



# STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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## EIGHTEENTH SESSION: AN ASSEMBLY OF OPPORTUNITY

Statement by the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson,  
Prime Minister of Canada, in the General Debate at the  
Eighteenth Session of the United Nations General Assembly,  
September 19, 1963.

I wish first of all, Mr. President, to congratulate you on your election to the high office you now hold. As one who has himself occupied that Chair, I know that it is always demanding, often difficult and occasionally an uncomfortable one, but your record and your personal qualities assure us that you will fill it with satisfaction to the Assembly, distinction to yourself, and honour to your country.

Some years have passed since I last had the honour to represent my country at the United Nations. My first words on my return must be to re-affirm Canada's strong and continuing support for our world organization and our desire to do what we can to help realize the ideals of its Charter.

### Change and Growth of the United Nations

From this rostrum, I am happy to recognize many old friends and respected colleagues. But I am also conscious of the fact that the eighteenth session of the General Assembly of 1963 reflects the great changes that have taken place in the organization since I was here, and which in turn reflect changes that have taken place in the world. Not the least of these changes is the admission of many newly-independent states whose distinguished representatives now add their wisdom and influence to the Assembly's deliberations.

Their presence is a reminder, which we should not need, that there can be no enduring peace and security in the world until all men are free, with the right to determine their own form of political life and the duty to display the responsibility that alone gives meaning to freedom.

For 18 years now, the United Nations has continued the search for effective ways to promote the purposes and principles of its Charter. In the broad balance-sheet the credit column remains favourable, even if limited by international fears and misunderstandings. Our task remains -- as it has always been -- to reduce and ultimately sweep away those limitations.

Of all the changes of the past few years, none has been more dramatic than the emergence of new and free nations in Africa. This emergence has had a profound effect on the political evolution of the United Nations and on international affairs generally. It has also added heavy responsibilities to our organization in many fields of activity. Finally, it has given new and urgent emphasis to two major questions of our time, colonialism and racial discrimination; both of which, we should not forget, can exist in many forms and have no common political pattern.

New states have brought United Nations membership closer to the goal of universality. They have also brought inescapable problems of growing pains. This process of growth and adjustment is bound to be difficult. How could it be otherwise? It requires patience and tolerance and understanding on the part of all members new and old.

There are new members that are small states with large problems of political, economic and social development. There are older members that are big states facing new and gigantic problems. Many of these result from their own great strides in science and technology. These advances have given entirely new dimensions to the threat of war and even to human survival, but they have also made possible a new era of progress and plenty surpassing any previous human achievement. The challenge to the world community, then, is a dual one, both negative and positive.

The problem of armaments, especially nuclear armaments, must be solved before scientific advances move it beyond man's reach. The disparity in economic and social development among nations must be corrected before it creates an unbridgeable gulf between "have" and "have-not" nations. It is the duty and interest of all members of the United Nations to see that this swift march of science and technology does not lead either to the universal destruction of war or to intolerable differences among nations in human welfare and social progress. Only through constructive and co-operative international endeavour can these two grim results be avoided.

#### Peace Keeping by the UN

The Congo crisis, about which I should like to say a word, has once again shown that these two things, security and welfare, are interrelated, parts of the same problem. That operations in the Congo were sustained in the face of great odds and obstacles is a stirring tribute to the courage and devotion of the servants of the United Nations. It is a witness also to the determination of the majority of its members that the United Nations should not fail in its Congo mission. This mission, broadly stated, was to cushion the transition from dependent to independent status -- a pattern which may again be needed in other colonial situations not yet dealt with.

The Congo mission has raised in an acute form the main problems of peace keeping of the United Nations -- problems of political control, executive direction, financial means and administrative co-ordination. From the Congo, new experience, not yet fully assessed, has been added to that gained from earlier peace-keeping operations. Canada does not share the doubts which have been raised about the nature and purposes of this United Nations action. We felt that

intervention in the Congo was a test which this organization had to accept and a duty which it could not shirk. We believe that this kind of important, if necessarily limited, peace-keeping activity has now moved beyond the stage of first experiment. We believe that it has become a practical necessity in the conduct of international affairs, and should be provided for as such.

