

THE 2007 DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD LECTURE

# UN Secretary-General Hammarskjöld

Reflections and  
personal experiences

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*Sture Linnér and  
Sverker Åström*

Uppsala 2008



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*This is the translated text of the 2007  
Dag Hammarskjöld Lecture given by Sture Linnér and  
Sverker Åström at Uppsala University on 15 October 2007.*

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# Preface

A gentle breeze of history blew through the Main Auditorium of Uppsala University, when two old but vital men, both in their early 90s, took the stage, during the late afternoon of 15 October 2007. Their speeches made a deep and lasting impression on those listening.

Sture Linnér (born 1917) worked most closely with Dag Hammarskjöld from 1960 onwards, when he supported the Secretary-General as Under-Secretary-General in charge of the United Nations mission in the Congo. He was among the last to see the UN leader alive. Sverker Åström (born 1915) first met Hammarskjöld in 1948, when both were involved in the negotiations for the Marshall Aid Plan as Swedish government officials. In the Swedish Foreign Service since 1939, Åström then served as chief of staff during Hammarskjöld's time as State Secretary for Foreign Affairs and Minister without Portfolio in the early 1950s. They developed a close personal friendship.

The year 2007 marked the centenary of Dag Hammarskjöld's move to Uppsala, where his father Hjalmar Hammarskjöld served as Governor of Uppsala County. Here he grew up as the youngest of four sons, deeply shaped and influenced by the local academic and spiritual (not least Christian) environment of this university and ecumenical centre of Sweden.

In a slight deviation from the standard format of the annual Hammarskjöld lectures, the organisers decided to acknowledge Hammarskjöld's legacy by recognising the lifelong merits of the two speakers. Both had ever since their first encounters with the Secretary-General influenced the public sphere and debate in Swedish society and left remarkable imprints on its social and political culture far beyond their professional careers.

Their presentations not only described fond memories of Sweden's highest international civil servant, bringing contemporary history to life. They were also in complementary ways significant political statements by men who had served with a similar commitment to values and norms in support of true humanity.

Some of the more moving episodes during the event cannot be captured in the printed versions of the lectures in the pages that follow. Neither do the videotaped speeches – accessible on the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation's website<sup>1</sup> – mirror the deep sense of empathy that filled the hall. The capacity audience in the auditorium could as little as the presenters escape the moments of true emotional depth that were an integral and precious part of this particularly genuine occasion. It was a historical moment itself, which those present had the privilege to witness and experience. But beyond this rare case of human interaction, the speakers were also able to share insights and information of a profoundly political and historic nature.

Sverker Åström, longstanding political commentator on current issues of international politics in the Swedish public domain, remained faithful to his image. Not only did he use the opportunity to reiterate his criticism of the hegemony of the United States and its intervention in Iraq. He also took the liberty of airing a few ideas about the role of the United Nations in dealing with this challenge.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.dhf.uu.se/DHLectures](http://www.dhf.uu.se/DHLectures) (in Swedish).

Sture Linnér surprised the listeners with some hitherto unknown details about his interaction with Hammarskjöld and John F. Kennedy and the exchanges between the two. What seemed at first hand to be a doubtful recollection of events turned out to be an account confirmed through a subsequent verification of the facts.<sup>2</sup> This makes his contribution a valuable source for historians still exploring the full interaction between the major powers – seeking to secure and promote their specific interests – and the UN Secretary-General, who was pursuing his own approach on behalf of an independent world body in difficult times, requiring similarly difficult decisions.

In 2005 Hans Blix had been the first Swede to deliver the Dag Hammarskjöld Lecture on occasion of the centenary of the birth of Dag Hammarskjöld. In his opening passages, Hans Blix had shared memories of his own childhood and student days in this town with the audience. His lecture followed those of Mary Robinson, Brian Urquhart, Joseph Rotblat, Kofi Annan, Lakhdar Brahimi, Mamphela Ramphele and Noeleen Heyzer.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> To document some of the statements we have also added some endnotes.

<sup>3</sup> All but one have been published since then. The texts are available through the Secretariat of the Foundation and can also be accessed on its website.

In 2007 two other outstanding representatives of a Swedish tradition of committed international civil service contributed in their own individual ways to this series of remarkable occasions. Like Hans Blix, they also studied at Uppsala University. Since their speeches were – as an exception to the rule – presented in Swedish, we have decided to publish them in parallel in both a Swedish and a translated English version.<sup>4</sup> We trust that readers will at least in part be able to sense the spirit that made this event such an exceptionally genuine one.

