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Kurt WALDHEIM
(Phonetic: VAHLThime)

Secretary General of the
United Nations (since
January 1972)

Addressed as:
Mr. Secretary General



The quintessence of the professional diplomat, Kurt Waldheim was elected to a second 5-year term as UN Secretary General in December 1976. He has a well-earned international reputation for fairness and objectivity, which undoubtedly helped him win reelection. A man in constant motion, Waldheim visited two-thirds of the UN member nations during his first term in office. He frequently feels frustrated in his attempts to keep the member states together. Seeing his main role as that of mediator, he resents being held accountable for events that are neither his responsibility nor within his limited powers to control. In his view, however, there is simply no alternative to the United Nations, and he is dedicated to its survival. He believes that the United Nations has moved from an era of confrontation into one of "Realpolitik."

Waldheim, who is considered a good friend of the United States, has spent almost half of his career at the United Nations in New York. His long service in this country has contributed to his understanding of American thinking and foreign policy objectives. He was encouraged by President Carter's recent statement that the United Nations is the most important instrument of international cooperation.

View of His Job

Waldheim sees himself as an optimist in the world's most hopeless office. His first term as Secretary General was notable because of his attempt to perfect the technical machinery of diplomacy. He was not innovative and his efforts did not produce a "Waldheim doctrine" on any subject, but he opened channels of dialogue for discussions of world problems.

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Few UN diplomats expect that his second term will bring any radical departures from his record of discretion and caution. He will undoubtedly continue to steer a narrow course between the developed countries and the increasingly assertive Third World majority. Waldheim believes that his three main duties are to engage in quiet diplomacy; to be the manager in a crisis; and to speak out, especially on humanitarian issues, when a Secretary General cannot be silent. He views the Mideast, Cyprus and South Africa as the main areas of crisis; he is skeptical about the value of reconvening the Mideast peace talks in Geneva this fall.

Personal Data

The imperturbable and indefatigable Waldheim thrives on work and usually puts in a very long day. Most UN delegates acknowledge his integrity, earnestness and good faith. Waldheim, 58, has a doctorate in law from the University of Vienna. His avocational interests include skiing, fishing, gardening and listening to classical music. Married, he has three children. Waldheim speaks English fluently.

Career Highlights

1955-56	Permanent Observer to the United Nations
1956-60	Envoy, then Ambassador, to Canada
1960-62	Director, Political Department West, Foreign Office
1962-64	Director general of political affairs, Foreign Office
1964-68	Permanent Representative to the United Nations
1968-70	Foreign Minister
1970-71	Permanent Representative to the United Nations
1972-date	Secretary General, United Nations

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