

**THIRTEENTH LALIT DOSHI MEMORIAL LECTURE**  
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**MUMBAI**

**THE UNITED NATIONS IN A CHANGING WORLD**

**DELIVERED BY**

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Mrs. Pratima Doshi, Bharat, Mr. Johny Joseph, Mr. Bongirwar, Mr. Premkumar, Mr. Sahni and distinguished ladies and gentlemen. Bharat asked me a question whether I would be writing my memoirs. I have been very wary of people who write memoirs, because the strange thing that happens when you write memoirs is all the significant things that happened in the posting where you are, seem to have happened during your tenure. And somehow the element of personal vanity can't be taken out of yourself when you try writing. So I have at least for the present decided that I won't write any memoirs. But I would like to thank you for the very warm and touching comments you made. For me, I had thought, that by agreeing to come to the Lalit Doshi Memorial Lecture this year, I would be giving to the memory of Lalit, something which I owed to him for a longtime. But having come here I have discovered something quite different. His memory has given to me over the last two days, so much...so many things about Mumbai, about my friends that I think the balance has somehow once again tilted in my favour. So I still feel I owe him an enormous debt.

I am most grateful to the Lalit Doshi Memorial Foundation for the honour you have done me by inviting me to deliver this Thirteenth Lalit Doshi Memorial Lecture here in Mumbai, the city of my childhood. For many years I have shared with Lalit the same desk and bench at College. Then, as now, I was struck by the unobtrusive seriousness of his demeanour, the fire of devotion to duty that burned so steadily within him as well as the gentleness and compassion with which he engaged his friends and colleagues. These qualities resonated strongly with us, his friends. Over the years I have preserved the memory of Lalit Doshi as a person of deep inner spiritual integrity as well as of strong practical wisdom. Adi Shankaracharya's *Viveka Chudamani* has a reference that goes something like this:

शान्ता महान्तो निवासन्ति सन्तो  
वसन्तबाल्लोकहितं चरन्तः ।  
तीर्णाः स्वयं भीमभवार्षां जना -  
नहेतुनान्या नपि तारयन्तः ॥37 ॥

(There are peaceful and magnanimous saints who live... like the spring season... for the good of humanity. They have crossed the dreadful ocean of finitude through their own efforts and with no ulterior motives they also help others to cross it.)

I see this evening amongst the audience a large number of my personal friends and colleagues from school and college and I am truly overwhelmed by the warmth and affectionate embrace that I have received over the last two days from each of them.

I have returned to this city now after 40 years almost to the month. I left in July of 1967. Bombay has been the city of my childhood; it has nurtured me physically, intellectually and emotionally. I have experienced many hopes, anxieties, disappointments and frustrations, especially during the fragile period of my adolescence. What I feel towards this city is an immense sense of gratitude; for all it has done to me. Now that I come here, I sense the gratitude somewhat like a child feels to its mother.

I was tempted while thinking about this lecture, to begin my remarks by looking back forty years to the time when Lalit and I had made our beginnings in our chosen careers. These were years of profound change in India; the first post-Nehru general election gave the Congress only a tentative victory at the Centre and saw challenges to its leadership in several states. The rupee had been devalued only months earlier and famine ravaged Bihar. The green revolution had begun to take seed but the pace and desperation of food imports continued. It was a time of immense domestic preoccupation. One telling instance of this was the election defeat, in this city, of the man who had for so many angry years given India voice at

the United Nations. I remember seeing V.K. Krishna Menon being trounced at the elections around that time.

It was also a time of highly charged political debates at the United Nations. These debates were initiated, speedily deliberated and as swiftly abandoned once polemical points had been made. More important than victory in getting a decision at the United Nations, was the opportunity to grandstand. For countries on both sides of the Cold War divide, the international assertion of a cause was directed mainly to domestic or bilateral audiences. But the same United Nations had, in 1967, dealt in agonizing detail with the political consequences of the Six-Day War and adopted a landmark resolution (Security Council Resolution 242) on the Arab-Israeli conflict. As I recall these details today I see them as depicting, in a snapshot manner as it were, both the high promise as well as the abject sense of futility that this organization projected to the world at that time.