#### Strengthening UN Arbitrament

A main task of our organization, therefore, should now be to strengthen and improve its capacity in this field, learning from the failures and successes of the past and seeking more effective ways to perform this function in the future. There will, of course, always be some situations in which the United Nations should not be asked to intervene, either because the intervention would be outside the Charter, contrary to the Charter, or because it would be beyond the United Nations capacity and therefore bound to fail. But there will be other situations where its intervention will be important, perhaps even essential, for keeping the peace, or preventing small conflicts from developing into big ones; for these there surely should be the advance international planning and preparation without which no national government would dream of acting.

I am of course aware that a few members disagree categorically with this peace-keeping concept of the United Nations and that they argue that most of the peace-keeping operations of the past have been illegal. They would have us believe that the most stirring and compelling phases of the preamble to the Charter are hollow, that the first purpose enunciated in Article 1 has no practical application. There are other members who are doubtful or indifferent or cynical regarding this aspect of our work. Both categories reflect attitudes which have forced the organization to improvise in carrying out tasks which have been imposed on it by the decisions of the Assembly or the Security Council. Those who are responsible for the necessity of such "crash" action are often the first to criticize the United Nations when the results are disorderly, delayed or inadequate.

The Secretary-General in a recent speech (I believe it was at Harvard University) has emphasized the advantage it would be "if countries would, in their national military planning, make provision for suitable units which would be made available at short notice for United Nations service and thereby decrease the degree of improvisation necessary in an emergency".

I believe we should now support this appeal by putting into effect those arrangements, which are increasingly becoming necessary, including a compact planning team of military experts which would provide the advice and assistance which the Secretary-General should have for organizing emergency peace-keeping operations.

#### Canada's UN Forces

National governments can also improve their own arrangements for assisting such operations. My own country now maintains forces, trained and equipped for the purpose, which can be placed at the disposal of the United Nations on short notice for service anywhere in the world. In case we are

required to do more in the future, we have recently given the Secretariat detailed information on what we can most readily provide to meet further requests for assistance.

In this co-operative peace-keeping activity we have been associated with many states and in many places far removed from Canada -- in Kashmir, in Palestine, in Gaza and Sinai, in Lebanon, in the Congo, in West New Guinea and in Yemen. Each situation has posed its own problems and suggested its own solutions. But always, running through it all, our own experience has taught us one thing: the importance of advance planning and organization, both within our national establishment and within the international organization. We would be happy to share our experience with others who have participated with us in the past in United Nations peace-keeping operations, as well as with those who might wish to do so in the future. To this end we propose that there should be an examination by interested governments of the problems and techniques of peace-keeping operations. This could lead to a pooling of available resources and development in a co-ordinated way of trained and equipped collective forces for United Nations service to meet possible future demands for peace-keeping or police action under the blue flag of the world organization and at the request of that organization. The Scandinavian member states, in their formation of a composite Nordic contingent for United Nations police and peace duties, have shown the way. We should now, I believe, try to make further progress along those lines, and my country would be proud to initiate steps for this purpose.

#### What Kind of UN Do We Want?

There are other fundamental United Nations questions to be dealt with - questions of constitutional reform, organization and administration, of financing and procedural methods. A comprehensive reappraisal should, I think, be made of certain basic questions, such as Charter reform, which have been pushed into the background of our thinking because of recurring tension in international relations leading to the fear that the questions themselves might contain the seeds of possible further friction. I am not proposing that this Assembly should decide that the Charter should now be reviewed with a view to making drastic changes and reforms. That, of course, would not be possible, and perhaps not desirable at this moment. But I am suggesting that at this session, in order that the United Nations can act more effectively in its various fields of responsibility, we should make a conscious effort to deal with certain problems which we have been avoiding.

