



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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Practical Work and Achievement

A speech delivered by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, and President, Seventh Session of the United Nations General Assembly, Mr. L.B. Pearson, delivered at the 21st Annual New York Herald Tribune Forum on October 19, 1952.

Your opening programme tonight has been concerned first with the special field of technical assistance and economic development, and second with a more general appreciation of current attitudes towards the United Nations - a panel discussion which has inevitably covered a wide field. The order strikes me as a sensible one, for valid general judgments on the United Nations can emerge only from a close look at its practical work and achievements.

The United Nations can take some pride in its progress in the field of technical, economic and social co-operation. This is a venture, not in charity, but in self-help and mutual aid, which can provide reciprocal benefits to the participants whether they be givers or receivers of aid. Mr. Acheson rightly said to the Assembly last week that, looking back over the record of the last seven years, this perhaps provides the most hopeful and promising aspect of the work of the United Nations. Efforts are steadily being made to bridge the technological gulf between those countries which received the greatest material from the advances of the industrial and scientific revolution and their less-developed neighbours in the world community. These efforts, spurred by impatience from one side, and checked by caution from the other, are an eloquent testimony to the good sense and imagination of both parties in this partnership to increase world levels of food and industrial production, to eradicate or reduce disease and illiteracy, and to increase man's powers over nature over an ever-widening area of the globe. They provide ground for faith in the ability of the United Nations to reach the goals which it sets for itself in this field through constructive practical action.

As you have heard tonight, the needs are great. But the resources at our disposal are limited. Therefore, the problem of priorities which faces all those governments which share in the United Nations programmes, and in related programmes, such as Point Four and the Colombo Plan, is an insistent and compelling one. If it is said that the present rate and scale of our efforts in the United Nations is modest, it must also be said that this rate and scale is limited not only by the resources and alternative obligations of the countries concerned, but

also by the capacity of the less developed countries to absorb and make the most efficient use of the assistance requested and received. Appropriations, whether granted through the United Nations or through other agencies - public and private - are important. What is also important, however, is a realistic assessment of not only what is right, but what is feasible and what should be done first.

That is why, in the various United Nations bodies recently, this word "priorities" has been increasingly heard. It is a symptom of growing awareness that while the things that need doing in the world, and that could be done through the United Nations, are unlimited, the capacity for doing them quickly, is limited.

The progress that has been made and, as we all hope, will continue to be made in this fundamental field of human welfare, is not, however, the only yardstick by which the record of the United Nations is judged. What people also want to know is what the United Nations has done and can do to provide a greater measure of security against aggression. For if war comes, the only kind of technical assistance which will be required will be machinery for removing the rubble and the ruin.

In working towards collective security, the United Nations has had to face the cold and bitter facts of the world in which we live. The United Nations did not create the lack of unanimity among the Great Powers. Nor did it create the acute division which has emerged since the war. These problems would have existed - I think in an even more explosive form - even if no world organization had ever been established. But the United Nations is the mirror that reflects them, and is sometimes mistakenly blamed because the picture is such a frightening one. But even without this United Nations mirror, the necessity for measures of self-defence in the present state of a divided world would still, unfortunately, have to be accepted as necessary.

The stake in collective security is not restricted to a limited group of states. It is shared by all. In addition to the threat and fear of conflict on a global scale, for many peoples of the world the most direct threat, real or imaginary, comes from their next-door neighbours or from the continuation of long-unresolved situations in their particular parts of the world. To such peoples, the existence of the United Nations is not merely a reassuring fact - it provides the actual means of seeking redress for grievances without resort to armed force. It also gives them some assurance that, if they are attacked, they will receive in some form or other, collective assistance.

The principle of collective security is fundamental to the Charter. It is based on the conviction that aggression in any part of the world constitutes, in the long run, a threat to every other part. If it is true that we cannot tolerate a city of residential suburbs surrounding slums and degradation, it is equally true that we cannot be safe in a world community which condones lawless aggression in any part of it.

Today, our acceptance of this collective principle - or, at any rate, its application in practice - must be qualified, as are so many things, by what the members of the United Nations are willing and able to do. To say we must exercise judgment in deciding how the collective security obligations of the Charter can best be discharged does not mean that we can ever afford to turn a blind eye to any act of aggression. But it does mean that those who have accepted responsibility for national and collective defence must exercise the highest qualities of wisdom, as well as of conscience, in deciding where and how the limited forces at their disposal should be applied.

While we must recognize, then, that collective action to meet aggression may have to vary according to circumstances, the response to aggression in Korea, and the adoption of the "Uniting for Peace" Resolution of November, 1950, are evidence that the great majority of the members of the United Nations desire to work towards the achievement of the kind of collective security envisaged in the Charter.

The answer to the question of whether or not we shall succeed is being given now on the distant Korean battle front by the forces of the United Nations whose sole objective has always been and remains "to repel aggression and to restore peace and security." If that collective action had not been taken in June of 1950, if it had not been firmly pursued within the framework of United Nations decisions, and if it were to be dishonourably abandoned now, there would be little point in our discussing tonight the value of the United Nations. Its value would have depreciated swiftly and perhaps beyond repair.

To sum up, I believe that both fields to which I have referred - technical assistance and collective security - are linked directly to each other. Programmes and measures in both fields must be developed, and, again, priorities must be set in accordance with our best judgment. Within our own national governments we know that such decisions can lead to disagreement over national policies. The same is true internationally. So differences have become apparent, between the materially developed and the underdeveloped countries of the world, over the amount of help which can be extended and the rate at which it can be extended. The countries from whom this material help must principally come believe that they must give first priority to defence measures for their own survival. That security must come first is not, in fact, seriously questioned by anyone. For instance, some countries where the material standard of living is deplorably low and where the need for development is very great, nevertheless feel that they must spend a very heavy proportion of their own income on defence and that this must be given priority. If that is true, then it can readily be understood that others, living under the same fear of war, feel that their defence must be given the same priority over plans for co-operative assistance. In such plans, of course, both sides should benefit, but the benefit on one side is less direct and immediate than on the other and, therefore, less likely to over-ride in the public mind the claim of immediate national defence.

The seriousness of this problem in the free world should be neither minimized nor exaggerated. It is essentially a disagreement over degree and pace, and the balancing of objectives. I believe we shall find the right solution to it. The United Nations should help us to do so.

After seven years, the United Nations is still a young organization, still largely an experiment. But one thing has become increasingly evident. Despite the disappointments we have all encountered, the spirit of interdependence in the world is growing. Today there is more contact, diplomatic and otherwise, between peoples of different races, religions and cultures than at any time in the world's history, and much credit for this is due to the United Nations. Apart from those countries which have chosen - or have been forced - to seal themselves off from the rest of the world, our increasing contacts with each other are slowly reducing the ignorance, suspicion and fears which have in the past proved such a fertile breeding ground for war. The progress is slow, but it is in the right direction and it is constantly being made, often in United Nations bodies which receive very little publicity. We must not, then, think of the United Nations solely in terms of the bitter disputes that now loom so large in the headlines. Our hope for the future of our world organization has a deeper and more solid foundation than these headlines would suggest. The war against ignorance and prejudice and, yes, even against fear goes on. That war will never be won by avoiding battles, but also it will not be won by rashly seeking engagements which, by the skilful deployment of voting battalions, result in victories which are Pyrrhic only. There is a strategy of international action between these two extremes which, if we follow it steadily and patiently and perseveringly will result one day in victory. Let us follow it.

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