*Henning Melber*

*Executive Director*

*Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation*

*Peter Wallensteen*

*Dag Hammarskjöld Professor*

*Department for Peace and Conflict Research*

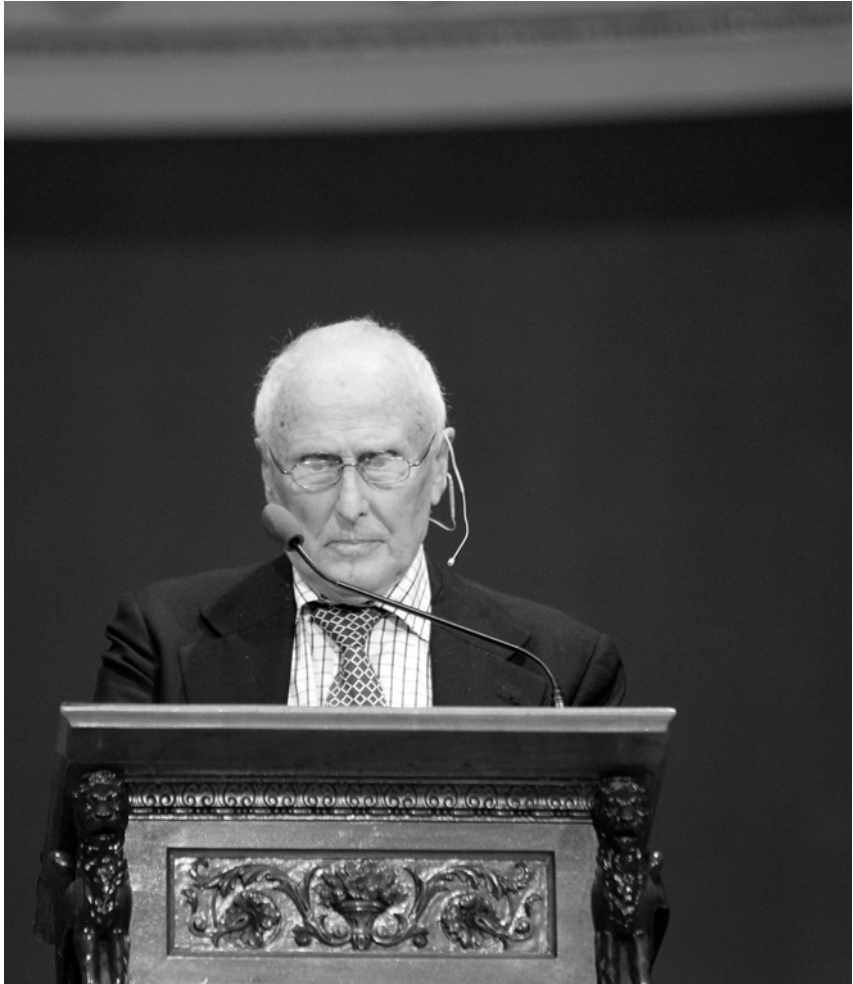
*Uppsala University*

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<sup>4</sup> The Swedish texts are published by the Department for Peace and Conflict Research and the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation. The publication, *Generalsekreteraren Hammarskjöld. Personliga erfarenheter och reflektioner*, can be purchased through the Department at Box 514, 751 20 Uppsala, ph. +46 18 471 2349. ISBN 978-91-506-1997-3.







*Sverker Åström delivering his lecture in Uppsala University Main Hall*

# Dag Hammarskjöld and International Law in the World Today

*Sverker Åström*

Gathered together here today to remember and honour Dag Hammarskjöld, it is natural that we take the opportunity to pay particular attention to the role of international law in his thinking and his actions. International law, as it is incarnated in the UN Charter, was for him the guiding light and source of inspiration, as well as the binding line of action, in everything he did as head of the UN. It was upon this that he wanted to build a world order that could ensure peace and create a foundation for the happiness and prosperity of future generations. In private conversations and in public contexts he always returned to the idea of the particular importance of international law as a shield for the interests of small states against the arrogance of major powers and the pressure they might bring to bear. With great fervour he stood up for the primacy of law over power. He used to claim that the UN acquired its real power by virtue of the fact that all the peoples of the world, those which had taken part in the Second World War as well as those – like Sweden – which had managed to stay outside, were united in a joint determination after the terrible ordeals of the war to prevent a new war. This determination finds expression in the first words of the preamble to the Charter where the purpose of the United Nations is stated as being ‘to save succeeding generations from the

scourge of war'. The absolutely central regulation in the Charter (article 2.4) is about all members having to refrain 'from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state'. The only exception to this rule is the right to self-defence against armed attack, and military action following binding decisions by the Security Council in accordance with Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

We have cause today to reflect upon these principles, which guided Hammarskjöld in world politics. First of all we may note that the world now only has one superpower. All the more important, then, that this power – which has at its disposal a military capacity unique in the history of mankind – should abide by the UN Charter's ban on the use of violence, and should in general observe restraint in its international dealings.

