

No. 53/24 The Opening of the Eighth General Assembly

Statement by Mr. L.B. Pearson, Secretary of State for External Affairs, and Chairman of the Canadian Delegation to the United Nations General Assembly, made on the occasion of the opening of the Eighth Session of the Assembly in New York, September 18, 1953.

It is customary for the retiring President to say a few words at the beginning of each new Session. They should be few, in the interest of the speedy and effective conduct of the business before us. In any event, in the Annual Report of the Secretary-General, we have a clear and comprehensive record by which we can judge how well we have succeeded or how badly we have failed in the seventh Assembly.

That Assembly, which, I think, will be known as the Korean Assembly, was a long one, lasting until August 28 of this year. It imposed heavy burdens on national delegations, and especially on the members of the Secretariat. The reason for this was the Korean Question, which overshadowed all others. It presented us with a major challenge. The Assembly worked hard and patiently to meet it. By its resolution of December 3 last, it laid the foundation for breaking the prisoner-of-war deadlock at Panmunjom. Then after the armistice was concluded on July 28, the Assembly, after a long and thorough discussion, by a formal decision made provision for the United Nations side of the Korean Peace Conference recommended in Paragraph 60 of the Armistice Agreement.

It now remains for the others concerned to take the steps necessary to bring about this conference, whose success can have such beneficial and farreaching results, but whose failure might have equally farreaching results of the wrong kind.

From the Korean experience we have, I hope, learned some lessons. One is that collective action against aggression can work, even when that action is incomplete, in organization, support and participation.

Korea, then has been a vindication of the principle of collective action, but even more, it has shown what could be done if all members of the United Nations were willing, collectively, to pay the price to make such action effective.

Another major problem in our discussions at the seventh session, and one which will continue in the future to challenge our resources of intelligence and understanding concerns colonial and racial issue. We have seen in acute form the practical problems which arise in our organization in seeking to reconcile the principle of the domestic jurisdiction of sovereign states, and

the administrative responsibility of some of these sovereign states over dependent peoples in their progress towards self-government, with the legitimate interest of the United Nations in human rights and in peaceful progress towards a wider freedom for all peoples. These are not merely arid, academic debates. They relate to issues which in a dynamic world arouse strong passions, and directly concern the fate of many millions of human beings. In general, discussion of these issues was conducted in the seventh session with a moderation and responsibility which we must all hope will continue.

The past year witnessed the resignation of our first Secretary-General, Mr. Trygve Lie, and the appointment of his successor, Mr. Dag Hammarskjold. To create, to maintain, and to preserve the traditions of an international public service in the climate of the critical post-war years has not been, and is not now, any easy task. That our organization has made so much progress here is a tribute to the administrative leadership and authority of Mr. Lie and his assistants and to all who have worked faithfully in the service of the United Nations. From our new Secretary-General we have already come to expect, and I know we shall receive, international service of the highest order.

I share Mr. Hammarskjold's hope, expressed in his Annual Report on the work of the organization, that in their policies all member governments will reaffirm "the respect they have pledged in the charter for the independent position of the Secretariat of the United Nations, and the recognition there given to the essential role of an international civil service in an irrevocably interdependent world."

At the end of seven years, the United Nations can still draw on a tremendous fund of world-wide support. Despite the gulf which divides the world, despite the failure of some sections of opinion to recognize the facts of interdependence, despite the inadequacy of our own efforts in translating aspirations into reality, there is a growing world community - spanning continents, races, languages and faiths - which follows and supports international efforts towards world co-operation.

May the assembly which now begins by its work and by its results strengthen and encourage and widen this co-operation.

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