

MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Press Department

Speech by Prime Minister Olof Palme in the United Nations
General Assembly, November 11, 1975.

Mr President,

The world today is very different from the one into which the United Nations organization was born 30 years ago. The passage of time has witnessed a transformation in the minds of men and their vision of the world. The conflict between East and West which not long ago contained the imminent risk of a third world war, has lost its intensity. Competing ideologies no longer cause the fear that characterized the era of the cold war. The Helsinki summit meeting of the European Security Conference is an important contribution to detente and increased co-operation between the peoples of Europe.

Poverty, violence and oppression remain, however, in most parts of the world. The strong continue to impose their will on the weak, the few on the many. Political instability, social upheavals and economic distress characterize our international life. But some fundamental changes in the last thirty years have a positive trend. They show that people rise against oppression, that foreign domination will never be accepted and that the privileges of a few nations will have to give way to equality between all. And this trend has been reinforced by a spirit of solidarity between the peoples, between forces for national independence and social change.

The last thirty years have seen the dismantling of old empires and the abolition of colonial rule. Peoples all over the world have demanded, fought for and achieved their right to self-determination and independence. They now start to shoulder their responsibilities in world affairs.

Through the efforts of the new states we are now acquiring a global vision of the problems of the world. They have contributed an acute perception of interdependence between all countries based on the respect for self-determination and equality. It is clear that such respect is given to the small nations mainly as a result of their mutual solidarity and cohesion. The United Nations organization has through their influence become a symbol of a better future and a forum where international decisions are fully shared also with the smaller, the weaker and the least wealthy countries.

Our view of the world owes much to the people of Vietnam. They have fulfilled their dream of independence, after one of

history's longest and most singularly cruel wars. Their epic struggle is a symbol that the will of peoples determine the course of history and that the ideals of liberation and self-determination will prevail. The end of the war relieves international relations of a festering sore, an impediment to global co-operation, that in the end, I am certain, will embrace also those nations that yesterday were locked in combat. Meanwhile it is against the will of the international community to prevent the two states of Vietnam to take their rightful place in the United Nations.

We are at the end of the dissolution of the Portuguese empire. The liberation movements in Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique have fought for their countries' independence and have achieved their goal. By their struggle they have also contributed to the fall of the most reactionary regime in Europe. At the same time the forces fighting against facism in Portugal supported the liberations struggle in Africa and by their efforts undermined the colonial regime.

Today we welcome Angola as a new nation in Africa. The conflicts in that country however endanger its unity and territorial integrity. We hope that it will soon be possible to establish a basis for peace and co-operation among the people of Angola. We must reject any foreign aspirations to limit the right of the Angolan people to decide themselves on their future.

In southern Africa one colonial empire has thus been dismantled but white minority rule still holds sway, made more pernicious by the doctrine of racial discrimination. The peoples in South Africa, Namibia and Southern Rhodesia are denied their freedom and right to self-determination. We have to ask ourselves, if changes can come about only through violence, through revolution, or if there is a peaceful way to eradicate the affront on human dignity of colonialism, racism and apartheid. In this organization devoted to the peaceful solution of conflicts we should not advocate force or armed struggle or use its authority to support such means. But we can predict that when men, who seek peace and progress are met only with oppression and exploitation they will in the end turn to violence and force. Those, who guard their unjust privileges, will destroy themselves when they refuse a life of racial harmony and respect for the human rights of all inhabitants. The United Nations has a duty to take effective steps to help the population in South Africa, Namibia and Southern Rhodesia to achieve equality and freedom.

May I add that the fight against apartheid and racial discrimination is so important that it requires the joint efforts of the world community. Therefore it seems to me most unfortunate that divisive issues are brought into this context. Sweden cannot accept that sionism is equated with racism. For this reason, we voted against yesterday's resolutions. We were given no other alternative.

It seems to me that this issue was brought up as an outflow of the deep conflict in the Middle East.

In the Middle East two peoples look at the same land as part of their national home. The result is a tragic conflict and deep suffering in the whole region. The people of Israel live since almost thirty years in a state which was recognized

already in its infancy by many other countries including the leading powers. It has a right as all other states in the area to live within recognized and secure borders. At the same time occupied territories must be returned in accordance with UN resolutions. The people of Palestine have a political identity and a just claim to national selfdetermination. As long as they are denied that right the conflict will not be resolved.

