

C . V . N A R A S I M H A N

HISTORY OF THE

UNITED
NATIONS

UNIVERSITY

A Personal Perspective

History of the United Nations University

A Personal Perspective

C.V. NARASIMHAN



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The United Nations University
53-70, Jingumae 5-chome, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo 150, Japan
Tel.: (03) 3499-2811 Fax: (03) 3499-2828
Telex: J25442 Cable: UNATUNIV TOKYO

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FOREWORD

THE BEST HISTORIES are often stories told by those who lived the events to be remembered. Family diaries are a good example of this because they do not focus on analysing past occurrences but on recording what is most interesting to the members of the family. This is not meant to diminish the value of scholarly histories as records of past events, preserved and analysed for posterity as well as for the use of future generations. The purpose is to draw attention to the importance of the interesting accounts that have the ability to bring vividly to life the events that are being recorded for history.

In a sense, this historical account has been developed more along the lines of a family story. Thus it helps the reader to recognize more immediately the wisdom that went into the creation of the family of the United Nations University and to recall more energetically the personalities who were involved. It also describes the early operations of the institution, recounting particularly how the key individuals responsible for its activities carried out their work, and it then touches briefly on the University's present work and those involved. In a sense, it is a summation of the activities of the people who comprise it.

The United Nations University is only about 20 years old, so it may seem presumptuous to state that it has a history. Although I cannot deny that I am biased in favour of the University, and therefore lean positively towards any recollection of events related to how it came into being and how its early years were spent, I do feel that there is much to learn from this account. I can say this because, even before I became a part of the UNU, I was conscious to some extent of the thinking that had gone into making the idea of the University a reality, having been involved in a modest way in the planning for one of its activities. In

spite of this, I had no doubt that there were many interesting but not widely known facts relating to the establishment of the University. After all, the University was a new kind of academic institution. But the most unusual aspect of its existence is the fact that it was the United Nations that took the step of bringing the University under its aegis. This was a milestone event in the history of international scholarship – an event worth recording and one about which stories should be told.

And while the history, or story, itself is important, the historian, or storyteller, is similarly important – especially a historian who can relive actual experiences in recalling the past. Mr. Narasimhan was, of course, a witness and participant in many of the events that make up this history, which is meant as a close-up view of someone who was closely linked to the thinking that led up to the conception and realization of the University.

There is no doubt that this account will prove useful to the generations of internationally minded scholars who will come to know this University when it has established its reputation. It will also be helpful to the participants in and supporters of the United Nations system, who will appreciate the value of having established a mechanism to harness the inputs of scholars in order to help solve pressing global problems.

It is perhaps too early to tell what the real impact of the University's work has been and will be. Will it help to foster wisdom among the men and women involved in finding solutions to pressing global problems? I sincerely hope so. Certainly, the history of the UNU is one worthy of telling because it is a university that not only seeks responses at a theoretical level but also concerns itself with the down-to-earth need for practical action. This story, its history, attests to this.

As a small institution, the UNU is similar to a family, albeit an extended one, and there must be other stories waiting to be told that can serve as histories. It is my fervent wish that we will see in the future other personal histories of the UNU which will contribute collectively to writing the story of this unique university.

HEITOR GURGULINO DE SOUZA
Rector
United Nations University

PREFACE

FOR OVER TWO years I had been discussing with the current Rector of the UNU, Professor Heitor Gurgulino de Souza, the possibility of writing a history of the United Nations University. Finally I accepted the invitation that he extended to me about 15 months ago to write this history: I undertook this task as a labour of love.

In the intervening period I had extensive contacts with the officers of the University's North American office in New York (UNUONA). I must acknowledge with special gratitude the assistance rendered to me by S. Chidambaranathan, the Director of the Office, the Administrative Officer Max Bond, and the Administrative Assistant Mary Esther Leung.

In April 1992 I visited Tokyo and spent a working week there, in the course of which I had extensive discussions with the Rector on the scope of my work. It appeared to us that, instead of writing a mere history of the UNU, it would be more useful if I prepared what might be called a historical study of the University up to date. This seemed particularly appropriate since the University building, erected with the help of generous contributions by the Government of Japan and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, was due to be officially opened early in 1993.

The terms of my assignment were as follows:

The consultant is to prepare a draft history of UNU. It will be in two parts. The first part will trace in detail from the beginning of the idea of UNU, first proposed by U Thant in his Introduction to the Annual Report of the Secretary-General in 1969, until the approval of the establishment of UNU by the General Assembly in 1972, and the subsequent formulation of the UNU Charter, the arrangements with the Japanese Government for providing the UNU headquar-

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ters in Tokyo, the selection of the members of the Governing Council and the first Rector of the UNU.