It is deeply regrettable that the world's strongest power, by attacking Iraq on 20 March 2003, has now infringed the fundamental rule in the Charter. That the attack was carried out for reasons that were deceptive or clearly untrue, means that the condemnation of the USA's actions is not just legal and political, but also acquires a moral dimension. To this day, the true reasons for the attack are shrouded in mystery. One may assume that it is a question of a geopolitical ideology, which, with moralising characteristics, aspires to total domination of – in the first instance – the entire Middle East and its oil resources. One could call it old-fashioned military imperialism. A quest for total hegemony is perhaps a more correct expression.

I am completely aware that contrafactual lines of reasoning about historic events are not permitted, and should be excluded in an academic forum such as this. But they can be intellectually stimulating and can shed new light upon a known course of events.

So I do not hesitate to ask the question of how Hammarskjöld as Secretary-General of the UN would have reacted to the American-British attack on Iraq in March 2003. For those who knew him well, and some of them are present here, there can be no doubt but that his reaction would have been extremely strong and that he would have seen the attack as a deadly blow to the principle of peaceful coexistence between peoples. Undoubtedly, before the attack he would have been very active in ensuring that the inspections in Iraq led by Hans Blix continued. He would – if the attack nevertheless had been carried out – most certainly have contacted the White House and demanded a cessation of military operations. This assumption finds support in the fact that Hammarskjöld on a large number of other occasions tried the response of travelling himself, or sending personal representatives, to areas where conflict had erupted or was feared (Hungary in 1956, for example). It was quite simply one of his working methods throughout his time in office as Secretary-General. He called it establishing ‘a UN presence’. In this particular instance he would surely also have proposed continued discussion in the Security Council, whose agenda would already have included the question. A majority of the Council’s members, including three states with the right of veto, had indeed already – despite considerable British and American pressure in the form of threats and bribes – declared themselves unwilling to support a Council decision that would authorise an individual state to attack. But

a continued debate would nevertheless have made it completely clear that America stood alone against a great majority of the countries of the world. It should be added that Kofi Annan, always concerned to act bravely and strongly in the spirit of Dag Hammarskjöld, did make major, albeit little-known efforts confidentially to persuade the USA to come to its senses.

It was at this stage that the Swedish government took its official position, when Prime Minister Göran Persson clearly stated that Sweden's government considered the attack to be in contravention of international law. This stand, taken on principle, has not subsequently been abandoned by the Swedish government, although Foreign Minister Carl Bildt has made some vague statements to the effect that the legal situation is not clear to him.

It is remarkable that when our new government, on 14 February 2007, presented its first declaration on foreign policy, the Iraq War was mentioned in just one sentence: 'The situation in Iraq is a cause for concern.' One had expected a clear stand and a critical comment upon this, the greatest international catastrophe since the Second World War, with almost 100,000 Iraqi civilian casualties, two million Iraqis forced to flee their homeland (about 40,000 of whom fled to Sweden), one and a half million internal refugees, and material destruction such that the country will not be able to rebuild a functioning society for generations. The gap between the West and Islam has deepened. The risk of terror attacks has increased alarmingly. The Guantanamo prison camp, that shameful blot upon American democracy, still exists and is being enlarged. The use of torture has been officially sanctioned. During the winter of 2007 there

has been a macabre argument between Congress and the White House about the use of torture. There was agreement as to its justification; disagreement as to the details of how it should be used. America has been morally discredited throughout the world, something that would have bitterly pained Hammarskjöld, great friend of America that he was.

The main responsibility for all the misfortunes and the human suffering of unimaginable proportions that have been caused by the attack and the occupation, lies with America's incumbent president, George W. Bush. But we know that there is another America, which is going to make its voice heard in a future that is not far away.

The reason that the Swedish government, both the previous one and the present one, has been so silent about the Iraq issue is evidently that it does not want to offend Washington. This is a completely wrong approach. Criticism from Sweden would be but a mild breeze in comparison with the storm of protests that is heard from domestic American opinion, and in the long term would not have any bearing on our official relations with the USA, which in our own interest must remain good. Our silence, however, means that we betray our values and traditions in a manner that will have far-reaching consequences for our self-respect and our standing among nations.

