

## Thomas Paine Colloquium 1987

*Message from the Secretary-General of the United Nations, his Excellency Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, to the participants in the Second Colloquium in the series Visionaries of World Peace, celebrating the life and work of Thomas Paine*

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the United Nations today for the convening of a colloquium on Thomas Paine, the great Anglo-American political theorist and writer. Your series, *Visionaries of World Peace*, under the auspices of the University for Peace, has my complete support, and I am pleased that this meeting has been organized with the assistance of the Peace Studies Unit of the Secretariat.

The visionary you are honoring today, Thomas Paine, was a courageous man of letters and of action, who gave of himself for the benefit of all humanity. In celebrating his life and work, the University for Peace has chosen a fit subject to exemplify its important task of studying, teaching, and promoting peace.

The University for Peace, having its origins in Costa Rica, reflects the future of a country which, since 1948, has eliminated its armed forces by constitutional means. The fact that a disarmed nation can live in peace and radiate the message of peace throughout the world has been demonstrated most recently by the imaginative efforts of President Óscar Arias, who this year was honored with a Nobel Peace Prize.

Thomas Paine, who was born two hundred and fifty years ago, wrote and lived with a keen sense of urgency. The basic premises of his *Rights of Man* were that there are natural rights, common to all men, and that only democratic institutions are able to guarantee those rights. On this very day next year, we will be celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, one of the first major achievements of the United Nations.

Much of Paine's thought is relevant today. Perhaps what is most memorable is the effort he made to point out the reality of human brotherhood, which he envisaged in a great republic of all the nations of the world. Thomas Paine's idea of having an 'Association of Nations' dates back to 1800. On 6 October of that year, the author of *Common Sense* sent a plan to his friend, Thomas Jefferson, who approved it. The

Paine Plan recommended ten peaceful ways for settling disputes, including a boycott of aggressor nations.

I salute this great visionary of world peace, whose passionate search for freedom and brotherhood has greatly contributed to the nobility of humanity. And I sincerely hope that your efforts will enhance the quest for peace in the world today.

***Greetings and statement by Tapio Varis,  
Rector of the University for Peace and Chairman of the Colloquium***

As Rector of the University for Peace, I have been asked to chair the Colloquium on Thomas Paine in the series *Visionaries of World Peace*. It is today that President Óscar Arias Sánchez, President of Costa Rica, is receiving the Nobel Prize for Peace. I have the privilege of living and working in that peaceful, voluntarily disarmed country of Costa Rica. When awarding the Nobel Prize, the Commission brought into the formulation of its wording that the process of peace has importance beyond the region where its impact and activities prove extraordinarily strong.

It is of great importance that we are convening this Colloquium at a time that the leaders of the two super powers, Mr. Ronald Reagan and Mr. Mikhail Gorbachev, are meeting in this country, the United States of America. And it is particularly inspiring to see that the list of speakers for today consists of distinguished scholars, intellectuals, politicians, people who know about peace, who have worked hard for peace. Costa Rica has been keeping a tradition of peace much longer than the media have been focusing specific interest upon its role in Central America. Being a Finnish citizen myself, I have great admiration for former President José Figueres, Don Pepe, who is over eighty years old and is still actively participating in peace-related activities. Former President Rodrigo Carazo, the founder of the University for Peace, is here with us, presiding over the Colloquium.

The people of Costa Rica are deeply desiring peace for the world and are continuing their historically important work in Central America that would be recognized internationally as an important model. May the model of democracy for which Thomas Paine fought help us again in designing the future with inspiring new visions for world peace.

***Welcome by Robin Ludwig, Chief of the Peace Studies Unit of the United Nations Secretariat for Political and Security Council Affairs***

As Chief of the new Peace Studies Unit, it is really a pleasure for me to welcome you all here. I speak also on behalf of the Under Secretary-General for Political and Security Council Affairs, who knows that you are meeting here today and takes great interest in what you are interested in yourselves.

The Peace Studies Unit actually originated and goes back to the International Year of Peace, which was celebrated in 1986. The Unit was created this past year in response to the support that was expressed by people around the world for the ideals of the Year of Peace. Even though the year ended, the stream of mail and telephone calls kept coming in to the United Nations. The Secretary-General decided someone should be there to answer. So, the Peace Studies Unit was created in order to serve as a clearinghouse for activities related to the promotion of peace, activities by non-governmental organizations, such as the University for Peace, and also organizations in the academic area.

It is our task to collect ideas and assist where we can to help people in promoting peace in various ways. And that is why we feel your meeting today is very important, because although we are deeply involved with aspects of conflict resolution and the work of the Security Council, all of this work goes back to certain basic values and principles. It is important for people to get together and discuss what those values are, what our common ground is, so that we can work further on that basis. I hope this will be a very good meeting.

***Introduction to the Visionaries of World Peace Series of Colloquia  
by Leo Zonneveld, President, United Teilhard Trust***

Who is this being called man? What are the expectations for human life; what is the future of the human phenomenon? Questions like these were being asked at the first colloquium in the series, *Visionaries of World Peace*, celebrating the life and work of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. I think these are valid questions. For we cannot hope to answer the question what peace is, if we do not want to know who man is.

