Thomas G. Weiss, Tatiana Carayannis, Richard Jolly, and Louis Emmerij, *UN Voices: The Struggle for Development and Social Justice* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 1-11.

Introduction

The United Nations Intellectual History Project was born because, after nearly sixty years, it was high time to trace the economic and social ideas that have been launched or nurtured by the UN system. Many of the individuals who have struggled for the cause of multilateral cooperation have had largely undocumented careers and experiences that are essential for the historical record of the 20th century. And perhaps just as important for the future of multilateralism, our intention is to introduce the world to the organization's human dimension by making more accessible the people who animate the United Nations.

Outsiders—and especially the next generation of students and scholars—rarely experience the UN first-hand but usually only through news clips and op-eds, Websites and textbooks. The world organization thus seems more a collection of boring bureaucrats than a creative center of gravity for international problem-solving.

The book presents a different view. It gives the stories of seventy-three individuals, all of whom have spent a substantial part of their professional lives in United Nations affairs, and who helped shape the organization's thinking about development and social justice over the last six decades. Their human stories, qualities, and commitments reveal a picture, not of tired bureaucrats but rather, of a focused and highly experienced group of professionals, with an extraordinary range of past and present involvements in national and international life. There are secretaries-general and presidents, ministers and professors, social workers and field workers, as well as diplomats and executive heads of UN agencies—men and women from countries all over the world.

The voices resonating here are inevitably a small and very incomplete sample of those found in the United Nations—and even among the seventy-three included, we have space only for a small selection of their experiences. We can do little more than remind readers that there are thousands of others who contribute and have contributed to the international struggle for a better world but whose voices are unheard.

We have employed the oral narrative to do what it does best, namely to give life, color, and imagination to the experiences of individuals and to extract the meanings that each attaches to them. Our voices reflect the expectations, events, and efforts of the second half of the 20th century that contributed to the economic and social record of the UN's life and activities. Whether it was the idealism of the early years of the UN, the anguish of the Cold War, or the initial euphoria and then the uncertainties of the post-Cold War era, our participants recall how their perceptions of events evolved over time, how tumultuous experiences forced themselves into public consciousness, and how they themselves changed perspectives through knowledge, exposure, experience, and the passage of time.

Who are the persons whose memories form the heart of this volume? A little over half of them served directly in the international civil service. They come from thirty-five countries, covering all of the world's regions and most of the UN's major language groups. A third of those interviewed spent part or all of their careers in academia, and a quarter or so in government service in their own countries. A fifth are women, in part a reflection of the paucity of women in positions of influence in and around the UN until recently. Most have advanced degrees, and about half studied economics, undoubtedly reflecting our focus on issues of economic and social development.

In terms of geographic distribution, a little over half trace their family origins from the industrialized "North," and nearly half from developing countries (Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America) in the "Global South." Ten per cent come from the former "Eastern bloc," and forty per cent from the "West." Nearly one-quarter of them experienced the dislocation that comes with growing up a refugee of war, or in political exile. And many share strong recollections of their families' experiences during the Great Depression and World War II. And virtually all of them express powerfully the importance of international cooperation in improving the lot of the have-nots. [Brief biographies are found in Annex 1]. Most of the interviews were conducted in English, although a handful (6 in French and 1 in Spanish) were not; English translations of the extracted interviews appear here, and the annex indicates the language in which the interview took place.

Our choice of persons to interview inevitably involved subjective choices. We chose persons in senior positions who were able to reflect on several decades of experience—but this meant missing younger persons of the next generation. We concentrated on economic and social development—and thus omitted many whose experiences were primarily in peacekeeping and humanitarian action. And we focused on the development and promotion of ideas, underplaying the contribution of many doers, not because they have not often generated important ideas, but because their contributions are less frequently written down and accessible.

We have maintained throughout the project the distinction between the "two UNs"—the forum in which states make decisions, and the international civil service. For the former, over the last six decades the decision-making arena for states has become more and more pluralistic. States are still the dominant actors in the UN, and national interests have not receded as the basis for making decisions; but nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector, and other non-state actors are playing larger roles. Success or failure of this UN depends upon governments' perception of their vital interests (or raisons d'état) and the accompanying political will or lack thereof to move ahead.

We are especially interested in the oft-ignored "second UN" of semi-independent secretariats as well as outside experts and consultants whose job descriptions include research, policy analysis, and idea mongering. This second UN is capable, under certain circumstances, of leadership and influence which alters international outcomes. We have consistently maintained that individuals and leadership matter—for international

secretariats as for all human endeavors. Success or failure in implementing ideas is, of course, not totally independent of governments, of resources, or of political support. Yet there is more room for maneuver and autonomy, particularly in the intellectual and advocacy realms, than is often supposed.

