

Fortieth Anniversary of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library :
Legacy of a Secretary-General

Tharoor: That opens up to the panel the question of the extent to which we are in a position to fulfil Dag Hammarskjöld 's hope that the United Nations Library would become a centre for peace. Many of you have alluded to the extent to which libraries serve the purposes of peace. What do you believe that this library, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, can do to strengthen this mandate, this responsibility for promoting peace?

Thorén: Libraries are very important peacekeepers. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library has an extremely important role to play by spreading information about UN activities. In my work, in Sweden, I can see the extension of that work. We get that information through the documentation and through your website. Our users today, not only students but also researchers and teachers at the University, journalists, parliamentarians, are extremely interested. The activities of the United Nations today influence our daily life to such an extent, it is important that we have access to that information. We as librarians play an important role in disseminating the information, and we also have to act as teachers and help students understand how the UN works.

Tabb: A major concern for all libraries now, if we're hoping to promote peace, is that our libraries are becoming increasingly difficult to get into. The most notable change in librarianship today is the degree to which libraries have become fortresses. What librarians have to do, if we're going to make our work useful, if this library, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, is going to help in some way promote peace -- is to find ways of getting the library outside the walls. This is why it is so important to take advantage of technology to try to make collections available to which people would not otherwise have access. Even more important, we have a responsibility to educate people to want to see and use things they didn't even know. What role this library, the DHL, has to play in that depends on what the Organization wants its library to be. For libraries in general the most exciting thing to think about is how can you get your collections into the hands of people who didn't even know they existed and had no idea they would be useful to them. This is one of our biggest challenges and a lot of fun.

Wilde: As a client of libraries, I would echo what several people have said already. What I was particularly struck by -- it went through all of the presentations -- is a kind of wonderful, large vision of their own responsibilities and of the social functions of libraries for society. We all live in a world where it is not difficult to feel a sense of a rising tide of irrationality, intolerance, prejudice, violent actions taken in the name of exclusionary visions of the world -- not inclusionary and tolerant visions. It seems, in that sense, the challenge that all of you have put out is how you can become more active in assuming this public voice.

McKee: It's about having marvellous collections but also providing good access to those collections and making the contribution we can make visible. Somebody said to me, the problem with information is that it's critical but it's invisible. Librarians are critical but invisible. We really need to work hard to

what we need is investment, we need investment in the development of those collections, in the properties, the buildings, the places that house those collections. One thing that impressed me about the Dag Hammarskjöld Library is space -- you must not lose the quality space you have. You've got space to expand your collections, you've got space to enjoy those collections; the periodicals reading room impressed me with the sense of space, the sense of quiet and relaxed study, which is exactly right. It's about investing in collections, investing in physical spaces, inside and outside, investing in preservation, investment in automation, of course, but also investment in mediation, the people, the staff. The reason that libraries are so much more effective than heaps of information like the Internet is that libraries have librarians. It's also recognizing the added value of the staff. But underlying it is exactly your point about the need to be much more assertive, much more visible, about the value of what we contribute.

Grunberg: I'm less optimistic. The Internet phenomenon is very positive in a way but it also has some negative aspects. Many people think they will find everything on the Internet and that libraries are no longer necessary. This is a big challenge, a big problem we have to face. Probably the most important job we have to do now, through cooperation between different libraries, is to restore the necessary function of mediation. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library can help other libraries make the work of the UN better known. People don't know it very well; they have no idea of the tremendous work carried out by the Organization.

Tharoor: I was struck by a couple of comments that raise an intriguing question. In a world in which security concerns mean that libraries are becoming more and more like fortresses and in a world where more and more people think they can get the information they need off the Internet, to what degree are libraries as institutions under threat? Is there a risk, such as we are facing in the UN when, in our case, the Member States say you don't need so much money for the Library because the way to go now is to have

show that we are not an either/or type of operation, but really a both/and. And that if you don't do the core library functions, including collecting, you will not have the assets, the material with which to do this kind of outreach. I am optimistic that we are clever enough and have been at this business long enough to be able to explain that our public missions really do require both physical places and virtual ones.

Thorén: There is a tremendous amount of information available on the Internet, but we can't abandon our clients; we must help them to judge the quality of the information and help them to understand where to look for it. I have found that more and more we have to act as teachers. It is extremely important that we guide the users. The Internet can be quite confusing with all the new information resources.

Tharoor: As T.S. Elliott said 50 years ago, "Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?"

Wilde: Let me pick up Mr. Grunberg's term of mediation. Librarians have a critical role in evaluating information, evaluating quality. This is something that has not penetrated, on the whole, the Internet world. Bad information that gets into the Internet is recycled back into, for example, the print media. This has really changed the way people do their work. There is a concept in economics in which bad money drives out good. There is a parallel with information: we should be concerned that bad information can drive out good, that people will tune in more and more to things that serve their immediate purposes, their prejudices.

