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INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION IN THE PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE: REPORT  
OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE

CONCLUSION OF AN INTERNATIONAL TREATY ON PRINCIPLES GOVERNING THE  
ACTIVITIES OF STATES IN THE EXPLORATION AND USE OF OUTER SPACE,  
THE MOON AND OTHER CELESTIAL BODIES

TREATY GOVERNING THE EXPLORATION AND USE OF OUTER SPACE, INCLUDING  
THE MOON AND OTHER CELESTIAL BODIES

Letter dated 9 December 1966 from the Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. of the  
Mission of the Republic of Liberia to the United Nations addressed to  
the Secretary-General of the United Nations

I have the honour to transmit excerpts from an address delivered on Thursday,  
8 December 1966 by President William V.S. Tubman, President of the Republic of  
Liberia, relating to the subject of outer space, with the request that it be  
circulated as a United Nations document.

Please accept, etc.

(Signed) Martinus L. JOHNSON  
Chargé d'Affaires, a.i.

\* Reissued for technical reasons.

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EXCERPTS FROM AN ADDRESS DELIVERED ON THURSDAY, 8 DECEMBER 1966, BY  
PRESIDENT WILLIAM V.S. TUBMAN, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA,  
RELATING TO THE SUBJECT OF OUTER SPACE

Apart from the instinct of man's self-preservation and the perpetuation of his kind, no emotion so pervades the history of man as his remarkable thirst for knowledge. From the moment we glimpse man's activity on earth, we see him engaged in a persistent, daring and often dangerous preoccupation with the world about him - always seeking to unveil another of its mysteries, always striving to control another of its forces, always aspiring, it would seem, to wrest power over the universe from the hand of God.

We cannot doubt that man was indeed meant to grow in knowledge and understanding. Given, from the first, "dominion over the earth and everything that moveth on it", man has also been adjured since time immemorial to expand his understanding of the universe and of his role in it.

The Proverbs of Solomon ring with the praise of learning:

"... a wise man will hear and increase learning..."

"...teach a just man, and he will increase in learning..."

"...the heart of the wise addeth learning to his lips..."

Homer and Sophocles sang learning's praises. Euripides warned that "who so neglects learning in his youth, loses the past and is dead for the future."

This theme echoes down through all of human history. We heard it from our own fathers; we are passing it on to our own children.

We are surrounded by proof that knowledge can enhance our lives, that learning can lessen suffering, broaden horizons, and enrich our days. We are the beneficiaries of mankind's unquenchable thirst for knowledge. We can only join the sages of the past in praising knowledge and in appreciating those who seek it and use it.

And yet man's history gives rise to doubts. We question whether it is knowledge alone that we should seek. We cannot, after all, be blind to the fact that it was for tasting the fruit of the tree of knowledge that our first parents were banished from Paradise! We do not believe that God would have man live in ignorance, but we do believe that man's goal should be wisdom and understanding, rather than mere learning or knowledge.

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We are not the first to question the worth of untempered and undisciplined learning.

Sir Francis Drake reminded us that "The desire for power in excess caused the angels to fall; the desire for knowledge in excess caused man to fall." The Apostle Timothy spoke of men "... ever learning and never able to come to the truth". And it is truth which we are told will set men free - not knowledge.

"Knowledge comes," says Tennyson, "but wisdom lingers."

So, it is our desire at this time to draw the subtle but essential line between an unbridled, unthinking, hollow quest for knowledge and the purposeful, thoughtful, creative search for understanding.

History readily demonstrates how easily, how often and how unhappily man's knowledge outstrips his understanding. Man's discoveries have repeatedly liberated some only to enslave others. Man's imperfection is never more clearly seen than in his inadequate and painful employment of the fruits of knowledge.

The Pharaohs advanced the frontiers of engineering knowledge, creating monuments which are admired down to our times - but their discovery caused the lives of tens of thousands of their fellow men.

The gin made possible the cultivation of cotton on a scale never known before - and the resultant demand for slaves has scarred the history of our continent.

The spinning jenny and flying shuttle brought mass production of cloth and clothes to people who could never before afford them but the machines consumed the lives of children as the cotton fields did the lives of Africans.

The bow and arrow, the cross bow, the firearm, each made it easier for man to obtain food - and to kill himself in ever greater numbers.

The energy of the atom has been released and controlled with still unimaginable promise for the good of man - but its principal use is still to hold in terror most of mankind.

Now, we watch in awe and apprehension as man reaches into the very heavens with the same imperfect hands and inadequate understanding that have marked his progress through the ages.