The outset of the new millennium is a remarkable vantage point from which to look back over sixty years of experience in international cooperation. The woes of our world are obvious—raging wars, glaring poverty and life threatening disease in many parts of the world, human rights abuses aplenty. Tragic events are part of the record, but there are successes as well. And they are more numerous and crucial than many cynics realize and certainly more than even many idealists hoped when the San Francisco Conference on International Organization was convened in April 1945. Since that time, there has been no world war. Decolonization is virtually complete. Economic and social development has been impressive in many instances so that life expectancies are now higher, child mortality lower, literacy higher, and malnutrition lower. In some cases, the march of democracy has led to greater political participation. Human rights norms and conventions characterize international diplomacy to an extent unimaginable even a few decades ago.

The United Nations, of course, is only part of the story—but certainly an essential chapter of contemporary history. There have been shortcomings, to be sure, and many will be sketched in these pages. At the same time, the world organization and its specialized bodies and agencies have played a central role in bringing ideas and issues into the limelight on the world stage, and helping in the concrete realization of new policies. By the standards of previous historical periods, international achievements have been striking since the signing of the UN Charter in June 1945 and the opening of the first General Assembly in London in January 1946.

But what precisely do we mean by "ideas?" We define them as normative or causal beliefs held by individuals that influence their attitudes and actions, in this case, toward economic and social development. The two types, *normative* and *causal*, are worth distinguishing at the outset. Normative ideas are broad, general beliefs about what the world should look like. That there should be a more equitable allocation of world resources is an example. On the other hand, causal ideas are more operational notions about what strategy will have a desired result or what tactics will achieve a particular strategy. At the UN, causal ideas often take an operational form—for instance, the target of 0.7 percent of national income as overseas development assistance (ODA). Causal ideas are, therefore, more specific, but they usually are much less than full-blown theories.[1] For example, if we were to begin with the sweeping ethical proposition that the world should be more just, then the idea of a more equitable allocation of resources can be both a normative idea as well as one way to improve international justice.

The recent research about the role of ideas that informs this project can be grouped into three broad categories. The first, institutionalism—such as Judith Goldstein's and Robert O. Keohane's analyses of foreign policy[2] and Kathryn Sikkink's on developmentalism in Latin America[3]—is concerned with how organizations shape the

policy preferences of their members. Ideas can be particularly important to the policymaking process during periods of upheaval. In thinking about the end of World War II, of the Cold War, or of the post-September 11th challenges, for instance, ideas provide a conceptual road map that can be used to understand changing preferences and definitions of vital interests of state and non-state actors alike. This approach helps us to situate the dynamics at work among ideas, multilateral institutions, and national policies. It also enables us to begin thinking about how the UN influences elite and popular images, as well as how opinion-makers affect the world organization.

The second category consists of expert-group approaches, which include Peter Haas's epistemic communities,[4] Peter Hall's work on analyzing the impact of Keynesian economists,[5] and Ernst B. Haas's work on knowledge and power[6] as well as more recent work by Sikkink on transnational networks of activists.[7] These approaches examine the role of intellectuals in creating ideas, of technical experts in diffusing them and making them more concrete and scientifically grounded, and of all sorts of people in influencing the positions adopted by a wide range of actors, including and especially governments. Networks of knowledgeable experts influence a broad spectrum of international politics through their ability to interact with policymakers irrespective of location and national boundaries. Researchers working on HIV/AIDS or climate change can have an impact on policy by clarifying an issue from which decision-makers may deduce what is in the interests of their administrations. Researchers also can help to frame the debate on a particular issue, thus narrowing the acceptable range of bargaining in international negotiations. They can introduce standards for action. These networks can help provide justifications for alternatives, and often build national or international coalitions to support chosen policies and to advocate for change. In many ways this approach borrows from Thomas Kuhn's often-cited work on the nature of scientific revolutions.[8]

The third category that informs our work consists of so-called constructivists such as Alexander Wendt[9] and John G. Ruggie.[10] These analysts seek to determine the potential for individuals, their governments, and international institutions themselves to be active agents for change rather than mere robots whose behavior reflects the status quo. The critical approaches of those more influenced by the Italian school of Marxism, such as Robert Cox and his followers,[11] are also pertinent. These view the work of all organizations and their ideologies, including the United Nations, as heavily determined by material conditions. The UN system has spawned or nurtured a large number of ideas that have called into question the conventional wisdom as well as reinforced it. Indeed, the very definition of what passes for "conventional" at a particular point in time in certain parts of the world is part of the puzzle that we have only begun to address.

Our oral history interviews were designed to capture important perspectives before they are lost, to preserve the memories of what it was like to be a pioneer in international cooperation. The UNIHP has an archive of those personal testimonies and recorded life narratives. The complete transcripts of the oral histories have already informed various specialized books produced by the project and will do so for the other volumes to be published in the series by Indiana University Press. The complete transcripts will be made available upon completion of the project so that researchers

worldwide can have full access to the material. We hope that these interviews will provide an essential element in solving a key puzzle in contemporary affairs, namely which ideas eventually become part of international discourse, policy, and action, and how.

