

SPEECH AT THE INTERACTION COUNCIL  
OF THE FORMER HEADS OF GOVERNMENTS

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On the occasion of this First Plenary Meeting of the Interaction Council of the Former Heads of Governments here in Vienna today, it is a very great honor for me to have this opportunity to greet you as the Convenor of the conference.

All of you who have gathered here today have held the highest political office in your respective countries. And all of you continue very active public life both at home and abroad. I would like to take this occasion to express my sincere appreciation to all of you for travelling so far to Vienna, despite your extremely busy schedules.

I would also like to express my most profound appreciation to the President of the Republic of Austria, Dr. Rudolf Kirchschlager, Prime Minister Fred Sinowatz, and other officials of the Austrian Government, who have cheerfully accepted the burdensome task of hosting this conference here in Vienna and who have given us such great support and warm hospitality.

I would like to further extend my deep appreciation to Dr. Kurt Waldheim, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Former President Pastrana Borrero of the Republic of Colombia, as well as Secretary-General Bradford Morse of the United Nations Development Programme and his staff for their indispensable help

in planning and realizing this conference. From March of this year when we held the Founding Committee meeting here in Vienna, and throughout the four ensuing Executive Committee meetings, their enthusiastic support and devotion have been unparalleled.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me share my greatest concern today with you. I am convinced that the world is facing the gravest crisis of the post-World War II era. Should we err in our response to this crisis, I fear that tragedy on a global scale could occur.

Today, world peace is being threatened from two fronts; one from the economic sphere and the other from the politico-military sphere.

As we look at the world's economic situation today, productive activities have generally diminished; investment has languished; interest rates are high and unstable; exchange rates fluctuate unpredictably and with the emerging signs of protectionism, trade has been impeded resulting in a decline in the volume of world trade in the last three years. Most of the countries of the world are facing recession and suffering from unemployment. Neither the OPEC nations nor the COMECON nations have escaped these problems. We are, indeed, in a generalized global recession.

In particular, we need to take note of the fact that the developing countries are facing difficulties of unprecedented severity.

This global recession is the second one we have experienced. The first one came 50 years ago, the great depression of the 1930's. As all of you remember, the great depression eventually led the world to the Second World War.

The current recession, too, has a seriously ominous air about it. If it lasts too long, no one can forecast what misfortunes might befall us. Protracted economic instability is an enemy of peace. It will eventually usher in social disorders, which will inevitably result in political tragedies.

While world peace is confronted with such economic crises, difficulties in the politico-military sphere are even more grave.

International politics have moved in the framework of East-West confrontations during the 38 years since the end of the war. During this era, we have seen periods of East-West tensions and periods of detente. Unfortunately, since the mid-1970s, the world has entered a period of intensifying East-West tensions that are potentially explosive. Numerous incidents in Africa, in the Middle East, in Kampuchea, and in Latin America all represent products of the East-West tensions.

Every one of the recent incidents -- the shooting down of the Korean Airlines plane; the bombing assassination of Korean high officials in Rangoon, Burma; the Iran-Iraq war; or events in Lebanon and the Caribbean -- is far more serious than the shot fired in Sarajevo in 1914. One cannot but shudder.

Particularly worrisome in East-West relations are the arms race and the accompanying increase of military expenditures in both camps.

This rapid increase in military expenditures is a major factor in budget deficits in many countries and it is impeding revitalization of the world economy. But even if we are to put this point aside, the momentum of further increase in military expenditures is likely to continue indefinitely in a vicious circle, if left unattended.

Where will we end up?

Today, the world has a stock of nuclear weapons that have a destructive capacity of a million times the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. And there is no guarantee that these nuclear weapons will not be used. It is a frightening thought, to say the least.

This is a brief rendering of my overview on today's world situation. What concerns me most is that the interaction of such economic and political disorders could lead to accidental events. These might further trigger unforeseen incidents that could precipitate a global tragedy for all mankind.

I feel that the greatest task international politics confronts today is how to overcome the current political and economic instabilities which weigh so heavily upon all of us and how we can achieve universal world peace. It all boils down to these simple questions.

Even if we were to overcome these problems that confront us today, however, there is no guarantee that peace and prosperity will endure over a long period. We, therefore, need not only to overcome the problems immediately facing us but also to lay a cornerstone for the rapidly approaching 21st Century. Many ingredients, of course, have to be incorporated in the cornerstone, but I would like to stress now that solving the existing population and development problems is a key element.

Confronted with such threatening circumstances, needless to say, world leaders now in power are trying their very best in their different capacities to maintain the fabric of world peace. Nevertheless, at this crucial time, it is highly significant that former political heads of many countries, who have accumulated both broad experience and profound insights, have gathered here to contribute their collective wisdom to mankind. This has been the rationale for convening this conference.

This first Interaction Council meeting faces an historical challenge. Countless peoples of the world are watching this conference with immense interest and expectation. We cannot fail to respond to their concern.

Let us strive for conclusions that will ensure a more abundant life and above all a more peaceful world.

(Thank you, Ladies and Gentlemen.)