

Against that trend of course, there are solid new international initiatives: The response to the famine in Ethiopia; the refreshing possibility of a summit of francophone countries; the new attention that is being paid to terrorism and to the trade in drugs.

And there are brilliant, unsung, successes. I spent part of last week in a refugee camp just inside Thailand, where the United Nations Border Relief Organization (UNBRO) is working with some of the bravest people I have ever met -- Cambodians uprooted from their homes and, with UNBRO, building literacy and hope and health in the shadow of Vietnamese shelling.

The world works. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is saving 400,000 children each year from death by malnutrition and disease. The crushing debts of Mexico and Brazil are gradually being worked down by international agreement, as was India's earlier. While local wars have taken countless lives, and atrocities continue daily in Afghanistan, and South Africa, and Cambodia, and Chile, the striking fact of these last four decades is that we have escaped the devastating global wars that twice destroyed the world in the 40 years before 1945.

But one does not save children, or reschedule debt or avoid world war by accident. That is the hardest of work, and requires, in addition to dedication, a continuing commitment to international systems and institutions.

That brings me directly to the Commonwealth, whose success is particularly important in an age where other international institutions are less successful, but which is also vulnerable to scepticism and complacency.

It is fair to say that the modern postwar Commonwealth came of age with the establishment of the Secretariat in 1965. It found its mandate then with the launching of its highly successful aid and development programs -- and it found a new vocation in the active role it assumed in facilitating the process toward Zimbabwe's independence. In that case, and with the Gleneagles Agreement, the Commonwealth demonstrated a capacity to achieve significant political change. That capacity must be exercised with care, but it characterizes the Commonwealth as an agency of action, not just talk. So does the quieter progress made on other issues -- the survival of small island nations; the pioneering studies