

UNITED FOR A BETTER WORLD

Opening by Senator Gareth Evans of First Full Meeting of Australia's Committee for the 50th Anniversary of The United Nations, Canberra, 3 February 1994

In speaking to this audience, it is hardly necessary for me to give a lecture on the significance of the United Nations' 50th Anniversary next year. I would, however, like to introduce this, the first full meeting of Australia's National Committee for the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, by saying a few words about the UN's approach to the anniversary, and why we should be throwing our national energies into the commemoration.

The United Nations has established a Preparatory Committee to coordinate preparations for the anniversary. Ambassador Richard Butler has been elected Chair, giving Australia a high profile internationally on anniversary matters. The Committee's functions include the drafting of a declaration for the commemorative session of the General Assembly in 1995, coordinating international projects and serving as a catalyst for observances around the world.

In the main, however, the United Nations' strategy for the anniversary is based on devolution of responsibility for the initiation and implementation of activities to the national level. The establishment of National Committees to coordinate anniversary activities is central to this strategy. So far some thirty countries, including Australia, have established National Committees and others have announced their intention to do so.

Your role will be to provide advice on appropriate government activities for the anniversary, to serve as a catalyst for other anniversary commemorations and to help to develop a publicity program in the wider community. The anniversary is a unique opportunity for Australians to learn more about the United Nations, to develop more realistic expectations of the world body and to encourage greater involvement in its improvement. As a strong supporter of the United Nations, I attach particular importance to Australia's preparations for the UN's 50th Anniversary and will follow the Committee's progress with keen interest.

It is perhaps typical of the UN that the theme; "We the Peoples of the United

Nations ... United for a Better World", which the Committee of eminent Permanent Representatives in New York eventually settled on - after typically protracted negotiations - is open to numerous interpretations. But two central messages can, I think, quite legitimately be drawn from this theme which are particularly relevant to Australia's commemoration of the 50th Anniversary

The UN Charter opens with the phrase "We the Peoples of the United Nations". Although at a practical level much of the business of the United Nations is in fact conducted between sovereign states, it is important to note that the United Nations was intended to serve a far broader constituency, one that can not, and should not, be defined solely in terms of nation states.

In the past, the pressures of Cold War politics limited the role of non-state actors in the UN. Now we are beginning to witness a renewed focus on the individual, on people. This can be seen in the growing acceptance by member states of a role for non-government organisations within the UN and in the increased attention being devoted to individuals as the key actors in economic and social development.

There is nothing new about Australia's interest in the UN's potential to improve people's lives. Dr Hudson's recently released book, Australia and the New World Order: Evatt at San Francisco, describes how Dr Evatt successfully argued that the UN should have a role in economic and social development as well as in the enhancement of international security, more narrowly defined. Since then Australia has maintained this concern for the aspirations of the individual. Australia's voice on human rights issues, its cooperation with the UN during the decolonisation era and its support for the notion of "human development" are only a few of the examples I can cite.

During the anniversary year we should be seeking to analyse and promote the evolving role of non-state actors within the UN, to educate people about how the UN impacts upon their lives and to generate greater public support for the work of the United Nations.

The second element of the theme that I wish to talk about is the forward looking tone conveyed in the words "United for a Better World".

The UN's 50th Anniversary Secretariat is not engaged simply in the task of organising a birthday celebration on a global scale. Admittedly, the UN has had

considerable success in fostering international cooperation in areas such as disarmament, agreement on fundamental standards of human rights, development assistance and protection of the environment, to name but a few.

We all know, however, that much more remains to be done. In the wake of the Cold War, the UN's capacity for action has been greatly expanded and expectations of the UN have risen accordingly. As a result the UN is faced with a series of major challenges and reforms as it moves into the 21st century.

Commitment to reform has also been a major element of Australia's UN involvement, particularly in recent years as opportunities for change have increased. You will know, from the release of my book Cooperating for Peace last year, that one area of reform in which I am keenly interested is the need for a more effective system of global security. The book takes stock of the nature of the security problems confronting the international community today, and makes many specific recommendations about how they can be tackled most effectively. It considers a range of issues, including: restructuring of the Secretariat; personnel and funding; improving the planning and management of peace operations; the composition and functioning of the Security Council; and more effective structures and coordination of humanitarian relief assistance. I argue for a much broader conception of security and a greater emphasis on peace building through a whole variety of preventive strategies which seek to address the underlying causes of disputes, conflicts and crises. The 50th Anniversary will, I hope, intensify debate on these questions and galvanise the will of UN Member States to agree on reform.

It should be noted, however, that the ongoing international debate initiated by the Secretary-General's Agenda for Peace, to which my book contributes, can not be expected to lead to an enhanced UN role in maintaining international peace and security unless the UN receives the full support of the major powers.

Consequently we must encourage President Clinton and his Administration, and the United States Congress to support the UN's role, and, resist proposals such as those of Senator Bob Dole, US Minority Leader in the Senate, in his recently tabled "Peace Powers" Bill, which would if enacted significantly lessen US support for UN peace operations and seek to impose further unilateral limits on US payments of its financial obligations to the UN.

Senator Dole's legislation would, in his own recent description, prohibit US troops from serving under foreign command in UN operations; bar US forces

from any standing UN army; provide for Congress to be consulted before the US casts its vote on peace keeping activities; have the Administration submit to Congress a "complete and realistic" annual peace keeping funding request and put a halt to the Administration 're-programming' funding from other areas, particularly from the Defence budget, when it does not budget sufficient money for peace keeping; put the UN on notice that the US will not pay an "ever escalating" contribution to the costs of peace keeping without "congressional input"; and give to the US "full credit~ for all US contributions to peace keeping operations, eg operation 'Restore Hope' in Somalia.

We can readily acknowledge that not all UN peace operations of recent times have been as successful as those in Cambodia and Namibia, but after the lessons of Somalia and former Yugoslavia, the US should join the international community as a whole in making a thorough review of how the UN decides, manages and resources peace operations, rather than stepping away from the organisation.

The 50th Anniversary is the appropriate time to address these, and other challenges, in a concerted way. In the words of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr Boutros Boutros-Ghali:

The Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations coincides with a turning point in history when the institutions of international relations are being re-thought and re-considered. The Fiftieth Anniversary will therefore be a time not only for reflection on what has been achieved and learning from the lessons of the past, but also for charting a course for the next century.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for giving of your valuable time to serve on Australia's National Committee for the 50th Anniversary. I know a start has already been made in organising a number of activities for the anniversary and I assure you that the Committee will continue to enjoy the full support of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in developing an expanded anniversary program. I would also like to particularly thank Roger Shipton, as President of the United Nations Association of Australia, for his role in convening this Committee.

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