in town and part of the time out, but fortunately we read the developments correctly. The Secretary-General was always—his step was in the right place—as the situation evolved. He was ahead of the curve and not behind it, and he knew which way the curve was going.

I say this only because I was involved in its matter intimately. It was interesting because there, for instance—I have not met him since I left the UN, but we had then this outstanding Russian/Soviet official at that time, Victor Sakhodiev. He was a brilliant linguist, and he had come to serve in the executive office of the Secretary-General. Of all my Soviet colleagues in the OSG (Office of the Secretary-General), Victor was by far and away both the ablest and, in a sense, the most smooth, in the nice sense of the word. In other words, one didn't feel that one was getting entangled in some tremendous ideological conflict with him, or straining every nerve to make sure one didn't say the wrong thing, or hurt anyone's feelings. Victor was a very

cultivated man. During those days of rapid change, he and I used to talk fifteen times a day to see how things were going, analyzing the news and developments.

While nobody could say they anticipated the speed of developments, I think I can say that Secretary-General Pérez de Cuéllar didn't put a foot wrong at that time. There is a small footnote which is important to me as a human being. That was this: on Christmas Eve 1991, just before Pérez de Cuéllar's term came to an end, I was working late. Pérez de Cuéllar was not well. He had a flu. There was an insistent call from Ambassador [Yuli] Vorontsev to Pérez de Cuéllar saying he wanted to meet him because he had a message of utmost importance to give him from Boris Yeltsin. Pérez de Cuéllar said, "Look, I would really like to see you, but I have got a fever and I cannot see you. My friend and *chef de cabinet*, Dayal, is there. Why don't you go and see him, give him the message and consider it given to the Secretary-General." So Vorontsev rings me in great agitation at about five in the evening. He says, "I've got to see you." "What is it?" He says, "You will discover when I come." He arrived with a message from Yeltsin, roughly saying, "As of tomorrow, the Soviet Union ceases to exist, and the Russian Federation will be born. And the Russian Federation would like to assume the rights and responsibilities of the Soviet Union, including its place in the Security Council. And Vorontsov has been asked to present you with the flag of the new Russian republic. Could you kindly set the process in motion?"

Of course, it was quite a momentous occasion. Vorontsov arrives with his deputy, and he was feeling a little ill at ease. He had, after all, been a great ambassador of the Soviet Union. There was, in his handing of the letter to me and the flag—I could sense a certain tension, and a certain sense of history, and a certain sense of anxiety, and a certain sense of hope, all of those things. When he gave me the letter and the flag, I said to him, "Ambassador, the Vorontsovs are

a great family. The Vorontsovs have served their country with great distinction long before the Soviet Union was created, and I'm sure the Vorontsovs will always do so for many, many generations to come." I remember [Leo] Tolstoy had mentioned the Voronstovs. Ambassador Vorontsov's face just relaxed. His tension broke. He gave me the most charming smile. He said, "Would you mind if we had a photograph together of me giving you this flag?" I said, "By all means. Let me request my friend Karl Fleischauer to join us for this because I see that we have to set in motion some things tonight."

Karl came up and we moved to the Secretary-General's office, with that great UN seal on the wall of the conference room. Yuli stood there and we called the cameraman, and he handed me the flag of the Russian Federation. Now, I mention this story as a footnote to the great change that occurred.

We were talking about the nature and the pace of change. The interesting thing was then that Karl and I then had to advise the Secretary-General on how on earth to get over the problem of a challenge on the question of the Soviet seat in the Security Council and the question of who succeeds the Soviet Union when the Soviet Union itself was breaking into a multitude of states. We sat down on Christmas Eve and drafted just a short note *verbale*, and I read it to Javier over the phone. I said, "Secretary-General, I think this is how we should handle it. Would you agree?" He said, "Yes, let's do it like that." So that night, I got the note *verbale* readied and sent it to all of the permanent missions on Christmas Eve. Basically, it was working on the assumption that none of them would challenge the change.

I rang Ali Teymour, the chief of protocol, and said, "Ali, we need a new flag to mount. The size we have got is wrong, but by Boxing Day just have these flags in shape to put all over the place." By the grace of the almighty, somehow or the other, the flag went up. The *verbale*

went round, and Yuli Vorontsev assumed his place the day after Christmas, sitting in the Security Council, as the ambassador of the Russian Federation—nobody hounding him out of his chair. Actually, it was both the right thing, and also we were lucky. All hell could have broken loose. But I think that the note *verbale* was skillful, and we were also lucky to have hit the right note. So sometimes you can get these things right in spite of yourself.

It just worked rather smoothly—not a sound. Some days after, in fact, people were a little puzzled, saying, “Didn’t all that happen a little more swiftly than it should have? Was there a slight sleight of hand there? Have we missed something?” It was too late. The game was over, Voronstov was sitting in the chair of the Russian Federation, the flag was flying outside the building, and that was the end of the matter. Otherwise, it could have been a dreadful mess and Pérez de Cuéllar’s last week in office could have been terrible. That would have been intolerable.

TGW: All joking aside, a little before 1991, did it seem like this crumbling would make possible what they called “new thinking” at the time?

VD: Actually, it was fascinating to watch that new thinking. It was simply fascinating. If you take [Eduard] Shevardnadze, you see the first time he came and spoke in the General Assembly, his speech was a classical Soviet speech, even though he was already talking of the new thinking. But the speech he gave in the General Assembly during the general debate was in the same old vocabulary. The next year he came, the vocabulary was different. The Russian poets were different. [Aleksander] Pushkin moved in, somebody else got shoved out, and all the rest of it. In other words, the use of his mother tongue changed. The poets he used changed. The language itself changed, and language is the soul to your being. So the whole thing changed.

But it was very interesting, actually. Gorbachev first came here—he came here in 1988, you remember, and when he came here to New York it was in December. I remember it very vividly. He called on the Secretary-General on the 7th or the 8th of December, and that night there was that big reception—Pérez de Cuéllar and Gorbachev—for ambassadors. Later that night came the earthquake in Armenia, and Gorbachev had to fly back shortly before dawn the next day. Don Javier had to go, and I went with him, to Oslo for the Nobel award on the 10th of December. But what happened in that meeting with Pérez de Cuéllar on the 7th or 8th of December, before the earthquake, was that Gorbachev started off with great warmth. He said to the Secretary-General, “Mr. Secretary-General, I really want to congratulate you on the wonderful work you have been doing for this organization that means so much to everybody on this planet.”

Pérez de Cuéllar was a modest person who was always ready to praise others, and he said, “Mr. General-Secretary, it is all because of you and people like you that my hand has been strengthened. What is our achievement, but that of member states? We would be nothing if it weren’t for their cooperation.” So this went on. Then what happened was that Gorbachev said, “Well, let’s just say that God is on the side of the United Nations.” I was sitting over there and I burst out laughing. I just burst out laughing. Gorbachev looked at me with a twinkle in his eye and he said, “By which I mean the forces of history. The historical forces are on the side of the United Nations.” So we had a great guffaw about it.

I said to Pérez de Cuéllar after, “You know, it’s very interesting. This man is more Russian than Soviet. I think he might even be more Russian Orthodox than atheist. I feel about him that he is going to be the first Soviet head of state who will lose office without fighting to stay or causing bloodshed.” Pérez de Cuéllar said, “Do you really think so?” I said, “Yes, Mr.

Secretary-General, I feel that about him. He may not go gentle into the night, but he won't go after a bloodbath."

It was very interesting because there was this change in the human being really that ended in the change of a political entity. In other words, there is a greater correlation than the classical Marxist-Leninists would concede between the status and the role of the individual and the nature of governance, or the nature of society, or the nature of the future of a nation. There is a relationship there which is sometimes denied. I felt it very distinctly with Gorbachev. There was a kind of a change in the nature of the Soviet animal. The stripes had changed, or the leopard had changed his spots. It had so happened. Otherwise, he could have lashed out, you know, at the first signs of confusion in East Germany, or in the other Eastern European states. He didn't. He held his hand. It wasn't a popular decision. It was one of the reasons why they tried to overthrow him.

These things happen. They are interesting because I think, actually, one of the things about the UN which happens to be true—it's not a falsehood, nor is it a pretense—it is in some strange way at the center of the world in foreseeing change. You read the signs very clearly at the UN. You can see what the stars foretell very clearly at the UN. You can tell a death foretold at the UN also, sometimes. When it comes to tyrants, you know who's going to go.

TGW: You mentioned a while back *An Agenda for Peace*. I just wondered if you could spend a moment talking about that document, and the situation surrounding its production, and how it was done. It seems to me that no document has ever been distributed so widely. At one time, I thought the Gideon Society had adopted it. It was everywhere. But all kidding aside, it really actually was discussed by tons and tons of people. From the inside, I would like to hear a little about that moment.

VD: Well Tom, let my memory hold true, and let it hopefully be clear. What happened was the following, as far as I recall. We had this first summit meeting of the Security Council in January. Was it the 29th or the 30th of January 1992? I was still then *chef de cabinet*. The Security Council adopted the resolution asking for the Secretary-General to come up with ideas rapidly on future directions in the area of peacekeeping and peacemaking because there was a moment of change in the air and the nations that were on the council wanted to catch that change and to be in front of the curve. It was a very, very exciting moment. I told Boutros [Boutros-Ghali], “I am going home because I have been away from home for nearly thirty years. I promised my mother, who is not growing any younger, that whatever happened I was going to take an early retirement and go home, and I would leave when Pérez de Cuéllar’s term finished. So everyone was expecting me, and I told my wife we were going home.”

