

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES



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TENTH ANNIVERSARY MEETING OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Statements made by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, and President of the seventh session of the United Nations General Assembly, Mr. L.B. Pearson, made at the Tenth Anniversary meeting of the United Nations, San Francisco, June 24 and June 26, 1955.

Statement of June 24

I am the fifty-first speaker at this commemoration meeting. If my conceit reached as high as the Top of the Mark, I could not honestly hope to add anything new or profound to what has already been said about the United Nations. I may, however, be able to underline and reinforce some aspects of what should be the obvious!

The Abbé Sieyès, in his later days, was once asked what he had done during the French Revolution. "I survived" was his reply.

The United Nations has survived ten years of international tension and "cold war" - no mean achievement in itself. The world - as a Canadian journalist wrote, ironically, the other day - has also survived ten years of the U.N.! My journalist friend then went on to suggest that the observance of our Tenth Birthday in this lovely and hospitable city where the United Nations was born under such expert and co-operative care, should be a "nice mixture of thanksgiving and surprise". I agree.

We can be thankful not only that the United Nations has survived its first years, which were more difficult than in 1945 we thought would be the case, (and which if we have any sanity will not be repeated), but also because, during this time, and notwithstanding its set-backs, our world organization has become an indispensable agency for international co-operation. If this one did not exist we would soon have to build another one.

It is, however, as idle to deny that the United Nations has lost some credit during these ten years as it is to deny that our hopes were too high in 1945. But only the thoughtless or the ill-disposed could believe that it is approaching bankruptcy. Indeed, while we have certainly no reason for complacency, the credit of the United Nations is moving upwards again - and its value is more generally recognized. Otherwise the club would not have such a long waiting list; one which we ought to remove or at least reduce.

The ghosts of past memories which this Opera House evokes. are here to warn us against over-optimism; and against the danger of trying to build - or rebuild - an international structure of peace upon grandiose but shadowy hopes instead of on hard realities. No man is the poorer - though he may be the sadder - for being shorn of his illusions. We have lost some of ours, about U.N., but not, I hope and believe, our faith, our principles, and our ideals.

Indeed if we draw the right conclusions from the experience of the past, we can gain thereby for the future. But experience in itself though a valuable channel to wisdom, is no guarantee of it. You may remember Napoleon's comment when someone recommended one of his officers to him for promotion on the ground that he had been through an exceptional number of campaigns. "My horse", Napoleon is reported to have replied, "has been through even more". Some of us have been through a good many U.N. campaigns. I hope we have learned more than our horses. If, however, we are to benefit from our experiences, the first step must be to draw the right conclusions from them.

May I recall one detail of experience. Ten years ago, in San Francisco, the smaller powers paid a price, by making certain concessions, for a foundation for the United Nations which we hoped would be solid, but which certainly proved to be illusory. This foundation was to be Great Power co-operation. The price we paid was to give these Powers a special position under the Charter.

We could not have had the United Nations at all without paying this price. It was not too high and it should not be made an excuse for our failures. The veto, for instance, is not the cause, as I see it, so much as the result of those failures. Other international organizations in which, in effect, all members possess a veto have worked well. Our machinery is adequate; but the will to operate it successfully has often faltered or been frustrated.

Improvement in that machinery - as in any kind of machinery - can, of course, be made. But the remedy for our ills lies not so much in such improvement: as in the desire and determination to make the existing mechanism function better, and for that international agreement on disputed questions. The responsibility for such agreement rests mainly on those members of the United Nations who have the greatest power and the special privileges.

True, the Charter has given us all, great or small, a set of standards of international conduct which it is our duty to follow. The greater the power of a State, however, the heavier is its obligation to exercise this power, in the United Nations and elsewhere, with restraint, with justice and in accordance with the principles of our Charter.

This week we renew - in words - our determination to live up to those principles; above all, to rid mankind of the scourge of war. But, if we are to succeed where all previous generations have failed, words alone will be of little avail. It is not enough merely to set up an efficient international organization and lay down an ideal code of international conduct. It is not enough to hoist a United Nations flag with a map of the world, though it may remind us that we are all more directly and vitally interdependent than ever before. It is not enough to meet one another in the Assembly, in the Councils and the Committees of the United Nations, though that should increase mutual understanding. It is not enough to learn to know each other as human beings outside our official contacts, though that also helps. It is not enough to accumulate more knowledge about each other, though that makes it easier to put ourselves in one another's place - something which is essential if understanding is to grow. It is the translation of all these things into political and social action; the application of high principles to individual and collective practice that matters.

