



# Statements and Speeches

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## THE UNITED NATIONS A FIRST-RATE ORGANIZATION

Speech by Stephen Lewis, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations, to the National Convention of the United Nations Association of the United States of America, New York, April 29, 1985.

...The fortieth anniversary, as everyone knows, is a time for stocktaking. I like the United Nations. I've only been around this lovely and byzantine organization for about seven months but I quite like it. I'm a shameless apologist. I think it's a first-rate international institution and I don't much care for the gratuitous detractors. To be sure, all of us understand there are problems, there are imperfections, there are deficiencies in the United Nations system. I've often asked myself, as I view it in a novice's way, could it be otherwise after 40 years? Do you know of any human agglomeration which is unsullied after 40 years of evolution?

The litany of deficiency is as well-known to you as it is well-known to the protagonists here at the head table. We're often worried by the capacity of the superpowers — indeed, all of the permanent members of the Security Council — to thumb their noses with impunity at decisions which are taken in the United Nations. That happens from time to time in a way which is disconcerting, unnerving, occasionally frustrating. We know, all of us, of the proliferation of nation-states, and the way this has engendered within the arena of the General Assembly an excess of rhetorical spleen; some aggressive posturing; occasional extremist attacks. It bothers some more than others....

All of us are bothered by the truth that some problems seem endlessly intractable. We haven't got peace and disarmament; we haven't solved the problems of the Middle East; we can't seem to handle Namibia and South Africa. That is the crisis of credibility which some so often relate. And on top of all of that, there is the sense of incremental change. The detractors would describe it as a kind of immobility that leads to inertia, compounded by evidence of mismanagement.

When you set out that litany it is, I admit, a little unnerving. But without being disrespectful I'm inclined to say so what? Sure it's frustrating, sure it's difficult, all of us have to cope with these truths, all of us have to understand their nature. But it doesn't for a moment — this is what is so important, and it is inconceivable to me that people don't understand it — it doesn't for a moment invalidate the tremendous contribution which the United Nations makes; it doesn't for a moment render us impotent; it doesn't for a moment diminish the value of working to reinforce the strengths of the United Nations.

Now, in a way which bespeaks a certain innocence, I sometimes wonder about the perceptions and motives of various of the detractors.

For some, it seems to me, the expectations have been extravagant: the achievement of peace and the rule of law, as indicated in your ceremonial this afternoon, is not ushered in over 40 years. Forty years

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