So we were all set to go home. Then Boutros said, “Look, could you serve as my *chef de cabinet* through to the end of February”—this meeting was at the end of January—“and try and use the next month or next six weeks to write a response to the Security Council resolution?” I said, “Secretary-General, I am off. My packing has got to be done, and I am very exhausted.” He said, “What we will do is this: I will constitute a group of senior under-secretaries as a kind of a group with whom you can engage in a discussion of ideas, and then you draw on whoever you want in order to help you write this. Just go ahead.” So he put together a group of senior under-secretaries. Mig [Marrak Goulding] was there, and [Vladimir] Petrovsky was there.

We had some meetings, discussed some ideas, and all the rest of it. But you know how it is. Basically, someone has got to pick up a pen and start writing the wretched thing. So I rang my friend Jim Sutterlin. I said, “Jim, you and I have struggled along in this area terribly hard together. Why don’t we try and sit down, you and I, and put together some thoughts on this

whole thing?” Jim said, “Sure.” So he and I sat down, and we said, “I think these are the ideas we have between us. Why don’t I write up some of them, you write up some of them, and then I’ll match them together and we will see if it makes sense. Let that be our first working draft.”

So that’s exactly what we did. Jim and I locked ourselves up on the 38th floor. I was given Brian’s old room, which for me was like being in the room of my mentor. I looked for inspiration in that environment. That was the room where Ralph Bunche had sat. That was the room that Brian had used. I said, “Here we go. All I need is a pad of paper and some pencils. Let’s get going.” And Jim sat in the anteroom, or some room nearby, and we just kept churning out the stuff.

We wrote a large number of chapters, and we decided, “Now look, what should we throw out? What should we keep? How should we arrange it?” In our first version of it, we also went into economic and social issues, as matters essential to peacemaking and security. Then Boutros said to me, “I would rather like something on peace-building also. It is not included in the agenda. It is not included in the resolution itself, but it’s a concept which I want to bring to the UN as my concept—peace-building.” I discussed it with him.

After that, Jim and I continued to work on the draft together. I soon found that Boutros wanted then to deal with me alone—partly because Jim had already retired and he didn’t know Jim, not that he knew me particularly. But Jim was a close friend of mine and he and I were like brothers. We used to keep discussing these things. Let’s just say that draft evolved from our brains. What happened was that I used to take the draft to Boutros, to his home. We would sit down and discuss it. Then he would say, “No, not this. What do you mean by this?” We would go through it all. He would say, “Now try your hand on it.” So I would rewrite bits of it.

After I had done this twice or thrice, rewriting passages and so on, he said, “Now, what’s happened to that idea you had?” I said, “Mr. Secretary-General, you wanted that one out.” He said, “Put it back. It makes sense. Now it makes sense to me.” So after I had gone through this about five times with him, he burst into laughter one day. I said, “Mr. Secretary-General, what’s happened?” He said, “Let me tell you a story.” He said, “I used to write a lot of [Anwar] Sadat’s speeches. I used to experience with him exactly what you are going through with me. At a certain point, Sadat used to really infuriate me: he used to suddenly behave as if he had written the whole speech, and as if I had had no function at all in the writing of it. And I am reaching the point where I am beginning to feel that this is mine, and not yours. So let me just say that I am very happy with this now.” I said, “Thank God. You can claim it. You can view it as yours. I am through.”

Then what happened was, he said, “But you know, I am not too sure if I am entirely satisfied stylistically with it. I like the way you express yourself, but sometimes I am not too sure if your turn of phrase isn’t somewhat eccentric. Do you mind if I ask somebody else to look over this thing?” I said, “No, by all means. I am doing it for the organization. It has to come out in your name.” He said, “I know Charlie Hill, and I would like Charlie Hill to read it over as well.” I said, “Sure. I don’t know him at all, but by all means.”

So Charlie Hill arrived and worked on it. Basically what Charlie did was—he didn’t change any of the ideas or add any—but he tightened it linguistically and stylistically, particularly at the start. He did an excellent job in terms of tightening the draft editorially and ironing out the linguistic eccentricities. But Jim and I always laughed about it because in fact all of our ideas, including those that were subversive, every one of them, stayed completely unchanged. By and large, out of the first draft, about 80 percent of that remained totally

unchanged. And out of the fourth, fifth, or penultimate draft, over 95 percent stayed unchanged. But, certainly, I would say Charlie Hill's improvements were most valuable. He tightened the writing.

He once said to me, "Why do you so often start a thought with a negation? Why don't you just say, 'That's really bad'? Why do you say, 'That's not good?'" I said, "Because in some strange and devious way I have got a Hindu mind. We even define the Almighty by a process of negation. He is not this, he is not that, he is not this, he is not that. I am not saying that the Almighty is residue, but he is neither this nor that because he is greater than just this or that. He is beyond normal attributes."

But then this document appeared. It was a very slender one, but a very tight one. After that, of course, it became something of a bestseller. I found when I went home to India friends of mine there, some of them denounced *An Agenda for Peace*. Many close friends said, "What is this interventionist document? What kind of Indian are you?" One, who was then foreign secretary of India and a contemporary and colleague of mine in government, made a point of observing in his memoirs that a friend of his, Viru Dayal, had written this somewhat unsettling document and that, "We in government didn't like some of the ideas." We disagreed and remained friends. On one famous occasion, a professor of JNU (Jawaharlal Nehru University), publicly denounced *An Agenda*, adding for good measure that while it was twenty-five pages in length, his critique of it was "five times longer." I said, "Good for you. I never had the energy to write anything of that length." It went on like that, but you know, Tom, it was a wonderful exercise to have been engaged in the writing of *An Agenda*.

But I think what happened thereafter was that the UN goofed in trying to implement some of its more audacious ideas before the ground was sufficiently prepared. I don't mean this

in any manner to be disrespectful, or being too clever by half after the event. But I think that, in a way, the UN's involvement in Somalia was a little precipitous—before we could, as it were, line up our ducks. The more proactive role for peacekeeping envisaged in *An Agenda for Peace* required a lot of preparatory steps. The ducks had to be lined up. Before the ducks were quite lined up, the UN went hurtling into Somalia. I had gone on by then. I really grieved when the UN suffered setbacks in Somalia. I said to myself, “All this is being done in the name of *An Agenda for Peace*. But we aren't there yet. We have yet to get our Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) into shape. We have yet to get our logistical side into shape. *An Agenda for Peace* envisages all that. We have got to have contacts with governments to get your standby arrangement. All that stuff has still to be done.”

We hurtled into that, and then we fell short in Rwanda, and we were short in the Balkans. So actually speaking, I personally don't think that the fault was with *An Agenda*—and this is not just the conceit of someone who had a hand in writing it—but I think in a way the exigencies of the moment pushed the UN, or the Secretary-General felt compelled, to go marching into situations for which neither the organization nor the membership were yet quite ready. Nobody desires to get into a mess, but you have exigencies. You feel you have to do something. There is a demand to do something. There is a manifest need. People were dying all over the place in Somalia and the Balkans.

So we went into these situations, in the immediate aftermath of *An Agenda for Peace*, without the preparatory work having been done. It was a question of time and of timing. It was a question of being able to see and to act with all due deliberateness. Somehow the UN was denied that time, or wasn't able to get it all together in time. Besides that, of course, each of these situations was a hellish one. You see, one cannot be too clever after the event—far from it.

One can only say, “If only we had a little more time after *An Agenda for Peace* before all hell broke loose in the Balkans, and Somalia, and Rwanda, maybe we wouldn’t have had such a rough time in dealing with these three horrible situations.”

But until this day, I remain convinced that the future of the UN must be in those directions. I am not one to ride roughshod over sovereignty, or the territorial integrity of states, or anything like that. I am an Indian, my bones and my blood. And I know what it means to protect the borders of my country which have been regained after 250 years. So I am not going to be someone who says, “Forget about sovereignty.” Not at all. But certainly there are great issues involved here. Some of the great issues—like genocide and unconscionable suffering—transcending of boundaries, the interaction of the international community.

When you take what have been described as the two great pillars of the UN—the pillar of sovereign equality of states, and the sovereign equality of the individual, and you rest this great edifice on those two pillars, you know the architecture that you want and that you need. That must be an architecture that accommodates a decent respect for the dignity and worth of the human person with a respect for the state. That means certain things in terms of the responsibilities that follow for the protection of rights and for keeping the peace. It is simply a matter of logic.

TGW: Clearly all those issues have only gotten more acute since, and the debate more acrimonious. Is it incorrect to say that the present Secretary-General has been more forthcoming on human rights and humanitarian issues than his predecessors, that the climate has permitted him to push out the envelope even more?

