

June 15, 1961  
And from - US Dept of State

SPEECH DELIVERED BY SENATOR HUBERT A. HUMPHREY  
AT THE OPENING SESSION OF THE WORLD CONFERENCE OF  
LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Mr. Cottier, and members of the World Conference of Local Governments, you have honored the United States, and honored in particular our nation's Capitol, by your presence here this morning. I want to extend to you from the United States Senate the most cordial and hearty welcome.

We are delighted that you can be with us. And might I add that we are very happy that our own local officials from many cities, villages, counties and states of the United States can be with us too. So this pleasant admixture of representatives from abroad, as well as local government representatives from our own America make a very happy occasion.

Now, Mr. Cottier, I am sure you know that my presence here this morning was one of the spontaneous, unplanned acts of American diplomacy. This is really grass-roots diplomacy. I was given the privilege of knowing around 9 o'clock this morning that I was to be here. At that moment I was in conference with the Majority Leader of the United States Senate and members of certain committees in that body. I was told by my efficient Secretary that as of last evening, it was determined that Senator Humphrey would be privileged to address this Conference.

I readily accepted that opportunity because I am a local official at heart. I once served as the mayor of one of our fine cities in the United States -- the city of Minneapolis, Minnesota, a city of over a half million people, a city that has all of the problems, challenges and all of the many exciting opportunities that other cities have throughout this nation and throughout the world. So when I see a Mayor, a Councilman, or local government official, I feel -- first of all -- a sympathy for him; secondly, I feel a sort of happy understanding of his predicament and then I feel a kinship -- a friendship -- that goes far beyond what executives at higher levels of government could ever possibly feel, with the exception, of course, of our President who has given to you greetings this morning.

I know that our President is regretful that he is unable to be with you, but you understand the circumstances. I know that a representative of the President has been here to bring his message. I know that the chairman of our District of Columbia Commissioners, Mr. Tobriner, has brought you a message, and without any more of the formalities or courtesies, let me get into what I want to say.

I am going to visit with you now as a local official, as a citizen, as one who has worked with some of the same problems that you have been working with. And I make no distinction in my comments between my fellow American local

officials and local representatives from other parts of the world. We are one family. We all have the same headaches, on occasion. We all have the same problems. At least, in degree.

The first thing I want to say is that there is no single group of public officials that have greater responsibility for the welfare and the wellbeing of the overwhelming majority of the population of this earth than those who are privileged to hold local public office and to conduct local public service.

If this is going to be a better world, if there is going to be a better standard of living, if there is to be some relief from human suffering, some better opportunity for the young, better security for the aged, better health care for the sick, better education for our young people -- it will be primarily because the local public officials who are close to the people have insisted upon it, have given leadership, and have called upon their central governments, as well as their local citizenry, to mobilize the resources that are available for a better life.

We in the United States can learn a great deal from our friends here today from overseas. We are a young country in many ways. I always hope that we will be young of heart, young of spirit, vital, willing to try to do things, to experiment -- unafraid. The one characteristic that I want to see in free people today, is that characteristic of being unafraid. The removal of fear means being willing to face up to problems whatever they are, and to do it with a smile on our face, with a sense of confidence. We can learn a great deal from our friends today, fellow Americans. Some of the officials here from the more than 50 countries represented in this conference represent communities where there's been local government for hundreds of years. The cities of Europe, Asia and some of our sister-cities in Latin America and Africa, have experience in local government that is rich, that is informative if we will only seek to learn.

I am going to ask my fellow Americans to be humble -- to recognize that while we have done many great things, we haven't done it all. There is so much that we can learn from others. This is why I believe that these conferences are important. We get a chance to know each other -- not by the written word, not by the document or publication of our association but we get to know each other by personal contacts. We can talk out the problems. We can ask each other how we are meeting these problems in our respective communities.

For example, - I am not sure how the traffic problem is in Geneva, but let me tell you it is bad every place in the United States. And I have a feeling that all over the industrialized part of the world where mass transportation and automobile transportation is the common pattern, the traffic problems are with us. It doesn't make much difference what language you speak or where you

come from -- it is hard to find a place to park your car. Regarding public transportation, the citizens think the rates are too high. The local officials think the service is not good enough. And the constituents are angry with both. So, traffic problems are familiar for us. We have problems of air-pollution. We have problems of municipal revenues. The other day in the Congress, a few of us who have been local officials tried to get the Congress in the Housing program to set aside a certain amount of what we call 'open spaces' in the city planning. As we plan for the new suburbs, as we plan for the growth and development of our cities, we ask that money be allocated not only to clean out the slums, but to buy up, early before the real estate speculators got a hold of it -- open spaces. This is to allow people who live in these areas of concrete and asphalt, where brick and mortar is the scenery to hope that the children of tomorrow will have parks and recreation, and open spaces where they could see a stream of water, green grass and breathe fresh air. Just to show you how old fashioned we are around here, we didn't succeed in that effort. We still have people who feel that the way to build a city is to put buildings as close together as possible; the way that you build a city is to build it with concrete, mortar and steel.

