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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW OF

SADAKO OGATA

BY

THOMAS G. WEISS

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THOMAS G. WEISS: This is the 13th of March 2002, Tom Weiss at the Ford Foundation interviewing Sadako Ogata on the tenth floor.¹ Good morning. I wondered whether we might begin at the beginning, and whether you might tell me a bit about your own family's background, with particular emphasis on how you think this led you to a life in the international arena and to an emphasis on international cooperation.

SADAKO OGATA: I come from a family who were involved in public affairs. I am part of the third generation who has served in the foreign ministry and represented Japan in the League of Nations and the United Nations. So the involvement in international affairs has come more naturally from what I heard as a child, followed as a family that was very much involved in World War II and in peacetime afterwards. And also all the books on the shelves had been very much history and public affairs.

TGW: What specifically were they involved in—trade, commerce, diplomacy?

SO: Diplomacy. I think, personally, the fact that I had just finished high school at the time of the end of the war, and this was the very early 1950s. We all went to study abroad—a lot of scholars of my generation. And I think we had a common interest in trying to understand one thing: Why did Japan start that war? So it was really part of our generation—the first postwar generation of scholars all studied our own diplomatic and political history. My own dissertation, that I presented later to the University of California, came out in a book called *Defiance in Manchuria*. But it was really trying to link the domestic political situation and Japan's own advancement or aggression to the continent. I think this is something that I know. I know war. I know peace.

And also, I think, at one point, I did study a little bit about the League of Nations. My grandfather was the Japanese representative to the League at the time of the Manchurian

¹ Peter Hoffman was present throughout the interview.

incident. I think my family all came from the liberal—and they were the liberal nationalists, not the liberal socialists—streak of the political tradition. My great-grandfather, who was a politician, then serving as prime minister, was assassinated by the military in the May 15th incident of 1932.

TGW: Do you recall how the League of Nations and Manchuria, or Manchukuo, was treated in your textbooks in school?

SO: No, I don't remember about school textbooks. But I know what I studied.

TGW: What about the experiment with the United Nations when you were, I suppose, somewhere in the midst of high school? The war ends, the UN and the Bretton Woods institutions arise, and you were interested in international affairs. Were these institutions discussed?

SO: I don't recall learning about international organizations, although we learned about history quite extensively.

TGW: There is much criticism of the way that United States textbooks present various aspects of our history, whether it is with Native Americans or with the Soviets.

SO: Today, in postwar Japan, there is a serious controversy over the way textbooks present Japan's external action into Asia, whether it was expansion or aggression, especially with regard to the treatment of Korea and the Koreans, and China and the Chinese. This is a huge political and historical controversy.

TGW: How did you happen to go to university at Sacred Heart?

SO: I was in the Academy of the Sacred Heart, a private girls' school, so it was a natural continuation.

TGW: What were the preoccupations among students, in terms of politics, in the late 1940s and by the time you ended in 1951? What were you talking about in the cafeteria? Was it postwar Japan? Or what kinds of international issues entered into discussions?

SO: That's such a long time ago. Besides, I was playing tennis much more than studying in those days. But I enjoyed studying history and philosophy too.

TGW: You said that many people in your generation went abroad to study. Was the United States the logical choice for you?

SO: Oh, yes. For me it was. Also, the U.S. was by far the most open, democratic country. It had a big influence, not only after the war, but even before the war. U.S.-Japan relations were close, even in popular culture—movies, baseball. These are really real things from America. So there was a familiarity. Besides, we lived in the United States before the war and had friends who encouraged and invited me and so on. It was not only to the United States that we went. I have friends who went to Europe too—Italy, France. The early postwar period in Japan was a time in which many opportunities were rapidly opening up for young people.

TGW: The period you were there was, some people would say, a fairly ugly one.

SO: In the United States?

TGW: Yes, exactly, in terms of the McCarthy period. Do you recall how people reacted to you?

SO: The McCarthy period was—isn't it 1955 or 1956?

TGW: It began earlier.

SO: I think the time I came, in 1951, was very much a time when the U.S. and the Americans were very generous. There was a kind of a confidence that "if you understood what we are, you would not have fought the war." I arrived in San Francisco during the time when the

peace conference was held. It was a time marked by generosity and openness. It was a bit of an optimistic period for Americans. I went around, invited, speaking to service clubs, Rotary clubs, a lot.

TGW: And there was not a leftover of sort of an anti-Japanese sentiment?

SO: Surprisingly not. It was a very open period. Then the McCarthy period came a little later—the “who lost China?” debates—that kind of thing.

TGW: You started out at Georgetown for your Master’s, and then subsequently you went back to the other coast. How did you choose Berkeley?

SO: Between Georgetown and the University of California I went back to Japan to register, this time for a Japanese diploma in political history. It is because, I think, after having come to the United States and seeing Japan from the outside—I became seriously interested in the political and diplomatic context of Japanese history. From a normal, ordinary, young, fun-loving student, I think I turned into an inquiring, dedicated student. Georgetown was all right, but Washington was a very special city. I spent a lot of time at the Library of Congress. I met a lot of students, but also many foreign service people. It was quite a lively place, and it aroused my interest even more. That’s why I went back to do much more serious study. And I concentrated on the political and diplomatic history of Japan.

TGW: Then Berkeley was a sensible place?

SO: Well, I wanted to go to a place that offered the possibility of combining international relations theoretical work and Asian studies. Berkeley had the ideal program. Besides, Professor Scalapino gave me a research assistantship. So I could fund myself.

TGW: Who else, besides Scalapino, were amongst your mentors there?

SO: Ernie Haas, who was very stimulating. Norman Jacobson, who was a very good teacher of American political theory. Those are the people I really enjoyed working with. I studied much more theory in those days.

TGW: Which books struck you at the time, and still strike you, as having really made a difference in the way that you think about international relations?

SO: Well, Ernie's books on integration theory were very important. Of course, we all read Karl Deutsch. Karl Deutsch was terrific; he really influenced me. And also Leo Gross.

TGW: The lawyer?

SO: Yes, but I decided not to do law.

TGW: What were the main differences at the time between Japanese scholarship and analyses of international relations and American ones? What attracted you?

SO: I nearly decided to major in political theory. American political theory and ideology was very attractive, and Berkeley was a place where, whenever your interest moved in a different direction, there were many sociologists, historians, political scientists one could turn to. They were all there. I still think it was the most exciting place. Deutsch was there for a year, I think, too. And Leo Gross was there.

TGW: What about the activity on the campus? Do you recall—this was just before the beginnings of the free speech movement?

SO: This was before, but it was a very liberal place. And I was not surprised when the student movement came. Very, very liberal—you shop around ideas, and you shop around courses.

TGW: Do you recall, in your own mind, a big change in the way that racial relations internally—the black-white relations in the United States—seemed to be discussed between your

first visit and your second visit? With these ten-year intervals, by 1963 we have a huge civil rights movement.

SO: I did not—I was on campus in Berkeley from 1956 to 1958.

TGW: Oh, I see.

SO: I got my degree in 1963, because I was on campus from 1951 to early 1953 in Georgetown, and then in 1956 and 1958 to do all the course work and take qualifying exams. Then I went back to Japan, and I did my thesis. I wrote it, and I started raising a family and so on. And in those days, you didn't travel so easily with foreign exchange control. I had the good fortune to be able to do my thesis in Japan under a very outstanding Japanese historian, Professor Yosaitake Oka, who Bob Scalapino and everybody respected enormously. I was also able to uncover very important primary source materials.

But the theoretical—I was using decision-making theory in many ways as the theoretical line of my thesis. So I finished the thesis. It was immediately accepted for possible publication by the University of California Press. But I had to get the orals done, so I went to Berkeley with a baby in 1962. But anyway, I managed. This is why I got the degree—I think I got it in 1963. Is that what it says?

TGW: Yes.

SO: I got it, and the book was out in 1963 too.

TGW: I think I remember your once joking at a reception or something that you actually saw more of your husband back in these days, even when you were raising a family, than you have recently because of your travels. How did you juggle responsibilities as a mother and a student, then as a teacher?

SO: I never went into full-time teaching until much later. I was only a part-time lecturer until 1975. It is not easy to get a tenured position in Japan to begin with. I lived in England for a while too. I think I went back to Japan in 1964. Then I got a part-time teaching job. So it was only one day a week that I went to teach. That is how I juggled.

TGW: What did you teach, actually?

SO: Diplomatic history. So I was teaching diplomatic history as a lecturer for undergraduate classes and international relations theories for graduate students.

TGW: Did you enjoy teaching?

SO: Very much, yes. I had good students. They're mostly professors by now.