#### Enlargement of Principal Councils

I have already mentioned the need for adequate and balanced representation in the main organs of the United Nations. Since the membership first began to expand in 1955, we have recognized that there had to be some adjustment and enlargement in the composition of the councils and of the Secretariat to reflect the changed geographical pattern of membership. To be fully effective, United Nations machinery and organization should adequately reflect the present membership, without giving undue weight to any single factor, whether it be military or industrial strength, population or financial contribution, politics or race or geography.

To this end, I believe that the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council should be enlarged in order to permit a better balance in their composition. We should not, however, confine our interest to representation. We should be even more concerned about powers and functions.

#### Absence of Unanimity

I am thinking particularly of the Security Council. Its record in recent years, for reasons which we all understand, has been one of diminishing returns. We are all aware of the main reason for this -- the lack of the essential unanimity among the great powers. That unanimity is still lacking; but this year, for the first time in the post-war period, we can perhaps begin to hope that improved political relations between the great powers may make possible the restoration to the Security Council of the high executive function which it was designed to fulfil.

We might also consider how to modify the Council's function to make it more effective as the instrument of political action for the United Nations. Indeed, the time may be at hand for a Security Council which can keep continuing watch on the affairs of the organization as a whole in much the same way as the executive committees operate in the Specialized Agencies.

If the enlarged Security Council were given a properly balanced composition, with sufficient safeguards as regards voting rights, it could conceivably become the main arena for political decision on questions which require urgent action. It could assume responsibility for many of the items which now lie heavily on the agenda of every session of the General Assembly. Such a Council could be in session virtually throughout the year and make it possible to cut drastically into the excessive time and energy now consumed by Assembly proceedings.

#### Relations of UN and Regional Organs

There is another change that might be considered. The United Nations will inevitably remain the central world forum for international discussion and recommendation on a wide range of subjects. We already have; in addition, regional groupings of states -- in Europe, Africa and Latin America. Other groupings conceivably may be formed. The time may soon come to correlate the activities of these regional groupings more closely with those of the United Nations. It is possible to envisage a stage in the evolution of the United Nations when regional assemblies may be used to deal with regional problems in search of local solutions or in the preparation for broader treatment at the full United Nations.

The United Nations, however reorganized to become more efficient, can never function effectively unless it has adequate financial resources. Far from possessing these, it faces a financial crisis. Temporary expedients have been found to meet this crisis. But the basic problem, arising largely out of the refusal of some states to pay their share of peace-keeping expenses of which they did not approve, remains untouched. I am aware of the explanations of their negative attitude to this problem given by the members concerned. But most of the arguments advanced have little to do with the real issue, which is that, if

the United Nations decides in accordance with recognized and legal procedures to engage in peace-keeping operations, the expenses should be borne collectively by the whole membership in accordance with Assembly decisions on apportionment. There is surely no other acceptable way. If we do not give the organization the financial support which it needs for discharging its responsibilities, its very existence will be endangered. In particular, the efforts of the United Nations and the Specialized Agencies to render economic and social assistance might be brought to an end.

#### Problems of Economic Development

The first concern of the United Nations, I know, is the keeping of the peace. If we were to fail in that, the whole brave human experiment would have failed; we should go down for good. But, second only to the keeping of peace, the great purpose of international statesmanship today must be to improve the living standards of all the world's peoples and to make possible a better life for all. The role of the United Nations in this field is necessarily limited. But if we wish, and if we will, it can be one of great and lasting significance.

Experience is more and more underlining the central significance and compelling urgency of economic and social questions in these years, rightly named the "Decade of Development", and our concern in that field is at the moment focussed on the forthcoming United Nations Conference on Trade and Development; we have been honoured to serve on the Preparatory Committee for that conference.

#### Economic Growth and Trade Expansion

The problems of economic development and those of trade expansion are fundamentally the same. But the purpose of development is to raise the level of real incomes, from which the main impetus to expanding trade must come. Higher incomes within a country, however, do not automatically improve a country's ability to trade. The improved incomes must be related in the long run to increased earnings through exports. Aid programmes, essential as they are, are only a means of bridging a gap until export incomes increase.

