

United Nations

Press Release

Department of Public Information
Press Section
United Nations, New York



GA/5992
19 September 1979

TRANSCRIPT OF PRESS CONFERENCE BY SALIM A. SALIM (TANZANIA),
PRESIDENT OF THIRTY-FOURTH SESSION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Headquarters, 19 September 1979

YOSHIO AKASHI (Under-Secretary-General, Department of Public Information): I need hardly introduce the new President of the General Assembly, Ambassador Salim. We will have about 30 minutes, or, if need be, a few minutes more, for questions and answers... So I shall open the floor for questions immediately, unless the President wishes to say a few words.

The PRESIDENT: First, I want to thank Mr. Akashi for organizing this meeting. I really do not have any statement to make. I think after my statement yesterday it would really be over-imposing on you to try and make yet another one. But I should like to say that I value tremendously the contribution made by the United Nations Press corps and by the Press and media in general to the work of the United Nations.

In my statement yesterday, I spoke in terms of involving world public opinion in the activities and efforts of the United Nations and there is no doubt that the role of the media is pivotal in this exercise. I want to assure you that during my term as President I will co-operate with you and -- to the best of my ability -- try to meet with you whenever I can. I want to assure each and every one of you that -- depending of course on the circumstances and it being understood that on issues the President does not really have a personal position -- I shall be ready to give background briefings and to discuss related issues. Once again, I am looking forward to your co-operation. I should say also that I have always had excellent co-operation from the media and from the United Nations correspondents, in particular during the time that I have been in the United Nations.

Mr. AKASHI: Thank you very much, Mr. President, for your most reassuring words about co-operation with the Press and media.

QUESTION: Ambassador Salim, yesterday, in your statement you mentioned the world community's sorrow at the death of President Neto of Angola. I wonder if you could say how that will affect the liberation movements in southern Africa.

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The PRESIDENT: To the extent that the loss of a person and of a leader of President Neto's calibre, statesmanship, dedication and personal involvement is certainly a loss to Africa and to the liberation struggle in Africa, it is bound to have its effect on that struggle. However, Angola's commitment, and the new government and the new leadership that will emerge in Angola, will ensure the continuation of the policies of President Neto. To that extent, I do not expect any change in the position of Angola or, for that matter, in the nature and tempo of the struggle in southern Africa. We will miss President Neto's wise counsel and wise advice, and I hope that not only the leaders of Angola but the leaders of Africa and the liberation movements, will continue to be inspired by what President Neto stood for and fought for.

QUESTION: In your statement yesterday you spoke of the necessity of providing for broader and enhanced participation by all nations in the United Nations. Your predecessor spoke of "this diverse assembly of States, juridically equal and each with its own voice which no one can silence". In the light of those two statements, what is your attitude to South African participation in the work of the General Assembly?

The PRESIDENT: I do not have an attitude. It is the Assembly, in its wisdom, that has an attitude. I refer to the previous Assembly. This Assembly has not had to take a position on the question of South African participation. But the twenty-ninth session of the General Assembly took the decision that, in view of the non-representativeness of the regime in South Africa and in view of its consistent violations of the positions of the United Nations and of the Charter of the United Nations, it could not be allowed to participate at that session. That was the decision that was taken, and I think that it would be premature for me to say anything about South African participation in the United Nations, unless I am faced with a situation that requires me to take a position.

QUESTION: In your opening remarks here, you spoke of the high value you put on the United Nations press corps. I wonder if you know that yesterday, when we came to hear your speech in the General Assembly hall, we found that our press gallery had been taken away from us and that we had been shunted to the fourth balcony, from which we could not see anything in the hall and where we have nothing to write on. Is this a form of appreciation?

The PRESIDENT: Perhaps Mr. Akashi would reply to that question.

Mr. AKASHI (Under-Secretary-General, Department of Public Information): I am fully aware of this new situation, which has arisen as a result of the expansion of the Assembly hall. I intend to take up this matter with Mr. Clayton Timbrell, Assistant Secretary-General for General Services, who is responsible for the remodelling and repairing of the building. Also, it is my intention to get together in the course of today or tomorrow with the President of the United Nations Correspondents Association (UNCA) to deal with the question of television coverage of the proceedings of the general debate after 6 o'clock in the evening because, according to the existing procedure, the coverage has to cease at 6 p.m., and I understand that many voices have been raised to say that because of this limitation on the seating capacity for the press in the Assembly hall the correspondents would like to have coverage

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at least through television in their rooms, and we shall see to what extent we can assist them in that area.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in view of your stated positions on the Middle East and some African questions, I was wondering whether you would find it somewhat difficult to maintain impartiality as President of the Assembly, where it is usually the custom for Presidents to maintain impartiality.