In these pages, our main objective is to let the "voices" of our interlocutors speak for themselves. They are poignant and amusing, insightful and forward looking. Some are selfless, some self-serving. These personal accounts reflect despair and hope, tragedy and triumph, blindness and insight. International cooperation is so necessary yet so distant. Readers discover our interviewees at both their heroic and less exalted moments. Professional training, national origins, religious upbringing, class backgrounds, and ethnic and gender identities shaped attitudes and efforts. Many of our interviewees disagree among themselves, and we have not shied away from highlighting such differences. Views are often unvarnished and refreshing. Moreover, we do not always agree with the interviewees, and where memories attempt revisionism, we have pointed out different interpretations for historical accuracy.

Those interested in a more detailed discussion of this project's oral history efforts are referred to Annex 2, "A Methodological Note: Making this Oral History." Nonetheless, a word is in order here about oral history. It is a method of research for preserving and creating knowledge of historical events as recounted by participants. Personal testimony comes from an in-depth interview conducted by an observer knowledgeable about the individual being interviewed and of the subject matter under investigation.

Although storytelling has been used worldwide by cultures to preserve—and by ethnographers to study—family and social traditions, the use of recorded oral history as a method of social science research only emerged with the advent of the portable tape recorder after World War II. Since then, oral history has become a method of data collection that cuts across the social sciences. Oral historians locate the individual in a social context with a central research question in mind and explore constraints on the individual's life story as well as the perceived impact of his or her decisions and actions.

While it is a method of research, oral history is also a tangible *product*. As a result of the interviewer's questioning, new evidence is created, which, in turn, can be analyzed much like other historical documents. The value of oral history as a method of investigation is that it is qualitatively different from other written documentary sources such as reports, correspondence, and diaries. The interviewer asks for clarification and fuller explanations of matters; personal memory, recollection, and interpretation are key. Oral history allows for more nuance and passion than antiseptic administrative or scholarly prose. Future researchers can hear the dynamic quality of personal accounts.

One of the intentions of oral history is to ensure that the voice of the interviewee rather than of the interviewer dominates. The former determines how her or his story will be told. Nonetheless, at the end of the day we wished to be able to compare and contrast perspectives across conversations, so our interviews were conducted following a loose

thematic structure within a biographical chronology. We wished to go beyond the more traditional mode of lengthy extracts from individuals that has characterized the more popular oral histories of Studs Terkel or those emanating from the academy.[12]

We imposed our own narrative structure on the text so that readers are able to hear the voices but also understand the main themes of international cooperation debated within the UN system. A similar technique was used effectively in an effort to recount the early years of the AIDS pandemic.[13] As an aid to future research, citations are used to indicate books or important primary documents that enter into conversations.

The importance of this archival collection reflects two realities. First, there is precious little institutional memory at the UN. Second, only a few people write their memoirs after they leave or retire from the organization. Our experience with this project leaves us ever more convinced of the importance of the UN's archives and those of its specialized agencies to UN history and the lessons of 60 years of global governance.

Notes

[1] For a discussion, see Morten Bøås and Desmond McNeill, *Global Institutions and Development: Framing the World?* (London: Routledge, 2004).
[2] Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, eds. *Ideas and Foreign Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).
[3] Kathryn Sikkink, *Ideas and Institutions: Developmentalism in Argentina and Brazil* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).
[4] Peter M. Haas, "Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination," *International Organization* 46, no. 1 (Winter 1992), pp. 1-36; and Peter M. Haas, Robert O. Keohane, and Marc A. Levy, eds., *Institutions for the Earth: Sources of Effective International Environmental Protection* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).
[5] Peter A. Hall, ed., *The Political Power of Economic Ideas: Keynesianism Across Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).
[6] Ernst B. Haas, *When Knowledge is Power: Three Models of Change in International Organizations* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994); and see Peter M. Haas and Ernst B. Haas, "Learning to Learn: Improving International Governance, "*Global Governance* 1, no. 3 (Sept.-Dec. 1995), pp. 255-284.
[7] Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).
[8] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 2nd ed.
[9] Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
[10] John G. Ruggie, *Constructing the World Polity.* (New York: Routledge, 1998).
[11] See, for example, Robert W. Cox, ed., *The New Realism: Perspectives on Multilateralism and World Order* (New York: St. Martin's, 1997); Robert W. Cox with Timothy J. Sinclair, *Approaches to World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey N. Smith, eds. and trans., *Selections From the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971).
[12] See, for example, Studs Terkel, *American Dreams, Lost and Found* (New York: Pantheon, 1980); and *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (New York: Pantheon, 1970). For an overview of methods, see Ronald J. Grele, *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History* (New York: Pantheon, 1970).

For an overview of methods, see Ronald J. Grele, *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Praeger, 1991).
[13] Ronald Bayer and Gerald M. Oppenheimer, eds., *AIDS Doctors: Voices from the Epidemic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).