This was also a time when press coverage of UN events was nominal. The media itself was largely cynical of a UN that, while unable to assert itself in Vietnam, remained hostage to superpower rivalry in its conference rooms. Global civil society was, as yet, nascent. The United Nations' support for the economic and social advancement of the world's peoples was not yet a source of agitation outside the corridors of government. In short, it was a United Nations still somewhat removed from the purposes and principles that had animated its Charter.

In his first address to the United Nations General Assembly in Paris in 1948, Jawaharlal Nehru observed that “however good the ends, the larger ends of the United Nations, or the lesser objectives which we may from time to time have before us either as individual nations or as groups of nations, it is important that we should remember that the best of objectives may not be reached if our eyes are bloodshot and our minds clouded with passion. Therefore, it becomes essential for us, for a while, to think more of how we are doing things than what we are aiming at, even though we should never forget what we are aiming at.”

That precept underscored India's involvement with the United Nations in every sense. From the lofty ideals conceptualized by its policy makers to the nimble procedural footwork practiced by its diplomats, India's role in the United Nations during its formative years was built on the assumption that the tenets of faith and practice that shaped its national self-image would find expression in this world body. That image was animated by the determination to end political subjugation, economic deprivation, ethnic discrimination and by a commitment to the Nehruvian ideals of non-alignment and peaceful coexistence. Indeed, India sought to energize the United Nations with these ideals even before its own independence. As a participant in the 1945 San Francisco Conference that drafted the Charter of the United Nations, India proposed as one of the purposes of the United Nations, the objective *“to promote recognition of fundamental human rights for all men and women, irrespective of race, colour or creed, in all nations and in all international relations and associations of nations one with another.”* This initiative anticipated, more than a half century ago, one of what is widely recognized as the three pillars of the United Nations today--- peace, development and human rights. But, in 1945, the world was not ready for that initiative. In fact that paragraph was not adopted.

At a purely conceptual level, the logic of these pillars, which are now seen as so self evident, is not difficult to understand. The essentiality of peace, not just between nations but within them, was central to the United Nations representing a successful universal experiment of nations collectively living and working together and reaching out to each other.

Today, that experiment rests upon inter-connectivity, inter-dependence and, indeed, on our intra-vulnerabilities. It has found cultural and technological resonance in the creation and energetic use of a global communications space, whether through satellite or the Internet. This experiment has also found profoundly human meaning in the definition of globally accepted norms that moved beyond the boundaries of national sovereignty to govern the response affecting every individual's social and human needs. With the spurring of entrepreneurial innovation and the creation of markets on a planetary scale, products and life-styles

that were once wholly indigenous and local have radically changed. As the borders of nations and minds have blurred, the experience of multilateralism has led to a search for universal solutions to universal problems whether they related to terrorism, environmental fragility or deadly disease.

Emblematic of this success of the United Nations is the realization that the ultimate beneficiary of international cooperation must be human aspiration. We all agree that the world is changing. What I wish to suggest to you today goes beyond that. Simply put, I would argue not that the United Nations has changed because of a changing world, but that the world itself has changed, and continues to change, because of the United Nations. And much of the impulse for that change can be sourced to founding members of the organization like India.

In putting forward this argument, I do not propose to make a chronological description in going back to history or to engage in any complex thematic analysis. The time available for this talk does not allow for that level of leisure or detail. I hope that in bringing linkages between times and themes I shall also be able to show you the very inter-connectedness that is at the heart of the United Nations.

Very early in the life of the United Nations, member states saw the value of consciously investing their national human resources in parts of the world remote in strategic interest. The commitment to what is today called “peacekeeping” saw countries like India willing to place their military and diplomatic skills and personnel at risk in distant conflicts. The paramedical unit provided by India to Korea in the early fifties and the more than 12,000 Indian troops sent to the United Nations Emergency Force in West Asia between 1956 and 1967 are early examples of this varied and yet consciously considered investment.

