

Address by Mr Stig Elvemar, ambassador of Sweden
to mark the opening of the Dag Hammarskjöld Centenary Exhibition
at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina on 28 April, 2005

Ladies and gentlemen,

About a year ago, in this beautiful library, another exhibition took place, honouring past Nobel Peace prize winners. After the opening ceremony I was interviewed by one of the local TV-channels. The reporter asked me if I had any favorites among the many Nobel laureates.

I answered that it was probably not fair to compare the many distinguished men and women who had received the peace prize with each other, but I had to admit that one of them had a special place in my heart – the second Secretary general of the UN and my countryman Dag Hammarskjöld.

I was only a schoolboy when he held his high post so it was perhaps not strange that I would be impressed by an international personality like Hammarskjöld. It is only later that I understood what a source of inspiration he has been to so many other people around the world – and how his vision for a better world and a better United Nations is still valid today, 44 years after his untimely death.

For me, and many of my generation, Dag Hammarskjöld became an example to be followed. His values and his system of beliefs had a major influence on us. We learned, among other things, that all nations and all peoples, no matter how small and seemingly insignificant, had to be treated with full respect. We also learned that idealism could be combined with professionalism and, on occasion, hard-nosed diplomacy.

We can get glimpses of what kind of a man he was by reading his own words, both in the form of official UN documents and his posthumous book "Markings". In his first statement as Secretary General in 1953 he spelled out the values that would dominate his public office. He spoke then of the vital importance of Loyalty, Dedication and Integrity. Anybody who worked with him and anybody who has studied his achievements carefully testifies that these values were indeed the guiding lights for his action. The present UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, has spoken of Hammarskjöld's wisdom and his modesty, his unimpeachable integrity and his single-minded devotion to duty. He has also put forward Hammarskjöld as an example, an impossibly high standard for any Secretary General who has followed in his footsteps, indeed for any servant of the international community.

Hammarskjöld was a complex human being with many sides and wide interests. The term "renaissance man" comes to mind. He was somewhat of a mystic as we can see in his book "Markings". But he was also a good photographer and an excellent mountain climber. It is perhaps not so well known that he was also a member of the Royal Swedish

Academy, thereby being one of the very few who get to select the Nobel Prize winners in Literature.

But it is perhaps his great vision for a better world that makes us remember and respect him today. He strongly believed that the United Nations was more than only a debating forum for the governments of this world. Based on a deep understanding of the UN Charter he felt that the UN itself should be an active force for good in the world – for peace, and justice, and democracy, and human rights. He set the example that all later secretaries general have followed. His active diplomacy and steadfast integrity sometimes got him in trouble with the great powers of the day. Luckily not all of them at the same time. In this respect the world does not seem to have changed much since the fifties and sixties.

He felt strongly that the UN was not to be used as an instrument of the great powers only. Small and emerging countries should also find that their interests were reflected in the work of the world organisation. This principle won him a great degree of respect among the diplomats of many countries and peoples at the time. The phrase "Leave it to Dag" was commonly heard in the UN corridors and elsewhere around the globe.

Here, as we stand on Egyptian soil, it is particularly important and relevant to mention one of the great innovations that were introduced during Hammarskjöld's time in office. I am of course talking about the first peacekeeping mission in Sinai almost 50 years ago. This led to the development of one of the most important tools of the UN to assist

countries affected by armed conflict. To date more than a quarter of million men and women from about 120 countries have served in UN peace missions – among them some 80 000 Swedish citizens. And we are still widening the scope of these undertakings. A modern peace mission involves so much more than military tasks. Today the international community is actively assisting war torn countries and societies by a long range of diplomatic and civilian measures. Peace has come to mean more than simply the absence of war.

The creation of peacekeeping shows another side of Hammarskjöld – his flexibility and willingness to try new tools for the sake of peace. Despite his deep commitment to the UN Charter that I talked about before, he had no problem going outside the letter of the Charter if he felt that it was needed – as long as the developments were based on the general purposes and principles of the Charter.

Just now the international community is involved in an important attempt to reform the United Nations and rewrite the Charter itself. I believe that Dag Hammarskjöld would have approved.

The Charter of the United Nations is an amazing document. But it was also a product of its time and today most governments and interested citizens of the world believe it needs to be changed – the question is only how?

We are all aware that the composition of the Security Council does not reflect the world of today. Another part of the UN system – I'm referring to the Trusteeship Council - became obsolete when the colonial era passed away.

But there are other problems with the charter, and the development of the peace missions that I referred to earlier reflects one of them. The Charter assumes that the main actors in the UN system are the member states themselves, represented by well functioning governments. The Charter prescribes – often in considerable detail - how disputes and conflicts between states should be handled. But it gives very little guidance what to do when individual member states become so badly damaged by internal conflict that they implode - when the legitimate government structures cease to exist. Nor is it clear about the obligations of the international community when the government of a member state is involved in massive human rights abuses against its own population.

All these problems - and others – need to be addressed in the ongoing process. And in doing so I think that Dag Hammarskjöld's vision about a better world can still serve as a major source of inspiration.

In Dag Hammarskjöld's own words: **The greatest prayer of man does not ask for victory but for peace.**

Thank you very much.