VD: I think it has. I think it definitely has. Let’s just say the envelope had been prepared. The envelope had been prepared at the worst of times. Earlier we were talking about

ideas, timing, and packaging. The ideas were ready. The timing now was appropriate. And Kofi has had the courage to package those ideas with great ability and with great sincerity. Even though he has had his ups and down in terms of trying to get those ideas through, with an awful lot of people saying he is going too far, and some saying he is going too slow, and some saying, “What do you think about sovereignty?” But he has put the right questions—“If you don’t intervene in situations of extremity, then how do you deal with a Srebrenica? How do you deal with genocide? And if you can give me a better idea, then give it to me. But if you don’t have a better idea, then stop complaining.” Don’t carry on like a terrier, snapping at everyone’s ankles, if you don’t have a better idea.

I think Kofi is right, and this is where I think Kofi has also been skillful. But again, I have been so absorbed in my own work on human rights in India that I am greatly out of touch with developments at the UN and therefore I speak with some reticence on these things, as I may not know enough. But this group which Kofi has drawn on now—Gareth Evans’s group, which talks about the responsibility of the state to protect, is a wise way of looking at the responsibilities that must accompany sovereignty. I think the state does have a responsibility to protect its own people. In fact, in my own work on human rights in India, we are trying to push the envelope in precisely the same direction.

For instance, this question arose in Gujarat, recently, where we had a very difficult time. On the 27th of February, 2002, a train with a large number of Hindu pilgrims coming back from Ayodhya was set on fire near a railroad station by people who were Muslim. Fifty-nine Hindus were burnt to death in that train. Terrible events ensued. An even larger number of Muslims were killed in retaliatory attacks. Our commission took the very firm position, arguing that the state has a responsibility to make sure that its own agents, and even non-state actors within its

jurisdiction, had a right to observe the properties of the constitution, the laws of our country, and our treaty obligations, and that this was an emerging principle of jurisprudence which demanded respect for human rights. In other words, the state could not say that violence was permissible by a group of people who were enraged at what happened in the burning of a train where fifty-nine people were killed. All of us, who took this position, I am glad to say, were Hindus—the four members of the National Human Rights Commission of India.

Here, Tom, is the interesting thing. You asked me about my childhood and what the UN meant to me. In my dotage, it means even more than ever before. In a way, everything that I came to love earlier in life has come to have greater meaning at this stage in my life, when I am back at home. If it is of any interest to you, you can read that opinion of the Commission on Gujarat on our website because we put it on the internet. It is an opinion of the 1st of April, which I was asked to draft for our commission, followed by another longer one on the same subject after getting the comments of the state government on the 31st of May, and another one which I drafted on the 1st of July, just before taking some leave. Those opinions touch on precisely the issue of responsibility of the state—and the responsibility of the state for its own acts, for the acts of its agents, and of non-state players within its jurisdiction. There is no escaping that responsibility.

These are ideas which, I think, have grown in our souls because of our work in the UN. But the interesting thing is this: they are not ideas which have grown only in the soul of UN people. They have radiated from the UN. My colleagues in the commission are, after all, justices of the Supreme Court of India. The chairman of my commission wrote a judgement when he was still Supreme Court chief justice, saying that even if India is not a state party to X or Y international instrument, if there is nothing to the contrary in domestic law, India must

consider itself bound in its conduct by those international laws and treaties. He took this position, in a very famous judgement having to do with the rights of women. We were not signatory at that time to the relevant convention having to do with the rights of women. The issue was sexual harassment and he said, "If there is nothing to the contrary in domestic law, then we must consider ourselves bound by international treaties on these matters." So the UN's centrality, as a kind of a center of the planetary system from which radiate great ideas, must never be underestimated.

TGW: We have to stop because we are almost at the end of tape number one.

TGW: This is the beginning of tape number two, the 15th of July, Tom Weiss and Viru Dayal in New York. We started with *An Agenda for Peace*, but I am interested in the presentation of ideas. This was a report that was widely distributed. You mentioned then the report on *The Responsibility to Protect*. Actually, I had the privilege of being the research director for that group. I can give you the report afterwards. This is the latest in a series of such commissions, beginning with Pearson in 1969 and a whole series of things in between. My question is: how do you look at these commissions as a vehicle for the creation and dissemination of ideas? Some of them have actually made a big splash. Some of them have fallen flat.

Is there a way to generalize about the utility of these eminent commissions? You yourself served on the Carnegie one, which I would probably myself put in the "having-fallen-flat" category in the sense that it did not immediately have the kind of effect that I think you folks thought it would. It may have over the longer run. Other reports, like for instance Mrs. Brundtland's (*Our Common Future*), were immediately picked up. I would like you to ramble

on with me here a minute about the utility of eminent commissions as a way to get ideas into the mainstream.

VD: I think you are absolutely right in observing that some catch the light and others don't. Some catch the imagination and others don't. You are absolutely right. I think certainly amongst the great reports of the last many years the Pearson Commission (*Partners in Development*) certainly does. Brandt (*North-South: A Programme for Survival*) did. Brundtland did. And in a strange way *An Agenda for Peace* did. The interesting thing was this: I think each of them, somehow or the other had a real clarity of purpose. They were of varying lengths. *An Agenda for Peace* is just twenty-five to thirty pages, while the Carnegie report (*Preventing Deadly Conflict*) was 300. That was its fault. It tried to cover too wide a range of subjects, in fact. Perhaps it went too far afield. It had too diverse a number of people with it. The other thing was it wasn't, in a sense, a response to a felt need. Its focus wasn't sharp enough.

Now you see, *An Agenda for Peace* had the great virtue of being a response to a summit meeting. There could be no higher kind, in a sense, than the Security Council meeting at the level of fifteen heads of state.

TGW: It was demand-driven?

VD: It was demand-driven. And also, it had a very specific purpose: how on earth do we deal with peacekeeping and peace-making and this new opportunity? Therefore, it was struck by lightning from the beginning. In other words, it had an incandescence because of its circumstances, which the Carnegie report didn't have. It was too diffuse, in spite of the great ability of a number of people involved. Maybe that was its problem—too many distinguished people. It wasn't singularly identified with a single person or an opportunity as each of the

others have been. The Brundtland report was Brundtland's report. The Pearson report was Pearson's report. The Brandt report was Brandt's report. Each was identified with a very specific purpose and a very specific person. Also each of them picked up one great idea at least.

When, in the Brundtland report they came up with the brand new idea of sustainable development, it was an idea that was immediately so intriguing that it changed the way that people were required to think. The Carnegie report didn't have that single idea which compelled a transformation of thinking; it didn't specifically challenge any clearly defined audience to transform its thinking. It provides a vast amount of material and ideas, however, especially if you read all the attendant reports, and it will be of value over the long run, but less spectacularly than—let's say—the Brundtland reports.

TGW: Yes, I have a shelf devoted to it!

VD: The domain of scholarship, which is a valuable domain, has a percolative effect. But it doesn't have the effect of instant transformation. It doesn't necessarily breathe life into a situation immediately. So I think that if there is to be a commission, the point of it must be that it must be very clearly linked with somebody who is standing for some great idea of a certain novelty. It must break recognizably new ground. It must also be readable.

TGW: And digestible?

VD: That's right, yes. Otherwise, it's better to have a background document of 400 pages and a brisk one of forty, which everybody reads and digests. That would be one way to do it.

TGW: One of the other vehicles for the production and dissemination of ideas since the 1970s has been major ad hoc global conferences. I wonder, as you look back over the years,

which of these come to mind, and why were they important to the production and dissemination of ideas?

VD: You know, I actually I think—and contrary to what many people feel—that global conferences have not been a waste of time. I don't share that view at all. I think that the global conferences have been very good in stimulating ideas. Even more important, they stimulate civil society. That is why, if you were to ask me whether five General Assemblies are worthwhile or one global conference, I am almost inclined to say one global conference. You see, first they are single-minded. Then they create an enormous rumpus. All of that is important for the spread of ideas. The racket is important for the spread of ideas. The noise, the clamor, the involvement of civil society is important.

If you were to ask me after thirty years of the UN which General Assembly stands out in my mind, I will have a hard time telling you, unless it's a commemorative session of some kind. But otherwise the sheer tedium of the speeches—the sheer tedium of these speeches, you know—it's just hellish. And you can see and hear, from year to year, the speech that has been written before. You can hear the wretched thing before it's been pronounced. So in other words, we have reached a point—at least I had reached a point—where I could write the speech of almost any foreign minister of the United Nations and ask them to read it out.

So I think, actually if you were to ask me whether global conferences are a good idea, I think they can be a wonderful idea for consciousness-raising. And I think that many of the great economic and social issues—the environment with Stockholm (UN Conference on the Human Environment) and Rio (UN Conference on Environment and Development), the Beijing conference for women (Fourth World Conference on Women), population and development in Cairo (International Conference on Population and Development), the Durban conference on

racism (World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance), I think these have been very, very important in harnessing the attention of more than governments that come and sit in the General Assembly. The UN is all about the spread of ideas to civil society. The Charter even talks about the “peoples”—it’s a very serious commitment that is made in the Charter. It is not, “We the governments;” it is “We the peoples.” Everyone says this all the time, but the only time when it actually finds expression in its most vivid form is in the global conferences.

