

INTERNATIONAL LEGAL MEASURES AGAINST TERRORISM

Efforts aimed at developing international law to deal with the problem of terrorism are being undertaken primarily in two Special Committees which have been established by the United Nations. These Committees are: the Ad Hoc Committee on International Terrorism and the Ad Hoc Committee on the Drafting of an International Committee Against the Taking of Hostages. The Committees each comprise representatives of 35 member states of the UN and report to the Sixth (Legal) Committee of the General Assembly. Canada is a member of both Committees. Both Committees held meetings in 1979 and the reports on their latest sessions will be considered by the 34th Session of the General Assembly.

From its inception, the discussion within the Terrorism Committee has been beset by serious philosophic and political differences. Canada, like most Western delegations, has been interested in devising new international legal measures for combatting and suppressing terrorism. The non-aligned delegations, and to a lesser extent the Socialist states, on the other hand, have been more concerned with what they consider to be the causes of terrorism (colonialism, racism, foreign dominations, etc.) as well as "terroristic" acts committed by certain "racist" or "colonialist" regimes. In response to this position the Western delegations maintain that it is difficult, if not impossible, to establish a direct causal link between any given social or political situation and a particular manifestation of terrorism. In addition, these delegations are of the view that it is not realistic to try to enumerate a list of causes which can be considered authoritative or exhaustive.

The discussion at the latest session of the Terrorism Committee was, as had been the case at earlier sessions, inconclusive. All that the Committee was able to do was draw up a list of eleven recommendations and submit them to the General Assembly for approval. These recommendations deal, for the most part in a general way, with appeals to states to eliminate the causes of terrorism as well as suggestions as to measures designed to prevent and suppress terrorist activity. From the point of view of international law, the most interesting of these is the request that the General Assembly consider the need for an additional convention or conventions in the area, but no specific proposal was submitted in this regard. Presumably any developments in this direction should not overlap with areas covered by existing agreements (in the areas