

OUR BETTER SELVES

Earlier this year in response to the famine in Ethiopia, the cream of Canadian pop music came together to record the song *Tears Are Not Enough*. Similarly, leading Francophone stars recorded *Les yeux de la faim*. The catalyst for both these unique enterprises was the desperate food crises in Africa. The result in both cases was collective action, – by the artists and in turn the largely youth audience that supported them.

This century's most disastrous conflict was World War II. That tragedy was also a catalyst for collective action: the world came together to create the United Nations. The scale is different, but again catastrophe begets a positive reaction. Another factor common to the United Nations and the money-raising efforts for Africa is that both depend on the active interest of youth for their continuation.

When it was founded in 1945, the UN was called the "last best hope of mankind." It was set up to bring together independent States in a forum where they could work out solutions to international problems and, if necessary, act together to implement these solutions rather than resorting to conflict. As the Preamble to the Charter of the UN put it, the primary purpose was, and is, "to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security." Serving as Canada's Permanent Ambassador to the UN in the early 1960s, Charles Ritchie suggested then that the Organization had not yet evolved from being a meeting place of nations into this effective force in international politics. The mechanism for achieving peace was well developed but not yet fully operational.



Canadian musicians recording the song *Tears are not Enough*. One of those taking part was Murray McLauchlan, who said of the tremendous public response that it was the focus on the famine that touched "the instinct of people to want to be immediately involved in doing something about it – to want to feel some kind of potency, particularly with younger people." He commented further that "There really is a burgeoning internationalism, and I think that may very well be the most important thing to come out of this."

WHEN AND WHERE

Following three years of discussion, the Charter of the United Nations was adopted at the historic San Francisco Conference April 25 – June 26, 1945. The United Nations officially came into existence on October 24, 1945, when the charter was ratified by the five major countries that became the permanent members of the Security Council.

Now marking the 40th year of its founding, the United Nations is still at something of a crossroads. Ambassador Ritchie, commenting on the saying "the United Nations is no better than its members" had noted it "was a truism abundantly proved, but the very fact that it had to be stated shows that there is a widespread expectation – or at least a hope – that the whole will turn out to be more than its parts...something superior to the sum total of the different nations represented there. It is to be an emanation of the good intentions, the better selves, of these nations, working together for peace and the dignity of man."¹ The expectation has only been partly realized.

A look at the record of the UN over four decades illustrates the continuing dilemma: successes that make it stand out as one of the most significant achievements of humanity and failures that serve to undermine the organization's basic principles.

Take the issue of peace for example. The UN has pioneered the military's role as a peacekeeping force, helping to diffuse and in many cases prevent conflict. However, even though the UN has played a large part in preventing them from escalating to engulf the world, there have still been more than 100 military conflicts since the end of World War II.

On another front, take a look at a map of the world. It is vastly different to what it was in 1945, with the majority of nations having achieved independence. Fifty-one original members took part in the San Francisco Conference and signed the Charter. Now there are 159 member States. Part of the success story of the UN is its decisive role in this process of decolonization and subsequently providing the means for many of these fledgling nations to become involved with older ones in international affairs. In all, over 700 million people have emerged from colonial rule during the past 40 years.

