

UNITED NATIONS IN THE 1990S: A CHALLENGING AGENDA

Address by Senator Gareth Evans, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, to the Forty-Sixth General Assembly of the United Nations, New York, 23 September 1991.

Mr President, I congratulate you on your election as President of the Forty-Sixth Session of the General Assembly. I am sure we will all benefit from your long experience here in the United Nations, and your authority as President that derives from that experience. Australia enjoys strong bonds of friendship with Saudi Arabia and is honoured to serve with you as one of your Vice-Presidents for this Session.

Australia warmly welcomes to membership of this body our Pacific island neighbours, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Equally, as a country of the Asia Pacific region, Australia welcomes the arrival at last of the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. And Australia having been among the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, we are delighted now to welcome these countries, too, to UN membership.

Mr President, you preside over a General Assembly when the United Nations is at last attaining the coherence and momentum necessary to meet the goals of its founders. The United Nations has sometimes been perceived as an autonomous entity - good or bad, progressive or retrograde, vibrant or moribund according to the eye of the beholder. In fact it can do no more than reflect the wishes of its members and the relationships between them. Its success depends on the

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membership's capacity for compromise rather than confrontation, for generosity rather than greed, for humanitarianism rather than hostility - and for a measure of idealism.

Throughout the United Nations system a quite dramatic change of atmosphere has been evident since 1989, most markedly, though not exclusively, in security matters following the collapse of the Cold War. Both the Forty-Fourth and Forty-Fifth Sessions of the General Assembly have been widely remarked as being among the most harmonious and cooperative on record, with major progress on issues such as the environment, human rights and even the reform and rationalisation of the United Nations administrative system itself. The old and all too familiar voting blocs acted less cohesively, and with more regard to consensus.

These atmospheric developments are partly attributable to flow-on effects from the end of the Cold War, but they appear to owe rather more to an emerging world-wide recognition that a great many problems can be dealt with effectively only by cooperation on a multilateral, and in some cases global, scale. To the familiar and established topics in this category like refugees, famine, debt and control of nuclear weapons have now been added issues such as major environmental problems, AIDS and narcotics. In an increasingly complex world the United Nations is itself becoming an increasingly complex place.

APPOINTMENT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

Mr President, these are all issues which this Session, under your guidance, will need to address. They are also issues which will confront the new Secretary-General whose appointment will perhaps be the most important decision to be taken at this Assembly. This is not to suggest that the Secretary-General is more important than the organisation, but it is a recognition of the vital task the new Secretary-General will fulfil as the United Nations approaches its fiftieth anniversary.

Much has already been said about the qualities which the new Secretary-General will need to take up the tasks which the United Nations is now able to, and must address. Foremost amongst them must be integrity, an independence of mind and a willingness and desire to serve the UN in the interest of the organisation as a whole. The Secretary-General must be a skilled and patient negotiator, with an intuition for the right moment to intervene and with the patience and stamina to bring negotiations to a successful conclusion. He or she must provide intellectual leadership in the crafting of imaginative approaches to the multiplicity of problems, old and new, requiring a resolution through the United Nations. Of course, the Secretary-General cannot develop these ideas working alone; in this,

as well as in other responsibilities, he or she must have the managerial capacity to harness fully all the resources and talents of those working in the Secretariat. Finally, in an age of mass communications, and with the spread of democracy, he or she should be able to transmit the principles and the purposes of the organisation to a wider public which will provide it with its necessary base of support.

The agenda which the Secretary-General faces can be summarised under four broad headings - political and security; development; humanitarian; and United Nations reform. They are a daunting collection on which I will offer some thoughts, certainly not prescriptions. But before so doing I should place on record Australia's admiration for the determination and wisdom demonstrated by Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar over the past decade. He has served the world well - through his personal involvement in a number of international issues including Cyprus, Afghanistan, the Middle East, Iraq/Iran, and through his overall management of the United Nations in times of crisis such as during the recent Gulf War. He has shepherded the United Nations from confrontation to great power cooperation. Moreover in the past decade the United Nations' financial situation has improved and there has been an increased preparedness to look to the need for administrative reform. He can look forward to the completion of his two terms with a sense of considerable achievement.

