

REVIEW OF THE WORK OF THE 27 SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

In his address to the 27th Session of the United Nations General Assembly the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Mitchell Sharp, noted that many were taking a dark view of the performance and prospects of the United Nations. He pointed out that the international community often appears to be incapable of preventing wars, powerless against terrorism, apathetic to starvation and misery, and irresponsible with regard to the damage of the environment. Mr. Sharp pointed out that the U.N. was bound to reflect the weakness of the society which produced it and national egotism appeared to be the ruling principle of that society. At the same time there was a growing sense of responsibility to the international community at large and, ending on a hopeful note, Mr. Sharp told the members of the U.N. to lift their heads above the problems on occasion to remind themselves of past accomplishments and to seek to trace those unrests in international affairs which give hope that the U.N.'s greatest accomplishments lie ahead.

On the eve of the session it was the view of most observers that compared with the drama of UNGA XXVI, UNGA XXVII was headed for a low key "session of consolidation" with positive action likely only in certain technical, administrative and budgetary sectors; little was expected in the political and security areas of concern. The actual developments during the General Assembly seemed to bear out the above observations with regard to the focus of attention and progress made on the various items.

In the administrative and budgetary field, the most significant debates concerned the proposed reduction of the scale of assessment to 25 per cent for the largest contributor, the United States. Canada took an active role in the discussions in the Fifth Committee by supporting the proposal to lower the assessment of the largest contributor, and by its support of the United States' proposal, was instrumental in achieving its adoption. An initiative which aided the passage of the resolution on this question was Canada's announcement to forego the benefits of the per capita ceiling principle which would accrue to it if the maximum ceiling were reduced to 25 per cent. In this way the financial disadvantages to the United Nations were eased.

Perhaps the most valuable accomplishment in the social and economic field was the establishment of the United Nations environment programme, incorporating virtually unchanged the decisions of the Stockholm Conference on the Environment. It is evident that the determination of the great majority of United Nations members that the environment programme should be set up and the basic administrative structure for it be approved overcame, through extended committee discussions, some of the concerns of member states for certain aspects of the proposals. Differences of opinion over the enlargement of the governing council and the site of the headquarters were likewise resolved.