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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW OF

DR. LETICIA SHAHANI

BY

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Transcribed by Ron Nerio

DR. LETICIA SHAHANI: Dr. Leticia Shahani, in New York, on Saturday morning, November 27, 1999.

RICHARD JOLLY: Leticia, you have had a full career in so many positions in the Philippines, but you have also had some very senior positions in the UN, indeed ending as assistant-secretary-general for social development and humanitarian affairs. But you came into the UN as an above-quota P-3 in 1964. What were your motivations for joining the UN?

LS: I already had some introduction to the UN before joining it. After I finished my Ph.D. at the Sorbonne, my fiancé and I decided to get married, and so we came to New York. One of the first job offers I had was to assist the Philippine mission to the UN, helping in its campaign for the Philippines to have a seat in the Security Council. I spoke French, a language not spoken commonly by Filipinos. I was asked to help in the campaign among the French-speaking delegates in the UN.

So that was my first introduction to the United Nations, through the Security Council. We won a one-year term, a split term, but it was still a victory for the country. So I guess the combination of wanting to settle in an international community because I had married a foreigner and to begin my career in the area of international cooperation greatly attracted me.

My father, Narciso Ramos, was one of the pioneers of the Philippine Foreign Service. He served as the first foreign secretary of President [Ferdinand] Marcos. So I knew the diplomatic world quite well. The UN was not really a stranger to me. But I had also the advantage of having considerable training in the field of languages, which was important to get a job in the UN Secretariat. The Philippine quota in the UN Secretariat is always full because there are so many of us applying for positions. I was told the Philippine quota was filled indefinitely. But I

was lucky because, during that time in 1964, I was told of an opening. In fact, the UN Secretariat wrote me saying, please come for your interview.

The editorial control office was staffed by Western Europeans and Americans, and its staffing pattern was above quota. However, since the UN is a political body, there were complaints that there should be some Third World staff members in that office. So that's how I entered the Secretariat. I believe I was lucky that I filled the requirements at a specific time period.

RJ: What is your first memory of the United Nations as a girl in school or with your diplomatic, and I think somewhat political, family?

LS: The Philippines has always been friendly to the UN, and this influenced my first ideas of the UN.

RJ: From the beginning?

LS: From the beginning we had Carlos Romulo, who was a signatory of the Charter for the Philippines. The Philippines was a Charter member of the UN. So, when we became independent from the United States, already our relations with the UN had the highest priority, insofar as our foreign relations were concerned. So, the idea of peace facilitated by a super body like the UN, which would help other countries prosper and help create a more peaceful world—I think during those early days, after the UN's establishment and even when I entered the Secretariat in 1964, when we still had the pioneers of the London office of, I think, Church —

RJ: Church House?

LS: Church House. The outlook still pervaded the Secretariat that the UN had a global mission to fulfill. It represented the hope of the world.

RJ: Tell me, did your family have any links with General Carlos Romulo?

LS: Oh, yes, quite close. My father and he were contemporaries. Both were journalists and pioneers of the Philippine Foreign Service. The most eminent members of the Philippine Foreign Service, right after Philippine independence in 1946, were those who were in the journalism field—people who could write, who could express themselves, and who could articulate their ideas. And this, I think, was the advantage of the late secretary Romulo in that he, among the Third World delegates, could articulate during those early days the hopes and aspirations of developing countries.

Yes, he was a good friend of my father, Narciso Ramos. When Carlos Romulo was the permanent representative at the UN, my father was the deputy of the Philippines ambassador in Washington. At that time, we were shaping Philippine foreign policy and training our diplomats in the State Department, which showed the influence of the United States in the formulations of our foreign policy.

RJ: Has the UN provided an important counterbalance to the traditional United States ties with the Philippines?

LS: Not really. I think our political relations with the U.S. are very strong and continue to be so. The UN is not strong enough to offset these relations. We have also important relations with members of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations). Our relations with ASEAN, for example, were born out of necessity. But I think the UN's influence has come in mainly in the development field, especially in the areas of health, children, women, et cetera. The specialized agencies and the UNDP (UN Development Program) have also played a major role.

RJ: Can you think of any major specific ideas in the economic and social development which grew out of the UN and which had a very clear effect on the Philippines?

LS: Well, UNICEF (UN Children's Fund) has always been a great favorite in the Philippines because of its effective programs for children and women. Of course, children are non-controversial. I think the women's issue, as it evolved at the UN, has also had a major impact. Although, by culture, the Filipino woman is quite liberated. We have not had the oppressive forces of other cultures in Asia.

In developing the North-South dialogue, I think the UN has played a role, not so much through the UN Secretariat, but through the debates in the GA (General Assembly). Although the Philippines is close to the United States, we also belong to the G-77 (Group of 77), we belong to the South. The UN has helped sharpen our own identity with the developing world.

I think the specialized agencies have had their own contribution. Economically, of course, the World Bank has had a role in this. The Philippines has been under IMF (International Monetary Fund) supervision for many years, with its negative and positive results. So, I think the Philippines can be regarded as a medium-sized, moderate, developing country, which has looked up to the UN to help articulate and defend its interests. The UN has its weaknesses. It has also its strengths. And, like any country, the Philippines goes where it can take some benefit from the UN in terms of policies, programs, and projects. For instance, the matter of candidatures. In the past, the Philippines chose to be a candidate for many of the human rights bodies, like the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Committee on Freedom of Information, and the Commission on Human Rights. We have many good lawyers in the Philippines. Those were the early days when human rights debates dominated the Third and Sixth Committees of the General Assembly before the development issues emerged.

But later on, we said, "Well, what do we get out of these candidacies in terms of assistance, in terms of actual projects?" So, why don't we go for the executive board of UNICEF. There we can get a bigger share of the pie.

With the creation of the UNDP, there was a growing sense of the practical approach to candidacies, not just visible prestige. During those early days, you know, if you could speak before the GA or if you were a candidate for a functional commission of the ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council), there was importance given to such candidatures from the point of view of protocol.

But, as the issue of development came to the fore, and the UNDP began its assistance to developing countries, and to medium-term plans, naturally, the Philippine Foreign Office began to be more practical in selecting positions for candidatures. This was a good sign.

RJ: Let's come to yourself as a young graduate with your Ph.D. from the Sorbonne. You joined the United Nations in 1964.

LS: I joined the editorial control office.

RJ: The editorial control office. But soon you started working with Julia Henderson.

LS: Yes, but not directly under her. I was assigned to edit the documents of the Bureau of Social Affairs, and Julia Henderson was then the director of the Bureau of Social Affairs. Of course, those days, the director was very high up in the bureaucratic hierarchy. There were very few under-secretaries and ASGs (assistant secretary-generals). If you were director, that was a very important position.

And, of course, Ms. Henderson was brilliant. I know this because she was a professor in my alma mater, which is Wellesley College. She taught economics. And I think it was her mastery of economics and, at the same time, her eloquent advocacy of social issues that made her

outstanding. You know, social policy came under her. Housing, building, and planning came under her. Statistics came under her.

RJ: All statistics came under her?

LS: Yes, at least the Office of Statistics in the Secretariat came under her. Also, the marginalized groups, the disabled, the youth, the elderly were under her. Again, you could double-check, but she provided a balance, you know, to the economic interests in the house. I think this is important because there must always be leadership for the social issues.

That's how I got introduced to the social issues, because I got to know the senior and the junior officials when I was assigned to edit some of the documents of the Bureau of Social Affairs. I mentioned to you Aida Gindy, who went on to UNICEF; she was a senior official of the Bureau of Social Affairs for a long time.

RJ: Did you meet Philippe de Seynes at the time?

LS: Yes, he was already well-known. You know, he was head of the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs, and this was above the bureau of Julia.

RJ: He was above, and Julia was reporting to him.

LS: Yes. Because there were the economic issues which had priority. And I think that that was understandable, because member states, unlike now, would not come to New York for the social issues, which were considered domestic issues. They would come for this new—I mean, this New International Economic Order (NIEO), which UNCTAD was saying would benefit the developing countries in trade and development and so on.

The human issues were mainly human rights issues—discrimination, the legal aspects of discrimination, the East-West political conflict in the Third Committee. So that the social issues,

as part of development, had not quite emerged. It was the pressure of delegates from the developing world which did that.

RJ: Tell us a bit about Julia, Julia's vision and her leadership.

LS: Well, of course I was not privy, you know, to the thinking of the senior managers. I was only there as a P-3, and new to the UN, but I was always impressed by her articulateness and her clarity of vision and her personality, that she could speak to defend her program or to answer the questions of delegates in committee. And, well, she was not just a bureaucrat. You know, she had vision.

At the time, the UN was still new. So, if you knew your program, you knew how to defend it—and, of course, money was not such an important issue then, and she also was American—you would make a good impression on the delegates. However, she could not completely speak for the developing world.

Again, I really did not know the politics of the Bureau of Social Affairs then. But intellectually I thought she was quite impressive. Whether delegates from the Third World at that time were satisfied with her performance was really beyond me, because I was just too busy correcting documents and making sure I wasn't stepping on the toes of the drafting officers. That was my main concern.