POLITICAL AND SECURITY ISSUES

When the history of the first fifty years of the United Nations is written I am certain that particular prominence will be given to Mr Perez de Cuellar's outstanding contribution to the resolution of regional conflicts - those in Cambodia and Namibia are but two examples where Australia has a particular role and interest. The new Secretary-General will need to maintain this momentum and build on the pattern of cooperation which has been achieved between the major powers.

UN representatives have played an outstanding role on Cambodia, and Australia regards with particular satisfaction the results of the meetings of the Cambodian Supreme National Council and the Permanent Five in Thailand in August and here in New York in the last few days. The Permanent Five, regional countries including Paris Conference Co-Chairman Indonesia, under the very able guidance of its Foreign Minister Ali Alatas, and Australia, and the Cambodian parties themselves have all striven long and hard to achieve a peaceful settlement to the

Cambodian dispute. All the signs are that no obstacles now remain to signature of a comprehensive settlement in Paris next month. But clearly once a settlement is achieved, the peace will have to be consolidated, and this will be no easy task.

The UN will have before it one of its most complex and costly decisions when the Security Council and then the General Assembly debate plans for the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia. UNTAC's assignment will be daunting, but it is a mark of the very great distance we, as UN members, have travelled in the last two years that such an undertaking will soon be a reality. I reaffirm here Australia's willingness to make a substantial contribution to UNTAC and to continue to play our role as a facilitator of a lasting peace in Cambodia.

In the Middle East, there is now a better prospect than in recent years for significant progress on Arab/Israeli issues as the international conference proposed for October approaches. What part the United Nations will play in the continued search for a resolution of the Palestinian question and the Arab/Israeli dispute will be, of course, a matter for the parties themselves to decide. It is clear though that the United Nations, and the new Secretary-General in particular, has the potential to play a constructive and valuable role.

We are also hopeful that the Secretary-General's continued efforts to achieve a settlement of the Cyprus question will bear fruit, the more so because of the personal effort the Secretary-General has invested in this task, and would urge the parties to proceed with the proposed conference.

But despite these areas of tension, just as we witness progress on issues which have been on the UN's agenda for some time, so new issues confront the international community. The violence now erupting in Sri Lanka and Yugoslavia is a stark reminder of the enormous difficulties which can result from social and ethnic tensions. We are all acutely conscious of how newly emergent nationalism within the borders of many existing countries around the world is creating a new set of strains and dilemmas in the conduct of international relations.

The most immediate area of concern for the international community is the situation in Yugoslavia. Australia, not least because more than 250,000 of its people have strong links of family and culture with Yugoslavia, has voiced its grave concern at the breakdown of constitutional order, the tragic loss of life and the impending threat of all-out war in that country.

The conflict in Yugoslavia has certainly reached the point where the international community needs to reinforce the efforts of the European community to resolve the crisis. Australia has accordingly asked the Security Council to take up the issue and use its influence to help bring about an end of the fighting. There are important issues to be resolved about the future shape of Yugoslavia's Republics, and in particular about the position of minorities within the Republics. These are issues that must be seriously addressed and resolved by negotiation once the fighting has stopped, but there can be no justification for resorting to force to settle them. Unfortunately there can be no doubt that the conflict within Yugoslavia has now created a situation which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security in the region, and one which demands the attention of the United Nations.

With the UN's new and constructive role come certain responsibilities and the need to recognise that changes in the international environment demand changes in this Assembly's approach to regional developments. For too long debate and resolutions on a number of regional issues have been characterised by outdated rhetoric. Let me make a plea to the Assembly that we might be able to consider changes to language which no longer reflect the realities of the nineties. For example, Australia hopes that debate on such traditional items as the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East, decolonisation and South Africa will be conducted in a fashion which acknowledges the opportunities for progress, and at least in South Africa's case, the progress already achieved. Similarly Australia hopes that it may be possible to rescind Resolution 3379 of 1975 equating Zionism with racism.

