

Guterres hails predecessor Dag Hammarskjöld as 'my reference and my inspiration'

[Secretary-General António Guterres](#) on Sunday described his predecessor Dag Hammarskjöld as his “fundamental inspiration,” who should be regarded as the “central reference” point for the whole United Nations ideal today.

Delivering the annual [Dag Hammarskjöld](#) Lecture in Uppsala, Sweden, the childhood home of the second UN Secretary-General, Mr. Guterres said Mr. Hammarskjöld made the “supreme sacrifice” in September 1961, when he died in a plane crash in what is now Zambia, while trying to negotiate a complex ceasefire agreement.

“The values that he fought for[...] make him a fundamental inspiration for us all, that want to pursue the same goals, the same objectives, with reference to the same values,” Mr. Guterres said.

He said that even more inspiring than Mr. Hammarskjöld’s personality was that he had been “not only a man of action, not only an extremely sophisticated diplomat” but also “a man of culture.”

“And that is probably what is today more lacking in statespersons, and in high-ranking officers of international organizations like the UN, is that strong link to culture,” added the UN chief.

He recounted that his predecessor had called poetry an “indispensable complement to diplomacy” quoting the Swede as saying that “the diplomat, like the poet, works with words – transposes words – using them as a key although not necessarily a master key.”

Turning to today’s world and his own diagnosis of some of the fundamental problems facing society, Mr. Guterres said that his predecessor had noted the same dangers of nations turning inwards, as opposed to looking outwards, and placing their faith in multilateralism.



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Former UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld in March 1954.

“If it’s true that globalization has provided enormous benefits to humankind in wealth; in trade in the increase of a huge middle-class; in the increase of the time of life; in the reduction in absolute poverty; the truth is that globalization has increased inequalities in a dramatic way,” said the UN chief.

“Many are the losers of globalization in the rust-belts of this world” he said, adding that an environment had been created now where faith in multilateral bodies like the UN “has been dramatically reduced.”

One of today’s great conundrums is how to build trust in the idea that there are solutions to the world’s current problems and challenges he said.

“The problems of our times are global problems that can only be solved with global solutions, but there is a certain trend for isolationism that was mentioned by Dag Hammarskjöld with all the consequences we are witnessing today.”

The lecture is given each year by an “outstanding international personality” in memory of the former Secretary-General, and co-organized by Uppsala University and the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation.