

UFO'S AT THE UN.

UFO UPDATE

By James Oberg

According to reports in UFO magazines and newsletters, the United Nations has begun an intensive examination of what former UN secretary general U Thant called "one of the most important problems facing the world," the origin and intention of flying saucers. This high-level UN effort was reportedly sparked by the fervor of a small Third World country and fueled by expert UFO testimony from the United States, France, Mexico, Japan, and other countries.

The actual story, as is so common in UFO-related matters, differs substantially from these widely publicized versions. The UN's role has been exaggerated, while other participants have not been described in complete honesty.

A dynamic interaction between two very different groups, each with their own goals and methods, has led to the current situation. Leading UFOlogists Dr. J. Allen Hynek and Dr. Jacques Vallee are eager to obtain official support for their UFO activities and to share in a measure of the UN's respectability. A group of political leaders from Grenada, a small Caribbean island nation (situated just this side of Trinidad and Tobago) populated mainly by descendants of free slaves, evidently sees the UFO issue as a means of attracting worldwide attention and respect. But these two groups appear to be trying desperately to stand on each other's shoulders, which leads to some awkward postures.

Grenada was granted its independence from Great Britain in 1974. Sir Eric Gairy, a longtime UFO enthusiast and self-styled "mystic" (he has seen UFOs over the Caribbean on two occasions), became the island's first prime minister. From his position as head of state, Sir Eric has been urging the United Nations to pay attention to the UFO question. Early in July 1978, he brought his UFO enthusiasms to Secretary General Kurt Waldheim.

The meeting was a normal diplomatic courtesy, extended to the head of state of any one of the 150 UN member states, but Gairy pushed it on to the attention of the news media by inviting, as part of his

official delegation, a number of UFO experts and enthusiasts. Hynek and Vallee were there, along with Dr. Claude Poher of France and ex-astronaut Gordon Cooper.

Secretary Waldheim listened courteously as the guests expounded briefly on the need for UN support of UFO studies; then made some general remarks of polite encouragement, thanked them for their time, and walked them to the door. "The most important meeting in the history of UFOlogy!" crowed UFO publications.

On November 27, 1978, the UFO contingent of Gairy's team was back at the UN again, in force. The Grenadan delegation had requested time to address the UN Special Political Committee on the issue of UFOs; and committee officials, as they must for all requests from member states, put the matter on the agenda.

Gairy, meanwhile, commissioned New York UFO expert Lee Spiegel (who established his reputation through a popular nightly "UFO news report" on WNBC radio) to organize an audiovisual presentation and arrange for the return visits of Hynek, Vallee, and other UFO personalities.

Spiegel's presentation included both

"classic" and never-before-seen UFO material designed specifically to impress delegates with the seriousness of the UFO phenomenon. "We won't necessarily be presenting a balanced picture," Spiegel remarked before the meeting, "Whenever that's been done, the result is clouded."

Prior to convening the UN committee meeting, Grenada had pared down its original proposal of a special seven-man UN UFO subcommittee—to a three-man ad hoc committee. Their mission was reduced from solving the entire UFO mystery to simply assessing the impact of the UFO phenomenon on world society. But from the moment the presentation began, marked by New York's first heavy snowstorm of the winter (reducing attendance to only one third of the member delegations), the Grenadan proposal was clearly in trouble. No delegation gave any indication of willingness to spend a dime, a drachma, a kopeck, a peseta, or a pfennig on the proposed UFO project.

Spiegel's presentation, however, went quite well. It was highlighted by the personal appearance of Lawrence Coyne (whose 1973 UFO encounter was described in this column in January).



New Mexico UFO sighting in 1963 formed part of audiovisual presentation at UN conference.

Gairy, Vallee, and Hynek also made speeches, along with Stanton Friedman, former nuclear engineer and currently a popular UFO lecturer. Professor Friedman was evidently intended by Gairy to replace the absent Cooper and Poher.

In the afternoon, a planned press conference was preempted by Gairy, who took the occasion to harangue the gathering about the need for adopting Grenada's UFO proposal. After several hours of this, an embarrassed Vallee was heard to ask an equally uncomfortable Hynek if there was any way they could get out of there. But the day finally ended, and with that came the announcement from Grenada's education minister that the UFO show had cost his country \$16,000. The bill was being forwarded to the UN.

