

Quotes about Geneva by Vladimir Petrovsky, taken from his speeches 1993-2002

“From Geneva, ideas of peace, justice and progress spread throughout the world. The experiment in international relations, of which Geneva is the scene, concerns every human being. Geneva represents a tremendous investment by the human race for its own survival.”

“The city of Geneva is one of the largest European centres of international interactions. This happened because of the spirit of openness, responsibility, freedom, and humanism which is so common among the people of Geneva and which has allowed this city to win a worldwide recognition.”

“The delegates of the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 understood very well the value of neutrality. Nestled at the heart of Europe, Geneva was an ideal setting for a new international organization to put down its roots. Switzerland's reputation for neutrality, dating back as far as the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, was an important factor in the delegates' decision. Geneva was also a more palatable solution than many of the other candidates in the political tug of war for the right to host the organization. The Great War had devastated most of the continent of Europe, but had left Geneva relatively unscathed. Neutrality had kept Geneva safe from the horrors of the first World War and made it an appropriate host to the movement for lasting peace and the prevention of future conflicts. This international character is very much present today and contributes to Geneva's reputation as an important forward-looking global centre for multilateral diplomacy.”

“Seventy years ago, Geneva succeeded - despite competition from Paris and Brussels - in gaining the right to accommodate the Headquarters of the League of Nations, thanks, mainly to its reputation as city of internationalism, tolerance and political impartiality as well as to the considerable experience in organizing large international fairs and meetings. Since then, Geneva's potential has been enhanced by an impressive infrastructure from which both the international community and the city of Geneva benefit. I am convinced that, in the new post-peace world, Geneva will maintain its prominent place in multilateral diplomacy despite the fact that a growing number of States are eager to host United Nations institutions.”

“In regard to this legacy of “Spirit of Geneva” it is worth mentioning that the concerns of the League of Nations related to the promotion of international understanding and cooperation, to disarmament and welfare, to the protection of the rights of the individuals and, in a broader sense, the propagation of the concept of humanitarian justice have found their reflection in the Charter of the United Nations, adopted in San Francisco in May 1945.”

“As you know this city is one of the major capitals of multilateral diplomacy. It is both the symbol and the birthplace of internationalism. As long ago as 1830 one of the staunch supporters of pacifism, Count Jean-Jacques de Sellon, organized here in Geneva the League of Peace to promote friendship among the European States and in 1863 International Red Cross was born. These associations have served as an inspiration for the creation in 1919 of the first universal intergovernmental organization - the League of Nations which had its headquarters in Palais des Nations. On 18 April 1946 the Palais has witnessed the historical moment of the smooth transition of this building and the international infrastructure in Geneva to the United Nations.”

“Within this international structure, Geneva has its own handwriting. Whilst New York is the major decision-making centre, Geneva is the major operational headquarters. Up to 65 per cent of all the activities of the Organization are conducted from Geneva, many of the operations extending to all regions of the world.”

“When looking at Geneva International from historical perspective, it is obvious that with the rapid development of multilateral diplomacy, this city has a chance of acquiring even more importance and become a Europolis of the United Nations – one of the edifices of the UN global architecture of peace, cooperation, and security – the major crossroad of people and ideas. However, these are not only the diplomats and the international civil servants who provide Geneva’s multilateral landscape. The city which is also an important European cultural and business centre attracts people from many walks of life.”

“The history of multilateral international cooperation in the humanitarian field started here in Geneva. It gradually expanded into other spheres such as disarmament and arms regulation, collective security, health care, postal services, telecommunication, global trade, financial interactions and so on.”

“Humanitarian affairs have traditionally been considered as one of Geneva's area of expertise due to the synergy of various leading humanitarian organizations based in this city. Geneva is the headquarters of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Organization for Migration, the Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and this has enticed many non-governmental organizations to settle in Geneva.”

“In our persistent efforts to advance human rights, Geneva, which is the home of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human rights as well as other United Nations humanitarian organizations, will continue to service as the focal point of humanitarianism. In the new post-cold war world, the strength of Geneva lies not only in its spirit but mainly in the tremendous amount of international knowledge. To rephrase the famous dictum of Francis Bacon “knowledge is the power of Geneva”. (On Palais Wilson) Geneva is indeed one of the most important centers for international diplomacy and humanitarianism in the world and is host to the largest number of international organizations in Europe, including the largest concentration of UN Agencies and programmes outside of UN Headquarters in NY. This makes Geneva an ideal place for learning more about how international organizations function, how their mandates overlap or complement each other, how negotiations are handled, and how the international community can work together to take action in countries where action is needed most.”

“Geneva will continue to consolidate its activities in its five traditional peace-building areas of expertise, namely: human rights and humanitarian affairs; trade and development; disarmament negotiations and implementation of the treaties; science and technology; and training and research.”

“Geneva is also one of the few crucial centres for interaction between global and regional structures. The tripartite consultative process between the UNOG, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe is just one example. The search for and harmonization of strategies to achieve peace and security is the major aim of cooperation between the UN and regional structures.”

“As a result of the reform initiated in 1993, the role of Geneva in peacebuilding and crisis prevention has been renewed and reinvigorated. In addition to strengthening its traditional position as a center for conference diplomacy and operational activities, Geneva has acquired new functions as a repository of

political technology in a variety of fields. The political know-how of Geneva makes it attractive for high level visits on the governmental and parliamentary levels. One of the primary aims of these visits are meetings with Heads of UN Agencies and Programmes.

As a multifaceted UN office Geneva Headquarters is also well positioned for cooperation with regional organizations as well as with new actors on the global scene, such as parliamentarians, political parties, academic world, the media, religious leaders, business community and civil society in all its aspects.

The new role of Geneva is one of the main reasons why I consider that the future of Geneva International is its knowledge, which is the soft power of the new, rapidly changing world.”

“Geneva actually provides a perfect infrastructure for the cooperation between the classical, traditional international organizations and the new actors in emotional activities includings: the parliamentarians, local authorities, business community, religious bodies and civil society in all aspects.”

“Contemplating the future role of Geneva International we need to take into account, that for the first time in history, all humankind is inter-linked by information highway, economic links and environmental concerns. Hence, no state or group of states can claim security at the expense of another. Issues are global by their nature and multilateral cooperation is no longer an option but a necessity for a peaceful and prosperous global society. To imprint this culture of co-operation in this new network era, UNOG is setting education as one of its main priorities. Young people are a source of creative energy and initiative, of dynamism and social renewal, thus education is the key to the new global economy. It is central to development, social progress and human freedom.”