



## Thor Thors U.N. statement, 24. september 1953

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STATEMENT BY THOR THORS (ICELAND) BEFORE THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

You may well wonder why my country wants to participate in this general debate. As with many of the discussions in the United Nations, the general debate, at the commencement of each annual session, is primarily and most conspicuously dominated by the big powers. It has become a routine kind of first round in the regrettable battle of words that has characterized every session in the previous seven years and lead to no fruitful results, to a world suffering from fear and heavy burdens of armaments and defensive measures. This Organization, which high sounding name "United Nations" has today become somewhat ironical, is however supposed to be based upon and built up by the participation of all nations, large and small. Although we all know that the principle of universality is far from being practised, so long as nineteen nations and among them such important countries of culture and history as Italy are being kept out, nevertheless we still have sixty nations which are Members of the United Nations. Some of them are great and powerful and hold dominating influence in the world in general and inside the United Nations. They also possess the terrific means of destroying mankind, weapons that can extinguish life on this planet. Other nations hold, to a different extent, influence and authority inside the United Nations, according to their strength in arms, their alliances with blocs inside the United Nations, or merely because of their service to the big powers or numerous blocs. Despite all this, despite all these weaknesses inside the United Nations, despite all pressure and political wrangling, every nation here represented, even the smallest one, has its responsibility, its duty to endeavor, to enhance and serve the ideals and aims of our Charter. Each Member Nation has the solemn obligation to weigh its words and its vote, and to employ both, according to its best conscience in the service of peace and progress -- and in no other service or purpose. There are, inside the United Nations, many disturbing elements, and it is at times difficult for a small nation, like mine, unwilling to belong to any voting bloc and fully aware of its little influence and almost powerless position in a gravely split world, to mark and follow its own course. But naturally, being one of the western democracies, our course most frequently runs parallel with other democratic countries by reason of common ideals, common inheritance and similar way of thought, similar desires and aspirations of our peoples, similar outlook on life, and the same love for freedom.

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When I speak of my nation as a small nation, I do so without any excuse. It costs much more individual and collective effort, much more sacrifice, much more work for a nation of few to build up and maintain a society of culture, progress and high education and fair standard of living in the modern demanding world, than for nations of many millions or tens or hundreds of millions. We in Iceland build on a civilization of more than a thousand years, having been an independent republic at the dawn of our history and for three subsequent centuries, and having preserved our thousand year old Parliament, which was of decisive importance in our struggle to regain our full sovereignty and re-establish our old Republic. Through the dark days of our history when we were under foreign domination, however friendly it wanted to be, Iceland acquired its knowledge and experience of colonialism. It is therefore natural that my people always has a feeling of sympathy and understanding both for the peoples of the world that still remain oppressed and are exploited in one way or another and for those who in recent times have lost their freedom.

The Icelandic people always desire to stand on the side of humanity and justice. The last session of the United Nations was the session on Korea. Let it be known and placed to the credit of the so often discredited United Nations that through the deliberations and decisions of the last session, the Korean armistice was reached - which we still hope may lead to peace, irrespective of threatening clouds. When we glance at the agenda of this session, we see before us such matters as the Tunisian Question, the Morocco Question, which are among the spectacular subjects on the agenda of the Political and Security Committee. We also had these questions last year, and after a debate which the accused party, France, completely ignored by being absent from the meetings when it was discussed, the Committee, and subsequently the General Assembly, passed resolutions intended to facilitate peaceful solutions by negotiations between the parties concerned. But fruitful results have not been achieved, and, indeed, France had served notice that it would entirely disregard any resolutions adopted by the United Nations. Since then, relations seem to have deteriorated and grave incidents have taken place. The General Assembly can only pass resolutions and recommendations. What, then, can the United Nations do in such cases? Do discussions here help in any way to alleviate such grave situations? Or why are they held?