As a mechanism for helping us to do this, for bringing us all together, the United Nations, as it exists today, is not far short of what we wished it to become ten years ago. Its doors for discussion and negotiation have been kept open. They may not always have been wide open, but they have never been closed and through them progress has more than once been made in settling conflicts and solving problems. More than one agreement has been worked out in the United Nations which has prevented a war or brought a dispute to an end. There has been more than one instance where the moral force of public opinion working through the United Nations has brought about an honourable arrangement where no basis for a settlement had previously existed. There has been more than one example of the application, in and through the United Nations, of both private and public diplomacy joined together for a good objective which was successfully achieved.

Not all United Nations debates or initiatives, however, have been fruitful. It is easy to retrace, in retrospect, where we have gone wrong during these past ten years. It is not so easy to see how we should try to steer our course for the next ten. We can perhaps admit that we have been carried along by events more than we have controlled them. It may be drift, rather than design, which is now our greatest danger. Yet one of the most hopeful omens for the years ahead is the fact that we are becoming increasingly aware of where events may carry us in this nuclear age, if we do not control them; and direct them away from war and toward a peace that is more than a symbol for propaganda or an uneasy interlude between fighting. To any man, of whatever nation or race or creed or colour, who has looked squarely at the shadow of the hydrogen bomb over his own country, "there is", as President Eisenhower has truly said "no alternative to peace".

The H-bomb was not written into the Charter; it was not created for peace; it was the product of a desperate anxiety not to be left at an impossible defence disadvantage in a time of fear and crisis. But now, because of this weapon, there stands behind our Charter pledges never to resort to war as a means of settling our differences, a deeper urgency, a more impelling incentive even than that of ten years ago. It is the prospect of mutual annihilation. The balance of terror has replaced the balance of power and that is not a comfortable or strong or permanent foundation for security. Peace rests uneasily on one, even less easily on two, hydrogen bombs. It is the tragedy of our first ten years that peace has found no better resting place.

The United Nations has another vital role; in acting as an agency through which international public opinion can express itself. Though the United Nations can be and has been misused for propaganda and even for abuse, it has, in my opinion, a legitimate and necessary part to play as a place where opposing views are aired, for the peoples of the world to hear and draw their own conclusions. It is in this sense that the United Nations acts as a kind of "town meeting of the world". Public opinion would, of course, continue to have its effect on all Governments if there were no United Nations, for no Government in these days of mass media of communication can entirely ignore what those in other parts of the world are thinking. No curtain - of any kind or shape or pattern - can completely stop the winds of opinion. But our world organization helps in this regard.

It is one of the premises of free and democratic societies that "you can't fool all the people all the time". A great deal can be said about "peace", for example. It is something we all want,

but its advocacy can cover other designs. Indeed, if there were more action for peace, there might be less need to talk so much about it. But here in the United Nations, however, governments have to parade not only their words but their policies, before the scrutiny of the international public, who are becoming more skilful in detecting "false fronts". This important function of clarification, of analysis, of education, is taking place all the time; on every day that there is a United Nations meeting anywhere in the world. This is the kind of open diplomacy which can be healthy and good. Its excesses - diplomacy by "loud-speaker" or by insult - are not so good. But even they tend to correct themselves as Governments come to realize that their ends are not attained by crude and tough talk, by name calling or abuse, by legal quibblings or by procedural wrangling; by twisting and torturing the meaning of words.

This last practice particularly has had a confusing and damaging effect on our debates. Too many good words of respectable parentage - democracy, co-existence, freedom, appeasement, human rights, popular, and above all, peace-loving - have been turned upside down and inside out and made to seem what they are not. What we need as we enter our second decade is a Convention for the Defence of Peace-loving words against Verbal aggression!

When the representative of the Soviet Union says - as he did on Wednesday - that "those who pay lip service to the principle of peaceful co-existence sometimes tend to violate that principle flagrantly in practice", I could not agree with him more. But any satisfaction or comfort I secure from that agreement, however, is removed by the certainty that I could hardly disagree with him more on who are meant by "those".

That disagreement, which makes the other agreement of no importance or even indeed of much meaning, arises from the fears and mistrust that keep us apart: fears that may be strong and genuine on both sides. It is these which endanger the world and they will not be removed merely by repetition of the word "peace".

The people of my own country - like those of many other countries - still have this deep and awful fear of aggressive attack and attack from outside; and by "outside" I do not mean our good neighbour the U.S.A. which we know, from a happy experience respects the rights and honour, the freedom of a less powerful neighbour. To remove the fear, the suspense - and I quote Mr. Molotov again - and with full approval - "what is obviously needed is something more than just verbal recognition of the principle of co-existence and peaceful co-operation between countries with different social structures".

