
Even in more tranquil situations, there is work to be done. This is the International Year of Disabled Persons, to promote the rights of more than 500 million disabled people throughout the world to full participation and equality in a barrier-free world.

And there is the position of women, in all countries, and the need to improve their condition, socially and politically, and to promote the equality of women with men. An important step in this direction is the recent entry into force of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

New states

But if collective world concern for individual human rights, and for organized efforts to promote the rights of women and the specifically disadvantaged are important recent phenomena, the emergence during the last 30 years of some 100 sovereign states must be counted as one of the most significant changes the world has ever seen. Dag Hammarskjöld was of course centrally involved in the process of assisting these new states to enter into the life of this institution. This was a period of birth and hope. But for many of those new states, perhaps for most, this hope was quickly tempered by the economic realities which faced them.

One reality which was evident immediately to the new states was that any economic interdependence which then applied was heavily skewed on the side of dependence and vulnerability for them. It was an asymmetrical relationship. The developing countries were acutely aware of this, but the developed world was not. That has now changed. I think that the change in perception on the part of developed countries towards the reality of global interdependence is of great significance, even a source of hope.

Developing-countries and world trade

The growing realization that to an increasing extent our economic futures are linked, can spur us towards solutions. The Brandt report has, I think, contributed in this regard. In particular, there has been an increased awareness of the contribution of the developing countries to the over-all world economy. It is now projected that between 1980 and 1990, developing countries will account for more than a quarter of the increase in world trade. These statistics mask, of course, important differences among the various developing countries most involved as well as the relative impact of these changes on individual economies. But they do indicate that developing countries are moving closer to the centre of the world economic stage.

Interdependence also has a price. It tends to make all nations more vulnerable to shocks from the outside and from forces beyond the control of national governments. It is therefore of paramount importance that the international institutions which provide the frameworks for the international economic system function effectively. If they do not, if they become deadlocked and divided along bloc lines, or if they become hostage to narrow interests, then the international economy will suffer. Under these circumstances, interdependence becomes a liability and all states suffer.

Inflation, high interest rates and sluggish growth pose real problems for the industrialized countries. The constraints on export growth and financing are mounting in the middle-income developing countries. It is, however, the low-income countries – particularly, the least developed – which are the most vulnerable and whose prospects