Background on United Nations and the Nobel Peace Prize awards

– Version three -- awarded to the UN and to the SG

The United Nations system has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on five previous occasions:
• in 1988 it was awarded to the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations,
• the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) received the prize in 1954 and 1981;
• it was awarded to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 1965;
• and the International Labour Organization (ILO) received it in 1969.

Kofi Annan is the second Secretary-General to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. The Organization’s second Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld, was awarded the prize posthumously in 1961, for his action in strengthening the United Nations.

Hammarskjöld’s award came just a few months after his death in a plane crash near Ndola (now in Zambia), while on a peace mission in the Congo.

On a number of other occasions, the Nobel Peace Prize Other has been awarded to individuals for their work directly related to the United Nations:
• U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull was given the 1945 award primarily for his, and the United States', strong leadership in creating the United Nations.
• Lord John Boyd Orr of Brechin was honoured in 1949 as the founding Director-General of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) for the way in which his scientific discoveries were employed to "promote cooperation between nations."
• Ralph Bunche, the United Nations acting mediator in Palestine, received the prize in 1950 for his mediation of the 1949 armistice between the warring parties.
• Lester Pearson was awarded the prize in 1957, primarily for his role in trying to end the Suez conflict and to solve the Middle East question through the United Nations. As Foreign Minister of Canada, he was one of the leading United Nations statesmen of his period.

Reasons for the UN awards

In his will, the benefactor of the awards, Alfred Nobel, stated that prizes should be given to those who, during the preceding year, "shall have conferred the greatest benefit on mankind," and that one of the prizes be given to the person who "shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses."

In awarding the 1988 prize, the Norwegian Nobel Committee stated that "the Peace-keeping Forces of the United Nations have, under extremely difficult conditions, contributed to reducing tensions where an armistice has been negotiated but a peace treaty has yet to be
established. In situations of this kind, the UN forces represent the manifest will of the community of nations to achieve peace through negotiations, and the forces have, by their presence, made a decisive contribution towards the initiation of actual peace negotiations.

In the 1988 Peace Prize Nobel lecture, Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar said he hoped the award, and the attention it generated, would "not only strengthen our capacity to conduct the affairs of nations in a more peaceful and just manner. I hope it will also stimulate a wider effort to consider new means and the new institutions which we shall need if we are to assure our common future."

Awarding for the second time the prize to UNHCR in 1981, the Norwegian Nobel Committee said that the world was witnessing "tremendous and increasing numbers of refugees," adding that "we are face to face with a veritable flood of human catastrophe and suffering, both physical and psychological." In this context, UNHCR "has carried out work of major importance to assist refugees, despite the many political difficulties with which it has had to contend."

In awarding the 1969 prize to ILO on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary, the Chairman of the Nobel Committee, Mrs. Aase Lionaes, said that few organizations had succeeded to the extent that the ILO had, in translating into action the fundamental moral idea on which it was based -- "If you desire peace, cultivate justice." She added that the demand for social justice had received "a tremendous impetus when the ILO was founded fifty years ago."

UNICEF was awarded the prize in 1965. In her presentation speech, Mrs. Aase Lionaes said UNICEF was "a peace factor of great importance. UNICEF has realized that children provide the key to the future; the children of today make the history of the future. UNICEF is now forging a link of solidarity between the rich and the poor countries."

Dag Hammarskjöld was awarded the 1961 prize "in gratitude for all he did, for what he achieved, for what he fought for: to create peace and goodwill among nations and men", said the Chairman of the Nobel Committee, Gunnar Jahn, in his presentation speech. He said Hammarskjöld "never departed from the path he had chosen from the very first: the path that was to result in the UN's developing into an effective and constructive international organization, capable of giving life to the principles and aims expressed in the UN Charter, administered by a strong Secretariat served by men who both felt and acted internationally. The goal he always strove to attain was to make the UN Charter the one by which all countries regulated themselves."

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