I actually, now since I’ve left the UN for ten years, I’ve been living in one member state amongst 190-odd. I find that the reach of our global conferences amongst civil society is really one of the most interesting things. When I run into odd people in my country who talk the language of the global conferences of the UN, my heart just sings because I hear this language in improbable places from improbable people. Whether they are talking about human rights, or whether they are talking about the rights of women, or whether they are talking about the rights of refugees, or disadvantaged groups of one kind or the other—these aren’t ideas that are plucked out of the air in some mysterious way in one particular district or one particular remote village of India. Somehow these ideas have come to people in some remote village or district of India because somebody has been involved in a global conference. Six degrees of separation—well, someone they know in the sixth degree or the seventh degree has been somehow associated with one of these great undertakings of the UN and the message has reached home in some remote corner of India.

So it is not the General Assemblies of the United Nations that have done that. It’s the global conferences. That whole racket, that disorderly mess is really what energizes the mobs! That is what democracy requires. Some are getting absolutely sick of the noise and the clamor

and the distressful mess and the rest of it. But you know, as far as human rights go, including in my country, I am quite happy about it—that everybody is screaming about the Universal Declaration at everybody else and holding their governments responsible on that basis. Why not? It's a free world. If that's the way that people will get up in some remote corner of my country and start talking about rights, or in China, or somewhere in Paraguay or Uruguay, or for that matter in Italy or even the United States, so be it.

These global partnerings have had their virtue. I am not going to knock them, even though an awful lot of money is spent. But frankly, they're much more fun than five General Assemblies taken together, and they cost probably less. So I am all for them if the racket will last for a week or ten days, while the General Assembly rattles on for three months. I don't mean any disrespect, of course, to the General Assembly. It is a Charter organization. Some say it's the principle organ, but that's another matter.

TGW: I was listening very closely to what you were saying about one of the purposes of the conferences being in fact to spread ideas to civil society. Lots of people would say that, in fact, these conferences are a way for civil society to spread ideas to governments.

VD: Fair enough, I agree. It's a two-way traffic. But it's better expressed in these global conferences than ever in the General Assembly, that's for sure.

TGW: How do you look at the sort of bane of governments' existence—NGOs (nongovernmental organizations)—over the years? They were obviously foreseen in Article 71, but there has been an enormous proliferation of the institutions and also their visibility and the importance of the issues they're dealing with. Where is this leading? What do you see down the line in ten years?

VD: You see, Tom, I have watched them quite carefully. I must say that I think life would be duller without the NGOs, and there would probably be much less point to it also. So I am all for them being thoroughly involved in the undertakings of the UN. I am all for it. But I think the NGOs have got to watch their step a little bit. Sometimes what happens is that the loudest shrieker is the one who writes his paragraphs or agenda into a document and wrecks the whole process. That's exactly what happened in Durban during the Conference Against Racism, Xenophobia, and All Related Forms of Intolerance. You see, Mary Robinson, who is about as open-minded a person as can be on these matters—she was actually frankly just fed up by the end with the NGOs because they adopted some kind of declaration and program of action that made no sense to anybody, was bizarre in its contents, and which frankly even she had to reject, saying this cannot be viewed as a serious document because it is just full of pulls, and pushes, and pressures. And whoever shrieked his guts out, rightly or wrongly, and even though it was a message of hate, wrote it into the document.

I don't think it should be the purpose of NGOs, surely, to write messages of hate, no matter how impassioned they might be feeling about this, that, or the other. Or if you want to write your message of hate, then for heaven's sake, choose a forum other than a UN conference and the attendant conference of NGOs. That's not the way to express yourselves.

What we need is the participation of NGOs. What the NGOs need is some discipline and order in their method of functioning. And certainly they must have a way of filtering out, as it were, the entrepreneurs of hate from their own councils and from their own drafting processes. There must be some decency to it. In other words, the NGOs that come must also be guided by the same Charter that is meant to be guiding everybody else there. In other words, they shouldn't be wrecking the temple because of their private hatreds or grievances. That's not the

way to behave, at least not in public. You can do anything you want in private. But even there there are limits under the new way of thinking on human rights. Even in private there are certain things you are not meant to do.

TGW: Do you see any official way to incorporate private voices or NGO voices in intergovernmental dialogue? We have seen what the ILO (International Labour Organization) did from the inside. And there has been much mention of a people's chamber, or assembly, or something like that. Do we have to find a way to officially do this, or is it better to keep them outside?

VD: You see, I have no problem with the idea of a dialogue involving governments and NGOs under the same roof. I have no problem. But I think, like everything else, there must be well-established ground rules on how to proceed and how to behave. You need rules of procedure if you are going to create new institutional forms of conducting business. You need rules of behavior and conduct. I think people then should abide by them. But I think the dialogue on many issues could be enriched by giving NGOs some time of day to express their views.

Take something like terrorism. You cannot have a whole lot of fellows coming into a meeting preaching hatred, saying that we are an NGO, we are free to do this, any more than governments should be encouraged to behave in its name. There are certain proprieties that the Charter requires of those who serve it, or pretend to serve it, or say they are serving it. I think those have to be observed. And interestingly, it happens even in human rights forums, where sometimes they are transformed into forums of hatred. Nobody can tell me or convince me that one of the purposes of protecting human rights is to preach how to hate your neighbor even more. There is something wrong in that way of thinking.

So I think that, somewhere here, the method of accreditation of NGOs becomes important. We can't have some kind of process which is loose at all ends and lets in all kinds of Huns into the field who are more busy hating each other than taking the process forward in some rational way. We need to be careful. But that being said, I think that the work of the world—if that doesn't sound too pompous—can only benefit from the involvement of civil society. It is increasingly getting better and better informed itself. There is so much talent that the governments must draw on. Besides, civil society knows where the shoe pinches. They know when to laugh and they know when to cry, and it is very often governments that make them cry.

TGW: Which private human rights groups do you think have had the most impact on UN thinking? Which NGOs?

VD: I guess one would have to say Amnesty International because it is perhaps the most powerful and best organized of human rights groups in the world. In some measure, now Human Rights Watch. But you know, Tom, I must say I don't think that's enough. I think that perspectives of a greater variety are required to be brought to this. And whether we are talking about governments, or whether we are talking about NGOs, you see, there has to be some accountability for views expressed, or actions recommended, or consequences incurred. I am not too sure if we have quite found out how to deal with that as yet. I don't think for a moment this is a reason to challenge the freedom of expression of anybody, least of all the great NGOs. But I think somehow or the other, within our own circles of, let's say, NGOs or whatever it is, they must have some system of being responsible for things they recommend or say. I don't know quite how it should be.

One of the things about giving advice is that it is always easier if you don't have to live with the consequences of the advice you give. That is so whenever we talk about third party of

any kind, including the role of the UN. You see, I am old UN man and believe greatly in the Charter and its various ways of acting. And though I believe greatly that the UN has a responsibility to act in a great variety of circumstances, I still always feel within me the need for this caveat that you have to accept responsibility for your acts. You can't just give a whole lot of gratuitous advice or start something off in the field, and then have no way of controlling it and let fly a chain of action with other people having to live with the steps and the measures you've recommended, and let them kill each other, or starve, or you exacerbate a problem and come away home feeling, "Well, I've done my job." That is not only a frivolous way of doing things, it is a positively harmful way of doing things. And sometimes I think that, with the best of intentions, the UN system may have made situations worse, including in the economic and social sphere.

We have to be very, very careful when we come to telling others how to behave. This is not to deny the universality of principles or human rights principles. Far from it. But the nature of the advice we give and the conduct we recommend must contribute to the furtherance of those things in the long run. Our recommendations shouldn't just look good for the moment.

TGW: You mentioned a magic word, "universality." You come from a part of the world in which there is an adjective attached to values—"Asian" values. There actually seems to be a large split in the middle of Asia. How do you see this debate?

VD: I must say I think Asian values—I belong to the school where, I think, the persons who usually say things like that want to perpetuate something which is perhaps less than entirely pleasant or indeed Asian. It's a semantic technique of protecting your turf or a wrong way of behavior. So I don't really bother too much about that. In fact, what is so special—or "non-Asian—about saying "thou shalt not torture?" Does it mean that if I am an Asian parent I can

offer my child to a torture chamber? If it is said “you shouldn’t be discriminated against on the grounds of religion, or race, or sex, or whatever it is,” does “Asian values” mean that you should discriminate against your daughter and not send her to school? Does it mean that, in the name of “Asian values” you can beat up someone, and be free to do so, if he is not a Hindu, or a Christian, or a Muslim, or a Shiite, or a Sunni, or whatever? It makes no sense to me.

Apart from that, if we read our own Asian philosophers, and if we read our own history, the finest of our tribe were great champions of human rights. Since I have been thrown into the arena of human rights, I have had to deal with this issue often. At the time of the Inquisition in Europe, the Mughal emperor Akbar, who happened to be Muslim, was ruling in India. He was one of the most remarkably enlightened persons who ever walked on this earth. There he was, with a conclave of people in his court, trying to create a syncretic way of thinking in our country, involving all the finest scholars and philosophers of different religions living in absolute harmony—no discrimination at all in his kingdom. And he was a great builder and a great ruler.

