



Statements and Speeches

No. 81/27

THE UNITED NATIONS' PLACE IN WORLD AFFAIRS

An Address by the Honourable Mark MacGuigan, Secretary of State for External Affairs, to the Thirty-sixth Regular Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, September 21, 1981

Foremost in my thoughts, as I again have the great honour of addressing this Assembly, are the enormous hopes that the world's peoples have had for this organization. These hopes have constantly had to confront the grave problems and dangers which continue to threaten world peace and security and to divide the nations of the world. But I am also conscious of the accomplishments of the United Nations in the last 40 years in advancing some of our common aspirations. There is progress towards greater equity in economic opportunity. We have avoided generalized world conflict. Appalling wars have occurred, but they have been contained. The UN role in these achievements is especially significant when we consider the limitations we, as member states, have placed on its capacity to act. I congratulate our Secretary-General for his own tireless efforts over the years.

I wish particularly to place in review today the notion of the UN's place in world affairs because I am very conscious of the fact that it is almost 20 years exactly since one of his [the Secretary-General] forerunners, Dag Hammarskjöld, was killed — in the service of world peace and of our organization.

The sort of world problems of 20 years ago are a gauge for measuring how far we have come, when indeed we have come any distance at all, in our search for the truly better world we were then after. A simple judgment is not easy. The world was dangerous then and it is dangerous now. But some of the dangers today are different than they were in 1961. It requires adaptation on the part of the member states of this organization to deal with them. We are entitled to ask if it is not because of difficulties in adapting the organization to change, as well as the restrictions we have placed on the organization, that the UN's impact on world problems has not been greater.

Not all of today's dangers are different. Sadly, some of the problems then are still with us today — white minority-domination in South Africa, for example, and its continued occupation of Namibia, or the seemingly intractable problems of the Middle East. Others have appeared to work their way back into our preoccupations, such as features of East-West competition which for a time had receded from the forefront of our attention.

But whatever the problems, there is a constant need to adapt to change. As I emphasized here last year, change is natural and inevitable. Our greatest challenge is to adapt to that change, not to resist it.

Many of us here are meliorists, who hold that we can encourage change for the better

The challenge
of change