The second part will consist of the development of the UNU's work programmes, projects and activities, including the establishment of the research and training centres, etc., under the stewardship of the three Rectors.

The consultant will study available material and undertake consultations and interviews with personalities who were formerly associated with the United Nations and UNESCO, former and present Rectors, the Programme Directors, the Project Coordinators, the members of the International Association of Universities, UNU staff and other collaborators considered appropriate. The consultant will provide the University with a list of persons to be interviewed in the course of the project.

In the course of my visit to Tokyo, I also had a series of discussions with the senior Associates of the Rector: Dr. Roland Fuchs, Vice-Rector, Academic Division; Mr. R.N. Malik, Executive Officer, Office of the Rector; Professor Tarcisio Della Senta, Director, Planning and Development Division; Mr. Vagn Kjellberg, Deputy Director, Planning and Development; Mr. Amadio A. Arboleda, Director, UNU Press; and others. I also had the opportunity to meet Mr. Kinhide Mushakoji, who was one of the first Vice-Rectors of the UNU. I also met Dr. Hiroshi Kida and Dr. Michio Nagai, two great friends of the University who were largely responsible for the decision taken by the Government of Japan to invite the UNU to have its headquarters in Tokyo. My work at UNU Headquarters was greatly facilitated by the generous assistance given to me by the Executive Officer and his associate Cynthia Velasquez, Senior Assistant (Council and Legal Affairs), Office of the Rector.

After completing my discussions in Tokyo, I proceeded to New York, where the new Director of UNUONA, M. Jacques Fomerand, had taken charge. Unfortunately he was taken ill shortly after I began my work in New York, but the assistance rendered by UNUONA continued under the aegis of S. Chidambaramathan, who by then had returned to New York, and of course Mary Esther Leung. During my stay I also met Mrs. Momoyo Ise, who was my associate in the early days of the UNU and subsequently served as Secretary of the Council and representative of the Rector at the UNU Liaison Office in New York. Her most recent assignment had been as Director of Administration of the UNU in Tokyo, from which position she returned to UN Headquarters in New York only a couple of years ago.

My next stop was Boston, where I met Dr. Nevin Scrimshaw, an acknowledged authority on the subject of nutrition, who had been engaged by the first Rector of the UNU, Dr. James Hester, to be the coordinator of the University's World Hunger programme. I had an ex-

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tremely useful discussion with him lasting for several hours. From Boston I proceeded to Montreal to meet Dr. Roger Gaudry, who was the first Chairman of the Council of the UNU in 1974. Dr. Gaudry was the former Rector of the University of Montreal and is well known in academic circles as a member of the International Association of Universities and various other learned bodies. The discussions with him recalled the early days of the UNU, going back to the processes which were used for the selection of the first Rector, Dr. James M. Hester.

From New York I also spoke on the telephone with Dr. Rabinowitch, a new member of the UNU Council, and with Dr. Alex Kwapong, who was one of the first Vice-Rectors of the University under Dr. Hester. These discussions were also very useful to me.

While in New York, I was graciously received by Her Excellency, Ambassador Lucille Mair, the current Chairperson of the Council. I benefitted greatly from my discussions with her.

In 1973 the Founding Committee needed a draft Charter to consider: this draft was prepared by a senior officer of the Office of Legal Affairs in the United Nations Secretariat, Gurdon Wattles. Mr. Wattles also rendered meritorious service as the representative of the United Nations in the discussions and negotiations with the Government of Japan that led to the conclusion of the Headquarters agreement between the UN and the Japanese Government in regard to the establishment of the UNU in Tokyo. I was able to meet Mr. Wattles in the course of my stay in New York and had extensive discussions with him, recalling his association with the work of the UNU in its early days.

Before leaving New York for Paris, I was very pleased to have an extended breakfast meeting with Dr. Hester. We recalled our association in the early days of the UNU, up to my retirement from the United Nations in August 1978. Likewise, I discussed with Dr. Michel Doo Kingue, Executive Director of UNITAR and *ex officio* member of the Council, his long association with the UNU.