What does it mean? And there was the Emperor Ashoka, in the third century B.C., who was putting up pillars all over India, from the southernmost parts to the parts which are now in Afghanistan, written in languages all the way from the Central Asian languages to the languages of South India, in Pali and Sanskrit, talking about issues having to do with good governance and rights. So I don’t buy this, that everything is either Western or Asian. I don’t buy that at all.

And when it comes to our own country, when I joined the Human Rights Commission, many of my friends asked me, “What are you doing? You are going to enfeeble the state by taking about rights all the time.” I said, “You must be out of your mind. Don’t you know why we fought for independence? We fought for independence so that we could write our own constitution. And the central chapter in that constitution is the chapter on fundamental rights,

rights that would justicable. That was the whole purpose of the fight for independence. What is independence about? What does self-governance mean, if not that? The same Indians who were writing our constitution were helping to write the Universal Declaration. You must be out of your minds to think that human rights are strange or alien concepts to India.”

You know, Tom, it’s interesting because even on this question of so-called humanitarian intervention and so on and so forth, people in India—as elsewhere—are nervous about it. I have said, “You must remember that the first time the issue of a Convention Against Genocide was raised in the UN, it was by India. It was before India became independent.” You see, the issue of genocide was raised by India in the General Assembly shortly before we were independent—in November, I think, of 1946. It was India, Costa Rica, and one other country that said there was a need for a convention against genocide. It wasn’t as if the French raised the question of the need for a Convention Against Genocide. It was India.

You know, Tom, then what happened was this. So great was the weight of genocide on the conscience of the world that work was taken up simultaneously and concurrently on the Convention Against Genocide and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But the Convention Against Genocide was a treaty. It was the first great human rights treaty of the UN. And you know what? It was adopted one day ahead of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Such was its importance and such was its gravity. The Convention Against Genocide was adopted on the 9th of December, and the Universal Declaration came on the 10th of December. The issue of genocide was so large that it was too large to accommodate even within the Universal Declaration. It required a treaty of its own. It was the first treaty of the United Nations on human rights.

So I tell people at home, “What are you talking about? It is India that raised the question of genocide. It is India that had a major hand in the drafting of the Universal Declaration. It was Mahatma Gandhi who raised the question of South Africa when the rest of the world was telling him to shut up. Don’t you know about Article 2 (7) of the Charter, they asked? It was India that went into Bangladesh because genocide occurred in 1971. Was it or was it not?” “Oh yes, sir, it was.” “Then why do you change your stand now?” That’s how it goes.

TGW: I think immediately about the notion of human rights, or the notion of humanitarian intervention, when someone is asking whether an idea matters or has an impact. Looking at the genocide convention or a particular intervention, I think the answer clearly is “yes.”

VD: Yes. There cannot be any other answer.

TGW: After years of being on one side of the desk, for the Vienna conference (World Conference on Human Rights) you served on the other side as a member of the national delegation. Was this ad hoc conference a step forward?

VD: I think it was actually. The Vienna one was. Here again, since I am no longer with the UN now, I judge these things by what effect they have had on those that are not of the UN family as it were. To the believers of the UN, it was their conference. I have asked myself, “What is the effect on those who are outside of it?” I think, actually, for instance, if you take the Vienna conference and its declaration and program of action, they have been quoted very frequently by the Supreme Court of India on a number of issues. The whole impetus for national human rights commissions also was greatly strengthened after the Vienna conference of June 1993.

The National Human Rights Commission of India came into existence in October of 1993. The initial draft of the bill for the Human Rights Commission was an inferior draft. After people came back from Vienna, they looked at it again and it was radically rewritten. It's not a perfect draft, but it's a much improved draft. Once again, I think that the concept of the UN as a kind of catalyst is very important. It is a radiator of ideas. Improbably people catch the light, as it were, because of its efforts and endeavors. Lots of NGOs went to Vienna. Lots of people came back. Lots of people who were not normally in governmental delegations, other than foreign service people, went along—professors, scholars, human rights activists. It kind of becomes a jamboree, and all of it helps in the energizing of those of government and of civil society.

So I think that the Vienna conference was important. And I judge it not from the side of the UN, but I see its effect in India. All kinds of persons get up and say, "In Vienna this was said." The most improbable guys get up and say it. Even take the argument on universality and so on—the Vienna conference dealt with this matter in a fairly definitive way. And the Vienna declaration was adopted unanimously. So now when someone gets up and starts arguing the same old line about "Asian" values or "European" values, I say, "Haven't you ever understood anything? Why don't you just go and read the Vienna document? All of this stuff was discussed threadbare on the road to Vienna in 1991, 1992, and 1993, in the preparatory conferences for Vienna. That is where everyone reached agreement. So don't just keep on displaying that you have the mind of a fossil. Just get on with it."

One of the virtues of UN conferences is that they are great clearinghouses for ideas. A lot of the junk gets shed along the way. Then something—I won't say definitive—emerges, and a new threshold is established. So you don't have the same old debates carried on ad infinitum.

There are, of course, an awful lot of illiterates who like to do so. But you can also say, “Why don’t you go and do your homework? Stop badgering us about things which have already been discussed threadbare. Get on with it.” It’s quite useful that way.

TGW: What would you say is the status of the divide between individual and political, and economic and social? Is that a relic of the Cold War that we don’t need to worry about? Is it basically part of the mainstream now? Or is there still, in your view, a great difference?

VD: Any of us who have anything to do with human rights know, in reality, that they are interrelated and indivisible. That is the fact of the matter. Now the problem arises, of course, that civil and political rights are easier to talk about and in a sense cheaper to talk about. I don’t mean this in any disrespectful way because they are very, very important. Without them we are nothing. But the fact of the matter is that with economic and social rights you have got to put your money where your mouth is. If you are going to be talking about economic and social rights, then someone has to make sure that somewhere a school is constructed. Or if you talk about the rights of the child, it means that somewhere someone has got to get that child out of a carpet weaving factory or a football making factory and have that kid benefiting from free, compulsory education.

In other words, there are costs to the purse when you talk about economic and social rights. Now I don’t think, therefore, that this is a matter of East-West and all that kind of thing. I think it is a question of what should be our objectives in terms of development? I mean, what is the responsibility of the state and society to those who are in economic and social need or difficulty, who are not, as they say, in the mainstream? So I think, actually, when we talk about economic and social rights, we are basically talking about issues of equity and justice in the

economic and social area. And we are talking about what Amartya Sen has so beautifully and vividly described as development as freedom.

You see, what you have here, really, is the fight against the three great “un-freedoms”—the un-freedom of illiteracy, the un-freedom that comes from the fear of early death, and the un-freedom that comes from the fear of starvation. So when we talk about economic and social rights, that is in fact what we are talking about. It’s a related but different subject from civil and political rights because it requires action of a different kind. In respect of civil and political rights, the state, by and large, is meant to abstain from doing wrong. In the case of economic and social rights, the state has to do something positive that is right. That is where the problem arises because then suddenly everyone becomes impecunious and can’t find a dime to help the child. You keep shrieking about the child being involved in child labor, but heaven help you if you would give a dime to send the child to school.

Then you have the whole wretched area of duplicity and hypocrisy in the debate on rights. Then a certain unpleasantness comes into it. It’s not necessarily between North and South because heaven knows you’ve got plenty of hypocrites both in the North and in the South when it comes to economic and social matters. But it becomes a painful affair because the people who are shrieking about rights of one kind suddenly seem to be immune to an understanding of what it means when it comes to the rights of the disadvantaged in other respects—totally oblivious because it means doing something about it in monetary terms.

TGW: Has the Declaration on the Right to Development then made a difference?

VD: I think it has made some difference on the theoretical side. It has taken the debate forward. But between the true believers, the half believers, and the unbelievers, there is still plenty of vacillation and all the rest of it. Everyone is trying to define what on earth it should

mean. Now, my compatriot, Arjun Sengupta, who is the special rapporteur on this—he wrote an extremely scholarly tract on it, basically zeroing in on health, education, shelter, and food, and saying how these rights should be fleshed out. He cut out the fancy stuff—plumbing the ocean depths and all that kind of stuff. Just how do we deal with Amartya's three un-freedoms? And he adds shelter to it. But basically these are the staples. He is trying to develop a kind of a theory of rights having to do with this.

I think, in a sense, in our own country we are trying to build a certain jurisprudence of rights, build a respect for civil and political rights and also for economic, social, and cultural rights. I mentioned Gujarat. That had to do with the issue of civil and political rights and the responsibility of the state, and the responsibility of state agents, and non-state players when it comes to life, liberty, equality, and dignity. But we have also been concerned with the jurisprudence of rights having to do with illiteracy, health issues, and issues of starvation and nutrition. Each of these matters we have taken up in our own commission and we have had elaborate hearings on them arising out of specific instances of death, or child labor, or things like that. We are trying to develop a jurisprudence of rights in order to change state policy.

In a sense, the language of rights therefore is a legitimate element to bring into the debate on economic and social issues in the UN as well. In meetings of national commissions, we have spoken a lot with Mary Robinson about it. We were very happy when she took up these issues in different UN forums and even with the Bretton Woods group. She did a wonderful job in this respect. And I think she was greatly encouraged to do so by national institutions, which provided her with their own experience and ideas drawn from their own efforts.

TGW: One issue that hasn't entered into our conversation that is intimately linked to rights is the notion of women's rights or gender issues. When did this big issue first come on your radar screen?

