

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 56/38

REVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Statement made by the Hon. Roch Pinard during the General Debate in the United Nations General Assembly in New York on December 5, 1956.

Mr. President, in the brief but turbulent history of the United Nations, there was surely never a time when we stood in more obvious need of the humane and objective viewpoint represented, if I may say so, Mr. President, by your own qualities of calm intelligence and broad understanding. The Assembly is fortunate indeed to have you as our President as we seek the rational and peaceful solutions which we must find if we are all to avoid the "universal disaster" you spoke of in your address of welcome to the new members.

I should like to add my own work of sincere welcome to our new members. We can rejoice that our organization now more faithfully represents the world as it is in all its diversity. We look forward to the early admission of those who have not yet taken their rightful place among us - notably Japan, whom we confidently expect to welcome before this session is ended - a welcome too long delayed. Nor can we be satisfied until the German people are properly represented here - and the unhappily divided nations of Korea and Vietnam. Then we hope soon to have among us new states like Ghana, the former Gold Coast, which, thanks to the energy and initiative of its people and enlightened colonial policy, are now taking their place as stable members of the world community.

This expansion of our organization does, however, present us with some new problems. There is danger that we might dissipate our energies in the confusion of voices and stagger under our own weight into anarchy. We cannot continue to act as we did when, though certainly never streamlined, we were a smaller company. We shall require enormous self-discipline if we are to meet the increasing necessity for swift, effective and above all, responsible action.

.../

Increasingly, also, we are dividing ourselves as members of the United Nations into smaller groups. I think that this is in many respects a healthy phenomenon. It can be a partial solution to the problem of size I have just mentioned. When there is not time to hear every voice, there is a good deal to be said for choirs. Most of our groups, moreover are not hard blocs. They are flexible and they are fortunately not exclusive. It is natural and fitting that like-minded countries should work together; but it is neither natural nor fitting when a group is forced to become so superficially at least united that it automatically votes as one, on even the most unimportant procedural issues: Fortunately for the work of our organization, there is only one such bloc -- and even here there have of late been hopeful signs of a restless intelligence at work. May the rest of us refuse to move backwards, because the only result of the ossification of blocs will be that the United Nations will grind to a stagnant halt; with the veto of the single state in the Security Council replaced by the veto of the voting bloc in the Assembly ?

Perhaps some will say, Mr. President, that this is today more than ever a Great Power world - a world of the super-powers - in which the freedom of action and influence of the lesser, the non-atomic powers is circumscribed as never before. While the greatest powers have the obligation to do what they can to see that the big issues are dealt with through the United Nations, and not only when it suits them, we of the smaller powers have the no less direct imperative to make it possible, by our actions and attitudes in the United Nations, for the great powers to have no excuse for bypassing it. If we lesser powers act with discretion and a recognition of our responsibilities, we are not powerless. If we do not, if we concern ourselves only with our own national, or group, or racial interests, then the United Nations will soon cease to be a place where the bigger powers co-operate with us and with themselves for any common purpose.

At this late stage in our General Debate, Mr. President, there are only two or three topics on which I should like to comment. The Chairman of my Delegation has already outlined the position of the Canadian Government on developments in the Middle East and in Hungary.

About the Middle East I wish only to state my belief that the success or failure of the experiment which we have set in motion here may well determine whether in our lifetime the influence of the United Nations will grow or wither. Nothing remains static for long. New challenges arise in new forms; and if we cannot meet the central challenge of organizing - as the distinguished Foreign Minister of Norway put it the other day - peace with justice through the United Nations, that attempt will be made outside the United Nations and with less and less regard for the common standard to which we have all subscribed in the Charter. It is my conviction,

.../

and that of my Government, that our best hope for attaining peace with justice is to work through the United Nations. In the long run this will be possible in practical terms to the extent that we can organize ourselves within the United Nations in order to be able to do more than pass resolutions calling for cease-fires or condemning aggressions.

Now, I would not for a moment underrate the enormous moral effect which such resolutions of the General Assembly have in mobilizing public opinion, at least in the countries where such pressures act directly upon Governments. But can we not go further? I feel that the time may be ripe for taking the next step in international cooperation to secure the peace.