RJ: Do you remember any specifics that Julia mentioned, or proposed, that inspired you at the time?

LS: Well, I really don't know, because I wasn't—shall I say, I was too low-ranking, really, to come close to her. But she did emphasize, in her speeches, the importance of the social aspects of development and of the need to look after the welfare of the human being and the

marginalized groups. Under what system this could be done—democratic capitalism, communism, socialism—was the big question.

But I think what was good with her was that she defended human dignity in the UN. I think before the UNDP Human Development Reports came, and the Social Summit in Copenhagen (World Summit on Social Development) was organized, the human being during her time was marginalized. You know, they were all lumped together, the disabled, the elderly, the youth, under social welfare.

RJ: The women, people.

LS: Vulnerable groups. And really, who cared for them? They can wait, delegates in their statements declared. I am sure Julia was inspired by the Charter, which stated that the social was just as important as the economic. But, at the same time, in the 1960s I think she also understood that in the house the economic was given priority. Because, you see, that's the way the system and governments worked.

If you were an ambassador of your country, the permanent representative, when you go abroad, you yourself would be worried about how your country related to the World Bank, the IMF, the Bretton Woods institutions. But you order your junior officers to hear debates on human rights; let them sit in the Third Committee and be responsible for social issues which were considered inferior to economic ones.

RJ: You speak as someone who has seen your foreign office—

LS: Yes, I was a career foreign officer and rose to the rank of ambassador.

RJ: —from a senior inside position, as well as an ambassador.

LS: A traditional senior ambassador, with coat and tie will not be normally happy dealing only with vulnerable groups at the international level. But I think diplomats will now

understand the importance of the Human Development Reports. But, at the time, during the 1960s, the culture of the house was really for economic issues and Security Council issues. You see, this was at the height of the Cold War. I saw Adlai Stevenson in action in the Security Council defending the U.S. during the Cuban Missile Crisis; security then was mainly a matter of a balance of terror, of armaments, et cetera.

RJ: The Cuban missile crisis —

LS: 1964, or 1963, I think.

RJ: Yes.

LS: But I was working with the mission, the campaign for the seat—

RJ: Ah, yes.

LS: —in the Security Council.

RJ: Yes. I think we have reached the point I should ask you about your assignments to the commission on women. Am I right that this is after your husband had died suddenly?

LS: Yes.

RJ: So, you had to make some changes in your life.

LS: Well, if you remember, Richard, I told you that I was able to transfer to a quota post in the Division of Human Rights, because once you got into the secretariat, you know, you got inside information about posts that are vacant, which you would not get if you are from the outside. So there was a position in the Division of Human Rights, in the section on the status of women. See, that's where the section on the status of women was first placed because it was part of human rights.

I had the fortune of having as my boss Margaret Bruce, who was the first chief of the Section on the Status of Women. She was English, and began her career in the Secretariat in

Church Office in London, during the early days of the UN. And it is from her that I learned the discipline of objectivity, you know, that you have to be objective in your reports, you have to be very careful, and since we were international civil servants, we had a mission to fulfill. I think that was also very important.

RJ: Which year did you transfer?

LS: I believe it was 1966 or 1967. And so I had the experience of preparing documents for the Commission on the Status of Women, and I think that this is one of the useful disciplines one acquires in being a member of the Secretariat. It teaches you to prepare documents, to be thorough and precise, and I've never regretted those years. Sometimes the work would be very boring, but it gave me a sense of achievement. Well, this is what the UN Secretariat really is for, to help intergovernmental bodies prepare for their meetings.

Then, when my husband died suddenly in late 1968—luckily, oh, I think four years before, I had taken the examination to enter the Philippine foreign service, just in case. That's the way young women should look at life, that marriage is never an insurance policy, so in case something happens—

RJ: And you had three children?

LS: I had three very young children. My oldest was seven, and the next one was four, and the youngest was twenty months when their father died. My mother said, "It is better for you to come home because it will be impossible for you to look after those children." Even if I had made a career in the Secretariat, I had to commute from New Jersey. It would have been impossible to care for the children. But, during that transition, I was lucky in the sense that by law I could enter the Philippine foreign service, since I had passed the entrance examination. Then, by coincidence the Philippine mission to the UN needed a representative to the

Commission on the Status of Women, someone who knew the background; well, I had the needed qualifications.

So, I served in the Commission on the Status of Women as Philippine representative, first as alternate representative. Then I became the full representative, until I chaired the commission in 1974, in preparation for the first World Conference of the International Women's Year, which was held in Mexico City in 1975.

RJ: Can I take you back, before we get on to chairing, to your first impressions in the Commission on the Status of Women. Indeed, even while you were helping prepare reports on the human rights of women, do you remember what your impressions were of the issues? Did you think that they were on the main issues? Did you have frustrations at some issues that were being neglected?

LS: Well, not really. I came in still as a P-3 to the section on the status of women, and all I had to do was to obey—not obey, but fulfill the mandates of the commission, what reports had to be drafted. And that was our main concern, to prepare for the next annual meeting and to make sure that the commission had the documents which could be a basis for their discussions.

But at the time, the thrust of the work of the commission was in examining the legal rights of women because, after all, this was quite a new issue for governments. The development aspect was just slowly coming in. After all, I think the Development Decade in the UN was 1960—

RJ: 1961?

LS: 1960 to 1970. And then the Declaration on Population was signed by heads of state in 1967. So the early emphasis of the commission was on the political rights of women, education or elementary legal rights, then the ILO (International Labour Organization)

conventions, such as equal pay for equal work. In addition, there was the legacy of the League of Nations; there was the Convention on Involuntary Prostitution. There was a rich background to our work. And my memories are still vivid of those militant Western European suffragettes of France and Poland. You know, Madame Dimbinska of Poland was outstanding.

RJ: Madame Dimbinska?

LS: Dimbinska. She was the Polish representative. I'm sure her name will appear in the rolls. Dimbinska. Madame Helene Lefauchaux and Mademoiselle Jeanne Chaton, both of France. And, of course, the Soviets at that time were also quite militant. That was one of the good things about them during the Cold War. When it came to women's rights, in theory, you know, the Soviets saw no reason why they shouldn't fight for women's rights at the United Nations. The Soviet constitution is the first constitution in the world to declare equal rights between men and women. Of course, it was only in the law that such rights existed. So, the Soviet representatives at the UN would always come fully endorsing all of the legal rights of women. They wanted to show to the world that they were in the forefront of women's rights. But that advocacy role, lacking in credibility and substance as it may have been, helped to increase at the UN awareness on the importance of women's rights.

However, at that time women's issues were not accepted by the men. They thought women's rights were really an embarrassment, sometimes a joke. What was the importance of the issue beside those large economic issues—the Cold War, President [John F.] Kennedy and the Soviets. The world was just too busy with more important concerns of the Cold War.

RJ: Who used to attend the commission? Mostly women or—

LS: Oh, yes. The commission—oh no, not the men. It was a female enclave. The first director of the Division of Human Rights was John Humphrey. He was Canadian.

RJ: John Humphrey?

LS: John Humphrey. Canada has always had people who were sympathetic to social issues, like the former Ambassador Stephen—

RJ: Lewis?

LS: Lewis, yes. He was the Canadian ambassador when we were preparing for Nairobi (Third UN World Conference on Women) in 1985, and it was quite a comfort to me to have his support when things were falling apart. But John Humphrey stood for human rights. Mr. Marc Schreiber, a Belgian, was his successor. He was my direct boss in 1966-68. He was a good lawyer. But he wasn't much of a feminist, because at that time women's issues were considered secondary in importance. It was hard then to see that women could have a pivotal role in the UN because the advancement of women hadn't emerged as a development issue. I think that's the beauty of the UN. Its influence moves like an iceberg. But, eventually, again because of the pressure of people, NGOs (nongovernmental organizations), the women's issue emerged.

RJ: Who were some of the women who stand out from the Third World?

LS: Well, let's see. From Ghana there was Annie Jiagge. She chaired the commission. Of course, from the Philippines, there was Helena Benitez. She was my predecessor.

RJ: Well, there was you.

LS: Well, there was me. For the Soviets, there was Tatiana Nikolaeva and Kunying Ambhorn of Thailand. She was there for over twenty years. There were many others whose names I can't recall.

RJ: Did any of these stand out in your memory for particular ideas?

LS: When I served as Philippine representative beginning in 1969, there was the development issue. We were now in the postcolonial period. Decolonization was over for many

countries; postcolonial India, Algeria, they were all very active in many bodies of the United Nations. So the development issue began to be introduced in the Commission on the Status of Women and the Third World representatives began to talk about poverty.

RJ: Women's poverty in particular?

LS: Yes. Yes. Especially the African women. They always have been in the forefront in bringing the attention of the commission to their plight.

RJ: Now, how much did the work of Julia in the Secretariat feed in ideas as opposed to draw on the commission for ideas which they would follow up?