Peace is a state of mind; a healthy, active, and intelligent equilibrium

in the mind of man which has its natural reflection in the Global Brain, in the dual role of both activator and participant. Man is a constructor of new dimensions. Humankind's visionary eye feeds the imaginative mind and brings itself to action in thought and deed, satisfying the urge for existential meaning. In order to find existential meaning, there is a need to cooperate, to speak with, to work with others. There cannot be a healthy mind without a synthesis of all that is experienced as known, as true, at the summit of one's personal reality.

This is certainly true for the visionary whose life and work we are celebrating today, the great American writer and political genius of British descent, Thomas Paine. The man, the patriot, whose writings did more for the American cause in the Revolution than did any other single factor, also proposed arbitration and international peace as a humanitarian. Thomas Paine suggested a great republic of all nations of the world, and proposed an international flag for it: the colors of the Rainbow. Here in the building of United Nations, the visionary Paine as a constructor of new dimensions, brilliant activator and humble participant, can not fail to stir our imagination. For Thomas Paine, it is true what Russell Davenport wrote referring to Arthur, the once and only King:

(A)...sword of vision and great pain,  
Which Arthur drew, which all man draw,  
By some enchantment of the law,  
And fling back to the gods again.<sup>1</sup>

The Romance of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table also tells us about Galahad, who drew out the sword from the floating stone at Camelot. The enchanting call from the sword in the stone repeats itself time and time again for those who are courageous enough not to ignore it. The meeting between a human being and the impossible is arranged continuously, as the author of *Common Sense* must have felt many times. And those who obey, people like Thomas Paine, may perhaps only become victors in the eyes of God and at the price of great suffering. The life and work of constructors of new and undreamt-of dimensions, visionaries of world peace, men and women such as Thomas Paine, are celebrated, recalled at occasions like these at United Nations Headquarters.

Our organization is called United Teilhard Trust only because it derives its principles, activities, ideas, and vision from the French scientist Teilhard de Chardin, to whom, as I said earlier, we devoted our

first colloquium at the United Nations. Teilhard de Chardin found both his sword in the stone as well as peace by asking himself: can I, 'this quantity of consciousness, which is thrown alive in the thorns,' become the embryonic eye of discovery in the Cosmic Being which is now forming itself in mankind? United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld found peace by asking: can this human body in which I find myself, 'this accidental meeting of possibilities, which calls itself I'<sup>2</sup> ... become a passionate instrument of direction in its Global Brain? On the first page of Hammarskjöld's diary it is made clear that the stone in front of him did not give up the sword easily; every human undertaking is at some stage an act of faith. Hammarskjöld says:

I am being driven forward  
Into an unknown land.  
The pass grows steeper,  
The air colder and sharper.  
A wind from my unknown goal  
Stirs the strings  
Of expectation.<sup>3</sup>

Driven forward we are, each of us individually, on a journey of faith – a journey which may bring us to the sword in the stone, a sheer impossible meeting with the unknown and the supreme, the yet unexpressed potential of human endeavor, of human energy. Each of us may find a challenge in trying to draw it out.

I would like to thank my colleagues and friends in New York, New Rochelle, and Escazú, Costa Rica, who worked so hard to make this Colloquium on Thomas Paine happen. It is such a pleasure for me to see many friends around in this conference room from as far afield as France and California: Monsieur Maurice Ernst, who heads the Fondation Teilhard de Chardin and the Brain/Mind specialists Jean Houston and Marilyn Ferguson.

I sincerely hope and pray that the great work of Thomas Paine will be continued, perhaps in a different spectrum of human awareness, for the soul of humankind cries out for sense, for meaning and understanding, again. And I am sure that the Gods have firmly planted the sword in the stone in front of today's speakers as well as before each and every one of us. It will encourage us to act heroically, in the true sense of the heroic spirit, in fulfilling ultimately our destiny as constructors of new dimensions.

***Statement and official opening by Rodrigo Carazo,  
President of the Council, University for Peace***

Thomas Paine – his thinking was simple, open, and clear. The accuracy of his words commanded the attention of readers, making them grasp the full breadth of his message with all its contrasts. He thus arose, in the world of his time, a deep concern for, and a commitment to the nation. He appealed not only to reason but also to human emotions. He sought to encourage the free flow of the imagination, while hoping that each individual could use his or her own intelligence. He was masterful and forceful in the propagation of his ideas.

He was a true believer in Justice. He advocated distribution of wealth from those who have more, to the benefit of the dispossessed, the old, and the needy. With his thinking, he ploughed deeply the seed of the democratic and republican ideals.

The people of the United States of America of that time, with the election of Jefferson, ratified the teachings of the Founding Fathers. Among them, Thomas Paine, who was universal and not parochial, reached outstanding fame in his lifetime and continues to do so today. His fame lived on as a result of his existential quest, which opened the way to a humanitarian, spiritual, and revolutionary attitude. This is at the root of his worldwide call for Justice, and its corollaries, Liberty and Peace.

The University for Peace is honored to open this Colloquium on Thomas Paine. As a visionary of world peace, he will get all our attention and our study. This is the best way for us to pay tribute to the man who left us ideas whose benefits humanity is still harvesting.