In Paris I spent some time at the Headquarters of UNESCO. My programme in the city had been coordinated very effectively by Mrs. Alexandra Draxler and the time that I had available to me was put to extremely good use. During my stay I had the opportunity to have an extended discussion with Dr. M.A.R. Dias, Director of the Division of Higher Education in UNESCO. I also met some of my associates who had been involved in the work of the UNU in its early stages. Special mention must be made here of Dr. Jagbans Balbir, who was seconded by UNESCO at various stages in the study of the UNU proposal, beginning with the study undertaken by Dr. Arthur Lall at the request of

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Secretary-General U Thant. I also met with Dr. René Ochs, who had been Director of the Division of Higher Education, and with Mr. Sema Tanguiane, former Assistant Director-General of UNESCO, who used to attend the meetings of the UNU Council in Tokyo as representatives of UNESCO. These discussions recalled some of the earlier difficulties with UNESCO which were smoothed out by the cooperation extended to the UNU by these former colleagues. It was also a great pleasure for me to visit Mr. Federico Mayor, Director-General of UNESCO.

From Paris I went to Helsinki in Finland, which is the Headquarters of the UNU World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU/WIDER). Its Director, Dr. Lal Jayawardena, gave generously of his time in order to share his insights with me, and to explain the steps he had taken to get UNU/WIDER accepted in academic circles as an institution of excellence. During my stay in Helsinki, I met Dr. Jayawardena's associates, Mr. Radhakrishnan, Secretary of the Board, and Mr. Perera, who had been working with Dr. Jayawardena since the inception of the Institute. Again, these discussions were extremely useful to me.

My next stop was Maastricht in the Netherlands, which is the Headquarters of UNU/INTECH (the acronym for the Institute for New Technologies). I had extensive discussions with Professor Charles Cooper, the Director of the Institute, and also with Mr. Martin Bell, a consultant of Professor Cooper. Again they shared with me their views on UNU/INTECH, their ongoing programmes, and their future plans. These discussions were also of great value.

From Maastricht I proceeded to New Delhi for extensive discussions on the UNU with Mr. G. Parthasarathi, who had been a member of the Founding Committee that was so instrumental in bringing the university into existence. Mr. Parthasarathi had experience of academic work as the first Vice-Chancellor of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, as well as considerable diplomatic experience, both as a Permanent Representative of India at the United Nations Headquarters in New York and as a member of the Executive Board of UNESCO. His contribution as a member of the Founding Committee, and also of the first Council of the UNU, cannot be exaggerated. I also had discussions with Professor M.G.K. Menon, the renowned scientist, who has recently stepped down from his position as a member of the UNU Council. On this occasion I also met Dr. A.P. Mitra, until recently the Director-General of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, who had just been appointed to the UNU Council.

I then moved on to Madras, where I completed the preparation of the first draft of this historical study of the UNU. I also took advantage of my

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presence in Madras to have a discussion with Professor M.S. Swaminathan, one of the consultants who participated in the ten-year review of the UNU in 1987.

The University had received a copy of a dissertation written by George Altomare entitled "The United Nations University: Origins, Founding, and Future," written in 1977 and submitted to Columbia University for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It is an excellent document and provides invaluable source material for anyone who wishes to know about the origins and founding of the UNU. I have drawn extensively on this work and have acknowledged the source wherever necessary.

During the early days when preparations were being made to establish the UNU, and when attempts were being made to mobilize the support, both financial and political, of various governments – including, most importantly, the Government of Japan – my most invaluable associate was Mr. Yasushi Akashi, who was a Japanese staff member of the United Nations Secretariat. Mr. Akashi also had very good contacts in the academic world in the United States, and helped to establish a small group of academics in support of the establishment of the UNU and to obtain financial support from the United States for the University. In those early days in 1974 we sat together for hours preparing the documentation and making the logistic arrangements for the first meeting of the UNU Council, which was convened in New York in May of that year. Subsequently Mr. Akashi returned to the service of his own government. Later he went back to the Secretariat, where for some years he was Under-Secretary-General for Public Information and thereafter Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament. At present Mr. Akashi is the Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Peace Mission in Cambodia. Mr. Akashi's contribution to the establishment of the UNU, to its initial funding by the Government of Japan, and to the support that he was able to elicit for the idea from academics in the United States is beyond praise.

While I am most grateful to all these colleagues and friends who have generously shared with me their views, experience, and insights on the working of the UNU, I of course take full responsibility for the contents of this study. I only hope that the study will help the UNU in its ongoing work during the second term of the present Rector, which began on 1 September 1992.

