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MAKING THE UNITED NATIONS EQUAL TO ITS TASKS

The opening statement on October 14, 1970, in the Debate at the Commemorative Session Marking the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the United Nations by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Mitchell Sharp.

...Throughout the world there is deep dissatisfaction, rooted, I believe, in a profound uneasiness that has seized peoples everywhere -- uneasiness about a world wracked by bloody conflict, uneasiness about economic prospects, uneasiness about the quality and meaning of human life, uneasiness about the health of the air we breathe, the water we drink, the soil that gives us sustenance.

The dissatisfaction of which I speak is not limited to any group of nations. It transcends the clash of ideologies, respects no barriers between East and West, between North and South. It is felt in developing countries, in countries that are technologically advanced, by nations represented here and by those as yet without representation.

Dissatisfaction is most clearly to be seen among the young, the oppressed, the alienated and the poor. Yet it is to be found increasingly among people in the prime of life, people who enjoy material success. It affects the leaders as well as the led.

We are facing a broad crisis of confidence between people and the institutions they have created. Governments, judicial systems, places of learning, organized religion -- all the great constants of civilized life are being questioned. And the way they are responding seems often to add to the dissatisfaction. The relevance of institutions, their competence, their usefulness, their very purpose, have been brought into doubt.

In this place, at this time, it is dissatisfaction with the United Nations that we must consider. It does not stop at the threshold of this chamber. It is felt, I am sure, in every delegation seated here today. As we look out at the world, we see little cause for comfort, less reason for congratulation and no justification for complacency.

And yet much has been achieved. In the dark days of the Second World War, while fighting for their lives, the leaders of nations created a conception

of a world organization and a world order that would bring peace and security, prosperity and dignity to mankind.

The founding nations at San Francisco in 1945 made a leap of the imagination unique in man's history. In the midst of chaos and misery, they determined that order must prevail, they turned their backs upon darkness and death and struck out towards a future of light and of life. The Charter was a remarkable achievement. It still is.

Within a few years the world found itself divided by what we called the Cold War. This was the first great test for the United Nations. And it survived. In the days of the Cold War the great United Nations family of agencies came into being and embarked upon the supreme task of bettering the conditions of life upon earth, a task they still pursue with energy and dedication.

Even in the most anxious days of the Cold War the nations came together here. If there was little meeting of minds, at least there was contact. If we failed to decide issues, at least we debated them. Out of confrontation came communication.

And we did certain things:

- Local conflicts, which could have escalated into world war, were contained.
- Co-operative financial and trading arrangements, basic to world prosperity now and in the future, were negotiated.
- Arms-control measures, the subject of mounting world concern, were given effect in a series of United Nations treaties.
- As new nations came on the scene, the need for international development assistance was recognized and acted upon.
- Colonialism, identified as incompatible with human dignity, was hastened toward its end, frequently with United Nations assistance.
- The elimination of racial discrimination, clearly recognized as intolerable, became a primary objective.

These are some of the major accomplishments -- tangible, constructive and plainly visible. What about the subtler forms of United Nations achievement? Within these walls we have engaged, as nations, in an ever more sophisticated exchange of views, in ever more fruitful negotiations of issues. Nations met here, as we are meeting today, in a continuing conference. The whole conception of diplomacy went through a profound change. From narrow, formalized negotiations carried on by an élite bureaucracy, we moved to a broad interchange of ideas involving whole nations and their leaders. The right of small nations to be heard even as great powers negotiated has been enshrined in this organization.

Why, then, the dissatisfaction, the sense of shortcoming, the uneasiness about the United Nations? I am suggesting four major factors, the root causes. There are undoubtedly others.

Perhaps the first is to be found in the disparity between the high hopes of 1945 and the slow progress made during the past quarter-century. We had a right to high hopes in 1945 because so much seemed possible then.

In the recorded history of man there have been many years of great moment but few, surely, of such significance as 1945. Has there been any other year in which was manifest such widespread relief and determination for a better future? Has there been any other year in which occurred events of such vivid horror, such appalling evidence of man's capacity to produce his own catastrophe? Could any other year claim all the elements of a present hell and all the ingredients for a future heaven? In 1945 man attained a kind of maturity. Not since he first fashioned rough stone tools had man possessed the knowledge and the ability to answer virtually all his needs. Not since he first associated with others in local tribes had mankind conceived the institutional structures to conduct his affairs effectively and peacefully. Not since man first struck down his brother in rage had he been able to destroy not just his neighbour or his enemy but the whole human race.

For centuries, these human capacities had been the subject of dreams or nightmares by scientists and inventors, by poets and philosophers, by warriors and madmen. But none were within the grasp of man before 1945. Then, in a few blinding weeks of inspiration, revelation and terror, man held them in his hands.

This week we have an opportunity to reflect on our use or our misuse of that knowledge and ability in the years since the Charter was signed. In doing so we shall be well advised to avoid putting too much blame either on the United Nations as an organization or on its Charter. The Charter is a remarkable political attainment. The Charter introduced into the world a minimum standard of conduct, a floor through which no state was to descend. The Charter was never intended as a ceiling on the good citizenship of nations. The failure of the United Nations so far to fulfil the promise of 1945 is no excuse for states not to live up to the spirit as well as the letter of the Charter.

For it is member states that are charged with the obligations of the Charter. It is member states that retain the primary responsibility for action or inaction by this organization. And that responsibility is not diminished simply because the United Nations is not yet as effective as the San Francisco Conference hoped it would be.

All member nations share some of the blame for this organization's weaknesses, just as we can all take part of the credit for its strengths.