LS: Well, Julia, you see, left—I think she left because she couldn't get what she felt was her due. I mean, she stood for social issues, and she could have headed the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs. She left the UN after heading the Bureau of Social Affairs for several years because social issues had become a dead end for her.

I really don't know the inside story. But, you see, Julia was head of the Bureau of Social Affairs and, as such, was responsible for the Commission of Social Development. There were fundamental ideological difficulties. The western countries felt that the UN should not deal with social issues at the international level. These were domestic issues, purely domestic. The communist/socialist states thought the UN should deal with them; but this was expressed, unfortunately, as propaganda.

So there was this fight between the western group and the communists/socialists. The communists thought that they were socially advanced because of their system and ideology. In their reporting style to the UN, they consistently pointed out the social progress they had achieved, whatever that meant. The developing countries were often caught in-between.

So there was an impasse in the Commission on Social Development. It took some time before the idea of "sustainable development" was introduced. The notion of human development was not yet introduced. But I believe the Commission on Social Development was one of those functional commissions of the ECOSOC which was passive for a long time. It's only now, in the 1990s, that it has gained prominence with the Copenhagen Social Summit of 1995.

But Julia left by the time I had joined the Commission on the Status of Women, first as alternate representative and then as full representative for the Philippines.

RJ: Well, then you moved to chair the Commission on the Status of Women preparing for Mexico.

LS: That's right, in 1974. The commission was, in fact, the de facto preparatory committee for the Mexico City conference.

RJ: Yes. How, in retrospect, do you look at the agenda for Mexico and the accomplishments?

LS: Well, I think the main accomplishment of the first United Nations world conference on women was that, for the first time, governments accepted the issue of women, the status of women, as a governmental concern. It wasn't just a social welfare handled only by NGOs. Now governments took a serious look at how half of the population in their societies live. And the difficulty with the preparations for Mexico was that you could not also avoid the politics of the United Nations.

There was a Plan of Action for Mexico, prepared by the Secretariat, which was adopted by the conference by consensus. But the Declaration of Mexico became very controversial, because there was a paragraph there about women having sovereignty over their bodies. It was not accepted, especially since Mexico was a Catholic country. And there were unresolved

political issues. "Zionism" was mentioned in the Declaration of Mexico and was objected to by the U.S. and delegates from Western Europe. The Declaration of Mexico died a natural death; it was hardly invoked as a document of the conference, but the Plan of Action acquired a life of its own.

Then the president of the conference was a man. Mexico was the host government and, I guess, the bias of the Mexican government and the foreign ministry was obvious—they couldn't allow a woman to chair. Yes, Mexico was the host government of the first ever world conference on women. But I guess that's how the world was then.

I knew intimately the head of the Mexican secretariat, Aida Gonzales-Martinez, who is now the chairperson of CEDAW, the Committee of the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. She was then a senior member of the Mexican foreign ministry. And, of course, Mexico has now a woman foreign minister—Rosario Green.

The Branch for the Advancement of Women in the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs served as the secretariat for the world conference. Helvi Sipila was the secretary-general of the first world conference on women. Kurt Waldheim had already appointed her in 1974 as the first woman ASG in the UN system. She was Finnish, and she was an articulate and effective feminist. She was at an NGO, very active in her own country. And I guess the Nordics had a say in her appointment.

In order to prepare for Mexico, there was a restructuring within the UN Secretariat to make the UN more credible. This always happens with the women's issues. The Secretariat gets restructured before or after a major event. So the Section of the Status of Women was transferred from the Division of Human Rights. It went to Mrs. Sipila's Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs.

The other unit on social policy, housing, statistics went to Phillipe de Seynes as head of the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs (DIESA). Jean Ripert succeeded him. So, it is always important to know structures at the Secretariat, because after a major world conference, within the Secretariat, the question is who now implements these beautiful plans of action?

Now, the Declaration of Mexico was not approved by consensus, and that is always a kiss of death in a world conference, as you know. But the Plan of Action was adopted by consensus.

RJ: Who were opposed?

LS: Well, insofar as the Declaration of Mexico was concerned, there was that paragraph on women having sovereignty over their bodies, and the Catholics didn't like that. And since we were in Latin America, countries like Mexico, Guatemala, et cetera, opposed the declaration. The U.S. also opposed the Mexico declaration because of the mention of "Zionism." But there were two important decisions made in Mexico. One was the creation of a women's fund. This is how UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women) was born, and the other was the creation of INSTRAW (International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women). These two were children of the Mexico conference.

As you know, UNIFEM is now with the UNDP. But, in the beginning, it came under Helvi Sipila's shop, because no one really knew where to put it, but it was better in the beginning to keep it under the substantive unit.

The Dominican Republic offered to host INSTRAW, and I think one of the difficulties in the UN is that once a member state offers to host and the offer is accepted, it is difficult to change that decision. You know, INSTRAW is languishing in isolation out there in Santo

Domingo because even with the best intentions, it is not easy to maintain a UN institution away from centers of communication.

RJ: I was pressing you on the real achievements of the Mexico meeting, and you said one achievement was the recognition by governments that they had to be active and in some senses committed. Secondly, you said the creation of UNIFEM and INSTRAW. Were there other achievements?

LS: Well, of course, once the women's issue went global, the work of the commission, ECOSOC, and the GA on women's issues, which had been neglected before and which was just piling up on the desks of foreign ministries, would now acquire importance and meaning. I know because I used to head the UN office in Manila in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. There were so many UN documents to read. But once an issue goes global through a conference, national governments are forced to do some things, like the creation of national machineries for women. The Philippine delegation had to create a national machinery before it went to Mexico because we wanted to announce to the world that we had a national machinery in accordance with General Assembly resolutions. That's one of the wonderful things which the UN can do—to put pressure on national governments to think and act on global issues which also affect domestic policies.

And then, in 1976, the commission decided to have a decade on women. I think the slogan of the decade is wonderful: equality, development and peace. The United Nations Decade for Women, 1976-1985: Equality, Development and Peace. Now I think the decade was important because at least it gave the UN and governments a long-term framework, because the women's issue is long-term in nature.

At that time, population was already a big issue. UNICEF was also beginning to think about women. So, I think Mexico was the trigger.

RJ: Looking back, do you think of any issues which in the commission, the prepcom, you would like to have seen on the agenda?

LS: The issue on family planning, reproductive health, this was something which was quite taboo then but I believe these were important. A clear picture about the actual contribution of women to the economy of the countries was not yet possible because the tools for measuring it were not there. There was Esther Boserup—she's dead now—but she used to be Denmark's representative to the Commission on the Status of Women. She was the one I first heard articulating the need to quantify women's unpaid work. Now, more than twenty years since, the UN has evolved indicators to measure paid and unpaid work of women.

The UNDP, in collaboration with ILO and the Statistical Commission, coming up with a manual on a global basis of how to measure women's and men's paid and unpaid work, not only in the home, but also outside.

RJ: Yes.

LS: So it is easy to have ideas about women and development and to say here's what's lacking, but you have to be careful in introducing such ideas into the UN so that they can be used later on as actual tools, so that they can be taken seriously over the long term. Mexico was not really clear on development. If you compare it to, let's say, Nairobi and Beijing (Fourth World Conference on Women). The Mexico Plan of Action is quite vague, but that was the best that could be done at that time. Women's issues were not quite well understood in 1975, but Mexico was an important first attempt.

RJ: Well, perhaps this is the moment to jump ahead to 1985.

LS: Well, before that, we had the Copenhagen World Conference of the UN Decade for women in 1980, headed by Lucille Mair.

RJ: Right.

LS: Who later on became ASG in UNICEF—

RJ: She did indeed.

LS: —for women's issues. Now, the Copenhagen Program of Action was not accepted by consensus because the world situation then was very difficult. The Danes offered to host it, but I am sure they regretted hosting it afterwards because the Palestinian issue became very controversial. One of the visible participants in the conference was Leila Khalid, who was a well-known member of the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization). I was one of the vice presidents of the Copenhagen conference. And I remember that last night. Mrs. Ostergard, a cabinet member of the Danish Government, was the President of the Copenhagen Second Women's World Conference. On the night before adjournment, she had to negotiate with the Arabs on the final Plan of Action, hoping that it would be adopted by consensus. At that point, I was asked privately to preside over plenary by—you know Benon Sevan?

RJ: Of course.

LS: He used to be the secretary of ECOSOC. See, this is the advantage of having been in the Secretariat. He said: "you better preside over the last meeting because you know the rules. We still have forty resolutions to pass. We have to adjourn tonight, and the president is still hoping to save the conference."

So I said, "alright." Those were the days when resolutions still had to be passed by voting. Well, we managed to pass all of those resolutions in plenary and we adjourned. I think it was midnight. But Lucille Mair, the secretary-general of the conference, had a difficult time

because the politics at Copenhagen, especially the Israeli-Palestinian issue, were difficult, quite emotional. These were the birth pangs of the women's issue to emerge as part of the global agenda.

