

On the tenth anniversary celebrations of the founding of the United Nations I said: "I can only hope that, when 1965 arrives, I shall be discussing with you prospects for 1975. Should this happen, we shall have escaped the worst." Well, at least this much has happened.

It is a privilege to be associated tonight with a Society which is trying to help in the realization of such admirable principles as laid down in your guide-lines.

In that realization, the Society stresses the "need for better communication between world leaders".

As one who has had an opportunity to meet many contemporary world leaders, I should not wish to minimize the importance of this kind of contact. But I should not, on the other hand, wish to exaggerate that importance or even ignore the danger of relying too much on such contact as a basis for sound policy.

More than once the air has been cleared at the summit by what seemed to be fruitful and useful encounter, when, down in the valleys and lowlands, where the people lived, there remained fogs of suspicion and mistrust and misunderstanding. The leaders, exposed to this on returning, had, therefore, quickly to adjust themselves to their own national public opinions and the adjustment has, at times, led to international recrimination and misunderstanding.

So, even more important than communication between leaders, is communication leading to understanding between peoples. Technically - with our miraculous modern media of communication - this is easier to do, and with an impact more immediate, broader and stronger, than ever before in history. But this very technical ease and efficiency in communication makes the possibility of its exploitation for wrong purposes a very real one, with results which can be as far-reaching as they are bad.

These bad results can come about by the direct control - exercised in totalitarian societies - over the media of communication; by censorship in the interest of those in charge of the state. Or they can come about in open societies by irresponsibility, and a misuse of power on the part of those who have full freedom within the law to propagate news and opinions. So communication between peoples becomes a complicated and tricky business, with national interest and self-interest at times getting in the way of the promotion of a friendly, human relationship and understanding. It can as easily result (or is this too pessimistic?) in eye-ball to eye-ball confrontation, as in heart-to-heart contact.

At times, the communication between both leaders and peoples can be merged in that town meeting of the world, the United Nations Assembly. This, too, has had its good results as well as others which are less good. How could it be otherwise when the United Nations is, as we are so often told, merely the reflection of its separate governments and peoples in the tense and unruly world in which we live?