THE PRESIDENT: I do not think that there was anything in the statement that I made, either in respect of developments in the Middle East or in the context of southern Africa, that would in any way affect my impartiality as President of the General Assembly. The positions that I have taken on both those issues are positions that have been articulated, defended, espoused, championed and reiterated by the General Assembly year in and year out, and in that respect I do not see that it should be in any way difficult for me to maintain impartiality. Of course, it depends on how one defines "impartiality".

QUESTION: In yesterday's speech you gave great importance to the problems of colonialism, a subject that you know so well and about which you feel with great intensity. A few days ago, the Secretary-General, Mr. Waldheim, referred during his press conference to the importance and effectiveness of what he called "quiet diplomacy".

Do you think that, if you as President of the General Assembly were to combine your knowledge of colonialism with this "quiet diplomacy", you would be able to convince the United States of America to do the following two things: first, to transfer soon all powers to the people of Puerto Rico as called for in the August 1979 resolution on that country approved without a negative vote in the Committee of 24, so as to enable that country to attain its independence and self-determination; and secondly, to help the Micronesian people to attain their independence as a unit, instead of trying to split that Territory with the purpose of keeping parts of that Territory as direct or indirect colonial entities?

The PRESIDENT: I do not know, but I will say that I will only be able to use the Office of the President informally, to promote those issues and situations where it is possible to make some headway. One is only in a position to use one's good offices -- particularly talking in terms of preventive diplomacy -- when the parties concerned are willing and ready to accept the efforts that one can make. Otherwise, if you try to volunteer your services in a situation where your services are not wanted or required or welcomed, then the best you are doing is engaging in an exercise in futility.

QUESTION: In your speech yesterday, you referred to the problems in the economic sphere faced by the developing countries. The matter is going to come up before the United Nations General Assembly; it is on its agenda. The problem at the moment is that the economic problems of the developing countries which have no oil have been accentuated in recent years, and if the process of debate continues at its present pace, either at the United Nations or UNCTAD, I suppose that it will take a very long time for these developing countries with no oil resources to solve their problems. Do you, thus, have

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any plans for a major initiative in the course of the current session of the Assembly in this direction?

The PRESIDENT: For one thing, I think that it is not very helpful to talk of major initiatives; one of the difficulties with initiatives is that if you have one too many, you can suffer from the problem of a proliferation of initiatives.

But I think that I should make a few remarks on that question. First, that it is a fact that developing countries which have no oil are suffering most in the adverse economic situation of the day. But it should be stressed that this suffering is caused not simply by the price of oil; their economic situation is what it is because of a combination of factors in the international economic situation. Secondly, it is also clear that there is a greater awareness that the question of energy has to be discussed in the context of international economic negotiations. Within that context, I believe that there have been efforts and informal discussions dealing with the question of energy not in isolation but in the context of other fundamental economic issues that face us in the international economic situation.

As you know, there were discussions in Havana during the meeting of the non-aligned States. There have also been discussions here in the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole; there are informal discussions going on and there will be more. My hope is that the concept of trying to engage in global negotiations with a view to the amelioration of the present plight -- not only of the non-oil-producing countries, but of the developing countries in general -- will be taken seriously in the forthcoming session in preparation for other sessions that are to follow. What is important, however, is that we have had a number of sessions in many forums at which not merely discussions, but comprehensive discussions, have taken place and at which intentions have been declared.

My point in my statement yesterday was to stress that perhaps the time has come now to try and translate into concrete actions the intentions which have been declared in so many regions.

QUESTION: If I may turn to the question of refugees, I think you yourself and the Secretary-General have been very much concerned with the proliferation of refugees, whose numbers are running into the millions, and the situations that create them seem, of course, to be out of control at the United Nations. Is it your opinion that perhaps the situation is running out of the control of the High Commissioner for Refugees, given the extent to which it requires his help? Nothing is said about augmenting his powers or his facilities. He is still operating on the premises of the old refugee problem. I have not heard any mention of this aspect of the problem, and I wonder whether you might comment on it to the extent to which you are able.

The PRESIDENT: I do not think the situation is getting out of the control of the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees. It is the refugee situation itself that is getting out of control. So far as the efforts of the High Commissioner for Refugees are concerned, they can do their very best, but they can only do what is within their means to perform. One of

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the significant things about the High Commissioner for Refugees is that we have had two excellent, distinguished, eminent personalities who have held that office, Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan and now Mr. Poul Hartling. Both have been and are dedicated individuals. They have done their very best, travelling all over the place to try to mobilize resources. But resources have to be forthcoming, and I think that the magnitude of the refugee situation is now such that the international community must really do more to augment the resources of the High Commissioner for Refugees.

