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Statement by Mr. Olof Palme, Prime Minister of Sweden, in
the United Nations General Assembly, October 20, 1970

Mr. President,

Your election to the high office of President of the General Assembly is a well-deserved tribute to your great personal qualities as diplomat and international personality. It is at the same time a fitting recognition of Norway's contribution to the cause of the United Nations since the very first days of its existence, when your distinguished fellow-countryman, the late Trygve Lie, began to build and organize the Secretariat of the new world organization.

The idea of institutional, global co-operation between states was not new at that time. The idea had been tried by our predecessor, the League of Nations. It failed. It failed, not because the idea was wrong, but because it was not applied with sufficient dedication and determination by a sufficient number of states. The time was not yet ripe for such great endeavour. However, the collapse of the League did not strangle man's yearning for peace, security and well-being through world-wide international co-operation. The set-back served as

a challenge for renewed efforts to organize the international community for the benefit of all world citizens. The United Nations was born.

Anniversaries are sometimes said to be futile exercises in mathematical arbitrariness. Furthermore, it can now be argued, 25 years is not a long time in the life of nations. This is true. Nevertheless, Mr. President, I think we are right in taking advantage of this solemn occasion not only as a reason for ceremonies and rhetoric but, in particular, for a profound analysis of the proper role of the United Nations in the world of to-day-and of to-morrow. It would be proper during this session of the General Assembly for Member States to widen their perspectives beyond the many urgent problems that regularly absorb our attention when we meet here for our yearly sessions. Let us this time try and foresee and evaluate the challenges that the United Nations will be called upon to meet in the decade which has just begun.

The world is now in a stage of increasingly rapid change in the social, economic, technical and scientific fields. These changes provide unprecedented opportunities for progress and well-being of humanity. But they also constitute unprecedented threat to human civilization and to the very existence of mankind. The creative power of human genius threatens to be turned against ourselves. Man risks to become the slave of technique instead of its master.

This development has led to a dramatically increased interdependence between peoples and states. The situation has been

described as "global partnership in life and death". Peace and well-being have become indivisible, recognized as the inalienable right of all human beings. The revolution of rising expectations is in full swing. It will soon be impossible to stop the free flow of information and ideas. Racial and other discrimination is being universally condemned. A new sense of worldwide solidarity across racial, religious and national lines is growing ever stronger. The generation that is now maturing into political responsibility and leadership challenges the barriers of convention, prejudice and fear which separate peoples and individuals. This new generation views the still deepening gulf between the rich and the poor peoples of the world as morally intolerable and as a threat to peace.

These are hopeful signs in an otherwise dark picture, because they show a determination to change an unsatisfactory reality. Indeed, the problems that face us are enormous. But they can be overcome. The catastrophe that threatens us is by no means inevitable. Armament can be turned into disarmament. The decade of development, that did not come true in the 60's, can become reality in the 70's. The social causes of violence can be eradicated. Together we can stop the destruction of human environment. What is needed is a firm political determination of Member States to undertake the necessary changes in the structures of societies and in international relations. The roots of international tension are often to be found in internal problems of states. Our first contribution to international co-operation is therefore to promote a sound development of our own societies. In so doing, we lay the foundation for our ability to fulfil our obligations under the Charter to promote peace

progress and justice throughout the world.


In his report to this session, the Secretary-General has expressed some cautious optimism with regard to the present development of the international situation. Indeed, there are signs that a spirit of increasing co-operation between the great powers for the purpose of promoting a peaceful solution of long-standing differences begin to yield results. The signing in Moscow of the treaty between the Soviet Union and the Federal Republic of Germany prohibiting the threat or use of force in accordance with article 2 of the Charter may prove to have historical significance for the future relations between the countries of Europe. Negotiations between the Federal Republic and Poland are in process. The four great powers responsible for the situation in Berlin have resumed their deliberations for the purpose of improving the situation in that city. The two leading nuclear powers are engaged in direct negotiations with a view to limiting strategic nuclear weapon systems. Intensive consultations are being conducted between European countries regarding the possibilities for the convening of a conference on security and co-operation in Europe with the participation of all states responsible for the security of the continent. Serious efforts are under way to eliminate the splitting up of Europe into different economic groupings. The talks in Paris on peace in Vietnam have been resumed on the level of heads of delegations, which testifies to an awareness that only a political settlement can put an end to that deplorable conflict.

Even in the notoriously dark picture presented by the situation

in the Middle East, a silver lining can be discerned. The agreements on cease-fire and on talks under the auspices of the special representative of the Secretary-General with a view to achieving a just and lasting peace in the Middle East were received with relief all over the world. Is it, finally, possible to see an end to this tragic conflict that during a quarter of a century has plagued the peoples in that part of the world? The optimism inherent in this very question is mingled with gnawing doubt. The recent violence in Jordan and the tragic and untimely passing of President Nasser, this great Arab leader, have caused a delay in the peace efforts. Yet, if the present opportunity to reach a settlement of the conflict is missed, it may never appear again. Great responsibility rests on the parties concerned and on the great powers to redemonstrate the statesmanship which brought about the cease-fire and the peace talks.

These developments seem to support the cautious optimism expressed by the Secretary-General, even if the emphasis tends to be on the first word rather than on the second. In any case, they should serve as a challenge, during this commemorative session of our organization, to increase the efforts to break the vicious circle of fear, armament and violence in the world.