For this reason, and for many others, we should do all we can in this Assembly to lay foundations for the success of next year's economic conference. That conference will be concerned, obviously, with recommending practical ways of raising and stabilizing the earnings that the less-developed countries derive from exports of primary products. It is hardly less important to enlarge the earnings open to all countries through trade in manufactured goods. For that purpose, as has already been pointed out by the first speaker in this debate, barriers to trade must be reduced and, in order to make this effective, measures may be needed to improve international currency arrangements and lessen the exposure of so many countries to balance-of-payments troubles.

In the complex structure of the world economy today, trade and aid are tightly linked. No amount of aid will create permanent, stable growth unless it is soon accompanied by developing means of increasing exports. Accordingly, all the members of the United Nations -- developed and developing economies alike -- have a common interest in seeking mutual aid and economic co-operation

which will be of mutual benefit. The success of this and other similar efforts, essential for peace and prosperity in the world, will depend largely on freeing economic and technical co-operation to the maximum possible extent from political controversy.

#### No Politics in the Specialized Agencies

The Specialized Agencies, the Functional and Regional Commissions, the other bodies dealing with economic and social problems, should be given the opportunity to concentrate on the special tasks which they were set up to perform. Recently, their work has been diverted and delayed by the injection of controversial political questions into their deliberations. There have been attempts to achieve political aims at the expense of the economic and social benefits which would accrue from the vigorous pursuit of the technical programmes.

I believe that the Specialized Agencies and other functional bodies of the United Nations should leave political matters to the bodies designed and intended for political debate and political decision: the General Assembly and the Security Council. If a moratorium on political controversy in the Specialized Agencies could be accepted, it would enable those Agencies to get on with their practical projects of co-operative assistance, and I think the developing countries would have the most to gain from that result.

Some members directly and immediately concerned with certain political issues involving human rights and fundamental freedoms sincerely, and indeed passionately, believe that their cases should be aired whenever and wherever the opportunity occurs. We can understand and fully appreciate the depth of feeling aroused by racial and colonial issues, without necessarily accepting the desirability of all the methods proposed for dealing with such issues.

The Charter does not require, or even authorize, sanctions, such as expulsion, to be applied merely because one member of the United Nations follows policies, such as apartheid, considered abhorrent and degrading by others. Quite apart from the practical and legal arguments against such action by majority vote, where will this course lead us? There may be -- indeed there are -- other governments represented in this organization which follow policies and adopt practices that are considered by many other members to be discriminatory and to violate human rights. But are voices to be raised by those other members of the Assembly for the imposition of extreme sanctions, such as expulsion? I hope not.

The fundamental aim of this organization should be to hold the nations together in an international system as nearly universal as we can make it -- and perhaps for that reason we should be seeking to increase the membership, not to decrease it.

#### Realities of World Politics and the UN

Today the world around us is filled with uncertainties and dangers from a wide and worrying variety of unresolved issues. Many of them do not appear on our agenda. Some may no longer be susceptible of United Nations

treatment and can best be dealt with, at least for the time being, by the parties most directly concerned. In its approach to international affairs, the United Nations has to take into account the reality of world politics, which in some cases makes direct negotiations preferable to United Nations involvement.

There are certain questions, however, which are the direct concern and responsibility of this Assembly. There are old questions such as disarmament, especially nuclear disarmament, the elimination of racial discrimination, freedom for peoples who have never had it and for others who have lost it. There are also new questions raised with each passing year. But, whether old or new, they have their place in United Nations priorities and they all pose the question, with a compelling urgency: How can this collective United Nations response to international challenge best be fitted into the pattern of world affairs?

We must soon find the right answer to this question, for time may be running out on us. While most members recognize the proven value of the United Nations and want it to continue in effective being, with a substantial role in our world, there are signs of decline and deterioration which we would be foolish to ignore and which could threaten the future use of our organization, indeed its very existence.