The distinguished representative of Iran, whose long experience and wise judgement are respected by every member of this Assembly, pointed out to us on November 29 that the force which the United Nations has placed in Egypt is not an international army as those who framed the Charter intended the United Nations to have. Mr. Entezam went on :

"Nonetheless, the establishment of this international police force represents a great step forward and it is such as to facilitate at a later stage the organization of this international army without which, despite the moral influence of our Organization, the implementation of its decisions could never be fully assured".

The United Nations is a collectivity of fully sovereign states. We must recognize that up to the present time we have not been successful in organizing in advance a United Nations Police Force ready for action anywhere at any time. Since the Korean experience, we have tried through the Assembly to have member governments earmark units of their armed forces for United Nations police action. Although I think the Canadian Government went at least as far as any others in this respect, no Government was prepared without any qualification to place its forces at the disposal of the United Nations in advance for such a purpose.

If, for the time being, we must accept this as a fact, we need not, I think, be thrown back wholly on the moral effect of what we say here and the resolutions which we adopt. As the Middle Eastern experiment has already shown, we have the possibility of using an intermediate technique between merely passing resolutions and fighting a war. The United Nations Emergency Force is not so much a fighting force as a police contingent endowed with international authority which the United Nations has interposed between forces which have themselves accepted a cease-fire and the obligation to withdraw on the understanding that the United Nations would put its own independent forces into the area to secure and supervise the cease-fire. This experiment must succeed because we all

.../

recognized in this Assembly that it would be much too dangerous to allow it to fail. It is our hope and expectation that no country, large or small, would withhold co-operation either in making contributions, if requested, to this International Force, or in letting it operate in its own territory, for the alternative would be to risk a local conflict developing into something more general and dangerous.

If our experiment works - and that is, of course, the first prerequisite - it may be that the United Nations might usefully consider some means of having units of armed forces of the smaller countries made available at short notice for such supervisory duties, on the call of the United Nations. The United Nations might also think of a permanent organization available to the appropriate United Nations authority to provide the necessary central machinery which would organize their contributions and put their forces effectively into operation when the need arises. I want to make it clear that I am not hinting necessarily that the present United Nations Emergency Force be made into a permanent force, although we should build upon the experience of that experiment. Shall we go back once again to the situation in which the United Nations found itself both in June 1950 and in November 1956, when everything had to be improvised, when there were no units, and no financial and administrative procedures to which the Secretary General could turn in the task given him by the Assembly of putting a United Nations force into a dangerous and delicate situation.

If the Secretary General had had such an organization available in September and ready for use in our time of emergency many of the difficulties and delays which arose might have been avoided. The Secretary General's truly amazing energy and devotion brought something together out of nothing with remarkable speed. But we have not the right, in all prudence, to expect the same miracle to be accomplished next time with the same success and speed. And next time - if there is one - we would wish to make sure that a cease-fire would be sustained and the United Nations forces would arrive in time, so that there would be no danger of a local outbreak of fighting growing into a general conflagration. That is the nub of our problem for the future. If we do not begin to think about a longer term solution of this problem, we may miss the psychological moment when national governments may perhaps be prepared, under the impact of recent events, to commit themselves to such procedures in advance for the sake of increasing the collective authority of our organization.

Even while considering how we can best organize collective security through the United Nations within the limitations of our situation, we must not neglect, Mr. President, the parallel efforts which have to be made to reach solutions of the points of most acute friction and danger. We must not imagine, needless to say, that the creation of this or any other international force will solve the acute problems we face. Such

.../

a force is a most useful instrument for insuring a negative kind of peace. But peace to be lasting must be positive.

