

The Spirit of the United Nations: Markings for the Future

On the occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the United Nations and the 100th Anniversary of the birth of Dag Hammarskjöld, the second Secretary-General of the UN,

“The purer the eye of her attention, the more power the soul finds within herself. But it is very rare to find a soul who is entirely free, whose purity is not soiled by the stain of some secret desire of her own. Strive, then, constantly to purify the eye of your attention until it becomes utterly simple and direct.”

Markings by Dag Hammarskjöld

On Thursday October 27, 2005 in conference room 3 of the United Nations Headquarters in New York, the Values Caucus; the NGO Committee on Spirituality, Values and Global Concerns in cooperation with the Department of Public Information and the United Nations Staff Recreation Council and numerous supporting organizations hosted a special event, in celebration of the 60th Anniversary of the UN and the 100th Anniversary of the birth of Dag Hammarskjöld, the second Secretary-General of the UN. The title of the event was *“The Spirit of the United Nations: Markings for the Future”*.

This event was part of a week of celebrations taking place at UN Headquarters around (October 24), United Nations Day. This particular event celebrated the past 60 years of the United Nations by remembering its founders and also to lay “markings”, of our goals and visions of the future that reflect more deeply the values and principles upon which the United Nations was founded.

Apart from highlighting many of the values in the Charter it was also a celebration for the United Nations family, and the main focus was to bring us all together to highlight the true spirit of the United Nations, and in so doing, acknowledge the invaluable contributions of its members, over these past 60 years.

It was a truly celebratory event, The conference room was transformed; we filled it with balloons, gifts of cookies, gorgeous flowers, and beautifully printed programs creating a joyous space where everyone could be welcomed into the party, which became full to capacity with over 650 people. It was a rich program, which had been created from the ideas of a whole team of people representing a cross section of the UN community and so everyone had the feeling that it was their event – so the atmosphere in the room was one of joy and unity. See printed program

During the event one video was shown where 5 key UN personnel were asked to share their reflections on what they felt was the true spirit of the United Nations. These 5 people were Anwarul Chowdhury, Under-Secretary General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UNOHR); Noleen Heyzer, Executive Director, UNIFEM; Farida Ali, Senior Programme Officer, UNICEF; Pera Wells, Acting Secretary-General WFUNA; Gordon Tapper, Chief Special Services Section, Office of Central Support Services. This video led the audience into a section of guided reflection and conversation amongst the gathering, where the participants wrote their reflections of what the spirit of the United Nations was to them, on hexagonal shaped hand made cards, each card had a quote from Dag Hammarskjöld’s book of meditations entitled *“Markings”*. These cards were then posted for 2 weeks in a beautiful exhibit at the UN.

Our main guest was the new President of the General Assembly H.E. Mr. Jan Eliasson, (a Swede like Dag Hammarskjöld). Jan Eliasson gave a great presentation on the importance of having roots (values) and wings (visions of hope). He was introduced by Mr. Shashi Tharoor who is the Under-Secretary-General of Communication, for the Department of Public Information. The program opened dramatically with the blowing of a conch shell and a lively performance from an authentic hula troupe from Hawaii, followed by a Native American presentation which included a prayer. We also had performances by the UN Singers, various video presentations, (including one which showed a wide cross-section of the UN community wishing the UN happy birthday, from the heads of departments to the maintenance teams who keep the building running). We also had children from the UN International School, who did a presentation around the preamble to the UN Charter.. The whole program was threaded together by the “voice” of Dag Hammarskjöld’s Markings reminding of us of the importance of the spiritual and values-based principles that guide us. A drum roll at the end called into the room a huge 6 foot cake stand which was an exact replica of the UN headquarters holding a large birthday cake “Happy 60th Birthday United Nations”, everyone sang happy birthday and the Hula dances lead everyone out of the conference room dancing to “Celebration” by Kool and the Gang!

It was a very uplifting event, which seemed to touch the hearts and minds of everyone present. We had many emails of thanks expressing their happiness at being part of such an event, including the president of the General Assembly, reminding many people of the purpose, and essence of their work in this “House”.

Thanks are due to so many, especially all those who helped, and those who gave their good wishes and pure feelings for the success of the program.

The event was webcast and has been archived on the UN website at www.un.org/webcast then click on archives, then Special Events, and then you will see the program listed under October 27 2005.

Here are some of the thank-you emails sent after the event:

“What a wonderful celebration. It was utterly moving and the energy in the rooms was unprecedented. . . . I think today's event summarizes best my work and feelings for the UN”
Farida Ali, Senior Programme Officer, UNICEF

“WOW! what an event. \ . . .It was truly a wonderful hour which brought many memories to someone like me who remembered Dag Hammarsjold. I literally ran into him, hit him pretty hard as he was coming from the escalators on the second floor. He smiled while his security guards frowned at me. For a long time when he would be coming down the hall the guards would motion me to step aside. Thanks for leading the planning of such a moving event”. Else Adjali, Church Women United

“What a fabulous event last Thursday! Congratulations!, You brought spirit, love, fun and enthusiasm into that space as well as a depth of meaning and a sense of community. And you did it in a well organized and efficient way...What a wonderful gift to the UN!” John Clausen, NGO Representative, Findhorn Foundation

“We are honored to have been part of such a wonderful, and mindfully prepared (and executed) event. It was truly a worthy celebration. I think the president of the GA said it best when he said he wished the UN could hold all of its meetings in the same spirit. Thank you so much, all of you, for all of your efforts. It was a work of art”. Pamela S. Meidell, Director, Atomic Mirror

“... the Staff Recreation Council was privileged to be associated with so moving and imaginative an event.” Ramu Damodaran, chief, Civil Society Service, Outreach Division, DPI President, UN Staff Recreation Council

“I had the privilege of attending the UN 60th celebration that you and your colleagues put together. Kudos to all of you for the wonderful programme! It left me feeling inspired...” Bill Yotive, Project Manager, Global Teaching and Learning Project, DPI

“On behalf of the President of the GA and his office, I would like to thank you and everyone else who was involved in the coordination and preparations of the celebration of the Spirit of the United Nations, for all your fine work and contributions to make the event such a success. I am sure that everyone in the room felt the true spirit of the Organization and also got inspiration and hope for their future work for peace and solidarity. The President was delighted to speak and thought the event to be very touching. Myself, I found it very inspiring and uplifting”. Pim Valdre, Assistant Attaché, Office of the President of the General Assembly