Fortunately, however, there are also signs now of improvement in relations between the super-powers, which could give the United Nations new hope and new opportunity. There is a little more benevolence and a little less bitterness, and the Cold War is a little less frigid. The United Nations is, among other things, a unique political mirror reflecting, often magnifying, and occasionally distorting, the dreams and the distresses of men. So I wonder what the eighteenth session of the General Assembly will show.

#### Lessening of Tensions and Prospects for Future

The picture could be a brighter one. The feeling today of crisis and collision is not as oppressive as it has been in the recent past. There is an encouraging contrast between the international climate at the opening of this session of the General Assembly and that which hung like a dark shadow over the last or the one before that.

I know that none of the great issues has been resolved. There is recurring tension in and around Berlin, in Laos and Vietnam, in parts of Africa, along the Sino-Indian frontier, in the Middle East, in the Caribbean and elsewhere. But there seems now to be more of a will, more of a desire, to seek peaceful settlements to stubborn problems. This improvement may soon fade before the test of policy and action. But it exists now, and we should take full advantage of it.

#### Test-Ban Treaty

Its most striking evidence, as has already been pointed out by the representative of Brazil, is the recent partial nuclear test-ban treaty between three nuclear powers, since adhered to by more than 90 states. Even by itself, that treaty is immensely valuable in putting an end to the poisoning



of the atmosphere which sustains all life on our planet. It showed that great powers were able to agree on something important in spite of the fears and tensions of Cold War. The global sigh of relief that followed that treaty was due not only to the ending of atmospheric pollution, important as that was, but to a feeling of hope for further progress towards peace. In particular, the time seemed closer when the long frustration of disarmament negotiations might be replaced by some positive measures of agreement, with priority to atomic disarmament.

It would be intolerable now if our hopes for some positive steps to remove the fear of universal destruction were one more to be dashed. I cannot believe that this will happen. I cannot believe that there are not sensible solutions which will be found to the problems of the relations of 700,000,000 Chinese with their neighbours, or to those of a divided Germany, a divided Korea, a divided Vietnam. I do not accept the permanence of the Berlin wall as a symbol of a divided world. I reject the theory that Arabs and Jews must forever be hostile. I do not believe it is the destiny of Cuba to be permanently alienated from former friends and neighbours in this Western Hemisphere, or for whites and non-whites to be permanently embittered in Africa because of racial policies which are bad and bound to fail.

I do not claim that there are quick and easy solutions to these problems. There are no such solutions, and there never have been. But there is a better atmosphere in which to begin the earnest and persistent search for solutions. And in this search, I repeat, the United Nations can play an effective role -- but only if it puts its own house in order.

#### Scope for UN Action

It is not the sole instrument for international co-operation. It has no supra-national authority. It is no substitute for national foreign policy or bilateral diplomacy. The Charter rightly recognizes that there are other peaceful means of solution, regional and limited collective arrangements outside the United Nations but consistent with its principles, which member states can employ, and which they do employ. Nevertheless, the United Nations alone serves us all. It provides the only world assembly to protect and advance human rights and freedoms and human welfare, to reduce and remove the causes of conflict. It can lead us out of the post-war wasteland into greener pastures of a creative and secure peace. It can. But whether it does, whether it discharges that great role and fulfils its great responsibilities, depends on us. When the United Nations fails, its member governments fail. When it succeeds, all the plain and good people of all the world succeed.

We are 18 years old now. The League of Nations was 18 years old in 1938. That was the year of appeasement, of unawareness, of failure of heart and nerve. The eighteenth year of the United Nations opens in a climate of greater hope. We can make it the beginning of the end of the situation where a man can communicate with a missile 1,000,000 miles away, but not with another man whom he watches warily over a curtain of fear and suspicion.

Shortly before his premature and greatly lamented death, Albert Camus wrote: "Since atomic war would divest any future of its meaning, it gives us complete freedom of action. We have nothing to lose except everything. So let's go ahead."

Well, I say: Let's go ahead. This is the Assembly of opportunity. We can make it, if we will, the Assembly of action for peace.

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