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We have other identical cases, where one of the parties concerned objects to a United Nations intervention and openly ignores any recommendation by the United Nations. Two of the items on the agenda of the Ad Hoc Political Committee for this session, which just started - in fact half of the agenda of that important committee - consists of questions relating to conditions in the Union of South Africa. The first one is Treatment of People of Indian Origin there, and the second one is the Question of Race Conflict Resulting from the Policies of Apartheid of the Government of the Union of South Africa. The first question concerning the Indians has been discussed in six previous sessions, since 1946. Altogether, the United Nations has spent some two months discussing this item alone, involving all the sixty delegations. Many eloquent speeches have been delivered on the subject. Indeed, many speeches from every corner of the world. Many resolutions have been passed and commissions have been set up. But, may I ask, of what avail? The second item concerning Apartheid only came up last year. It was then discussed during eight days and a resolution was adopted. A commission was established to study the racial situation. The reports of both commissions can be expected to be negative. Many distinguished representatives have sat on these commissions, anxious to bring about satisfactory solutions. The representative of the Union of South Africa has always warned the Assembly that its intervention is unconstitutional and its resolutions, therefore, null and void. That has been a clear attitude and a frank warning has been given. Article 2, paragraph 7, has been invoked, and we all know that it debars the United Nations from intervening in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state. It has been useless to remind the parties of Article 56, which reads: "All Members pledge themselves to take joint and separate action in cooperation with the Organization for the achievements of the purposes set forth in Article 55". And, as we know, that Article, in the interest of stability and well being, stresses the necessity of peaceful and friendly relations among nations, based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and <sup>therefore,</sup> / obliges the United Nations to promote, inter alia, higher standards of living and universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion. These are solemn obligations by all the United Nations everywhere. It seems that the General Assembly is at least entitled to remind Member Nations of these serious undertakings.

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But experience shows that there is nothing more it can do. It takes two to make an agreement. Discussions year after year have proved of little or no avail, and time has come when the United Nations should make it clear that repeated discussions and the passing of resolutions are useless in cases where one or both parties are unwilling to cooperate and negotiate for the solution among themselves. This has also proved to be the fact about some aspects of the Palestine Question, which, this year, is the third item before the Ad Hoc Political Committee. There again, no response from the parties to some of the resolutions adopted in previous years. Therefore, all these cases have proved more or less hopeless. It is, indeed, dubious, if repeated demonstrations of hopelessness and utter inability and impossibility on behalf of the United Nations, enhances its prestige or increases respect or trust in it among the peoples of the world, many of whom would like to see it strong and capable of helping suffering people in their pursuit of justice and equality. The power of the United Nations to settle disputes is supposed to be vested primarily in the Security Council -- but we all know, due to the present world situation, that the Security Council possesses no real power and offers no effective help. The veto disposes of that. This is no bright picture of the United Nations as it approaches its eighth anniversary.

I have mentioned three items on the agenda of the Ad Hoc Political Committee. Let us look at the fourth and last question; it is supposed to handle the Admission of New Members. As I mentioned before, there are now some eighteen countries outside the United Nations that have applied for admission. As we know, the Security Council must recommend the membership of each applicant. Ever since the lowering of the temperature in the cold war, or since 1947, the number of nations being kept outside of the United Nations has been increasing. However the rule, according to Article 4 of the Charter, is supposed to be that membership in the United Nations is open to all peace loving nations, which are able and willing to carry out these obligations. In spite of this declaration of universality, eighteen countries are again and again barred from admission. They are even referred to with the derogatory phrase of "package", and we are told to take it or leave it. There are, however, as I stated, certain minimum requirements and qualifications stipulated.

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To be peace-loving is one of them. This stipulation explains why it has not been possible yet to admit the Central People's Government of the Republic of China, which has been engaged in aggression in Korea, as resolved by the General Assembly in 1950. That a Government in control of some 500 million people and such vast territory should be kept outside the United Nations indefinitely seems, however, unthinkable and ill-advised. It is to be hoped that the Government of the Chinese People's Republic will prove itself able and free to demonstrate its willingness to cooperate with the United Nations for peaceful and friendly relations among nations and in the removal of threats to the peace and in adjustment and settlement of international disputes. The Peking Government will have an excellent opportunity to prove its willingness and qualifications toward this end at the Political Conference which, it is still hoped, will convene late next month. So much about China. But what sensible reason is there to exclude all the other eighteen countries from entering through the gloomy gates of the United Nations, when they so desire. Why are countries like Italy, Finland, Ireland, Portugal, to mention only a few, kept out. No sensible reasons exist. Yet, we all know the veto bars them all. And the matter is still hopeless. If anyone doubts that assertion, let us look at the report of the Special Committee on Admission of New Members. That Committee, composed of representatives of nineteen Member States, came to the wise conclusion that it could reach no conclusion. This question, therefore, comes before this session equally or even more hopelessly than ever before.

