

Canada Promotes the Use of French at the United Nations

With a mandate from the delegations representing French-speaking countries at the United Nations, Mr. Yvon Beaulne, the Canadian Ambassador, made the following suggestion to the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly on November 19, 1969, regarding the working languages of the UN Secretariat :

When the question of languages was under examination last year, as the Committee will recall, the Canadian delegate stated among other things that to recognize the principle of official languages was to accept their use in practice and the consequences that involved. This means that, while retaining a pragmatic attitude towards the problems to be solved, it is necessary to accept the costs their solution entails and to seek machinery capable of preserving the efficiency of the organization to be administered. Bilingual or multilingual countries manage to do this (not without some difficulty, it is true), but in the end they look upon the situation as enriching. The United Nations, for its part, should certainly be able to do the same.

It is because of the importance Canada attaches to this principle that the Canadian delegation took an active part in the drawing-up of Resolution No. 2480B at the twenty-third session of the General Assembly. May I remind you that the primary purpose of the resolution was to ensure a more equitable use of French, and of the other working languages, in the Secretariat? To this end it was decided to intensify the language-training program. For our part, Mr. Chairman, we consider that this program is the most effective means available to the General Secretariat for the implementation of Resolution No. 2480B.

The delegations representing the French-speaking countries have asked the Canadian delegation to express the hope that further progress will be made towards ensuring a more equitable use of French in the United Nations. We understand the difficulties that have to be overcome in recruitment and staff-training and we rejoice that the Secretariat has shown so much goodwill in attempting to rectify the imbalance that we had to deplore. We are convinced, however, Mr. Chairman, of the need to work energetically towards the realization of this object as soon as possible.

We have been constantly interested, during the past 12 months, in the steps the General Secretariat has taken with a view to improving the training program. We shall continue to follow its operations closely. The implementation of Resolution 2480B seems to us to be a matter of great interest; in fact, in our opinion, the question has a very high priority. In this connection, we should like to hear the views of the General Secretariat regarding the adequacy of resources, both in personnel and equipment, available for the training program.

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