It is now the duty of the prime minister, and nobody else, to say the right words and against the background of Swedish values and ideals formulate our judgement on the American Iraq policy. He does not need to express a word of criticism against the USA by naming names.

What is necessary is a description, in simple terms, of the main elements of the peaceful world order that Sweden for more than a century has struggled for – under the leadership of Hjalmar Hammarskjöld (Dag's father), Hjalmar Branting, Östen Undén and Olof Palme – and which Dag Hammarskjöld embodied in his work. Such a description, which is quite in agreement with the leading principles behind the EU's joint foreign and security policy, would essentially be a strong critique of the American strategy as it was proclaimed for the first time in September 2002, and which evidently is intended with moralising justification to secure American world domination.

The course of events surrounding the war in Iraq has brought to the fore a problem that for many years has been the subject of intensive discussions and serious research in academic circles. Not least the Department of Peace and Conflict Research, led by Peter Wallensteen, at this university has made important contributions. I refer to the attempts to develop methods, in as far as this is possible, to predict and prevent threats to peace instead of meeting them when they have already arisen and perhaps already led to military conflict. Innumerable proposals to create forms of preventive diplomacy have been put forward, but to them I would like to add yet another, which has not previously been the subject of public debate.

My idea is that, without a change in the Charter, one should aim at an agreement, in the first instance between the permanent members of the Council, that each member should provide a report to the Council, the first part of which would contain a presentation of that particular country's view of the situation in the world, and which in its second part



would more specifically describe the risk to peace which that country considers could be expected to arise within the near future. The permanent members would provide a report annually, and the non-permanent members once during their two-year mandate period. The reports would be the subject of a joint annual debate in the Council at foreign minister level, which would start with a report from the Secretary-General, which might be called 'The State of the World', an equivalent to the American president's 'State of the Union', perhaps in the form of an appendix to the Secretary-General's traditional report to the annual General Assembly. The arrangement would be reminiscent of the methods that have long been practised within the OECD and shown themselves there to be very successful. The originator of these methods was no other than Dag Hammarskjöld.

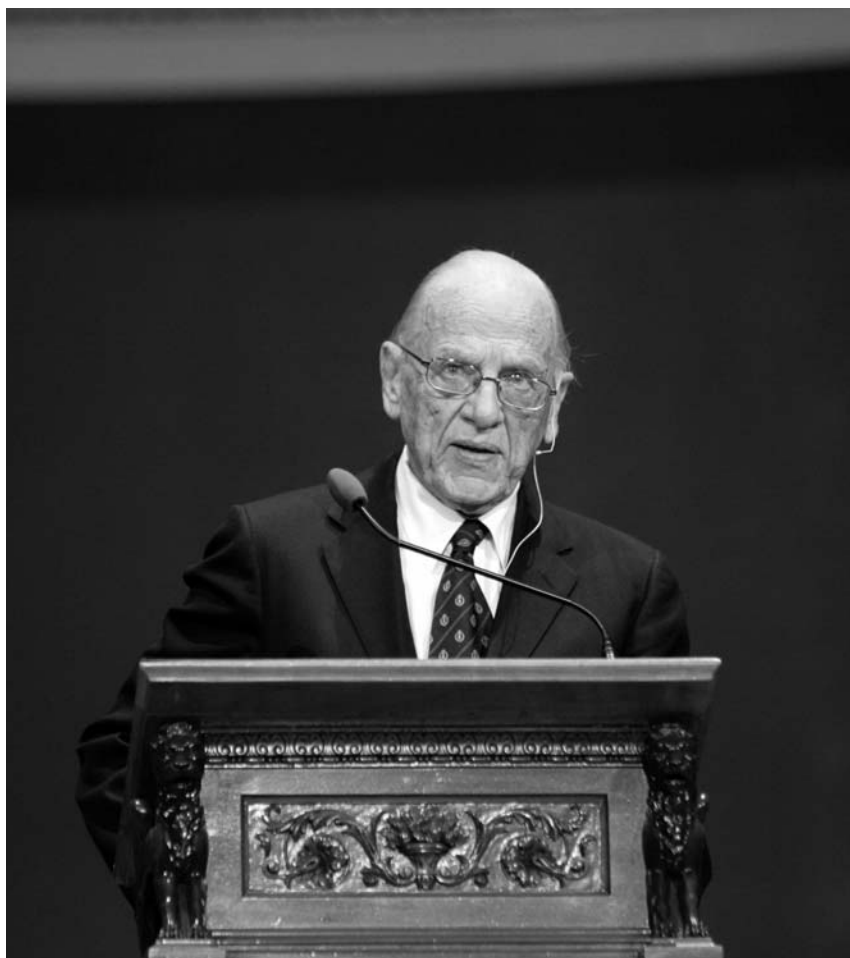
The advantages of the proposed arrangement would be that all members of the Council, in effect all the member states, would be obliged to make a serious appraisal of the foreseeable risk of armed conflict and propose possible preventive measures. An international discussion about these questions would be encouraged and, most important of all, if the reports were to point towards the dangers of an armed conflict and such a conflict nevertheless breaks out, the Council members concerned would have to shoulder some of the responsibility for the UN not having acted in time.

