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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW OF

MOSTAFA TOLBA

BY

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Transcribed by Ron Nerio

THOMAS G. WEISS: This is the beginning of tape number one. Tom Weiss interviewing Dr. Mostafa Tolba in his apartment next to the Nile on the 18th of May 2001. Good morning.

MOSTAFA TOLBA: Good morning.

TGW: I wonder if we could start at the beginning and whether you would tell us what you think of your own family background and whether your early years contributed to your subsequent interest in international cooperation, the environment, and development. Could we go back to the beginning?

MT: Well, I can claim that my family background and my childhood definitely, in one way or another, influenced the way I look at things in life rather than probably my career and my choices in career and so on. My father and mother come from a village in middle Egypt, middle, upper Egypt. It is a place called Minya, which is 250 km south of Cairo. A village called Damsheer. I was not born there, however, because my father was probably the only one in the village who was educated at El Azar University, the theological university, and he was appointed teacher in the ministry of education. His appointments took him in different parts of Egypt. But at the time I was born, he was in the middle of the delta rather than in middle upper Egypt. He was in a place called Zifta, which belongs to a government called Garbeya. Garbeya means west. So it is west of the delta, and that is where I stayed for ten years of my life until I got primary school certificate from the schools there. But whenever the school year finished in May, rather than going north to where the sea and the cool weather are, we normally spent the three months or three and a half months holiday in the village in upper Egypt among my nephews, my cousins, my nieces, the whole family. I do not know if it was different from

other villages at that time. But when I was five or six years old, when I started noticing things, I remember that the village was something like 6,000 or 7,000 people. Now it is over 35,000. These 6,000 people or so, out of them something like 6 percent or 7 percent were Christian Copts and the rest were Muslims. Between all the Muslims there were intermarriages. So, everybody in the village was either my uncle, my aunt, my nephew, my niece, whatever it is. Even if the relation goes back to the grandfather number six or seven, all of them consider one another first uncle, first cousin, and so on. That sort of knitted relation between the family members left a very big impact on my way of life. I cannot let go until now with the relationship I have to all the members of my family, whether it is in the village or here in Cairo, and it went even beyond that. The ones I made as friends over the years tended to constitute for me, a family. So the way I look at things is coming from this village approach.

Second is when I became seven, eight, or ten years old—1930, 1931, 1932 (I was born in December 1922), I started hearing the stories of the Egyptian revolution in 1919 and that the British, in fact, expelled our political leaders, Saad Zagloul and his colleagues, out of Egypt and left for the Seychelles or Malta. Before going around in the world, I thought these were nowhere on the map. Coming from Egypt, and at this age Seychelles to me was something unknown, and Malta, which is next door, is just the end of the world there. At the same time, in 1930, 1931, we started feeling what actually happened all over the world—the Depression, economic depression and things became very, very cheap. You could not sell or buy an acre of land. If we wanted to get something, if somebody got sick, we wouldn’t have at that time, medical insurance or anything of that sort. So, whenever anyone of the family really got seriously sick it was a

very difficult job to find anybody to buy an acre or two of land in order to treat the person. So, again the idea of economic crisis or economic depression came very early in the game when I was about ten years old, eleven years old. I did not realize exactly what it meant, but I saw the impact of it.

Then a couple of years later, one thing happened that influenced me tremendously in my life—I am the fifth child of my father, the first four died. I am the only one left, and in spite of that I had not been a spoiled child. Both father and mother were kind but were extremely firm because they were coming from village culture and traditions, and they wanted a strong man coming in the family. My father had his land in the village, but because he was all the time outside the village, he rented it to my uncles to my mother and to my father. All the land was distributed among them for them to grow crops and give him the rent at the end of the year. So, suddenly when I was, I think, fourteen or so he said, "We take contracts between ourselves and the members of the family, you go and collect the rents from your uncles and from now on you sign the contracts with them and arrange it the way that makes you feel comfortable." And that was a big shock to me because I was only fourteen years old, and I was sad to do this, but this was my responsibility. He looked at me and said, "Look, why are you worrying? These are your uncles, all of them. There's nobody who is not a close relative. So if you make a mistake of a hundred pounds against them, or a hundred pounds against yourself or against me, this is irrelevant in the end because it is within the family. But it will teach you how to take responsibility." And that was the thing that I really appreciated so much about my father, to put me on the track of how to manage what I have at a very early age in life.

So, I think these combinations of things in the early days put things in my mind of how I run my activities. Maybe subconscious, but they are there all the time.

Politically, that again is another story. When I was sixteen and a half or seventeen or so, the Muslim Brotherhood had already become extremely, extremely active in Egypt. There was nothing whatsoever at that time related to terrorism or usurping power or anything of that sort. The leader of the Muslim Brotherhood was Haasan el Baana. He was an amazing personality. He had such a charisma and such knowledge of how to address people, how to use the Koran and all Islamic regulations without imposing anything or pushing in one direction or the other. He made them think of following the ideas of that glorious and peaceful religion to the extent that when I joined the faculty of science back in 1939—I was less than seventeen years old—I was already a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, and I helped my friends establish a little mosque in the faculty of science to pray and advise people and so on. In the meantime, the faculty I was educated in, the faculty of science belonged to the only university in Egypt at the time, now called the University of Cairo. At that time it was called Foad el Awal University, after the king who died in 1936 and who was the father of our last king, King Farouk. The faculty of science for some reason or other, in the late thirties, 1939 and the beginning of the forties, 1940, 1941, 1942, and 1943 was considered as the seat of communism in Cairo. I didn't really feel competent to give an explanation for this until now. A tremendous shift occurred in my thinking at that time. What we—my colleagues who graduated from the faculty of science in 1942 had already been involved in studying socialism vis-à-vis capitalism. And they were all demonstrators, assistant lecturers, whatever you call them; they were assisting in the faculty. I was at that time with some

of my colleagues—in the last year of the university, studying—all of us special degrees. And for the special degrees, at that time they used to train them to do a bit of research. They were normally appointed after graduation as demonstrators as follow-up research. So our exercises were being carried out during the night while in the morning we were attending normal classes and that was the regular feature. Even when we graduated, we were teaching during the day and in the evening carrying our research for the Master's degree. So, we were staying in the faculty all night. We had *Das Kapital* by Karl Marx with us, and each one of us studied a chapter and gave a synopsis of what was in this chapter, an analysis of how we felt this was relating to our feudalist system at that time, the emerging capitalist system in the country, and the Islamic system, which is more towards social equity than the capitalist system. We spent the whole year doing this. When we graduated we continued with this, and I think it stayed with us for quite some time, that whole group of 1941, 1942, 1943, 1944, these four years graduates of the faculty of science. So when the revolution came in 1952, there was a clear direction towards social justice and the application of socialist economy rather than the feudal system, thus jumping over the capitalist system directly into a social system. We did not feel like strangers to that, and that is probably what caused a great deal of us to be in line with the thinking of the revolution and a great deal of us to hold important positions as ministers, prime ministers, and so on, in later years, during President Gamal Abdel Nasser and the early period of President Anwar Sadat. That is as far as the background.

My father, in spite of the fact that he is a graduate of the theological university, he has never been involved in religious groups or Muslim Brotherhoods or anything of that sort. He was himself a very respected person in the family, in the village, and they

wanted his advice on religious matters when he went home during the summer holiday, but he was not part of any political thinking. As to where did I go and how did I go in that sort of direction of cabinet, United Nations, the university, all these actions? I don't know how to describe this. I planned or thought I was planning my life in a completely different way, and I got the exact opposite of what I was planning. How far does this relate to my own belief that I strongly believe in fate and that things are going to happen? My line would be to think carefully of what I want to achieve and do what I can to reach there, and if I cannot then it is God's will that I didn't reach there but not a failure on my side. That is a general feeling that I have. But when I was young, when I was sixteen years old, sixteen and a half, at the time of finishing the high school where I was saying that I went into the faculty of science that is a very, very strange story. At that time I was like all the young people in Egypt, extremely fascinated by the uniforms of the students in the military schools. They had beautiful red tapes and things. At the age of sixteen and for all of us, it was very attractive to the girls. Egypt was a closed society, so something to show off. Whether that was the only reason or that I wanted to get over the education system fast, I don't know. I cannot figure out why I thought I would go to the military college. But, at that time you couldn't go into the military college unless you had come from a family with land. They can prove that they have such and such land so you are coming from a decent background. And then somebody would vouch for you in the interviews indicating that you are a respected person coming from a respected family.

As I told you I was the only surviving child. My mother was illiterate, but she had an outstanding sense of feeling. She just felt whatever I was likely to do. I don't know how, it was as if she was reading an open book. And so she called one of my uncles

who was deputy mayor of the village, and told him, "Look I feel that my son wants to go to the military college. I have that feeling and for him to go to the military college he will have to prove that he is coming from a family with money with land and he has all this. That he can prove it straight ahead. But what is important is somebody to vouch for him that he is coming from a respectable family, and I am sure he is going to call on you to get someone at the king's palace to vouch for him, and I don't want you to do this." So he came to me later on and said, your mother said this and that. Are you planning to do that? I said, "Yes, I'm dying to go into this." He said, "Alright I will tell the chief of cabinet of King Farouk, he's a friend of mine, to vouch for you that you are coming from a respectable family." By the way the chief of cabinet who we talked to is the uncle to our new ambassador, our new minister of foreign affairs, Ahmed Maher. His uncle to his grandfather is Ahmed Maher, who was the prime minister of Egypt, and the second one, his uncle to his mother, is Ali Maher. You see, the two ambassadors who were mixed up in who was becoming the minister were the two brothers, Ahmed Maher and Ali Maher. The grandfather Ahmed Maher was one of the old political figures of times of the kings and was prime minister, and Ali Maher was one of the first prime ministers immediately after the revolution.

So I did apply and ran through my medical exams. I passed and went into the interview and everything went all right. I went the day of the announcement of the results, and they told me that my name was not there. I was not among those accepted. And it turned out nobody noticed that I was born on the 8th of December 1922. And according to law, any candidate applying to military college should be seventeen years old by the first of September. The law says seventeen years, and it's up to the minister of

defense to give an exemption up to three months. It turned out that I was three months and one week less than seventeen. So, for that one week, they said, “Well, you come for the January session and you will get in.” I left the school so upset. I met one of my colleagues who was sitting with me in the secondary school at the same desk. And he said, “Where have you been?” I said, “In the military college.” I told him the story and he got fuming. We were very close to one another. My grade at that time was the seventeenth highest grade all over the country. Seventeen out of three thousand graduates. And my colleague was number sixty-seven. He said, “I am the sixty-seventh, and I applied to the faculty of medicine, and you are seventeenth and going into this rat hole. You are going with me to the faculty of medicine. We went straight to the faculty of science, which at that time was teaching also the first year medicine. Its place is now taken by the University of Ain Shams (Heliopolis).

I went there and applied with all my credentials that I am coming from a rich family, that I have this and that and so. I came back at the time when they were supposed to announce the results. I looked at the list of those accepted in the faculty of medicine. I found the name of my colleague and no trace of my name. I went to check with the faculty registrar. He asked me, “Did you fill out a pink form or a white form?” I said, “I do not know.” So he pulled out the file, and he found that I filled out a white form. It turned out that the white form was for the faculty of science and the pink form for the faculty of medicine. So, we got the results of the faculty of science, and he found that I was number five and he said, “Four among the first ten in the Baccalaureate are in the faculty of science and not in the faculty of medicine. I knew nothing about the faculty of science. I thought the faculty of science because its name in Arabic, *Kuleyat Al Uloom*

was *Dar Al Uloom,* which is the Arabic language faculty. The registrar explained to me in that at the faculty of science, biology, chemistry, physics, geology, mathematics, and so on are studied there. So, I said, "I do not want to attend the faculty of science, I want to join the faculty of medicine." He said that there is no way other than finding someone accepted in the faculty of medicine who wanted to change to the faculty of science and do a swap. It did not happen and I continued in the faculty of science.

