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Statement by the Right
Honourable Joe Clark,
Secretary of State for
External Affairs, to
the 41st Session of
the General Assembly of
the United Nations

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Mr. President,

May I first congratulate you on your election as President of this Session and pledge Canada's full support. I would also like to wish the Secretary-General well after his recent surgery. His dedication and courage have been an inspiration to us all and we are thankful that we can continue to rely on his leadership.

In my first speech to the General Assembly two years ago, I described Canada as a "friend" of the United Nations. In fact, we are more than that. We believe this institution is essential to the safety of the world, and we defend it even when its actions are foolish or infuriating or wrong. Our country is thirtieth in population size in the world, but fourth in the size of our financial contribution to the United Nations system. Canada's commitment will not alter or change. But the commitment of Canada - and other countries like us - will not alone protect the United Nations from the erosion of respect which is slowly weakening the organization we built to bring the world together.

When we gathered last year to celebrate the 40th Anniversary, a sad irony faced us. The United Nations was becoming more necessary and less effective.

Who among us cannot list many issues that should be addressed and resolved here, but are not? Who among us has not thought of referring one or another issue to this forum but then held back for fear that debate would only serve to exacerbate our difference? Our instincts tell us that this is the right place for issues of global importance, but we often fail to raise them. That failure is the expression of our fear. It has led us more and more to resort to blocs, to bilateralism and even to unilateralism.

Mr. President,

It became apparent during the resumed session of the General Assembly last spring, that some of us were still unconvinced that the UN requires reform. Personally, I have not detected much decline in the amount of rhetoric, nor much increase in pragmatism and consensus-building. The exceptions - which should have been the rule - were our consensus decisions on combatting terrorism and improving the situation in Africa. But even here we made only a beginning.

It would give me the greatest pleasure to be able to say that we had already rededicated ourselves to the fundamental goals of the Charter and had turned the Organization around. That would be too much to expect in one year. Yet a year is long enough to expect some progress to have been made. Instead we have pushed the institution closer to the brink of financial bankruptcy and continued to deprive it of relevance.

We need reform on two fronts - financial and political. This Session starts its deliberation with the consideration of the Report of the Group of High Level Experts on the administration and finances of the UN. The 18 experts deserve our profound gratitude.

There are some recommendations with which Canada might quibble. But this is not a time for quibbling. The recommendations should be accepted without change and applied as soon as possible. They would reinforce the significant measures of financial reform already undertaken by the Secretary-General. The key area that requires further discussion - the planning and budgetary process - is profoundly contentious. We are obviously divided. But we must find common ground lest the whole reform process be imperilled. Our acceptance or rejection of the report of the Group of 18 will be the litmus test of our commitment to renew the UN's capacity to fulfill its mandate.

Our budgets are swollen by the accumulation of outdated and misguided programs. A thorough review would free resources for meeting needs that have long been relatively neglected. These include large areas of development, in particular the promotion of women and the promotion of human rights in general.

We must also deal with the question of arrears and withholdings. At present, these amount to a total of 400 million dollars. This shortfall has severely strapped this

Organization. A fixed schedule of repayment, allowing for some flexibility, would provide a solution to the arrears problem. But even more important is the question of withholdings which, as you know, threatens to cripple the Organization financially this year. We look to those states which are withholding to follow the example of the People's Republic of China which, without any change in "consistent principled positions" has announced payment of accumulated withholdings of \$4.4 million.

The adoption of the report of the Group of 18 and the settlement of arrears and withholdings would address half the problem. The other half is more basic. There is simply no escaping the fact that worldwide support for this institution depends on its performance. There may be some who think that if the UN were flush with funds, all would be well. But the stark reality is that the UN must be reformed politically, as well as financially.

We are in danger of becoming a caricature of the hopes expressed in 1945. This was to be a forum in which difficult decisions were to be taken; it has become a means to avoid them. When there is crisis, we have endless debate. When there is a need for hard compromise, we draft resolutions which defy agreement.

Our publics are sensible. They want peace and prosperity and justice. They judge the United Nations by what we do together, not what we say separately. They want results, not only speeches. They hear our constant refrain about the need to reform - but if we have stopped listening to ourselves, they too will soon stop listening.

The place to start is with administrative and financial reforms. Obviously, putting our house in order won't put the world in order - but it will protect and strengthen the only organization that can. Canada is a strong friend of the UN, but Canadians who are making sacrifices at home do not want to subsidize inefficiency here.

To be sure, there will be resistance to reform. There always is. We either face it down, or risk slipping back into the shadows from which we emerged with so much hope in 1945.

I cannot believe that any of us here could contemplate such a future with equanimity. None of us pretends that even a fully reformed UN will extinguish racism, unleash a global economic boom, or put an immediate end to every regional conflict. Yet we all know the kinds of contribution that UN

agreements can make to international peace, prosperity and social advancement. Resolution 242, the Law of the Sea, and the declaration and covenants on human rights, are but three that come immediately to mind.

Mr President,

In this International Year of Peace, we will be judged more than usual by our achievements in arms control and disarmament. All members of the international community will join Canada in applauding the new dialogue between the United States and the Soviet Union. President Reagan has told us of letters he has exchanged with General Secretary Gorbachev containing new arms control proposals. We welcome this direct open engagement of the two leaders in the negotiating process. The talks last weekend between US Secretary of State Shultz and Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze have also contributed to an improved atmosphere in superpower relations. We can all hope this will lead to progress at the nuclear arms control and space negotiations which the two superpowers have reconvened in Geneva. We are encouraged by recent signs of flexibility in the positions of both sides in their efforts to achieve the agreed goal of radical reductions in nuclear weapons - reductions which will strengthen the strategic balance and improve international security.