One of the difficulties, but not a decisive objection, is that many states would be reluctant to express their views if this were likely to lead to a worsening of their relations with the states expected to be involved in a presumed conflict.

I am aware that an arrangement such as the one I have just proposed would require long and detailed preparation. If the idea is at least deemed worthy of consideration, the departments and foundations associated with Uppsala University could play an important part. That would be a guarantee for the work being carried out in the spirit of Dag Hammarskjöld.

I would like to end these observations with a deeply felt personal declaration that I am proud and happy to have been a friend of, and in my professional life been able to work with, one of the great Swedish figures of the last century, the student at Uppsala University who became Secretary-General of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld.





*Sture Linnér delivering his lecture in Uppsala University Main Hall*

# Dag Hammarskjöld and the Congo crisis, 1960–61

*Sture Linnér*

In his brilliant book about Dag Hammarskjöld, Mats Svegfors has a chapter about the Congo entitled *In the Hell of Darkness*.<sup>1</sup> Those words are an entirely adequate description of the country that at the beginning of the 1960s became a danger to world peace, and where Hammarskjöld's intensive work to bring about some sort of order in the chaos ended with his falling to his death in the air crash of 18 September 1961.

First a few words about the historical background to the Belgian Congo that on 30 June 1960, declared itself independent under the name of the Republic of Congo.<sup>2</sup>

When Henry Stanley in the 1870s succeeded in following the River Congo right down to its mouth, he gave the signal for exploitation of the area. He entered into the service of the Belgian King Leopold II who – at the 1884–85 Conference of Berlin – had persuaded the colonial powers to recognise the Congo territory as his own realm. The monarch embarked upon an unimaginably brutal exploitation of the natural resources, particularly of rubber. At the beginning of the 20th century,

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<sup>1</sup> Svegfors, Mats, *Dag Hammarskjöld: Den första moderna svensken*, Norstedts, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> The Congo has changed its name several times. For a long time it was called Zaire, but is now called the Democratic Republic of the Congo (*République démocratique du Congo*).

the maltreatment of the population and the ruthless acts of cruelty gave rise to an international scandal, and in 1908 Leopold was forced to hand over the colony to the Belgian state, from which time it was called the Belgian Congo.

From then on the authorities refrained from the very worst forms of brutality, but a terribly strict work discipline was still practised, and discontent among the population started to ferment all the more. In the 1950s, the dissatisfaction found influential spokesmen in charismatic leaders such as Joseph Kasavubu and Patrice Lumumba. In many respects they were each other's opposites. The 35-year-old Lumumba, a tall and thin Don Quixote, impetuously charged against all sorts of windmills; the little chubby Kasavubu/Sancho Panza, 50 years old, came after him in a thoughtful manner and at a gentle pace. Their political messages, too, were totally different on essential points. Both these men, who would jointly try to save Congo so it would be able to live on in a new form, distrusted each other just as much as they distrusted the Belgian colonial power.

In 1959 rioting started in the capital, and the Brussels government saw itself forced to embark upon negotiations about decolonisation. Belgium had in mind a transfer to self-government over several decades, but already on June 30, 1960, the Congo Republic was proclaimed, with Kasavubu as President and Lumumba as Prime Minister. Five days after independence, Congolese soldiers in the capital mutinied against their Belgian officers who wanted to retain control of the army. Within a few days, the mutiny turned into military anarchy, which soon spread across the entire country.

Separatist tendencies rapidly came to dominate in almost all of the six provinces. On 11 July, Katanga region broke away from the new state, under the leadership of Moïse Tshombe and with the support primarily of Belgian but also of English mining interests. This revolt meant that the entire state's existence was at risk, because Katanga stood for more than 60 per cent of the country's entire natural resources, including such important materials as uranium and copper. (In parenthesis: the atomic bomb that killed more than 100,000 people in Hiroshima in 1945 and destroyed 90 per cent of the city, was made from uranium from Katanga).