The first year we studied botany, zoology, chemistry, and physics. And our professor of botany—God bless his soul—was an outstanding man, but he was so rough that we hated botany, all of us. And coming from biology section in the secondary schools, we did not have enough mathematics to allow us to drop botany in the second year. We had to drop physics and take botany, zoology, and chemistry. So, six of us were in that line, and we went to see the dean at that time, Professor Musharrafa. He was like [Albert] Einstein and one of those outstandingly bright individuals in Egypt, mathematician, applied mathematics. And we told him that we did not like botany. We, all six of us, want to take physics instead of botany in the second year. And we are ready to take any amount of mathematics he wants us to study. And he threw us, literally, threw us out of his room and said, "You are spoiled kids. The professors of botany are not treating you softly that is why you don't want to take botany, because they are firm men." So, we got out and with the mentality of a child, again, seventeen years and a half, it went into my head, I have to prove to Professor Musharrafa that I'm not just a spoiled kid. So the system is that in the third year you drop one of the three subjects, take it only for half a year as a subsidiary subject and go on with two. If you get outstanding in any of the two subjects and pass the other one and the subsidiary, then you take a special degree in

that subject. So it just shot in my head that I must try to get a special degree in chemistry and a special degree in botany—just to show Professor Musharrafa that I can get a special degree in botany—and then leave it and take chemistry. Determination. And that was probably one of the things that stayed with me all my life, that if I decide that I want to achieve something I go after it and I try to do my best to achieve it. I did that.

When I was getting into the fourth year, the professor of botany came and saw me and said, "We have four or five vacant posts for demonstrators, assistant lecturers. The day you graduate, we will appoint you as demonstrator." For a kid of eighteen years old, demonstrator at the university was out of this world; God is up there and demonstrator is down here. So I went into the department of botany. The next day I met the dean, who was then the head of the department of chemistry. He said, "Why did you not come to chemistry?" I told him what happened. He made a fool out of me. He said, "Did you not ever hear of something called 'budget'?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Do you not know that there is somebody called the minister of finance?" I said, "Yes." He said, "If the minister of finance finds that these posts are not occupied and he does not have enough resources this year, he will cancel them. What do you do with your special degree in botany? Go and sell cabbage?" So the next day I closed my shop in botany and went into the chemistry department to start chemistry again.

Botany would not sit on its laurels. So one of my friends, who was already a demonstrator, took me to a professor who had just come back from Cambridge, late Professor Saeed. He is the one who really gave me a push in life. He said, "Why are you going back into chemistry?" I said, "Well, frankly speaking, I love chemistry and I do not like botany." He said, "Alright, I have my Ph.D. in biochemistry, plant biochemistry.

Why do you not continue botany and when you graduate and are appointed demonstrator, come and work with me for your Master's and Ph.D. in biochemistry. So you satisfy the botanists and in the meantime you satisfy yourself by dealing with chemistry in biochemistry." I liked that and went straight back into botany. Then they gave us what I talked to you about earlier, a piece of research. The piece of research that I was given was in plant pathology, and it was a very difficult piece of work. So by the time I finished the year and the results came out, it turned out that I got the degree with first class honors. The first thing I did was to tear apart the books on plant pathology and the research piece that I had been working on.

Then I started with Professor Saeed. In three years, I finished my Master's degree. At that time, they used to send the thesis to an external examiner in England. One day after presenting my thesis, when I went to the university, my colleagues said, "Congratulations." I said, "Congratulations on what?" They said, "Didn't you read the newspaper today?" I said, "No." They said the government had opened the scholarships for the second time after the war, and had chosen twenty-three people to go on missions to Britain and that I was going for a Ph.D. When I checked the newspaper, I found out that I was being sent for a Ph.D. in Liverpool in plant pathology, the subject I hate the most.

I got my Ph.D. and went back. I established a school in plant pathology and microbiology. I had eight girls and boys having the Master's and Ph.D. under my supervision in the subject that I did not want to have in the first year and the second year of the university. In the branch that I tore its books in 1943—I turned out to be one of the

authorities in the subject and a very big school with almost one hundred scientific papers on that subject. As you can see what I planned never went in the direction I wanted.

TGW: Hence your belief in fate?

MT: Hence my belief in fate, yes. The only time that I applied for anything, and it was just as a joke, it was advertised in the University of Cairo that the University of Iraq, wanted two professors of botany in 1954. I was sitting in my room with one of my colleagues, who was a little more junior than myself, and we just applied. He was assistant professor and I was lecturer so I thought there was no point in them having a lecturer to become professor. In spite of that, three or four weeks later, we both got the offer to go as professors to Baghdad. I stayed there at the time of Nuri Al Saeed, the then prime minister of Iraq who was politically on the opposite side of Nasser, and there was the Baghdad Pact. At that time, just two years after the revolution, and as I told you before, when the revolution came with its way of thinking, it did not seem foreign to us. So a number of us were involved in it, and I was in that group which was literally working against any pacts that could put Egypt in one camp against another. That was the beginning of a thinking that led to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Bandung movement in 1955. I stayed for four years in Baghdad at the time, and then Nuri Al Saeed got sick and tired of two or three of us, and instructed the minister of education that our contracts should not be extended any further. That was fine.

The same year, 1958, May or June, when I was coming back to Egypt, all my students came to the airport, and I was appealing to them to leave. "Boys and girls," I said, "I am a persona non-grata, for God's sake, there is no reason to put yourself face to face with Nuri Al Saeed." They said, "No, do not worry. The next year you will be

coming under a different regime." It was really amazing that kids of the age of eighteen, nineteen, twenty, would tell me this. I had no clue that something was brewing in May 1958. On 14 July that year was the revolution, that is three months later. The king and the crown prince, Abdel Kareem Kassem and Nuri Al Saeed were assassinated. An officer took over. I was asked by name to go back to Baghdad. So I went in September 1958.

Nasser and Kassem at that time were on very good terms. Then somewhere by January or February 1959 the links broke, and Baghdad started to take a negative attitude towards Nasser and turned the public against the Egyptians, saying that we are turning the people against the regime in Iraq, which was completely ridiculous. Luckily some of my family members were in the embassy, counselor, minister plenipotentiary; and I was with my wife. So they came home and said, "We have information that the military ruler of the capital Baghdad will issue within one or two days a decree to detain Mostafa in prison." And they wanted to send my wife home with the wives of some of the members of the embassy. She said, "No, I am not going. I am staying with anyone who is staying here. Where do I go if he is going to be detained?" President Nasser was informed that this was going to happen. So he issued a presidential decree canceling the whole Egyptian education mission to the whole of Iraq. He sent all the Egypt airplanes to Baghdad to take us back to Cairo with instructions that I should be the first on the plane because I was the only one who was to be detained. So I left and came back home.

Two or three months later they said, "Well, you can now do something more useful, become the assistant secretary general of the supreme science council." From then on, I started to get much more involved because the chairman of the supreme science

council was the late Kamal Hassein member of the revolutionary council and vice president of the republic. I started getting heavily involved in politics, into the Socialist Union, the elections, and what Nasser called the avant-garde, that is the special institution, or sort of party, about 2,500 people handpicked, who would really run the politics of the country. I was in that until Sadat became vice president with Nasser. In that capacity, he was appointed as chairman of the political committee of the party, and I was his chief of cabinet for political affairs. I was in the very deep kitchen of the politics of the country at that time. Of course all that exposed me to many foreign guests and foreign ideas. When he became president and had this break with Mr. Aly Sabry and others, the ones who were extreme left, I was in his cabinet of the 15 of May 1971, which was called "correction of the path."

Before that, I served in the United States. After the science council, I was asked by Nasser to go to the U.S. to our embassy as minister plenipotentiary in the embassy for cultural affairs and director of the education bureau. The basic reason was that at that time we had 1,500 boys and girls doing Ph.D.s in the U.S. There was too much propaganda against Nasser and the way in which he was running the country. That led to a large body of boys and girls to staying in the U.S. and not going back to Cairo.

TGW: I wonder if we could go back a little here. You mentioned the Depression. You did not mention World War II, and I wonder whether you could reflect a little, either in high school or at the university, about whether the topic of the League of Nations and international cooperation came up. And then also, about the impact of the war on your and students' thinking, and in particular whether the founding of the United Nations came into discussions and how it came into discussions.

MT: The issue of the League of Nations was very heavily debated at the time when I was just entering the university, 1939, after the beginning of the war. The general feeling, I do not know what is was outside of Egypt, but the general feeling among the young intellectuals in Egypt was that the League of Nations proved itself to be completely useless and very weak, representing the weakness of all nations of the world at that time. Nobody ever believed that the weakness was because the secretariat was weak or the offices were weak, like what sometimes happens now. The general feeling was that the countries of the world had become very weak, that they were not raising any finger against any wrongdoings. The result was that the League of Nations was simply a reflection of what was going on. When it was abandoned, I do not think it left any bitter feeling at all. On the contrary, it was a feeling of relief that this weak animal no longer existed.

In 1945, when the war ended, and the beginning of the establishment of the UN, two things are worth noting. First, overall, there was a feeling of optimism and that one can gather from wherever you were studying. I was studying at the Imperial College in London at that time. I got my Ph.D. at the Imperial College in London, but I had several colleagues in Oxford and Cambridge, and we all commuted and met with one another. But in London itself, there was a large body of students from the Arab world. Collectively, we were sitting together, addressing the issue of where the Arab world would sit after the 1945 war and how far our issues and situations were going to be reflected in the new structure that is being designed. Of course, in 1946, I for one had the first feel for that when our prime minister at that time, the late Nokrashi Pashar, went to the Security Council, asking the British to leave us alone, to leave our country. And he

was shouting and in the Security Council he said, "We want you to leave our land. We are an independent state. You are forcing your way in our country." These were the first actions touching on Egypt in the UN. It was interesting because the same night I was changing from Liverpool to the Imperial College. I did not find at that time that Liverpool had any reasonable preparation for a study of what I was going for—physiology of host parasite relations and plant pathology or physiology of micro-organisms.

I left Liverpool and went to London, London University at the Imperial College to see the professor who was one of the two main leaders of that subject in Europe. I told him that I wanted to work with him. It was November 1946. He said, "I accept my students in July and August, so all the places in my laboratory are full, but there is my colleague who is professor of plant physiology, who is also interested in physiology of host parasite relationships. I will ask him. He probably has a place in his laboratory." He came down; it was eight o'clock or nine o'clock at night. And he said, "Yes, I know this man, in fact I examined his thesis for the Master's degree. Then he took me with him and we went up in the elevator to his floor. When we were going up in the elevator, he said, "Ah, you Egyptians want us to leave your country. What wrong did we do to you to kick us out?" That was the first impact of the UN on an individual from one member state directly. I said, "Well, I am not coming here to speak politics, I am coming to study for my Ph.D. Are we going to talk about my Ph.D. or something else?"

It was very unfortunate because I knew from the beginning that he was Jewish, Professor Francis Gregory, but I had and still have every respect for the man because he was an outstanding scientist. He is full of ideas. All my life, not only me, but several of

my friends and colleagues, had no problem whatsoever with any other religion, whether it is Christian or Jewish. On the contrary, here in Egypt, most of our physicians and scientists were Jewish. But he played a very dirty trick, which I cannot really forgive him for. He told me, "Fill out your application form for your Ph.D. It is now nine o'clock, and the registrar's office is closed. Sign it, and I will give it tomorrow to my secretary to send it to the registrar. But, between now and the time that we start our work, which is April, we are going to work on wheat, which does not grow until April. Let us repeat your experiment from your Master's degree to see whether my results are correct or your results are correct." Because what I got in my thesis was opposite of what he was saying.