A half-century later, we take for granted not only the immense and multi-national character of United Nations peacekeeping but also the involvement of regional groups of States in wholly external situations, whether NATO in

**Afghanistan or the European Union in Kosovo. That the world has changed to allow such human and material involvement, rather than purely political or moral involvement is a tribute to the conceptual entrepreneurship of the United Nations nurtured under considerable political and military risk. Today this has proven to be viable burden-sharing in a financial as much as political or operational sense. A Rand Corporation study recently estimated that the United Nations currently deploys over 80,000 soldiers and police in nineteen different countries for the cost of some \$ 5 billion per year. This makes the UN the second largest provider of expeditionary forces in the world, after the US but ahead of NATO, the EU and the AU. The UN spends in one year in all nineteen of these missions about what it costs the US for one month's operation in Iraq.**

**It is relevant that of the nineteen operations, most if not all are in theatres of inter-State war, and as many as nine are within individual States. The intra-State premise was nurtured in the early sixties in the Congo, not recently as is commonly believed, following the request of a sovereign government for United Nations assistance in the face of civil war. The Security Council at that time too talked about the need to prevent the occurrence of civil war! in the Congo and to take measure to prevent this. In the event, the United Nations embarked upon the then biggest single military assistance operation organized and directed by itself where States, such as India, agreed to participate diplomatically and militarily in a domestic situation and where Nehru dispatched with alacrity a brigade and, subsequently, individuals of distinction including General Inderjit Rikhye and Ambassador Rajeshwar Dayal.**

**For Nehru, the situation in Congo epitomized the dangers inherent in the transition from colonial subjugation to independence. Coincident with the emergence of the crisis in Congo, in the second half of 1960, member states at the United Nations adopted a declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples. This resolution, the famous "1514 Resolution," included a paragraph stating that "inadequacy of political, economic, social or educational**

preparedness should never serve as a pretext for delaying independence.” It was an exultant formulation, reflective of the fact that as many as seventeen African countries had gained independence in the course of that one year. The resolution, however, fell short of expressing how the newly free nations were to cope with the inadequacies they faced in a world that was only putatively one of sovereign equals.

A month after the adoption of Resolution 1514, President Kennedy, in his inaugural address, reached out “to those peoples in the huts and villages of half the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery” and pledged “our best efforts to help them help themselves.” It was a pledge that was soon translated into the proposal to launch a Development Decade. It was a remarkably visionary proposal but even in its infancy there was the realization that economics alone were insufficient. Secretary-General U Thant, in a foreword to a UN-compiled publication on the development decade observed that “development is not just economic growth, it is growth plus change.” The publication itself spoke of the dangers of human rights being submerged if material aspects of growth were given over-riding and disproportionate emphasis without reference to concerns of equity.

A number of changes at the United Nations derived from this evolution of a people-centred development strategy, coupled with the dramatic increase in the numbers of the world’s politically independent, but often economically straitened, peoples.

Most significant was the extension of the peacekeeping model into one of peace maintenance and enhancement through a direct linkage with the well-being and security of individuals. This, in its turn, transformed the Organization from an essentially Headquarters based institution into one with a varied and vibrant field presence. Its funds and programmes ---entrusted, among others, for children, women, refugees, development and human rights---together with specialized agencies like the WHO and FAO became overwhelmingly field based, and the notion of a “United Nations country team” emerged. The United Nations emerged from an earlier role as catalyst to one of active partner in domestic change. So

successful have these many partnerships been, sustained as they are by cooperation with both governmental and inter-governmental agencies, that their very prevalence has raised issues of overlap and ambiguity. Today the imperative of coherence in a system-wide United Nations strategy has become a major preoccupation for the new Secretary-General.

