

REPORT ON THE 41st SESSION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The work of the Third Committee (human rights, humanitarian and social affairs) was in a state of transition at the 41st Session of the General Assembly (1986), as no major question (except the adoption of a text on the draft declaration on the right to development) dominated debate. The Third Committee largely completed its agenda in the shadows of the financial crisis and in light of severe budgetary restrictions facing the United Nations organization. Emphasis was on short or medium term activities and programs rather than on new initiatives. The Canadian delegation intervened on the majority of items, and was particularly active on the agenda items concerning the international covenants, drugs, refugees, human rights and women's issues. In all cases, concrete resolutions were adopted by consensus, or with comfortable majorities. Seen in this light, UNGA 41 confirmed the tendency towards reform in the UN system, and also confirmed the priority which human rights seems increasingly to be enjoying among member states.

The debate on racism and racial discrimination, which largely is a discussion of Apartheid and South Africa, evolved in a climate of relative moderation, despite numerous oratorical attacks on South Africa and calls for global and obligatory sanctions. Even the presentation of the Special Rapporteur, Mr. Ahmed Kalifa, was only a repetition of earlier years, although the question of the cost of his trip to present his views (as well as the expenses of all special rapporteurs) elicited a passionate debate on the sometimes selective and inaccurate nature of Mr. Kalifa's work as annexed to his report. On the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, whose 1986 committee session was cancelled, there were informal consultations in which the Canadian delegation played an active role, which resulted in the adoption of a consensus text which foresees the holding of an extraordinary session of states parties to the CERD in 1987, in an effort to end the financial impasse restricting committee sessions.

In the debate on social questions (aging, youth, handicapped persons), the majority of delegations placed the accent on programs at the national level, in part in order to reduce the impact of confrontation between proponents of two special funds on aging, one proposed by Malta, the other by the Dominican Republic. The same climate of confrontation over funding dominated debate concerning the decade for handicapped persons. Questions related to youth were mentioned only in passing, and even

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