

What did Governor Cuomo say this afternoon: "The world is still talking; still striving?" That's precisely what Pérez de Cuéllar is reinforcing in his endless peripatetic wanderings around the planet. It is of immense value. Occasionally, it allows for a cessation of bombing civilian populations in a war like Iran/Iraq. Sometimes it may even result in reconciliation in a place like Cyprus — perhaps in the next year or two — that would be an enormous achievement for the United Nations. Sometimes it brings parties back to a discussion together which they would not otherwise contemplate. Always it prevents, to some extent, a mere fire from becoming a conflagration.

In the context of the United Nations, of the international community, all of that is immensely important: just keeping nations talking. Winning trust, as Pérez de Cuéllar does, is of immense significance. Pérez de Cuéllar is trusted by everyone. One of your potential new members of the executive board (Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick) trusted Pérez de Cuéllar, and I sense that her discerning judgments were selective. Mr. Troyanovsky, the Soviet Ambassador, trusts Pérez de Cuéllar; Botha of South Africa trusts Pérez de Cuéllar. Pérez de Cuéllar is a man who — as I said — is giving a new definition to the role of the Secretary-General. That role is not to be lightly impugned or disparaged.

Finally — point five — I remind you of the continuing process, year after year in the General Assembly and in the committees associated with it, where we achieve concrete things. That, too, is a matter to be celebrated and brought to the attention of the American community. Last session of the United Nations — my first session — there was an important resolution on international drug trafficking, which resolution is now on its way to becoming an international convention. There was, after seven years of painful drafting in Geneva, a Convention on Torture; a convention which will permit us, after 20 countries have signed and ratified it, to identify publicly those who continue to engage in the obscenity of torture. And then there was, of course, the extraordinary response to the African famine.

I want to point out that historians may look back 20 or 30 years hence and say that the response of the United Nations to the tragedy of Africa was perhaps its finest hour. Not only has the United Nations managed to galvanize tangible international support in a way that has never been experienced before; but in an equally exemplary fashion, it has put in place, on the ground in the 20 countries involved, the kind of co-ordinating and distributing leadership which is literally saving thousands of lives. I was proud when I was in the Sudan to watch the work of the United Nations personnel in UNICEF and the UN Development Program and UNHCR. It was something to behold — not only the extent of their commitment, but the way in which the United Nations was delivering food directly into the mouths of those who were starving, and doing it with a level of mastery and resolve which speaks to an extraordinary international body. These matters are matters which should convey pride and consequence by all of us who speak fervently for the international body. The fortieth anniversary is a good time to reassert the focus and to deal with the distortions.

The United Nations is simply not as bad as some would have it. Certainly it's polarized in the General Assembly, but not terminally for heaven's sake. The General Assembly remains a forum to which the leaders come. Everyone believes now that Gorbachev will come at the end of September 1985. Do you think that is some kind of incidental inconsequence? It's important that Gorbachev be there, and it is fascinating that he regards the United Nations as an institution sufficiently worthy to address on the fortieth anniversary of its life.