

## Procedural questions

A subject of perennial complaint at the United Nations concerns the technical inefficiency of the organization as a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations. At the General Assembly of 1969, the then Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mitchell Sharp, alluded to the problem in these terms:

“The United Nations (including all its organs and associated agencies) is drowning in a sea of words. Talk is of the essence at the United Nations, but to be useful it must be kept within reasonable bounds. As we all know, this is not being done. The number of conferences and meetings, and the paper they produce, have increased to the point that even those members with the largest resources have difficulty in providing competent representation and coping with the flood of paper. As the conference load increases there has been a corresponding decrease in effectiveness. This has led governments to attach less importance to the United Nations’ activities and efforts. The credibility of the United Nations as a negotiating forum and as an instrument for resolving the world’s problems is wasting away. Public confidence in the organization is being weakened and public support is being undermined . . . .”

Subsequently the Canadian delegation took the initiative in sponsoring resolutions, which were adopted, aimed at reducing the volume of paper and the proliferation of committees and subcommittees of doubtful value. The tangible results were to check the rate of increase of documentation and meetings.

Although it is possible, from time to time, to effect technical improvements in the administration, procedures and activities of the United Nations, and incidentally to effect some economies, it has to be recognized that an almost universal organization of sovereign states, which itself