So I repeated the experiment and I got exactly the same results that I had gotten before. So he blew up and sent a letter to the ministry of education in Egypt saying that I do not even know how to use the microscope. He was so upset with that. I said, "Can we forget about all this because I am not going to work on my Master's degree subject. Now I am coming to work with you on rust in wheat." He said, "Who told you that I want to register you?" I said, "You already registered me." He said, "No, you are mistaken," and pulled the drawer and took out the application form, which he had not sent. So that was a bad move. I went out, and I was so crushed I could not see. I forgot completely that I was in London and was crossing the road and did not look to the right, I looked to the left the same way I do in Egypt. I was knocked down by a trolley bus, and people had to come down and push it back. I was sent to the hospital and stayed for six weeks and then another six weeks at home with a private nurse until I started walking with a stick. I went to see the original professor, Professor Brown. The minute he saw me he said, "I am really sick with what happened. It never crossed my mind that anybody would behave

like this. If you want to work with me, you are most welcome any minute." And I finished my Ph.D. in less than two years with a thesis that he and his colleagues said that each of its two parts was equal to a Ph.D.

We were worried as Arabs about the position the UN was going to take vis-à-vis the Arab countries and the developing countries in general. Because it was basically developed countries, Egypt was among the first ones to sign, but I do not think we took any stand from it. We were relieved that the League of Nations was gone and this was a new organization based on the optimism of stopping the aggression of [Adolf] Hitler and the old Nazis and so on. And they were talking so much about justice and security and the like. Well, what turned out, sixty years almost now, is not exactly what everybody was aspiring for when it was first established. I think probably, if I am honest with myself, that the whole issue of giving permanent membership to a limited number of countries with the power of veto over anything else in the UN was the biggest mistake. I do not think that they are prepared to open up the constitution again for any management, any correction of what happened. Nobody can imagine that what you signed, what you wrote in 1945, first half of the twentieth century could be valid at the beginning of the twenty-first century as if nothing ever happened in the past fifty-five, fifty-six years. But everybody knows that there are things that need to be changed. The Trusteeship Council, sitting over there, it had meaning when countries were under colonial life and so on. Who is now under colonial life? Why is it sitting as a constitutional body of the UN? What is really its function? And there are hundreds of things which are in the constitution that need to be looked at. But the great scare of opening the constitution could mean that the governments would press for canceling the veto which could make

one or more of these permanent members use the veto to block anything from being corrected. This is one of the issues I do not know how they are going to handle. I think the governments of the world have to come up with a position on this. I do not see a revolution in the UN, but at least there must be a clear position from the General Assembly. Probably, the governments would refuse to take any decision unless there is a correction of the situation. It is a very serious situation that we are facing. But it is not the only one. There are plenty of structures and points that need to be considered.

TGW: You mentioned earlier that Malta and the Seychelles seemed far away. But your first really overseas living experience was in London. I wonder about two things. What do you remember from the, cultural or intercultural impact of the stay? Of your living in Britain, the former colonial master perhaps, present colonial presence when you left? And what happened among students and among your peers and others around Indian independence? I wonder whether the whole notion of decolonization was a preoccupation among students or professors or yourself, and whether it seemed that this was the beginning of a very important process. I think sometimes we look back and see things, but I wonder if at the time whether it seemed like the beginning of a tidal wave, and whether this decolonization process was going to move ahead much more quickly than anyone had anticipated.

MT: First on the intercultural issue, I must admit that I did not, for one, feel for a second when I went to England—and that was my first trip abroad outside my country—that I was going into a foreign country. I did not feel, neither from the people nor from the students, nor from the professors, any discrimination or any looking down. In the laboratory, where I was studying with Professor Brown, there were three

Egyptians, two Pakistani, three Indians, one from New Zealand, and four Brits. So we were all either coming from Britain or from where Britain was a former occupying power or a former colony to Britain. Yet, the relation between the ten or twelve of us was excellent, without any special effort on the part of any of us. We were on equal footing. We were very close friends. We were happy together. We understood one another, easily cooperated, and were very willing to help and so on.

The decolonization of India was a real trauma at that time. We had people from Pakistan, two people from Pakistan, one person from West Pakistan, and the other from East Pakistan, the current Bangladesh, and three from India. Despite all the trouble back home, I, for one, did not sense any grievances of any of the other two groups against the other. The Pakistanis, whether east or west, were not taking any negative stand against the Indians in spite of the war that was going on between them. The Muslim-Pakistani, the West Pakistani, was so obsessed with his love for Mohamed Ali Jenah, the leader at that time. The Indians were so obsessed with their love for [Jawaharlal] Nehru; [Mohandas] Gandhi had already gone at that time. But somehow the fact that Jenah and Nehru were friends under Gandhi made the feelings softer. Towards the end of my stay, around the end of 1949, things became a little bit harsh, but it was never reflected on the relations between the individuals studying over there. Each one of them was speaking about whether Jenah was right or Nehru was right, and whether they should separate, or whether they should continue to support one another and constitute one country. But by that time, there was no question whatsoever about the East and West Pakistan being separated. That came much, much later. But the whole issue of Nehru and Mohamed Ali

Jenah was quite obvious in the air, in the discussions, by everybody, by Indians, Pakistanis, British, Arabs, anywhere.

Whether the independence of India was considered as the beginning of an iceberg of decolonization, I do not think so. I do not think at that time it was obvious to anyone of us that there is going to be a rolling effect of all this. And in fact, it did not. It started after the Bandung meeting, after the Non-Aligned Movement, and the fact that three of the leaders were very charismatic at that time and very respected globally. They got together and established that idea of the Non-Aligned Movement—Nehru, Sukarno, and Nasser—and then Tito came after that to support his own position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, but the pillars were established at Bandung by the three leaders. And from then on, particularly in Africa, and I do not know if it is simply because of the presence of the Non-Aligned Movement and their willingness for support, or the charisma of Gamal Abdel Nasser and people being moved by the way he talked about independence and so on. But anyway, it was not until 1954 that we started to see a growing movement of independence in Africa and Asia. In fact, the whole issue of East and West Pakistan did not take place. I left London in 1949, and Pakistan was still intact, east and west. In 1961 when I went to visit Pakistan as secretary-general of the Egyptian science council, it was East and West Pakistan. I think the idea of a nonaligned group helped in a series of independence movements, including, I would say liberating some of the countries from the very old backwards regimes that were on top of them, like Yemen for example.

The appearance around that time of the early 1960s when the notion of the Non-Aligned Movement became rooted, the idea of the New International Economic Order (NIEO) emerged and was fought for, and also the UN negotiated its first international

development strategy back in 1970. From the mid- or second half of the 1950s to the end of the 1960s, some major shifts in thinking happened. Independence took place and the membership of the UN increased so much, essentially from developing countries, who were fighting for economic independence and equity, particularly the whole issue of the new international economic order. Everybody was feeling that the economic order, the global economic order, was more tilted towards the North than the South. The real problem is when we start something in the developing countries, because of the lack of continuity in the institutions back home, the follow up of any of the issues that we were raising tended to become like a broken record. We are repeating ourselves with terms and slogans without really realizing how it appeared, how it came up to the surface, and where did we reach since it came up, what the obstacles are and how we can avoid these obstacles. And in 1970, I was part of the delegations which negotiated the first New International Development Strategy, "NIDS I" and "NIDS II."

We were talking of a New International Economic Order to become more just and more helpful to the developing countries. Then we said that we need an approach to development that can improve the lot of developing countries' people within the next ten years. And then we came to the stumbling block of money, and we said that we need an increase in the amount of official development assistance to meet the needs of the developing countries under this development strategy that we are approving now. When we calculated the official development assistance at that time, end of 1969, beginning of 1970, it was 0.35 percent of the gross national product. So we said, to achieve the major elements of the international development strategy, we need to double this from 0.35 to 0.7 percent. That was 1970. In 2002, when you will go to Johannesburg (World Summit

on Sustainable Development), and the developing countries will be talking about 0.7 as if the 0.7 is a Koran, a Bible, Old Testament, something coming from God. They forgot completely that the origin was that we wanted to double the figure in order to meet the needs. I tried in 1997 at Rio Plus Five, when I was chairing the Commission on Sustainable Development, and when I chaired the committee of the whole preparing for the special session of the General Assembly, I tried my very best to get my own people in the Third World to remember that we were talking about doubling the 0.35 to 0.7, that was 1970.

When we went to Rio (UN Conference on Environment and Development) in 1992, we were 0.34 and not even 0.35, thirty years after trying to get the 0.7. In 1997, five years after Rio, the 0.34 went down to 0.29, so there was a complete deterioration in the ratio. I said, "Why don't you sit down and talk sense to the developed countries and tell them, 'Let us agree that first, we do not want any further deterioration in the ratio, second, if we are 0.29 today, let us agree that next year we will be 0.3. That is 0.01 every year, and then we reach the 0.7 in forty years from today.' But the increase in the gross domestic product globally would mean a bigger chunk than the loss that we are having today, and this may not be as difficult for the developed countries to accept, if it is a gradual 0.01 every year. They would not have great difficulty." I aired this with some of the developing countries, but my own people just got stuck with their views that it is renegotiating Agenda 21, the same language that we keep hearing all the time. I think the people in New York, the missions in New York, are more committed to the political nuances of what you are saying in your debates, your discussions, and your resolutions rather than the realities of what you achieve. I do not want to say that the staff in New

York and the missions and the ambassadors are not top-class. They are top-class, and from them we normally get all the ministers of foreign affairs and so on. But that does not mean that they are not bent on the political aspects, essentially on showing that they are taking strong stands here and there.

I am claiming, with no pinch of salt in it, that the success in achieving ten or fifteen international agreements in the field of environment, regional or global, including the Montreal Protocol, the Vienna convention, the biodiversity convention, and the Basel convention was of course for several reasons, but one of them in my view was that I never had a negotiating session in New York in all the seventeen years of being the head of the agency. I kept suggesting to them in the Commission on Sustainable Development to get moving. I remember one of the deputy prime ministers of Canada who said, “Why don’t you take us once out of the cellars of the UN to see the air, to take us somewhere else outside the UN?” But there is a general feeling that the Group of 77 are stuck with the special formula that they do not move from, that the negotiators in New York depend to a large extent on the missions. They have very specific ways of concentrating on issues which I would not concentrate on.

There is also the fact that, unfortunately, we in the developing countries do not go to the meetings well prepared. We also have a lack of continuity, lack of continuity at home and on the delegations. In a country like Egypt, you find the vice minister of foreign affairs for economic affairs is an ambassador sitting there for two years, and then he or she is appointed ambassador somewhere. And somebody else will follow him or her. The one that is going to follow him or her starts almost from scratch because the girls and the boys who were working with the vice minister are also diplomats and they

are going somewhere else. So there is no continuity. There is no complete institutional memory of what happened over the years in a given activity so they can't follow-up on this. I tried very hard to get the developing countries, the Group of 77, to put together ten people. I said, "The whole problem in having two or three from Latin America and the Caribbean, two or three from Asia, two or three from Africa, and one or two from the Arab world—can't all these governments represented in New York and Geneva (at least) afford to put these people on a permanent basis to analyze the documents that are coming to different international meetings and identify the issues that are of significance to developing countries?" And give them options. Let them decide, each one of them according to their own interests, on where to go, rather than facing the countries of the north with less than adequate preparations. You find that a delegation of a developed country is composed of a large number of delegates whenever a topic is coming up, somebody sits in the chair of that delegation and speaks with authority on the subject, because he or she has all the background. We do not have that. How do we expect the UN really to be a fair place for everybody when we have these huge differences in institutional capacity at home, continuity, preparation, and so on?

