

# STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION  
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS  
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 48/30

## THE UNITED NATIONS - ITS STRUCTURE, ITS DEFECTS AND ITS ACCOMPLISHMENTS

An address by Mr. G. Ignatieff, Member of Canada's Delegation to the United Nations, New York, to the Quebec Provincial Association of Protestant Teachers, Montreal, May 21, 1948

It is a privilege to be able to talk to you today about the United Nations. The success of that organization depends, I am well aware, upon the widest public knowledge, understanding and support. This audience includes many members of the teaching profession who can be instrumental in furthering the cause of the United Nations.

During the past two years I have had the opportunity of serving in an official capacity as an advisor to various Canadian delegations to the United Nations: to the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Atomic Energy Commission and the Economic and Social Council, and I have, therefore, been engaged in the day-to-day operations of the organization. In the light of this experience, let me pose and try to answer four important questions about the United Nations which are in the minds of many of us today.

- (a) What was the United Nations set up to do, and how does it do its work? (the structure)
- (b) What are the defects of the organization?
- (c) What are its accomplishments?
- (d) Why should we support the United Nations?

The Charter of the United Nations will be three years old on June 26, 1948. This document, which was worked out with so much good-will and painstaking care at San Francisco, defines the rules of international conduct which must be observed if the peoples of the world are to achieve peace and security, the observance of fundamental human rights and improved standards of life. These are broadly the objectives of the Charter. The Charter also defines the international machinery required to enable these rules to be effectively applied.

More specifically, the principal purpose in the United Nations as set out in the Charter is "to maintain international peace and security". If you look at the Charter you will find that this purpose is proclaimed in the first Article. You will also find that in this Article emphasis is placed upon prevention, by collective action of all the members, of war and its causes. The prevailing idea in the Charter is to combine the efforts of the members of the United Nations in maintaining peace by removal of the causes of war, primarily by substituting pacific settlement or adjustment of international disputes for the arbitrament of war.

The Charter also provides further and supplementary objectives to be followed in the removal of the causes of war through the development of friendly relations between states -- the achievement of international co-operation in the economic, social, cultural and humanitarian fields and through the use of United Nations machinery as a "centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends".

This matter of bringing harmony in the actions of nations is central to the purposes of the United Nations. But anyone familiar with the problem of building up an orchestra will excuse the United Nations for the many notes of disharmony which have issued from its halls in the first three years of its life. Three years are short in the life of an orchestra -- it is even shorter in the life of a world organization which has had to be laboriously built up in the difficult post-war years, and which embraces so many different backgrounds of ideology, religion and political and economic thought and practice.

### STRUCTURE

How does this big organization work? What is its structure? It is far more varied, vast in scope and complex than is generally realized.

There is the General Assembly, the meeting of all 58-member states which has overall responsibility for the control and co-ordination of the work of the organization, as well as particular responsibilities in the field of political conciliation and the development of world law. As a forum for the expression of world opinion it holds a paramount position in the organization and exercises an influence which should not be under-estimated.

There is the Security Council, charged under the Charter with "primary responsibilities for the maintenance of international peace and security", but I shall consider the accomplishments and the failures of this body in more detail later on.

In the economic, social, cultural and humanitarian field there is a particularly impressive and varied effort going on which, in the time available, I can do no more than to summarize.

The Economic and Social Council, its commissions and the related specialized agencies, operate in this field. The Economic and Social Council now has several commissions at work. Among these are (1) the Economic and Employment Commission; (2) The Social Commission; (3) The Transport and Communications Commission; (4) the Commission on Human Rights. In addition, there are also three regional economic commissions in Europe, Asia and Latin America for the regional economic advancement of these areas.

Then there are the important specialized agencies, 12 in number, whose functions I shall indicate.

There is the International Trade Organization, of particular importance to Canada as a trading nation. The Charter of this organization was signed in Havana last month. This Charter sets out the rules which have been agreed upon for increasing international trade under the peculiar conditions of the post-war world. And it provides a blueprint for the organization necessary to make these rules effective.

