

Such was Canada's view at the International Conference on Viet-Nam held early this year in Paris. I attempted to have the United Nations and the United Nations' Secretary General firmly integrated into the peace observation machinery which was being established at that conference. These efforts failed.

After five months of efforts to play the role of an impartial international observer, we withdrew from the International Commission of Control and Supervision in Viet-Nam, frustrated but by no means embittered.

Canada remains prepared to play its part in peacekeeping and peace observation. But we have learned a lesson from our long and frustrating attempts to have these peacekeeping bodies operate objectively. The lesson is this -- peacekeeping and peace observation operations stand the best chance of success if they are conducted under the authority of the United Nations' Security Council.

We have long assumed that progress in technology, agriculture and communications would mean progress for the underprivileged -- a ladder on which people could climb away from hunger, disease and degradation. Yet tragically the word "progress" has come to mock us: the gap between rich and poor is wider than ever. Material achievements are threatened by spiralling world inflation, increasing pollution, unforeseen commodity shortages and by the capricious movements of world finance.

For ill as well as for good, we are increasingly inter-dependent however jealously we guard our independence. No nation can solve inflation in isolation from the others. No nation can ensure the cleanness of air or the purity of water that flows freely across political boundaries. Faced individually by each sovereign state, the challenges are insurmountable. For they are universal problems and they can only be met effectively by universal solutions. The United Nations and its agencies are the only bodies with the authority and with the breadth of representation to meet these challenges.

Even collectively these challenges are intimidating. Our experience with the problems of international security not least those of the Middle East -- has taught us that they will not be overcome by conferences alone, by resolutions or by formal votes. They require a profound and clear-headed appreciation of the dimensions of the problems matched by a common will to work cooperatively towards solutions.

We must try to avoid barren and abusive confrontations which are frequently the result of the formal voting process. Consensus is another and often surer route. It is the technique we are increasingly using at our Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings. The results are not dramatic -- but they are nonetheless real.

Consensus does not mean the imposition of the will of the majority on a reluctant minority which feels its vital interests are at issue; it means the shared recognition of what should and can be done. I believe we attach far too much importance to the voting scores -- votes are little solace to the hungry.