

The Pinnacle of Internationalism

With President Mikhail Gorbachev, a new light began to shine in international relations. In his historic 1988 address on peace and international cooperation before the United Nations General Assembly, President Gorbachev powerfully presented his new vision for the USSR and for the world. He also proclaimed his highest esteem for the United Nations—in his words, “this unique instrument without which world politics would be inconceivable today.”

The enlightened thinking behind this address had been developing in the USSR for some time. No doubt that very enlightenment in some mysteriously destined way propelled Mikhail Gorbachev, who would become the champion of world freedom and the 1990 Nobel Peace Laureate, to the leadership of his country.

The head of the task force that drafted the speech for President Gorbachev was Vladimir Petrovsky, then Deputy Foreign Minister of the USSR. Mr. Petrovsky had long been connected with the United Nations. In 1957, at the age of 24, he became an attaché with the Permanent Mission of the USSR. And from 1964 to 1971 he served as Political Affairs Officer at the UN Secretariat. In 1978 he joined the Soviet delegation to the First Special Session of the UN General Assembly on Disarmament. He would later become the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs who drafted Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali’s landmark Agenda for Peace. Finally, he was the visionary Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, at the same time serving as Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament.

President Gorbachev’s speech represents the pinnacle of internationalism. And so it was received by the assembled delegates. He described the perestroika in his own country and its potential for peace and international cooperation. He called for the abandonment of old stereotypes, and for the development of a “mutually interrelated and integral world.” He vigorously advocated demilitarization. He declared, “Freedom of choice is a universal principle that should allow of no exceptions.” And he affirmed that we can only reach our common goal together.

We are fortunate that C-SPAN recorded the entire event, from the arrival of President Gorbachev’s motorcade in the circle and his welcome by Secretary-General Pérez de Cuéllar to his departure, thronged by admirers. The address is almost an hour long, but we will see a very brief excerpt of the coverage now, to capture the spirit of that golden moment in the history of the United Nations.

Today, as we reflect on Sri Chinmoy’s profound commitment to the United Nations, it is fitting to recall his deepest respect, admiration and brotherly affection for both President Gorbachev and Mr. Petrovsky, which continued to blossom over the years. Let us offer our gratitude to those world-servers whose contributions to the United Nations and to humanity can never be adequately appreciated.