There is the International Civil Aviation Organization with its headquarters in Montreal. Its job is to improve air safety by the establishment of international standards and regulations. The Food and Agricultural Organization is engaged in increasing the world's food supply, in distributing it more fairly, in raising nutrition levels and bettering the condition of rural populations.

The World Health Organization is waging an international campaign against disease and epidemics and we are proud of the fact that its Canadian Secretary-General, Dr. Chisholm, is doing such a first-rate job in this important cause.

The International Labour Organization, also located in Montreal, is working on behalf of economic security and the improvement of living standards.

The International Refugees Organization is caring for a million refugees and already has been responsible for repatriating or re-settling two-hundred thousand of them.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization is helping to restore educational facilities in war devastated areas, to promote better understanding between the peoples of the world by furthering universal respect for justice and for fundamental human rights and freedoms.

The International Bank provides loans for post-war reconstruction and the Monetary Fund helps to ease exchange problems and to promote monetary stabilization. The work of the International Children's Emergency Fund is, I am sure, familiar to most of you through the appeal for children which it has sponsored and which it is hoped will mean the saving of the lives of millions of under-nourished children.

Finally, there are the Universal Postal Union and the International Telecommunications Union responsible for co-operative international action in the essential fields of postal and telegraphic communications.

Before completing this background account of the structure of the United Nations in the social, economic, cultural and humanitarian fields, I must refer to several other endeavours of continuing co-operation to improve the human lot.

The Trusteeship system, operating through the Trusteeship Council, carries out measures provided under the Charter to give opportunities of progress and eventual independence to dependant and non-self-governing peoples and for the protection of their rights.

I should also mention the First World Conference on Freedom of Information recently held at Geneva, which marks an important step in the process of trying to secure and extend free access to information and thus promote better understanding between the peoples of the world.

The first international declaration and draft convention of human rights has been drawn up and is now being considered by the members of the United Nations.

Finally, work on the codification and the development of international law is progressing, including law on Genocide and law which would make the plotting and waging of aggressive war punishable on individuals as well as on nations.

All this is part of a process, gradual and productive but unspectacular, which usually does not get into the headlines. I am sorry that I have not been able to go into more detail because I think it is necessary to realize that this kind of activity is going on day by day in order to appreciate the immense vitality and promise, which despite certain frustrations and failures, exist in the United Nations today.

## DEFECTS

The headlines in the press day by day, especially these days, are mostly concerned with criticisms of the United Nations. As I shall endeavour to explain, however, these criticisms are sometimes based upon the failure of the organization to do things which it was never meant to do. It is said, for instance, that the United Nations has failed to achieve unity among the nations, especially unity among the Big Powers. It is sometimes described as an organization of "Disunited Nations". It is, I believe, a point of fundamental importance to understand that the United Nations was never organized to achieve unity. On the contrary, unity was assumed among a group of states that founded the organization. The United Nations is based on the assumption that the "sponsoring powers", namely the United States, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union and China (to which France was later added) would maintain that unity which had brought these powers together in a victorious coalition in the recent war. These were the powers which invited the rest of the nations to San Francisco to join them in building a world organization that would maintain the peace. It was on this assumption of their staying united, that these powers were accorded the privilege of permanent membership in the Security Council, and given the power of the veto, in order that in all major issues of maintaining the peace of the world, they would act in agreement and thus lead the other member-nations in collective action for the purpose of keeping the peace or restoring peace if it had been broken. Moreover, the veto power was granted to these nations on the assumption that it would be used "sparingly" and in such a way as would not "wilfully obstruct the operations of the Council".

It is common knowledge, which I need not labour, that these assumptions have not been fulfilled. The veto has not been used sparingly -- to say the least -- by one of the permanent members. The Soviet Union has exercised the veto 23 times to date. I do not propose to inflict upon you the technical explanation of the veto, apart from saying that it applies only in the voting procedures of the Security Council where it is referred to as the 'rule of unanimity of the permanent members'. It is, however, important to appreciate that the United Nations has not failed because of the veto. The veto is, in fact, merely a symptom of a more fundamental disease which afflicts the world today. The symptom moreover can be treated by curbing the use of the veto by the development of appropriate rules governing its use. But the disease would remain - the disease of Big Power disunity and conflict which hampers and obstructs not only the work of the Security Council but also other councils, committees and commissions where the Soviet Union is represented.