The Brussels government flew in Belgian troops to the Congo. There then followed a period of extreme confusion. Lumumba did one about-turn after the other, and appealed to both the USA and the Soviet Union and – on 12 July – to the UN for military help. Hammarskjöld intervened with incredible speed and effectiveness. By using article 99 of the UN Charter he was able to call a meeting of the Security Council and get support for a peacekeeping operation in the Congo. The decision was taken by the Security Council at 03.25 hours on July 14. Only 31 hours later (in the evening of July 15, local time) four aircraft with UN troops landed in Leopoldville, and at the same time deliveries of foodstuffs began to arrive, following UN negotiations. The sensational success is eloquent proof of the trust that Hammarskjöld had managed to build up in wide circles. Hammarskjöld was the only person in the world who, thanks to his personal authority, could possibly have averted what might easily have caused an international disaster.

In this extremely serious situation, Lumumba demanded to be able to use the UN forces to defeat his political opponents, which Hammarskjöld naturally could not accept. Instead, the prime minister sought support from the Soviet Union. He was then dismissed from office by Kasavubu, who in turn was dismissed by Lumumba. At this juncture, Joseph Mobutu intervened; until quite recently he had been an office worker in the army administration but had rapidly advanced to the rank of colonel. Now he neutralised the two potentates and parliament, and appointed his own government consisting of a group of students (several of whom incidentally continued their studies in the evenings). Lumumba sought refuge with the UN but soon changed his mind and fled in the direction of his home province. He was captured under circumstances that have never been clarified, and was handed over to Katanga where he was murdered in January 1961.

Hammarskjöld had sent his most trusted colleague in New York, Ralph Bunche, and me to the Congo at the beginning of June, 1960. Our task was mainly to report to him about the political, military and economic developments. On July 15, I was given the responsibility for the UN civil activity in the Congo. In short, it meant that with the help of a shadow cabinet of 10 to 12 international experts in intimate cooperation with the Congolese government a new administrative structure was to be built up, economic and social life was to start functioning again and as many Congolese as possible were to be educated so that they could lead their country towards better times. When the Congo became independent, out of the population of 14 million people only 17 had any higher education. We had the support of, at the most, just over 20,000



UN soldiers who would be responsible for order – that meant one soldier per 100 sq km. They were meant to uphold the law and cooperate with an army that did not take orders from anybody, did not know if and when it would get paid and by whom, or against whom it was fighting and why.

A major problem was that sometimes there was no government minister to discuss anything with, even in the key departments; or sometimes the opposite – there might be three or four heads of one and the same department who were bitter rivals with each other. This meant that my group, whether or not I wanted it to, often and for long periods actually came in many respects to function as the real government, with representatives in every provincial capital and with experts spread across the country.

But in truth it was not just the Congolese who contributed to creating a bizarre, Kafkaesque atmosphere. Paul-Henri Spaak, then Belgium's Minister of Foreign Affairs, told me several times of the severe antagonism – stretching back many years – between the mother government and the administrative leadership in Leopoldville, between the bureaucracy in Leopoldville and the industrial circles in Katanga, and between the Brussels government and the enormously powerful Belgo-English mining interests. And interspersed with all this, the permanent split both in Belgium and in the Congo between Walloons and Flemings.

In May, 1961, I was given responsibility for the entire Congo operation and thus came even closer to Hammarskjöld than ever before.

My impression of him is that he was a *beacon of light* in the Congolese darkness. I am not going to avoid that epithet, even though it may have a romanticising ring. Of course he made mistakes and misjudgements; anything else would have been inhuman. Perhaps to some extent he had lived too sheltered and exclusive a life to be able to understand the everyday Congolese realities – he could sometimes seem like a nobly formed Ming vase among rough clay jars.

One of his particular features was that there was an atmosphere of *purity* surrounding him. When I was in his company, I felt as if much of what was grey and blemished within me was washed away, as if I experienced what the ancient Greeks called a catharsis, a cleansing. He had an amazing ability to bring forth the best within you, to get people in his proximity to grow – in my opinion the foremost characteristic of a really great leader.

As a superior he was extremely demanding – not least of his Swedish staff – but at the same time I was often amazed by the endless care, indeed tenderness, he used to get us to do our very best.

*Integrity* was another of his most important distinctive features. He was absolutely steadfast when it came to the UN Charter, even though this brought him into serious conflict with the great powers, and indeed risked leading to the breakdown of world society. Many of us remember how Soviet representatives in the General Assembly went so far, in their attempts to have him removed, as to call him a criminal, and how he rode out that storm with his principles intact. But his uncompromising integrity applied – this is worthy of emphasis – in just the same degree

to his relations with the Western powers. Let me tell of an episode that illustrates this.