The vast field presence has also prompted a normative change in the thrust and authorship of United Nations policy. A human thrust, which sees people as both the beneficiaries and the agents of positive change depends on benchmarks that are commonly understood. The United Nations has succeeded in translating statistics-based economic intention into practical objectives; nowhere is this clearer than in the Millennium Development Goals which highlight both the problem and the achievable solution in un-nuanced fashion. One has just to consider that world military spending now exceeds \$1.2 trillion. If even 1 per cent of this amount was redirected towards development, the world would be much closer to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Scholarship, national experience and civil society assessments have all made clear, for instance, that the halving of global absolute poverty by 2015 *is* doable. What is remarkable is that the entire United Nations membership has accepted this and, logically, each nation's responsibility to work towards that goal and to be accountable in their efforts to so do. Since their establishment in 2000, the Millennium Development Goals have become a universally shared framework for development.

What is also remarkable, as I suggested earlier, is the authorship of the series of proposals that culminated in the Millennium Development Goals. During the initial stages, these Goals were entirely crafted within the Secretariat and in a real sense reflected the salience of the office of the Secretary-General. Although identified as a principal organ of the United Nations in its Charter, the Secretary General has historically deferred to the membership in authoring proposals for action. An American scholar, Kent Kille, in a study of United Nations Secretaries-General has ascribed qualities to three of them: Dag Hammarskjold the visionary, Kurt Waldheim the manager and Kofi Annan, the strategist. I shall not comment on

how apt these labels are, but there is no disputing the imprint of the individual upon the office. To my mind, Kofi Annan's strategy of allowing independent consultative processes to formulate proposals gave him a good basis to make recommendations to Member States. It created a non-partisan, and at times non-political, congruence of national interests that served an important international end. He did this also in relation to questions of peace, security and human rights during his last years. Based on recommendations from a high-level panel, he won support for new institutions and mechanisms to nurture post-conflict societies, to promote democracy, to respond with agility to emergencies, to set standards for nations as they deliberated upon human rights questions and to acknowledge a United Nations responsibility that extended beyond governments to peoples in need of protection. Today this responsibility is being pursued by the new Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon outside the glare of publicity but vigorously and deliberately in the areas of the world where human vulnerability is most in evidence such as in Darfur, Congo, Haiti, etc. Secretary General is currently, in fact, on a visit to Haiti.

But some basic questions may well be asked of the organization: How far has the United Nations succeeded in helping the people of the world avoid the scourge of war or to provide even a modicum of security to its nations and peoples of the world? How far has this quote "parliament of man" ("Locksley Hall" Alfred Lord Tennyson in 1837) changed the universe of discourse around the world from the power politics of the major players to a reasoned dialogue between nations as equals irrespective of size and status? Why has the UN failed to bring stability to the Middle East or to avoid the precipitous decline into civil war in Iraq? These are critical questions that need to be asked continuously even though the answers to them are difficult. Our answers must take account of the fact that *au fond* (at the bottom or at the base) the United Nations can deliver only what member states especially the veto wielding powers are willing to agree to. Where unilateral action is taken on the basis of the perceived contingent interests of one country, or where the majority view is rejected, the organization can best serve the interests of peace by a steady persistence in re-addressing the issues, in re-centering the debate as it were,

without provoking confrontation, the patient mobilization of public opinion in the direction of peace and principle and a realistic preparedness to work in the medium term with sub-optimal alternatives. Having said this, however, no Secretary General can escape the responsibility as “secular pope” of giving strong voice to the conscience of the world community.

In this insecure world, the United Nations cannot afford to ignore giving priority to the goal of eliminating weapons of mass destruction or WMD, while preventing both their geographic spread and potential acquisition by terrorists. These priorities are especially important with respect to nuclear weapons.

But the issue of nuclear disarmament has caused major division and polarization among member states -- specifically between states with and without such weapons, and between North and South. While virtually all states agree that the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is the fundamental instrument seeking to achieve disarmament, non-proliferation, and to promote peaceful uses of nuclear energy, an important aspect of the NPT, there remain, however, wide differences over the relative priorities of these activities. Everyone is aware of the differences that bedeviled the Review Conference in 2005 and the continuing debates on this issue today.