In mentioning the number of 10 million, I was making the point that recently, for example, there has been the question of the refugees in South-East Asia, and it has received a lot of publicity. And yet the refugee situation in South-East Asia is simply a fraction of the totality of the problem of refugees. In Africa alone, we have something like 4 million refugees. So I think it is extremely important for Governments, both individually and collectively, to do their utmost to augment the resources of the High Commissioner for Refugees. But, as I was also saying yesterday, in addition to helping the High Commissioner for Refugees, it is more important for us to try to do our level best to make the refugee situation unnecessary.

QUESTION: May I ask a substantive question about your proliferation-of-initiatives statement? Do you not think we might need an initiative to consolidate some of these countries that come in that are not viable and by their very nature are going to be in trouble? We now have 152 Members. Could we not have 1,500 at the rate we are going -- dots and spots rather than viable areas?

The PRESIDENT: In the first place, I do not know that we will ever have 1,500. But if we were to have 1,500, there would be nothing wrong with that if in fact the world was such that we were to have 1,500 independent nations. And, talking of viability, I think that the United Nations Charter does not mention the viability of States. The United Nations Charter and the principles of the United Nations speak about this equality of States and the sovereignty of States. This Organization was meant to be an organization of all States irrespective of their size, irrespective of their geographical locations, irrespective of their resources. If we are going to make a study of the viability, say, for example, of small States, then we may have to make another study of the level of representativeness of given States. And once we do that, we shall have to think in terms of what will be our governing criterion. Is it going to be military power? Is it going to be financial power? Is it going to be resources? Is it going to be population? In this context, you can imagine that we would never come to a common position because, if you take population, then quite clearly China, India and some other Asian countries would be the super-Powers of the world.

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If you take military power, then you may have only the United States and the Soviet Union and a few other countries. And so I think what the Charter provides is the best alternative for an institution that is supposed to solve the interests of the international community as a whole.

QUESTION: In your opinion, do you see the continued presence of Tanzanian troops in Uganda as becoming contentious or analogous to the Vietnamese situation in Kampuchea? And if not, do you think it might be a case that might be judged in the context of an attempted solution to the Kampuchean matter?

The PRESIDENT: I do not know if the President of the General Assembly has an opinion on that. If you want to have a Tanzanian opinion, you should ask the representative of Tanzania, and he will let you know. But from what I have seen thus far in this Assembly, there has been no effort to try to link the two questions. I have noted no complaints by the Government of Uganda about the presence of Tanzanian forces in Uganda, and since we are talking in terms of the country's sovereignty, non-intervention in internal affairs, I would expect that the Ugandan Government will perhaps raise this matter and complain about the Tanzanian presence in Uganda. In that case, perhaps, I as President could give an opinion.

But quite frankly, I do not think that it would be right for me to explain. Had you asked me this question two days ago, I could definitely have given you the Tanzanian point of view. In fact, in an informal meeting I had two days ago with senior editors, this question was asked, and I did give that point of view, so I would refer you to the record of that meeting, where you will find my views on that subject.

QUESTION: In that vein, the same problem that cropped up last night at the end of the session was facing the delegates of the non-aligned countries in Havana. This is a different place. And it is not prejudged, as a delegation is sitting. Can you give us any indication as to the mood of the General Assembly with regard to the options that are open to it?

THE PRESIDENT: The podium is a very lonely place. I think you are in a better position to judge moods than I am, sitting where I am seated. But think one thing is obvious. The United Nations has its rules, its procedures and its precedents. The Assembly itself is the master of its own procedures. It will be up to the Member States to explore all options. Right now, the Credentials Committee is meeting today, and it will submit its report to the General Assembly. In that Assembly, the Members will decide what the best option is, given the circumstances.

I think, frankly, that it would be premature for me to speak of the possibilities or options. They are numerous, and it is up to the Member States to decide which is the best.

QUESTION: In his report the Secretary-General appeared quite concerned about the many bedevilling problems affecting the globe and mankind, and of course the United Nations, and he pointed them out. I am wondering whether you share his views, and what you think the United Nations, which is the organ for world peace, can do about these problems?

THE PRESIDENT: I definitely share the concern expressed by the Secretary-General on the state of the international situation generally, whether it is in the area of conflict situations or in the area of international economic problems. I also share his view that the United Nations is the only forum that can attempt to do something to lessen the conflicts and tensions that prevail in the world today.