Mr President,

Political independence becomes hollow, almost illusory for any new state if it is not coupled with the right to influence and direct also its economic and social development. The dissolution of colonial rule however does not entail any automatic change in the pattern of control of the world's commerce.

Industry and monetary affairs, unequal economic relations remain, leading to a profoundly unjust distribution of the riches of the world. Thus the developing countries are fully justified in demanding with increasing insistence and in full solidarity changes in the international economy and substantially increased aid from the rich world.

In the United Nations we are all engaged in efforts to achieve economic and social justice on a global scale. The rich cannot continue to exist as islands of affluence in a sea of poverty. Those who talk about "international morality" are sometimes written off as naive or sentimental or unrealistic. But who is unrealistic? The one who says that the 20 per cent of the worlds population that control 90 per cent of its resources must share them with all the others, who have only 10 per cent, or the one who says that the affluent minority should hold on to its riches come what may? Here is a case where a moral concern coincides with the realistic self-interest of the entire human family.

I am convinced that the task of development in the poor nations is essentially their own responsibility. There is much to be said for a policy of self-reliance for countries in the third world. They must carry out themselves the internal institutional reforms which are necessary for this purpose. There is no alibi in the international order for any lack of progress on the domestic front.

In fact, reforms in the international order will be meaningless, and often impossible to attain, without correspondending reforms in the national orders.

However, at the same time the rich nations must accept the reform of an economic system which has served the poor countries badly. Sweden has pledged its support for a new international economic order and I repeat that pledge. No one would have an interest in bringing the present world economic and monetary system to an abrupt collapse and I am confident that no government would wish that to come about. But all countries will gain in the long run by such changes that would give the third world its share of the global wealth.

The political commitment on the part of the rich countries to effect real change has been given from this rostrum during the 7th Special Session of the General Assembly. We now need concrete evidence of their readiness to put promises into

practice. The Special Session drew together the results from some important earlier international conferences and set in motion a series of measures which are now to be dealt with in subsequent negotiations. Sweden will endeavour to make its contribution to these negotiations. Specifically I can pledge that we will continue to keep our official development assistance up to the target of 0,7 per cent which we have already reached, we will work for international negotiations to alleviate the debt burden of the poorest and most seriously affected developing countries,

we will cooperate in negotiations on individual commodities in international trade and in the work on an integrated programme with the view to stabilizing commodity markets and improve the export earnings of the developing countries,

we will also propose arrangements that compensate for fluctuations in their raw material export incomes,

we will advocate a special consideration for the needs of the developing countries in the reform of the world monetary system,

we will continue to advocate a greater role for the developing countries particularly in the international financial institutions.

We all realize that the resources of the globe are exhaustible. Thus we have come to question more insistently a way of life favouring the accumulation of material things to the point of greed and waste. There is a clear need to reorder our priorities in the distribution of common resources. In this we must direct a substantial part of the energies and skills available in the industrialized world to improve the material level of life for the majority of poorer countries.

The desire to see a more even distribution of the world's wealth is for me also a projection of an effort to abolish injustices in my own country. I believe that equality within nations - both the rich and the poor - is a prerequisite for equality between them. We wish to shape our society in such a way that the people decide on production and its distribution, that the citizens are free from dependence on any authority outside of their own control and that a system based on class is changed into a community of people working together on the basis of freedom and equality. I believe that if we succeed in creating such a society, it will have a natural solidarity. That solidarity is the fundamental requirement of a world society and in the end it is the prerequisite of its survival.

Mr President,

The United Nations has thus played a historic role in the quest for national independence. It is the central forum for the struggle to achieve political and economic selfdetermination. One remaining process must now be set in motion. The immense and growing technological capacities must be reoriented in order to fulfill basic human needs. The human, technological and economic resources squandered on armaments is the most glaring example of misuse. Annual expenditure on armaments now approaches the level of 300 billion dollars.

This equals the total income of the countries with the poorest half of mankind. Roughly half of the world's scientific and technical manpower is now employed on improving existing weapons and developing new ones. Who can defend a world order based on such grotesque priorities?