VD: You know, actually, I must say I think it came up during the preparatory work for one of the great conferences. I think it first began to click in my mind when Helvi Sipilä turned up here once and helped with one of these earlier conferences—was it the one in Helsinki, perhaps, a long time ago?

TGW: Do you mean Mexico?

VD: Mexico, perhaps. You see, it's very interesting that you ask that question, the nature of my reaction. But I think I was pretty much an ignoramus on issues concerning women until one of these conferences did a bit of consciousness-raising as far as I was concerned. There has truly been a transformation in the whole area of women's rights because of these conferences. I have no doubt about it. Whether it was the Bella Abzug on the one hand, or some nice, genteel lady from India or from China, a kind of sisterhood came into existence—an awful lot of men began to understand what they were talking about.

I think, actually, that in a country like India, it would be the world conferences under the UN auspices that stimulated the rights for women, rather than Germaine Greer or Bella Abzug. With all due respect, how many Indian women come to New York City? But they all learned, again, through this peculiar process of the UN. There were people going from the village to preparatory meeting, or someone you knew, or someone's cousin going—all that goes on, you see. That's how it happens. And again, the Beijing conference—all kinds of women's groups from developing countries went to these conferences.

TGW: How were these issues addressed in the front office, in the Secretary-General's office, when you were there? How did they come in? Obviously, world conferences come up, but what else happened?

VD: I think they very often then came in the form of, "You are busy telling the rest of the world how to behave, why don't you shape up in the secretariat itself?" You see, they often came in that way. In other words, fairly aggressively saying, "Physician, heal yourself. You go around telling everybody else what to do while the secretariat is a mess. There are hardly any women in senior positions, and the women in the secretariat are all confined to the general services. No one gets a promotion and all the rest of it."

I think that there was a very conscious effort, partly because of that, on the part of the Secretary-General then to search for eminent women for senior positions. It became a kind of a necessity and a perfectly reasonable necessity, if I may say so. But I dare say that the hands of the Secretaries-General were forced on this. For instance, when you ask for posts, governments are likely to send you the names of six good men. Then you have to go back to them and say, "How about six good women?" They say, "But isn't there anyone in the secretariat?"

I think even within the UN itself the movement for gender equality and respect for the rights of women and so on increased greatly because of the world conferences. The UN found itself in a position where its own conduct was being brought into question, perfectly reasonably, by people who had gone to these places—"You guys aren't shaping up, you know." And those who were in administration or those who were in the front office began to feel a little silly about it. I think that's the truth.

TGW: One of the other monographs we're working on in which human rights enters is this relatively new notion of human security. In your view, how did this emerge on the UN's agenda? When did it come about? How did it get there? Is it a good idea, actually?

VD: You see, the human security thing, I'm not sure when it first appeared, but I know that Sonny Ramphal's group—

TGW: The Commission on Global Governance.

VD: Yes. They wrote at some length about it. But even that was quite late in the day. The ideas were rooting around a time before that in various forums and so on and so forth. My own feeling, Tom, is that like many good ideas, its roots are diverse, but finally traceable to some great truths. Those go down to issues of equity and justice. There are some core virtues that are essential in society. And these ideas of human security and so on, in fact they are elaborations of the idea of the need for equity and justice in society, or the protection of the dignity and worth of the human person. They lead to the need for practical steps, these ideas. They are the consequences of certain fundamental ways of thinking.

So in other words, the turns of phrase that we use evolve. But the genesis of these ideas has deep roots in the concepts of the Charter and of the Universal Declaration. The concept of human security is intrinsic to these great instruments.

TGW: Why do you think the idea of human security came on the international agenda?

VD: I think it came on the agenda because of the crassness of our performance and because of the vast numbers who were dropping dead in situations that were not acceptable anymore. Either it was brought on by political violence; or violence stemming from language, race, religion, or the like; or violence that came from natural calamity, or from manmade disasters of one kind or another of which we seem to have no limit. It's kind of a march of folly

over decades in front of our eyes, and a consciousness that doesn't permit us to accept that anymore.

But basically, if you ask where the consciousness has come from, I would say, "Well, in a sense, it's an ancient consciousness, whether it comes from our conscience itself and from all of our faiths. There is nothing new to it in human thinking. But certainly, it is absolutely implicit in the expectations of the Charter and of the Universal Declaration." You don't let certain things happen all around you. You don't let gratuitous killing occur, and you don't have people dropping dead, for no good reason, all around you. These are impermissible situations.

You see, the desire to work for human security is a desire born of a deep resonance in any person with a reasonable conscience, one which arises from our deepest beliefs. It is this desire in these deep beliefs that find expression both in the Charter, which governs the conduct of states, and in the international instruments on human rights, which govern the manner in which human beings should be treated. The UN is an evolution and a crystallization of these desires and beliefs; they have always motivated human beings in their rational moments.

TGW: Are there any weaknesses in this concept as an organizing principle for UN activity, with every institution on the masthead now involved in security?

VD: Tom, the weaknesses are those of responsibility or irresponsibility. The problem is that we have to be very, very responsible when we talk about third party intervention. First, you can't raise hopes unreasonably high and then fail to fulfill them. Alternatively, you can't set your sights too low and do nothing. There must be a fine measure in what you set out to do and your capacity to do what is reasonable and correct. I think one of the problems which we face very often is that we either pretend not to see a problem, or we see everything and then fail act

comprehensively. At times, we handle things so poorly that we don't know at the end of an operation whether we have actually helped anybody or hurt people.

If we look back on fifty years of developmental activity in Africa, I ask myself have we really done much good. Sometimes, even when I was *chef de cabinet*, there were great meetings of the General Assembly—a Special Session on Africa, Stephen Lewis's first stellar appearance here at the UN. Dick Walters had replaced Jeanne Kirkpatrick and brought a new impetus to the U.S. role. We were all working our guts out try to get that one right. We were all clapping our hands when the Special Session was successfully over. We were over the moon. Brad [Morse] was helping. Maurice Strong was helping. Everybody was so happy, and the Africans were delighted at the end of it all. What really happened, since twenty years later we were back in the same hole?

In other words, there is something missing. There is something missing there, or something wrong there. When I was reading about this latest meeting of the Group of 8 (G-8) in Dublin, and everyone saying, "We've got it right this time," I said to myself, "I just hope to God we have." As a concept, human security is a wonderful idea. But we have to be clear about what we mean to do, and whatever we do, do it properly. That is the biggest problem.

I don't like to gripe about things I've witnessed, but the truth is that the UN sometimes has not necessarily done everything it could have, or should have. It has sometimes left problems hanging, and sometimes it's left them in a way that they have gotten worse. If you take Afghanistan, for instance, I know they got that great Geneva agreement and all the rest of it, but the fact of the matter is that while that agreement put a gloss on Soviet intolerance—a decision that had already been taken by Gorbachev—it failed to achieve a thousand other things and its implementation was deeply flawed. And even the things it was supposed to achieve weren't

quite achieved. Years of carnage and cruelty followed with many tens of thousands of people killed. I have often asked myself if the Geneva agreement was a famous victory. I have great doubts in my mind. After all the hand-clapping that went on at that time, terrible things were set in train and the agreement was repeatedly violated in many important respects.

TGW: Does it make sense, since we're on Afghanistan for the moment, to think about post-September 11th as a different kind of world? Besides having postponed our interview for a few months, what are the big changes? In particular, does this make a difference for human rights?

VD: Let's take the first part of it first. I think what has happened is that something extremely ugly that people weren't talking about sufficiently came out into the open after September the 11th. That was the ugly face of "religion." You see, the fact of the matter is that the most God-awful things have happened in the name of God. The 11th of September, unfortunately, showed all of us what can happen. So I think, to that extent, September the 11th was a very sad and serious lesson for everybody on this planet: the Almighty really meant otherwise when he asked us to be faithful. I think it is going to be a very hard lesson to learn and to digest, and for all of the faithful, regardless of the faith or the creed to which they belong, to get it firmly into their heads that the purpose of religion is not to kill each other in the name of God, but to do something quite the opposite.

But I think that, in some tremendously powerful way, that issue has now come out into the open. While we have fought all through human history in the name of religion, I think people have suddenly gotten wind of the fact that we can finish ourselves off now if we carry on in our manic-depressive way on this subject any longer. I think there is something seriously awry.

I don't speak in terms of Islam and the so-called conflict of civilizations. But I think that what we have is a very serious truth that has come up to confront all of us—that we can do great harm in the name of faith. And we better all shape up in our respective societies, whether India, America, Pakistan, Israel, or Egypt. We better have the voice of reason triumphing over lunacy.

Now this also leads into the subject of rights, and there are two aspects here that need to be considered. The first is whether rights should be sacrificed in the name of the security of the state. That is one issue. The other is whether rights should be sacrificed in the name of religion. I am convinced, in my own mind, that either of these would be a great tragedy. The whole idea of rights has developed because they are needed as protection against the state. And if, in the name of fighting terrorism, the state itself is going to adopt all kinds of laws to diminish and abridge rights in an unreasonable manner, in a manner which is outside of the law, outside of our constitutions, outside of our treaties, we have got a great problem of our own making ahead. We must prevent this from happening.

