

**Tribute by Dr. Mukhisa Kituyi
Secretary-General of UNCTAD**

**for the late Dr. Gamani Corea
Former Secretary-General of UNCTAD**

This afternoon, I have the sad honour of paying tribute to my distinguished predecessor, Deshamanya Gamani Corea, who died earlier this month. His passing is a great loss to us. He was a true warrior for the weak and disadvantaged, and the tribute we pay to him today only underscores the continuing importance of his life's work, and the lamentable reality that much of what he fought for remains unfulfilled.

Gamani Corea was an unlikely hero. He carried the title Deshamanya, "Pride of the Nation", the highest title and honour that his country can bestow, yet he was a shy man. He was born into the intellectual elite of his country, and found intellectual sustenance in the rarefied air of Oxford and Cambridge. While he could have had a prominent career as a leader in national politics, he instead gravitated to the life of a technocrat, a diplomat, and an intellectual force in the global arena.

His commitment to the cause of development – as a national civil servant and as a global diplomat – ultimately brought him to UNCTAD; not just to the leadership of the organization but also to the design stage of the edifice itself. Indeed, his role in shaping the first United Nations Conference on Trade and Development should not be underestimated.

It is no surprise, therefore, that as UNCTAD Secretary-General he carried on the spirit and ideals of Raúl Prebisch, while bringing his own convictions to the organization. Indeed, Corea embodied the true character of UNCTAD: the courage to challenge conventional wisdom, not for its own sake, but out of an unwavering commitment to bringing about a better world.

He was ideally suited to this task. He had modesty of spirit and humility of mind – a mark of true greatness. And yet, despite his deeply held values, he was not by nature a confrontational man. He was instead a devout man of conviction and principle, who was not afraid to stand up to the strong in defence of the weak. He was, simply put, an embodiment of the confident South.

And it was as the product of the confident South that he led this organization from 1974 to 1985, with a vision to make it an intellectual hub as well as a centre for meaningful negotiations on matters of global importance. And for a time, this was so. Commodities agreements were negotiated. The Common Fund was established. And a worldwide movement towards a new global economic architecture marched on. Indeed, it is touching that the voice of the South inspired the respect of the embodiment of

realpolitik himself – Henry Kissinger – who encouraged Corea to stay the course no matter what their intellectual or ideological differences might have been. This is what happens when true titans meet.

Yet all good things come to an end, and so did Corea's time at UNCTAD. The world had changed, and with it UNCTAD.

Despite the changes in the global context, and in the organization itself, his spirit and legacy live on. UNCTAD remains an intellectual centre of excellence on development in the United Nations system, and in the broader development community. And the quadrennial UNCTAD conference remains the only major UN conference on development that takes place on a regular and predictable basis. It is, in many ways, the Olympics of development.

And it is so partly because of the Olympian nature of Corea. The end of his tenure at UNCTAD did not mark the end his commitment to development. He became one of the founding fathers of the South Centre, in effect the OECD of the South. And he remained active on development matters, including as a member of his country's delegation to the Rio Conference in 1992, proving that even after serving humanity you can go back to serving your country.

It is therefore through his spirit of service that we honour him. We keep alive his principles and his aspirations for a better world. He put into practice his dream of an UNCTAD that makes a difference, and we are committed to that dream too.

I wish to close by observing that there are echoes of a not-so-distant past in this chamber. Corea's time at UNCTAD may perhaps seem as distant as yesteryear, and yet in many respects the world remains the same: The global economic system continues to impede the full development of developing countries; some countries of the South have emerged as vibrant players on the world stage while others remain mired in desperation; and the global economic environment is in flux, casting into uncertainty the global balance of interests and power.

And now, just as in Corea's time, we have the opportunity to change things for the better. Through the post-2015 process and the forthcoming UNCTAD XIV, we can strive to more effectively address global challenges by fostering a new spirit of cooperation and consensus in UNCTAD, which is the way that Gamani Corea surely would have wanted.