RJ: What do you think were the achievements of Copenhagen?

LS: Copenhagen? Well, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women became open for ratification—I think just before Copenhagen took place. And that, of course, is a major convention for women's rights. Several member states signed the convention during the conference.

And then you had the Copenhagen Plan of Action. I really don't remember now what were its main issues, but I am sure the issues of development began to emerge because of the North-South dialogue. You see, Beijing has to be seen in relation to all of its previous predecessors.

RJ: Of course.

LS: Because there was consensus in the conferences in Beijing and Nairobi. But the struggles, the struggle to mainstream women, to be accepted by men in positions of policymaking, for women to be part of farming, micro-financing, small-scale, medium-scale, national issues, the global issues, was a long struggle. Western feminists were saying all you need are daycare centers, family planning, equal pay for equal work. But the Third World women were saying, "Oh, no; firewood is politics, water is politics, the North-South issues are politics, the conditionalities of the IMF are part of the lives of women and therefore women's issues."

The political atmosphere was not conducive for a consensus in Copenhagen. So, we went to Nairobi.

RJ: In 1985?

LS: In 1985, within the decade.

RJ: For which you were the secretary-general.

LS: That's right.

RJ: Which meant that you were heavily involved in—

LS: The preparation of the substantive agenda and final documents to be adopted, hopefully by consensus.

RJ: —in the preparation and in mobilizing interest.

LS: Yes. And also putting in place a conference staff. Of course, delegations have a major say. I think that this still is the most ideal situation; should there be future UN conferences, the secretary-general must also know the system, the staff, the politics of the secretariat and of delegations.

One of the things which I think was important while preparing for Nairobi was to get interagency cooperation, because the UN depends on the cooperation of the specialized agencies and other parts of the UN system; that's why UNICEF and the WHO (World Health Organization) are important.

As secretary-general of Nairobi, I managed to have the representatives of the specialized agencies go to Vienna and be part of the preparatory committee, an ad hoc interagency committee. At present, this interagency committee of women has become a permanent body, headed by Angela King, the assistant-secretary-general and special advisor on gender.

So, all of these ad hoc initiatives have become institutionalized over the years. That's why sometimes it is hard to say what impact a global conference has, because, in the beginning,

you have ad hoc arrangements, but later on, people say, "Oh, it works, it's good, let's not throw these away." It takes time for ideas to take root.

I think this is why Beijing Plus Five is having a hard time. It's too soon after Beijing to have another conference. How do you measure what you have done in five years? Especially for these long-term and difficult issues. What we did in Nairobi may be called modest but politically important, and maybe it is better that we waited ten years instead of five before another global conference took place. I think that that was the advantage of the time gap between Nairobi and Beijing. There was a waiting period of ten years, a gestation period. So Nairobi was called the Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the year 2000. So, when the preparations for Beijing took place, the starting point was the Forward-Looking Strategies of Nairobi. Delegations refined and improved on it and then went beyond it.

RJ: Who were some of the people that you remember in Nairobi, some of the women who had dynamic ideas or exceptional vision?

LS: Okay. I think it is hard to say, but I should say the African women as a whole. I learned so much from them, when they told me, "Look, firewood is politics, water is politics, food is politics." Ideas like those, I think, are revolutionary for the women's issues, yet they are so basic. But, contact with the grass roots give you this insight.

RJ: I have just been in India, seeing in several villages so many women carrying water, it seems to me that women in India carry probably just as much water as women in Africa. Why is it that it seems to be the African women who showed this leadership?

LS: Let's see. There was Devaki Jain—she still writes—a pioneering NGO from India. Of course, Dame Nita Barrow of Barbados—she's passed away, God rest her soul—but she was in charge of the NGO forum in Nairobi and did a very good job. Well, I don't know why the

African women seem more dynamic—maybe because Asia is just too culturally diverse and so populous. There are some countries that are advanced. There's Japan. But it is only lately that the Japanese women have been more articulate and the Japanese government is now taking the women's issue more seriously. The contribution of the Japanese government to the gender program of UNDP is considerable. India, of course, has had its feminists. In the Philippines, the NGOs have been very active.

RJ: Of course, the meeting was being held in Nairobi.

LS: Oh, yes. There was Pamela Mboya, the wife of the late Tom Mboya. And the one who was president, whom I sat next to at the conference itself, Elizabeth Kenyatta, the daughter of Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first president.

RJ: Was she mayor of Nairobi at that time?

LS: Yes, she served as mayor of Nairobi but had already finished her term, I believe, when the conference took place. She was already, you know, fairly senior when she presided over Nairobi.

RJ: Did Esther Boserup play any particular role?

LS: Esther was more of a technician, but certainly an influential one. I don't remember whether she went to Nairobi. Helvi Sepila attended Copenhagen and Nairobi.

In 1985, the Voluntary Fund for Women at that time was beginning to come under the umbrella of UNDP. It was during my time as assistant-secretary-general that separation from the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs to UNDP took place. Peg Snyder did a good job as the fund's first director. I felt, however, that the fund should not be lost in the technicalities of aid and that the issues of human rights of women and the dignity of the human

person should be integrated with economic considerations. So, I believe the UN had a major role to play in determining the priorities of UNIFEM.

Of course, there were so many actors and actresses on this stage. The NGOs—sometimes the unsophisticated NGOs had more to say than those who were already skilled. But some of the leading feminists also had something to say. Margaret Papandreou, then the wife of the Greek prime minister, was quite active in organizing the Greek women. In fact, one of her colleagues, Helen Stamires, is now the head of INSTRAW. Helen's experience goes back to Nairobi.

Of course, in the U.S. delegation, there was Maureen Reagan, the daughter of Ronald Reagan, assisted by Alan Keyes, who was then an assistant secretary in the State Department.

RJ: What were your memories of Alan Keyes?

LS: He put enormous pressure on us in the Secretariat.

RJ: Yes. I remember him in UNICEF.

LS: Mr. Keyes told us that if that word "Zionism" ever appeared in the final document of the conference, their plane, waiting in the Nairobi airport, would leave any time should that word appear. The U.S. delegation will leave the conference, we were warned. And Mr. Keyes told Jean Ripert, who was an under-secretary-general of the United Nations and was my immediate boss: "You know, if this conference doesn't go the way that we have been saying it should go, you will lose your job; you can be fired because you are a member of the Secretariat." This is the way he was talking. He continued: "I won't lose mine. I'm a member of the U.S. government." Oh, the Nairobi conference was very difficult. There were pressures from all sides—the Russians, the Kenyans, the Arabs, the Western Europeans, and the U.S.A.

How it ended up by consensus is really a miracle. I got some insights from that experience. It was about 10 o'clock at night, the night before adjournment. There were only

maybe six parties who could decide whether the conference would succeed or fail. First was the Kenyan government, which had spent $1 million and more plus grants from the Canadians and other governments. The Americans, of course. The Soviets, headed by the first woman in space, Valentina Tereschkova. Let's see. A representative of the Palestianian and Arab group, and myself representing the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar. We all represented the final negotiating group.

Some said there would be no consensus in Nairobi, despite four preparatory committees. The third preparatory committee failed in Vienna; I had to go to New York to report to Perez de Cuéllar. I told him: "I tried my best. Now, the ball is in your court. I have done my best as your ASG and secretary-general of the conference. I think you will now have to invite all of the permanent representatives for drinks to tell them that we need a fourth prepcom to guarantee the success of Nairobi. There was no budget, so it was to be an informal meeting. So, at least we would go to Nairobi with fewer paragraphs of the draft in brackets. So, we had a fourth meeting to remove square brackets.

In the end, we would rise or fall on the issue of "Zionism." Of course, there were other issues like apartheid, the North-South dialogue. So, in the end, that's how the UN also works. In the end, just before the brink, we are forced to take stock. In the UN, what do we really want? So, the Kenyans were saying: "Of course, we want success. Gosh, our government would be criticized." And the Americans said, "Well, you better remove that word 'Zionism,' or we shall leave."

And the Russians, well, I think they were feeling the heat. They weren't as competitive as the Americans, but they said they would not abandon the Palestinians and the Third World. The African women said: "Well, why should we be imprisoned by the use of 'Zionism?'"

For my part, as secretary-general, I said: "This is the fortieth anniversary of the world organization. If we can't even agree on an issue like women, why should the UN exist at all?" I said: "I have instructions from the Secretary-General that this conference must succeed. There are interests of women beyond the national interest."

RJ: So, how did you resolve the clashes?

LS: Well, everyone agreed the conference had to succeed, so the formula arrived at was to delete the word Zionism. But, it would be replaced by the phrase: "all forms of racial discrimination."

And then there would be an understanding that, when this paragraph was voted upon, there would be no explanation of votes. Because Arab countries might say: "In our view, the phrase, 'all forms of racial discrimination' means 'Zionism.'" So, that was the agreement. We delete "Zionism," replace it with "all forms of racial discrimination," and no explanation of votes.