TGW: During the time that you were at Berkeley and began your teaching in Japan, the enormous flood of decolonized countries arrive on the international scene. Do you recall?

SO: Oh yes. The Hungarian revolution took place in 1956, and there was a flood of Hungarian students who came to Berkeley.

TGW: I was thinking, actually though, of the beginnings of African-Asian rumblings, of massive decolonization and, beginning with Bandung, of what would become "the South."

SO: Well, I think that was a little bit later. In 1956-1958, even on the Berkeley campus, the black students were rather limited in number, although there were quite a few from Asian countries. I went to the United Nations as a member of the Japanese delegation in 1968. That was the first time I got involved in the UN. I knew about it from books and documents but not in a practical sense before that. I visited Berkeley on the way, and Ernie Haas said how much things had changed. This was after the civil rights movement and all the changes in the student body. Between 1956 and 1968, I was not in the United States. We lived in England for two years. It was a period of limited academic work but I was very busy on the home front.

TGW: How did you end up as a member of the Japanese delegation? Had you been working on the United Nations?

SO: No, it was just by chance. Most of the things happening in my life have come by chance. But you see, when Japan was admitted to the United Nations, it was 1956. At that time, there were women leaders. One of them, Ms. Fusae Ichikawa was quite well known. She was in the House of Councilors—a very outstanding person. She led the suffrage movement. They presented a request to the Japanese government, the foreign minister, to include a woman on the UN delegation. Since 1957, a woman has served on the delegation. However, I was very removed from all those kinds of public developments.

One year—about ten years later—suddenly they ran out of people to send with the delegation. It was very senior, advanced people who went. They were lawyers, educators, and professionals. They heard from somewhere that I had studied these things—international politics, international organization. I had good English. Somehow some research went around, and then Ms. Ichikawa appeared at my house one summer and asked me.

So there was a big family consultation because I had two children. One was still quite small. Then I said, “I’ve worked on these things. I’d like to have this experience.” So they all got together and let me go.

TGW: What surprised you the first time you came here? What shocked you, what was totally unexpected?

SO: There were very difficult items on the agenda, already. I was on the Third Committee. There were two different but interesting items: human rights and armed conflict. The other one was the question of the retroactivity of war crimes. There were other very interesting items. And already, privacy—human rights and privacy was on the agenda. There

were several issues that really interested me. And I found it very broadening to meet a lot of delegates—very interesting people from all over the world. The British representative was Hugh Gaitskill's widow. I got to know her quite well. The American, Jean Harvey, she was the vice president of UNA (UN Associations).

I made very good friends, particularly among representatives from small African countries, who were very effective delegates. The variety and quality of the delegates impressed me too.

TGW: By the time you arrived in 1968, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was quite intact. In fact, the Group of 77 (G-77) had been functioning in Geneva and then in New York since the first UNCTAD (UN Conference on Trade and Development) in 1964. What do you recall about the dynamics of North-South negotiations at that time?

SO: I think I came to the General Assembly in 1968. The next year, my family said, "Well, you've had enough." So I didn't go. I had good working relations with the Foreign Ministry, so I became rather active on UN fronts. Then I came again in 1970 because the Foreign Ministry asked me to. So I came in 1970, and then again in 1975. Then after that I joined the Foreign Ministry and was stationed as minister here at the Japanese permanent mission. Those were the days of the New International Economic Order (NIEO) and Zionism as racism.

TGW: In retrospect, how do you look back at what was basically North-South confrontation? Was this useful in terms of framing issues internationally, putting them on the agenda?

SO: I think the big success of the United Nations was to present development or the North-South issue as a political issue. I don't think the United Nations really did contribute very

much to actual development work. But it framed development as a political issue. And especially the General Assembly, in dealing with the New International Economic Order issue, was very lively. I even wrote papers on these developments in the UN. It was a very powerful experience. The G-77, the Non-Aligned Movement—the UN was very lively in those days.

TGW: How did Japan view the NIEO?

SO: I think Japan was much more on the cautious side.

TGW: Not as reserved as the United States?

SO: The United States—I don't know whether "reserved" is the right word for the United States, but it took the whole thing out of the UN. To Japan, the UN is important. It's always been a little bit, maybe too, idealistic about the UN.

TGW: One of the vectors, or the vehicles, for ideas that many people have brought up in interviews is global ad hoc conferences. In the 1970s, when you are in and around the UN, we had Stockholm (UN Conference on the Human Environment), and then Bucharest (UN World Population Conference), and a whole series of conferences. How do you look upon these conferences in terms of the production of ideas?

SO: I think in the 1970s the UN was on the vanguard of new ideas—world conferences on the environment, population, women, food. I think the UN was able to get hold—when you say "UN," it really means some of the member states—and it took the issues and presented them as a global agenda. So I think it played a more constructive role in the 1970s as an agenda-setting forum. The secretariat is usually cautious.

TGW: There was a whole rash of conferences again in the 1990s. What's their utility in the 1990s?

SO: I think a lot of agenda-setting was fine, but actually, I think follow-up was much more formalistic. I never really participated very much in these global conferences.

TGW: As a delegate in New York when one of these conferences took place—the action programs, or any of the ideas that grew up surrounding them—was the mission seized by them?

SO: Oh, very much.

TGW: So is this one way to get governments to look seriously at something—to get them to examine their perspectives and priorities?

SO: For example, like the women—I never went to any of the women's conferences because there were plenty of women's groups who wanted to send delegates and so on. So that was fine. But during the 1975 conference in Mexico (UN World Conference of the International Women's Year), I was here in New York as a delegate to the General Assembly. Whenever the United Nations comes up with an agenda, if you have powerful groups within the country to seize on the agenda and put it through, it works quite well. And the women's issue was very much an interplay between what the United Nations could do and what the domestic women groups could promote. There were very committed groups of American women who affected the UN. It was not only the developing countries, but a lot of women's groups from all over the world pushed the UN. And that, in turn, spilled over to developing countries. In Japan, there was a ready response to that. I think it became a rallying point. They kept on saying that there were no women in the higher echelons of the Foreign Ministry. Suddenly, I was appointed minister. It worked well with me because I could stay here with my family. So I became a minister in the Japanese permanent mission, and I stayed for almost four years. So I got to know the UN well. I have always looked at the UN from the government side.

TGW: When you were back in Japan and you were teaching, how did your own framework that you brought to the classroom, or your writing, change as a result of a practical confrontation with the United Nations system?

SO: I think as far as the United Nations is concerned, I could not just take the formal legal approach to the study of international organizations, which was very prevalent. I could make that into something a bit more real—a pragmatic approach.

TGW: And how did students respond to that?

SO: I think they liked it that way, although I think they're more comfortable when everything is square and clear.

TGW: In terms of ideas that come onto the international agenda, one of the other vehicles that many people have pointed to happens to be reports from eminent persons, beginning with the Pearson report in 1969 on development (*Partners in Development*), and the Club of Rome report (*Limits to Growth*) for the Stockholm conference, et cetera. You yourself—we will get to this later—are involved in a new commission. But when did these commission reports, when you were sitting in the mission or watching the UN, when did these commission reports make a difference, if at all?

SO: When I was in the Japanese mission here, from 1975 to 1979, I covered the Committee on Peacekeeping. It was a special committee that I was in charge of. So I followed the Middle East, but much more peacekeeping. Also I was on the UNICEF (UN Children's Fund) Executive Board, and later I became chairman, so I saw some development work. I went to the field to see how it really worked because I didn't know the developing world very well. I was much more interested in the operating side of UN activities, I think—looking back I would

say that. So the Pearson report, reform of the UN—these things interested me. Yes, the Pearson report, the Palme report (*Common Security: A Programme for Survival*)—those had an impact.

It is later, when I went back to Japan from 1980 to 1990, I was back teaching. I had to do some administrative work by then at the university too. But I was on this UNA/USA project on United Nations decision-making. I was on the Commission on Humanitarian Issues. Then I was also Japan's representative on the Human Rights Commission for four years—the first ever representative from Japan on this commission. For Japan I provided some pioneering work.

So I got much more involved after the 1970s, even if I was not in the government for ten years. And then I was on the Global Governance Commission—that was in the 1990s. I think however, that the utility of the big commissions has receded in the 1990s. That's my impression. So in terms of agenda-setting, I don't know how far commissions can provide impetus. Is it because the world is saturated with too much information? Globalization? Maybe, but I think it is difficult to see who is really setting the agenda now.

TGW: Let's go back for a moment to UNICEF. UNICEF has a reputation for being closer to the "coal face" in terms of its hands-on work with women and children.

