

I GLOBAL CHALLENGES IN THE YEAR 2000

Keynote Speech by Stephen Lewis

Stephen Lewis began by drawing attention to three important positive developments which are likely to affect the international situation in the years ahead. The first of these is the change which has come over the United Nations--this was symbolized by the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the UN Peacekeeping Forces. There is hope now that the UN might resume its original role as the guardian of international peace and security. Mr. Lewis recalled the oppressive atmosphere which prevailed at the UN when he first went there in 1984 and he suggested that future historians would be amazed at how quickly it had changed. The second important development, according to Mr. Lewis, has been Mr. Gorbachev's leadership of the Soviet Union. This is turning out to be a remarkable performance. Not only has the Soviet Union been adopting a constructive attitude toward the United Nations since 1986, but its attempts at agricultural reform and at increasing its trade with the West, as well as the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan, augur well for the future. Finally, Mr. Lewis believes that recent developments in the disarmament process (such as the INF agreement and the resumption of negotiations on chemical, conventional and strategic weapons) are another encouraging sign.

Nevertheless, Mr. Lewis said, despite these hopeful developments we must not ignore the serious threats to our security which we will have to deal with in what remains of this century. Problems of poverty and under-development were far from being solved and it seemed likely that the next US president would be George Bush (he was in fact elected three days later) who would pay no more attention to these issues than did his predecessor. To make matters worse, Third World poverty was increasing rapidly: for example, if one excluded India and China, the amount spent by most of the poorer countries on health and education fell by forty percent from 1972 to 1987.

Mr. Lewis used the situation in Africa to illustrate the severity of the problem. If the debt continues to increase and there is no change in the amount devoted to development assistance, by the year 2000 the billion people living in Africa will have a lower standard of living than they do at present. The African countries' annual interest payments on the debt have risen from US \$3 to 5 billion between 1980 and 1983 to US \$25 billion in 1989. By 1995 this figure could be as high as \$45 billion. One realizes