So, we went to dinner. We adjourned at 4 A.M. The adoption of the final document of Beijing was child's play compared to Nairobi, where we voted paragraph by paragraph, until the Forward-Looking Strategies of Nairobi was finally adopted by consensus. There was struggle for women to be accepted as part of the development process. There was no gender mainstreaming—not yet. We wanted to first link women with apartheid, with all forms of discrimination, with refugees, etc.

So, when the revised paragraph on "Zionism" came to the vote, the Arabs still stood up to explain their vote. "In our view—." Of course the U.S. objected. But never mind, they had already approved it. There were reservations. So, that's how Nairobi was approved by consensus, through the eye of a needle!

RJ: And this was the first women's meeting, world conference, to have a declaration approved by consensus?

LS: No. There was no declaration. It approved by consensus a Plan of Action called "Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2000."

RJ: But it was the first one—

LS: Well, Mexico had a declaration and a plan of action. The declaration had to go to the vote, as there was no consensus. It was approved, but it had to go to the vote, which meant the house was divided. However, the Plan of Action, a simple document, was adopted by consensus. There was no struggle for its adoption in Mexico. But the Copenhagen Plan of Action was not adopted by consensus. The Copenhagen conference was also difficult.

Nairobi—well, I don't want to claim too much; the Plan of Action of Mexico was adopted by consensus but it did not signify much in terms of feminist ideology. But Nairobi was a major breakthrough in what we can call the integration of women in development and making the women's issue now a part of the entire development and peace process. And, of course, human rights. The 1976-1985 women's decade theme was: equality, development, and peace.

RJ: Let me conclude by asking you, looking back at Nairobi, with an additional thirteen or fourteen years now of implementation and, of course, this being Beijing, what do you think were the achievements of Nairobi with the perspective of the decade?

LS: Well, first of all, Nairobi was the first successful attempt in a UN global conference to put women's issues within the major concerns of the UN, as part of the economic and political picture. Women's issues became part of the major development issues like population. They became part of the North-South dialogue. They became part of the peace process.

NGOs were given recognition in Nairobi. The NGOs also met in Mexico and in Copenhagen, but the NGO forum in Nairobi, was both diverse and consensus-oriented. This was very interesting, because then you had all of those peace stands where the Palestinians and Israeli women met, clashed, and talked peacefully. The Forward-Looking Strategies also disaggregated women. The Forward-Looking Strategies, when referring to refugees, said let's talk about women refugees. When we talk about the elderly, let's talk about the elderly women. When we talk about the disabled, let's talk about disabled women. When we talk about heads of household, let's talk about women single parents and women heads of household.

So, this approach brought women under the larger economic and political pictures. It also became women-specific in certain areas of the vulnerable groups. If you look into agriculture, well, how about women farmers? So, Nairobi brought out this invisible half of the population. In other words, let's identify the women in population groups.

RJ: Very good. And if you look back on Nairobi, and you say, yes, we achieved a lot, but it was pity we didn't manage to do A or B, do you have any disappointments in retrospect?

LS: Well, of course, disappointments are to be expected. When you go global in organizing conferences, it is a time when the world puts on its best behavior and everybody prepares for it. Donors are more generous, national governments are more generous. But there's always a feeling of letdown after the big event, and that's the fate of women's issues really.

The sustainability of it, you see, is the problem. So maybe I'm used to the balloon being deflated after that. But, I think that's where the challenge is. A lot of the work has to be done, in my view, by national governments, because the global and international can only do so much.

The UNDP, for example, is now developing the tools to measure gender mainstreaming. How do you measure the participation of women in paid and unpaid work? Now, you have some precise methods. How to eliminate poverty through gender mainstreaming?

But, I feel, having been in politics myself, if you are in power, legitimate power, you can eliminate poverty overnight if you want to. But you must have a dedicated team and the political will. You don't need all that intellectual and technical equipment. Even if you have the tools to measure, the political will is so important and the sincerity, the credibility of government. That's why I wish we had political leaders of the stature of Gandhi or de Gaulle or Nehru who would have the moral authority and the unselfishness to say government is for the people. But that's the political leadership which is lacking. So, the UN fills this vacuum but inadequately.

I believe the UN has the moral authority, but it has to do it by degrees. It might take decades or years before a UNDP resrep can accomplish what he can do under one national administration. Because if he goes too far, he can be punished. Well, that is the culture of the UN system. Member governments are jealous of the UN having too much power, even in issues of development and elimination of poverty.

RJ: Well, I think I should say thank you very much, Leticia, and I think you've left many trailing thoughts for us to pursue on some future occasion. Perhaps at that point we should also come back and look at some of your other activities in the UN in chairing crime prevention or leading the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs.

But thank you very much.

LS: Oh, it is a pleasure and a great privilege.

RJ: That's the end of side two of the tape interviewing Dr. Leticia Shahani on November 27.

RICHARD JOLLY: This is Richard Jolly interviewing Dr. Leticia Shahani, on December 11. This is the second tape. And we are going to start, Leticia, by asking about your experiences and your perspectives on crime prevention, including your role as the ASG on social development and humanitarian affairs and crime prevention, and then, of course, your role as Secretary-General of the seventh congress in crime prevention. Perhaps you could start by giving your overall perspectives.

DR. LETICIA SHAHANI: Yes. Well, this is an interesting topic. I believe that the programs of crime prevention, and the treatment of offenders, which the UN has advocated, were inherited from the League of Nations. There is a long history in the UN of some kind of international cooperation in this field.

Originally, the crime prevention unit came under Julia Henderson's old social affairs bureau, and, as I told you in the first interview, when Helvi Sipila, as the new assistant secretary-general, was given an "empire" or a structure to supervise and be in charge of, the Crime Prevention Branch was one of those units which was placed under the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs. When the center moved to Vienna, the Crime Prevention Branch followed this structural transfer.

It is interesting to study these structural transfers of social development, because I think they also show the advantages and disadvantages of certain social development issues, and how some of them lend themselves to international cooperation, while some don't. Some of them are best discussed at the national level.

The crime prevention program of the UN has on the whole been self-contained. Every five years, experts on crime prevention and members of the criminal justice system have their own UN congresses because crime prevention lends itself to international cooperation and

mutual support. There is no North-South divide here. All countries are mutually dependent on each other.

When I was the secretary-general of the seventh crime congress, we did not go through those painful and wrenching preparations for Nairobi, or Beijing, or the International Conference on Human Rights, or the World Social Summit. The documents are prepared by a group of experts who are recognized in their fields: lawyers, judges, high police officials, law enforcement officers, and the entire criminal justice system. But there has been a long history of cooperation among member states in the area of law enforcement, control of international terrorism, treatment of prisoners. One of the memorable things which I witnessed as ASG of Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs was the early participation of the People's Republic of China (PROC) in UN affairs.

I don't remember the exact year when the PROC became a member of the United Nations, but that was a historic event, of course. The first social development issue the People's Republic of China participated in was to sponsor an Asian meeting on juvenile justice. I think this is one illustration of how the UN plays a role which maybe no other international agency can do.

The PROC entered as a major power in the UN and began to participate in political and economic activities. But social concerns, of course, are more delicate, because they are regarded as domestic issues. But, as members of the UN, the Chinese allowed the world organization to assist them in a delicate domestic issue—how to administer juvenile justice.

The fact that the Beijing government, at that time—around 1983 or 1984—asked the UN to sponsor a meeting of experts on juvenile justice showed that the Chinese authorities were worried about crime rates in their own country among their young people. They had no legal

framework within which to treat juveniles who were not yet of the age of majority. How do you punish them? How do you reform them so that they can be integrated into human society?

One of the achievements of the UN Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs was the drafting and the approval of the Beijing Minimum Rules of Juvenile Justice. In 1985, I served as the secretary-general of the Seventh Congress on Crime Prevention and the Treatment of Offenders, and I think that this is one of the issues which was already hailed at that time as a concrete achievement of the UN.

I remember going to China, meeting some of the officials of the Ministry of Justice and of the Interior, and it was quite, I think, a very good demonstration of international cooperation. During the seventh crime congress, one of the main issues was also the rights of the victim. The traditional emphasis of the criminal justice system is on the offender. Crime prevention and the treatment of offenders, you will note, was the title of the UN program, because of the emphasis on the human rights of the accused, not the victim. The emphasis on the rights of those who were victimized, the issue of victimology, however, began to emerge. That was one of the issues in the seventh crime congress.

Rights of the victims were widely discussed in Milan, where the seventh congress was held. The Italians have always had a great interest in the issue of crime. Mr. Adolfo Beria, a well-known judge in Italy at that time, was the one who negotiated the hosting of the congress of the Italian government.

Then, of course, the drug fund was always headed by the Italians because of their experience in law enforcement, with the Mafia, and drug lords. Mr. Di Genarro headed the drug fund during my time.

When the center moved back to New York, the Crime Prevention Branch was left behind with the drug fund. It was felt that the crime branch was better left with a fund, which could make the activities of the UN more visible in Vienna.

Of course, from a policy point of view, that decision had some advantages, because I think when you are at the global level, you must also select those issues which lend themselves to some drama like combining drugs and crime. I think this is the advantage of the UNICEF; children are always a dramatic issue, a humanitarian issue. Issues of money laundering, drug trafficking, transnational crimes, extradition—all of these have a transnational component in which governments are interested. I think that the crime program of the UN has now reached some global visibility.

RJ: What do you think are the biggest achievements of the United Nations in the area of crime?

LS: It is not so much the UN per se, I think, but some members of the UN, like the U.S., that have a definite interest in issues like drug trafficking and laundering of money. The fact that countries now accept the UN, not so much for interfering in police or interior security matters, but for discussing international problems relating to crime, I think the UN has been useful in bringing countries together all over the world to find common solutions.

RJ: Can we go back to the Seventh Congress on Crime Prevention? Were there any issues that were sharply divisive?

LS: Not really. I have not kept up with the latest crime congresses. I think that they tried to keep the political issues out, such as specific acts of political terrorism, Palestine, and Israel. They really don't come into the discussion. However, the problems of the Interpol (International Criminal Police Organization) and its relationship with national law enforcement

officials do come in, so that maybe these crime congresses are sanitized from the very hot political issues.

RJ: Do you think that has been a mistake?

LS: I don't think so, because these congresses take place every five years and preparations for them are really done efficiently, in a professional manner. The political issues somehow have a way of filtering in but in a subtle, tactful way. When I say they are sanitized, I think the genuine concern is there, among countries, and I think that the UN does provide the forum, where Interpol, for instance, can hold meetings with very high police officials of many countries outside the glare of publicity.

RJ: You can imagine that during the Cold War the boundary between spying and crime prevention was a very thin one, but now with the end of the Cold War, perhaps there could be a large arena in which international cooperation could be useful and would be accepted.

LS: Certainly. I think this is a challenge before the leadership of the UN, to really seize those opportunities where its programs have international relevance. Some issues are "flavors" of the year or of the decade, and then other concerns replace them.

You are correct in saying that the UN should be able to study trends which in the past were taboo, but now are accepted because of relaxed political conditions. Yesterday, December 10, for instance, I crossed the street to attend a ceremony in the Trusteeship Council because it was the anniversary of Human Rights Day—December 10, 1999. The optional protocol for the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women was open for signature.

The optional protocol will now allow individuals, or groups of individuals, to file complaints against member states parties to the convention by writing to the UN Committee on the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, and say that this state

party has not lived up to its responsibilities under the convention. That would have been unthinkable twenty or thirty years ago; there would have been opposition. For example, the former socialist states would have been very strong in their opposition, but now many of them accept the principles of the optional protocol.

RJ: I can imagine that there will be a big outpouring of complaints, in part because there are many things to complain about still, and, in part, because the women's movement is well organized, so they may well have meetings, encourage individuals, or even small groups of individuals to complain.

LS: That's true, because I think the women's movement has become a world-wide force that one has to contend with. Under the optional protocol of the Convention on Civil and Political Rights, there were hardly any complaints from women because they had no chance under a larger umbrella covering the entire range of human rights. I am sure it was mainly men's rights which would get the attention of lawyers and the UN itself when the optional protocol on Civil and Political Rights was taken up. I think it is good that we do have these gender specific optional protocols which women can use.

Going back to crime, drugs, cooperation in law enforcement, catching criminals, extradition, the [Augusto] Pinochet case, and the international criminal tribunals being set up, even if there are no bilateral extradition treaties between countries—we do have one, for instance, between the U.S.A. and the Philippines—but if law enforcement or criminal acts goes global beyond national boundaries, I think it would be very good. That would protect society and people, at large.

RJ: Let me ask you about other long-term changes in trends within the UN from when you first worked here in 1964 until the present. What changes do you see? What strange changes strike you today compared with your first impressions of the UN as a system?

LS: Let's go back to the social issues, because I think that this will relate to your own activities in the UNDP on human development. I left the UN in 1986 when Mrs. Corazon Aquino asked me to joint her government. That was a revolutionary period of change in the Philippines, so I felt that I had to go back to my country. The Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs stayed in Vienna for some time, but when Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali became the SG (Secretary-General) and because of the need to prepare for important conferences like the Social Summit (World Summit on Social Development), Beijing, and Rio (UN Conference on Environment and Development) in 1992, the human dimensions of development pressed on the Secretary-General very much. So, he did organize very early in his administration a group of advisors who were committed to the restructuring of the economic and social units of the United Nations. I was part of this group.

People from the population field, from the social and economic fields, we were all there. We met for a weekend in the SG's office. Other issues came up. That is when I think the recommendation for a deputy secretary general came up, a deputy who would look at the social and economic issues, since the SG was so occupied with the political issues. The group of advisors pressed for that, because although economic and social issues are long term, socio-economic issues are a legitimate concern of the Secretary-General.

Because of other factors, the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs was brought back into the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in New York. I think that

laid down, I would like to think, the foundations for the Copenhagen Social Summit of 1995, because the social and economic, and the political, I think, had a better focus at headquarters.

RJ: They were brought together more coherently?

LS: More coherently.

RJ: Let met press you, because over the years I see DESA, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, not being as innovative and path-breaking as it could have been and, perhaps, as some other parts of the UN have been; and, perhaps, not as innovative and creative in its reports in recent years, as it was in the first decade or two, perhaps when you first joined.

LS: That's true.

RJ: Do you agree with those judgments?

LS: I agree.

RJ: Why do you think that is?

LS: First of all, remember the *World Economic Survey*? I think it was begun under Philippe de Seynes, as under-secretary of the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs. They used to put this out regularly. From the 1950s through the 1970s, the *World Economic Survey* was like the bible of development. There was also the *World Social Survey*. These were pioneering efforts and there was no competition from other UN agencies.

At that time, I was in the Office of Editorial Control, and the UN had money to undertake in-house research within the Secretariat. The research activities of UNDP didn't exist at that time. The World Bank was not too conscious about publishing, the regional economic commissions were really still bureaucracies, and the Society for International Development didn't exist. The important institutes of research which now are doing global research did not exist then. So, the UN Secretariat, particularly DIESA, was a pioneer in this field. And even I,

as an editor, had the luxury of copy-editing many documents, et cetera. I think you could also see that in the early years, ECOSOC was truly a debating place for economic policies, and the functional commissions for ECOSOC, such as the Commission on Human Rights, were visible and important bodies.

UNDP in the beginning was a purely technical organization, in areas such as irrigation and forestry. The fact that it has gone into intellectual activities and putting out pioneering research such as the Human Development Reports means that the UN proper was replaced in its research functions. I wouldn't say that this was all for the good; I think the UN should come with its own publications because, after all, it still is the repository of government thinking and policies. There are ambassadors who are accredited to the UN who pronounce policy and attend UN meetings. Academics have their own way of looking at the future, but they are not in the electric chair of policymaking and budget allocation which are political responsibilities.

I believe there could be a division of labor still among UN agencies and units and knowing where the advantages and disadvantages are.

RJ: If I may interrupt, do you think the prestige of the UN has shifted a lot over the last thirty-five years?

LS: It has, and maybe it is because of its own success. It's like a mother which has given birth to many children. They don't go to the ancestral house anymore for family problems. There are so many intergovernmental organizations now. For example, in Asia, which I know well, you have ASEAN. Why go to the Security Council when you can discuss your troubles—Filipino, Malaysian, Indonesian conflicts, and even those of Burma—among yourselves? Who wants to go global when the regional organizations will serve one's purposes?

Then the fact that there are also economic groupings to discuss specific North-South issues. You have the Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), where America sits down with China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. One thing with APEC is that the foreign ministers and the trade ministers of member countries sit together. You don't find that in the UN—this artificial bifurcation of the of the economic and political—the World Bank and the Security Council, is not good, particularly for developing countries.

I believe, at a certain point, that has to be resolved, because the World Bank is attended by ministers of finance or budget officials and then the foreign ministers go to the UN. But they represent the same governments.

The advantage of APEC is that the foreign ministers and the trade ministers are forced to sit together; the Taiwanese trade minister is talking to the Chinese trade minister because both their countries affect regional trade and resources. The UN has been played up as the international negotiating organization, but you can't go global all the time, especially for regional concerns.

RJ: When you look at the long-term trend on gender issues, from 1964, when you came in as a P-3 to today, do you have a very positive feeling?

LS: Oh, yes. I think gender equality is one of the enduring contributions of the UN to humanity. I say this very objectively, not because I am a partisan of gender and the advancement of women, or because I have been so involved in many aspects of it, but objectively speaking, when we ask what are some of the enduring issues which the UN has sponsored, and which have been kept alive because of the UN and despite the UN.

RJ: Gender is certainly one.

LS: Yes, gender is one. Where has the organization kept it alive? It has kept it alive as a global movement through the Commission on the Status of Women, the Commission on Human Rights, ECOSOC, and the GA. Every time a foreign minister comes to the General Assembly, he hears something about gender, from his own delegation or—

RJ: But not in the 1960s?