I should like to illustrate this point by reference to other important instances of this disunity and its baneful effect, in which the veto as such plays no part. In particular, in spite of high hopes and great effort on the part of several countries, plans for the international control of atomic energy and for the control of armaments have not been realized, mainly, in my opinion, owing to Soviet intransigence; and little if no progress has been made towards agreement on the military forces, that are to be pledged in advance to the Security Council for its use in suppressing breaches of the peace and stopping aggression. The Big Power conflict over the peace settlement in Europe, as well as in the Far East, reflect exactly the same pattern. It should be remembered that it is not only the Security Council in the United Nations that reflects this conflict. The Assembly, where decisions are taken by a majority, is likewise hampered, especially in its important work of international conciliation. Instead of this great public forum being used for conciliation and to bring harmony between the nations, we find only too often, as for instance last September, October and November, the Assembly being exploited by some nations for the purpose of emphasizing the differences between nations and for the purpose of scoring advantages in the propaganda and political warfare which is being waged throughout the world.

It would be shutting ones eyes to the defects of the organization if this matter of disunity were only applied to the relations between the Big Powers. The United Nations is far from being a "union of nations". Collective action for agreed common ends is growing slowly, painfully, and one must admit, rather modestly, and the organization is certainly far from achieving the concept of a world government with power to enforce law. The principal members of the organization, the Big Powers, through their veto, do not recognize the right of the organization to coerce them at all. As for the other member-states, so far the organization lacks the power by which it can enforce its decisions. This is perhaps most clearly seen in the cases of Greece and Palestine. These cases illustrate how the United Nations, through the passing of Assembly recommendations, has had to depend wholly upon voluntary co-operation and not upon coercion.

I have suggested earlier that the United Nations relies ultimately upon measures to prevent war and the removal of its causes, rather than upon coercion and suppression by force. But the organization cannot be really effective in maintaining peace without the use of force at all. The main cause for this situation, in which organization finds itself without any means to use collective force in support of the Security Council's decisions, is the fundamental disagreement between the Soviet Union and the other permanent members of the Council, which has so far prevented the Military Staff Committee from preparing plans for the application of armed forces with which it is charged under the Charter. Thus the military agreements provided for under Article 43 between members of the United Nations have failed to come into effect.

The fact that so far the Security Council has been unable to organize collective armed forces to aid it in the discharge of its responsibilities does not however, in the opinion of some members of the United Nations, prevent those who wish to do so voluntarily from banding themselves together for the purpose of collective self-defence or on a regional basis.

At the last General Assembly the head of the Canadian delegation, the Secretary of State for External Affairs, put this idea forward in the following paragraph, which I quote:- "Nations, in their search for peace and cooperation, will not and cannot accept indefinitely and unaltered a Security Council which was set up to ensure their security, and which, so many feel, has become frozen in futility, and divided by dissension. If forced, they may seek greater safety in an association of democratic and peace-loving states willing to accept more specific international obligations in return for greater national security. Such associations, if consistent with the principles and purposes of the Charter, can be formed within the United Nations."

The Secretary of State for External affairs developed this idea further in the statement in the House of Commons on 29 April last when, in reviewing world affairs, he said and I quote: "Our foreign policy today must, therefore, I suggest be based on a recognition of the fact that totalitarian Communist aggression, endangers the freedom and peace of every democratic country, including Canada. On this basis and pending the strengthening of the United Nations, we should be willing to associate ourselves with other free states in any appropriate collective security arrangements which may be worked out under Article 51 or 52 of the Charter".

The Canadian government is certainly not alone in expressing such views.

In the United Kingdom, Mr. Bevin, addressing the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, is reported as saying yesterday that it is the policy of the government to proceed towards a world-wide system of collective security step-by-step, beginning with those countries that are willing to co-operate with the European Recovery Program and the Western European Union.