TGW: I wonder whether, in these assignments—we talked about it at the university, then in Baghdad, then in the supreme science council, then in Washington, then back in senior posts in the government—in those early years, how UN ideas about economic and social development came into your work? Did they come into your work? How did they come into your work? How important were they, either as an academic or as a government official? Were you aware what was going on in New York, Geneva, and around the world?

MT: Well, how did it come into my work first as a scientist. And the strange thing is that the beginning came through UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and not the UN. At the time, when I was in the university—I never left the university by the way, until I became minister. I was on loan all the time from my position because I said that I am not going to leave the university until I am professor. So I got two professorships, one at the National Research Center and the other one in Cairo University. But when I became minister, they said, "Well, that's it. You can't be a minister on loan." When I was doing research and supervising we needed reference materials (books, journals, and periodicals). We were short of foreign currency to buy the magazines and reference books that we needed. UNESCO established what was called "UNESCO coupons" in the mid-1950s. And we bought with Egyptian money the UNESCO coupons, and then sent the UNESCO coupons to the publishers and they would send us the material. That is one element.

Another element came in 1960 or 1961, when I was in the science council as I mentioned. I was taking the responsibility of trying to review the higher education in Egypt, particularly the university education. I needed a group of university professors at the highest level from all over the globe, some twenty, twenty-five in different fields, particularly science, engineering, medicine, not the social sciences, and I asked UNESCO to help me with this. So they sent names and CVs (curriculum vitas) and I checked with them until I really ended up with an outstanding team from six or seven countries, really top-notch. They stayed here, in Cairo, for about a month or so and visited the different faculties and met with the staff and then made their recommendations. When we received the recommendations, they were carefully sifted because they were meant to be

implemented, not shelved, i.e., recommendations for the sake of recommendations. These were followed up by the minister of education who was also responsible for higher education at that time.

The third contact was again with UNESCO when I became deputy minister of higher education at the beginning of 1966 and also secretary-general of the national commission of UNESCO. In the latter capacity I was normally the alternate member of the executive board of UNESCO. The board member was the deputy prime minister and minister of culture.

That was the time when we entered into a heavy fight with Israel over the curricula and teaching material in Gaza. That was 1966 and 1967. The Israelis were trying by any means to stop the Egyptian books from getting into Gaza Strip, which was under the jurisdiction of Egypt, and to teach the boys and girls in Palestine books written in Israel. That was my first experience of how to handle a political issue at the international level, which included: how to deal with your colleagues, thirty or thirty-five members of the board, to ensure that you get some of them on your side; what are the materials that you should provide them with; how do you handle yourself if you are loosing; and how do you use your knowledge of the rules of procedures to stop something. All that was an educational process.

My second experience was in the UN itself when we were negotiating the New International Development Strategy in 1969 and 1970, as a member of the Egyptian delegation. And that was the real face-to-face fight between the North and the South for the first time, an open fire with continuous complaints from the developing ones. But one important aspect at that time, 1969, 1970, was that I never heard in the debate or the

discussion the term "corruption" jumping into the discussion. Now, both sides are accusing one another with corruption. Donors are accusing the recipients of pocketing money, misusing or mishandling it. Recipients are accusing the donors of buying certain people in their countries with the money that they are spending, or getting back the money in the form of equipment or staff and so on. So the fight at that time was for equity in the economic order, for more support to developing countries. It was more of a genuine willingness to cooperate rather than deliberate attack by one group and deliberate tries by the other group to keep away from its obligations. The last thirty years have shown that. This was the time that I was deputy minister of higher education, and even when I was minister of youth and when I was minister of science. All this was in the UN General Assembly and the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). I was also involved with the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). UNIDO was established by one of my fellow country men, an Egyptian, the late Dr. Ibrahim el Rahman as an industrial division in New York, and then as an industrial organization, as part of the UN proper in Vienna, as I was very heavily involved with him, in his discussions. He was four or five years older than myself, but we were very close friends. He was also a graduate of the faculty of sciences, and before me he was the secretary-general of the science council. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) came rather into the life of almost every Egyptian because of the infectious diseases, particularly malaria that came at sometime and schistosomiasis or belharsia. WHO was very active in this respect. And the FAO, because of the fertilizers, pesticides, the improved seeds, and so on. So we all knew FAO and WHO.

Every Egyptian has contacts with the UN in New York, represented especially by the Security Council. The General Assembly has always been the place where everybody talks. But the Security Council, at the time that we were trying to get the British out of Egypt, in 1948, after the defeat of the Arab world at the hands of Israel in Palestine. Then 1956 of course and the Security Council decision regarding the attack on the Suez Canal. And in 1967 again, the third war in the Middle East. Also, 1973, but I was already in the UN by that time. So our knowledge, my knowledge, of the UN was basically on the WHO, FAO, and UNIDO. I do not think I can claim that I knew much about the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the International Postal Union (IPU), the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), or even the International Labour Organization (ILO). It did not ring many bells at the early times.

Bretton Woods institutions and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) were of no relevance to anyone in Egypt except in the last couple of decades. Now, things changed completely. The organizations which we were normally dealing with, UNESCO, FAO, and WHO, are sort of receding in their impact. What is now very much up on the minds of everybody, even the man on the street, is the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the Security Council. I do not think that one can say that ECOSOC rings many bells in a country like Egypt, although I have been involved myself with it for twenty years. And the so-called revitalization of the ECOSOC by virtually every one of its presidents was merely a repetition that we hear every year. Now, of course, there is concentration on the Bretton Woods Institutions and the WTO and to a lesser extent on the environment. Apart from the fact the environment has became an important element on the global

agenda, Egypt has two of its sons heavily involved with environment at the international level—myself at the global level and Professor Mohammed Kassas, who was the president of the IUCN (World Conservation Union) for six years. He is one of the most well known experts in arid lands and desertification. So, two well known figures in the environment makes it obvious that the government would give attention to the subject. But I think the main issue now in Egypt, and I believe a large body of developing countries, is the pressure to include environment in the trade regulations. That is why the environment is always coming up, not the pollution up there and what to do about it, but how to avoid the use of environmental protection as a protectionism and as a means of non-tariff barriers. Anything else in the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), of course, does not ring many bells.

Regarding the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), we do not have atomic nuclear power stations at all here; we do not have atomic energy in Cairo. We have only two research reactors in Inchas. We know of it, the people know of it, because the minister of electricity in Egypt is coming from the IAEA, and the current director general is Egyptian, so it is natural that the people would know. But I think that everybody is basically now aware of the UN in the form of Security Council, Bretton Woods institutions, the WHO, the FAO, and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). That is how the UN is looked at, and I am sorry to say the general feeling wherever you look is a bit negative about any of these. This is not specific of Egypt but unfortunately a widespread concern.

TGW: I was wondering, you moved from pure research, teaching in the academy, and then to the national civil service, and then to the more political and policy level.

What did you find rewarding, or frustrating, about those particular assignments? How do you look back on a career that touched on these three different aspects?

MT: In fact, I would say that I moved through four phases. One is the academic, as university professor. The next one as manager in Egypt, which is deputy minister, minister, and president of the academy. And one as a diplomat in the U.S. when I was in the embassy in Washington. And one as international civil servant. Four phases. I think looking back now, I doubt if I can say that I have too many things that I can hold in my hand and say that, "This is what I achieved," as much as I did in the academic field. When I see that I had eight boys and girls starting from the Bachelor degree, from the fourth year in the university, getting Bachelor's degrees, then Master's degrees, then Ph.D. degrees under my supervision, and to see now that each one of them has a school of six or seven boys and girls—one of them became vice rector of a university, several became deans, others became heads of departments, and all of them reached the level of professor—I can hold these people and say, "I made these boys and girls academically. Their parents created them with the help of God, but I created them academically as individuals." And I can touch them. I can touch the hundred, the hundred-twenty or so, scientific papers published in Egypt, India, Germany, England, U.S. and the UK and say, "These are my scientific publications." So that is the thing that I can put my hands on and say "These are facts."

I served as a diplomat for two years only, in our embassy in Washington. At that time, more than 50 percent of our boys and girls were refusing to go back to Egypt after finishing their studies because of so much negative propaganda against Nasser and his regime. What was rewarding in my assignment with the embassy was the trust and

openness of the political leadership. My instructions from President Nasser were very clear. I was not there to defend his regime. I was there to correct erroneous information fed to our students. I was given complete freedom to state the facts. If the students identifying something that was actually being done wrong, I should admit and ask them for their views about correction. If the information they had was wrong, then I should tell them the facts. That helped a lot in carrying out my responsibility. At the end of two years a good deal of them went back to Egypt. I also went back as under-secretary of state for higher education. In both careers, the academic and the diplomatic there were also frustrations.

In the university, the culture at that time was rarely allowing these active young lecturers to be promoted before older ones. My several scientific publications and large research school did not qualify me to be promoted before older colleagues. I had to wait for her/him to publish a couple of papers in order to be promoted before they considered promoting me. Of course this is part of the prevailing ethics and culture in the academic institutions. We were accepting it. But it was frustrating to the young people because we wanted to be recognized. But ultimately we got recognized among our peers.

In my diplomatic assignment what was frustrating was the rift between the way I was looking at my responsibility and the confrontations with e.g., the American Friends of the Middle East, who were giving our students false information about Egypt and the leadership in Egypt. My colleagues in the embassy, the career diplomats, were keen, and I think rightly so, on enhancing the relations with the U.S. That sort of conflict was frustrating.

My third step was that of cabinet minister. One day I said to late president Sadat that what I learned in the two years at the cabinet minister level, being exposed to the various problems facing Egypt, and the various options for solving them and the difficulties facing each of these options, opened my eyes to look at the bigger picture than concentrating on the area that I am dealing with. I told him that I learned in these two years more than what I learned in the twenty or twenty-five years before that. When I joined the UNEP, I saw President Sadat and he asked me about what I learned in the UN. My response was that in the one year that I spent at that time in the UN, I learnt about the world, the way people are thinking, and the global picture much more than I learnt in the twenty-eight years I served in Egypt, whether in the academic field, as manager, or as cabinet minister. He was really surprised, and he entered into a discussion with me on how I saw things. I told him the fact that I am exposed to 150, 160 different governments, each one of them having a different point of view, and I do not have to please any of them, but at least I have to take into consideration why they are thinking in this way or that way. And accordingly, whenever I am coming up with a solution, I have to keep in mind that each individual, each country, or each group of countries will find a piece that meets part of its own concerns.

TGW: Let us go back to the international civil service before we plunge into the environment. I do not know whether it is a fair question or not, but how would you compare your close collaborators over the years in the United Nations with your close collaborators in government here in Egypt or in the university either in Egypt or as a student in England? How do they compare in terms of their dedication, their ideas, their ability to work hard, and produce good results? It is always difficult to generalize across

a large number of people, but how do you feel about the international civil service in looking back? You yourself benefited from it, you said, you learned an immense amount. How do you evaluate this experience?

