

Sometimes we tend not to give enough credence to the view that international relations can be improved, and existing tensions or misconceptions overcome, through unofficial, non-governmental channels. In many ways, person-to-person exchanges, contacts and informal dialogue outside the framework and protocol of rigid bureaucratic or political structures can be rewarding for those involved and can help break down the barriers of mistrust and suspicion that sometimes exist between peoples. The pursuit of a healthy international environment must not only be restricted to the official plane; there are many other ways of building bridges between peoples and cultures in an often troubled, self-centred and self-seeking world.

We must recognize that mankind shares this planet and that it must learn to live together despite the ideological divisions and mistrust that often divide it. This vision of the unity of mankind lay behind the founding of the United Nations in 1945 and the creation of the network of UN agencies that have done so much constructive work in many fields -- international development, health and educational programs, in international trade -- to name but a few, through a co-operative, multilateral approach. Sadly, today these very institutions are under sustained attack from some quarters and sorely need the support of all UN Member States.