

Tällberg Forum 2005

A Festival of World Music and the Music of the World

Open-air Concert

Dedicated to Dag Hammarskjöld on the Centennial of his Birth

“Reflections on a Waymark”

Address

by

Hans Corell

Ambassador

Former Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and the
Legal Counsel of the United Nations

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Friends,

“Occasionally some man with exceptional power of statement or of feeling and possessed by the true missionary spirit, will deliver a message to the world, putting old truths in such a way as to bite into the consciousness of civilized peoples and move mankind forward a little, with a gain never to be altogether lost.”

The quotation is from a speech by Elihu Root, accepting the Nobel Peace Prize for the year 1912. Elihu Root was a former U.S. Secretary of State.

In 1961, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded a man who fits this description perfectly: Dag Hammarskjöld. Needless to say, he also contributed some new truths. The Prize was awarded posthumously. Dag Hammarskjöld, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, had died on 17 September 1961 in a plane crash at Ndola in Africa.

This year, we are celebrating the 100th anniversary of Dag Hammarskjöld’s birth through different manifestations in Sweden and elsewhere. Our gathering tonight is one of them.

What would Dag Hammarskjöld have wanted to be said tonight – in a brief moment at the beginning of a festival of world music and the music of the world? One thing is clear: he would not have wanted the focus to be on himself.

This is all the more so, since our concert is held on the eve of a Tällberg Forum workshop entitled *How on Earth Can We Live Together?*

Dag Hammarskjöld was a prominent man and a man of many talents. He found his strength in several sources: nature, religion, literature, poetry, art, music. His own efforts over the years to write poetry are reflected in his “*Vägmärken*”. In English “*Markings*” or “*Waymarks*” as some of us prefer.

Reading and writing poetry was an important source of strength and inspiration to Dag Hammarskjöld. A few lines of a poem often make a greater impression on the human mind than the ordinary prose of an essay or a novel.

So, could there be a more appropriate way of honouring Dag Hammarskjöld’s memory on this occasion than to reflect on one of his Waymarks? Let us therefore observe a moment of stillness and ponder over the following lines:

“Öppenheten för livet ger en blixlik insikt i andras livssituation. Ett krav: att från känsloringet driva problemet till en klart fattad intellektuell gestaltning – och handla därefter.”

In English – my own translation:

“Openness to life grants a swift insight – like a flash of lightning – into the life situation of others. A must: to force the problem from its emotional sting into a clearly conceived intellectual form – and then act accordingly.”

How should this Waymark be understood today? How should we who have gathered here in Sammilsdal tonight understand it?

“Openness to life.” Do we observe the world around us with sufficient interest and openness? Are we prepared to inform ourselves also about matters that do not directly or immediately concern us – or our generation? Are we receptive enough? Could we not all do better?

“Blixklik” is an unusual but very expressive word in Swedish, difficult to translate – *“like a flash of lightning.”* What comes to mind is the image that rests for a few moments on one’s retina when something is lit by a flash of lightning in a nightly thunder. A sharp, even painful impression, followed by attempts by the observer, again embraced by the darkness, to recall the picture.

What is it that Dag Hammarskjöld wants us to see – and later recall before our inward eye? *“The life situation of others!”* Again: are we sufficiently open to be concerned about others? Or are we too self-centered? Maybe our greatest problem today is that we are inundated with impressions. It is difficult to digest all this. But that is not an excuse for being passive.

Another dilemma is that the impact on our minds depends on the way in which events are presented by the media. A few months ago, a major catastrophe visited the Indian Ocean region. The tsunami! Thousands perished. Many of the victims came from other parts of the world, including Sweden, where most people had never heard of such a thing as a tsunami.

The width of the catastrophe, relayed by television, caused a wave of sympathy towards the victims – and rightly so. But why is it so difficult to master the same support for the victims of AIDS, malaria, famine, contaminated water and other hardships that every year harvest victims in a number equivalent to several such tsunamis? Maybe because it is difficult for us to understand and fathom what is happening – continuously and with devastating impact on humanity – while we are struggling with our own lives.

And now the imperative: *“A must!”* To Dag Hammarskjöld, the obligation was self-evident and borne out both by his personality and the tradition in which he was brought up: the high ideals that the righteous civil servant should fulfil.

The message from Dag Hammarskjöld is clear: Indifference is not acceptable!

“Force the problem from its emotional sting”, he continues. Again a very colourful expression for what we all experience when something affects us. The immediate and intense pain, as when stung by an insect. The message is that we must not allow ourselves to get confused or lose our focus. Instead, we must make an effort, wrestle with the problem and force it *“into a clearly conceived intellectual form”*, as Dag Hammarskjöld puts it.

How this is understood depends, I believe, on our own situation: What is my capacity? My position? Is there anything I can do to address the problem? Does my profession allow me to offer my services? Can I engage myself working with others

to help resolve the problem? Should I join an association or maybe a political party to influence development? Can I contribute funds?

And finally, when we have forced the problem in this manner and maybe identified what we could do, we must not leave it at that. We must follow through. “*And then act accordingly*”, as Dag Hammarskjöld concludes.

To reflect on a Waymark is of course a very personal thing. Maybe your reflections would be different from mine. That does not matter. The main thing is that we engage ourselves in issues that concern humankind – other human beings. We must do that to be able to live together on this Earth.

Our immediate concern is maintaining international peace and security – now also threatened by terrorism and transnational crime. This is where the United Nations has the main responsibility. But we must also address poverty, disease and other sufferings. We must enhance human rights, the rule of law and gender equality. We must make sure that life on Earth is sustainable. We are taxing the global resources heavily and need to get together to solve the problems that face us – and coming generations.

Some of us have gathered here to participate in the Tällberg Forum. This can be seen as a response to the call of the Waymark. Others are here for different reasons. Hopefully, your interest and curiosity have been awakened by this Waymark. Do continue reflecting upon Dag Hammarskjöld’s *Waymarks* and help making a difference in the days to come!

Thank you for listening! Now let us listen to the music – the language that can be understood by all!