

INTERNATIONAL LEGAL MEASURES AGAINST TERRORISM

The past year has seen a renewal of efforts within the United Nations to come to grips with the issue of international terrorism and, in particular, the taking of hostages.

International terrorism was originally inscribed on the agenda of the United Nations General Assembly in 1972 by the Secretary-General, following the tragic events at the Munich Olympics. That year, the Assembly adopted a resolution that created an Ad Hoc Committee on International Terrorism. This Committee met only once, in 1973, its work being hindered from the outset by highly ambiguous terms of reference. In the face of strong resistance by certain African and Arab delegations to the introduction of international measures against certain categories of terrorist acts, the agenda item was tacitly permitted to remain inactive through the 1973, 1974 and 1975 General Assembly Sessions.

In 1976, at the 31st session of the U.N. General Assembly, the issue was revived as a result of an initiative by the Federal Republic of Germany relating to the drafting of a convention against the taking of hostages. This proposal called for the creation of a new committee to deal with this subject. At the same time, a number of Third World countries introduced a resolution which called for the reactivation of the Ad Hoc Committee on International Terrorism. Canada, although a member of this Committee, voted against this resolution in the belief that the mandate of the Committee was unsatisfactory and could even be used to provide justification for certain acts of terrorism.

The last session of the Ad Hoc Committee was held in New York from March 14 to 25, 1977. As in 1973, Third World delegations stressed the importance of studying the causes of international terrorism, which were generally attributed to policies followed by Israel and governments in Southern Africa. These delegations were also opposed to any proposals which might, in their view, affect the operations of national liberation movements. Canada and other Western delegations, on the other hand, stressed the need for the international community to develop specific