As to what the United Nations can do about it, I really think that in spite of its limitations -- and it has limitations -- the Organization is well equipped to cope with many of these crises and many of these problems, if only Member States themselves, and in this respect particularly those Member States which are most directly concerned, are prepared to use the Organization as an instrument to try to resolve some of these problems. Unless that willingness is there, it become exceedingly difficult for the Organization to be as effective and as helpful as it could be. As I said yesterday in my statement, this tendency to use the United Nations as an instrument of convenience is not helpful to the Organization, nor to the peace and security of the world. The United Nations must be used in the way it was intended to be -- as a perpetual instrument for the promotion of peace, security and international co-operation.

QUESTION: You are often referred to in the press as a possible candidate for Secretary-General. Would you eventually consider running for the post?

THE PRESIDENT: We have a Secretary-General of the United Nations. In my opinion, my very frank opinion, he is doing a superb job in an extremely difficult situation. I think we must not add to the burden of his responsibility by indulging in idle speculation. The responsibility of the Office of Secretary-General is such that I really think what the international community must do is to support the incumbent effectively for as long as he is in office.

QUESTION: On the question of Namibia, if no further satisfactory progress can be made by the Contact Five and South Africa, do you expect it to be brought back to the Security Council?

The PRESIDENT: I think that would be a fair assumption since the Security Council is the body which decided on the United Nations plan for the independence of Namibia -- the Secretary-General's plan which was endorsed by the Security Council. Since the only party which is still recalcitrant -- if I may use that term -- is the South African Government, as was rightly stated in the United States Senate by Ambassador McHenry some time ago, the position now is that there is a convergence of views on the part of the African States, on the part of the Secretary-General and the United Nations, on the part of the Western Five and on the part of SWAPO. The only "missing link" that makes it impossible to bring about the required negotiated solution results from South Africa's opposition. So if the South African Government continues to

maintain its present position of obstructing the United Nations position, clearly the Security Council will have to meet and consider what course of action should be taken. However, if the South Africa Government should now come back and say that it is prepared to implement the Secretary-General's plan, then of course that would be in the best interests of all of us, in the best interests of the United Nations and in the best interests of peace and security in southern Africa.

QUESTION: To omit the question of disarmament from this press conference would be an insult to the intelligence of the world. I do not know what question to ask you on disarmament, except possibly this one. I think it was during the last session of the General Assembly that the majority of nations finally rebelled against the arms race and began to assert themselves more forcefully. There was a sort of reactivation of something that seemed to have been forgotten, and I think a new committee was established. But of course the fury of the arms race has continued and even increased during the past year. Do you think that the heroic effort that was made last year by the majority of nations will be continued? Or will there be a tendency to say we are licked, that the situation is simply out of our control, and that there is nothing which can be done about it?

The PRESIDENT: Disarmament is a very important issue. The irony of this issue is that, invariably, everybody talks about disarmament. I do not know of one single State that professes its opposition to disarmament. It is the implementation of this call for disarmament which defies all efforts at this point. There is no doubt that, despite all the talk of disarmament, in the final analysis the arms race is continuing. We see agreements here and agreements there, but with every agreement there is another tendency to create more sophisticated weapons and different concepts of weapons systems and, ultimately, the balance of terror -- or the balance of fear or the fear of mutual destruction -- remains. And this is not in the interest of disarmament; it is not in the interest of international peace and security.

I think that the goal of disarmament has unfortunately remained more of an ideal than a realizable objective. But I am confident that, since there is an intention on the part of everyone to try to reverse this process, we shall make use of forums like the General Assembly to achieve this reversal before it is too late, because, quite frankly, there is no doubt that contrary to popular belief this element of security through the stockpiling of the most sophisticated types of weapons is not really security but an expression of total insecurity.

I can only say that I fully endorse what the Secretary-General has repeatedly said: that there must be more serious efforts regarding the process of disarmament. With regard to what will happen during this regular session of the General Assembly, I really cannot foresee. But I have no doubt that the spirit of the special session on disarmament will continue to be maintained during this session.

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QUESTION: Will you call upon the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) if it desires to speak in the General Assembly, and have you received word from Mr. Arafat that he wants to come?

The PRESIDENT: I do not know the answer to the first question. One can call upon a representative only when he asks to speak, and I have not seen the representative of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) asking to speak as yet. The answer to the second question is that I do not know when he is coming or if he is coming.

QUESTION: Yesterday in the General Assembly, you spoke of your view that the PLO must be brought into the peace process. Do you see a realistic way of bringing that about, in view of the fact that Israel, one of the main parties to any settlement, is resolutely opposed to negotiating with the PLO?