Throughout the study, I have avoided the use of footnotes, to make for easier reading. When references are made to actions taken by the General Assembly, ECOSOC, UNESCO, or the UNU Council, the texts are quoted *in extenso*, with the dates. Other material used includes various

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evaluations of the UNU's work, for example the Ten-Year Evaluation Report of 1987, and materials supplied by the UNU's Information Services. I have also made extensive use of UNU internal documentation that was made available to me. Except where it is obvious that I am stating my own views or recollections, or quoting from other sources, for example the Altomare thesis, the study is based entirely on official documents.

I take this opportunity to record my appreciation for the invaluable assistance rendered to me by my old family friend Mr. S. Sarath, who placed secretarial services as well as his computer, word processor, and printer at my disposal for the preparation of this study.

The index of names was prepared by my daughter, Dr. K. Mukund: my thanks go to her.

Mr. John Fenton has done a very conscientious job of editing the manuscript, fleshing out chapters 4 to 8 with additional details. I am most grateful to him for his cooperation.

Last, but most important of all, I sincerely thank Professor Heitor Gurgulino de Souza, the present Rector of the UNU, for inviting me to undertake this study and for thus enabling me to continue to assist an institution which I helped to set up, back in 1969.

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1

THE CONCEPT

IN SEPTEMBER 1969, in his Introduction to the Annual Report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on the work of the United Nations, the then Secretary-General, U Thant, said:

In recent months I have given much thought to the establishment of an international university. The idea occurred to me because my attention was drawn to the work being done by individuals to establish institutions of learning with an international character. I also have in mind some institutions of research and training which were established under international auspices and which have considerable success in promoting economic development. I feel that the time has come when serious thought may be given to the establishment of a United Nations University, truly international in character and devoted to the Charter objectives of peace and progress. Such an institution may be staffed with professors coming from many countries and may include in its student body young men and women from many nations and cultures. Working and living together in an international atmosphere, these students from various parts of the world would be better able to understand one another. Even in their formative years, they will be able to break down the barriers between nations and cultures, which only create misunderstanding and mistrust.

The primary objective of the international university would thus be to promote international understanding both at the political and cultural levels. I feel that such a scheme could be the legitimate concern of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, which would be responsible for the working of the detail, selecting a board of trustees for the university and appointing as its head a scholar of international renown. The location of the university should be in a country noted for its spirit of tolerance and freedom of thought. I very much hope that the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization might find it possible to develop this idea further and eventually bring it to fruition.

The Concept

I had a hand in the drafting of these remarks by the Secretary-General. I knew, therefore, that U Thant had been referring to the work being done by individuals to establish institutions of learning with an international character. One such institution which came to his attention in the early part of 1969 arose out of a visit by Earl Mountbatten of Burma to the United Nations at the invitation of the Secretary-General, who hosted a luncheon in his honour. At this luncheon Earl Mountbatten referred to the work that he had been pursuing in establishing a number of United World Colleges in five or six different centres spread over several continents, including one in Wales. He spoke highly of the success of this experiment and this was the proximate consideration that encouraged U Thant to put forward the idea of an international university in his 1969 statement.

The idea of such a university under international auspices is not new. In 1986 Mrs. Elizabeth H. Rose, a devoted American supporter of UNESCO from Denver, Colorado, wrote a paper entitled "UNESCO, UN University and I." In this publication she detailed at great length



U Thant, Secretary-General, United Nations, 1961–1971

her visit to several UNESCO Associations in Japan and her discussions with several Japanese leaders. It was her idea that this institution should be established in Japan, the "rising sun" of Asia. That her work and her efforts were recognized by the concerned officials in Tokyo is borne out by Hiroshi Kida, former Vice Minister of the Japanese Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, in a statement he made at the colloquium which took place in December 1985 to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the launching of the work of the UNU. In this statement he referred to the fact that he first heard about the concept of a UN international university from Mrs. Elizabeth H. Rose in 1964.

"She suggested", Mr. Kida told the colloquium participants, "that it was time for Japan to raise its hand at the UNESCO General Conference; she said Japan would be a good place for such a university because here there could be exchange between East and West cultures. Well - I was very surprised! It would not be ~~the Japanese~~ custom, particularly for those in government, to raise our hands at UNESCO conferences. But Mrs. Rose ... was a very devoted supporter of UNESCO activities. And she backed up her support with her own private contribution of funds."

Mrs. Rose's efforts to propagate the idea ultimately bore fruit with the support subsequently given to a United Nations University by Secretary-General U Thant in his September 1969 Annual Report.