Never in history has the capacity of man to destroy himself his civilisation and his physical environment been greater than today. And it is constantly growing. And yet no solution has been found to break out of this vicious process. The record of past efforts is depressing. Already before the first world war attempts were made to achieve agreements on reduction of armaments. They failed. The League of Nations devoted many years of hard work to the task of disarmament. In vain. And we as members of the United Nations committed ourselves to work for disarmament. The history of our organization is replete with the records of our failures.

What went wrong as we strove so hard to prove the rationality of this or that disarmament measure?

In my opinion the answer is only partly to be found in the inadequacy of negotiating methods or the technical solutions offered to the complicated disarmament problems. The reasons for failure in breaking the deadlock are basically political and related to what the Secretary-General has termed "a crisis of confidence" among states.

The climate of distrust between nations has always nourished irrational behaviour on security matters. When distrust reigns governments tend to regard any changes in the external situation in the perspective of potential threats to their national security.

Few politicians wish to attract criticism for negligence or lack of foresight in matters as serious as those of national security. Even in cases where all experts may agree that a reduction of armaments is possible and necessary - let us say for economic reasons - there is a strong reluctance on the part of the political decision-makers to tie the new level to an international commitment. It is inevitably argued that times may change and that national freedom of movement must not be curtailed.

Impediments to agreements on disarmament seem to be built into the very structure of our societies. This is how, in a climate of distrust, the world continues on the absurd course of spiraling armaments.

Looking back at the last thirty years, we find that some stages of the history of disarmament could properly be described as moments of lost opportunities. But the glimmer of hope has always been followed by failure and disillusion.

In my opinion we are today facing another moment of similar significance. Only this time the price for failure seems higher than ever.

Detente and the tide of democratisation of the international community give rise to the expectation that it will prove possible to curb the nuclear arms race. At the same time, however, the potential danger of a new round of nuclear

arms proliferation stemming from the widespread fission technology for peaceful energy purposes is imminent.

This time we cannot allow that events get out of hand. Mankind must become the master of technology, not its victim.

The newly manifested will for mutual confidence and for a just world order must be mobilized. Pretensions to supremacy based on the possession of nuclear arms are in the long run inconsistent with a world in search for independence and equality.

Mr. President, we must mobilise a new political momentum for progress in disarmament. Every country must view the problem of its own security in a broader context than that of military defence against an armed attack. Investments in political confidence are often as important to national security as investments in armaments.

It is true, of course, that most of the countries which live in peace with their immediate neighbours nevertheless build up costly defence establishments. This is due, as is the case in my own country, to fear that a conflict between the great powers may spread also to territories of countries not directly concerned. Detente between these powers accompanied by measures of genuine disarmament would, consequently, remove much of the basic motives for military expenditure in various parts of the world.

Another problem has been the exaggerated secrecy surrounding the size and the use of government expenditure for military purposes. I realize that certain details of a country's military preparedness cannot be made public. But I am convinced that if at least information on the main chapters of military expenditure which are now kept secret - mainly because of mistrust but perhaps also by tradition or bureaucracy - was released and realistic means of international comparison devised, it would be found that considerable outlays for military purposes are unnecessary.

Attention must also be focussed on a particularly objectionable trend of military technology. As in the case of the nuclear weapons great human and technological resources are employed to improve existing conventional weapons and to develop new ones. In this process we know that there is a risk of producing not only effective but also exceedingly cruel weapons. From a humanitarian point of view it is of great importance that increased attention be paid to existing and new particularly cruel conventional weapons - and that efforts be made to achieve restrictions or prohibitions of use of such weapons and - eventually - agreement on their elimination.

Mr. President, a considerable expansion in the use of nuclear power for peaceful purposes is now going on throughout the world. This provides us with great resources of energy which is cheap and much less detrimental to the environment compared with the fossile fuels, which at present are the main alternatives. At the same time the use of nuclear power involves considerable problems. Partly new factors come into play. This means that caution must be observed when extending the use of nuclear power and that intensive efforts must be made to solve the manifold problems of security. It does not mean however, that we should refrain from further

developing this source of energy.

A problem on which we must now focus international attention is the risk that accumulation of plutonium can facilitate the production of nuclear weapons. This is also the most urgent disarmament problem facing us at present.