The current focus of attention on nuclear arms reductions should not however detract from the necessity of similar progress in the field of conventional arms control. The results of the Stockholm Conference on Confidence and Security-Building Measures and Disarmament in Europe have also added to the sense of momentum towards greater security and cooperation in East-West relations. Stockholm represents the signal accomplishment of bringing new openness and predictability to the conduct of military affairs in Europe. The establishment of agreed procedures for air and ground on-site inspections is a landmark achievement which could serve as a productive precedent for other arms control negotiations. Canada, with our record of promoting constructive verification solutions, derives special satisfaction from having contributed to this outcome. It should facilitate the movement to the negotiation of more extensive measures of military restraint and reductions.

These signs of hope should spur the UN to tackle the broad range of important arms control questions before it. Progress on one issue can unlock progress on others.

Canada will strive for a ban on chemical weapons. We will continue to work to ensure that outer space is developed for peaceful purposes. We will be seeking to play an active role in strengthening the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Canada will again be supporting a comprehensive nuclear test ban. This is a fundamental goal and one towards which concrete steps can and should be taken now. Canada welcomes President Reagan's undertaking that the USA is prepared first to move forward on ratification of the Threshold Test Ban Treaty and the Treaty on Peaceful Nuclear Explosions and then to take subsequent measures to further limit and ultimately end nuclear testing.

We urge all nations to cooperate and indeed participate in the development of the verification techniques needed to provide the confidence necessary to ratify these agreements, and which will enable us to plan the subsequent steps which we must take in all areas of arms control. For verification is not just a question of technical capacity but of the political will to reach agreement on the application of technologies and techniques.

In this spirit and in cooperation with others, Canada will continue to work vigorously towards real progress on verification.

A further critical task facing the UN is to buttress the international trade and payments system, now under great strain, and to stimulate the growth so desperately needed in much of the developing world.

We are making some progress. Canada is encouraged by movement forward on the elaboration of the Baker Plan, and by the agreement of Economic Summit countries, at Tokyo, to co-ordinate their economic policies more effectively. We particularly welcomed the unanimity of the agreement in GATT to launch a new round -- the Uruguay Round -- of multilateral trade negotiations. These are all welcome signs of a growing recognition that we must work together in pursuit of a sound and fair international economic system.

Mr. President,

A raison d'être of this organization is to create a more humane world. The most fundamental human rights embodied in the Charter and UN human rights documents are being systematically and grossly violated in a number of member countries. The reports of Amnesty International are an indictment of our age. In Afghanistan a whole people has been tyrannized and millions of its citizens made refugees. Around the world and every day people are being tortured and killed for their political and religious beliefs.

One of the most distressing trends of the past year has been the deterioration of the situation in South Africa. The government of the country has stubbornly refused to dismantle the abhorrent regime of apartheid and to adopt a system that respects human rights for all its people. It has instead imposed a draconian state of emergency. We have seen hundreds of deaths and more than 10,000 detainees.

The South African government's repressive policies can have no other outcome but more violence and, in the end, a cataclysm in which all South Africans - white and non-white - will suffer grievously. That would be tragic for a country so blessed in human and material resources.

Canada has worked to intensify the international community's pressure against apartheid and has helped mobilize the special capacities of the Commonwealth to try to stop the destruction of Southern Africa. Canada is implementing all the sanctions agreed to by six Commonwealth leaders in London last month. But pressure will only be fully effective if the international community stands as one, and I urge all countries, especially those with significant economic relations with South Africa, to implement further concrete measures on an urgent basis.

International terrorism threatens us all and we must all act together to fight it. The United Nations, functioning as it always should, expressed this purpose and met this need over the past year. All member states agree on the threat that international terrorism poses. At the last session, the Security Council unanimously and unequivocally condemned all acts of hostage-taking and abduction. At the same session, the General Assembly spoke with one voice condemning all acts, methods and practices of terrorism. This was the UN at its best.

These words must, of course, be matched by specific and practical actions. Canada has undertaken an initiative in the International Civil Aviation Organization to support the structure of international law against terrorism. We are proposing that an agreement be drawn up that would commit all parties to prosecute or extradite those who commit acts of violence at international airports. I am confident of the full support of the international community for this initiative. I am equally optimistic that the common will of the United Nations, as expressed through such practical steps, will be decisive in our common struggle against this scourge of our times.

Mr. President,

I have touched upon only a few of the issues with which the UN will have to grapple in this and future sessions. As difficult as these are, I remain confident that this institution can serve our common needs and serve them well. We have only to give it the means and the direction. Canadians, for their part, wish to have a strong UN capable of dealing pragmatically and effectively with global issues. In this session the Canadian delegation will be seeking every opportunity to join with like-minded states in realizing that goal. If I have dwelt on the need for reform, it is because I am convinced that it is still within our grasp.

I can think of no better way to conclude, Mr. President, than by recalling the words of my distinguished Canadian predecessor, Lester Pearson. At the eighteenth session in 1963 he said, "... the United Nations alone serves us all. It provides the only world assembly to protect and advance human rights, freedoms, and welfare, to reduce and remove the causes of conflict. Whether it can discharge its great role and fulfill its great responsibilities, depends on us. When the United Nations fails, its member governments fail. When it succeeds, the people, the plain and good people of all the world, succeed."

Thank you, Mr. President.