Despite what may appear from the daily images in the media of violent deaths across the world, it is pertinent to note that in overall terms during the past decade there has been an almost five-fold decrease in deaths from civil and international conflict. During the 1990s such deaths averaged 200,000 per year. In 2003 they came down to 27,000. This is again a Rand Corporation Study. There is little doubt that this statistic is seriously dented by the violence witnessed over the past several months in Iraq but there can be little argument either that the overall decline in the number of wars and casualties is ascribable largely to the efficacy of UN peacekeeping and nation-building around the world.

Since the end of the Cold War, the United Nations has assumed a range of unprecedented responsibilities central to a changing world and, in the process, given practical direction to globally accepted norms of democracy, participatory governance, the rule of law and, ultimately, the rights of the individual. It has conducted elections in sovereign states and helped structure the bases of their administration, including the civil service, the judiciary and the police and the media. It has sent inspectors to verify compliance with international commitments. Through the International Criminal Court and other specific Tribunals, it has brought to trial public figures, including those who have served as Head of State. Through new instrumentalities like the Peace Building Commission, it has consciously fashioned post-conflict reconstruction efforts in fragile societies emerging from war and internal strife addressing complex institutional and developmental challenges.

India's attitude to these improvisations has been, largely supportive. India has become much more willing to accept a role for the United Nations even in its immediate strategic neighbourhood; the United Nations political mission in Nepal offers the most recent instance of this readiness to accept the new and evolving rules of the game as well as its consciousness of its own responsibilities. But, having been privileged to have been associated with the courage of India's initiatives in bilateral relationships, particularly with China and Pakistan, I would argue for a bolder, less risk-averse approach at the multilateral level as well. If I may borrow a phrase from Ambassador Frank Wisner at the Tenth Lalit Doshi Memorial Lecture, India can play a role in world affairs congruent with the weight of her billion people, her industry and her intelligence.

India should not shy away from doing so. India cannot afford to forget the very real leadership role we have been called to assume at the United Nations both by virtue of being a founder Member even before its independence and, for twenty-five years, being the major Asian presence, in the absence of a China that had yet to be admitted. It is a role that India can in many continuing senses claim, and in other senses can reclaim.

What is heartening is that such a role is largely congruent with that of the United Nations itself in defining the areas with which it should be substantively engaged. Nowhere has this definition been clearer than in the sequence of international conferences on specific subjects which have helped refocus both the global agenda and to enlarge the conversation beyond governments to civil society, the academic community and the private sector. In that sense, the change the world has seen has been largely determined by the United Nations and it should be a matter of little surprise that some of the compelling items on this agenda have been those that a country like India has steadfastly sought to introduce into the global discourse. I might add that in the global compact many Indian companies have been at the very forefront of defining the roles of corporate social responsibility that came up under the Global Compact Initiatives suggested by Secretary General Kofi Annan .

At the Stockholm Conference in 1972, Indira Gandhi spurred a whole new dimension to deliberations on the environment when she spoke of poverty as the greatest polluter and set the tone for a global challenge of competing ideas and options on the preservation of our planet. This competition has survived the vicissitude of scientific fact often being at odds with political conviction or economic expediency. Equally important, it has infused a scientific and technical debate with an economic and political urgency that is no less than the one relevant to human rights. We have not seen a similar *chutzpah* on India's part in approaching the climate change debate today.

If the world has come to acknowledge the multi-dimensional character of the perils it confronts, the United Nations can claim to provide the most assured means of integrating a viable response to them. In a context where terrorism is far more than a matter of law and order or HIV/AIDS far more than a health concern, the United Nations remains responsible for anticipating as much as addressing the larger context of each. To effectively do so, it must be backed not only by a supportive membership and a dedicated Secretariat, but by institutions whose structure, agility and procedures are equal to the demands placed upon them.