MT: If we talk about the academic part, which started by me being a university student in 1939 until I started going on loan from the university to government jobs in 1959, with the exception on four years in Iraq, which is a bit different, I would say that this is the period, and I think probably the group who graduated before us had an even better opportunity, that was the period when the ethics, the culture, and the tradition were of extremely high values in the universities. The professors were really full-time professors. They had absolutely nothing else to worry about other than educating the students and trying to find solutions to even their personal problems. I noted very little undercutting by any professor to another one. It was very rare. They were very keen on pulling us up to follow them in their track, the contrary of what is happening nowadays. Anybody who reaches a high level in the university or anywhere does not want to see anybody popping up next to him or her.

I will give you one example. When I came back from England, after I got my Ph.D. at the end of 1949, I was appointed lecturer beginning of 1950. My professor, who educated me during my Bachelor degree and the Master's degree, the one I told you who offered me to work on biochemistry rather than go to the chemistry department. And I also told you at our time, the special degree students would have a piece of research during the fourth year to train for becoming a demonstrator and for research work. I arrived at the beginning of the academic year, and the same professor welcomed me and said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "I am going to arrange myself and organize my

laboratory." And he said, "Look, Mostafa, if you go on doing this for another year, you will rust, become lazy, and you will not start again." I said, "So, what do you suggest?' He said, "You know, this year's special student in Botany is my nephew, Ahmed Naguib. I was planning to supervise his piece of research for the Bachelor degree. Now that you came, you go and supervise his piece of research and start building your laboratory over what you are going to ask him to do, so that you can get into the business of producing students who are producing research from day one." And that was two weeks after I came. He was the first one to graduate and got his first degree, Bachelor degree, and then worked with me for the Master's degree in microbiology. And then the rest followed. This was his nephew whom he would have liked very much to help, but that was the attitude, the culture, and the ethics of the professors at that time.

This is probably something that got impregnated on one's behavior, and we claim that my generation—and this does not apply only for the fact that we have science, you go to the faculty of medicine, for example—people of my generation, you find them behaving in exactly the same way because they have been treated in exactly the same way that we were by their medical professors. So that left an impact that is making it very difficult for us to accept what we see now in the university: the lack of respect for the professors, the lack of respect of the professors for the students, private lessons, cheating in grades, and so on. These are things that we never heard of in our time. What I am speaking of does not reflect in any way the attitude or the nature of all the university professors now. There are very good people, but there is a large body of those who, unfortunately, are not good enough for that level.

In England, this is definitely a singular experience, because it was just after the war, there was absolutely nothing to eat or to wear. We had rations for everything. We had one egg every two weeks, one loaf of bread per week. We had one shilling worth of meat per week. So that sort of discipline was applying to the queen and to the students who were coming from anywhere in world. At the university, we were twelve in Brown's laboratory, as I told you we had parts of the work in the field and parts of the work in the laboratory. The laboratory had, I do not know, a hundred petri dishes, fifty conical flasks, I do not how many beakers, and so on. And we planned our experiments so that each one of us would finish with the petri dishes at the time that somebody else would be needing them. And then I would take some of the conical flasks of someone who had finished with them, and we worked together in a team with the bare minimum of equipment and got outstanding results for our Ph.D.s. So everybody was working very hard, was cooperating very much with his colleagues, was aware of the needs of his colleagues, and keen on making sure that these needs were met.

That sort of attitude, I do not know how it is now in England, but some of it is probably still there. I graduated as I told you in 1949 from the Imperial College. Thirty-nine years later, 1988, they ultimately realized that I deserved to be elected as Fellow of the Imperial College, which is the highest scientific honor that one can get, like the Fellow of the Royal Society, but they have their own fellowship. And I was among five who are elected every year. By the time it reached me, it was thirty-eight years after I got my Ph.D. The rector, or the chancellor, of the university was having a reception to honor the new fellows and invited a number of professors. One of those professors was my colleague when I was doing my Ph.D. by the name of R.K.S. Wood. We were doing our

Ph.D.s at the same time, but he was a staff member and I was on a scholarship from my country. He came to the reception and he approached me and said, "You know Mostafa, I really do not know if I want to congratulate you on the fellowship." I was really taken aback, and I said, "But why R.K.?" He said, "Because you are lost to microbiology. They are recognizing you as an eminent person in environment, but not in your line of specialization, which is microbiology. That is why I am upset. I wanted you to be a fellow in microbiology."

Staff everywhere, whether at the national or the international civil service. I served in the Egyptian supreme science council, at the top level. I served in the Ministry of Higher Education as number two to the minister. I served as minister of youth. I served as president of the Academy of Scientific Research and Technology. People worked hard; they did what I asked them to do. I do not know, I may be completely mistaken in this, but I have a feeling that when they have somebody who has ideas and who has initiatives, they entirely depend on him and leave it to him to come up with the initiatives, and do not give any new ideas to the extent even that when they prepare a note or a memo or something, they are not so accurate in making the complete research to prepare the material or even to look into the typing to make sure that there are no typos or that there is nothing missing, keeping in mind that the boss reads every damn thing that comes under his nose. I noted this here in Egypt and noted it in the United Nations over the twenty years in UNEP.

Although I have my type of management, they say that I am autocratic. I do not know how they can say that, but that is the governments who say that, not my colleagues. Governments did not manage to force me into doing anything that I did not think is

correct over the twenty years in the UN. So they were taking it as not flexible, very autocratic. But my system of management, in the office, wherever I was, I met with my senior colleagues and some of the juniors every week for at least two hours to discuss and check if they have any new ideas or if they found that some of the ideas are not working and why and so on.

In UNEP, there was a standing system of what I call the management committee and the management group. The management group was the three assistant secretaries-general working with me. They would meet with me three or four times a week in order to tell me what they were seeing as difficulties and I told them what I was seeing as difficulties, what was going on outside UNEP. And the management committee met every month, and that was composed of the deputy and the two assistant executive directors, and all the directors of the division, something like twenty people or so. We would sit for a whole morning every month, reviewing everything that is happening in our organization. Some of them were very honest about their work; some of them were keen on doing things to the best of their abilities. Unfortunately others piggy-back on the back those who are working and spend most of their time trying to figure out how to get leave, how to import something duty-free, or how to plan a visit, a safari. I can safely say that among the professionals probably 70 percent were good quality workers. Among the support staff, surprisingly, probably more than that, probably 80 or 85 percent were very good workers.

The fact that I am coming from one country and then exposed, in UNEP for example, to staff from sixty or seventy different countries. This is the day-to-day relations; people coming from sixty, seventy, or eighty different cultures. The first two or

three years were a learning process. I had always been working with national staff. So to go into a multinational body like UNEP was not easy, but over two and a half years when I was deputy to Maurice Strong, I had enough time because Maurice was taking the responsibility of fundraising and raising the flag of UNEP and for that touring the globe. During these two and a half years, I had the privilege of having a colleague, the assistant executive director for the program, an American, Robert Frosch. He was before that the assistant secretary of the Navy in the U.S. for research, and he was an outstanding physicist. So to have somebody at this level, and I was coming to UNEP from president of the Academy for Scientific Research and Technology. Two real good scientists, we used to lock ourselves into his or my room, fight like cats and dogs over the substance, nothing ever to go out of that room, wherever we were. We would never leave the room until we agreed that this is what we are going to do in this subject and that subject. So that was an intellectual leadership of very high caliber. I do not think I managed to get anybody, when I became executive director, of the caliber of Robert Frosch. His wife was a friend of my wife as well, so we were very close family friends. He was also a Jew, but one of those who were like a soft balsam, an outstanding fellow, full of ideas and full of humor. It is a major education.

One of the things about Maurice Strong, he may not be the highest intellectual in the world. But I have never seen anybody in my life who chose or picked people in the right place at the highest caliber as him. Not that he picked me, but because of the fact that he picked Bob Frosch and the one whom he picked for the fund, Paul Berthoud, an outstanding Swiss. He did the same with all other similar posts.

TGW: I interviewed Paul a couple of weeks ago.

MT: Paul was the one who ran the fund and the administration. He was D-2, because he was coming from UNCTAD as D-1 and then Maurice offered him D-2. The three of us were all the time together. Bob Frosch knew little about finance. He is substantively top-notch. Because I had been minister and deputy minister, I had an idea about budgets and things that can go wrong with administration. Paul knew everything about the UN system, about funds and finances, and then he was also very well versed with the substance that Bob Frosch and I were discussing. So it was a pleasure to see that team working together. We were running the organization because Maurice Strong was making his statements all over the globe and getting the required financial and political support for UNEP. It is surprising that God gives to anybody the gift to be able to choose individuals. Maurice never missed on this. I do not know where he learned this, but it must be something born in him.

TGW: Intuition, I would say.

MT: Intuition, yes.

TGW: How did you become aware of what we now call "the environment" or repackaged as "sustainable development"? When did this come on your radar screen? You were part of the preparations for Stockholm (UN Conference on the Human Environment), but when did the notion of the human environment as an idea come into your consciousness? And which things did you read, which kinds of discussions, or which kinds of problems made you realize that this was a critical issue?

MT: First of all the idea of the environment as such, I cannot claim that it came on my plate before 1969 and 1970, when we were talking about preparations for Stockholm. But what is really surprising is that very early in the game, 1947, that is

twenty-five years before anyone talked about environment, I was working for my Ph.D. on a disease which attacks the lettuce in England, the lettuce seedlings and made them topple down. Fungus attacks the seedlings above the sail surface and it dies. So we were trying to treat that disease by putting the seeds in a powder, which was an organic mercury compound, fungicide. It was at that time that I was talking to my professor about what actually is going to happen. We are going to save the lettuce by killing that, but what is going to happen to the other micro-organisms in the soil, which could be beneficial to other plants? And will there be any remains from this chemical in the lettuce plant when we eat it? We started making some preliminary analysis, because we had at the Imperial College, at that time, as I told you, the bare minimum of equipments to make a chemical analysis. And of course the equipment that we had was not that accurate to bring minute traces. So we were satisfied with the fact that nothing was left on the plant to cause harm to the individual. But that was exactly what we were talking about afterwards as the impact of the human activity on the environment and the impact of the environment on the human health.

When it came on my desk officially, it came when I became president of the academy in 1971. At that time, the United Nations had already decided to convene the Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972. The decision was taken in 1968. The secretariat was established in 1969, and then they brought in Maurice Strong because nothing was moving. So he started touring the globe. Each country established a national committee to prepare for Stockholm. And by virtue of the fact that I was the president of the academy, I was appointed president of that committee. Maurice Strong came to see me in Cairo in my office to talk to me about the conference and ask me to

arrange a meeting for him with some of the leaders in science and business and so on to talk about the environment. Like all ministers from other developing countries in 1971, none of us ever accepted the idea of environment as an important issue. We considered, all of us, that environment is the problem of the rich. They are becoming so prosperous, and now they are looking at the trivialities which make the life much better and try to block our own development under the guise of protecting the environment. I told that much to Maurice Strong.

Then he gave the lecture. I took him over there and introduced him. The lecture was attended by probably 500 people, a big attendance. And he got the same questions from everybody. Then he said, "How do you find a solution to this situation where this is not a unique case? Developing countries are all like this." I said, "Maurice, the only hope that you have is to show, somehow, that this is not meant to stop the development activities of the Third World. Otherwise we are going to come to Stockholm, all of us, and attack whatever you are saying." Then he had the bright idea of holding that meeting at Founex, Switzerland, where he brought people concerned with the environment and development in the North and South. All in their personal capacity and all were coming from top-level posts, ministers, deputy ministers and the like, and some academics. That week in Founex, I think, was much more important than Stockholm itself. That was the time when everybody saw the light at the end of the tunnel. We, all of us, started seeing that environment is not an isolated issue. The whole approach to environment, coming from the West, essentially pollution, was the reason why we objected to it. Air pollution and water pollution were the concern of the North. We said, "We want to pollute first, and when we become rich like you, then we start cleaning it up."