In the United States, this idea of the United States government promoting the progressive development of regional or collective arrangements for self defence has received the endorsement of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Such arrangements if concluded on the basis of the Charter,

would no doubt go far in making the United Nations a more effective instrument for the maintenance of peace.

To conclude my remarks on the defects of the United Nations, I summarize them:

The organization suffers from the basic conflict in the world today which it did not create, though which, on the other hand, it has been able to do little to resolve. It also lacks the power to enforce, the power to coerce members to observe the rules of the organization and its decisions and the power to suppress aggressors. These are important defects, defects which if not corrected in time may prove fatal to the organization.

#### ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Coercion, however, as I have emphasized throughout my remarks, is not a substitute for voluntary co-operation between nations. It is recognized in the United Nations that it is the development of more voluntary co-operation which is required if wars are to be avoided. If agreements can be reached by free discussion and negotiation, they are more likely to be durable than acquiescence to decisions in the face of force.

It is in the efforts of the United Nations to substitute pacific solutions for war in the settlement of international disputes that I believe we should look for the principal accomplishments of the organization. Let me cite some of the more important examples:- (1) the Security Council, without the use of force, induced the Soviet Union to withdraw its troops from Iran; (2) British and French troops were withdrawn from Syria and Lebanon, also without the use of force; (3) In the case of Indonesia, the Security Council was able not only to bring about a Truce after serious fighting had broken out between the Netherland's forces and the Indonesians, but also to obtain agreement to a set of important principles upon which further negotiations have been proceeding, leading to a general political settlement in Indonesia. Here is a case where the efforts of the Council have served to keep the peace affecting 70,000,000 people; (4) India and Pakistan brought their serious dispute over Kashmir to the Security Council. Both parties indicated that there was danger of imminent war which would have involved 400,000,000 inhabitants of that great sub-continent. After a period of prolonged difficult negotiations in which every effort was made to have the parties themselves agree to terms of settlement, the Council recommended terms of settlement to both parties and established a commission to assist them in reaching a peaceful settlement of the dispute. The four cases I have cited as examples of the United Nations all had this in common; they illustrated the effect of the persuasive influence of public opinion brought to bear upon governments through the Security Council. To this audience, most of whom I understand are professionally engaged in teaching, it would be presumptuous for me to stress the importance of public opinion, particularly as a moral influence in democratic countries.

• Through the United Nations this influence, if employed with obvious good-will and embodied in a fair and just recommendation consistent with the principles of the Charter, is bound to have a most determining effect upon a democratic government.

Public opinion not only has a strong influence upon the United Nations. It is in turn shaped and molded by the public debates on international affairs which go on at the United Nations day by day. In this way the public is promptly informed of what is really going on in the world, and a new community of interest and a sense of common purpose is built up between the people of various countries, especially those who are possessed of the same good-will, and a desire for peace and constructive work for common ends.

Even open and frank discussion of the conflict between the Soviet Union and its associates and the other countries of the world, though bad for the nerves, also has the effect of consolidating opinion among the nations who are really willing to harmonize their actions and thus serves to prevent the further spread of totalitarian influence and aggressive power. The United Nations in this respect can be said to "ring the bell" even though it may be an alarm bell. If the nations are warned and act in time any nation planning a war is less likely to be able to pick off its victims one by one.

#### WHY SHOULD WE SUPPORT UNITED NATIONS?

I now turn from the consideration of the accomplishments of the United Nations to my last question - Why should we support the United Nations? I suggest at least five reasons.

The first, I suggest, is that the United Nations, for all its present defects is our principle hope for peace. It is an organization which tries to substitute collaboration between nations, and the observance of certain agreed standards of conduct between nations, for a condition of international anarchy and the pursuit of exclusively selfish national purposes and ambitions. It provides a meeting place where nations can try to settle their disputes peacefully by negotiation instead of by means of war. If this process may be thought slow and sometimes frustrating, I think you will agree that even a lot of talk is better than a little war, particularly as little wars have a habit of growing into big wars.