One day in July 1961, in the Congo, the American ambassador came to see me to show me a telegram he had received from President Kennedy personally, something very unusual, since cables from Washington to American ambassadors are usually signed by the Secretary of State. The message, which was also sent to the Secretary-General, was essentially that if Hammarskjöld and his man in the Congo didn't change their pro-Soviet policy, the President would see himself obliged to withdraw the US from the UN. I felt my cheeks starting to burn when I read the text: now the work of the United Nations was on the verge of falling apart though my actions.<sup>3</sup> In short, the background was this: at a certain time a politician by the name of Antoine Gizenga aspired, allegedly with strong financial support from the Russians, to the office of Prime Minister.<sup>4</sup> Several Western powers and particularly the US reacted strongly to this, and demanded that the UN should stop Gizenga on his way to power. I refused to intercede against him on the grounds that the UN Charter did not allow us to try to steer the internal political development. Besides, I was personally completely convinced that Gizenga's incompetence would soon be apparent to the Congolese themselves, if he really did reach the sought-after position.

<sup>3</sup> Madeleine G.Kalb sheds light on this episode in *The Congo Cables: The Cold War in Africa – From Eisenhower to Kennedy*, Macmillan, New York, 1982, pp. 274-76.

<sup>4</sup> Later research shows the Soviet Union's uncommitted stance with regard to Gizenga. See Mazov, Sergei, 'Soviet Aid to the Gizenga Government in the Former Belgian Congo (1960-61) as Reflected in Russian Archives', in *Cold War History*, Vol. 7, No. 3, August 2007, pp. 425-37. American policy also seems to have changed when this became clear to the USA, *ibid*, p. 434.

I contacted Dag Hammarskjöld by telephone to ascertain his position with regard to the dramatic threat from the USA, even though I knew what his answer would be. And he did indeed retort, without a moment's hesitation: 'I do not intend to give way to any pressure, be it from the East or the West; we shall sink or swim. Continue to follow the line you find to be in accordance with the UN Charter.' So it went. Gizenga's support sufficed only to make him deputy prime minister in August 1961. He did not gain control of the new government.<sup>5</sup>

The dangerous episode had a remarkable sequel. When the Congo adventure for me was eventually over, and I found myself back in the UN headquarters, I was summonsed to a meeting with President Kennedy. The meeting – which took place in the Oval Room of the White House in Washington on March 14, 1962<sup>6</sup> – started with Kennedy explaining the background to his actions on just that particular occasion I have described. He had, for his own political survival, felt obliged to heed the deep aversion towards communism or extreme left views in general, which even long after McCarthy's hysterical heyday played an important role in domestic American politics. He had gradually come to realise how unjustified it was to oppose the UN Congo policy for that reason, and since it was now too late to express his apology to Dag Hammarskjöld, he wanted to do so to me. And the most powerful man in the world added: 'I realise now that in comparison to him, I am a small man. He was the greatest statesman of our century.'

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5 Strangely enough, Gizenga did become prime minister in 2006, 45 years later! See, for example, Weiss, Herbert F., 'Voting for Change in the DRC', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 18, No. 2, April 2007, pp. 138–151.

6 According to the Appointment Book that is in the Kennedy Library in Boston, the meeting started at 10.40 a.m. Also present was Harlan Cleveland, Assistant Secretary of State for International Organizations.

Besides purity and integrity, there were a number of other fundamental features of Dag Hammarskjöld's character that are worthy of comment. Some I shall pass by, since they are already well known, for example his intellectual brilliance; he stood at the pinnacle of the education of his time, as familiar with the poetry of Harry Martinson as he was with the latest discoveries within nuclear physics. And even though he sometimes devoted 20 hours a day to his important tasks, he was and remained *the eternal seeker*: he always wanted to inform himself as to the latest research within the most diverse subjects; he continually stretched the boundaries of his knowledge to the extreme. In that respect, he serves as an example for students of later generations.

Within this seemingly reserved and cold member of the aristocracy of the intelligent there was in actual fact a great measure of *tenderness, indeed love towards his fellow humans*. He once wrote some words that provide an important key to his personality: 'The explanation for how a man can live a life in active social service in full harmony with himself as a member in the community of the spirit, I found in the medieval mystics for whom self-effacement had shown the way to self-fulfilment and who had found the strength to accept every demand from fellow men in distress, and even to accept every fate that life had in waiting for them when they followed the bidding of duty. Love...for them quite simply meant a surfeit of power that they felt themselves filled with when they truly lived without any thought for their own well-being. And this love found natural expression in a resolute fulfilment of duty and in an unreserved acceptance of life, whatever it brought them personally in the form of labour, suffering or joy.'

