

Answering the detractors

supporters specialize not in insightful analysis, but in inspired sophistry. They are fundamentally anti-internationalist. They do not believe that the national interests of the United States should ever be subsumed in the interests of the greater international community. That makes me impatient. Groups of people who do not understand the moral and human imperatives of the international community in 1985 demonstrate a philistinism for which none of us should have any time.

Yet it does great damage; I have to admit that. And although it saddens me to say so, people of such views within the United States and other countries — in particular, the Heritage Foundation — engage in easy slanders of the Secretariat to which the Secretary-General is hard-pressed to respond. They put Third World countries on the defensive. They provoke many Americans into needless opposition. So they need to be dealt with, not as an obsession, not as an *idée fixe*, not as a preoccupation, but as a group which wields influence and therefore has to be responded to. I am engaged in the self-immolating chore of reading tract after tract, monograph after monograph, article after article disgorged by the Heritage Foundation. Before long, I hope it will be possible thoughtfully to document the flaws, the weakness, the generalizations, the partial truths, the factual errors in what will amount to a dossier of indictment. In other words, in a rational persuasive and thoughtful way, to fight back in the defence of the United Nations. Indeed, I hope that we can mount a coterie of Ambassadors at the United Nations, champions of the United Nations, and gradually, over time, take our message right across the United States of America. We must say strongly and fervently and unapologetically that this is an institutional forum which deserves the celebration of humankind, not witless and gratuitous criticism.

The UN's strengths

Let us consider the strengths. But in summing the arguments in defence of the United Nations, let us not retreat into the old dialectic. Think of the specialized agencies. UNICEF almost single-handedly legitimizes the nature and character of the United Nations. Four hundred thousand youngsters under the age of five saved every year by UNICEF. Saved from death every year by UNICEF. When I stood in a refugee camp earlier this year in The Sudan, right on the border with Ethiopia, to which 80,000 Tigreans had made a migration desperately seeking survival; when I stood in that camp and chatted with the doctors from Médecins sans Frontières, and asked them how it was possible to keep children alive in circumstances of such eviscerating desolation, they said to me that "part of the reason is that we have these little packets of oral rehydration therapy to distribute — 15,000 of them a day and in that way, Mr. Lewis, we keep hundreds of children alive." Now it is important for the world to be reminded over and over again, with unselfconscious vigor, that you would never have that outcome without the United Nations. That is the kind of thing which the world body achieves.

More still, you have the United Nations Development Program which spends 675 to 700 million dollars US each year, turning such amounts into further billions of dollars of projects which speak to the economic long-term viability of

the countries whose present economies verge on catastrophe because of the African famine. Beyond that, you have the UNHCR (the United Nations High Commission for Refugees), which day in and day out saves tens of thousands of people, and provides shelter and vaguely civilized environments, whether in Pakistan or in the Middle East or in The Sudan. One could set out specialized agency after specialized agency doing ennobling work. Indeed — dare I say it — including UNESCO. Therefore it is important when summoning the arguments in defence of the United Nations not to forget the specialized agencies.

The place to do it

Nor — number two — is it possible to forget the kind of very special political environment which is created within the United Nations despite all of its difficulties. In the fall of 1984 the world had not been at the negotiating table in Geneva for more than a year; everybody felt we were perched on the precipice looking into some cataclysm of human destruction; and the superpowers were not talking. Lo and behold Andrei Gromyko comes to the General Assembly and makes a speech within which there is a hint that perhaps the bargaining process can be reinstated, and Ronald Reagan comes to the General Assembly — third year in a row, unprecedented in the history of presidential contributions since 1945 — and makes a speech within which there is a kernel of hope about reinstating the negotiations. A few months later those negotiations are consummated again in Geneva. I think it is palpably true that that could not have happened without the existence of an international agency through which ideological opposites can speak to each other, however obliquely. That is one of the great values of the United Nations.

And so to point number three: the question of some of the intransigent issues which seem to be so frustrating when we deal with them. Let me look at the most difficult of all, arms control and disarmament. Let me remind you of the First Committee in the United Nations. Time and again, year after year, in what some would call a suffocating process — I would call it a liberating intelligence — we deal with resolutions on a comprehensive test ban, on the prohibition of the use of chemical weapons, on the non-proliferation treaty, on the nuclear freeze, on nuclear winter, on a ban on fissionable materials, on the reduction of conventional arms; all of these resolutions, one after the other, addressed with vigor and passion and fervor by the countries involved. Yet, say the critics: "You never achieve anything. Resolution after resolution is passed and then not embraced by the superpowers." But the fact of the matter is that such a view of the process is both trivial and distorted, because whether it is in the First Committee in the fall, or whether it is in the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, or whether it is in the United Nations Disarmament Commission in May here in New York, we keep the pressure on the superpowers. They have to vote, they have to take a stand, they have to meet and speak to every single one of those resolutions. It is absolutely inescapable, and in a very important, if unacknowledged, way helps to maintain a glimmer of sanity in an otherwise lunatic environment. One should therefore applaud and recognize the value of those arms forums even though we recognize as well that the ultimate decision will be made in Geneva.