I have also seen a moving personal memoir written by Ambassador Glenn Olds, former Ambassador of the United States to the Economic and Social Council and to all bodies operating in the United Nations in the field of economic and social development. He has referred to his interest in the concept of a United Nations University going back to 1941 and earlier. The opportunity to promote the idea in a more concrete way came to him when he was invited by President Nixon to assume the post of US Ambassador to the Economic and Social Council. Even before he accepted this appointment, Dr. Olds had been promoting the idea with various officials and academics including, amongst others, President Kennedy, Vice-President and later President Johnson, and President Nixon. He has recalled his work, in close association with me and my deputy Mr. Robert Muller in 1969, in the drafting of the passages in the Secretary-General's Report that were quoted earlier in this chapter. He has also noted that, among the sponsors of a resolution in the Second Committee of the United Nations General Assembly in 1969, the United States was absent from the list of sponsors, although he himself in his personal capacity had been deeply involved in the consideration of this proposal by the General Assembly.

SUPPORT FROM ASAHI SHIMBUN

Support was given to the idea of the United Nations University in April 1970 in an editorial published in the influential Japanese newspaper *Asahi shimbun* by Dr. Michio Nagai, who was at that time an editorial writer on the staff of the paper. He supported the establishment of the UNU as an idea in itself and he also strongly recommended that it should be established in Japan. He mentioned his own contacts amongst academic circles, who all showed great interest in the idea. Subsequently he wrote an article about the UNU in the *Japan Quarterly* (vol. 18, no. 4, 1971), where he went further in his support of the same idea. I have no doubt that the final establishment of the UNU with Japanese support and with its Headquarters in Tokyo was in large part due to the efforts of eminent personalities like Dr. Kida and Dr. Nagai.

At this point it must again be recalled that the idea of a United Nations University was certainly not new. In a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Columbia University, published in 1977, George Altomare referred to various proposals made immediately after the First World War under the auspices of the League of Nations, and also to several proposals put forward to UNESCO after its establishment at the conclusion of the Second World War. He even referred to efforts to establish a university with an international character in India. One of the strongest supporters of the idea was Michael Zweig, who published in 1966 a book entitled *The Idea of a World University*. All these efforts no doubt set the scene for U Thant's statement in September 1969 advocating the establishment of a United Nations University.

Following U Thant's proposals, ~~the~~ General Assembly discussed the matter in the Second Committee, and finally adopted in plenary session a decision dated 13 December 1969, which requested the Secretary-General "to undertake, in co-operation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and in consultation with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research and any other organization he deems necessary and taking into account the views expressed at the twenty-fourth session of the General Assembly, a comprehensive expert study on the feasibility of an international university, including a clear definition of its goals and objectives as well as recommendations as to how it might be organized and financed."

THE FIRST FEASIBILITY STUDY: 1970

Following the General Assembly's decision, U Thant asked a close personal friend and former colleague, Dr. Arthur Lall, former Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations, to undertake a feasibility study concerning the United Nations University. Lall discussed the proposal at a luncheon convened by U Thant at which the Director-General of UNESCO at that time, René Maheu, and Chief Simeon Adebo, the Executive Director of the UN Institute for Training and Research, were present. It will be recalled that the feasibility study was to be prepared in cooperation with UNESCO and UNITAR and the presence of these two officials at the lunch was intended to facilitate Lall's task. UNESCO deputed Jagbans Balbir and UNITAR deputed Mohammed Nawaz to assist Mr. Lall in his study. Lall did the best he could under the circumstances, considering that UNESCO did not give him its full cooperation. Lall had actually published more than one study, of which the most important was *Modern International Negotiations – Principles and Practice*, and was himself adept at such negotiations. However, he was well aware that UNESCO had received many proposals since the Second World War in regard to a United Nations or International University, and that these, for all practical purposes, had been shelved.

The Lall study was considered by ECOSOC in the summer of 1970. It adopted a resolution on 30 July 1970, of which the operative paragraphs read:

1. *Invites* the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to make available to the General Assembly at its twenty-fifth session its views on the goals and objectives and also optional models of an international university and at an appropriate time to put forward proposals as to how the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization might participate in such a university;
2. *Further invites* the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research and other interested agencies and organizations within the United Nations system to provide the Economic and Social Council at an appropriate time with their detailed recommendations as to how such a university might be organized and financed;
3. *Requests* the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its twenty-fifth session on the basis of such views as may be available at the time.

Following the invitation of ECOSOC, both UNESCO and UNITAR produced reports giving their own views about the feasibility of an international university. These reports were placed before the General Assem-