



The United Nations

In the field of peace and security, the main achievements of the United Nations in 1987 related to Afghanistan, terrorism and disarmament. Of particular note was the four-party agreement, fostered by the United Nations and followed up with a multinational observer mission, on the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.

Canada's statement on Afghanistan at the 42nd UN General Assembly was a highlight of the political agenda and helped to hold the line against any softening of criticisms which might otherwise have followed earlier Soviet indications of a willingness to withdraw. The vote on the resolution left no doubt that the Soviets were being challenged by the world community to match deeds with words.

Early in 1988 the four parties most concerned — Afghanistan, U.S.S.R., Pakistan and the U.S. — met under United Nations auspices in Geneva and reached several agreements on the modalities for a Soviet withdrawal and the return of refugees from Pakistan. These agreements also called for an Observer Mission to investigate and report on the implementation of the agreements and to enable the United Nations to continue its good offices role in Afghanistan. Canada was invited to join the Observer Mission and contributed five officers as an expression of its commitment to achieving peace in the region.

Another highlight of the 42nd General Assembly was the reconfirmation of the UN's condemnation of terrorism in all its forms. This strong statement also reflected the complex and detailed work being undertaken by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to draw up international standards for preventing terrorist acts and regulations for dealing with those that do take place.

The Middle East and South Africa remained the two most complex and politically sensitive issues on the political agenda of the United Nations. Debates on both issues revealed little progress towards solutions over the past year, and imperceptible changes in voting patterns on virtually identical resolutions. Canada's higher profile on southern Africa in the Commonwealth context was noted at the UN, and the creation of the Committee of Foreign Ministers served to improve the general atmosphere on this issue and bring about a small degree of moderation in the texts of resolutions. The lack of movement towards any form of international peace conference on the Middle East tended to make the debate on that subject more difficult and the resolutions somewhat more radical in tone.

The war between Iran and Iraq and its impact on the Gulf remained of major interest to the United Nations Security Council. On July 20, 1987, the Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution calling for a cease-fire and movement towards a negotiated settlement. Further efforts to persuade Iran to respect the terms of this resolution took place over succeeding months, but without success. Nevertheless, the ability of the Security Council to reach unanimous agreement on this and other resolutions (Angola, Israel) has reinforced its role in the area of international peace and security.

The United Nations also continued its efforts to resolve regional conflicts in Central America and North Africa. Canada led a fact-finding mission to Western Sahara as part of the Secretary-General's good offices in that dispute.

The UN theme for 1987 was the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, and it inspired an unusual range of conferences, projects and other activities involving governments of every level and numerous non-governmental organizations. The activities of the Year of the Homeless were matched to some degree by a focus on other social and economic issues, including the environment and AIDS.

Environment was a major concern of the United Nations in 1987. The World Commission on Environment and Development, chaired by Mrs. Brundtland, Prime Minister of Norway, reported to the General Assembly in October and presented a convincing case for greater attention to be paid to sustainable development. The Canadian Delegation, led by the Environment Minister, strongly endorsed the Commission's report and urged the United Nations to ensure that sustainable development is incorporated as a guiding principle in all its work.

In its work with the specialized agencies of the United Nations, Canada focused on ensuring the completion of work being carried out by ICAO for controlling acts of terrorism at airports and by IMO with respect to terrorism on ships. By the end of the year, the ground had been prepared for the adoption in 1988 of two new international legal instruments to deal with terrorism. A Convention on the Protection of the Ozone Layer by Reducing the Use of Chlorofluorocarbons was negotiated in 1987 in Montreal under UNEP auspices.

Last year was also a year of renewal for the specialized agencies. Because of a conviction that there was a strong need for improvement and reform, unlikely to occur without changes in leadership, Canada became deeply involved in the first two in a series of nine elections for heads of UN organizations, which are taking place during the next two years. In November, Federico Mayor, from Spain, was