Again unhappily, we cannot agree on how that "something more" can be achieved, or indeed even on what it should be. So the fear of each other persists, and while it does, those countries who believe in coming together for collective security - and who cannot find it at this time in the United Nations - will (let there be no doubt about this) continue to seek it in defensive regional arrangements negotiated and operated in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Our unity in this regard cannot be shaken by untrue and unwarranted allegations that such arrangements are aggressive and provocative. We know that they are not and we will not abandon them. We know that they are not a spearhead - as charged - for attack against one state. They are a shield against aggression from any state. We will not - we dare not - abandon or weaken them until our security can be assured on a broader, and better basis preferably by the United Nations - or until peace rests on something even stronger than force of any kind.

Mr. President, as we look back, let us hope that the need to avoid collective, nuclear suicide will help us to remove these fears and misunderstandings which now haunt and harry us.

It can be done; not by the recognition of "co-existence" which is a sterile word, but by active and friendly international co-operation which will convert fear and suspicion into tolerance, understanding, and one day, please God, eventually, into friendship between all peoples. For this essential process, the United Nations exists; valuable as ever, even indispensable.

It is the living symbol of our interdependence, and embodies that emerging sense of international community, going beyond nation and region, which alone can save us in this nuclear age.

We must broaden and deepen this development in the next ten years. For that reason I regret, though I acknowledge, the necessity of holding important conferences outside the United Nations, a practice which has been growing in recent years. This may be the best - indeed in some cases the only - way at this time to resolve some of our biggest problems. Yet it is better, whenever it is possible and as it was intended ten years ago, to tackle these problems inside our Organization. We must work towards that result.

The United Nations is a remarkably flexible and adaptable mechanism. It is led and staffed by a group of able, trained and dedicated men and women whose zeal and devotion will in time deteriorate if we do not make the fullest use of their capabilities.

Let us, then, make more use of the organization we have, not following too slavishly the original blueprint where we find it impracticable or outdated, not aiming to run before we can walk, but aware that the United Nations has unique and unexplored potentialities if we treat it as it was meant to be treated, as an instrument through which our conflicting interests may gradually, one by one, be harmonized, and our mutual understanding may grow. Here, in our world organization - better than at any other place - can we meet the challenge of the nuclear age; co-destruction or co-operation.

If we fail in this supreme challenge, there will be no occasion in 1965 to celebrate our twentieth birthday; or, possibly, to celebrate anything else.

Statement of June 26

The talking - and the traces even of tumult - are over, or almost over. All that could be said this week about the United Nations and the world in which it must work, has been said.

Our week of commemoration now ends. But our Charter, which is today before us as signed in this place on June 25, 1945, - our Charter remains; as the international Bill of Rights, as imperishable as Magna Charta itself. It enshrines for all time man's hope - so long deferred - that he may live his life in peace and freedom; in dignity and security.

This Charter is, and will always be, the best Declaration of San Francisco, and I suppose no other can add very much to it. It remains also our best peace programme - and others with five or seven or ten points can scarcely do more than repeat it or elaborate on it.

It is the standard of international conduct by which our actions will be measured. We signed it ten years ago and we honour

and commemorate that signature today. But we have not yet fulfilled it. Indeed almost before we ceased praising ourselves for what we had done by agreeing on its noble language and its lofty ideals, our actions, became shrouded in the mists of distrust and suspicion that began to envelop the world. Our faith was soon frozen by fear, and our hopes shaken by hatreds. Only now does the sun show some sign of breaking through.

When President Truman spoke at the signing of the Charter, he said this:

"You have created a great instrument for peace and security and human progress in the world. The world must now use it! If we fail to use it, we shall betray all those who have died in order that we might meet here in freedom and safety to create it. If we seek to use it selfishly - for the advantage of any one nation or any small group of nations, - we shall be equally guilty of that betrayal. The successful use of this instrument will require the united will and firm determination of the free peoples who have created it. The job will tax the moral strength and fiber of us all". It certainly has and it certainly will.

The fact that today is another anniversary - that of the launching of the war of aggression in Korea - is a grim reminder of how great the gap has been between our pledge and our performance, between debate and deed; of how far short we have fallen of our avowal of "practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours".

It is altogether fitting this afternoon - as we celebrate, with solemnity and satisfaction, the signing of our charter of peace - to recall also, with honour and sorrow, the memory of those who have died that it could mean more than words in the search for peace. Their sacrifice is the tragic proof of our failure to understand, and act on the understanding that, in Pascal's words, "strength without justice is tyranny, and justice without strength a mockery". We can retrieve this failure and redeem this sacrifice, but only if we never forget that peace is more than a word or a declaration. It is something determined by the policies of nations. Even more, it is something in the hearts of men. There will be no peace until nations' policies are based on our Charter; above all, until we live our own lives in accordance with its principles.

This week has recalled us to these principles and, because of that, it has, I think, shortened in some small way the distance between a today - with all its alarms and unrest and tension - and a better tomorrow when strength will walk with justice, peace with progress, and the good life will be for all people.