

Those who wrote the Charter had certain clear ideas about what was needed to preserve international peace and security. They inherited some social, economic and legal machinery and devised more. But the most farsighted of them could not have foreseen many of the problems that have preoccupied the United Nations since. The whole range of exercises in peace-keeping, the transition to the post-colonial world, the machinery for economic co-operation between the developed and developing countries, the extended protection of human rights, the work accomplished in relation to the environment, the seabed and outer space -- all have called forth activity unimaginable in 1945.

In a remarkable way, the organization has risen to these demands. It has done so by creating a large and complex family of agencies -- so large and complex, indeed, that strong administrative leadership is as crucial to the continued authority of the United Nations as political leadership itself. To ensure that the machinery functions at maximum effectiveness on a sound and equitable financial basis is a problem of the first order. The Canadian delegation will work to ensure that this problem receives the steady attention it deserves.

Considerations of cost and complexity are, however, a reminder that a price has to be paid if the United Nations is to be flexible and dynamic. I contend that it has displayed these qualities. The successive challenges of the last generation have been met with only two changes in the Charter, to increase the membership of the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council. Apart from this, we have built upon the Charter machinery, giving a living interpretation to the Charter itself. While it has been difficult in practice to secure the required degree of agreement to amend the Charter, this does not seem to have prevented the United Nations from keeping up with the times. Canada is ready to look seriously at any specific proposals to amend the Charter or make it work better, if these have broad support among member states. But I am not convinced that a new Charter that could be agreed upon now would be better than the Charter written in 1945.

I have struck a hopeful note; I may be criticized for that. But I am convinced this is the right perspective. We have to concentrate on the problems of the day. This Assembly will have to concentrate on measures to prevent terrorism, to consolidate our first advance in the environmental field, to secure administrative and budgetary reform, to protect human rights in Africa and elsewhere, and to develop international law, especially the law of the sea and the law governing air-piracy. Meanwhile, the Security Council may well be obliged to deal with threats to peace -- for example, should the current tension in the Middle East rise dangerously. All these matters are sources of deep concern. To deal with them successfully -- to deal with them at all -- will, we know, lead us at times into anger, frustration and despair.

It is, therefore, a healthy corrective to lift our heads from these problems on occasion to remind ourselves of the great work the United Nations has accomplished in the past, and to seek to trace those currents in human affairs that give hope that its greatest accomplishments lie ahead.