Just as King Canute could not sweep back the tides with his broom, we cannot, and would not want to impede the thrilling tides of man's progress. But we can and would cry out like Solomon: "With all thy getting, get understanding".

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Man's knowledge is awesome, but what of his understanding? Does man understand adequately the forces which he believes he now masters? Has man's wisdom kept pace with his learning? It would not seem so.

We do not think that man is yet mature enough, disciplined enough, wise enough, to lay his hands on the very secrets of the universe. When we think of the suffering which has so often accidentally and blindly followed man's past advanced in science, we can only believe that man now owes it to himself to pause and reflect before plunging wilfully on the path he has chosen.

We are told that one apparatus has transmitted so many thousands of photographs of the moon that it will take months simply to develop, not to study, just develop them. We were told that man in a weightless state could accomplish prodigies of strength; but we see a grave man forced to renounce his efforts in space because he is exhausted by less than an hour's work. We hear that men in space now sight man-made objects which none can identify and that two such objects circling the earth recently collided in all that expanse of space.

In short, we must concede that once more man's reach has surpassed his understanding. Would not all mankind and all human progress now benefit from a pause for study and assimilation of the information that man has accumulated but has not assessed? Would not the dangers of unsuspected catastrophes be reduced if man refrained from throwing new objects into space until he better understands the meaning of those he has presently circling there?

It would seem so and we believe that all men would be benefited by an international agreement to refrain for a given, reasonable period, five years perhaps, from engaging in any experiments in space not specifically accepted in advance by international agreement. We believe that such a period could be used to collate, to study, to evaluate, to understand the data already collected.

Ample provision could be made in such an agreement for the launching of such internationally useful and apparently benign objects as communication satellites. Provision might also be made for internationally sponsored and controlled weather observation satellites.

Whatever the approach to details, the substance of the agreement would be the same - to remove the element of competition, of haste, of heedlessness from man's exploration of the heavens, and to oblige man to take the time to arrive at a mature understanding of the forces with which he is dealing before he risks

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plunging himself and all humanity into a cataclysm which none could foresee, took the time to look for, or could remedy.

There is no need to dwell on the corollary benefits which could result from such a moratorium. The senseless waste of manpower and money which results, not from the quest of knowledge itself, but from the haste and urgency with which these experiments are undertaken, could be reduced if not eliminated. Even if only one tenth of the sums we see mentioned for such activities were devoted to the alleviation of hunger, disease and ignorance on earth, what miracles could be worked.

We know that an agreement of this type would not be easy to reach. It might affront national pride, anxiety for self-defence and the sacred cows of science and progress. The chance for man's understanding in this field to keep pace with his knowledge would surely make the effort worthwhile.

Liberia and its neighbours are, of course, not direct participants in the "space race" today. But no matter how small, no matter how struggling, no matter how poor we may be, we share the same heavens with the greatest Powers. Their catastrophes are usually ours; their failures of understanding affect our lives as intimately as their own; their concentration of money, imagination, scientific endeavour and national ambition on a headlong, impatient and wasteful race for knowledge which they cannot even take the time to study affects our lives, our hopes, our future just as it does their own.

In this context we do not think it awry, and we hope that none take it amiss, that we should propose in this manner, to commence an effort to obtain an agreement to halt, or at least to limit and control, the space race for a period of five to ten years, that we should call upon our sister African States to join us in developing specific steps leading toward the negotiation of such an agreement, that we should, further, look to the co-operation and assistance of all those who share with us a compulsion to take every step necessary to assure that man's lust for knowledge is not allowed to ravish his wisdom and understanding.

We may, I think, rightly paraphrase Alexander Hamilton in comparing knowledge to a great river, "kept within its bounds it is both beautiful and useful, but when it overflows its banks, it is then too impetuous to be stemmed; it bears down all before it and brings destruction and desolation wherever it comes."

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Let us then use daring and imagination and wisdom and understanding to curb the excesses and keep this glorious quest for knowledge within the bounds of men's ability to understand and intelligently employ its forces.

Having thus commented on and expressed our great concern of the present-day ambitious, unrelenting and continuing quest for knowledge without understanding not only of the things around us but of the things above and beyond us in this epochal era which rationally and of necessity form a part of the very life and existence of the present, the hope and prospective of the future, we commit our country, ourselves, all nations and peoples to the one eternal God and pray for guidance and deliverance from suicidal destruction and annihilation.

May God out of His bounteous mercy forgive and save us.

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