As Israeli, French and United Kingdom forces are withdrawn in accordance with the General Assembly's cease-fire resolution, and as the United Nations Emergency Force is moved into the area, a momentum for peace is created which should not stop short of a political settlement of both the Palestine and Suez questions. A cease-fire is better than fighting; but it is precarious at best and must be used to begin work here and now on a political settlement which will provide an honourable and secure basis for the lasting peace of the area. This is not a settlement which can be imposed by the international force. It must be a settlement on which all interested parties agree. The Force is the instrument of the settlement, not its creator. An international force to hold the ring can be useful, and in the short term necessary; but it is no substitute for grappling with the more intractable political problems before the sense of urgency and danger has gone out of them, leaving the same old tinder exposed for the next explosion. The world, the United Nations, cannot afford another such explosion.

It might be asserted by some that in the present circumstances of increased international tension there is little point in expecting serious discussion of disarmament at this session of the General Assembly. While it is true that progress towards agreement on disarmament cannot be divorced from the international situation in general, nevertheless the need to make a start, however modest, towards disarmament grows steadily more urgent. The rate of scientific development, particularly in the field of nuclear and thermonuclear armaments, and in the means of delivering them, and the growing realization of the terrible consequences of the use of such weapons compel us all to continue the effort to agree at least on the beginnings of a disarmament programme.

Two weeks ago the USSR made public proposals on disarmament and on methods of negotiation. This move was made in sinister circumstances indeed. It came at a time when almost all governments in the world were condemning Soviet savagery in Hungary. The Soviet Government statement was followed within a few hours by the cynical announcement of a large scale nuclear explosion, and their proposals were also accompanied by boasts about the vast military might of the USSR. In such circumstances we must consider carefully how much credence we can put in the assertions of the same Soviet leaders of their peaceful intentions. As prudent men who have a responsibility to our several peoples we must make certain that our desire for peace does not expose those who have given us office to the same dark power of tyranny which stalks Eastern Europe.

.../

Nevertheless the Canadian Government are prepared to show their faith in the United Nations by approaching these proposals of the USSR for an examination of their merits as though they had been put forward in less equivocal circumstances.

Some of the proposals are quite familiar. Indeed the general framework appears to us to be the same as recent Soviet plans. The main new element is an apparent readiness to accept the principle of aerial inspection. If this acceptance proves to be real it will represent an advance which we could regard with satisfaction. It would be the one spark of hopefulness to come from Moscow in these gloomy weeks of crisis. But although the value of aerial inspection appears to be gaining acceptance among the Soviet leaders they seemingly have yet to grasp its principal merit. It would be an advantage if the secret manoeuvres of the Red Army could no longer be executed threateningly right on the borders of the Western world. But the greatest danger to mankind lies in the massive surprise assault with all the modern apparatus of mass destruction. The Soviet proposals still would afford no means of gaining assurance that forces of destruction were not being prepared in the vast regions of the Soviet Union.

Having said this, I would repeat that we are prepared to join in the examination of the new Soviet proposals. It has always been our view that the United Nations offers the proper framework for achieving disarmament. But we have never thought that the substance of the problem could be brought nearer solution by increasing the number of the negotiators. We therefore look with scepticism on the Soviet suggestion for a conference based upon the participation of the NATO and Warsaw Pact powers. And while we in Canada would welcome any advance which might be initiated by exchanges between the great powers, we are doubtful that in the present tense situation any helpful results could be hoped for. It is no use pretending that confidence has not been severely shaken and that an improved political context has not become necessary.

Insofar as we may draw conclusions for the general terms in which the Soviet proposals are presented, we fear that these proposals, like too many of their predecessors, may be aimed simply at the weakening of the non-communist world, particularly by the disruption of NATO, and at continuing the division of Germany and of all Europe. We shall continue to hope, however, that there is some more constructive approach to the problem of Germany and of Europe involved. On the crucial question of control the proposals give no sign of readiness to clarify the Soviet attitude, which has never come from behind its veil of obscurity. Nor do they reflect the difficulties, which the Russians acknowledge to exist, of detecting concealed stockpiles of nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, we will study these Soviet proposals with great care. We will never refuse any opportunity to seek after even the germ of an agreement on disarmament.