No-one can be complacent over the difficulties still ahead in the resolution of regional conflict. We do, however, share a genuine global sense of optimism about the UN's future role in peace and security matters. There are four distinct areas of UN activity in this regard: peace enforcement; peace keeping; peace making or preventive diplomacy; and arms control and disarmament.

The Gulf War was a classic case of peace enforcement by collective security measures. The founders of the UN recognised that it would have to have available to it as a final resort the use of force to resist aggression. But willingness to undertake enforcement action, by itself, does not constitute a system of collective security. Its actual use on this occasion will have a deterrent effect for the future, but the establishment of a true system of collective security

also demands progress on multilateral disarmament, the development of confidence building measures in various regions of the world and commitment to the removal, on a consistent and even-handed basis, of the root causes of conflict.

In fact, situations like Namibia and Cambodia involving peace keeping forces are more likely than the Gulf to set the pattern of future United Nations action ie a form of peace making activity which falls somewhere between good offices on one end of the spectrum and enforcement action on the other. The final settlement of a dispute will be through negotiation, but often with a peace keeping component. Although peace keeping operations were not originally envisaged in the Charter, they fit precisely the sort of circumstances which are likely to occur more often in the post-Cold War era.

The Secretariat has done an outstanding job in this area over a number of years and I must pay tribute to the individuals involved. There are now over 11,000 military and 3,000 civilian personnel from fifty-four countries serving in nine UN peace keeping operations in the Middle East, the Sub-continent, Cyprus, Angola and Central America. A further 2,700 personnel are on standby, ready to be sent to the Western Sahara to complete the deployment of MINURSO. Five new peace keeping or related operations [UNIKOM, UNAVEM II, ONUSAL, MINURSO and the UN Guards Force in Northern Iraq] have been approved in the first nine months of 1991, placing an enormous strain on those parts of the Secretariat responsible for their creation and administration. Clearly resources must be increased and upgraded and we welcome the appointment by the Secretary-General of the team of consultants to report on how the organisation of peace keeping activities might be improved in light of these expanded responsibilities.

In a new climate of international cooperation it would be logical to anticipate an expanded role for the UN in peacemaking or preventive diplomacy. The new international circumstances underline both the need and the opportunity for the UN to expand its hitherto successful but limited activity. More often now than previously, the UN must be able to identify potential conflicts, analyse their causes and bring the parties to see the possibilities for resolution of their differences while conflicts are still only at the dispute stage. This will require both new approaches to and additional resources in the Secretariat for information gathering and conflict resolution. What is needed chiefly is a body of skilled and experienced staff, who can not only analyse information, but develop options for action which can be presented to the Secretary-General or the

Security Council.

In order to establish the conditions for a global peace, the United Nations must intensify its work on disarmament and arms control. The Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the safeguards system of the International Atomic Energy Agency are cornerstones of arms control. Revelations about Iraq's extensive clandestine nuclear program in violation of its NPT and safeguards obligations, the first and only such case in the history of the treaty, have highlighted the need for an even more effective and intrusive safeguards regime that can meet the challenges of the 1990s and beyond. We have warmly welcomed the recent decisions of China, France, South Africa, Zambia and Tanzania to become parties to the NPT and hope that these decisions will help influence those few countries remaining outside the Treaty to re-evaluate the benefits of membership.

We also welcome the DPRK's stated intention to sign a safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency, in accordance with the obligations it accepted on acceding to the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. We look forward to the full, prompt and unconditional implementation of that agreement, because we remain concerned at the continuing operation by the DPRK of an unsafeguarded nuclear facility and reports that it has been building other nuclear facilities, leaving open the question of whether it is pursuing a nuclear weapons capability. This course of action by the DPRK is destabilising to the Korean Peninsula and to the North Asian region generally.

