

**RECOLLECTIONS OF LEADING WORLD FIGURES BY DAISAKU IKEDA
A BUILDER OF WORLD PEACE: DR. BOUTROS BOUTROS-GHALI
FORMER UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL**

“THIS is my honest opinion, Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali: I’d like to see you make greater opportunities to meet with ordinary people, with youth, with students. Many, many young people want to contribute to world peace and support the efforts of the United Nations in some way. The key is how to make the best use of their enthusiasm and allow their voices to have an impact. This is the responsibility of all leaders, I think. And private citizens in various fields are saying that they would like to talk with you.” This is what I said to the UN secretary-general at our second meeting, which took place at the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo in 1994.

Dr. Boutros-Ghali assured me that he agreed one hundred percent with my view. During the Cold War, he explained, the United Nations could not freely communicate or interact with private individuals or organizations. That had changed now. He wished to promote exchange and communication with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), universities, workers and other private organizations. This was a new experience for the United Nations, he added, but it was now trying to put into practice precisely what I had just articulated. And he heartily supported this new direction, he said.

Certainly, it is necessary to meet with the political leaders and government officials of the member nations as well, but in this age when the world is growing increasingly smaller and becoming more interlinked, the crucial challenge the United Nations faces is to transform itself into an organization that is not controlled by the narrow interests of individual member nations. It must represent the world as a whole.

The United Nations must become a parliament of all humanity, which places human interests before national interests. Indispensable to this end is opening avenues of communication, of input and feedback from people of goodwill around the world, people who look beyond their national interests. The benefits to be derived from the UN head engaging in direct communication with the people are surely immeasurable.

“It may be presumptuous of me to say so,” I continued, “but when we look at things from above, we can only see about thirty percent of the whole picture. From below, we can see the other seventy percent or so. When we look at issues and problems from the standpoint of the people, much more becomes visible.”

By “from above” I meant the viewpoint of bureaucrats and government officials, the face the nation presents to outsiders, and that, instead, we needed to highlight the views of the people, to focus on the human face behind the nation.

I was most happy to see that on his next trip to East Asia, Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali gave talks at Korea University in Seoul, South Korea, and Aoyama Gakuin University in Tokyo, Japan, and after both lectures, conducted question-and-answer sessions, engaging in just the sort of dialogue with youth that I feel is so important.

ON our third meeting, in 1996, in addition to expressing my appreciation for his efforts to meet with young people, I also took the liberty of suggesting that the United Nations solicit donations from the public to help solve its financial problems. The United Nations is finding itself with ever-expanding duties on the one hand and a shrinking budget on the other. Many countries find some excuse to criticize the ineffectiveness of the United Nations while at the same time withholding their due financial contributions, which are

necessary for the world organization to be effective. Dr. Boutros-Ghali noted that if just one ten-thousandth of the funds that had been spent for military purposes during the Cold War were spent on the United Nations instead, its financial difficulties would be over.

Though this is the biggest practical problem we face in the quest for world peace, no one is willing to confront it. I suggested that the United Nations adopt a policy of soliciting donations from private benefactors and organizations around the globe: "The people of the world are serious. They are honest. They sincerely want peace. Their commitment to peace can be trusted. Their goodwill can become a source of true strength for the United Nations. I hope you will find a way to summon and focus their goodwill. If you do, you will not only restore the UN financial base, but you will change its structure so that it can no longer be dominated by the interests and policies of the governments of member nations."

Dr. Boutros-Ghali promised to think seriously about my suggestion. He also voiced appreciation for the SGI holding commemorative events around the world to celebrate the United Nation's fiftieth anniversary.

DR. Boutros-Ghali became the UN secretary-general in January 1992. The Cold War was over, and there were high expectations for a renaissance of the international body as the world moved from an age dominated by the two superpowers to a new world order, centered on the United Nations. Dr. Boutros-Ghali shouldered a very heavy burden, facing as he did utterly unprecedented circumstances. He was on the threshold of a new time in history, of the sort that humanity had never yet to experience.

After his inauguration, he took up the challenge of streamlining U.N. bureaucracy, and presented a report titled "An Agenda for Peace," consisting of various concrete proposals and recommendations for making peace a reality. In his paper, he declared that the time of absolute and exclusive national sovereignty had passed.

He was right. It is people, it is life that deserves our true respect. Nations are no more than a social convention; they are a means to serve people, not an end in themselves. The absolute authority of the nation is nothing more than a myth designed to establish the absolute authority of the leaders of nations.

