

# ASSESSMENT OF THE FIRST CONFERENCE

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(Professor Whitmann was Secretary-General  
of the 1955 Conference)

The dramatic lifting of the Iron Curtain, which had for decades sealed off communication between East and West, was the outstanding feature of the first United Nations International Conference on the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy in 1955. Many scientists had doubted that a truly scientific meeting would be permitted by governments, and had predicted that science would be submerged by political propaganda. Could this United Nations initiative be a creative instrumentality toward realizing that "Open World" which Niels Bohr advocated with such eloquence?

The Conference fully lived up to Mr. Hammarskjold's hopes that it would inaugurate a new era in intercommunication. Participating scientists were enthusiastic over the opportunity for direct association and discussion in a professional atmosphere, without significant political intervention. To laymen everywhere, the knowledge that the world's scientific elite was exchanging information and ideas about nuclear energy, with the purpose of developing its potential benefits to mankind, was most heartening. Here was long-delayed evidence of international co-operation.

Papers and seminars on pure science were, naturally enough, more in evidence than those on engineering applications, both because of the relative state of knowledge and because of reticence to disclose engineering "know-how" to potential competitors. Furthermore, it is quite evident in retrospect that the prospects for economical nuclear power at an early date were over-estimated by the enthusiasts. Even so, the creation of a body of informed opinion was an essential step to stimulate further research, design and sound economic analysis for the eventual development of useful power from the atom.



Prof. W.G. Whitman (UN photo)

A most significant initiative of this Conference was the recruiting of an international group of scientists within the staff of the United Nations to plan, to guide and to operate the Conference. This group of "Scientific Secretaries", consisting of 22 men from 14 nations with differing ideologies, was absolutely vital to the success of the enterprise. The competence and loyalty which all of these men devoted to the challenging task which they faced well demonstrated the tremendous potential which exists for effective international co-operation in the service of mankind.