

In addressing myself to this question, Madame President, I should like it to be absolutely clear that the criticisms I have to make and the remedies I shall suggest come from an active and loyal member of the family of nations represented here. Canada has shown its confidence in this organization by its wholehearted participation in all aspects of the work of the United Nations. We could not conceive of a world in which the United Nations did not have a central and vital role to play.

The institutional problems facing this organization are difficult in themselves. They are compounded by the fact that, because of their intractability, there is something like a tacit conspiracy, in which we have all joined, to pretend they don't exist. The situation might be compared to the cumulative effect of pollution in a lake or the action of the sea on the foundations of Venice; failing vigorous corrective measures, a slow but certain process of destruction is going on all the time. If we do not act, there is a very real danger that the United Nations, instead of fulfilling its high purpose as a center for harmonizing the actions of nations in the achievement of the objectives set out in the Charter, will become a sideshow on the international scene, its activities brushed aside as irrelevant.

There are three areas in which remedial action is imperative:

First: The UN (including all its organs and associated agencies) is drowning in a sea of words (to which I am contributing this morning). Talk is of the essence at the United Nations, but to be useful it must be kept within reasonable bounds. As we all know, this is not being done. The number of conferences and meetings, and the paper they produce, have increased to the point that even those members with the largest resources have difficulty in providing competent representation and coping with the flood of paper. As the conference-load increases there has been a corresponding decrease in effectiveness. This has led governments to attach less importance to the United Nations' activities and efforts. The credibility of the UN as a negotiating forum and as an instrument for resolving the world's problems is wasting away. Public confidence in the organization is being weakened and public support is being undermined.

We can and should act to arrest this process by identifying priorities and dealing with them in an effective and businesslike way. We must also find the new techniques needed to deal with the problem of the unwieldy size of UN committees and boards, particularly those responsible for UN action programs in the all-important field of development. Some of these boards are almost as large as the UN itself was not so many years ago, and have proved ill-suited to fulfill the purposes for which they were created.

I urge these measures because I believe they are essential to the future progress of the organization. At the same time, we should acknowledge that such remedial action can only deal with the symptoms rather than the disease itself. Member nations, locked in outdated conceptions of sovereignty and national interest, find debate to be a convenient substitute for action. So long as this attitude persists, the United Nations cannot hope to fulfill the aspirations of its founders.