

Speech

of United Nations Resident Coordinator, Mr. John Hendra

Date: Friday, October 17, 2008

Event: UNIS UN Day Celebrations – All-school assembly

Dr. Chip Barder - Head of UNIS

Mr. Tran Ba Viet Dung, Director General, Ministry of Education and Training

Ambassadors, Senior Government Officials

Principals, Teachers and Parents

My Colleagues from the UN

Most Importantly UNIS Students – Girls and Boys

This is my third UN Day, and, like other years, one can't but be impressed by the inspiring parade past of national flags and the caring, warm community of teachers, students and parents here this beautiful morning. This is indeed what UN Day, and UNIS, is all about – a United Nations community that cares about the world, its people and its future.

Some of you may remember that last year I came with a big photo of a birthday cake to celebrate the 30th anniversary of Viet Nam joining the UN. This year I need 3 *birthday cakes*: one for the 63rd anniversary of UN Day; one for the 60th anniversary of the signing of a very, very important document -- the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and last, but certainly not least, one for the 20th anniversary of the founding of UNIS Hanoi. Congratulations on UNIS' 20th Birthday!



$$63 + 60 + 20 = 143$$

So our first picture this year is..... a birthday cake!! Now, if we add up all the candles for these 3 special birthdays – 143 -- that would surely give us the right to make some wishes, don't you think?

In this very important year then what should we wish for? Any ideas what we should wish for??

I think this year we should wish that all young people in Viet Nam -- and around the world -- learn about, and get to really understand, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

I am sure some of you are thinking - Yea, okay, it's 60 years old but isn't it just another piece of paper like the UN always produces?? Why is it so important?

Indeed the Universal Declaration is one big piece of paper – as you can see in our next picture.

(show picture) Maybe one of you can guess - *Who is the woman holding the Universal Declaration?*



It is Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of the 32nd President of the United States Franklin D. Roosevelt. And why was Eleanor Roosevelt important?

She in fact was one of the key people behind the Universal Declaration. She managed to get many countries around the world to sit at one table and agree that all people no matter where they live, no matter what their race, whether girl or boy, Buddhist, Christian or Muslim – who knows maybe even whether they like Superman or Pokemon – that all people are equal. And all people should be treated in the same way -- no difference should be made between them.

So if all people are equal, then all people should also be able to go to school, all people should be able to live a healthy life, and all people should be able to express themselves freely.

This is what this Universal Declaration did for the first time in history and why it is so special. For the first time, people around the world agreed that “You have a right” -- “You have a right to go to school”, “You have a right to be free” and “You have a right to live in peace”.

What's more, let me share a secret from the Declaration with you. Did you know that you all have the right to rest and leisure including holidays? That's what it says in article 24 of the Declaration. So principals and teachers giving you a break from

school next week is in fact not only a nice thing of them and Dr. Barder to do but in fact it is your right! You have a right to relax! And teachers have to respect this right.

But it also means you have to also respect to come back to class on time. So you see, having a right to something also means you have a responsibility.

You know what else is special about the Universal Declaration? It is also special because it is universal – that means it applies to every country. In fact, many countries have used the Declaration to make their own laws since it was signed not long after the Second World War by 48 countries. Wow! Can you imagine sixty years ago 48 countries agreeing on one thing? It is a big achievement.

The tragic thing though is that in spite of this, and despite the great progress that has been made over the past 60 years, millions of people around the world still suffer from serious violations of their basic human rights.

Even though people have a right to be free, there are still many, many children forced to work under terrible conditions; even though all people have the right to food many people still go to bed hungry every night.

And so the work of the United Nations to protect and promote human rights continues, together with the work of thousands of others -- world leaders, individuals, citizens groups, students and teachers – people just like you. It is up to each and every one of us -- to work toward a global culture of human rights, where every person’s rights are respected and fully realized. I think that maybe this should be our first and most important wish today.

But I think we might have time for 1 or 2 more wishes. I have one more picture to show you.



In order for our first wish to be realized, we also need a safe, healthy and prosperous world. So I think we should also wish that the United Nations, our partners and all world leaders, with your help, succeed in our promise to achieve these 8 very important goals we discussed two years ago – the Millennium Development Goals.

The Goals are all listed -- to eradicate extreme hunger and poverty; to achieve universal primary education; to promote gender equality and empower women; to reduce child mortality; to improve maternal health; to combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases; to ensure environmental sustainability; and to build a global partnership for development -- and are all to be achieved by the target year of 2015. That's only 7 years away so we all better hurry up!!

Thirdly, as the UN we wish that UNIS will continue to be a place that embodies the ideals and principles of the United Nations for years to come. In such an international and multi-cultural environment, you have opportunities every day to live up to these principles and help make them a reality in line with UNIS' mission -- to become "responsible stewards of our global society and natural environment".

And finally, in this anniversary year of so many important events, it is very much my privilege on behalf of all of my UN colleagues both past and present to wish each of you, and to also wish all of UNIS, a very happy United Nations Day – and a very, very Happy 20th Birthday!!

Congratulations UNIS!!