SO: They didn't talk so much then—it was before the Convention on the Rights of the Child that I was chairman. The then executive-director—it was before Jim Grant—

TGW: Henry Labouisse?

SO: Labouisse was very cautious. He just did not want to get into politics. He was afraid that the Convention on the Rights of the Child would immediately take UNICEF much more into politics. He was very cautious about that. And he was much more concerned about the developing world's children and not, for example, the street children in New York. So it was

a much more focused organization; it was trying to do health and education work—very thorough work on the ground, primary health care and all that—in developing countries.

TGW: Is it your impression that academics, outsiders, consultants, and experts were able to insert new ideas onto UNICEF's agenda?

SO: Well, some of rights issues were brought in by Poland—I may be wrong, but I think there were some very active governments. And UNICEF has a very strong national committee system in which the delegate is there for years, is really devoted, and helps with agenda-setting. And I think it was hard to resist the outside pressure, especially after Henry Labouisse retired.

TGW: But after you were in New York, you then go back to Japan. This is full-time that you're teaching now?

SO: Oh yes, very much so. Even before I came to New York, in 1976, I got a tenured position. I was an assistant professor. So it was not easy to get out, but I did get out. I changed universities too.

TGW: What has happened to the academy in Japan over the intervening years? You've mentioned that when you first went to Berkeley, there was a more diplomatic historian's approach. By this time, have the latest academic trends penetrated Japan?

SO: The latest trend, when I went back to the universities in the 1980s—I think some of the more interesting new work was Joe Nye's and Bob Keohane's interdependence theories. *Power and Interdependence*—that was really quite exciting, and I used that in my theory classes. So I covered some of the latest theories at that time in the graduate school seminars. I continued to specialize in decision-making and gave a seminar on foreign policy decision-making.

TGW: So now you're back teaching, but then you're borrowed for the Commission on Human Rights?

SO: No, it was not the summer. That's for the sub-commission. It was February and March. And it was not easy, but anyway I marked everything before I left, and I was away for about a month.

TGW: And what were the most pressing issues for Japan and the Human Rights Commission?

SO: Well for Japan, Japan hesitated to become a member because of, I think, Japan's wartime wrongdoings in Korea and China. There were a lot of violations of human rights. Japan was not ready to face it, I think, without having done something about repairing relations with these countries. I think that was the real concern. Japan takes things rather seriously. They don't try to defend a bad record. That's what many of the delegates do on the commission, but that's not the way Japan is. So that was one aspect. There were two big issues in the Human Rights Commission—apartheid and the Middle East.

TGW: What about the East-West struggle? At least my impression is that it played itself out continually.

SO: Yes. But there I think Japan's position was rather clear. Between East and West, it was firmly in the West. But the Middle East was more delicate—human rights violations in occupied territories.

TGW: I think a number of people in interviews have argued, out of all the issues that have come up within the UN framework, that human rights may have been the most subversive one. How do you look at human rights?

SO: It is politics. You cannot say it is human rights. It is the politics of human rights that is really at the center. And yet, if you say it is pure politics, that is not quite correct—it's very interesting. I think that was the time when Latin America was under extremely severe

scrutiny, and I think [Javier] Pérez de Cuéllar had a hard time dealing with that. He changed the head of the Human Rights Division at that point. The case of Uruguay was very relevant. I knew some people who were diplomats and who left the country during the worst days of the military domination in Uruguay. And it was resolution 1506—was that the procedure? And Uruguay was on it. At the same time, during the time I was representative, the regime changed. And it sent a delegation announcing the change and its appreciation for the constant attention that the commission had provided.

There were two aspects. When you press, and press, and press about the violations of human rights, in the first round you don't get very much. It's because it's so easy to just condemn. At the same time, it does give some encouragement to those who are resisting. And that's a very important aspect. At the end, when the government has gained enough openness to listen and tries to correct its practices, it becomes more sensitive to the pressure that comes from the Human Rights Commission—although they understand that the process is very political too.

But the commission does play some role in bringing about the opposition, which feels encouraged by the attention that the commission gives it. That is a real benefit, I think. But if the country in question is a totally closed regime, I think the voices are muted and the international impact is very limited. There are also a lot of double-standards, no doubt. I learned much later, by being the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), if you really want to change the world, a lot of discretion is needed. You cannot just go around condemning and think that the world changes. But I would attribute some usefulness to the commission's work.

TGW: Where did Japan come down on the generation of human rights arguments?
You've mentioned mainly civil and political rights.

SO: Oh, the right to development?

TGW: Yes, exactly.

SO: I don't think that was taken very seriously. Nobody took that very seriously, in those days anyway.

TGW: Because it now seems part of the conventional wisdom?

SO: Well, Japan is very much for development. You can give lip service to the right, but I don't think the right to development will change the real world.

TGW: In and around the commission, or in and around the General Assembly, what was your impression of the utility of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in trying to help frame issues?

SO: Too much. A commission cannot work with NGOs all over the place, trying to influence everybody. It's just too much. It's so disorderly. I think the commission expanded, too, in number.

TGW: The number of states in it?

SO: Yes, and it became not so much a commission—it was more like a general assembly.

TGW: At what point do you think the universal versus particularist interpretation of human rights appeared? Did this rear its head during the time you were there? Were "Asian values" already on the table?

SO: I think in the 1990s it's gotten much worse. And I don't see the utility in confrontation. If you have a mission to work on common agendas over human rights, I think you should come up with much more convergence rather than trying to split. I think the fact that the

western countries also ganged up in criticizing alienated a lot of people. And there was a surge of the Asians and Asian values asserting themselves in the 1990s.

At least there were efforts. Oh, the American delegate, for example, during my term, Mr. Richard Shifter, he really worked hard in talking with delegates, even if there were differences. It was a forum in which he would really try to consult and try to understand. And that was appreciated. If you go there just to criticize, what's the use in having a forum? And I think there is a growing split there which, I think, if you are in the United Nations, I don't think that's the best way to go around.

TGW: You move from the classroom to administration, or "deaning." Why did you do this? Was it a satisfactory experience?

SO: Looking back, I am very happy I did it. But I never planned it. I had never been on the secretariat side, or the UN side, although I've dealt with it. Again, I was special rapporteur on Burma. The Human Rights Commission asked me to conduct other such missions, but I declined. I don't think I should talk about what I declined, but anyway this one was something real. I went with some hesitation, but with the attitude of, "Let's see what I can do." I think the challenge was trying to break through in a country that was very, very tightly isolated. You know it's a hermit country. Unless you reach out and try to talk, they can stay a hermit. It was one of the most difficult missions I've done, with everything considered together.

But while I was in Burma, I just happened to hear on the radio that Thorvald Stoltenberg had resigned after only ten months as UN High Commissioner for Refugees. I thought, "My goodness, what a short term." That's about all I thought. Then when I came back, the Secretary-General was looking for a successor. There were consultations, and suddenly I was asked by the foreign minister, "Would you consider being a candidate?" Because the western group was in

search of someone and Japan was approached. I said to myself, “My goodness.” At the time, I was also telling the Japanese that there should be more Japanese representation at the United Nations. I said, “My goodness, if I am asked should I just say thank you, but I have a very good life, and decline?” So I said, “Well, if it really comes to it, I will not, at that point, run away.”

Then there were all sorts of consultations at the end. By the time it came down to a short list, I had gotten a little bit keen. I decided that maybe I would like to. And it was Pérez de Cuéllar who called me, suddenly. It took a long time—towards the end of December 1990.

TGW: What were the politics of your selection, or election?

SO: I think there were a lot of consultations between the Secretary-General and the donor countries. America played a very big role, I think.

TGW: Was it essential that you were from a donor country? Was that part of the equation?

SO: I don't know. I was not very much a part of the refugee community. I did listen to the reports of Sadruddin Aga Khan year after year when I was on the General Assembly and I met his successor. I had met the former Danish prime minister Poul Hartling, who was high commissioner and who came to Japan and so on. I had not really done very much. But I think the human rights circles knew me quite well. Dealing with Burma and all that was another consideration. I came from Japan, and Japan didn't have anybody heading an agency, except WHO (World Health Organization), probably, which goes through an entirely different process of selection. So I think maybe I was a rather attractive choice. I don't know. I know that the Americans were very much behind looking into it and coming up with saying that I was not a bad candidate.

TGW: Do you think the fact that you were a female helped or hindered?

SO: I think it didn't hinder. But in those days, there was hardly anybody. Nafis Sadik was head of UNFPA (UN Population Fund). But it is a very small agency—I mean fund. So I don't think there was anybody else. But I don't think Pérez de Cuéllar went around saying, "I want a woman." No, he was much more discreet in those days. I think the whole thing was much more discreet. I don't know if I would have wanted to be a candidate on that basis, if that's the way they went around looking for a person—to be very honest. Because I think in the world I was in, we never had quotas or anything like that in Japan.