A universal and non-discriminatory register of Conventional Arms Transfers under the auspices of the United Nations should also be established as soon as possible as an important international confidence-building measure. Australia participated in the UN expert group on Conventional Arms Transfers; with the finalisation of that Group's recommendations and the support by the G7 and the P5 for the establishment of an Arms Transfers Register there is now an expectation of action by the international community.

The Gulf War underlined the crucial importance of a successful result to the Chemical Weapons Convention negotiations. They have now entered a final critical stage. It is clear that a further intensification of effort is required. The deadline of 1992 set by the Conference on Disarmament for completing the Treaty must be observed. As I have proposed to my CD colleagues, a meeting before too long of the CD at ministerial level will, in my view, be necessary to

provide sufficient impetus for the negotiations and a political framework for resolving outstanding issues.

The Third Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention held in Geneva last month showed that there is a need for more to be done to further strengthen that important regime, and above all to ensure that the Convention becomes universal.

DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

In the new international environment, issues of international economic growth and development must take an even more prominent place on the agenda of a new Secretary-General. Substantial economic progress has been made in some regions, as for example, in parts of Asia and Latin America, but great human needs exist unaddressed, particularly in parts of Africa where, unfortunately, economic and social conditions have continued to deteriorate.

In the economic forums of the United Nations system, there is increasing recognition that each nation must be responsible for promoting policies which will encourage the participation of all sections of their populations in the economic and social development processes. Furthermore a relationship is increasingly being noticed between human freedoms and sustained economic development. For the benefits of rational domestic policies to be fully realised, however, the major industrialised countries must play their part. They must maintain their efforts to foster greater stability in the international economic environment, and take action to remove the international barriers to economic development.

The diminution in the security threat has enabled more resources to be available for development, both in the developing world and in Central and Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. It will be important to ensure that assistance provided in East Europe be additional to levels of assistance to developing countries and not represent a diversion of resource flows away from developing countries. The alleviation of poverty in the developing world remains the central humanitarian challenge.

Perhaps most crucial, however, to the economic future of developed and developing countries is the need to strengthen and liberalise the multilateral trading system, both in the achievement of a successful conclusion to the

Uruguay Round and in its aftermath. The importance of such liberalisation was recognised in the United Nations international development strategy for the 1990s. Further liberalisation of trade would not only boost world economic growth, but engender the stability and confidence needed by the emerging market economies of Central and Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, as well as providing an important stimulus to development efforts in Latin America, Asia and Africa.

QUALITY OF LIFE AND HUMANITARIAN ISSUES

The issues of peace and security and of development have, of course, been central to the deliberations and activities of the United Nations for many years. They are issues which have demonstrated the role and functions of previous Secretary-Generals and are issues which I am sure the new Secretary-General will know well. What is new for all of us is the emergence over just the last few years of a whole group of previously neglected issues for which international solutions are actively being sought - issues, moreover which for the most part generate quite strong feelings, are not readily susceptible to straight-forward technical negotiation and settlement, and so require great skill in handling.

Undoubtedly the most prominent recent addition to the new agenda has been the environment. While from the 1970s environmental protection became an important part of the domestic political programs of many nations, it was not perceived by most governments as having an urgent international dimension. The 1980s saw a significant shift in both perceptions and reality and the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development to be held in Brazil next year, will cast in relief the major new issues involved in the protection of the global environment in the face of the impact of climate change and increased threats to the biosphere. Every effort must be made to achieve ecologically sustainable development. As part of this process, due accord needs to be paid to the imperatives of economic growth and for appropriate mechanisms to be established for the transfer of technology to enable developing countries to meet the challenges involved in the protection of the environment. The inter-relationship between protecting the global environment and ensuring global economic development will prove to be the critical issue as the end of the century approaches.