Each of us has to shoulder his particular responsibility in this context. Nuclear-weapon-states, non-nuclear-weapon-states, parties and non-parties to the NPT, exporters and importers of nuclear material, small countries as well as big. We all have some measure of responsibility for the turn of events and we must act together in this matter where the shape of the future of all of us is at stake.

How can the danger of any further proliferation of nuclear weapons be averted? The obvious prerequisite is of course that those two powers who started the nuclear race assume the responsibilities which are theirs. They have to comply with their treaty obligations and solemn pledges to the world community to reach real results in their talks on nuclear disarmament. The non-nuclear-weapon powers are entitled to demand such compliance.

The great powers have acquired the potential to destroy each other completely and many times over - and the rest of the world as well. Still they continue their nuclear arms race as if they could somehow gain added security or leverage. And all these outlays are made on weapons the use of which, according to their possessors, must be avoided at all costs. Detente must provide the opportunity for the two nuclear giants to finally break out of this deadly spiral. And other countries which possess nuclear weapons must follow.

The states contemplating the acquisition of nuclear weapons have to face the responsibilities which are theirs. If they should choose to step over the threshold they will disrupt the efforts to uphold the nonproliferation regime to which the majority of the members of the world community adhere. They will increase the probability of an outbreak of a nuclear war which cannot but cause disaster to all of us.

Exporters of nuclear material have their particular responsibility. It is imperative that they follow the recommendation of the NPT review conference and agree on arrangements to the effect that exports of nuclear material will only take place if all the peaceful activities of importing non-NPT states are placed under safeguards.

Importers of nuclear material and equipment should accept this obligation in the interest of all of us. This is a matter of equity. The majority of the world community has accepted the obligations which the NPT imposes on them. The others should follow.

We must all work towards further improvements of the existing safeguards against nuclear proliferation. In the long term perspective an international system for the management of the whole nuclear power cycle from the uranium mine to the final storage of highly radioactive waste should be aimed at. National solutions will not be adequate.

Mr. President,

There is a clear connection between disarmament and the quest for a new economic order. The human, material and technological resources spent on armaments represent an immense potential source for development. If we succeed in halting the arms race and starting the process of disarmament this source could be utilized for progress on the road to greater economic and social justice. This in its turn would strengthen our possibilities to deal in a more effective way with the political, economic and social injustices which are the ultimate causes of war.

What is now needed is a world-wide recognition of this inter-connection. I am optimistic enough to believe that, if the question is put in such a perspective people everywhere, who now look upon the insane armaments race with feelings of helplessness, will claim a halt in the race as their right. That is a new situation which statesmen everywhere will have to take into account.

Mr. President,

The United Nations is our central political forum. It is here that we must mobilize the political determination necessary for breaking the present deadlock in disarmament. Sweden is therefore fully behind the Secretary-General when he emphasizes the necessity to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations to cope with this tremendous task.

I am a strong believer in the United Nations. Some people tend to emphasize the lack of substantial success in the United Nations' involvement with some of the major problems of peace and security, of human rights, and the degrading poverty of a large majority of the world's population. We are all well aware of the shortcomings and the failings of the United Nations. These are however a reflection of the international society which created and now guides the organization.

But perhaps we should look more to its achievements. Looking at a longer period we must appreciate the UN role in bringing to bear the moral weight of world opinion on the colonial powers. This was essential in the struggle for self-determination and independence which no doubt is the most significant historic development of the last thirty years. The organization has played an essential role in promoting peace in the Middle East and in other conflict areas.

Still it is necessary to seek constantly to improve the effectiveness and capacity of the organization. The organization is the symbol of the international co-operation needed to create a structure for peace and solidarity between the peoples of the world.

For us it is a matter of principle that the organization live up to its vocation of universality - without exception. If the United Nations is to play its legitimate, prominent role it must be fully representative of the entire international community. The participation of all states is essential to deal effectively with problems of international peace and security.

The United Nations has sometimes taken decisions which we regard as unfortunate and unwise. That does not give us reason to turn against the organization or deny it our co-operation. I am confident that through an open dialogue in good faith and with good-will our differences will never reach the stage where they become a genuine threat to the very existence of our institutions.

We should likewise be aware that the United Nations cannot be taken for granted. It exists because the member states work for it and in it. Indifference is what could do the most damage to this organization which is so vital to the vast underprivileged population of the third world, to small countries everywhere and indeed to all nations in the world.