TGW: The UNHCR that you found was not exactly at the high point of its trajectory.

SO: Oh no. And this was something about which some of my very close friends in the Foreign Ministry worried—"Mrs. Ogata is all right, but will she really be able to survive in such an infested place?" It was very badly managed—terrible. That's the way it was looked at, with Jean-Pierre Hocké having gone through difficulties. Morale was very low and all that. But then some people said that [Thorvald] Stoltenberg was there just to clean up a bit. So the worst period may have been over.

TGW: You say you found morale low.

SO: No, I was told. That's all.

TGW: Well, what did you find when you arrived in Geneva? What was your impression of the secretariat?

SO: It's interesting—we all know these things. I went and I just walked in alone. There was nothing of the Japanese sending somebody to accompany me. I just went alone. And of course, the ambassador was very helpful. I think, looking back, all of the staff were determined to help me because they needed a high commissioner badly at that time. So there was an advantage.

TGW: In a counterintuitive way, was the arrival of a whole host of crises helpful?

SO: I think so. That's what we were talking about with some of the colleagues the other day. I had to go through crisis after crisis over ten years—big crises. There was no choice but to decide on things. And I think the very first one was northern Iraq. Already the Gulf Crisis was there, but that didn't affect refugees so much. It was after I arrived that 1.7 million Kurds fled northern Iraq. I arrived on the 19th of February, because I still had to finish reading all the theses and grade papers before I left. We cannot just throw away students.

So I arrived towards the end of February in Geneva. And I went through briefing after briefing—very thorough. It was like going back to school. I said, "I feel as if I am in graduate school again." And they looked very surprised. I seemed to have asked enough questions during these briefings because I heard later that the staff said, "This is a high commissioner who asks questions a lot." But academics are like that.

The Nordics were a very prevalent support group, because I think there was a closeness to Nordic high commissioners, and Nordics are very humanitarian-oriented. They don't do very much bilateral assistance, so they use international organizations quite well. And so I went to the Nordic countries as a first step in getting to know important donors. Then the Kurdish crisis took place. It did cut short the mission by a day or two. I came back to Geneva and the Secretary-General sent Jean-Claude Aimé over. With the Red Cross, Mr. [Cornelio] Sommaruga came. Already very, very important decision-making had to be done. It was over Kuwait. What do you do with Kuwait? What do you do with the refugees coming into Iran?

And for the first time, Iran came for help. And I am told this was very unusual. Iran is a huge country; they manage most things by themselves. But they could not this time, and they

came to ask me to go. That was my first big mission. So I have had very close contacts with Iran ever since.

TGW: So in a period in which there is an organizational crisis, and then we superimpose international crises, do you think the secretariat is particularly open to the influence of an outsider like yourself and other outsiders?

SO: They have no choice because the whole UNHCR is the office of the high commissioner. They don't really have that much choice, except to make sure—but I think there was a determination to make a go out of me. I got that impression. Then they found out I listened to people. I listened very carefully. And there was nobody else to go to—you have to decide. So those are two things that may have helped me survive.

TGW: A few years earlier you were still in the academy, I presume analyzing the end of the Cold War. What did the end of the Cold War look like on the inside of an international institution, because this time period also coincides with the implosion of the Soviet Union and of the former Yugoslavia?

SO: You see, I think it was the time when President [George H.W.] Bush said it was a “new world order.” We looked and looked and there was no world order. I think more and more we would feel that it is easier to wake up in the morning to know where you belong. This was totally different. But I am not saying that from the first day this was what I thought. The challenge was really—for the Iran part, the challenge was to help Iran receive refugees. And they did open the borders and receive the refugees. All the Iranian bureaucracy needed help with getting visas, getting cards, all things that always complicate dealing with any country. There was that, but there was no problem of refusing refugees. They received them at that time. Iran was one of the major refugees-receiving countries.

But the real challenge was over the Iraq-Turkish border. That was a huge issue. I think the number is about 400,000 who fled to northern Iraq or were stuck on the border mountain range between Turkey and Iraq. And our colleagues were all waiting on the other side of the border in Turkey. But there were two reasons why Turkey did not want to accept them. Turkey was a very difficult country. It still is, but it was very difficult at that time because they were afraid of the Kurds. They have enough problems with Kurds within Turkey, and they feared that additional entry would unbalance their Kurdish problem. So they did not want to receive them.

Our UNHCR mandated position is to receive refugees and to make sure they are never stopped from entering. Now, the Americans and the coalition forces were less than effective in forcing Turkey to receive. Turkey is a member of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), so that at one point—and this is also when the media came. I arrived on the Iran-Iraq border when CNN (Cable News Network) was arriving. It all happened really fast. But when it came to the Iraqi border, the media were there ahead of me. They were showing films of all the people who were trapped in the mountains and desperate

So they had to do something—the coalition forces had to do something. The decision was taken to bring them down to the Kurdish side. The mountain is steep on the Turkish side, but it's a slope coming down on the Iraqi side. So there was the geographic aspect to it too. But it was a major decision for me to agree to help because the question was asked within the offices: "Is it our mandate to allow and to help people go back to their own country that expelled them?" And who would take care of the security of these people brought down? And I decided that you could not really insist on being on the other side into the Turkish side, and disregard the lives of the people on the mountaintop. So it sort of changed the thinking a lot, and some of my colleagues think that that was one of the most important decisions I took.

TGW: After years of being in New York, where the atmosphere is politicized, and then the Human Rights Commission in Geneva, did you find the treatment of refugees less political? Was there a North-South dimension to any of this?

SO: No. There are real problems over saving human lives, and they are always political. But it is not the kind of conference politicization that you find in New York or in the Human Rights Commission. The real problems involve the security of states and the security of people. What we had to do was to work out these problems—because refugees sometimes brought insecurity to states too.

TGW: What was your impression of the staff that you inherited?

SO: Good. Oh, there were complications. When I came to New York—ten days after I assumed office I came to New York to pay my respects and to meet some of the under-secretaries-general. I think it was the under-secretary-general in charge of administration, Martti Ahtisaari, who told me that my office had many cases in the administrative tribunal. It was an accumulation of all sorts of problems, I suppose, confrontations between the staff and the high commissioner. I said, “My goodness, what kind of a place did I come to with all these problems?” Of course, staff management, especially administrative issues and discipline issues are very complicated in the UN because there is a very heavy protection coverage of staff. We dealt with some very difficult cases over the years, but when I left there was zero. So I take that as a very good sign that we handled these things well, even with a lot of frustration and complications on all sides.

TGW: In terms of explaining your judgement of the overall quality of civil servants who work for HCR—you mentioned it was high—to what extent can this be explained by the

concrete nature of the activities, mixed with the fact that you insist upon staff spending time not just in Geneva but elsewhere?

SO: I think field experience is very important. The standard length of service is two years for difficult posts, and four for headquarters and more advanced or comfortable places. It can be very hard on staff members' lives, especially when children are older, at the middle level in school. With young people, it doesn't matter as much. It was very hard, and yet I thought this was absolutely necessary to avoid a stalemate. Even people who are in management, they were all people who had field experience.

TGW: Could this be generalized to the rest of the system?

SO: I think there could be more improvement. There's a big gap between the UN and the field. And whenever I came to New York, I've said this many times to the senior management and the Secretary-General and the Security Council. The gap between the real world and the UN headquarters is very large.

TGW: Was it possible during this flux of the 1990s to bring in outsiders who might provide advice? I am just trying to figure out what kinds of outside analysts or idea mongers and academics you think were useful to the institution and to you personally.

SO: I did two things. One was to set up an archive in the office because I found that all sorts of reports and mission records were all stacked in a very disorderly way. I went to the *Palais*, which has beautiful archives and beautiful libraries and so on. I thought we could at least put our records straight. It's fine now. It really has a good archive now. But then I also wanted to have a Center for Documentation and Research (CDR).

I set up CDR for two reasons. One was to bring in information technology, set up computers and so on, which was introduced rapidly. We were trying to get some kind of a

database for dealing with refugees, and it started with, I think, Vietnamese refugees. We had set up a database. This helped a lot with providing information to donor countries, not only money-wise but also for refugee recipient countries. We started the documentation through the use of computers—computerized information. This is still considered very useful, especially for asylum issues.

Then I thought maybe we should have some visiting scholars—but in a very limited way because we didn't have the funds. I also thought about taking in people who had field experience, to spend some time reflecting and analyzing. Several people had that opportunity, and some produced good monographs. But you see, UNHCR is a very busy office, and having the time to think and write is regarded as a luxury by the office as a whole. But the CDR did manage to establish contacts with think tanks and academics. And in that sense, it was rather useful.

