

Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization

After nearly three years as Secretary-General of the United Nations, I am more convinced than ever of the need to preserve and strengthen the Organization as a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations. I also believe that an extended and tolerable future for all humanity ultimately depends upon our success in making the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations the basis of the day-to-day relations of Governments and peoples. On the eve of our fortieth anniversary, in this, my third, report on the work of the Organization I intend to examine the basic premises of our activity in the United Nations which is the practical embodiment of the concept of multilateralism.

The original intent of the United Nations was to provide a framework in which Governments of differing persuasions could, in their wisdom, work out solutions to international problems and, if necessary, together take action to put those solutions into effect rather than engaging in conflict. As the Preamble to the Charter puts it, the main purpose was, and is, "to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security". The basic assumption was that all nations had a vital common interest in peace and in an orderly and equitable world and would be prepared to co-operate to achieve it.

Unfortunately the history of post-war international relations has so far shown that the common interest in peace and security has tended to assert itself only when things have reached a dangerously critical stage. Until that stage short-term national interest and opportunism tend to override the common interest. We are still very far from general acceptance of the principles of the Charter as rules to be lived by at all times by all Governments in their international relations.

In these circumstances, it is paradoxical that while contemporary realities have strengthened the need for the use of multilateral means for dealing with our problems and enlarged the scope for growth and development through multilateralism, there is an increasing questioning of the rules, instruments and modalities of multilateral co-operation. There is also, on occasion, an apparent reluctance to make the effort required to use international organizations effectively.

The past year has been a time of great-Power tension accentuated by a lack of progress in disarmament and arms limitation which has heightened fears of nuclear confrontation; of violence or threatened violence in several parts of the world; of continued economic difficulties in spite of a recovery in certain developed countries, and a deterioration in the situation of many developing countries; of drought and famine in several regions; and of a tendency to side-step major problems in a way which is likely in the long run to increase frustration and bitterness. Virtually nothing that has happened has shown that these problems can be solved effectively by purely bilateral or unilateral efforts.

Why has there been a retreat from internationalism and multilateralism at a time when actual developments both in relation to world peace and to the world economy would seem to demand their strengthening? We need to consider this question carefully if we are to make our institutions work better. I hope very much that political scientists and

intellectuals the world over, as well as political leaders and diplomats, will ponder this essential problem on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the United Nations.

After the Second World War there was admittedly a certain over-confidence in the capacity of international institutions, born of a desperate desire to build a new and better world. It then seemed possible to establish, as a first priority, a system for maintaining international peace and security under the provisions of the Charter. If such a system could become effective, the main obstacle to disarmament and arms limitation, the insecurity of nations, would be removed, and the rule of law rather than the rule of force would at last begin to come into its own on the international level. With these co-operative achievements a world community would have come into being, capable of directing its affairs by reason and enlightened self-interest. The system would include equitable economic institutions and steady progress in social justice and human rights.

What has happened to that majestic vision? It was soon clouded by the differences of the major Powers. The advent of atomic weapons brought with it a new doctrine of security based on nuclear deterrence, a doctrine which was not taken account of when the Charter was drafted. Moreover, the world turned out to be a more complex, far less orderly place than had been hoped at San Francisco. The problems of post-war international peace and security were less clear cut and less susceptible to the kind of international action envisaged in the Charter. The forces of nationalism and fears for national security, far from abating after the Second World War, were soon very much on the increase. The international community's inability to solve many of its problems, whether political or economic, even when it could agree in principle on what the solution should be, gave rise to a process of side-stepping the United Nations and recourse to other measures—force, unilateral action or confronting military alliances—which weakened reliance on the Organization.

In looking back, however, it would be a grave mistake to underestimate, or simply take for granted, what has been achieved and what is now being done by the United Nations system. During a period of revolutionary change it has accomplished a great deal for the betterment of the human condition.

The United Nations has played a decisive role in the process of decolonization which has brought independence to hundreds of millions of people. The Security Council has throughout its existence considered many of the difficult problems of conflict in the world and on a large number of occasions has come up with a basic formula on which their solution might be based. It has also taken numerous actions to limit and control conflict. Peace-keeping operations have successfully controlled violence in a number of critical areas. Nor should we forget that, although there have been a