The second reason I would suggest is that the United Nations represents an effort to apply the processes of democracy to the conduct of international affairs. I have already referred to the important influence exercised through democratic legislatures and assemblies, through the press and through public meetings and discussion such as this, upon democratic governments and in turn upon the representatives of such governments in the United Nations. There is another aspect to this question however, when one recalls various secret agreements arrived at in the past, especially between big powers often at the expense of the small, you will appreciate the importance, especially to a smaller country like Canada, of having the United Nations where open diplomacy is the rule, and where all countries, great and small, have the opportunity of taking part in the making of international decisions and of sharing their responsibilities.

The third reason I would give is that the United Nations recognises the essential inter-dependence of the nations of the world. The tremendous technological developments which have taken place since the industrial revolution, and which have brought us with incredible rapidity from the age of steam and iron into the age of the atom are also breaking down traditional divisions between peoples both in space and in time. International collaboration or isolationism is no longer a real choice. This idea has been expressed a number of times, but with particularly appropriate language by our Prime Minister when speaking in Brussels on November 10, 1947, when he said "We are all members, one of the other. What injures one, injures the other - what is done by one to help mankind, helps the other". Recognizing therefore the inter-dependence of the world today, the United Nations offers the only means for all nations to work together for their common welfare and for peace.

My fourth reason follows from the others I have just given. If the world today and our civilization necessarily rests upon the inter-dependence of the nations, our world and our civilization has also become extraordinarily complex and brittle. The most obvious example of what I have in mind is the immense destructive properties of the atom bomb, of the guided missiles and other horrible novelties which appeared at the end of the war. Many wise men have predicted a crisis in our civilization unless these destructive forces are brought under control and turned to constructive ends. But in the economic field also, those of us who recall the last great depression of the '30's will

appreciate the compelling necessity for international cooperation to meet and overcome the dangers of economic and social forces which so profoundly affect our lives, if uncontrolled. United Nations offers the means for such international cooperation.

And lastly, and following upon the other reasons I have given the United Nations points the only way to unity of the world, by agreement and consent, instead of by conquest and compulsion. Hitler tried to impose his own idea of unity - and it might be tried again. The United Nations on the other hand offers perhaps a slower way to world unity, but a more worthwhile and more lasting way, based upon collective effort and consent and upon justice to nations large and small.

#### CONCLUSION

If I have spoken emphatically about the reasons which in my opinion should lead us to give all the support we can to the United Nations, I do not mean that we should adopt an attitude of "my United Nations right or wrong". What is needed I would suggest in all humility, is not an uncritical enthusiasm, but a persistent painstaking effort to understand, and in this way to formulate an intelligent public attitude which will bring a constructive influence to bear upon this Organization.

I have therefore tried to present what, in my opinion, is a fair balance sheet between the defects and accomplishments of the United Nations. The accomplishments may seem rather flimsy, especially when compared with the serious defects to which I have referred. They should not, however, be over-estimated.

Peoples of good will, nations of good-will, through the Agency of the United Nations, are bending selfish national interests to the common good, and over a very broad field in international activity are gradually but with considerable effect building up agreement which affects our daily lives.

It cannot be overlooked, however, that in the absence of effective provisions for enforcement, voluntary agreements in an organization composed of 58 member states with widely differing backgrounds and points of view, are apt to be built upon the lowest common denominator and are, therefore, of little weight. But as a delegate was heard to say at Lake Success the other day: - the United Nations "like the prettiest girl in the world, can only give what she has got".

It is a challenge to everyone who wishes to work for peace, to see to it that the United Nations gets more, so that it has more to give. Miracles, however, should not be expected for like every human institution, it is based on human imperfections. I need hardly remind this audience that schools have existed for a much longer time than the United Nations in a large part of the world, but they have not yet done away with ignorance. The United Nations has not banished insecurity or war, but it offers to the world an organization to mobilize all efforts of good-will to work for peace and for better cooperation and understanding between the nations. If it did not exist today it would have to be created. As it does exist today it should be used to the full and constantly improved. For the United Nations is our main hope for world peace.