At the same time, the utility was never really proven to the organization widely enough. It was disbanded after I left. I rather thought it might happen that way. Also, in 1993 we started publishing the bi-annual *State of the World's Refugees*. There are four volumes out. I think those are good records. You probably know it. It is shared in various academic communities. It's solid. I think UNHCR should have something like that, and I've made a strong appeal to the High Commissioner, Ruud Lubbers, and I think he's going to restore it.

Because UNHCR is a doing organization, really a doing organization, I really learned a lot by being exposed to the real world. And I even said to some of my academic colleagues that my knowledge base has somehow changed. You can read most of the things that are written—they are very special analyses. Fine. But I learn much more from what is really happening in the world. And when it comes to policy initiatives, they always come from

something that I have learned by being exposed to it—the policy directions and policy thinking came much more from the field.

TGW: I actually was on your academic committee for the second *State of the World's Refugees* in 1995. Did the production of these four volumes—you mentioned that staff grumble about these eggheads writing away. But did some of the ideas that were discussed in the production of the report—erosion of sovereignty, expansion of human rights, politicization of aid—did these then find their way into staff discussions? Were they taken seriously?

SO: Not as much as I would have liked. Whenever these things were finished—even with some of the colleagues who spent time in academic settings—I always went to the presentations. But senior management colleagues—not all of them went. I think the reading habit is not as entrenched as it is in academic communities.

TGW: The way that you have mentioned your own knowledge base having been increased by exposure to these two worlds—is there a way to do this more systematically for both of these worlds? Not equal exchanges, but would it not be beneficial for staff members to take a year off and be recycled and learn how to read again, or for people in the academy also to get their fingernails dirty?

SO: I think so. But you see, I said my knowledge base is somewhat changed, but I do have something of a habit of mind, systematic thinking is already ingrained—you can't get rid of those things. So in analyzing and organizing my thinking as I was exposed, I think it was a great benefit that I had had that training. But the world is not that systematic. So systematic thinking is useful, but not sufficient for policy formulation.

TGW: You mentioned that, at the Human Rights Commission, NGOs complicated your life. NGOs are actually part and parcel of UNHCR.

SO: Very much so, yes.

TGW: What is the difference between these things—you're both in Geneva?

SO: Yes. But you see, the UNHCR—I am not saying there are not advocacy groups that are very important. We need them. But you see, the UNHCR has more than 400 contracts with more than 200 NGOs; they are there to help and to do things. They are not there to politicize, although some of them politicize. That's OK with me.

TGW: I think NGOs would argue that a good lobbyist has some operational experience. It makes you more informed and able to do the kind of advocacy you need to do. So I think you may be contributing to your own problem by having all these contracts with NGOs.

SO: Well, we need them. But I think what I tried to do, we had this—what was it called? PARINAC—Partners in Action. What we really wanted to do was develop the local NGO capacity much more and we hoped that the big European and American NGOs would help bring the local NGOs into partnerships. I think there is room for more improvement there. NGOs are also becoming a business enterprise too.

TGW: In terms of international discussions, would it be possible to “pluralize”—I think that would be the word—intergovernmental negotiations by somehow more formally associating private voices? This is an idea that keeps floating around.

SO: For example, the very last conference to which I made some inputs—that is the Afghan Reconstruction Conference that took place in Tokyo. A lot of Afghan NGOs, as well as international NGOs, were there. They had a separate meeting, and the report from that meeting came to the conference. There were some who insisted that they should be there the whole time. But I said this was really difficult—there were sixty-one states, twenty-one international organizations. That's already quite a large conference—about 100 representatives. To have

another forty or fifty representatives would make even allocating speaking time too complicated. So at the same time, I thought having it parallel with some reporting—that was the compromise I proposed. Some were happy, some were not. But that's always the way it is.

TGW: My recollection of debates within your staff is that there was a huge battle between people who thought they were the protectors versus the assistants. How did you look at the confrontation of these two big factions?

SO: Oh, it's still there. I think it's still there. The legal protection people, you see—but one of my colleagues said, "But you cannot protect dead bodies." And I think if we did not have assistance, protection would have been much, much more difficult because governments would receive refugees—it's always a huge burden. And most of the governments receiving refugees are governments of developing countries. If we brought no assistance and then insist that they give protection to refugees—they wouldn't. They cannot. So I think of assistance as being a part of protection, this is what I insist, and I think most people understand that.

But this legal protection does result in certain conservative consequences in the sense that it might delay solutions. Providing asylum is a comfortable thing for refugees, which is proper. But maybe habits form on the part of the receiving governments to try to get assistance forever, and the refugees try to get assistance forever, and this does not lead to solutions. I think in the days when the refugee outflow was much more limited, this may have been possible. But in the 1990s, when it was in the millions all the time, not thinking about solutions was not possible nor the best thing. Somehow, this habit that I acquired being high commissioner was to really look for solutions all the time. It is a very funny, solution-oriented person I've changed into.

TGW: So much for Ernie Haas's theories? One of the dynamics that sometimes leads to paralysis, sometimes leads to creativity, happens to be the terms of reference of individual

agencies. On balance, how do you look at rivalry within the UN system? Some people see this as excessive concern with turf, others see it as predictable bureaucratic struggles, others see it as totally wasteful.

SO: There are wasteful elements. Somehow in the 1990s, with the big humanitarian crises, humanitarian work became very popular. So the humanitarian space became very crowded. And I think I've said this without pinpointing or anything. You know, my predecessor, Mr. Stoltenberg, went to Jim Grant and wanted some assistance for refugee children. Jim said, "Assistance by UNICEF stops at the entrance of refugee camps." That's the way it was looked at. Now they're all over the place, everybody. And we probably need them too. But this was the reality. And then the machinery of coordination became very heavy all over the place. And then even protection—I think in terms of statutory mandate, it's the ICRC's (International Committee of the Red Cross) and the UNHCR's responsibility. But all sorts of people are starting to claim protection.

TGW: Would you have any hope for a more centralized, or more highly-orchestrated presence? It's my view on this, and I've written it, that the 1997 so-called reform that came apart at the last minute was on the brink of making a sensible decision about consolidating more operations. Will that ever happen?

SO: I don't think so. You know, that was one of my most painful experiences. And I don't think I'll write about that in my memoir because I think it's debasing. But it was one of my most painful experiences. First of all, maybe headquarters people say I was too haughty, or arrogant. I accept some of that. It comes from the mandate too—our interpretation of the mandate. But I never really asked for anything more than what I was doing. It was really Maurice Strong who wanted to put something more centralized and rational in the humanitarian

operational part of the UN. He thought that the coordination—humanitarian coordination work could be given to UNHCR instead of to the Secretariat. Was it called OCHA (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs)?

TGW: It still was DHA (Department of Humanitarian Affairs). Then it became OCHA.

SO: Yes, DHA. He thought it would be much better to have an operating agency do it and asked that the proposal be examined. I said, “Well, I can study that.” That already caused an uproar. You cannot imagine the kind of opposing rumors, criticism, and all that, that came through. It was appalling. I did it—not because I asked for it. I was asked to study this, and I thought I could do that because coordination is best done operationally. You have to be responsible for money, persons, and to allot various responsibilities. Operating agencies do that. So we were studying this, and in no time, there was so much pressure from everywhere, including on the Secretary-General. I think the Secretary-General probably felt that, with this kind of acrimony, it wouldn’t work. So in the end, what he said was that DHA should not be operational, but DHA could assign responsibilities—that there was a clear possibility of a lead agency, or coordination by DHA, which was the way it was run until then.

Since then, what has happened? There has not been one assignment of a lead agency role in any operation. And DHA has become OCHA. And they want to become operational once again. It’s terrible. I wonder how it is looked at. And you know what I felt afterwards? If the bureaucratic turf battle is that strong, I am much happier not having to do this coordination and be out of New York and doing things.

TGW: Why will you not put that in your memoirs? It seems to me that it’s really important.

SO: I might. I'm trying to do much more of an analytical piece, with some themes of changing protection regimes depending on the change in the nature of war. It really gets to the change in the nature of war changing the operations of humanitarian regimes. What are the basic conditions? What are the means to realize this? So those are the things and I have plenty to write about.

TGW: Do you have a title?

SO: Not really, because some people think I should have a rather attractive—like Dick Holbrooke's proposal, *Going With a Flack Jacket*. I don't know. I haven't really thought about it. But you probably are asking about this. What is the evaluation? There should be an evaluation.