I say that the way you build a city is to make it a suitable environment for people. A person is the important object - a city should be framed around the people. How I wish that our city planning of tomorrow would be centered, not around economics of real estate, not merely around the so-called convenience of industry! Let us have as a prime purpose of cities and towns and villages, a suitable environment for the development, the enlightenment, and the enrichment of God's greatest creation -- the human being.

Today, recreation, health, education, transportation - are becoming common problems. I care not whether you are from Brazil, or France, or whether you're from India or Japan, or whether you are from the United States or from Mexico - It makes no difference, my friends. Cities are cities. They are all noisy. They are all far too dirty. They all have far too many problems of what we call social order or policing. They are all crowded. They all offer a tremendous challenge to the ingenuity, the intelligence of the citizenry and the local officials.

I want to speak now, primarily, to my fellow Americans. I have long been interested in what we call the diplomacy of people to people. I recognize that I am speaking in the auditorium of our State Department.

This is a fine auditorium - better than anything we have over at the Congress, may I add. Of course, there is always that jealousy between the legislative branch and the executive. If somebody will tell me someday why legislators are unwilling to do for themselves what they are willing to do for the executives, I would be very happy to know. Anyway, I approve of this auditorium - I want that quite clear.

But I do want everyone to share this thought with me: The Government of

the United States is not just a government in Washington. The Government of the United States is the government of the thousands and thousands of local jurisdictions of government -- the districts, the villages, the towns, the cities, the counties, the 50 States, and then, the National or Federal Government.

This is a government of limited powers. Above all I add that all of the government -- the totality of our government, local, state and Federal -- does not represent even then the society that is ours, because we believe in the doctrine of popular sovereignty. We believe in the power of the people. In the people is vested the legal power, economic power, the political power of this republic. And this is essentially true in every free society.

When we hear people talk about what the Government of the United States is doing, don't think for a minute that this is all the United States is doing.

Because the Government of the United States is like the cap of an iceberg, visible from afar and often very formidable, but its real strength is the base that all too often is unseen or at least to which far too little attention is given. The only way that I know to make our government better is to see to it that the lot of the individual citizen is better. The only way that I know for America to have a real voice in this world that will be listened to and heard is to have that voice be the voice of a good conscience, of a clear and clean mind, of a strong and good heart.

This is why some of us have said that America's image to the world or our picture before the world is not merely the picture or the image of Washington, D. C. It is the image and reflection of the work and the deeds of every local official, every local community and every citizen.

This United States Senator has said repeatedly -- and I repeat it here this morning - that whenever an injustice is committed in any locality by any citizen or permitted by any local official, whenever there is a denial of human rights or abuse of civil liberty, or whenever there is denial of opportunity, the United States of America suffers and is weakened not only at home but throughout the world.

The best thing that this country can do for humanity is to set a good example. My friends from over seas, you can help us. You too must set a good example - and you too must ask us to live by high standards. This is a mutual cooperative effort.

I don't want America to stand on the high plateau looking out as if we were a superior people, because we're not. I want Americans to be a partner in the common enterprise of extending the areas of freedom and of building a society in which humankind can live a better life.

I want to be a cooperator not a dominator. I want us to share and I want you to share with us, and may I say that we both have so much to give to one another. There is so much we can learn from each other. It is impossible for a free country with representative government to have a strong effective program of mutual cooperation and an effective foreign policy unless the people share it, unless the people know what it means, and unless the people have understanding of the world in which they live.

My friends of local government, there is so much that you can do in the Sister City program. There is so much we can do by people to people contacts - cultural exchanges, families being brought together -- not just Americans going to your country, but you coming to our country.

There is so much that we can do in our schools to teach our young people today that this is one world and it is getting smaller by the hour, more interdependent, more inter-related. There is so much that we need to know of one another.