In my own country, everyone knows we have a problem with terrorism. We have been living with terrorism for over twenty years, while others are only now talking about it. In spite of this, our National Human Rights Commission helped to bring down the Terrorism and Disruptive Activities Act in our country. It was not renewed in parliament because of opposition from the Human Rights Commission. Then another terrorism bill was sought to be introduced in the year 2000, and we opposed it. It was not introduced because of our opposition. Then, after 9/11, an ordinance was promulgated, which we were powerless to fight but which we opposed nevertheless. But the climate had changed, and the ordinance was thereafter reintroduced as a bill and adopted in parliament as an act in 2002.

The debate in parliament essentially revolved around the opinion of the Human Rights Commission. After the adoption of the act, we have taken the position that, under our constitution, it is parliament that enacts laws, not the Human Rights Commission. We respect this, but heaven help anybody who violates the rights of the people of India in the name of implementing of that law. Then it will be our duty, once again, to say that a wrong has been committed and to bring to book those who have transgressed the rights of others.

Here, it is important to say that India is a country which has the democratic space for the expression of such views, even when they are sharply at variance with those of governments. So even though there are just four or five of us in the commission as members, we can say and do exactly what we feel we should say and do. And the nature of the debate in parliament reflects the debate which we encouraged.

But now for the other aspect of the matter—the aspect of religion and rights. I think that whenever those who profess to speak for a religion say that, in the name of religion, we can suppress the rights that are inscribed in the great covenants and treaties of the UN, we have got a problem with them, with our religions and the interpretation of our religions. I don't think there is any religion that says that you can mistreat your girl child. Nor do I think any of them encourages you to go and beat up your neighbor if he is of a different faith. I don't think that's so. There is the whole issue of caste. We have a problem at home with this matter. It is as old as India. Caste is not going to disappear. But under no grounds should discrimination be permitted on the grounds of caste.

There is no fancy or facile way of abolishing caste because it is as old as India. You can't abolish caste in India, but you can certainly fight to abolish discrimination on the basis of caste. The laws must not permit it. The laws must be administered faithfully and there must be

no such discrimination. The doors of opportunity must be open to everybody regardless of caste. And gradually, therefore, caste must wither away. If not like the Marxist state, it must nevertheless wither away because it has become redundant.

So when we talk about 9/11, I would say yes, it was a moment of pivotal importance, both in respect of the issue of religion gone amuck, and in respect of the need to defend rights more critically, and with greater determination, both because of the possible onslaught on rights by the state acting in the name of security, and by those professing to act in the name of religion. We have to be terribly alert because of that.

TGW: I would agree. I wonder, as you look back to St. Stephen's, or Oxford, and your interest in development, and your budding interest in the UN, if you compare what you were thinking then and what you are thinking now, how have your own views toward development changed? What are the most important alterations that now salt and pepper your own worldview that were not present forty or fifty years ago?

VD: I think, Tom, what has happened may simply be an attribute of aging. Maybe it's the impatience that comes with aging. I remember in this connection Sean McBride, a brave, upright man. He had just been appointed commissioner for Namibia. I was a young fellow and he was kind enough to be never condescending. He was fond of me and I respected him greatly. I remember Sean once coming out of a meeting and saying, "I've got to get independence for Namibia in five years." I said to him, "Sean, how are you going to do it? It's a terrible problem this one. It's not going to go away in five years." He said to me, "Virus, you have no idea what it's like to be an old man in a hurry. I have no time. I have got only five years. I have got to do it in five years."

It's like this. I think two things have happened with the passage of time. One is a greater impatience. I don't have the time now for all kinds of refinements. I don't have time for trickle-down effects and all that kind of stuff. There is no time for any of that. It's too short. The other is, I think—and this is largely because of my life in the UN and what I have been doing for the last ten years since leaving the UN—I have begun to view issues of economics as issues of rights. I have increasingly begun to think of these things as matters of rights—the right to education, the right to health, the right to food, the rights of the child, the rights of women. Here again, it is the UN that has given this concept. It is not something which has come out of my head—far from it.

It is the environment in which I have lived in the UN, especially from the 1980s onward—the transposition of many of these questions from issues of straight development, of flat economic theory, to issues of rights. In other words, it has changed my perspective and my way of looking at these things. If people now, for instance in government, say to me, “It's going to take twenty-five years,” I say, “That's a lot of rubbish. You have got a child here who hasn't gone to school. Suppose it was your child. How come your child goes to school and the child of the *dalit*—a socially marginalized group—doesn't go to school? Could it be because you are a caste Hindu and the other is not? Don't you see that to deny the resource of education is a rights issue and is related to the capacity to escape the demoralization of illiteracy that that child has not been able to escape?”

In other words, in a way the passage of time has radicalized my thinking. It has radicalized it through an understanding of rights. That is what has happened to my mind when it comes to developmental issues.

TGW: Since you're an old man in a hurry, we can't look to the long run, but to the medium term. What do you think are the main intellectual challenges for researchers, for the United Nations, in thinking about global problems? Where would you invest your energy and resources over the next, say, ten years or fifteen years? Where would there be the biggest impact?

VD: You know, Tom, I am not a very talented guy in this area. I think, again in my somewhat primitive way of looking at these things, I would just like us to see in our lifetimes some end to the major travails of poverty. I am not talking of "poverty eradication." I am talking here about the enrichment of life, the bringing into the mainstream of society and of life, if I may say so even of the planet, of people who live on the margins. I want the so-called human family to be traveling on the same river, at least, so that some are not stuck in some distant tributary or some landlocked area with no future.

I think one of the problems which we face now is, both within countries and among countries, the marginalization of categories of people who are being left out of the mainstream. I think we somehow or the other have to deal with that problem. Apart from it being ethically unacceptable that there should be this divide—not just the digital divide and all that—it is a divide, really, in respect of the dignity and integrity of human beings, some being far less equal than others. Unless, somehow or another, we can overcome this divide, we shall be creating a planet which will be exceedingly unfair and painful. That would be an intolerable situation.

In my view, the thinking, policymaking, and actions of states and of civil society have to coalesce around this great objective. And somehow or the other, we should find the focus, and the energy, and the capacity to achieve this. There has to be a major concentration of focus and of energy. In Thomas Mann's book, *The Holy Sinner*, there is this young hero who is extremely

frail. He was born in a noble family. I think he was a prince and he becomes a pope later. He was very frail, and people said he was effete. But somewhere along the line, he became a brilliant warrior. It wasn't his physical strength or prowess in arms. But he did have a tremendous capacity to focus his energies. It made all the difference. Though a physically frail young fellow, that capacity to concentrate made him unbeatable in battle.

Now the problem with, I think, a lot of the efforts of the so-called UN family is that we have an awful lot of ideas, one better than the other. But I sometimes wonder whether we haven't gotten so spread out that we might lose the big battle while winning small skirmishes. I am not saying that we shouldn't try to win the war against HIV/AIDS (human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome). Sure we have to. But we won't win it unless, at the same time, we can bring all of the people of our countries up to a minimal level of dignity and hope. Only then will things fall into place.

Maybe I feel as I do because I have lived abroad for so many years and have a guilty conscience, and maybe it's because I come from a comparatively privileged background and that makes me feel even guiltier. But the evidence of our eyes, what we see every day, tells us that there is something seriously wrong. It doesn't take a great brain to see it.

TGW: That's a very good answer to that question. Is there something I should have asked you that I didn't that you're dying to answer?

VD: I have talked far too much. I came singularly unprepared, so I don't know. Maybe I should have thought more before coming, but in a way at least this was very spontaneous.

TGW: Very spontaneous. I have actually enjoyed my afternoon. I hope you have, too. Thank you.

VD: I hope it was of use.

