

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION  
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS  
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 49/31

Statement by Mr. L.B. Pearson,  
Secretary of State for External Affairs,  
Chairman of the Canadian Delegation to the United Nations,  
In the Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly,  
September 26, 1949.

Every speaker in the general discussion which opens our Assembly emphasizes - and rightly so - the vital role of the United Nations in sustaining and ensuring peace. Is it doing that? Is it being given a chance to do it? The answer is indicated by the fact that five years after the end of war even the formal processes of peace-making have not yet been completed. Even if they had, there would be no assurance in the international atmosphere today, a compound of suspicion and fear, that the United Nations could convert a technical peace settlement into something that would be more than the absence of armed conflict. The major problems of the post-war period remain unsettled and the conditions that would make possible their solution do not seem to exist. It is with increasing concern, therefore, that the people of the world regard these unsolved problems and watch the United Nations Assembly in its efforts to make a contribution to their solution.

We must begin by making a careful re-appraisal of the policies and activities and procedures of our world organization, and asking the question what, in the circumstances, we may reasonably expect the United Nations to accomplish.

So far as the Canadian Government is concerned, we have tried to make practicability the touchstone of our attitude towards the United Nations. Where we consider there is any real promise that a proposed course of action will contribute effectively to the solution of any particular problem, we are prepared to give it our full support. On the other hand, we wish to avoid giving to the United Nations, tasks which in the light of the limitations under which it now suffers, and which must some day be removed, it is clearly unable to perform. We wish to be certain that before any course of action is initiated there is a reasonable expectation that it can be carried through to a good conclusion, and that the members of the United Nations will support the organization in this process.

These are the principles which have guided the Canadian Government in determining more particularly the policy it should follow in the Security Council, where its first term of membership is now coming to an end.

When we accepted membership on the Security Council we were fully conscious of the great possibilities for good which it, of course, possessed. We knew also, however, that these possibilities would be largely nullified if the five permanent members were not able to work together on a basis of friendly co-operation and mutual concessions. Without such a basis, the veto would obviously be used to prevent political decisions being reached in the Council, and the military staff committee would not be able to reach any agreement to put international force behind any decision - even if one were reached.

In spite of these handicaps, however, the majority of the members of the Security Council have tried to make it work constructively and there have been some real successes.