In response to Grenada's presentation, the Special Political Committee adopted a "consensus," which in UN legalese is far less formal than a "resolution." The committee recommended that the General Assembly do four things: first, tell the people from Grenada that the UN "has taken note" of their proposal; second, invite member nations to conduct their own research concerning "extraterrestrial life, including unidentified flying objects"; third, pass the Grenadan requests to another committee, the one on Peaceful Uses of Outer Space; and fourth, allow Grenada to make another presentation to that committee the following June.

While these recommendations seem insubstantial and primarily a bureaucratic way of mollifying Grenada, UFO specialists were moderately pleased to see that UFOs had at last been officially acknowledged by the UN. The UN's response, however, falls far short of even the weakest UFO proposals, and even farther short of the "high-level UN UFO-study project" widely described in the UFO press. If the unanimous silence of other UN delegations is any indication (since, ordinarily, dozens of delegates rush to express their opinions on nearly any topic), a UN-sponsored UFO study will never be approved.

Grenada, meanwhile, may be expected to host the "Second

International UFO Conference" this coming November. The "First International UFO Conference" was held in Acapulco in April 1977 and is universally considered to have been a complete fiasco. Similar fears are being raised about the second conference. UFO experts, disheartened by the lack of any real progress at the UN and dismayed by what some view as Grenada's exploitation of the UFO issue, are now seeking the sponsorship of other UN states, which have allegedly expressed vague stirrings of interest. The secret hope is that France will sponsor a new resolution, but more realistic observers regard Bulgaria or Nepal as the likely choice.

(Next month *Omni* will present a UFO pictorial based on the UN presentation.)

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There is one famous story about the UN and UFOs, and it comes courtesy of the main office of the UFO Education Center (UFOEC) in Valley Center, California (near Mount Palomar Observatory). Center director Charlotte Blob once boasted of having two branch offices, one in Appleton, Wisconsin, and one in Guadalajara, Mexico.

According to UFOEC, a 180-meter (600-foot) diameter spaceship settled over a small mountain near Guadalajara in October 1976, causing widespread electrical failures. Soon after the sighting, a being who claimed to be a pilot from the spaceship appeared at a local doctor's clinic, seeking an examination.

"I was shocked at the appearance of the being," the doctor later testified. "His features were the same as a regular human's, but his skin was as white as milk. He insisted that humans on this planet were very low on the scale of evolutionary development."

Later, the physician (elsewhere identified only as "Doctor Diaz") was brought to New York by officials of the UFOEC. A meeting was arranged at the United Nations, at which Diaz was introduced to Ambassador Francis Redhead of Grenada and to a representative of the UN's Technology Applications Section. Somebody then

leaked the story to sympathetic newsmen. "TOP UN PROBE INTO INCREDIBLE ENCOUNTER WITH SPACE BEING," headlined the weekly tabloid *National Star* in its April 25, 1978, issue. The article went on to describe how "high-ranking United Nations officials have joined top scientists in a secret investigation of a startling report about a real-life encounter of the third kind."

This story was apparently endorsed by leading UFO experts, although the "top scientists" could not be identified.

However, over the following months, some disturbing rumors began to appear. No UN probe was apparently ever launched, and the UN official whose politely encouraging remarks were widely quoted as having endorsed the sighting refused any additional comment on it, evidently wanting nothing further to do with the episode. Diaz, the "eminent forty-five-year-old Mexican doctor" with "impeccable credentials," turned out to be *Charlotte Blob's husband*, an improbable coincidence of the first magnitude. According to UN insiders, Diaz as much as admitted to them that he had been pressured into going along with a publicity stunt concocted by his wife. And Grenadan ambassador Redhead, whose country has been urging the UN to get into the UFO act, denied that the original meeting had any official status: "It may have been at the UN, but it was not sponsored by the UN." Redhead could not recall who had invited him in the first place.

The most curious coincidence, of course, was that the saucer and its pilot had appeared in Mexico next door to the last surviving branch of the "UFO Education Center"; additionally, the fact that the witness had such a close but covered-up relationship with the director of the UFOEC also tended to raise suspicions. What's most significant about the Diaz affair is that nobody in the UFO community seems to have questioned its authenticity—or, if they did (and many are now claiming they were skeptical all along), they kept their suspicions to themselves. The tabloid press and the UFO pulp monthlies were left to make the most of it, which they eagerly did. ☐