TGW: I've written about it, and I'm—

SO: In following the Afghan situation, maybe something of a lead agency kind of allotment would work. I'm not sure. Maybe, because otherwise it gets too complicated.

TGW: And too wasteful.

SO: Too wasteful.

TGW: My argument is that the UN is rather hopeless on this front. But at least on the front lines, in a crying humanitarian emergency, one should be able to pull this together.

SO: But you know, for that UNHCR has to perform. That is very important that we be able to perform. Emergencies I think we can usually manage, but when it gets to solutions and repatriation, it becomes a bit messy.

TGW: There are a couple of other conceptual notions that penetrated UNHCR while you were its head. On internally displaced persons (IDPs), how did this idea come in and how did a well-established bureaucracy, with an internationally-agreed convention, make room?

SO: I think the internally displaced, when they were mixed with refugees, UNHCR always dealt with them. And there are a series of General Assembly resolutions asking, also accepting, and requesting this. But the internally displaced persons population, especially in Africa, is huge and is not attended to. UNHCR cannot really cover all the African IDPs, because, I think, there is conflict, there is poverty, urbanization—all these things are part of the IDP crisis. And I think UNHCR maybe could have done more with conflict-related IDPs, in Somalia, for example. When the refugees had to cross borders coming into Kenya, UNHCR dealt with them. At one point, through a cross-border operation, we tried to reach the people who were in real need of assistance and protection, to some extent, by meeting them inside the country.

So there were these ingenious and imaginative approaches, which I thought was fine. But for UNHCR to be asked to do all the IDPs, I think it would have been too much in terms of operational capacity and funding. Interestingly, the IDP budget assistance doesn't necessarily come from the same sources—for example, for refugees, the State Department provides support out of the PRM (population, refugees, migration) budget. For IDPs, you have to deal with AID (U.S. Agency for International Development). And that funding situation is very complicated over IDPs.

TGW: That's an operational argument. I was trying to think about the idea. The IDP didn't exist in the 1980s, and now it seems to be omnipresent—the people existed, but the notion was not there in policy discourse.

SO: I think it also has something to do with the changing nature of the predominant pattern of war. If the war is much more internal, naturally displacement is predominantly

internal. And this kind of adjusting to the realities of changing world politics and military action is what has not been solved—which came across very big in the Balkans.

TGW: Yes, where you were the desk officer, as I recall.

SO: I hope it didn't mean that I was micro-managing.

TGW: One of the other notions that has come out of practice as well as out of the analytical world is the need to move quickly from relief to whatever is next—reconstruction or development or redevelopment. Once again, is this an idea that is obvious as a result of war, or is this an idea that actually has been worked upon—has come in from the outside and has begun to be discussed and make a difference?

SO: I think it is the result of the way operational agencies have been structured—both humanitarian and development. When the reality is humanitarian recovery, reconstruction very often has to move in parallel.

TGW: So it is a necessity?

SO: I think the structural question has to be raised. Especially this was painful over Rwanda. Rwanda—a quarter of the population were refugees outside. But once—and I'm not saying they went back voluntarily in any way—but once they went back, President [Pasteur] Bizimungu very much wanted UNHCR to stay and stay, because in a country where a quarter of the population are refugees, somebody has to look after them through their reintegration. And there was nobody else who would do it quickly. We tried to get UNDP to come in and the World Bank. They would say they were just too slow, and not only slow but their method of work is one in which you have to ask a consultant and have a series of assessments before anything is done. You will never get any roof over any housing. Then when you try to do it—and I think we may have overdone it in Rwanda—but when you did quite a bit, such as the

shelter projects that UNHCR carried out, then the donors would say you are overstepping. “OK,” I said, “maybe we are overstepping, but you have to make the development agencies come in too.” And they would say, “You are there too much, therefore they don’t come in,” and all that kind of nonsense. But I think this aspect has been understood better, not that the development agencies are really quick enough yet.

TGW: I’m curious about the reaction of your own cabinet, or the institution as a whole, when radical criticism may be made. For instance, that humanitarian aid fuels war or that humanitarian aid is politicized. When a reporter, a newspaper reporter, or an academic study of some consequence comes out with these kinds of messages, what happens within the institution?

SO: There are sensitivities. Officials get upset. I think the most serious criticism was over the militarization of refugee camps. This was again with the Rwandans. It was very serious because that led to the eventual attacks on the camps and spread the war deep into the Congo. It’s not even solved yet. But the amount of efforts I made to try to bring somebody in to separate the intimidators, or the *Interahamwe*, from the refugees—this will be very much in my book. And I got very little support there. In 1996, the Security Council comes up with a resolution to dispatch a multinational force. They left before they did anything. And what they didn’t really want to do was to become involved in the separation of these combatants because that drags them right into the internal conflict, which most countries don’t want.

OK, you can criticize me. At the same time, when there is no help, what do you do? And this is still something—I will really put it in my book. How do you deal with situations like this? Refugees are fleeing, mostly, the defeated party of an internal conflict. Some are really bad. In the way they fought, I have no sympathy for them. But still, if the war crimes tribunal takes

decades to have any impact, I think that is not the answer. If the military would not even come and separate groups, what do you do? It's not solved.

TGW: Yes. In fact, this is a theme in the recent report that we helped write, *The Responsibility to Protect*. Conceptually speaking—military action to help protect human beings is not something that colleges are looking at, not something that is in military doctrine, not something that anybody has any experience with, and not something the military particularly wants to do. So there's a black hole in terms of protection, in terms of the concepts behind it.

SO: Sure. And you cannot protect without doing something about those who intimidate. Even in the Security Council, protecting civilians is fine. But you have to take actions to counter those who are causing the problem, and they don't even talk about that.

TGW: You mentioned when you were in New York that the Mexico conference on women popped up. When do you actually think that gender as an issue, as a concrete programming issue, as a policy issue, appeared within the UN system and why?

SO: Oh, I think Mexico had a lot to do with that. And then I think, the first woman who was either under-secretary-general or assistant-secretary-general, Helvi Sipilä, she was very good. She opened these gates, I think. And there was a clear idea of trying—because there were many women who were very able, but somehow in the promotions they missed out. So I think I brought in the accelerated promotion of women, and the way it's counted in the UNHCR. When I came, I think there was not a single D-2 woman in UNHCR. There was one D-1 lady. I think there are a couple now, and they are all able people. No question. There has to be, and these things are happening. But I think allowing the space to move up, and opening up, was very important.

TGW: Has this been an idea that has been mainstreamed sufficiently to make a difference in programming? How did UNHCR handle this?

SO: I thought trying to deal with women's health issues may not be sufficient, but we have included that, and it should be fully done. But I don't know whether only women can deal with women things. I don't think so.

TGW: I hope not.

SO: I hope not.

TGW: I was curious. I wanted to come back to something you said earlier in relation to one of your present activities, The Commission on Human Security. You mentioned that you weren't quite sure that August commissions—a number in which you have participated—hadn't run out of steam in the 1990s.

SO: Yes, this is what I'm wondering, because I was in one of the biggest—the Global Governance Commission. I think the book is good, although [Boutros] Boutros-Ghali thought it was a bit medieval. That was rather interesting. But if the question is—the part on the UN reform didn't really come through, but the part on human security—and I had a hand in that one—in contrast to state security—I don't say that that was the origin or anything—but it began to seep through.

At the same time, this particular commission on human security that I have agreed to co-chair, from the very beginning I said, "I don't want to just put up a report. It has to come up in an action way." So the report I would rather like to see would be small, but would like to have action points carried out and brought into various programs. So I'm looking much more toward an action linkage for this report, from the very beginning. There's some difference of views

among the commissioners and that is inevitable. But I don't want an erudite academic report or anything like that.

To do that, you have to reach out to various human security-related actors in the world ahead of time. So we're trying to set up linkages in various parts of the world from now on and listen to what they have to say about human security. Don't think that we know about everything. So there is interchange. In Africa, there should be three points now—listening to their way of looking at human security, get that into the planning, but also to send out the messages so that they can carry on. I would like to see all the action points quickly, early. I'm not going to, nor can I solve the human security questions all over the world.

TGW: Actually, how would you define human security, and where do you think this came from?

SO: It came through different ways, different people. My own preoccupation is really trying to protect refugees in conflict situations. That's where my thinking on human security comes from. And there has to be a much clearer focus on the victims themselves, as people who have to be protected not necessarily through states. So there has to be much greater focus on how you protect them directly. So mechanisms for conflict resolution have to be attuned much more to the victims themselves. Also, we are going to focus on communities.

TGW: Obviously, your co-chair, Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, is no small fish on the academic front. But how do you hope to bring in other outside academic views into the commission?

