



INTERACTION COUNCIL

Opening greeting by Co-chairman Ingvar Carlsson, former Prime Minister of Sweden at the Opening Ceremony of the IAC 24th Annual Meeting, 2nd May 2006, Dead Sea, Jordan

Your Majesty, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

With a deep sense of gratitude to the Government of Jordan, I am opening the 24th Annual Meeting here at the Dead Sea.

I would first like to introduce my colleagues to all of you. Would you please stand up as I call your name?

Of course, next to me is your former Prime Minister and the Organizing Chairman of the 24th session, Dr. Abdel Salam Majali.

Sitting in the first row are:

Our Honorary Chairman, Helmut Schmidt, former Chancellor of Germany

Mr. Andries van Agt, former Prime Minister of the Netherlands

Mr. Esko Aho, former Prime Minister of Finland

Mr. Valdis Birkavs, former Prime Minister of Latvia

Mr. Jean Chretien, former Prime Minister of Canada

Mr. B. J. Habibie, former President of Indonesia

Mr. Jamil Mahuad, former President of Ecuador

Mr. Andres Pastrana, former President of Colombia

Mr. Yevgeny Primakov, former Prime Minister of Russia

Mr. Jerry Rawlings, former Prime Minister of Ghana

Mr. Jose Sarney, former President of Brazil

Dr. George Vassiliou, former President of Cyprus

Some members had to cancel their participation at the last minute. My co-chairman Kiichi Miyazawa and our Honorary Chairman Malcolm Fraser, in particular, are extremely sorry that their health did not permit them to be with us. Kiichi Miyazawa sent us a message to you, which I would like to read to you, as he says what I wanted to say.

His Majesty, Mr. Chairman, Distinguished guests, Dear Colleagues

Allow me to greet to you through a message. I am truly grateful that so many distinguished personalities have gathered by the Dead Sea, Jordan, for the 24th annual meeting of the InterAction Council.

I would like to first of all express my profound appreciation, on behalf of the InterAction Council, for the good will, generosity and hospitality of His Majesty the King Abdulla bin Al-Hussein, the Government of Jordan and its Foreign Ministry.

I am personally sorry not to be with all of you, as it has long been my wish to visit the Middle East, and I was hoping against hope that my doctors would permit the fulfillment of my long-held wish.

I have long had a personal curiosity to visit the birthplace of the three monolithic religions and to observe with my own eyes the legacy of ancient civilisations. I have read the holy books of the three Abrahamic religions and have been deeply struck to realise how all of the three share the common origin. It would have been deeply satisfactory, if I could at least sense the causes of the complex ambivalence felt by believers of each.

Let me briefly point out what the InterAction Council has prioritised over the past quarter of a century since its inception. The priorities are:

- peace and disarmament,
- world economic well being
- nexus of development, population, environment and global ethics

The Council has always studied various long-term, global issues with advice of experts in these fields, and we have proposed realistically feasible solutions to our successors. After over two decades, many world leaders today heed attention to our policy recommendations.

The issues we prioritise, in fact, are applicable to every part of the world. But their relevance to the conflict-prone Middle East seems much stronger. This region attracts more global attentions than any other regions of the world.

Even within the last couple of months, the launching of the Hamas Government in Palestine, the Olmert Government in Israel, the moves surrounding nuclear suspicions over Iran, the continuous violence in Iraq and ever rising oil prices and other complicated issues have been on the mind of many.

The particularly disturbing nuclear question, of course, is not confined to this region. It appears that the world is moving in the opposite direction of nuclear non-proliferation, as we look at the controversial nuclear development in North Korea and the recent U.S.-India agreement.

Herein lays the particular significance of your deliberations this year. It is the first time the Council is addressing the whole issue of the Middle East and hearing directly from regional players their convictions and proposals for peace, stability and progress in the Middle East. The timeliness and significance of the meeting cannot be overemphasised. It will prove to be one of the most important meetings we have held.

An increasing number of people seem to feel that the ominous clash of civilisations is gaining reality. It would be dangerous, however, to interpret the caricature incident of earlier this year as a sign of the inevitable clash between Islam and Christian civilisations or between the Arabs and the West.

The caricature conflict proved that the proposals we made in our "Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities" was appropriate for today's world. I hope the Council will once again renew its effort to advocate and disseminate the Declaration.

So, very urgent issues overwhelm the 24th annual meeting. I hope very much that the Council will come up with a powerful message to the world to reaffirm the ethics of humanity, reverence for all life, mutual respect, tolerance and understanding as the basis for all human interactions, be it among individuals, societies or nations.

Thank you very much for your attention and let me extend my very best wishes for a fruitful and constructive meeting.

So, now I would like to call on Jan Eliasson, the President of the 60th Session of the UN General Assembly who concurrently serves as the Foreign Minister of Sweden, who kindly agreed last year to deliver the keynote speech on the “Present State of the World” and has fulfilled his commitment, despite his extremely busy schedule due to the dual roles in Stockholm and New York.

Jan Eliasson, please?