A few moments ago, I spoke about the coincidences in 1945 of political achievement and scientific advance. Surely the great paradox of that time was that the founding nations failed to realize that the nuclear age had begun. This seems all the more incomprehensible today when we realize that the Charter and the bomb were being put together at the same time.

Science in the past quarter-century has so far outstripped politics that all our political institutions, above all the United Nations, have seemed less and less relevant. How else can we now look upon disarmament discussions in the fifties, for example, when bigger and bigger bombs were bursting in the atmosphere and threatening us with radiation hazard? While we struggled with age-old earthly ills -- hunger, disease, illiteracy -- science shot Sputnik into

orbit in 1957 and a dozen years later sent men to the moon and back. How could we hope to deal effectively with the gap between rich and poor nations when science was clearly running away from us all?

If governments exhibit in the next 25 years the same indifference they have shown in the past, science will either destroy man or enslave him. It is sheer fantasy that science, inevitably, is in man's service. Today's man's ability to continue to control his own destiny is far less certain than it appeared in 1945.

Without suggesting for a moment that we should seek to stifle the scientific mind, I believe we must find ways of putting science and technology to work for the good of man for the improvement, not the impairment, of the human condition.

We do this within our national boundaries by re-examining existing arrangements or by devising new means, whichever way provides the most effective results. We must, with the same foresight and vigour, do so in the international sphere to check the bad effects of the relentless pursuit of science, to direct its powerful force for good into co-operative action for the benefit of us all.

The United Nations is not unaware of this need. It has begun to act in fields such as communications, transportation, outer space, the environment and the peaceful uses of the seabed.

A third big factor that feeds dissatisfaction is that the United Nations has often appeared to be rudely bypassed, or shamelessly to stand aside, while major world events were unfolding, while grave crises were erupting, particularly in the field of peace and security. Berlin, Vietnam, Czechoslovakia leap to the mind, but they are only the most obvious examples. Other critics have found it incredible that this organization can claim any standing in today's world when it has excluded for decades representatives of nations forming very substantial segments of the world's population.

Finally, I suggest that some of the aims, interests and values which in 1945 had very great appeal and support in this organization are no longer the ones that dominate here, or those that motivate nations and individuals now.

The preoccupations of the United Nations, once those of a membership predominantly white and of European origin, have shifted radically and rapidly with the organization's changing racial and regional composition. Yesterday we celebrated the tenth anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and People. This year marks the beginning of the Second Development Decade. Our attention has been shifting too -- perhaps not quickly enough -- to meet new demands and expectations in a rapidly-evolving world situation. All these changes are bound to be unsettling.

We have to adjust to them, as an organization, as individual member states, as nations. We may not have developed fully the reflexes of mind and mechanism needed for quick change. That we are learning I have no doubt, but whether fast enough one cannot be so sure. I ask you: How much time do we have?

I have sought to launch our discussion on a course that is positive and constructive, away from the temptations of self-congratulation, mutual recrimination and, above all, of apathetic indifference.

If we who are the members of this United Nations have the will to do so, we can accomplish anything we wish -- our Charter aims, the conservation of that fragile balance of nature on which we all depend for survival, the aspirations of people everywhere for a quality of life that is fit for human beings. Nor for cold computerized robots, or the lifeless masses of Orwell's 1984 but for warm and vital human beings -- the people for whom the Charter speaks.

Wherever we come from, whatever our constitutional forms, whatever credentials we hold, we are all here representing people. It is they who are the ultimate beneficiaries of what the United Nations does and the victims of what it leaves undone.

Our peoples now all know this, all round the globe. They can, via satellite and the other marvels of instant communication, watch us now, all the time. They will know if we fail them, why and how.

For people everywhere know today what they expect of us, even if they cannot always articulate their views or formulate their ideas. They want to have done with wars and weapons, to have done with social discriminations and economic disparities, to reduce hate and hypocrisy, pomp and pretence in human relations.

Acting in concert, we can, I believe, accomplish whatever we set out to do, provided our will to succeed is sustained and strong. We can find ways to reduce the tensions which threaten to erupt into world conflagration. We can find some equilibrium so that expanding populations will get an equitable share of the world's resources. We can reduce armaments in a manner which does not threaten the security of any country. We can deal with disparities which set the poor nations at odds with the rich. We can remove or reduce the ugly threats to our human environment.

These problems spill over national and regional frontiers, with no hope of effective unilateral control. Even if concerted action should evade our grasp for the moment, for reasons which are not entirely within our control, we cannot and should not seek to evade our responsibility either as individual members or groups of members. Our Charter obligations remain intact and nothing prevents us from discharging them unilaterally.

Individual nations can refrain from using force and violence in international relations. They are not compelled to devote ability and resources to produce nuclear weapons and others equally capable of mass destruction.

It is possible for them to allocate increasing amounts of resources to economic development and social progress, to environmental-control measures, to improving the quality of life. Individually, we can act within national boundaries to ensure that the dignity of man is assured.

If every nation represented here today does its utmost to put and keep its own house in order and to bring about friendly relations with other states, part of the great task of the United Nations will have been accomplished. If, as member nations, we come her in the knowledge that everything we can do within our own jurisdictions has been done -- and I do not suggest that any nation here today can make that claim --, we shall find fewer problems to face -- and those that remain less difficult.

I speak today for Canada and I pledge Canada to full support of the United Nations in the years to come. We cannot, together or separately, solve all mankind's problems at once. Dissatisfaction and unease will remain part of the common human experience. If we have the will, the courage and the patience, we can make greater progress in the next quarter-century than in the last, so that the youth of our time, and of times to come, may receive from us a United Nations equal to its tasks and a world in which they, in their time, can build upon the foundation we have laid.

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