.../

My Delegation was much impressed, as I am sure others were, by the suggestion of the distinguished Foreign Minister of Norway last week, that there should be some kind of United Nations registration of nuclear test explosions. In my opinion, it is neither necessary nor realistic to contemplate an immediate ban on all such tests. That is our conclusion after weighing the best scientific evidence which we have. But the scientists are the first ones to admit that their evidence is by no means complete or conclusive. They are somewhat reassuring about the present level of radiation in our atmosphere but while the averages appear to be comforting, an overdose in one small locality might occur. Therefore, while we can take limited comfort from the absence of alarming conclusions - or indeed any conclusions - in the interim report of the United Nations Scientific Committee on Effects of Atomic Radiation, it does not seem to me that we would be justified in looking into the future with equanimity. My view is the United Nations should give close attention to the question of nuclear tests and I can assure you that we will support the Norwegian proposal for early and serious consideration of the whole matter.

It seems to me that any agreement on nuclear tests is likely to be in the nature of a compromise. We must be guided by two considerations : we must try to meet whatever may be competently estimated as the requirements of the objective scientific situation and we must enable the needs of defence in a dangerously divided world to be given reasonable satisfaction. Because both of these are indefinite quantities there can for the present time be no facile and final solution, and I do not think we can hope to find a satisfactory arrangement, even of a temporary character, which fails to take into account either consideration. So long as the nuclear powers continue to conduct tests at their own discretion there will be widespread agitation to change the situation, but so long as the proposed solutions exaggerate the importance of one of these two factors and wholly neglect the other they are unlikely to provide an acceptable basis for negotiation.

If we consider what we may hope to achieve in present circumstances, I think we may all conclude that we should try to help the nuclear powers in the first instance to agree that they should set, as a self-denying ordinance, some annual or other periodic limit on the volume of radiation to be generated by test explosions. There would have to be some agreed method of allocating quantities between the powers concerned. To maintain confidence there would also have to be some arrangements for notification of the proposed tests and for their verification - and this need not in my view give rise to insuperable difficulties. A system along these lines might serve for the near future during which it might be reviewed from time to time in the light of the data on radiation hazards which the UN Scientific Committee will be gathering. It would be my hope that in due course this interim measure would be supplanted by a disarmament agreement which would deal in a more definitive way with nuclear weapons as well as other aspects of disarmament.

.../

Mr. President, although our efforts these past few weeks have necessarily been directed toward a search for lasting solutions to the critical political issues which beset the international community, we must not permit our preoccupation with these problems to divert our attention from the need for increasing cooperation in pursuit of the economic and other objectives of the Charter. It has been suggested that the political problems with which we are confronted are so serious that useful initiatives in other fields should not be attempted. However, it is the belief of my Delegation that, as the members of the international community demonstrate their ability and willingness to cooperate in finding constructive solutions in the political field, so our capacity and our responsibility for finding better and more dynamic methods for strengthening the international economic fabric are enhanced.

I believe also that we should consider the best methods for assisting the countries of the Middle East to restore their normal economic life following the present crisis and to make plans for continuing economic progress and growth. The United Nations should ensure that any political settlements in the Middle East crisis take account of the need for solution of the pressing economic problems of that area.

I believe also that the United Nations should continue to improve and strengthen the programmes which have been initiated to assist the economic development of the underdeveloped countries. To this end, my Delegation will propose in the Second Committee that the United Nations undertake a study of existing programmes of bilateral and multilateral economic aid in the expectation that such a study will result in better understanding of the scope and nature of the problems still to be resolved. This suggestion will be designed to promote, through an exchange of information, coordination of the economic aid programmes which are now being conducted under the United Nations' umbrella or outside it. A better understanding of the scope of existing programmes and of the experience acquired in implementing them would undoubtedly pave the way to more informed and realistic consideration of SUNFED and other programmes which will be under consideration.

In conclusion, may I say that although we may find this session somewhat frightening and discouraging, it has nevertheless accomplished useful work. Our concrete realizations as yet are few, but we do see the hope of progress which could change for the better the great experiment of this Assembly in international cooperation. We have all learned a great deal in the past few weeks, and the experience should make us wiser in the future.

S/C