When we discussed in Founex, the issue of use of natural resources for the process of development and that the protection of these natural resources is part of the protection of the environment, then immediately it dawned on all of us that protecting the environment in that sense is our only means of ensuring that development is going to continue, one point. The second point is that if that is the understanding and they, our colleagues in the North, understand it this way, then whatever they are going to give as money to support the environment will mean to us support to the process of development by managing well our natural resources. So the whole barrier between environment and development fell after the Founex meeting. And that was the time when I shifted gear, and then went heading the Egyptian delegation to the Stockholm conference and became a spokesman for the Arab countries at the conference. And then became spokesman for the African/Arab group when we were negotiating the Stockholm principles and all the fights over them. And then at the end, Maurice Strong had to rely on ten or twelve people, lock them up in a closed room and give us enormous amounts of sandwiches and drinks. He told us, “You are not going to go out of here until you agree and finish the final version of the principles.” I followed the same technique after that.

TGW: What do you recall most from the Stockholm conference? What were the main players? What were the main tensions? In particular, I would like to hear you comment on the presence of nongovernmental organization (NGOs), which now have become part and parcel of virtually every UN discussion, but prior to Stockholm they actually were a much more minor player. I just wondered if you could recreate, if possible, the atmosphere in Stockholm.

MT: If we go back to the story of the environment and how it developed, it did not develop through governments. It developed through citizens, and the most important player in the environment arena were the people of the Nordic countries. They were the first to notice. As you know, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, particularly Sweden, are having colossal amounts of lakes, from one meter to one kilometer, and these were viable lakes. The people used to go out on Sundays and Saturdays to fish; this is their hobby. And in 1966, 1967, 1968, they started seeing the fish coming dead. The same happened in London, in the river Thames, but it did not attract the attention as much as it did in the Nordic countries because of the magnitude of the number of lakes. So the number of people who noticed that was very high. And the result was that it was these people in the Nordic countries who pressed their governments to do something to see why this happened. Of course, gradually it turned out to be the acid rain, and the acid rain took over most of the discussions on air pollution in Stockholm. Anyway, it was people who pushed governments. The government of Sweden proposed to the United Nations to look into the matter and to convene a conference which they offered to host in Stockholm. That was 1968, but the issue started two or three years earlier.

When we came to Stockholm, the public was also involved, so the nongovernmental organizations in the Nordic countries were already there in full power, and they invited their colleagues. Maurice Strong encouraged them to come to the international conference. And the government of Sweden arranged for a set of conference rooms and halls for the nongovernmental conference exactly opposite the government hall. And what was going on the in the government halls was merely pure governmental negotiations and discussions. And the others were playing their own game and were

coming up with their own recommendations and nobody paid real attention to that. But one would say that the amount of people who attended the nongovernmental conference were almost equal to those who attended the government conference.

But one very, very important character was that almost no one from the developing countries attended the 1972 conference from nongovernmental organizations, while the 1992 conference in Rio was overwhelmed by nongovernmental organizations from developing countries. So in these twenty years the nongovernmental movement in the field of environment, after Stockholm, really emerged as a very, very strong power. That was the impact of the 1972, but the impact on the 1972 itself was rather limited. I do not know what is going to happen in Johannesburg. Since 1992, the participation of the major groups into the actual work of the Commission on Sustainable Development was quite obvious. But I am still putting a question mark, really, on how far are they, the civil society and the major groups are influencing the decisions of the Commission on Sustainable Development. I still see, and I have been participating in eight out of the nine sessions and chairing one of them, that what comes out or results of the meetings of or with major groups are usually annexes to the report of the commission itself. So the decisions are purely governmental. There is no participation outside the governments. Is this going to continue or will it change in Johannesburg and after? That remains to be seen. But I am not feeling at all that the civil society, business, nongovernmental organizations, women, youth, academia can have any major influence unless they are members of the official delegations which go into the negotiations, i.e., the government delegations but as part and parcel of the negotiation activities. So, I think I can say that

the NGOs are still a long way from having a major impact on events in government meetings.

TGW: You mentioned academics. It strikes me, not just as an academic, but as one who observes these processes, in the issue of sustainable development, or the environment, for more than any other issue except perhaps more recently acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), that the scientific community, or a group of people with specialized knowledge, has probably brought more to the table than for any other issue. Is that correct? That knowledge and measurement and facts, to the extent that we have facts, whether it is on acid rain or population growth or warming of the planet, or whatever it is, is a substantial portion of the debate. Whereas in other topics the balance between politics and knowledge is totally in favor of politics. Here, at least research has something to bring to the table.

In the environment, the role of the scientific community or the research community is more important than for other issues, like gender or trade or health, except for AIDS. Here there is a dispute as to what is actually going on or is not going on, and there actually happens to be, or at least in many people's minds, a concrete indication that things are getting better or worse. And I am just trying to gage whether this is an issue in which researchers have more to say and have made more of a contribution than for other issues that are more politicized and less technical.

MT: Well, there are two points here. One, whether the issue is politicized or not, and second, the role of science. As to the role of science, I think the other areas that you mentioned, most of them, fall within the sphere of the social sciences rather than the absolute sciences. When you come to the environment, and that was probably the point

of strength of UNEP, that being a scientist myself and looking into what UNEP is all about and what we are dealing with, and found that I am dealing with air, air pollution, with water, amounts and quality, with land, soil, forests, deserts and so on, that there is no way that I can convince anybody to take an action unless we have concrete figures showing what is actually happening in terms of the quality of water or the amounts of water, what is available, what is being used, what is the rate of decrease in the per capita water available, what is happening to the various pollutants in the air, whether it is led, cadmium or sulfur or whatever, how did air movement carry air pollutants from one place to the other, like the issue of acid rain. The same applies to the issue of ozone, destruction of the ozone layer. Scientists developed mathematical models to show what is going to happen to the ozone layer in the years to come and what is happening now. We never reached a concrete stand on the issue of ozone layer before February 1987.

We started negotiating, we started talking about the ozone layer in 1974. We started negotiating in 1980. We reached a convention in 1985. This is a framework convention. No real commitments, almost saying, "We love one another and we are going to cooperate in order to save the ozone layer. We could not manage to get a treaty that is specifically saying who is going to do what up to that time. In 1986 we could not. In 1987, we had five groups of scientists modeling what is going to happen to the ozone layer over the next thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, seventy years. One of them was Russian, the others were from the West. The Russians split off. They said our models do not tally with the models of the other groups. In February, we put them all together in Germany and asked them to compare the hypotheses on which they are basing their models. And when they compared and adjusted the assumptions on which they were basing their

models, the five groups came to the same conclusion. Unless something happens now to stop the deterioration of the ozone, it is going to go beyond the point of repair. If you do it today and start implementing it within ten years time for example and the whole world accepts that and does it, it will take until 2070 to heal the ozone hole that is there. One voice of the five groups from different parts of the world, and that was thrown on the negotiating governments, and they could not go anywhere, they had to respond. So it took us from March to September 1987, six months of non-stop negotiations. And in September we got the Montreal Protocol. So we had from 1974 to 1987—thirteen years—talking about ozone and what should be done to halt its destruction and only six months after the scientists spoke with one voice, we managed to get a legally binding treaty. The same applies to everything else.

Desertification has been the same. Soil loss, FAO, and UNEP and the map for the soil loss in the world. On water resources, UNEP is working until now with the Swedes to produce a map of the water shortages all over the globe. So, environment has turned to be not a social science subject but a pure, solid science subject that you can monitor, you can trace, you can figure out what is happening, and so on. And this is not possible in other areas. Probably meteorology comes the closest to it.

Whether it is politicized or not, I cannot say it is *not* politicized. When it comes to identifying the issue, science speaks with its own voice, and people accept this and say "yes, we need to do action." When it comes to doing action, politics play games. And politics based on the economics of the material that you are going to handle, if it is costly, if it is affecting the industry or affecting the economy of the country, then the politics are very high. So, you have an ozone science committee which does not have politics. A

committee deciding on the impacts of the ozone depletion was partially politically motivated. The third committee deals with the responses and that was very highly politically influenced. The first one was headed by a British, not because he was British. It was solid, but he could not manipulate anything in science. The second was headed by a Soviet, at the time of the Soviet Union, so it was partially manipulated because they did not want to be accused of anything on the impacts. And the third was headed by an American who wanted to get the benefits for their multinational corporations, and they were under the pressure of these. So it was very heavily politicized. This is an example that is not necessarily applicable to other environmental problems.

TGW: Let's look back over these negotiations that you mentioned that you were involved in, a dozen or fifteen of them, Montreal, Basel, biodiversity, et cetera. If hard scientific evidence is one factor in the equation, what are the other important elements in determining whether one moves from a piece of paper on this table to a convention or accord which actually influences government policy? What are the lessons from your negotiating experience?

MT: There are three or four lessons that I learned from all this. One, of course, is science that you mentioned earlier. The second is a commitment of a number of governments to the cause of that particular treaty. The third is continuity of the negotiating teams in as many countries as possible, where they ultimately turn out to become friends when they sit with one other for one or two years. And they would be prepared to listen to one another rather than to shout at one another. And the fourth, and I think it was very important, that the head of the agency responsible for the negotiations or under whose auspices the negotiations took place should not play the role of an

international civil servant but rather the role of a committed person to the cause which he is representing, and in my case, that is the cause of the environment. And if he/she is known to be objective not in any way stamped as going to the North or the South or the East or the West, that he/she is giving everybody his right to state what they want and to offer what they can. That creates a very special type of trust. And out of this I benefited in all the negotiations.

The people, all the countries who were fighting with one another, over actions to be taken to protect the ozone layer, never told one another why they were objecting to the others points of view, why the European Union was objecting to the Americans and the Canadians or the so called Toronto Group, why the Japanese were objecting, why the Russians were objecting too. But because they felt that I am honest and trustworthy, each one of them told me the nature of the problem they were facing, why they do not want this or that. And the result was that I have never had them negotiate among themselves on their text. I put my own text, keeping in mind the points that are worrying each one of them, so each one would see a partial solution to what he is worrying about and then they put brackets around the things they do not like when they negotiate. I do not interfere in that negotiation. Then I take back what they produce—sometimes I put a piece of paper with no brackets and it comes out for me with 200 brackets. But I take it and I send it back with no brackets, again putting a compromised formulation based on my private contacts with these different governments. And so on until we reach the solution. In the six months that I spent on the Montreal Protocol, I had one meeting in which the Group of 77 participated. "And that group," I told the West and other developed countries, "these people have not used chloroflourocarbons, they use 3 percent of the

chloroflourocarbons. You are using 97 percent." So there is no point in telling them "tomorrow, you start cutting down." We have to agree on a grace period for them. And they immediately said "that is fair enough. How long do you suggest?" I said "ten years." And that was it. They accepted ten years and the article of ten years for the developing countries was agreed. They never attended any of the marathons of negotiating sessions that followed until September.

Those who attended these sessions were some twelve individuals representing the U.S., Canada, the European Community troika—the current, the previous and the coming chairman, the Japanese, and the Russians. These were the basic contenders and with them was always Norway representing the Nordics. And I had been meeting with them almost every two weeks to take a step forward. And they became very close friends. They sat with one another because it was a closed room, and there was no audience around and ultimately they agreed on something and there was a step forward. So there is science, continuity among the people, commitment by a number of governments, and a role of the agency responsible beyond the neutral, placid role of the United Nations body, a role of somebody active who is keen on getting a solution to the problem.

