

Address
by Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky
United Nations Under-Secretary-General
Director-General of the UN Office at Geneva
at the opening of the Exhibition
of the Russian Folk Art
Palais des Nations, 7 February 1995

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

1. Today, we have a very special event at the Palais des Nations - the opening of the exhibition of Russian folk art from the private collection of Anatoly Panin. This event is unique in two respects. To begin with, this is the first time that such kind of exhibition has been held at the Palais des Nations. Secondly, the collection itself is unique. Mr. Panin has devoted 30 years of his life to the collection and revival of folk art in Russia. His

accomplishments in this field are significant and they are highly appreciated all over the country.

2. Folk art reflects the spirit of the nation, the deepest layer of its self-conscience. To understand the nation one needs to get acquainted with its folk art. On the other hand, I would like to emphasize an interesting observation made by Mr. Panin. Certain pieces of folk art, in particular children's toys, are surprisingly similar across nations and continents. Some interesting ethnographic theories could be built upon this idea. Its basic meaning, however, is fairly simple - despite all the diversity of human races and cultures there is a fundamental unity of humankind and this is

precisely what the United Nations was set up to facilitate.

3. This exhibition helps to understand the origins and spiritual heritage of the millennium of Russian cultural development. It also gives a rare chance to find out what the so-called mysterious Russian soul is about. The world outlook of the nation, its sense of beauty and its humour, its dreams and its history - everything is reflected in folk art.

4. In conclusion I would like to express my gratitude to Mr. Panin for this unique exhibition and invite all of you to enjoy it.

Thank you for your attention.