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Kurt WALDHEIM  
(Phonetic: VAHLThime)

AUSTRIA

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 five-year term as UN Secretary General in December 1976; his well-earned international reputation for fairness and objectivity undoubtedly helped him win reelection in 1976. Waldheim feels that his main role is that of a mediator, and 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. In June 1979 he hailed SALT II as a step in halting, and eventually reversing, the nuclear arms race. At the direction of the Security Council Waldheim went to Tehran in early January 1980 to attempt to secure the release of the American hostages held captive at the US Embassy; the mission ended in failure. (C)

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 did open channels of dialogue for discussions of world problems. 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. Since he first visited Malaysia in April 1979, Waldheim has placed special emphasis on the refugee problem in Southeast Asia. In May 1979 he condemned Iran's new leaders and the form of justice practiced in that country. Waldheim has said

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that there are five persistent issues confronting the United Nations--the Middle East problem, southern Africa, Cyprus, the new international economic order, and disarmament--and that these issues are all moving into critical stages. In June 1979 the Greek Ambassador to the United Nations credited Waldheim's dedication and inventiveness for the resumption of intercommunal talks on Cyprus. Waldheim remains skeptical about prospects for a lasting Egyptian-Israeli peace unless there is strong UN involvement. (C)

Closely guarding what he sees as the UN prerogative of problem solving, Waldheim in February 1979 decried the tendency to use a nationalist approach to problems rather than fully utilizing regional and international machinery such as that provided by the United Nations. He believes the United Nations is viewed as a court of last resort--consulted only after the breakdown of bilateral talks. Waldheim has said that no problem facing the United Nations is more vital than the need to strengthen the effectiveness of the Security Council. He believes that the ways in which this body is used, or not used, and the respect, or lack of it, for its decisions should be given the closest attention by all member states. (C)

Career and Personal Data

Waldheim has a doctorate in law from the University of Vienna. He was Austrian Permanent Observer to the United Nations during 1955-56, Ambassador to Canada from 1956 to 1960, Permanent Representative to the United Nations during (1964-68 and 1970-71 Foreign Minister from 1968 to 1970. The imperturbable and indefatigable Waldheim, 61, thrives on work. Most UN delegates acknowledge his integrity, earnestness and good faith. Waldheim, enjoys skiing, fishing, gardening and listening to classical music. He speaks fluent English. Married, he has three children. His wife, the former Elisabeth Ritschel, accompanies him on some of his official trips. (C)

8 May 1980