

European Community, and a multitude of more local arrangements – whether bringing together the nations of Southeast Asia, or keeping peace in Cyprus or the Sinai.

Shocked by war, we found ways to work together. Now, sheltered by relative peace, we are drifting away from the international system that helped build that peace. The United States, Great Britain and Singapore, after careful consideration of their national interests, have served notice on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). India and Brazil and others resist renewal of multilateral trading negotiations. Greece is reconsidering its role in NATO. Instead of sending signals of leadership, the European Community is characterized by its bureaucracy and disputes, the General Assembly by its cacophony, the Security Council by wilful impotence. In Central America, the Contadora process seems stalled. In Namibia, the Contact Group, including Canada, has taken no effective initiatives. While bombs kill baggage-handlers, and the hostage-taking at Beirut is treated as live “soap opera”, all civilized nations lament terrorism, but are slow in finding practical ways to fight it.

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 skepticism 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

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