In my previous remarks, I have often referred to controversial articles of our Charter, which have rendered difficult or hindered fruitful or desirable work and result by our Organization. The Charter is now eight years old. It was created under the bright and romantic moon of the San Francisco approach. Those were happy days. But, alas, times have changed. It seems that many delegates were realistic enough to predict such changes of atmosphere. Therefore, Article 109 of the Charter contemplates a conference for reviewing the Charter in 1955, when ten years of experience have been acquired. All man's endeavors are fallible. Errare humanum est. And experience also tells us that new times demand new measures. A revision of the Charter in 1955 is, indeed, timely and warranted. But no one should expect any great changes. No revolution is being planned. The wise and far seeing authors of the Charter created a safeguard against any irresponsible future action.

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According to Articles 108 and 109, any amendment needs two-thirds of the votes in the General Assembly to come into force. And, moreover, it must be ratified, in accordance with their respective constitutional processes, by two-thirds of the Members of the United Nations, including all the Permanent Members of the Security Council. Thus, there can be no change of the Charter, except through unanimity of the big powers. It is not unlikely that we will be, in 1955, as today, faced with two alternatives: either a United Nations Organization principally and practically the same as our present one, or no such Organization at all. It is useless and deceiving to talk about any World Organization without the membership of all the big powers on both sides of the Iron Curtain, which barrage, let us hope and pray, will soon melt away in the warm rays of international understanding and friendly co-existence of various economic systems, or, if that does not come true, then it will have rusted to pieces from age and wear and an unsuitable climate. Furthermore, if the United Nations is to achieve its lofty goal, if the great dreams of San Francisco are ever to become reality, and the ideals of the Charter are ever to serve and bless mankind, then the principle of universality must prevail. Let each country decide its own form of government; there must be room for them all under the dome of the United Nations. The United Nations must never become a simple gathering of hostile voting blocks, where the gates are closed to others and the minds are closed. The United Nations must never become a Russian halleluja propaganda society, nor an exclusive American Club. It can be justified and is natural that the big powers maintain their veto, when military action is contemplated. The burden and sacrifice of fighting would always be theirs to the greatest extent. But the veto is dangerous, unreasonable and frustrating in such questions as the admission of new Members.

One of the most important items before us, or more correctly, the most important question, is Disarmament. Again, we must admit this has been treated in all previous sessions. Or rather, no treatment has been found possible since 1946, when ice cold winds of the cold war began blowing. No result has been reached. Resolutions have, however, been passed -- a whole bunch of often high sounding resolutions. Some of them, those which were naive enough, have even reached unanimity, sixty votes in favor, none against. And speeches and words have flowed year after year. All kinds of words, friendly words, warning words, angry words have flowed. No avail.

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The production of armaments has flowed too, incessantly and ever increasingly. All kinds of armaments, from the small ammunition to the most destructive ones. Those intended for individual killing, mass murder, wholesale slaughter, to the point of complete destruction and extinction of huge areas of land and human life. All kinds and every size of ammunitions are available, to suit any place and any congregation of human beings.

And who wants this? The United Nations was founded to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. What has it done to slow or call off the armament race? Nothing. It has proved to be entirely unable and impotent to do anything in this vital matter. No wonder some people talk about the United Nations as merely a debating club. Why is the United Nations Organization unable to do something in order to alleviate the tension? And what will happen if the armament production should reach what the distinguished Foreign Minister of Australia called the saturation point? When the toys pile up, does not the child want to play with them?

Yet, so many talk about peace, and the people everywhere pray for peace. And the great leaders of the world have spoken. Let me remind you all of three great speeches of the three most powerful leaders of today, whose decisions and actions will influence our fate and future more than any other human activities.

President Eisenhower said in Washington on April 16, 1953. I quote: "First: No people on earth can be held - as a people - to be an enemy, for all humanity shares the common hunger for peace and fellowship and justice. Second: No nation's security and well-being can be lastingly achieved in isolation, but only in effective co-operation with fellow-nations. Third: Every nation's right to a form of government and an economic system of its own choosing is inalienable. Fourth: Any nation's attempt to dictate to other nations their form of government is indefensible. And fifth: A nation's hope of lasting peace cannot be firmly based upon any race in armaments, but rather upon just relations and honest understanding with all other nations. Every gun that is made, every war-ship launched, every rocket fired signifies - in the final sense - a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. ..." These words are eloquent, noble and clear.