**There is, of course, the need for reform of the United Nations. I know the subject of reform is very dear to the hearts of most Indians, but it seems to be focused only in one area, which I had to address even yesterday.**

**A Security Council that is representative of current rather than an obsolete global power structure is an obvious necessity. While the balance between representative-ness and efficiency needs to be maintained, any reform of the institution must allow it to creatively contribute to solutions to the many intractable political issues rather than be purely situation-driven. If the General Assembly is to truly foster the possibilities of a globally consensual course of political and economic action it has to go beyond the temptation to navel gaze or provide a forum for pre-crafted assertions of national positions. Imagine the legislative muscle of any reformed Economic and Social Council that can derive policy options from sources that are nationally experienced, academically sustained and non-governmentally championed to redress some of the enduring inequities of our time.**

**None of these goals is un-realistic. With the dramatically enhanced visibility of the United Nations, thanks to the relentless pace of global media and conversation, expectations of the Organization are at an all-time high. And I would venture to say in most parts of the world those expectations are matched both by the hope that the United Nations *will* succeed in meeting them and that it *can* succeed. That conviction stems from the realization of the growing fragility today of the boundaries between the afflicted and the secure, the affluent and the needy, the healthy and the indisposed, the refugee and the giver of refuge. There is, in fact, an inexorable link between the one and the other.**

**Allow me to quote from someone whose expectations and experience of the United Nations animated his desire to serve it at its highest level. “It has been a long journey from my youth in war-torn and destitute Korea to this rostrum and to these awesome responsibilities,” remarked Ban Ki-Moon on assuming office as Secretary-General. “I could make the journey because the UN was with my people in our darkest days. It gave us hope and sustenance, security and dignity. It showed us a**

**better way. So I feel at home today, however many miles and years I have travelled. For the Korean people, the UN flag was and remains a beacon of better days to come. There are countless stories of that faith. One belongs to me. In 1956, when the cold war was raging around the world, as a young boy of 12, I was chosen to read out a public message on behalf of my elementary school, addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Dag Hammarskjold. We urged him to help the people of a certain faraway Asian country in their fight for freedom and democracy. I hardly understood the deeper meaning of the message, but I knew that the UN was there for help in times of need.”**

**Today’s world no longer possesses the luxury of any time free of need. Danger, deprivation and despair threaten to erode democracy, decency, and decisiveness. But the threat can, and must, be averted. If a changing world finds itself increasingly imperiled by the first three, danger, deprivation and despair, the United Nations can be invigorated only by the next three, democracy, decency, and decisiveness. In the process, we can help restore the world’s own equilibrium and assurance and allow our collective energies to be invested in what Secretary-General Ban ki-Moon has called “our common enterprise in upholding humanity’s deepest values and highest aspirations.” Mahatma Gandhi’s remark that “peace between countries must rest on the solid foundation of love between individuals” may strike some as quaint or outmoded but I believe that, in its essence, there is no truer or more apt idiom for the underlying logic of the United Nations today. Whether you choose to call it love, or compassion, or sharing, the core truth remains that there can be no value deeper, or aspiration higher, than the readiness to care for, and to be cared for by the “other”. That remains the most valid vindication of the faith, so eloquently reaffirmed in the UN Charter, of the “dignity and worth of the human person.”**

**In a tribute, written two days after Lalit’s untimely death, his senior colleague, S. Shankar Menon, compared him to “a lotus leaf floating on water and still untouched by it.” There is a Chinese poem, in ancient China also, which talks about the lotus being the flower of the recluse and says more or less the same thing.**

**This is a powerful metaphor that resonates with the United Nations too. This organization offers opportunities for global thinking moored in the inevitabilities and possibilities of the future rather than the momentary realities of the present within which it is anchored. Botanists tell us that the lotus is an aquatic perennial, but if its seeds are preserved under favorable circumstances, they may remain viable for many years. So too, I would venture to say, with the United Nations. This organization is given constancy by the hopes and expectations invested in it, and yet it is the continuing source of change in itself and in the world. These seeds will flower and flourish only if the world remains gentle and kind to itself.**

**Thank you**