LS: Yes, he would, but it would stop at the level of the Commission on the Status of Women or the ECOSOC, but the pressure of NGOs, of women delegates, and of women in political power has been steady so that it has reached the General Assembly as well as the highest levels of government. In a way, you can't really say the same for environment, or for population. The best advocates of population are still the women.

You cannot say the same for crime or for the elimination of poverty. They have advocates, but the warm bodies have to be there to push for it—like in the women's movement.

You have a similar momentum in the issue of children, but with children there is consensus in looking after their welfare because they are not as much a part of institutions of oppression and discrimination as women are. So there's really no fierce struggle in society as it is in the case of women.

But gender cuts across hereditary rights, access to credit, access to education, access to politics, et cetera. So the women's issue has affected so many aspects of life. In the UNDP—for instance, food security is one of the concerns of the organizations. But unless the women are brought in, you really will not be able to ensure that everyone will eat at the household level.

RJ: I like your emphasis on struggle—that without struggle there's no real well-founded progress.

LS: Yes. No sustainability and no transforming character. When they ask, “What do you have all these global conferences for?” It’s because they rally people, especially women, and give hope to women in Africa, who, before these conferences, were hardly given any attention by their governments. Or take the case of refugees. Then women say, “this is what they said in Nairobi, this is what they said in Beijing.” There is created a reference point for advocacy and action.

RJ: When you say without struggle there will be no transforming outcome of the progress for women, what do you mean by transforming?

LS: Well, the UN is always saying that the UN is an agent for change, and the UN administration says that the UN must have a transformative character. All activities of development, population, environment, governance should ideally bring about change. But these are abstract intellectual concepts. The only force which will bring about change are people themselves. This is why change in an institution like the UN is slow, because the people managing it are slow to change.

You can have the most beautiful book or study, or the most stimulating workshop, but how long will these ideas trickle down to the people in the villages? This is why political struggle or political triumphs are transformative. I say this because I participated in Ms. Aquino’s return to power in the Philippines. Although she was of the elite and came from a rich family, she was overthrowing somebody that was oppressive; she symbolized change.

So what brings about the change? The legal aspects came later. Mrs. Aquino said in the campaign trail: “I am just a housewife. I’m a woman. My opponent, who is a military dictator, says that I am not good at budgeting for the country and that I am not good in economics

planning. But I am telling you that I am not good in cheating; I'm not good in murdering; I am not good in assassinating; so choose. What kind of leader do you want?"

Mrs. Aquino won because the people wanted change. That is what the UN must never forget because that's what it is there for. It is for change. I think that's the secret of the dynamism of the women's movement because women have a stake in the success of the UN's activities on women.

Women in Africa or Latin American, for example, have a link with the UN, in a way which very few other UN issues have. I think UNICEF also has that, but very few UN issues have mass appeal.

Why do I say change despite the UN? Because, at a certain point, the bureaucratic lethargy of the UN is against accommodating these messy issues, like women and gender, because they do not fall within neat, bureaucratic structures. At the grass roots level, and this is despite governments, you feel the surge and the cry for change. So, I say the women's issue has grown because of the UN and also despite the UN.

RJ: Let me just ask you a bit more about the Philippines and Cory Aquino's dramatic coming to power. Did the UN help in that way?

LS: No, not directly. I don't think that it could have helped at that stage. After all, the legitimate representative of the Philippines at the UN was the Marcos government. The permanent mission here was headed by a Marcos appointee. These are some of the difficulties of government representation. The UNDP resident representative at that time—I don't know who he was—had to adhere or had to respect the decisions of the Marcos government. In that case, the UN becomes neutral. This is where I think the UN, the specialized agencies, and the UNDP

have to be very clear about their relations with governments, because there are all kinds of government. There are governments which are repressive or democratic or liberal, et cetera.

I would like to recount my experience in relation to governments. I was ready to present the report of the Nairobi conference before the Third Committee in November 1985. I felt that to be the high point of my career as ASG of the United Nations and as secretary-general of the Nairobi conference.

I was already in New York, ready to make the report, when I got a call from my brother, Fidel V. Ramos.[1] He said, "You come home because father's very ill and my hands are too full with all of these demonstrations." He was then the vice chief of staff of the armed forces in the Marcos government. Our father, Narciso Ramos,[2] at that time was heading the Economic and Cultural Office of the Philippines in Taipei because of broken diplomatic relations with Taiwan. He was previously ambassador for nine years, so President Marcos asked him to head this office.

My brother said, "Our father is in Taiwan now. I can't pay attention to him. You better come home. Whatever you are doing at the UN, leave it. Come home right away." So I had to leave New York. I had to go to Taipei. My father was dying, so I had to bring him home to Manila.

In the course of events, I was engulfed, upon my return, by the political turmoil because of popular opposition to Mr. Marcos. Although my family was caught in the cross-fire, because my brother was the armed forces vice-chief of staff of Mr. Marcos and my father was Mr. Marcos' first foreign secretary in 1965, we knew already of the criticisms against the Marcos regime. That's why I distanced myself. I was glad I was at the UN during the worst years of the

[1] After Corazon Aquino, Fidel Ramos became president of the Philippines, 1992-1998.
[2] Narciso Ramos was foreign secretary of President Ferdinand Marcos, 1965-1968.

Marcos regime. And my father, although he was personally close to Mr. Marcos, was very critical of the latter's administration.

My son, Ranjit, was the most pro-Aquino. He was eighteen years old. He would tell me: "Mother, if you are not going to take Cory's side, there is not much point in your being a UN official. You must be for change."

This was the time that Mr. Mark Malloch Brown, the UNDP administrator, was part of Mrs. Aquino's international support group. But I didn't get to meet him. I was too involved with local groups.

Mr. Marcos called for snap elections. Of course, I felt I had to do my duty. I went to our home town to register as a voter. I had organized the only rural YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association) in the Philippines in our home town, Asingan, way back in 1973. I am also involved with NGOs at home. I was president of the National YWCA of the Philippines in 1972. This is because my mother was so active in the YWCA, and President Ramos's mother-in-law was the first executive-secretary of the Manila YWCA way back in 1940.

RJ: Many family links.

LS: So many influences. In our hometown, I met with the local YWCA because they got a grant from the world YWCA. I asked them how they were using it. So finally they asked me, "Madame, whom are you for?" "Whom will you vote for?"

I felt in this little town of ours no one would hear, so—I couldn't help it—I said, "Oh, I'm for change." In a way there was no fear in me. To tell you the truth, it did not matter that I was an ASG of the UN when the issues were so critical; and I just said, "Oh, I'm for change, I'm for Cory."

It electrified the local media when the news leaked out. Somehow Mr. Marcos heard it quickly, and the local media publicized it. I created a furor. Pérez de Cuéllar wrote me a letter because some Filipino officials complained to him.

RJ: What did he say?

LS: First the media heard that I was for Mrs. Aquino. I said, “Oh, gosh, what is the implication now for an ASG of the UN?” Then I went back to Manila, and I got so many phone calls. People asked, “Is it true that you are for Cory Aquino?” My support for Cory Aquino was important because I was the first high-ranking official to come out openly for Mrs. Aquino, who was the underdog.

RJ: Prominent official of the Philippines.

LS: Of the Philippines and also of the UN. But this did not come into my calculations having been away for so long from my country.

RJ: And perhaps in the heady atmosphere of Nairobi, where they let the women speak out.

LS: Yes. And having been so used to the UN, speaking of human rights.

RJ: But what did Pérez de Cuéllar say in his letter?

LS: I became a center attraction for the media. At last somebody is brave enough to say she is for change, the opposition media proclaimed. But then I got a phone call from my brother, Fidel V. Ramos, and he said, “Hey, Lettie, what are you doing?” I said, “What?” I replied I had a right to say what I felt.

“Yes, but don’t you know what you’re doing? The NGOs are now here in front of my house, and they are saying, ‘We know who has the balls in the family.’” The NGOs knew that he was not for President Marcos, but as vice chief of staff of the armed forces, he could not come

out openly. He was also aware that any move on his part—not that he was afraid for his life, because he's a soldier—would implicate so many people in our armed forces. And, at the same time, he had to be correct with President Marcos. He said, "Don't you know what you're doing? In front of my home—there are all of these women NGOs demonstrating." I said, "Look, I just expressed my own opinions." "Yes, but don't you know you're being irresponsible?" he said. "Do you know you are responsible only for your life, but I am responsible for so many others." He was one of the few credible military figures in the country at that time.

RJ: Very interesting parallels.

LS: So I said, "I am just expressing my personal opinion." And he said, "but in my case, the entire armed forces, not only the generals, but also the common soldiers and their families will all be implicated." But the cat had been let out of the bag. Of course, it broke into the national press: "Shahani, the first cousin of Marcos, for Cory." Headlines.

In the meantime, someone in the Philippine Mission to the United Nations reported me to Pérez de Cuéllar—that a UN ASG was involved in partisan politics. So, the Secretary-General wrote me a letter. I should have kept the letter more carefully. The Secretary-General in his letter said that as an international civil servant, I should not forget Article 102, or 101, of the Charter which says that international civil servants should not participate in partisan politics of their countries.