SO: Well, through contacts, I think. The problem, or the challenge, is that Amartya Sen has much more abstract theoretical views on all sorts of things, which is important. He is to bring the poverty and the development part into the security debate. I am concentrating much

more on the conflict part, and I have headed an organization that specializes in dealing with victims of conflict. So we have fairly concrete ideas. But how do you bring the two—conflict and development—together? I am insisting that we have to come up with two or three very clear integrating concepts that integrate the two. And I have a hunch, but I have not really been able to persuade everybody, that it should be in the social field. That's where the community is and I'm not dealing with individuals. It is the groups of individuals—a different configuration of social groups, but it is there when there are inequality issues, injustice issues, rights issues, that some kind of a disparity starts and conflict starts. It might be economic causes—that I don't know. There are a variety of options. And that feeds into politics and even conflict.

TGW: Presumably, the traditional approach to international peace and security is also part of the equation.

SO: Yes.

TGW: Do you see a downside to this concept? I always like embracing more and more things, but human security is sometimes so broad as to be without utility as an analytical tool.

SO: When you look at what has happened after September 11th, for example, I don't think, with all due respect to President [George W.] Bush, I don't think superb American military action is going to solve all the terrorist issues. You cannot just kill every terrorist and finish it, because a deeper or more widespread sense of injustice over poverty, discrimination—all these things do feed into a sense of not being properly accepted or mainstreamed into whatever society there is. There is the question of Islam, which is connected to this too. Then there is the question of globalization that takes a lot of human beings' wealth, financial resources, information all over the world, and people feel more uncertain that they are not part of this. And

this sense of alienation, uncertainty, drags them much more into ideology, and into, what shall I say, a nationalist, even—or ethnicist search for identity.

I think there is that aspect of globalization. I am not a globalization analyst—who are doing all sorts of things. OK, fine, they can do that. But there is a reality that against globalization there is a localization trend. Not all terrorists come from there, but there are certain linkages.

TGW: I was just wondering, in analytical terms by casting the net so widely, whether it was actually possible to say truly meaningful things about elements of human security if you have to say something about the whole package.

SO: Well, we will have to see. I think we will probably have to see the whole package, but come up with certain integrative concepts for the poverty part and the conflict part. There, I would say social equity, or something along those lines, might be rather relevant. That's what I'm trying to figure out.

TGW: How did UNHCR react to the “Asian values,” in inverted commas, of the Taliban in terms of your programming for women and children and your own female staff members? How did you deal with that?

SO: Oh, it was not easy. But during the Taliban days the majority of the refugees were still outside. But there were those who returned. Many of them were integrated, or there were some who became integrated into their former communities. And our colleagues—some of them—tried to give them job opportunities, and we needed women staff in order to visit them and try to help them in this difficult social context. I don't think that we were the ones who went around banging and criticizing all the time because we had to get things done. I think this was the reality.

So it was a very limited operation inside the country, but there were those returnees whose security and well-being we tried to do something about—not as actively as I would like to have seen, but within the limitations. I think before September 11th, this was about all. We were trying to find pockets of security, help those who wanted to return there, and trying very, very limited integration kinds of community developing programs. That was the best we could do.

TGW: In your efforts around the conference on Afghanistan and fundraising and actually the way the program is being carried out, is your impression that “we”—the collective we, the UN system, NGOs, governments—have learned from previous crises?

SO: I hope so, some things. At least right now, there is concentrated attention and realization that unless you improve the conditions in Afghanistan, there is still the danger of reverting back to chaos. I think that’s the lesson.

TGW: What about operationally?

SO: Right now the main players are the humanitarian agencies. The UN has persevered—I think that is recognized and it’s necessary. UNICEF has come back with a lot of “back to school” kind of programs. I think UNICEF has spread out. UNHCR is spreading out rather rapidly with return programs inside Afghanistan, as well as trying to have voluntarily organized return from Iran and Pakistan. And I think UNHCR is doing quite well in preparing and positioning. Then the question is how can you really link this with community-building as the returnees go back.

The returnees, if you add the internally displaced and the refugees together, gets to about 5 million, which is a large population. I am not saying that everybody will come back, but this is a big community development. There is also the need to integrate demobilizing soldiers. All of this has to be linked in the integration process. I am trying to talk to UNDP and to the World

Bank. They have to focus a bit more quickly on the operation of integrating populations in the course of community-building.

TGW: One of the huge issues that you dealt with at UNHCR, and is most obvious to me anyway in Afghanistan, is the interface, or the interactions between the military, and the humanitarian and eventually the development agencies. What do you think we've learned over the last decade on that front?

SO: I think when you talk about the military you are talking about high technology, large-scale military action, like dropping bombs—strategic bombing and all that kind of thing. I think you need different types of military action much more attuned to the needs of the people and the victims. I have asked a colleague—you know Carol Faubert? He is one of the most resourceful staff I've had. I've asked him to think of an international separation force, for example.

TGW: It's the same acronym as an international security force.

SO: Yes, but it has to be separating various civilians from combatants and then dealing with them, because if you just separate and alienate, there is no chance. But it's a little bit more than what the DDR—is that what you call it—demobilization, disarmament, and rehabilitation. They are assuming that there are these operational needs that clearly fall into respective categories of work. But the reality is much messier because peace and cease-fire situations are often intertwined.

TGW: I was wondering whether, at least as I look at the success of this experiment, that what seemed to be distinct about this is the extent to which—and you've mentioned this earlier—there is a reliance upon local knowledge, or an emphasis on Afghan solutions to Afghan problems. This is part of conventional rhetoric, but not always part of the conventional

approach. Is this something that's emerged from other crises that we're trying seriously to implement here for the first time, the emphasis on involving Afghans?

SO: Well, isn't it? Because Afghanistan is much too big for the UN to manage with an interim administration, as in Kosovo, East Timor, and Cambodia. I think it's just too big. It's a huge country, geographically—I mean just the way the UN cannot quite manage Congo. I think the Secretariat is much more cautious these days.

TGW: Let's go back for a moment to your student days—and you've told me you still believe in reading, unlike some of our colleagues! As a result of things you've read over your career and of varied experiences, how would you say that your own thinking about international cooperation has changed? What do you feel strongly about now that you didn't think about earlier? Or what have you rejected totally in your present approach to human security or Afghanistan that had been prominent earlier? What has changed most?

SO: I'm maybe a bit more cynical. You see, there are several thoughts, like interdependence that you talk about. The basic model still comes from interstate war times and international interstate cooperation, where the needs are really quite different. Now with all the conflict resolution with diplomats—bringing in diplomats to various places and saying, "Let's learn about conflict." I mean, people who could negotiate between different states really don't have a clear sense as to how you negotiate among people. So I think we have to go in maybe for inter-community violence or inter-city violence management. And I think this long tradition of interstate assumptions has to be reviewed in order to find really effective tools.

TGW: So if you were head of the non-existent UN research unit and you had a budget to look at issues, what would you hire competent people to do? What would you think are the main intellectual challenges, let's say over the next ten to fifteen years?

SO: I think you have to bring in people who really know what the violence and the complications are first hand—have real clear clues. I'm not saying everybody in the field understands these things either, but certainly everybody at headquarters has to be much more exposed. That's for certain. I still associate myself with the academic community and feel a part of it, but you cannot really live in the ivory tower. If you really want to solve the world's problems you have to reach out much, much more. So it has to be what in simple terms would be more exchanges among people of different disciplines, different exposures, and different backgrounds.

I think there are young people—for instance, I went to Tulane University to receive an honorary degree in 2001 that they've been offering me over the years and finally I managed to go. So I was very happy to get it last year. And I went to the School of Public Health and there were young post-doctorate people. I was very impressed by these people. Some of them had been Peace Corps workers and they had gone to the field. They really knew what they were talking about, and I thought it was really wonderful to have that kind of experience if we were going to deal with public health matters. You could probably bring those kinds of people into mainstream thinking too. They really knew what they were talking about.

TGW: Is there a question that I should have asked you and I forgot to ask?

SO: You've asked me a lot of questions. But where are you heading? Does this oral history have a purpose?

TGW: The purpose is to try to document both the ideas and the processes leading to the ideas, and what happens with them in policy and decision-making circles.

SO: You know, this is very interesting. We talked about agenda-setting. It bothers me that the UN is trying to do the agenda setting, or regain some of it—not everything. I think the

Secretary-General is trying to reach out in a very unique way. He alone is reaching out, instead of the Secretariat, to various areas, and I think he's rather good at it.

TGW: I think that more than his predecessors, he is certainly reaching out to intellectuals, the business community, and NGOs.

