

Mr. President,

The Canadian Delegation looks forward with hope and determination to the proceedings of the XXVIIth session, over which you will preside. We count upon you for that same wisdom and judgement which characterized your distinguished predecessor's term of office. Your election is a mark of our high regard for you and for your country. Poland symbolizes for the world the unquenchable flame of national will, blazing out after centuries of darkness. We remember that the terrible war which brought this Organization into existence began in the defence of Poland's national independence. We remember too the debt every country in the world -- not least my own -- owes to the Polish people in all the arts of civilization. How fitting it is, Mr. President, that the year of your election should be the 500th anniversary of the birth of that towering genius, Nicolaus Copernicus, to whom all mankind stands debtor.

May I welcome you also, Mr. Secretary-General, to the indispensable duties upon which you have embarked so vigorously. With the whole world as your province, you have already travelled widely. Canada was honoured by one of your first visits as Secretary-General, as it was some years ago by your first appointment as an ambassador of your country. Your concern for both the authority and the efficiency of the United Nations have been evident from the outset; in the measures you have taken to assert the one and enhance the other, you have our admiration and support.

It is a current commonplace, Mr. President, to take a dark view of the performance and prospects of the United Nations. One respected international commentator observed just the other day, "The United Nations Organization has never been weaker than it is now", while your predecessor, Mr. Secretary-General, has called the phase through which the Organization is now passing "a time of trials".

There is ample evidence to justify a sense of defeatism. The international community often seems incapable of preventing war, powerless in the face of acts of terrorism, apathetic at the spectacle of starvation and misery, and irresponsible in its willingness to risk permanent damage to the environment. We seek to explain this by observing that, in a world of sovereign nation states, the United Nations is bound to reflect the weaknesses of the international society which produced it. Time and again, national egotism seems to be the ruling principle of that society.

This is at the root of the world's deep anxiety. For the better part of this century, we have known nationalism has imperfections. Yet mankind is not about to do away with sovereign states. Indeed, the events of the century, by breaking up old empires and multiplying new sovereignties, have acted as a stimulus to nationalism. New states are not willing to deny themselves the advantages they believe older states have gained from national independence. Certain great tasks of social and economic construction are indeed impossible except in conditions of independence. And while some advantages of independence may prove illusory, even this is irrelevant since the Charter establishes national sovereignty as a fundamental principle.

These are powerful considerations. In the face of them, it is unrealistic to plan for an international order in which the system based upon sovereign national units has been replaced. Instead it is more hopeful and more sensible to work to transform the existing system, encouraging it when necessary to produce the antidote to its own poisons.