Mr. President, It is natural at this moment to pay tribute to the wisdom of those men who a quarter of a century ago drafted the Charter of the United Nations. They had a visionary feeling for the possibilities of the future, without losing grasp of the demands of reality. They took account of the special responsibilities for peace and security resting with the great powers,



while at the same time safeguarding the equal rights of all Member States. They realized both the possibilities of undertaking international actions and the limitations presented by state sovereignty. If the United Nations to-day has shortcomings - which indeed it has - the drafters of the Charter are not to be blamed. It is not the Charter, but the disrespect for the Charter by Member States, which is responsible for the inability of the United Nations to safeguard international peace and security.

When looking back over the past 25 years of the life of the United Nations we note some very essential achievements. The most important one is to be found in the field of independence of peoples under colonial rule. With some well-known and deplorable exceptions, this process has been marked by a spirit of friendship and co-operation between the newly independent country and the former colonial power. The credit for this happy development goes to both parties alike. The United Nations can be congratulated for having served as a frame and forum for this historical process. Trusteeship has been transformed into partnership. The remaining tasks in the field of decolonisation refer above all to the Portuguese territories in Africa. The anomaly of this situation is all too obvious. Reinforced efforts by the United Nations to settle this problem are urgently called for.

Mention should also be made of the achievements in the field of peace-keeping. My country has had the honour to participate in virtually all of the peace-keeping operations. We are therefore well placed to testify to the importance of further increasing the efficiency of the peace-keeping machinery of the

organization.

Less spectacular perhaps, but yet of great importance is the progress made in the works towards evolution and codification of the principles of international law concerning friendly relations and co-operation among states. The results achieved in this field mark an important advance in the efforts to secure greater respect for such fundamental principles of the Charter as non-intervention, the prohibition of the threat or use of force, selfdetermination and sovereign equality between states. The non-observance of these principles is indeed the very root-cause of world insecurity and turmoil.

Already at the birth of the United Nations, the great powers had a dominating position on account of their vast military and economic resources. This is still more true to-day, in spite of the largely increased number of sovereign states. There has taken place, however, a remarkable development in power relations between the great powers themselves. A factual duopoly of super power has been established between the two leading world powers. Let me stress that this is not necessarily a negative element. These powers are fully aware of their enormous destructive potential and of the particular responsibilities that this implies. They constantly try to liquidate causes for great power conflicts. A balance of power exists as a safeguard - however a fragile one - against a world conflagration. Yet, Mr. President, I submit that this power duopoly contains certain risks for the smaller nations. Big power consensus may be reached at the expense of small power interests, for instance through the preservation of status quo, when

change is in the interest of the small nations. Super-power domination also tends to shift the emphasis away from this organization - even from the Security Council - over to behind-the-scene deliberations by the big powers. The many small nations must constantly see to it that their interest is properly safeguarded in this process. For them the best way to do this is to strengthen the United Nations. Our Charter provides an excellent machinery of interplay between the few big and the many small nations of the world. It is therefore - in the view of my Government - very timely and proper for this session to adopt a resolution whereby Member States solemnly rededicate themselves to the principles and purposes of the Charter.

What does this mean in concrete terms? In connection with the discussion of measures for strengthening of international peace and security the Swedish Government has offered certain observations in this regard. I would like to sum them up briefly.

1. The disarmament efforts must be intensified. Disarmament is the crucial and most urgent problem of our time. Certain risks may be worth taking in order to achieve it. The late President Kennedy's words still ring in our ears: "The risks inherent in disarmament pale in comparison with the certain danger of continued arms race." The time to change the trend is now during the first year of the Disarmament Decade.
2. Efforts to counter racism and colonialism in Southern Africa must be intensified. This concerns not only the African continent. It has a direct bearing on the possibilities of creating a basis for sound relations between peoples of different races all over the globe. The situation prevailing in Southern Africa

is a challenge to human decency.

3. The enormous differences in social and economic conditions between rich and poor, nations as well as individuals, must be bridged. The success or failure of the Second Development Decade will have a substantial importance for the possibilities of safeguarding international peace and security.

4. The human environment, in the broadest sense, must be dealt with as a matter of equal importance as the most serious problems facing mankind for the next future. The qualitative aspects of economic growth must be accorded highest priority. The protection of human environment must be an integrated part of economic development. This is therefore in the interest of all nations. Safeguarding our environment is nothing less than a matter of human survival.

5. The United Nations activities to promote the respect for human rights should be intensified. The human rights questions transcend the boundaries of nations and the concept of the sovereignty of States should not be allowed to prevent progress in this field. Oppression, be it national, social, racial or religious - can no longer be viewed as falling under the exclusive sovereignty of the individual State. It concerns all mankind.

Mr. President. I have dealt with some aspects of peace and security in the broadest sense of the words. The list is by no means exhaustive. I might, for instance, have stressed the need for the improvement of several parts of the United Nations

peace-keeping machinery. Here, no doubt, much can be done in order to strengthen the role of the United Nations under the Charter. My intention - however - has only been to point to some domains where intensified efforts by the United Nations take on a particular urgency. If this anniversary can serve as an inspiration to Member States to proceed in this direction then it has certainly justified this solemn commemoration.

Mr. President. These 25 years of the existence of the United Nations have not passed without personal sacrifices. Men and women, from many nations represented in this hall, have given their lives in the service of our organization. My country has not been spared. In Sweden names as Folke Bernadotte and Dag Hammarskjöld will always stand as symbols for unselfish dedication to the cause of peace and understanding between peoples. This is the occasion for us all to pay tribute to the memory of all those who made the ultimate sacrifice for the ideals of the United Nations.