SO: But he's not an intellectual like Boutros Boutros-Ghali was. It was very interesting in that sense. And I think he may come up with something that could be a breakthrough. He has really very strong instincts and courage. I was very happy to read in the papers that he came out clearly with his views on the Middle East. I was getting very restless, to be honest. If all the mighty military strength that the U.S. has cannot solve that, what is the use of being strong? Isn't that the kind of questions that come up more naturally?

TGW: It's also the kind of leadership that actually comes to the fore and seems to me is essential. The bully pulpit is much more important and much more of a tool than I think Secretaries-General have generally made of it.

SO: Yes, I was going to ask you to get some reports. I was really getting—I was hoping that he would come up. He has tested it, but I think he came out very—because you cannot take it like this and still go after terrorists, potential terrorists, rather than real terrorist action.

TGW: Yes.

SO: But in that vein, too, I think, if you go for a very complete solution to the whole world's problems, you will never get anywhere. So I think you have to be more pointed, realistic, and pragmatic. Step-by-step, but get to real problems.

TGW: But agenda-setting, intellectual leadership, and putting out norms and principles is one level of activity. And then, as you say, attacking bits of problems is another. It seems to me

that the UN's comparative advantage is at those two extremes, and not trying to do everything in between.

SO: But also in decision-making in capitals today. When there were strategic considerations necessary during the Cold War, I think decisions were taken on policy levels more. Today, decisions are taken more on a political level. I think there is much more tabloid influence on policy. And I don't know how to go about that one. This is for even Afghan reconstruction. To really persevere, to sustain is not going to be that easy once the strategic threats that the U.S and so on would consider as relevant are gone. You know, the good thing about Bosnia is that IFOR (International Force) and SFOR (Stabilization Force) have stayed. It made a big different. Since Dayton, it is already six years.

TGW: That's right. There was a commitment and there still is.

SO: Even if it's small, that kind of thing is important.

TGW: Absolutely. You've been very kind to put up with us this morning. Thank you very much.

SO: It was sort of fun talking, too. Thank you.

INDEX

- Academy of the Sacred Heart, 2
 Afghan Reconstruction Conference, 28
 Afghanistan, 28, 32, 41-43, 46
 Africa, 9, 33, 38
 Aga Khan, Sadruddin, 19
 Ahtisaari, Martti, 24
 Aimé, Jean-Claude, 21
 armed conflict, 8, 34
 apartheid, 15
 Asia, 2, 7, 17-18
 Asian-African Conference (Bandung), 7
 Balkans, 34
 Bandung, Indonesia, 7; *see also* Asian-African Conference
 Berkeley, California, 4; *see also* University of California-Berkeley
 Bizimungu, Pasteur, 34
 Bretton Woods institutions, 1; *see also* World Bank
 Bosnia, 46
 Boutros-Ghali, Boutros, 37, 45
 Bucharest, Romania, 10; *see also* World Population Conference
 Burma, 18-19
 Bush, George, 22, 45
 Cable News Network (CNN), 22
 Cambodia, 43
 Center for Documentation and Research (CDR), 25-26
 China, 2, 4, 15
 civil rights movement (U.S.), 5-7
 Club of Rome, 12
 Cold War, 15, 22, 46
 Commission on Global Governance, 13, 37
 Commission on Human Security, 37
 Commission on Humanitarian Issues, 13
 Committee on Peacekeeping, 12
Common Security: A Programme for Survival (Pearson report), 13
 Congo, 35, 43
 Convention on the Rights of the Child, 13
 Dayton, Ohio, 46
 decolonization, 7
Defiance in Manchuria, 1
 Deutsch, Karl, 5
 developing countries, 12, 13, 29
 development, 9-12, 17, 34, 38, 41
 as a human rights, 17
 UN contributions to, 9-10
 East Timor, 43
 Europe, 3
 Faubert, Carl, 42
 Ford Foundation, 1
 France, 3
 Gaitskill, Hugh, 9
 gender, 36; *see also* women
 Geneva, Switzerland, 9, 20-21, 24-25, 28
 Georgetown University, 4, 6
 globalization, 13, 39
Going With a Flack Jacket, 32
 Grant, Jim, 13, 30
 Gross, Leo, 5
 Group of 77 (G-77), 8, 10
 Haas, Ernie, 5, 7, 30
 Hartling, Paul, 19
 Harvey, Jean, 9
 Hocké, Jean-Pierre, 20
 Hoffman, Peter, 1
 Holbrooke, Richard, 32
 human rights, 8, 13-16, 18-19, 27-28
 universal versus particular, 17
 Human Rights Commission, 13-15, 18, 24, 28
 humanitarian aid, 34, 38, 44
 humanitarian assistance, 21, 31
 Hungary, 7
 Ichikawa, Fusae, 8
 ideas, 1-3, 10, 12, 25-26, 30, 33
 and academics, 25-26
 and commission reports, 13
 and institutional rivalry, 30
 biographical influences on, 1-3, 10, 12
 internally displaced persons (IDPs), 33
 International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 21, 30
 Iran, 21-22, 41
 Iraq, 21, 32
 refugee crisis in, 21
 Islam, 39
 Italy, 3
 Jacobson, Norman, 5
 Japan, 1-4, 6-8, 10-17, 19, 20
 and human rights, 15-17
 and the New International Economic Order, 11
 and the UN, 10
 women's suffrage in, 10
 Keohane, Robert, 14
 Korea, 2, 15
 Kosovo, 43
 Labouisse, Henry, 13
 Latin America, 15
 League of Nations, 1-2
 Library of Congress, 4
Limits of Growth (Club of Rome report), 12
 Lubbers, Ruud, 26
 Manchuria, 2
 McCarthyism, 3-4
 Mexico, 11, 36; *see also* UN World Conference on

the International Women's Year
 Middle East, 12, 15, 45
 military protection of civilians, 36
 New International Economic Order (NIEO), 9-10
 New York, New York, 9, 11, 13-14, 24-25, 31, 36
 Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), 9-10
 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), 17, 28, 41, 45
 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), 23
 North-South relations, 9, 24
 Nye, Joseph, 14
 occupied territories, 15
 Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs (OCHA), 31
 Oka, Yosaitake, 6
 Pakistan, 41
Palais des Nations, 25
 Palme report, *see Common Security: A Programme for Survival*
 Partners in Action (PARINAC), 28
Partners in Development (Pearson report), 12-13
 Peace Corps, 44
 peace-building, 1, 39, 42
 peacekeeping, 12
 Pearson report, *see Partners in Development*
 Pérez de Cuéllar, Javier, 16, 19-20
 Poland, 14
 population, 10
 poverty, 33, 38-39
Power and Independence, 14
 refugees, 21, 23-24, 26, 29-30, 33
Responsibility to Protect, 36
 Rwanda, 34-35
 and refugees, 34-35
 Sadik, Nafis, 20
 San Francisco, California, 3
 Scandinavia, 21
 Sen, Amartya, 38
 Shifter, Richard, 18
 Sipila, Helvi, 36
 Somalia, 33
 Sommaruga, Cornelio, 21
 Soviet Union, 2, 22
State of the World's Refugees, 26-27
 Stockholm, Sweden, 10; *see also* UN Conference on the Human Environment
 Stoltenberg, Thorvald, 18, 20, 30
 Strong, Maurice, 31
 sustainable development, 10
 Taliban, 40
 technology, 26, 42
 terrorism, 39, 45
 Tokyo, Japan, 28
 trade, 1
 Tulane University, 44
 Turkey, 23
 UN Association (UNA), 9, 13
 UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), 12-14, 30, 41
 UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), 9
 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 13
 UN Development Programme (UNDP), 34
 UN General Assembly, 9-11, 17, 19
 UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 16, 18, 20, 22, 25-29, 32-37, 40-42
 UN Population Fund (UNFPA), 20
 UN reform, 37
 UN Security Council, 25, 35-36
 UN World Conference of the International Women's Year (Mexico City), 11, 36
 United Kingdom (UK), 7
 United States (U.S.), 2-3, 5, 7, 10, 19, 39
 civil rights movement in, 5-7, 19
 United States Agency for International Development (USAID), 33
 University of California-Berkeley, 1, 4-7, 14
 free speech movement *and*, 5
 University of California Press, 6
 Uruguay, 16
 Vietnam, 26
 war crimes, 8, 36
 Washington, D.C., 4
 women, 10-11, 13, 36-37, 40; *see also* gender women's suffrage, 8
 World Bank, 34, 42
 World Health Organization (WHO), 19
 World Population Conference (Bucharest), 10
 World War II, 1-3
 Yugoslavia, 22
 Zionism, 9