I am sure that my friends more from other parts of the world are perplexed when they read American newspapers about American politicians. May I add that some of our own people are perplexed too. I'm sure you must be perplexed when you know for example that a political party in power in this country can have several voices expressing different points of view. A congressman or senator who exercises independence of judgment even though he may be of the same political party as the President, might confuse people who have the parliamentary structure of government. We need not to criticize, or jump to quick conclusions. What we need is understanding. This requires personal contact.

I therefore urge each and everyone of you to make it your business to help build in this world today a better understanding of the part of the world that is yours, a better understanding by someone else of your city, a better understanding of your economic, your political, your social, your religious institutions.

It is interesting that scientists share knowledge. The scientists spend time, unbelievable amounts of time, trying to find out what other scientist are doing. We spend hundreds of millions of dollars to translate scientific documents so our scientists can know about your scientists, and your scientists can know about our scientists. Maybe this is why we have such advances in science and technology. Maybe this is why we will get to the moon and come back. But may I suggest that unless we spend a little more time getting acquainted, a little more time in searching for understanding, a little more effort to try to adjust our difference, the trip that we take to the moon will be made perhaps because you can't stand to live on the earth any longer.

I appeal therefore to those who are the political leaders to do what a political leader is required to do: to understand the people, to represent the people, to give leadership to the people, to sense their hopes and their aspirations. This can't be done just by the Secretary of State, and it can't be done by fellow Americans just by massive doses of American money. That isn't the answer at all. That helps, but the answer is much deeper.

So this morning I appeal to my friends in the Conference to join together as one mighty family or to put it in a more militant term -- as one mighty army. We are in a war against man's ancient enemies -- and it is these enemies that represent the allies of tyranny and that represent the common threat to humanity everywhere in the world. These are the enemy of poverty, which grips vast areas of the world; the enemy of sickness, illness, poor health, that afflicts over 70% of humanity; the enemy of hungry that gnaws away at the very physical and spiritual being of people; and the corrupting and eroding enemy of ignorance and illiteracy which breeds passion, fear, hatred, bigotry and all the evils that siphon vitality from our strength.

These are the common enemies. I care not the color of your skin the faith that is yours, the country from whence you come, the size of your community or of your country -- what we need is a common allegiance to a coordinated program on the part of humanity to strike body blows against these ancient and vicious enemies.

I submit that we can do something about them. I'm a man who is optimistic of the future. I do not think that the revolution that is sweeping this world today is a communist revolution. I don't think that it is a revolution that will end in tyranny. I think that the revolution that is sweeping the world of which you are so aware is a revolution against the intolerable conditions of the past. I think this is a revolution that is sweeping up the people of the world to lift them to a higher ground, so that they can have a new life. I appeal to those who love freedom to join that revolution, to guide it, to insure its success, and not in any way to try to stand in its way. To try to stand in its way would mean that you would be rolled over.

This revolution needs direction and above all it needs sympathetic understanding. And I say that we of this world, this modern world, have it within our means now -- if we would but put forth the effort -- to remove from the face of the earth famine and starvation. Never again need a human being be the victim of famine if mankind would but put himself to the task of the production and distribution of food and fiber, which is ever so abundant in this world.

Why is it we can't become sufficiently aroused over this? Why is it that we're so excited about a man in orbit and yet we have so little concern about a man in the depth of desperation, the depth of despair, the depth of misery.

I call upon my fellow American to let this century be known as the century of man's enlightenment. I do not want the United States of America known only as a Nation that produces great weapons, or as a Nation that was known as the richest of its time. I want America to be known as a Nation of the healer, of the teacher, of the provider, of food and fiber, to clothethe naked and to feed the hungry.

And I say that if people who love people will make up their mind that these ancient enemies of hunger, disease, proverty and ignorance, can be defeated, if we all understand that these are the real enemies of humanity, the real allies of despotism and tyranny we will have gained a new sense of living, a new appreciation of the wonder of this world which will bring us to what we call that pursuant of happiness.

Now I want to express to you my thanks for your willingness to listen to me. It has been a joy to be with you and I believe that the words that I have spoken here this morning represent in a very large measure the spirit and the heart of the millions and millions of people who make up this great Nation of ours -- the workers, the farmers, the businessmen, the teachers, the house-wives, the children.

Make no mistake about it. In this good land of ours today, the spirit of the people is good and it is strong. There is a desire on the part of the people of this United States to work hand and hand, side by side, shoulder to shoulder with people who desire to improve the lot of their fellowmen, people who seek social and economic and political reform.

If we can get this common understanding out of meetings such as this, a better day is in the offing.



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