TGW: Your career in UNEP was bounded by two major conferences, Stockholm and Rio—and you began to speak a little about each. I wonder whether you can use those two conferences as a vehicle to examine global ad hoc conferences in general as a means to contribute to international consensus and cooperation. Generally, people view these either as essential events or junkets that bear no relationship to international affairs or as essential events. The reality is certainly somewhere in between. But in your view, are

these conferences important? If so, why? And under what conditions can they be most useful?

MT: I have no doubt that international conferences are necessary, if we really want to solve any global problem, whatever it is—population, social justice, environment, women, whatever. How to ensure that they are successful or useful is a million dollar question which I have been pushing over the last thirty years. That is to set specific goals and targets. If we go and meet in an international conference on women, the first conference on women (UN World Conference of the International Women's Year), what did we want to achieve in ten years that is doable, reasonable, and identifying who is going to do what to achieve that target. And what are the yardsticks by which we can measure every two or three years, whether we are moving in the right direction or not, and then adjust accordingly.

When we meet in ten years time after that, we have to figure out, these were the targets, quantifiable targets. We should keep away from. "We ought to do the following—," this is not a target, this "blah, blah." Targets could be we want to see women having 30 percent of positions in parliament and government, for example. Or in the education system, we want to have the illiteracy in the developing countries cut down by 50 percent of the current percentage. But if I say, "We should not exceed 50 percent illiteracy," and I am starting today with six billion people, and 50 percent of the developing countries is probably two or two and a half billion, in 2010, the six billion will be seven and a half billion. For seven and a half billion, six and a half billion are in developing countries, 50 percent of that is three and a half billion, so that is nonsense. I want a figure that does not exceed what I have today but rather goes below a figure that

could be monitored every other year. But nobody wants to have targets; nobody in the governments wants to commit themselves to anything that is called a target. I tried it for twenty years in UNEP, and the governments are just allergic to having targets. They started now listening to the word target without that great allergy. We have plans for everything coming out of these conferences, but none of these, including Agenda 21, have specific targets. I said that to Nitin Desai two weeks ago when we were together in Washington. I said, "I have been telling you and Maurice Strong, please get some examples of the targets that can be achieved in ten years in the field of sustainable development and cost them and say who is going to pay what of these costs. And see if they are going to be implemented. But if you go on like this, adding elements over elements, people will loose faith in United Nations conferences."

TGW: This is very interesting. One of the other vehicles besides conferences that many people point to are reports from eminent groups and people. I suppose in your field one points to the Club of Rome report (*The Limits of Growth*) of 1972 and the Brundtland report (*Our Common Future*) in 1987. And many people argue that *The Limits to Growth* was actually wrong in certain ways, but it at least helped advance the debate. So, two questions: Are these reports important in moving debate, in getting public visibility for the issues? And the second part of the question for me concerns the Brundtland report's term, "sustainable development," which now appears everywhere. What is the genealogy of that term and is it important to have a catchy (or un-catchy) phrase, a phrase that people sort of seize on to in order to make public policy?

MT: No, I think these are two completely different points. One, the significance of the reports. I do believe the independent commissions, whether they are completely

independent, or even established by the United Nations, like the Brundtland one, upon the recommendation of the governing council of UNEP. The fact that they choose commissioners in their personal capacity, and they choose commissioners for their own merits, and that the commissioners were not in any way bound to a political sensitivity to a given government made their analysis much closer to the reality than the things that are produced in an intergovernmental body. They are independent, and then they do, because of the names of the people there and under so much media attraction, push the debate forward in the subject. The three reports, one on development by the former chancellor of Germany—

TGW: Willie Brandt?

MT: Yes. And the one on peace by Olof Palme and the one on environment and development by [Gro] Brundtland. The one on dams, the latest that came last year on the impact of dams on the water and the environment, the one on oceans, which was carried by the former prime minister of Spain, the one on forests by the former prime minister of Sweden. There are five or six such commissions which came up with reports which are very valuable and full of information and ideas and the mere fact that they wanted to reach a consensus did not dilute the substance in the report. They did not do this at the expense of the content of the reports. They fought for a long time.

The second one is the catch words—well, first one point of correction, “sustainable development” was not coined by the Brundtland Commission. Sustainable development was actually coined by the governing council of UNEP in 1981 when the council considered the question of having an environmental perspective, to the year 2000 and beyond, what are the likely changes that are going to happen. And in the light of this,

how do we achieve the process of development that does not harm the environment? We were not considering sustainable development in the context of what we are discussing now, that is social development, economic growth, and environmental protection. Because we started back in 1973, one year after UNEP was established, with "eco-development," development that is ecologically sound. Then we came into the next year, "development without destruction," development without destroying the environment, the message I carried to the World Food Conference in my statement on behalf of UNEP. Then we came into "environmentally sound development." So all of it, in the context of environment. Then ultimately we thought that a sustained development would mean protection of the environment and its natural resources. So that is where we coined that.

In 1982, we had a ten-year anniversary of Stockholm in Nairobi. The governing council of UNEP open to all states—it was a general conference again. And it came up with a declaration and action plan, like all the other general conferences. Japan came up with the issue of having a report on environment and development by an independent commission. And the governing council, the governments, other than Japan, insisted that this should be an intergovernmental process and not by an independent body. And they fought, they could not agree, so they turned it over to the regular session of the governing council that followed. And that is why it did not come out in 1982, ten years after Stockholm. It came out in 1983 by the governing council. And I had to contact governments and see their reactions, and the general line was that we should have an intergovernmental process. So the council established an intergovernmental committee to prepare a report on the environmental perspectives to the year 2000 and beyond. And it recommended to the UNGA (UN General Assembly) to establish an independent

commission to prepare a report on environment and development. The commission headed by a developing country person with a developed country deputy or vice-versa, a developed country person with a deputy from a developing country. That was a very interesting story. Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar was the secretary-general at the time. And when this came out of the General Assembly, at the recommendation of the governing council, which immediately established its own intergovernmental committee, Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar called me and said, "Whom do you think should come as president?" I said, "Well, I think the two names that come to mind are Edward Heath of Britain, former prime minister of Britain, or Jimmy Carter of the U.S., but I do not think that any of these I can touch." He said, "Why?" I said, "Well, the president of the United States now is Ronald Reagan, and if I touch Jimmy Carter he is going to cut the contributions to UNEP. So I am not prepared to loose that."

TGW: And Edward Heath?

MT: Yes, I think Margaret Thatcher, my very close friend, would cut my throat if I touch Edward Heath. He said, "Alright, so who do you think we should have?" I said, "We should try Gro Harlem Brundtland." He said, "But why Gro Harlem Brundtland? She is also in the opposition." I said, "The Swedes and the Nordics in general are different from other countries." And he said, "But I do not know her." I said, "Well, I will call her and check with her." So I called her and I said, "Gro, this is the situation, what do you think?" She said, "You know I am in the opposition now and I want to get my party into the government, so I do not want to loose my time making reports and so on." I said, "No, it does not take too much time if you find yourself a good secretary-general and you have good people as commissioners. Then it will work." So she said,

"Look, I am going tomorrow to Bonn by mere chance for the Socialist International, and I will meet Olof Palme"—he was still alive—"and the German chancellor Willie Brandt. And I will ask them if I can do it without damaging the potentials of my party. I will get back to you the day after tomorrow." She called me the day after, and she said, "Well, you are right. I asked both of them, and they said, 'Well, if you get a good team and a good secretary-general, you can do it.'" I said, "Alright, do you accept then?" She said, "Yes, I accept." I said, "I will tell Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar, and he will send you an invitation." He sent her an invitation, and then four, five days later he called me again, and he said, "You know, I got a name for vice president for Gro Harlem, but told them that I do not know if Mostafa Tolba would be able to cooperate with him. So I said I will check with you first to see if you can accept him." I said, "Who is that?" He said, "He is a man from Sudan." I said, "Who from Sudan? Mansour Khalid?" He said, "Yes, how do you know?" I said, "Well, he is a very old friend of mine. We are friends for the last twenty-five years." He said, "Good Lord, alright, so you can accept him?" I said, "Very much so." He was the former minister of foreign affairs and permanent representative to the UN in New York. So I took the two of them and went to New York and invited a press conference, and said, "Here are the great people. To my right is the real bulldozer, Gro Harlem Brundtland. She is going to bulldoze all of us and have something good out of the commission. And Mansour is a very old friend, but he is a very tough nut, so they have to wrestle one another very well." And it went on. So, when you have good people and when you have good commissioners, you get something good. But they do not have to have a catch word. The Committee on Dams did not have any catch word. Oceans did not have any catch word. The one who is extremely, extremely clever in getting catch

words is Maurice Strong, "Earth Summit." I do not know; he has a talent for these things.

TGW: At a slightly less august level, I am interested in your view of the use of expert groups and outside consultants by UNEP or by other parts of the UN. Once again, to over-simplify generalizations, there are those who argue that these are essential; you open the window and bring in some fresh air and some new ideas. And there are others who argue, perhaps more cynically, that one usually hires consultants who say exactly what you want them to say. But for political or bureaucratic reasons it is difficult to say, so you hire basically a clone, or someone who is close, to bring out the views that are quite similar that seem independent. What, in your view, as you look over the system as a whole, has been the utility of experts and expert groups?

MT: Expert groups, I do not think that anyone can claim that they are coming to say what the people in the UN want to say. Expert groups are invited to represent a range of thinking, a range of specializations that are not available to the UN body per se. And that is one thing that I strongly support, again with a clear mandate—what do we want to get out of them, out of the expert group, which specific information do we want analyzed, what data do we want to get out of them, what details do we want from them. There must be very clear terms of reference and very clear guidance as to what we want to achieve from that.

Consultants are a different story. I differentiate between consultants and advisers. In UNEP, I had something like ten, twelve senior advisers. They would come on a regular basis, every two or three months, each of them would come and spend with me three or four days. And I raise with him or her one or the other points that are in his or

her line of specialization that I know they know better than I in these areas. So that is not preparing a report, not writing a report, they are advising me directly. And we argue for one or two days, we talk, we exchange views, as scientists, among ourselves. Consultants, unfortunately, turned out in the UN as a source of financing friends. I kept telling my own people in Nairobi when we have a job, we advertise it, we ask for the qualifications, we seek the highest qualified person. The person comes, is interviewed, proves his credentials, and he is excellent during the first three or four months, A-1 in the exchange of ideas and views. Within these three, four or five months, he becomes what I call United Nationalized. His colleagues teach him that his job is to write terms of reference for people to come and write what he is supposed to write. And that is how it went into the United Nations. And you see lists in UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), in the World Bank, in UNEP, and if you look carefully into these lists, you find in each one of these lists a friend of somebody. And he is moving from one assignment to the other, to the third, to the fourth. So each one of them having four or five of his friends. He is moving them from one place to the other. A source of funding to these people while the staff members themselves are supposed to be the qualified people to do the job. I never minced my words in telling my staff that in Nairobi, and it applies in other places. I am seeing it in UNDP, the World Bank, everywhere.

TGW: I wonder whether you would mind briefly retelling the story we had at lunch about how you moved from being a minister to a deputy executive director of UNEP when you were on a mission in Libya when a telegram arrived from New York.

