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PRIV. TIL RED STATSMINISTERENS TALE

Vedlagt følger statsminister Thorbjørn Jaglands tale under Regjeringens middag for FNs generalsekretær, Kofi Annan, i kveld på Akershus Slott.



STATSMINISTER THORBJØRN JAGLAND

Dinner Speech in honour of Mr. Kofi Annan,
Secretary-General of the United Nations
Akershus Castle, 3 September 1997

Check against delivery

Mr Secretary-General and Mrs Annan,
Dear Kofi and Nane
Honored guests and friends,

Let me first be formal and say that it is a very great pleasure for me to welcome the Secretary-General of the United Nations on his first official visit to Norway in his new capacity.

Let me then say from the heart; I hope you feel like coming home.

We are welcoming a long-standing friend. Norwegian governments and officials have worked with you for years. We know your qualities. And you know our commitment to the United Nations.

Since the first peace-keeping mission was sent to the Middle East in 1948, more than fifty thousand Norwegians have worn a blue helmet. This figure is equal to more than 1 per cent of the population of Norway. Together, the Nordic countries have provided 25 per cent of all peace-keeping personnel in the UN's history. Norway is among the ten largest contributors to the UN budget and among the main contributors to UNICEF, UNDP and other organizations of the UN family.

We have with us tonight Norwegians who worked with Dag Hammarskiöld in the Congo. We have invited representatives of the troops serving in the Middle East and in the former Yugoslavia. We have included people who have been given leadership responsibilities on behalf of the Secretary-General and the UN General Assembly. We are proud of their contributions to the fulfillment of the UN Charter.

I mention this to highlight the importance that we attach to the United Nations and its Secretary-General - and to say how deeply interested we are in the effectiveness of the organization.

In January you were given what your predecessor Trygve Lie called "the most impossible job in the world". Trygve Lie spoke these words at the height of the cold war. But serving as the world's leading civil servant is no less demanding as we approach a new century at this time of great changes. We know what a daunting task you have taken on.

We admire your work and we welcome the results. To put it in your own words; a "quiet revolution" is taking place. A real process of reform is emerging. Confidence in the United Nations is coming back.

We support your reform programme. We even encourage you to go further. Your initiatives will help us achieve what you spelled out in a letter to me three weeks ago: "A greater unity of purpose, coherence of

efforts and agility in responding to the challenges of an increasingly dynamic and complex world."

If leading the UN is an impossible job, then our job is obvious: To help you make the impossible possible.

Today, people from all corners of the world call on the United Nations. When you were in charge of UN peace keeping you were confronted with the "revolution of rising expectations". At the same time you have known better than anyone that the means at your disposal are the sum of what the member states are willing to provide.

All too often the United Nations is blamed for a lack of backing from member states. This is highly unjustified. What we never see is an estimate of what would have happened if there were no peace-keepers, if there were no UN to stabilize the situation, to monitor a cease-fire, to facilitate talks or to bring relief to the most vulnerable.

We must refocus our efforts and address the new threats to peace and social progress. Conflict between states is no longer our most pressing challenge. We are facing conflicts rooted in poverty, social differences, ethnic problems, environmental degradation and human rights violations.

This is a kind of human suffering that seldom reaches the headlines of the evening news. The international community tends to react only when there is visible war or spectacular suffering. But all too often that is too late. We must be better placed to prevent conflict rather than to cure and repair after violence has broken out.

I would like to say to my fellow Norwegians: The visit of the UN Secretary-general gives us an opportunity to shift our electoral focus for a moment. Let us remember that as a nation, we are extremely privileged. We have no right to forget the unmet needs of so many people. Meeting those needs is also part of our responsibility.

Mr. Secretary-General, two weeks ago I visited Sarajevo. Your people are doing a great job in Bosnia, and we are proud that you chose a Norwegian to lead the ongoing UN operations there.

During my visit I met a 17 year old boy who had just returned to Sarajevo after spending three years in Norway as a refugee. He wondered what to expect from the future. Would the university be open to him? Would he get a decent job? Would the fragile peace last?

The young man had two hobbies: skiing and soccer. But he could no longer ski. The people of the Olympic city of Sarajevo can no longer ski because there are land-mines laid all over the hills. He could still play soccer. But he hardly dared to pick up the ball if it went over the fence. There too, the ground was full of mines.

We can help that young man. We can and must continue to be present in the field to give peace a lasting chance. We can and must continue to

offer our humanitarian support. We can and must help the people of Bosnia to get rid of the land-mines.

In fact, we can make an extra effort right now as diplomats from 100 countries have started negotiations on what we hope will be a total ban on anti-personnel mines. If we succeed we will bring the world one step forward - and one step closer to the ideals of the UN Charter.

Mr. Secretary-General,

You can count on Norway's support. We will continue to contribute more than our share. We will continue to offer our expertise and our people to the services of the UN.

Last week we even offered the jewel in our political crown to head the World Health Organization!

Honored guests,

I would like you all to join me in a toast to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and Mrs Annan - to Kofi and Nana - to our common effort to achieve a better, a more decent and a more civilized world.