McKee: Media are always saying: surely, the Internet means the death of the book. And of course that is not the case. The librarians in this room know that as soon as you put your catalogue on the Web, your reservations of books go up by about 40%. Which proves Winston's point, the two are complementary, they are synergistic. What we've done is widen choice; different types of use require different media. My 16 year-old daughter thinks in sound bites because she gets her information from the Web. And she can't do that thing which is second nature to most of the people in this room, which is collating information from five different sources in order to come up with aggregated

consider the best reference websites in each of the various fields of knowledge. It's a tremendous work because you have to follow very carefully, to update the information about the websites, the changing URLs, etc. It takes a lot of human resources and money. What do we observe? Our users -- 90% of them -- go straight to the free access stations and do their own searches. Only 10% make use of the library's "selected" websites. Before the Internet, everybody knew what a library was -- a place with some selected items. The Internet is completely the basis of our work. It means that we have to be very inventive, to treat information in a different way. One way to do it is to develop our reference services on the Web, as it is done more and more by more and more libraries -- with live services. But that is also something that requires a lot of human resources. So we need to find money to do it.

From the floor

Audience (New York Public Library): Bob McKee pointed out that post September 11th there has been a 20% gain in library use, which represents lots of those people who weren't found in public libraries in the past 15 years. They're coming back. In my 25 years with the Library, the thing most asked for, in terms of UN publications, is human rights. It is still the thing most frequently asked for. The most wonderful thing that the UN has done over the last year and a half is to provide access electronically to information in multiple languages. New York is a city of multiple languages. That's the direction in which I think we need to go.

Audience (World Federation of United Nations Associations): I wonder if I could remind this audience of a third Dag Hammarskjöld Memorial Library, which is also celebrating its 40th anniversary, or just about. That's the Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation's Hammarskjöld Memorial Library in Zambia, a library funded through the generosity of the Swedish people, situated and up and running remarkably quickly after the tragic plane crash. Dag Hammarskjöld would have been pleased by this flourishing library, I think, for three reasons. First, along the front of the library, texts have been engraved, taken from his book *Markings*. One of them is his saying that in our generation the path to holiness necessarily passes through the road of action. Secondly, I think Hammarskjöld would be especially pleased because Zambia is the first country in Africa, as far as I know, that managed a peaceful transfer of power when President Kaunda lost the election and President Chiluba took over -- a mark of democratic wisdom. Thirdly, this library is situated in Zambia, in southern Africa, a region of a very strong concentration of least developed countries, an area of poverty. I'm sure he would feel it's good for a library bearing his name to be a focal point for developing education as fast as possible in that region. Some of our distinguished panellists might like to recall that this library exists and it certainly needs their support.

Tharoor: I have my own Dag Hammarskjöld quotation up on a wall: never for the sake of peace and quiet deny your own experience and convictions.

Mangla: I find myself in a familiar environment, talking about the Internet and the future of libraries. You have to look at it from various national and international perspectives. In most developing countries, the Internet is just a topic for discussion. As a professor

rights, women's issues, sustainable development, and so on. What we've seen in the last 20 to 30 years is the evolution of a number of very large bodies of knowledge, which we have no taxonomy to deal with as traditional librarians. I speak as the representative of an organization that is one of the principals of the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules. Where is all this stuff in that, or in Dewey, or even in LC [Library of Congress Subject Headings]? There is a disjointedness here, a dis-functionality between these very important and very complex academic, scholarly, intellectual issues, a failure, perhaps, of our profession to address the ordering of that knowledge in our traditional core discipline of cataloguing and classification.

between the UN and the public library community might have some added value in terms of access. You mentioned specifically the cost of information on the Internet. The solution, in part, in those areas where such a thing exists, is access to the Internet through the public library -- it needs to be free. That freedom has two principles underpinning it. One is freedom from cost; the other is freedom from filtering. Which is why the American Library Association is exactly right to challenge the U.S. Government on imposing filtering on public libraries.

Tabb: Many of these issues become intertwined. We need to embrace the Internet. It is the largest publishing medium in the world today. If librarians take an adversarial role to the Internet and consider it to be an enemy, we are dead. What we must do is think about integrating it, and one of the things that we regret in many respects at the Library of Congress is that we started talking about the National Digital Library, and I think we should have been talking about is a national library that has digital aspects to it. The lead here has been shown by Harvard, which has talked about its digital initiatives and not about being a digital library. So integration or coherence is an extremely important aspect of all this. Another is

legacy to the world today is a tremendous library at the UN and a worldwide system of depository libraries as a living force in international affairs, working for the ideals and the true spirit of the UN.