MT: My relation with the Stockholm conference, as I told you, I was head of the Egyptian delegation, and I worked very closely with Maurice Strong as spokesman of the

Arab world and spokesman of the African/Arab group. And then in this small informal consultation group of ten, twelve people who spent two or three nights in a closed room trying to wrestle with the issues that were still pending. So when he was appointed as executive director—that is what I understood from Maurice—he called me from Geneva in the beginning of February, a month after he joined UNEP, and said, "I want to come and see you in Cairo as your personal guest, not as guest of the government." I said, "By all means, come." So he came and he said, "I do not want to come to your office. Can you come to the hotel when I am there?" I went to see him, and he said, "Look, I have been appointed executive director. I told [Kurt] Waldheim that I cannot run this organization with a negative attitude of the developing countries towards environment. I want to have a strong personality from the developing countries who can convince others. I want to get Mostafa Tolba from Egypt to be the deputy." And Waldheim told me that he will try his best. "So what do you think?," Maurice Strong asked me. I said, "Well, definitely I will be very happy to help with this new subject and work on it, but I am a cabinet minister and my faith is within the hands of President Sadat. If he says 'yes,' fine, if he says 'no,' then there is no way I can join you. And I cannot tell you 'yes' or 'no' without something going to the president raising the question with him." Then he left, and I forgot completely everything about it.

By the middle of the month of February, I was in Libya on a delegation with three other ministers negotiating with the Libyan prime minister, and some of his ministers an electronic research program for three days. I do not know why they were so excited about it that they put us in the revolutionary council room as if we are building a nuclear bomb. And with all the officers surrounding us with their machine guns, so we could not

get out. The food was coming inside and we did not get out until the evening. At ten o'clock at night I go back to the hotel. Every night they say that somebody from the ministry of foreign affairs called you and he could not find you. So when I arrived, I returned to Cairo. I found the deputy minister of foreign affairs waiting at the steps of the airplane. He said, "I failed to get through to you. There is something very important that has happened, and I wanted you to know." And he told me that Waldheim send a telex to the minister of foreign affairs, offering me the post of assistant secretary-general as deputy executive director of UNEP. And that the foreign minister was away, and the deputy prime minister was acting minister. He took the telex to the prime minister. The prime minister told this deputy, "This a very big offer. Please send a telex back saying that the government accepts." So they sent that to Waldheim. I said, "Is that all?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Did he check with the president. He cannot agree on lending me without the agreement of the president." He said, "Now, look, I am coming to you as a friend. You are minister, he is prime minister, you can ask him. I cannot ask him whether he did that or not." So I called the security adviser of the president. I told him, because normally the telexes go to him, "Did you see the telex from Waldheim?" He said, "Yes, they are offering you a big job." I said, "Yes. Did you see the answer?" He said, "Which answer?" I said, "The prime minister sent saying 'yes.'" And he said, "This is very strange because the prime minister had resigned and nobody knows this. And the president is in Alexandria forming the new cabinet. I said, "What do we do now?" He said, "Well, there is no way that we can contact the president because he is blocking any contact with him in Alexandria." The same night, he called me and said, "The president called and he is coming the day after tomorrow and he is going to the

central committee of the party to announce the resignation of the prime minister and that he himself is becoming prime minister. He said you are with him on the cabinet." I said, "Did you tell him what happened?" He said, "I did not dare. I told him that Waldheim sent a telex offering you assistant secretary-general. And he said, 'Nonsense, nothing doing, he is with me on the new cabinet.' So, I did not say a word. He wants you to write a note for him on science and higher education, universities, these are the areas on which he wants to concentrate in his address to the central committee." So I had to go and see the vice-president, who was my first prime minister, and I told him the story. He said, "Well, we cannot afford this for Egypt to have two decisions, one from the prime minister and one from the president. It would not work. It will damage the image of Egypt. So I am going to see the president in Alexandria and explain to him, and I hope we will clear the situation." He came back, announced the resignation, announced the new cabinet, and I was not on the cabinet, but I was appointed president of the academy under the prime minister directly, and the president of the academy attends the meetings of the cabinet, meetings when they are headed by the president. The president refused to sign a presidential decree loaning me to the United Nations for three months. Then the vice-president went to him again, and said, "This is becoming really too obvious that we are making fools of ourselves. That does not work." So he signed the decree, I think the 12th or 13th of May, and asked me to meet him at his Barrage rest house. He spent three hours with me asking about science. The minister of state for cabinet affairs was writing everything that I was saying and then he asked me, "Where is the research plan that you said was finished." I said, "It is with my deputy." "Why didn't you implement it?" I said, "Because there is no money." "Why no money?" I said, "Because the minister of

finance." He said, "The minister of finance is your very close friend." I said, "In spite of that, you instructed him not to pay a penny outside the preparations for war." So he told the minister of cabinet affairs to call the minister of finance and tell him that the president wants EGP (Egyptian pounds) 2 million, which was about $5 million at that time, for the national plan that Mostafa Tolba finalized for science and technology. Then the minister was excused. The president then got out of his desk and really went out with me to my car, and halfway when we were going out to the patio of his rest house in Barrage, he stopped and said, "I want to tell you something that nobody else knows. You have been working very close with me. You have been very honest with me. I want you to know that I am going to war in 1973, because if I do not go into war, the Egyptians will consider me a traitor or a coward. And I am not a traitor and I am not a coward." God Bless his heart. He was really something this man, and surely enough, four months later, he had the 6th of October War. It will remain imprinted in my brain, that the 6th of October War, I was the first one to know of when I was going to the United Nations.

TGW: You have been very kind. If you permit, there is one short question, and for the other, the answer may be as long as you like. The first one, and I do not think anyone else could answer this, on balance, do you think that placing UNEP in Nairobi was a good idea or bad idea? Located in the Third World was an important symbolic gesture, but logistically speaking and in terms of the way policy debates occur many people think it was a bad idea. What is your view on that?

MT: That was raised with me from the first day I became executive director, even with Maurice Strong before me. I must say, in all honesty, I am extremely happy that it was not located in New York. That is one thing.

TGW: Well, you were not under anyone's thumb there, I presume.

MT: No. Geneva, I am not really seeing what is the difference between its location anywhere and in Geneva. I am not seeing a day-to-day interaction between WHO, WMO, ILO, WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization), ITU, or UNCTAD. There is no daily contact between them. Each one of these is on an isolated island. The ones in Vienna are the same, UNIDO and the International Atomic Energy Agency. They do not even talk to one another in the same building. So I do not think that the fact that it was in Nairobi did have any influence. If it did, it had a positive influence because of the fact that the ministers were not coming only to the governing council. They were very much attracted by the safaris in and around Nairobi and they would come and spend a day or two before or after, relaxing from the business at home wherever they are coming from. The only thing was the taxing on our times, the staff, to attend meetings of other organizations, which are normal for a body which is taking the role of coordinator and a catalyst. So you cannot coordinate yourself, you have to catalyze others, and coordinate others. And that required two things. One, that we have high-level staff; D-1s and D-2s as majority in order to be able to go and talk with the assistant director general of FAO. You cannot send him a P-5, P-4, or P-3. They will send him to another P-5, P-4, or P-3. So it has to be the high-level people, which unfortunately my successor, Mrs. Dudswell, did not take into account, and Klaus Topfer is forced to cut down on the big posts because of the shortage of money that he has. So his boys and girls would not have a high standing when they go to the WHO, UNESCO, WMO, FAO, or ILO. Anyhow, these big giants, each division of them is equivalent to UNEP, so if you want to talk to anyone, you send a senior man who is knowledgeable

and can talk. These senior people were on the run all the time. And that was really taxing to their time and to their families. If it was in Europe, they could have gone and attended a meeting in Paris and come back the same day, but in Nairobi they had to spend the whole night on the plane, a day of work, and the other night going back home. But otherwise I do not think the impact was great. The fact that the people there felt a completely different atmosphere and the fact that—I do not know if you have seen the headquarters of UNEP—you have 140 acres of land and only three floors spread over part of the place, the rest is garden. Mr. Peréz de Cuéllar, when he came to visit UNEP, said, "I really envy you. Why don't you give me this office and take mine?" I said, "I'll take it with the job." Then I had a house with two acres of land, garden, where I held all my informal consultations with the ministers, who were coming for informal consultations mid-way between two governing council sessions. Normally the governing council was May, but February they would come, by invitation, fifteen, twenty. At the end of my stay with UNEP, I was unable to accommodate all of them at my home. I did not want to change the informal atmosphere. I had to say, "No," because they wanted all to come for the informal consultations more even than to the governing council itself. So they were coming home, we were sitting on stretch chairs, rolling off our sleeves. My cook was making barbecue in the garden. And we were sitting from nine o'clock in the morning until six o'clock. On some of these occasions, Princess Chulabhorn [Mahidol], the daughter of the king of Thailand, was coming as head of their delegation. She would come with her husband, the ambassador, and a team of photographers and so on. They would all stay inside the house, and she would sit with the ministers in the garden outside. They would eat their food inside and she would eat with us. That was a

completely relaxed atmosphere. At the end of each one of these consultations, I would tell them that this is what I understand that you are telling me as an advice, and I am coming with this as my own report. If you go home and you find that what I am saying to you now is completely against the view of your government, then you come to the governing council and reject what I am presenting. That is your full right that you are coming here in your personal capacity. So everybody was so keen to come to my informal consultations, and they got really sometimes upset that I said, "No, I cannot afford it." I said, "This is home, I have limited capacity. I cannot afford it."

TGW: I just wondered whether, with regard to the environment or sustainability, what do you think are the main intellectual and operational challenges facing the UN system during the next ten or twenty years?

MT: I do not think that anything will change over the next two or three decades. I think the main challenges that are going to face the UN will still be poverty, which until now, they have done nothing to alleviate; peace, which they spend too much time talking about, and there is really no real peace on earth, except peace for the strong. The third element is women, who are still not yet having their full rights anywhere in the world, including even in the most advanced countries, except probably Sweden and Norway, where they are being given so much freedom and recognition. But the thing that I sincerely hope that the UN will turn its eyes to is the youth, the people of tomorrow, the leaders of tomorrow. Who is going to really help these people and adapt their views at the national, regional, or global level? They are not having any opportunity. The tremendous political vacuum in most of the developing countries. At least in your country there are parties, they join a party, they go and get engaged in the elections of

mayors of this or that, members of parliaments, governors, something, although there is no real philosophy surrounding them. But in most of the developing countries, they do not belong to parties. They are barred from getting into parties, into the political system. Where do they learn their political agenda? Where do they learn how to lead, I do not know. We are talking of the rights of the child, human rights, but where are the rights of the generation that is going to lead this world in the next twenty or thirty years? Who is helping them? What can be done to help them? I do not think we should get the great heads of state of the world to sign declarations that they are looking after the children and the youth, because—I think—they do not want to see them as leaders. They want to remain there as heads of state or government, so somehow probably a conference of youth by the youth themselves would be useful. We did that once in UNESCO, during the General Conference of UNESCO, some thirty-five years ago. The secretary-general of UNESCO was René Matheu at that time, 1960 probably. They asked each delegation to send a representative. I was there because I was deputy minister for higher education responsible for students coming from abroad and our students abroad, so I was considered as responsible for the youth. But the rest were young boys and girls, eighteen, twenty, twenty-two, twenty-four, twenty-five years old. There were seventy or eighty of them. It was an amazing eye-opener. The first boy who spoke was one of the heads of a student union in one of the universities somewhere, and he stood up and said, "I do not know why you are inviting us. If I look at the podium, the youngest sitting at the podium is seventy years old. What do you expect us to talk about with you people?" And that is the reality. We are sitting over there, blocking their ways, keeping them from saying what they want, running the show the way we want. We can have a United Nations

conference *of* youth, not on youth. Let them talk, and come with their own aspirations. How do they want to see the world? We will probably have some reasonable, some meaningful recommendations and ideas rather than the things that are becoming stale, that are becoming clichés of the old generation.

TGW: Fighting words on which to end our conversation. I am very grateful indeed, and I wish you god speed. Thank you.

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