So I wrote him a letter saying that I was aware of the provision of the Charter, but I believe that international civil servants are not prohibited from exercising their basic political rights and expressing their personal opinions.

Then I got a letter from our minister of foreign affairs, because they did not know what to do with me now. They thought I was a wild card. I was summoned to the office of the minister

of foreign affairs, whereupon I was given the letter which was written, I was informed, on the instructions of President Marcos.

The foreign minister wrote a polite letter reminding me that I was still a member of the career foreign service, still a career ambassador. When I became ASG, I just took a leave of absence from the Philippine Foreign Service. He wrote: "I would just like to remind you that you are still a member of the career foreign service, and in your capacity as career ambassador and as a senior official, please observe protocol."

When I read the letter, I said: "The dye is cast." So I wrote the foreign minister, Pacifico Castro, a letter, and I said: "Thank you for your letter. I hereby tender my resignation as a member of the Philippine foreign service." That at least freed me from the national government.

But with Pérez de Cuéllar, I had to wait a while, because my father was dying, and there were all these political issues. Then, after that, the elections took place and Cory lost.

RJ: I had forgotten that.

LS: She lost because the elections were rigged and the ballots had been tampered with. Marcos's loyalists said Marcos really won, but we said that the process was so blatantly manipulated. There was the drama of the nuns guarding ballot boxes with their bodies, and then the computer programmers walking out, saying that the results were being manipulated.

I went back to Vienna, and I had to do some soul searching, but in the meantime, the people power revolution took place. The people surrounded the military camps, and then the military backed Cory, and then Cory successfully took power.

When I was in Vienna, Mrs. Aquino asked me to join her, and I said, "I think it's time to go home."

In recounting these episodes, I wanted to show the difficulties of an international civil servant when there is revolution in her country. The UN can bring about changes before and after a revolution but not during the national upheaval. But the difficulty is that the most important relations of the UN are with governments; but it should be with the governments *and* the people.

RJ: In the early days of the UN, when a large part of the oppression, if you like, of governments related to the final days of colonialism, the UN had a clear mandate, because particularly of U.S. pressure, but also of course, Third-World pressure, to support decolonization, and to make for an orderly process of transformation of power. My perspective of that is that the UN played a very worthy and a very good role, but that was because the outcome had been decided, we must move from colonialism in the very Charter.

But when the colonial period was either over or largely over, then these issues, as with the Philippines, and as with many other oppressive regimes—

LS: And more will come.

RJ: More will come, yes.

LS: More will come. Because the struggle for power will always be intense, even in democracies, because democracy is a long process and the struggle for legitimate power continues, especially when there is poverty. I think politics is the avenue, you know, for economic and social and political power. This is why I believe the Human Development Reports of the UNDP are so welcome, because they show governments that there are other indicators of power.

RJ: And of success.

LS: Yes. There are other measures.

RJ: By which they need to be judged, and by which people will judge them.

LS: Yes, they will be judged by the people and civil society. So it is not just staying in power. It's not just having a strong military or having your allies across the oceans or having your own global summits. Those days are over.

RJ: Very interesting.

LS: But I think the UN must never lose its links with the people. In my case, I felt it.

RJ: What could the UN do, in general, or through its field operations, to have more links with the people and not just with governments?

LS: I think it is very important for the UN to be a student of power. I think the UN shouldn't just say about governments, "They're in power, so they're my partners." You have to know a country's politics and with what kind of government you are dealing. Was the president elected legitimately? Are his policies popular? Are they repressive?

So, even if you attend his dinner parties, or you have to be at the airport to meet him, you know what's happening inside without really divulging your information. These are the basic diplomatic skills. I guess I was tested when I was ambassador to Romania from 1975-1978. It was really no fun being ambassador there at that time.

RJ: The dinners weren't that good? Well, they probably weren't bad.

LS: Well, I learned a lesson I never forgot. I learned what it is to live in a state-controlled economy. Everything is controlled: office supplies, the banks, the press. I wouldn't have that again. But I learned how to behave as a diplomat. Of course, I was against Mr. [Nicolae] Ceau_escu's repressive methods, but I was at the airport when he arrived from overseas, because the bilateral relations had to be maintained. But my reports back home were truthful. I was correct in making my assessments.

RJ: You never feared that they would spy on your reports?

LS: Well, would anyone open the diplomatic bag? In Romania, during Ceaucescu's time they did. We were very correct in our bilateral relations. I think my reports were very critical. I knew that sooner or later, the regime couldn't last, even if I saw him in his glory.

RJ: What was the UN doing in Romania at that time?

LS: One of the people I could talk to during my diplomatic mission in Romania on issues was the UNDP resrep.

RJ: Who was that?

LS: I've forgotten his name.

RJ: Do you think UNDP had a skillful relationship, formally correct but in practice sensitive to the people?

LS: I can't say, but at least the UNDP kept alive some programs. At that time, of course, I guess the only political rationale was that under Ceaucescu Romania was a member of the Group of 77; and that's why the Philippines opened links with Romania, as the first socialist country with whom we had diplomatic relations.

RJ: What year was that?

LS: 1975, the year of the Mexico conference. At least they thought of themselves as a developing country. So, maybe that gave Romania some breathing spell, and maybe the UNDP office in Bucharest provided some of that space. So, in that way, the UN must know when to be neutral, must know when it should be for the people and not support the government.

Naturally, the UN cannot be in the forefront of a national revolution, but it must be a serious student of power, like what is now happening in Indonesia, for example. Whoever is the UNDP resrep must be able to distance himself or herself from the repressive forces. Otherwise,

they have no business being there. On the other hand, the relations with the Indonesian government must continue. After all, the relations are with the member states, not with their specific governments.

RJ: Yes. I find that fascinating, and including the things that you are saying about the need for the UN to relate to people. I think we're coming to an end. Are there any other points that you would like to make?

LS: Well, I am glad that social, human issues are now considered center-stage in development. But I also would look at the UNDP in a special way because of its machinery of having country offices. It has now a responsibility of providing the UN system with feedback from that country, not only from governments, but what the people are really thinking. Because here at headquarters, relations with the UN are made mainly through ambassadors. Naturally, every ambassador would like to put his of her best foot forward for his country, for his government, for the appointing power. All of this must also be taken with a grain of salt by the UN authorities. You just can't swallow everything hook, line, and sinker.

The UNDP at the country level can now serve as a filter, as you know, a direct link with the people. But there are also NGOs and NGOs, and there are people and people So you have to make sure that these NGOs and so-called leaders of the people are legitimate representatives of people's interests.

I think that over the years, there are shifts of power within the UN, but these are really responses to global changes. This, of course, is my first time to do work with the UNDP as a consultant, and I think, because of its country offices, the UNDP will make a major contribution to development, to the elimination of poverty, to world peace, to social development, because it is positioned in such a way. The resident representatives are the ambassadors of the UN

Secretary General, as Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali said; he felt that they should be brought into the diplomatic network; maybe that system could be used, but it should remain flexible.

With globalization, it becomes more and more difficult at the national level to really cope with all the rapid developments in technology. This is why human development must not be neglected. And maybe people like us who have been both with government and with the UN can have a link with an independent body, with whom we can exchange views independently, and not always through official transcripts. This independence is important. Having been in the foreign service, I am not one of these NGOs, or these academics, who pooh-pooh government. I don't think that civil society can replace government, although governments must be accessible.

RJ: Of course not. But I agree, often that isn't seen. What I think is interesting about the UN is the strengths of independent reports prepared, either by the UN, like the *Human Development Report* in an independent way, or by consultants, as in the ILO World Employment Programme, preparing independent reports on countries, which were formally independent of the bureaucratic structure of the ILO. I think governments, at their best, recognize the value of independent reports. They may be criticized sometimes by them, but they have an important part in a mature democratic structure.

LS: Yes. In the early days of the Division of Human Rights, there was a system, you would have special rapporteurs who would talk about controversial issues in an independent manner. Mrs. Sipila was the special rapporteur on women and family planning at the time. Or you would have expert group meeting, where you were invited as an independent expert. It's cheaper than getting consultants. You bring together a group of eminent people and give them a topic. That's quicker than having all these independent studies sometimes.

I believe that the UN should develop a kind of system of advisory bodies. You would have this group of eminent persons who have been with the UN, who can advise the SG in a disinterested way. I think that there are many vehicles which can give access to objective facts and informed opinion.

The UN is in an undisputed position because people want to be of service to the UN, because it means to be of service to humanity. It is different from being an advisor to Microsoft or IBM (International Business Machines).

RJ: Very nice point, I think, on which to end. Thank you very much. Let us transcribe this, you can read it, and check that it says the right things. Let us say thank you very much on behalf of the UN Intellectual History Project.

LS: Thank you. It is a pleasure to be associated with you and also, of course, with this study.

RJ: Thank you.

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