In our conversations, he liked to return to the decisive role that his mother had played for his view of man. If his father Hjalmar, with his strict feeling of duty, stood for law in the family, his mother Agnes represented the Gospel. Already as a child, Dag's mother impressed upon him the commandment that you should love your neighbour as yourself, and throughout his life he sought to follow that teaching, even and not least towards the so-called little people in society. I remember, for example, the last night of his life when right up until dawn we were discussing whether or not he ought to go to Katanga. At about 3 o'clock Dag suddenly says: 'Has Alice had anything to eat and drink?' Alice sat in a corner and kept notes of our discussion; she was my secretary, not Dag's. But it was he who came to think of her, not me.

In one central area in societal life, he was a visionary, far ahead of his time. When I started to work under him, there were just two things that he impressed upon me. One was in critical situations never to feel hampered by the UN's bureaucratic practices, but always to act according to my own judgement. The other, and most important, was that wherever I should come to find myself in the future in a UN capacity, I should first of all acquaint myself with the *position of women* in the country. And should I find that the authorities allowed them to freely develop their resources, well then we in the UN should do everything to favour that country for its clarity of vision. That might sound obvious today, but it certainly was not so 50 years ago. Still today far too few important posts within the UN are filled by women. And not so many years ago, the then Secretary General charged me with the task of chairing a committee with the mission to determine how the organisation could best

support nursing mothers. Around the table sat 50 men – undoubtedly excellent and well-meaning men – but not one single woman!

What did Dag Hammarskjöld do in the Congo that has been of lasting value? As very much a party myself in the case, it is not for me to try to provide any judgement. One thing, though, does indeed seem to me to be a most likely answer. The Congo crisis could easily have provoked armed conflicts in other parts of Africa, even led to a world war. It was Dag Hammarskjöld and no one else who prevented that. And it is certain that for a suffering people he came to be seen as a model; he brought light into the heart of darkness. I know that during the last year of his life he came to love some lines by Pindar; let them serve as a memorial to him:

What is someone?

What is no one?

Man: a shadow's dream.

But when god-given glory comes

a bright light shines upon us and our life is sweet.

(from *Pynthian* 8)







*Sture Linnér and Sverker Åström by the grave of Dag Hammarskjöld*

## Uppsala University

Uppsala University, founded in 1477, is the oldest and best-known university in Scandinavia. Famous scholars such as Rudbeck, Celsius and Linnaeus were professors at the university. Seven Nobel Prize laureates have been professors at the university, among them Archbishop Nathan Söderblom, who was also the University's Pro-Chancellor. He received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1930.

In the same year Dag Hammarskjöld completed his studies at Uppsala with a bachelor's degree in Law. He had begun his studies in 1923, received a BA in Romance Languages, Philosophy and Economics in 1925 and took a further post-graduate degree in Economics early in 1928.

In 1981, the Swedish Parliament established a Dag Hammarskjöld Chair of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University. The university's international studies library is also named after Dag Hammarskjöld.

## Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation

The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation was established in 1962 in memory of the second Secretary-General of the United Nations. The purpose of the Foundation is to search for and examine workable alternatives for a democratic, socially and economically just, ecologically sustainable, peaceful and secure world, particularly for the Global South.

Over the years, the Foundation has organised over 200 seminars and workshops and produced over 150 publications of material arising from these events, among them the journal *Development Dialogue*.



Copies of this publication may be obtained from the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation,  
Övre Slottsgatan 2, S-753 10 Uppsala, Sweden, fax: +46-18-12 20 72,  
web: [www.dhf.uu.se](http://www.dhf.uu.se), e-mail: [secretariat@dhf.uu.se](mailto:secretariat@dhf.uu.se)

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*The Humanistic Legacy of Dag Hammarskjöld*

Noeleen Heyzer, *Woman, War and Peace: Mobilizing for Peace and Security in the 21st century*

Hans Blix, *UN Reform and World Disarmament – Where do we go?*



*The medal which Uppsala University has produced in memory of Dag Hammarskjöld is awarded to the Dag Hammarskjöld Lecturers. It is designed by Annette Rydström and cast in bronze. The obverse shows a portrait of Dag Hammarskjöld and the reverse a handshake and a text in Latin which reads: 'Uppsala University to its disciple in memory of his outstanding achievements.'*

*Photo: Jan Eve Olsson, Kungl. Myntkabinettet*



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