

Sadako Ogata's Speech

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It was 1968 with the General Assembly that I came to the United Nations for the first time. Of Course, I'd studied about the United Nations a great deal and so on. I studied political science, I studied international affairs; I studied history, particularly Japan-Asia-U.S. relations – that kind of history.

And since I'm only given five minutes to really sum up, I thought I'd just give a few contrasting thoughts and positions. I started from the "World of Ideas." That is what I mean by scholars, scholarships. "World of Ideas" moved into more the "World of Action." I think that's one transformation that I think I went through.

And then another one was again on security issues – from state security to incorporating human security. That's another transformation that I think I went through not only intellectually, but in terms of action. And then the third transformation may be from moving from humanitarian work to development work. And that's where I'm landed right now.

In the future, what kind of changes I will go through, I don't know. But it's not because of me, because the world is really a very, very rapidly changing, moving world that we're living in. And the real issue is, I think, how can you really work through the 21st century with practices, habits, assumptions from the 20th century? This is very big one that I think we all have to think about. I'm not giving answers yet.

I had the privilege of really studying a lot of international affairs even when I was in high school and college in Japan. But to move from the world of scholarship – which is a wonderful world, and I would rather keep on going – to something in which you do something about your knowledge.

And this started when I first came to the United Nations as a public delegate, '68, and then '70-75 I kept on coming here. And what did I learn? That the world consists of lots of countries, big and small; lots of people and delegates, brilliant and clever. I mean, there's all kinds of combination of people in the world. And I think I learned that fact by being really in the General

Assembly and the various committees a great deal.

You know, it was a big shock to me when a delegate from a small country in Africa – I don't think I should name it – could be so influential in committee matters. It does make a difference, if you have articulate thinking, and, what shall I say, a “beyond-your-national-capacity” kind of delegate. It does affect the outcome. And this was something that I learned. Big countries, big influential countries don't necessarily have the same kind of influence in public forums. And I kept on realizing this. And I think this is something that, when you deal with people, you have to deal with people with what they all have. That was one thing.

Now, from where did I move from security? Because from 1991 through 2000, for 10 years, I was the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and in that capacity, I was invited here at the council to give various reports and ask for much more support, in the sense of policy support.

Why did I think about humans? See, originally, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is really there to deal with refugees, which means people who cross national borders. Because of persecution, because of threat, because of different religious beliefs and so on, they are no longer under the protection of their state and have to cross borders to seek protection from others. I mean even passports are very simple proof – if you no longer have the support of your country, the country will not give you passports.

So, in this sense, the responsibility to protect them and the system falls on the High Commissioners for Refugees, the office. And there were very difficult times that I dealt with, because many of the conflicts were not only in between the states, but inside the states.

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