Human rights is not, of course, a new issue. The element of innovation lies in the way in which much past rhetoric of concern is now being translated into action,

not only within the United Nations, but in bodies such as CSCE. The dramatic changes which have taken place in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe over the last few years have been matched by a significant diminution in the abuse of human rights. Equally there have been changes for the better in many parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Nonetheless serious abuses continue, including in our own region - not least in Burma. We believe that further progress can be assisted through constructive dialogue of the kind that Australia actively pursues bilaterally and multilaterally. We believe it crucial that United Nations human rights mechanisms be strengthened, and would encourage appropriate funding being provided within the UN system to accord resources for all human rights activities, including the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights.

The global refugee problem remains as large as ever. The challenge for governments -and the international system - is to preserve the essential protections that must be extended to refugees while providing other appropriate responses and humanitarian assistance for persons displaced by other causes.

The United Nations will regrettably need to continue to respond to natural disasters and other large-scale humanitarian emergencies which occur around the world. Like other countries, Australia has been concerned for some time that coordination among the various organisations involved in United Nations humanitarian emergency relief is sometimes inadequate to the need. We wish to see improved coordination of such responses. What we need to devise in any General Assembly resolution is not a facile cosmetic response, but a carefully considered mechanism which actually works in practice.

In the aftermath of the Gulf War we have seen the UN revisit the key question of intervention in the internal affairs of other countries. The Charter notes explicitly that the United Nations is not authorized "to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state". Yet there are also basic goals in the UN Charter, in particular in the social and humanitarian area, which have always qualified the principle of non-intervention - the monitoring machinery successfully being developed by the Commission on Human Rights is but one example of how the balance struck between considerations of sovereignty and humanitarian imperatives has evolved.

Today we can readily endorse the Secretary-General's view in this year's annual report that "the principle of non-interference with the essential domestic jurisdiction of states cannot be regarded as a protective barrier behind which

human rights could be massively or systematically violated with impunity." The UN's role in Iraq following the war, while governed by the enforcement provisions of Chapter 7 of the Charter, underlined nevertheless that sometimes such UN action is needed in the face of great humanitarian emergencies which threaten international peace and security, even though there may be no agreement from the member state most directly concerned. We are not yet at the stage where we can prescribe new activity or indeed Charter amendment for the UN to enable it greater flexibility to cope with such situations. But we have to recognise that there may be cases where a more flexible approach is in fact needed if the UN is to meet successfully its global objectives.

UNITED NATIONS REFORM

There is thus a widespread consensus that the present unwieldy Secretariat structure - the product of the conflict and compromises of the Cold War and uncoordinated responses to specific problems of the past - is not well suited to the range of tasks which member states now expect of the UN and which in the new international climate it should be capable of performing. It is unreasonable to impose on the incoming Secretary-General a structure which he or she will find so much difficulty in managing, which reflects past problems, not present realities, and which the new Secretary-General, as Chief Administrative Officer, has had no input in shaping.

Australia would thus support a resolution in the General Assembly which would sweep away these constraints on the Secretary-General and which would, on the basis of consultation with the incoming Secretary-General, establish procedures to ensure the recruitment from all regions of the most outstanding men and women to work in the Secretariat and set out a new basic structure for the Secretariat, which would permit it to fulfil its roles in the development of policy options to assist the deliberative organs and in the implementation of their decisions. The detailed elaboration of the basic structure should be the responsibility of the Secretary-General as the UN's Chief Administrative Officer.

Ultimately, it will be for member states and for the new Secretary-General to acknowledge that if the United Nations is indeed to become the sort of organisation which its founders foresaw, now is the time. Never since the end of the Second World War has there been such hope. That hope has to be translated into political will: to achieve and maintain peace, to better the economic lot of mankind, and to permit the individual to live decently and free from fear. In

fulfilling this role the United Nations must be purposeful, energetic and adaptable. Its ultimate success will depend on the capacity of member states to work together in the common interest. The achievement of which the United Nations is capable is worth the effort of all of us to bring about.

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