INDEX

- Abzug, Bella, 60
 acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), 71
 Afghanistan, 53, 64-65
 Africa, 10, 26-27, 64
 debt crisis in, 26
 Aga Khan, Sadruddin, 15, 17, 22
Agenda for Peace, An, 18, 34, 38, 39-40, 43-44
 Allahabad, India, 6
 Amnesty International, 51
 Andrews, Charles Freer, 6
 Annan, Kofi, 24, 41
 Armenia, 33
 Asia, 5, 11, 13
 decolonization in, 5
 Asian-African Conference (Bandung), 11-12
 Ayodhya, India, 41
 Balkans, 39-40
 Bandung, Indonesia, 11-12; *see also* Asian-African Conference
 Bangladesh, 13, 15-17, 23, 55
 independence of, 16
 refugee crisis in, 13, 15
 Barnard University, 7
 Beijing, China, 46, 60; *see also* Fourth World Conference on Women
 Berlin Wall, 5
 Binns, Alwyn Earnst, 3
 Bodleian Library, 9
 Boutros-Ghali, Boutros, 35, 36-37
 Brahimi report, *see Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations*
 Brandt, Willy, 45
 Brandt report, *see North-South: A Programme for Survival*
 Bretton Woods institutions, 25, 28, 59; *see also* International Monetary Fund *and* World Bank staff of, 28
 Brundtland, Gro, 43-44
 Brundtland report, *see Our Common Future*
 Bunche, Ralph, 17, 36
 Caltex, 12
 Cambridge University, 6
 Canada, 10, 23
 Carnegie Commission, 43
 Carnegie report, *Preventing Deadly Conflict*
 caste system, 12, 67
 Chesterton, G.K., 8
 China, People's Republic of, 11, 48, 60
 Ciba-Geigy, 16
 civil society, 70
 City University of New York Graduate Center, 1
 civil society, 46-47, 48, 51, 56
 Coat, Pierre, 15
 Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC), 26
 Cold War, 20, 27-29, 57
 Columbia University, 7
 Commission on Global Governance, 62
 Commission on Gujarat, 42
 Commonwealth, The, 10
 Congo, Democratic Republic of, 2, 16
 Convention Against Genocide, 54
 Costa Rica, 54
 Cox, David, 8
 cummings, e.e., 4
 Dayal, Harishwar, 5
 Dayal, Rajeshwar, 16
 Declaration on the Right to Development, 59
 Delhi, India, 7; *see also* New Delhi
 decolonization, 4-5
 developing countries, 61
 development, 18-19, 26, 68
 Dublin, Ireland, 64
 Durban, South Africa, 11, 46, 49; *see also* World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance
 East Germany, 34
 East Pakistan, 13; *see also* Bangladesh
 East-West relations, 21; *see also* Cold War
 Eastern Europe, 26, 28
 Eden, Anthony, 9
 education, 14
 Egypt, 66
 England, *see* United Kingdom
 Europe, 10, 53
 Evans, Gareth, 41
 Firth, Tony, 8
 Fleischauer, Karl, 31
Founders, The, 9
 Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing), 46
 Gandhi, Mohandas, 1, 6, 55
 gender, 61; *see also* women
 Geneva, Switzerland, 13-14, 22, 64-65
 genocide, 40-41, 54-55
 Ghana, 10
 Glasgow, UK, 15
 Goodheart, Arthur, 7
 Gorbachev, Mikhail, 29, 33-34, 64
 Goulding, Mig Marrack, 35
 Great Depression, 3
 Greer, Germaine, 60
 Group of 8 (G8), 64
Guardians, The, 9
 Gujarat, India, 41-42, 59
 Hammarskjöld, Dag, 2

- Heidelberg, Germany, 10
Helsinki, Finland, 60
Hill, Charlie, 37-38
Himalayan Mountains, 3, 13
Holy Sinner, The, 70
House of Lords (UK), 7
human development, 19
Human Development Report, 18-19
human rights, 20, 21, 40-41, 47, 48, 50-51, 53-55, 57, 62, 63, 66, 68
 and India, 41
 economic versus social, 58-59, 69
Human Rights Commission (HRC), 53
Human Rights Watch, 51
human security, 62-64
humanitarian intervention, 54-55
Hungary, Soviet invasion of, 8
ideas, 1-2, 18-20, 21, 23, 28, 32, 39-40, 42-47, 48, 56, 62, 71
 and academics, 26
 and Bretton Woods institutions, 28
 and eminent persons reports, 19, 43-45
 and end of Cold War, 32
 and global conferences, 45-47, 48, 56
 and *The Human Development Report*, 19
 and human rights, 20-21
 and interagency competition, 25
 and the UN, 34
 and women, 43
biographical influence on, 1-2
political versus economic and social, 23
timing of, 19-20, 39-40
Imperial Tobacco, 12
India, 1-10, 11-13, 15, 38-41, 47, 53-56, 60, 66-67
 and caste issues, 67
 and human rights, 41
 and the United Nations, 6
 constitution of, 1-2
 independence of, 54
 membership in UN of, 1
 partition of, 4
Indonesia, 5
international civil service, 27
International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo), 46
International Labour Organization (ILO), 50
international law, 13
International Monetary Fund (IMF), 28
Israel, 66
Italy, 48
Jackson, Robert, 16-17, 23
Jackson report, *see* *A Study of the UN Development System*
Jaeger, Gilbert, 15
Jamison, Thomas, 15
Jawaharlal Nehru University, 38
Johannesburg, South Africa, 11
Kashmir, 6
Johannesburg, South Africa, 10
Lahore, Pakistan, 4
League of Nations, 5-6
Lewis, Stephen, 64
Liu, F.T., 23
MacMillan, Harold, 9
Mann, Thomas, 70
Marsh, Percy, 9
Marxism, 34
McBride, Sean, 68
Mehta, Ved, 10
Mexico City, Mexico, 60; *see also* UN Conference on the International Women's Year
Mission for Hammarskjöld, 2
Moreas, Don, 10
Morse, Bradford, 64
Moscow, Russia, 29
Namibia, 10-11, 68
National Human Rights Commission of India, 11, 13, 42, 56, 66-67
Nehru, Jawaharlal, 1, 5
 and Asian decolonization, 5
New Delhi, 1, 5
New International Economic Order (NIEO), 21
New York, New York, 22-23, 43, 60
Nobel Prize, 33
nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), 19, 48-51
 and the UN Charter, 49-50
North-South Dialogue, 21
North-South: A Programme for Survival (Brandt report), 44-45
North-South relations, 21
Oslo, Norway, 33
Our Common Future (Brundtland report), 43-45
Oxford University, 6-10, 14, 68
Pakistan, 4, 66
Paraguay, 48
Parker, Tom, 8
Partition (of India and Pakistan), 3
Partners in Development (Pearson report), 44-45
peacekeeping, 17, 35, 36, 44
Pearson, Lester, 45
Pearson commission, *see also* *Partners in Development*
Pérez de Cuéllar, Javier, 11, 19, 23, 29-31, 33, 35
Petrovsky, Vladimir, 35
poverty, 70
Prebisch, Raúl, 29
Preventing Deadly Conflict (Carnegie Commission report), 44-45
Pushkin, Alexander, 32
Ramphal, Sonny, 62; *see also* Commission on Global Governance
Rau, Benegal Narsing, 1

- religious intolerance, 65
 Rhine Valley, 10
 Reformation (Protestant), 8
 refugees, 13, 15, 21-23, 47
Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations
 (Brahimi report), 18
Responsibility to Protect, 41-43
 Rhodes, Cecil, 7
 Rhodes House, 9
 Rhodes Scholarship, 7, 10
 Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, *see also* UN Conference on
 Environment and Development
 Robinson, Mary, 49, 59
 rural development, 7, 12-14
 Royal Dutch Shell, 12
 Rwanda, 39-40
 Rushdie, Salman, 3
 Russia, 30-32
 Sachs, Jeffrey, 25-26
 Sadat, Anwar, 37
 Saddington, Dennis, 10-11
 Sakhodiev, Victor, 29-30
 Schyder, Felix, 15
 Sen, Amartya, 26-27, 58-59
 Sengupta, Arjun, 59
 Sherry, George, 23
 Shevardnadze, Eduard, 32
 Sipila, Helvi, 60
 Somalia, 39-40
 South Africa, 10-11, 55
 Soviet Union, 29-34, 64; *see also* Russia
and Afghanistan, 64
 collapse of, 29-30, 32
 Srebrenica, Bosnia, 41
 Stockholm, Sweden, 46; *see also* UN Conference on
 the Human Environment
 Strong, Maurice, 64
Study of the UN Development System, A, (Jackson
 report), 18
 Suez Crisis, 8-9
 sustainable development, 45
 Sutterlin, Jim, 35-36
 terrorism, 66
 Terrorism and Disruptive Activities Act (India), 66
 Teymour, Ali, 31
 Thackaray, William, 8
 Tharoor, Shashi, 3
 Tolstoy, Leo, 31
 UN Charter, 1, 2, 4, 21, 47, 48-50, 52, 55, 62-63
and decolonization, 4
and nongovernmental organizations, 49
 UN Conference on Environment and Development
 (Rio), 46
 UN Conference on the Human Environment
 (Stockholm), 46
 UN Conference on the International Women's Year
 (Mexico City), 60
 UN Conference on Trade and Development
 (UNCTAD), 21, 24
 UN Development Programme (UNDP), 18-19
 UN General Assembly, 46-47, 48, 64
 UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 13-
 16, 18, 21-23
and North-South relations, 21
 UN Relief Organization in Bangladesh (UNROB), 16
 UN Security Council, 30-31, 35, 44
 UN staff issues, 25, 27-28
 ul Haq, Mahbub, 18-19, 26-27
 Umbricht, Victor, 16
 United Kingdom (UK), 7-9
 United States (U.S.), 10, 23, 48, 66
 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1-2, 21, 48,
 54-55, 62-63
 University College, Oxford, 7-8
 Urquhart, Brian, 2, 4, 23, 36
 Uruguay, 48
 Uttar Pradesh, India, 4, 6, 9
 Vickers, Joan, 7
 Vienna, Austria, 55-56; *see also* World Conference
 on Human Rights
 Vorontsev, Yuli, 30-33
 Walters, Richard, 64
 Washington, D.C., 15, 22
 Windhoek, Namibia, 10
 women, 43, 46-47, 60-61; *see also* gender
and developing countries, 60
and UN staff positions, 61
 Woodruff, Philip, 9
 World Bank, 28
 World Conference Against Racism, Racial
 Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related
 Intolerance (Durban), 11, 46-47, 49
 World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna), 55-56
 World War II, 3
 Yeltsin, Boris, 29-30