

The task of controlling conventional weapons is the responsibility of every government. Huge sums are being spent each year purchasing such weapons, often to the detriment of services essential to the public, such as education and health care. Those who are more concerned about the size of their military arsenal than about the welfare of their people cannot expect to receive international aid without conditions.

The recently established UN Conventional Arms Registry is a start, and I urge member states to make information available to the registry as Canada has done.

More can be done, however. For example, next year we will be reviewing the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons that deals with land mines. The abuse of land mines is responsible for continued suffering and death by civilians long after the fighting has stopped. We must strengthen the convention by extending its scope to cover internal as well as international conflicts and insisting on effective verification measures to ensure compliance. I have instructed my officials to create a task force to consider other initiatives that might be taken in the coming months and look forward to sharing ideas with ministers.

Secondly, we must conduct an in-depth review of the UN's economic and social activities.

I think I speak for most members of this Assembly when I express serious concerns regarding what can best be described as the aimlessness of the United Nations system when dealing with economic and social issues. While the debate on the UN's mandate in the area of peace and security is lively and productive, it is vague and directionless when we tackle economic and social problems.

We do not say that everything must be changed — far from it. Certain reforms have already been introduced, including one in particular that we welcome: the decision to make the UNDP [UN Development Program] administrator responsible for system-wide co-ordination. But at a time when large sectors of international economic activity are beyond the control of states, and when the resources devoted to development and international co-operation are subject to all manner of constraints in all of our countries, we must rethink the role and mandate of all our multilateral institutions, including those of Bretton Woods. These questions will be taken up at next year's Group of Seven summit, to be held in Halifax, and should be debated as widely as possible at every level concerned. Canada is ready to proceed with a comprehensive re-evaluation of its multilateral system as it applies to economic and social issues. If necessary, the relevance of certain institutions must be rethought and a real solution must be found to the problem of duplication.