The PRESIDENT: I would not venture to say how the PLO should be brought into the negotiating process. All I can say very unequivocally, and without fear of contradiction, is that we are all calling for peace and justice and a durable settlement of the Middle East problem. We are all saying that the situation in the Middle East is not the concern of only the people of the area. What happens in the Middle East is a matter of vital concern to the security of the world and the international community. We are all saying that we are searching for a genuine and lasting solution to that problem.

What I said yesterday -- and I do not believe that it was anything new -- was that for such a solution to be reached in the area, the Palestinians must form an indispensable part of the negotiating process. The Palestine Liberation Organization is the representative of the Palestinian people and, therefore, must be in the negotiating process. As far as bringing that about is concerned, I am fully aware that the Israeli Government is opposed to any discussions with the Palestine Liberation Organization. But I do not think that this opposition should be the basis for avoiding another realistic situation, and that is that there can be no permanent peace in the area without taking account of the reality of the existence of the Palestinian people and the existence of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

In my statement yesterday, I also stressed that, in addition to the rights of the Palestinian people, there are certain other basic prerequisites for the peace and security of the area. I stressed the question of the right of all States in the area to independent existence and I want to stress this point again. I also emphasized the fact that there can be no peace when the concept of retaining the fruits of conquest is accepted.

Those are elements which I elaborated. I realize only too well that they are not new elements because others have pointed them out before. But I think that the fact remains that unless these elements are fully taken into account, real peace in the area will continue to elude the international community.

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QUESTION: Are you contemplating any new procedural innovations during your presidency to make the General Assembly session very businesslike, avoid night meetings and, above all, have the Assembly adjourn on 18 December as planned?

The PRESIDENT: I do not know that all that can be achieved. To begin with the question of avoiding night meetings, perhaps sometimes one of the best ways of streamlining the procedures is to ensure that there are night meetings. Quite seriously, concrete recommendations have been made by the Secretary-General in terms of rationalizing the procedures of the General Assembly and improving its efficiency. I believe that we can achieve that objective; at least I believe that we can make a serious effort during the current session at improving the Organization's efficiency.

Again, like many other things in this Organization, on the question of efficiency and the streamlining of the procedures almost all Member States are agreed. Take, for example, the simple question of punctuality. There is not one single delegation which will not say that the meetings should start on time; and yet meetings have been known -- to put it mildly -- not to start on time. At this session we shall say, "Let us start meetings on time". When we say "start on time", we mean if the meetings are scheduled for 10:30 o'clock let us start at that time, not at 10:35, 10:40, 10:50 or 11 o'clock.

I have very honourable intentions, but the implementation of those intentions will certainly depend on the co-operation of Member States.

QUESTION: If I may return to your reply to a previous question, I wonder whether you consider resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) as being a sort of foundation for peace in the Middle East. If so, would you view the acceptance of those resolutions by the PLO as absolute before there could be some kind of settlement? Do you see the possibility eventuating that the PLO will accept resolution 242 (1967) so that movement can be made in the direction of what we all want?

The PRESIDENT: Resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) were very carefully elaborated in given circumstances. Everybody is agreed also that they are solid foundations for peace in the area. But there also is almost near consensus of view that what is lacking in resolution 242 (1967) is the element of the Palestinians as a people -- a people with rights which is also entitled to the right to self-determination -- as distinct from seeing the question simply as one of refugees.

I shall not say anything is "absolute", except the absolute importance of the parties to the Middle East conflict understanding that there is no alternative to negotiation, and that only a negotiated solution can bring about peace in the area. The concept of saying that one would never negotiate with a given party is somehow alien to the very spirit of the United Nations.

As far as the PLO's position is concerned I think that the PLO has a strong position against Israel as Israel has a strong position against the Palestinians. And in the final analysis, somehow, some way -- there must be a

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way -- those principal parties to the conflict must find a way of negotiating a mutually acceptable solution which will ensure the security of all the peoples in the area and the rights of the people of the Middle East.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you did not quite answer that question. You said that everyone is agreed that resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) are solid foundations. But the PLO has not agreed. Would you ask the PLO to agree to resolution 242 (1967) and accept Israel's existence as a precondition for negotiation?

The PRESIDENT: I think I answered that very clearly: I said there are solid foundations. But I said also that the missing link in resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) was the way the Palestinians are treated. Now, I am quite prepared to ask the PLO to accept the fact of Israel; in fact, I do not even have to be converted to that. In all the discussions we have had with the Palestinians and with the Arab countries, we have always stressed this point of the existence of Israel. But I must also be equally prepared to ask the Israelis to accept the fact of the Palestine Liberation Organization. Now, I am not sure whether I will be able to convince the Israelis on that.

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