Prime Minister Winston Churchill said in the House of Commons on May 11, 1953: "I must make it plain that, in spite of all the uncertainties and confusion in which world affairs are plunged, I believe that a conference on the highest level should take place between the leading powers without long delay ... It certainly would do no harm if for a while each side looked about for things to do which would be agreeable instead of being disagreeable to each other ...



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It would, I think, be a mistake to assume that nothing can be settled with Soviet Russia unless or until everything is settled. A settlement of two or three of our difficulties would be an important gain to every peace-loving country. We all desire that the Russian people should take the high place in world affairs which is their due without feeling anxiety about their own security. I do not believe that the immense problem of reconciling the security of Russia with the freedom and safety of Western Europe is insoluble. ..." Those are magnanimous words of great vision by Britains grand old man.

Prime Minister Malenkov said on August 8, 1953: "The President of the United States stated on April 16 in his speech to the American Society of Editors, that there is no controversial problem, big or small, that cannot be solved if there is the wish to respect the rights of other countries. This is an important statement. It could only be welcomed. ... The basic interests of strengthening peace and international security demand that the Great Powers make every effort to ensure real progress in reducing armaments, the banning of atomic and other arms of mass destruction. ... We firmly maintain that at the present moment there is no disputable or outstanding issue that could not be settled in a peaceful way on the basis of mutual agreement between the countries concerned. This refers also to those issues under dispute that exist between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. We stood and stand for a peaceful co-existence of two systems. We consider that there is no objective ground for a collision between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. The interests of the security of both countries, as well as international security, the interests of the development of trade between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R., can be safeguarded on the basis of normal relations between both countries. ..." These words of the leader of the great Soviet people are clear and outstanding.

So when these three leaders give the world such parallel statements, when they all seem to be seeking to get together, why don't they? That the world must know, it demands to know. Time has come to face facts. When we hear, day after day, over the radio and read in newspapers, that over eighty leading cities and centers of population here in America, are being singled out as targets for atomic attacks, and as we can imagine that such visits would be returned in the visitors own territory, has not the time arrived for facing facts and awaken to this deadly outlook? We cannot continue to live in a fools paradise.

But it seems clear that the decision lies with the big leaders and so does the responsibility.

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The speeches we have already heard in this general debate from the distinguished and influential leaders of the United States Delegation and of the Soviet Delegation have also been in rather conciliatory vein. So the doors seem to be open. At least not closed. We are most anxious to see that the doors are approached and that the negotiation chamber be entered. Is it to be the single door for the great leaders, or one of the many doors of our great mansion here, or is it to be the door of the conference room of the political conference about Korea? Any entrance will do, if the negotiators enter in the right mood and in good faith.

Madam President,

I have spoken at some unusual length and I regret I have, in some aspects, presented an unpleasant picture, darkened by deep shadows and grave clouds.

There are, however, some brighter and more encouraging views that should not be forgotten. Some more positive factors about the United Nations.

In the political field, while we may not have achieved great affirmative successes, I firmly believe that the UN has succeeded in averting great disasters. The first major effort in history at promoting collective security by common action through an international organization has been tried, and has succeeded. In Korea the UN fought, not for a military victory, but for the victory of an idea — the idea of collective resistance to prove that aggression does not pay. The aggression has been repelled. We now have an armistice, which we hope will lead to permanent peace. The UN action in Korea alone has justified the existence and proven the worth of the United Nations.

In the Economic and Social fields, in which the United Nations has moreover had great success in many specified fields, I refer to the long range programs for mutual help and international cooperation for prosperity and progress.

It is gratifying to note that many Member States show interest in the observance and promotion of human rights and have been active in implementing and enhancing some of the principles of our great Declaration of Human Rights, which we adopted in Paris in 1948. In many countries, the ideals of this encouraging Declaration still remain remote from practice. However, the trend is progressive.

We are hopeful that the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund can continue its noble work to bring relief to hungry, poor and orphaned children in wartorn and impoverished countries. My people have been happy to contribute from the beginning to this worthy cause.

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In conclusion, let me state: Responsible people, in every country and every community, desire and are decided to march onward to peace and progress, happiness and better life. They demand to know whether they are being led towards this desired goal by the powerful leaders of the world, or if they are being misled. Are they being led toward a better world, or are we all being driven like a flock of sheep to the slaughterhouse? The answer to this question, we must find out for ourselves and act accordingly, bold and without hesitation. It would be the gravest error and most dangerous irresponsibility merely to acquiesce and deceive ourselves by saying: Time alone can tell.

We must ourselves, to the extent humanly possible, be masters of our own destiny.

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