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NOFORNKurt WALDHEIM
(Phonetic: VAHLThime)AUSTRIA*Secretary General of the
United Nations (since
January 1972)*

A competent professional diplomat with a reputation for fairness and objectivity, Kurt Waldheim is serving his second five-year term as UN Secretary General, having been reelected by acclamation in December 1976. In his opinion, there is no alternative to the United Nations, and he is dedicated to its survival. He insists that his main role as Secretary General 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. Waldheim has expressed concern about negative public attitudes toward the United Nations and about what he calls the apparent inability of UN officials to generate broad public support for the organization. Despite his sometimes gloomy and pessimistic pronouncements on the activities and future of the United Nations, he enjoys serving as Secretary General and is confident that he has done a good job. (C)

**The Job and Waldheim's View of It**

The post of UN secretary general is a position having great responsibility but no real power. The incumbent ranks as a head of state, but unlike the leader of a sovereign state, he has no consistent political constituency of his own; he has no clear-cut policy line on which to base his efforts; and he has only a modest staff with which to carry out the decisions of the organization. He is responsible to a General Assembly of more than 150 nations, each with its own view on every issue. He is the administrator and chief of staff of the organization and acts as its representative worldwide. (U)

When Waldheim accepted the appointment by the General Assembly to a second term, he described the post as "one of the most fascinating, and at the same time, one of the most frustrating jobs in the world." He sees himself as an optimist in the world's most hopeless office. He

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SOURCE METHODS EXEMPTION 3B2B
NAZI WAR CRIMES DISCLOSURE ACT
DATE 2001 2007

ORIGINAL CL BY	015787
REVW ON	3 Dec 2000
EXT BYND 6 YEARS BY	015787
REASON CGR	7

CR 80-15657

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has said that his three main duties are to engage in quiet, behind-the-scenes diplomacy; to be the manager in a crisis; and to speak out, especially on humanitarian issues. He has also remarked that, as spokesman for the United Nations, he must be so objective that all nations will accept his mediation. (C)

Waldheim publicly disagrees with critics who dismiss the United Nations as too cumbersome and faction-ridden to intervene decisively in any conflict. He contends that its current ineffectiveness is the fault of member nations who use it as a forum for narrow nationalist squabbles, and he places much of the blame for the organization's poor record on the superpowers, because they bypass it in favor of bilateral negotiations. He closely guards what he sees as the UN prerogative of problem solving. In February 1979 he 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 has noted that the United Nations is viewed by many countries as a court of last resort, to be consulted only after the breakdown of bilateral talks. Waldheim has said that the most vital task of the organization is to strengthen the effectiveness of the Security Council. (C)

Since the beginning of his first term, Waldheim has been acutely conscious of the problems of the developing world. He regards the reduction of the gap between the world's rich and poor nations as the greatest challenge to international statesmen. Waldheim has told a close friend that he would like to be remembered as the Secretary General who brought about the beginning of a constructive North-South dialogue. (C)

During his eight years as Secretary General, Waldheim has been involved in organizing and supervising the operations of the various peacekeeping forces in the Middle East and has helped restore order on the island of Cyprus. During 1980 he has become involved in the problem of resettling Kampuchean refugees. In carrying out the duties of his office, Waldheim has traveled throughout the world. (C)

Waldheim is confident that he can be reelected in late 1981. A high-level UN official has said that Waldheim believes he has the support of the United States, France and the United Kingdom but is less certain of the support of the Soviet Union and China. The official added that, in his opinion, Waldheim had accepted the appointment of numerous Soviet nationals to senior UN posts in Geneva in order to gain Soviet backing for his reelection. (C)

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Early Life and Career

The son of a civil servant, Kurt Waldheim was born on 21 December 1918 at St. Andrä Wördern, near Vienna. After graduating from the Consular Academy of Vienna in 1939, he studied law at the University of Vienna. During World War II, he served in the German Army and was wounded in the right leg. In 1944 he returned to the university and received a doctorate in law. During that year he also worked as a court official and attained the rank of assistant judge. In 1945 he joined the foreign service and was appointed secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Three years later he was assigned to the Embassy in Paris as first secretary. From 1951 to 1955 Waldheim was director of personnel in the Foreign Ministry. (U)

Waldheim was Permanent Observer to the United Nations during 1955-56 and then Ambassador to Canada from 1956 to 1960. Returning to Vienna, he served in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, first as director of the Political Department West during 1960-62 and then as director general of political affairs from 1962 until 1964, when he began a tour as Permanent Representative to the United Nations. He remained there until 1968 and held the post again during 1970-72. In the interim he was Foreign Minister. (U)

Personal Data

The indefatigable Waldheim thrives on work and usually puts in long hours at his job. Most UN delegates acknowledge his integrity, earnestness and good faith. []

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Waldheim has personal warmth and charm, although he appears to be stern. He enjoys skiing, fishing, gardening, and listening to classical music. He is married to the former Elisabeth Ritschel, whom he met while both were studying law at the University of Vienna. The couple has three children—Liselotte (born circa 1945), Gerhard (born circa 1950), and Christa (born circa 1961). The Waldheims both speak English and German; he is also fluent in Italian. (C)

3 December 1980

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