"The world is still in some ways in its 'Middle Ages' when it comes to international organizations and cooperation,"¹ Dr. Boutros-Ghali wrote. He was criticizing the overwhelming tendency of nations to put their own interests far, far ahead of the interests of the world as a whole. As international exchange and communication increase, there is a danger that countries, peoples or small groups who are unable to keep pace with the speedy process of globalization will close themselves off.

Buddhism teaches that if you light a lamp for another, it will also brighten your own way. Dr. Boutros-Ghali stresses that we need to teach people that, by helping oppressed peoples in other parts of the world, we also help our own nation. Only when people all around the world are concerned with the suffering of others, no matter how far away they may be; only when the tide of the awareness of global citizenship rises, can the United Nations, the ship of peace, make real progress.

We cannot close ourselves off from the world. This is the tradition of Dr. Boutros-Ghali's native land of Egypt. Born in 1922, Dr. Boutros-Ghali recalls that he spent half of his life with a view of the Nile. His present home in Cairo is near the river, too. When we first met, in 1993, he told me that he had read my dialogue with Arnold Toynbee and other of my writings. He said that as a result, he felt as if we had already met. On that occasion,

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he told me about his family and his early life.

His grandfather, Boutros Ghali Pasha, was prime minister and foreign minister of Egypt when the country was under British rule. Two of his uncles also served, respectively, as foreign minister. His cousin was a government minister as well. His was a political family. Just as a child born into a doctor's household often tends to become familiar with things medical even before going to school, Dr. Boutros-Ghali learned naturally about the world of politics from childhood so that it became second nature to him, he said. What did he learn? The spirit of devoting oneself to the public good. His grandfather was assassinated by extremists. One of his uncles was persecuted and imprisoned.

WHEN Dr. Boutros-Ghali was fourteen, Italian forces under Mussolini invaded neighboring Ethiopia and the Ethiopian emperor fled into exile. Dr. Boutros-Ghali was on his way to Switzerland at the time, and as he crossed the Suez Canal, he saw the flag of the Italians flying, symbolizing their victory. He knew he would never forget that terrible injustice.

Dr. Boutros-Ghali's lifelong goal has been to help the oppressed nations of the Third World. In the 1952 Egyptian Revolution, his family was considered "feudal" and "enemies of the people," and some ninety percent of his inherited wealth was confiscated or nationalized. He was also stripped of his political rights, but they were later restored because he was a professor at Cairo University, and the authorities assessed that he might be a valuable asset to the country. His two brothers, however, were forced to leave Egypt in order to have any hope of successful careers.

Dr. Boutros-Ghali obtained a doctorate in international law from the University of Paris before becoming a professor of law at Cairo University. At the Egyptian university, his lectures gained such renown for their high quality that students came all the way from Europe just to take his courses.

At the end of October 1977, Egyptian President Anwar el-Sadat suddenly appointed him Minister of State for Foreign Affairs. At the time, President Sadat had decided to take the historic step of visiting Israel, but he was not able to win the support of his cabinet, and the foreign minister and others resigned. He chose Dr. Boutros-Ghali to take over as foreign minister.

SINCE its founding, Israel had been in conflict with its Arab neighbors, and much blood had been spilled on both sides. President Sadat declared that no more young people must die, that Egypt needed no more such "heroes." Nor did he wish to see more wounded Israeli young men and women. Three weeks after he became foreign minister, Dr. Boutros-Ghali visited Israel with President Sadat.

It was no easy task to bring down the thick wall of mutual distrust that divided the two nations, and in fact President Sadat was later assassinated for his efforts. Dr. Boutros-Ghali's life was in danger as well, but he came from a family that knew that giving one's life for a great and just cause is the duty of those in public service. Enduring attacks from both the Israeli and Arab camps, Dr. Boutros-Ghali was responsible for all of the behind-the-scenes negotiations that led up to the Camp David peace accords and the 1979 signing of the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt at the White House.

Dr. Boutros-Ghali is a man of powerful convictions, who has proudly declared that there is no problem that cannot be solved. One must be an optimist to achieve world peace, he says. It is just like being a doctor who saves lives. You will never succeed unless you have a positive attitude.

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It is certainly true that once we start listing the difficulties, there is no end. But to achieve great things, we must find a starting place, something that we can do, and then do it. Giving up is the enemy of progress and eventual success.

Dr. Boutros-Ghali says that peace is not something we can sit around waiting for; it is something we must build ourselves. □

1. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, "Empowering the UN" *Foreign Affairs*, Winter 1992/93.

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