

and the IAEA could not, in fact, make use of all the facilities they had sought in the new Centre, and in line with the official Austrian policy promoting Vienna as an international centre.

The Fifth Committee welcomed this and subsequently requested that the Secretary-General prepare a report on the financial, functional and social implications of specific transfers of UN personnel to new accommodation in Vienna. This report, presented to the General Assembly at the thirty-first session, proposed a five-year plan of action for relocating 500 professional staff from New York and Geneva, where a total of 7,800 now serve. After some negotiations behind the scenes, the Fifth Committee and in capitals, a consensus was reached that accepted most of the Secretary-General's recommendations.

#### Legal questions

The debate on legal questions at the thirty-first session was highlighted by a German initiative on the problem of a new stage-taking and a new Soviet item titled "Conclusion of a world treaty on the non-use of force in international relations".

Speaking to the Assembly on September 28, 1976, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany, Hans Genscher, requested the General Assembly to include an item titled "The drafting of an international convention against the taking of hostages" on the agenda of the thirty-first session. Genscher's initiative attracted wide support, including that of Canada, and the question was referred for consideration to the Sixth Committee, which is responsible for legal questions. A resolution establishing an *ad hoc* committee on the drafting of such a convention was adopted by consensus. Nevertheless, this very sensitive development could be jeopardized by the reactivation of the Special Committee on International Terrorism, which, during its first period of existence, tended to concentrate its attention on the causes of terrorism, on which no agreement could be reached. The Special Committee is expected to meet well in advance of the *ad hoc* drafting committee, and the decision taken by the Special Committee's mandate is bound to affect the chances of the *ad hoc* committee's producing a workable convention.

The Soviet Union's initiative on the non-use of force in international relations took the form of a draft treaty, which, in the view of the sponsors, confirmed those

principles of the Charter that obliged member states to refrain from the threat or the use of force, without, in their view, narrowing or broadening those principles. Other delegations, including that of Canada, argued that the text contained highly-selective and significant variations and departures from the provisions set out with such clarity and authority in the Charter. The draft treaty failed, therefore, to draw a consensus, and the item will be re-examined at the thirty-second session.

#### Conclusion

The United Nations proper (excluding the Specialized Agencies) has at least four essential functions: to help settle political disputes and prevent war; to regulate or codify standards of international behaviour — e.g., in the field of human rights; to collect information about and to stimulate economic and social co-operation, particularly through technical and other forms of assistance; and to act as a forum for international discussion and debate. Each session of the General Assembly, of course, helps to implement this fourth function, though some sessions have come close to deadlock because of disagreement about the rules of procedure or the meaning of the Charter. The thirty-first session skirted these dangers and reached agreement on most of its agenda.

In regard to the other three functions, the success of the session would have to be judged as only modest. The Assembly is not primarily responsible for dispute-settlement, a job that belongs to the Security Council. But it can sometimes facilitate negotiations or point the way to a solution. For example, by giving the Secretary-General a mandate to explore the basis for a reconvening of the conference on the Middle East, and by renewed pressure on South Africa to relinquish its control of Namibia, it may have helped to move negotiations along. Disarmament will be given greater scrutiny and a new attempt will be made to reach international agreement on ways to stop terrorism. But in other respects standards of state behaviour were not noticeably advanced by the session. The process will be a long one, given the deep divisions that exist. Finally, the issue of better co-operation between rich and poor countries was left in abeyance. At least there was no backsliding. The stakes are enormous and the ideas revolutionary. As in so much that is associated with the UN, it is to the hearts and minds of men one must look for solutions rather than to the machinery of co-operation that is at their disposal if they are ready to use it.

*Essential  
functions  
of United Nations*