

Answering the detractors

is a matter to be celebrated. At the 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 permits us, after twenty 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.

Historians may look back twenty or thirty 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 twenty countries involved, the kind of coordinating 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 UNDP 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 is polarized in the General Assembly, but not terminally. The General Assembly remains a forum to which the leaders come. Everyone believes now that Gorbachev will come at the end of September 1985. This is not some kind of incidental inconsequence. It is 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.

Certainly there is extremism. But there is tangible in the United Nations a new spirit of moderation, particularly from some of the developing countries. All you have to do is look at the document "The Declaration on the African

Economic Crisis" to see the extent to which the African countries accommodated the interests of the developed world; the extent to which the sought rapprochement.

Defence without defensiveness

I think that the supporters of the United Nations are excessively defensive. It is not necessary to be so defensive. It is not necessary to be dragooned into the arguments of the detractors. The arguments are not terrifically persuasive and they are riddled with self-serving sophistry. It is necessary simply to accumulate the defence and to set it out chapter and verse. Do not be intimidated by those who are critics. Do not succumb to the blandishments of vilifiers. The United Nations is a first rate organization with the simple deficiencies of time and age and circumstance. So what do you do in a situation like that? You analyze it, you speak to its strengths, and then you go out and advocate its work.

Perhaps all of this is, in a sense, self-centeredly Canadian. I hope not. It is a little easier for Canada — a middle power, quite unthreatening, utterly non-nuclear, and with a particular advantage in being bilingual so that we have special access to the francophone world. We have, above all, a lasting and visceral commitment to multilateralism which is ingrained, and endemic to the Canadian character. We share this continent with the United States; we are good friends, and we hope that we can in the future share as well Canada's more positive view of the United Nations. I have learned as I travelled over the last number of months that it is not hard to convey a more positive view of the United Nations. There is a yearning everywhere amongst people to affirm the validity of the international community and of an international organization.

The Charter may, here and there, be under siege; but it is still an incomparable blueprint for a more just, civilized, humane and tolerant international community. One day we shall achieve it — infidels of all varieties notwithstanding. And so to the dreamers, the idealists, the pragmatists, the artisans in the vineyards of human betterment, the indefatigable apostles in the cause of peace, to all who are tenacious, and unrelenting, I wish you well and ask you never to be cowed. □