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Statement by Prime Minister Olof Palme of Sweden on  
October 21, 1985, on the occasion of the commemoration of  
the Fortieth Anniversary of the United Nations.

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General,

Let me at the outset from this rostrum convey this message from the people of Sweden and their elected representatives to all assembled here: We believe in this Organization and we are committed to it. We are all aware of the problems of the Organization and can look back at both failures and successes. But the experience of forty years has not weakened our dedication to the purposes and principles laid down in the Charter. And, more important, we look at our world today and remain convinced that the United Nations is only at the beginning of its history.

Let us not make the United Nations the scapegoat for problems that reflect our own shortcomings.

It is not the United Nations that has not lived up to us. It is we who have not lived up to the ideals of the United Nations. It is by improving ourselves and our policies that we can improve the United Nations.

The United Nations is contemporary with the atomic bomb. During forty years it has been our common fate to live under the nuclear threat, under the risk of total destruction of civilized life on earth.

There is no more urgent task than to try to reduce, and ultimately eliminate, this risk. Negotiations have produced some concrete results. But by and large the nuclear arms race continues unabated. The main responsibility for halting and reversing this ominous process falls on the nuclear powers themselves. However, as pointed out in the Five Continent Delhi Declaration, during the last 40 years, almost imperceptibly, every nation and human being has lost ultimate control over their own life and death.

Many countries are technically able to produce nuclear weapons. When they have decided to forego this option, it has been in the knowledge that they would not increase their own security but decrease the security of all. Many of us have formally committed ourselves by acceding to the NPT which was brought about by the joint efforts of the two leading nuclear powers. We are now entitled to demand that the nuclear powers fulfil in the near future their

part of the deal, that is measures of real disarmament and, as a first step, a comprehensive test ban treaty. We also have to make it perfectly clear to the nuclear powers that although there were, at the time, no international rules prohibiting them from acquiring these awful weapons they should certainly not consider themselves free to put them to use at their own discretion. The non-nuclear countries, who would also suffer death and destruction in case of nuclear war, have a legitimate claim to make their voices heard and to discuss, with the nuclear powers, ways and means to reduce the risk of the planet being blown up, be it by mistake or adventurous calculation.

Any use of nuclear weapons would be deeply reprehensible. One can speak of an international norm which is gradually gaining acceptance. Time has come to consider whether mankind should not begin to study, in earnest, how this utter moral reprobation could be translated into binding international agreements. We should consider the possibility to prohibit in international law the use of nuclear weapons, as part of a process leading to general and complete disarmament.

Mr. President,

The United Nations offers a machinery for cooperation between the large and the many smaller states in the

world. It offers every nation an opportunity to participate in the work for peace and a better future.

The veto has far too often prevented the Security Council from taking action. The cure does not lie in an abrogation of this rule, but in the creation of an international climate in which the leading powers recognize the necessity, also in their own interests, to reduce tensions between themselves and to take collective action against disturbances of the peace.

Much can be done within the Charter to strengthen the ability of the United Nations to maintain peace and prevent conflict. The Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues has put forward some proposals. The Secretary General has in his annual reports described several concrete ways to strengthen the United Nations, and he should have our full support in his admirable efforts to improve the Organization's functioning.

The Nordic countries have presented concrete proposals in this regard. The potential of the United Nations could be better used if actions were taken early to prevent conflicts. The Secretary-General should be given full cooperation by all members of the Security Council for a more active role of the Organization in this field. In this regard the possibility of peace-keeping operations, not only to contain, but also to prevent conflicts should be considered.

The United Nations has financial problems. Let me say quite frankly that it is deeply disturbing that the United Nations should have to struggle year after year with these difficulties. The sums involved are small according to any yardstick. The United Nations system cannot possibly be a heavy financial burden to any country. Selective withholding of assessed contributions and refusal to participate in the financing of certain United Nations activities do not reflect an economic necessity but a political consideration on the part of some countries. Ideas have been put forward to reduce the maximum share of the assessed contributions that any one member state is required to pay. A more even distribution of the assessed contributions would better reflect the fact that this Organization is the instrument of all nations and make it less dependent on contributions from any single member state. In that case the rest of us would have to shoulder a somewhat greater financial responsibility. Sweden, for its part, is ready to participate in discussions to explore these ideas.

Mr. President,

Peace is, of course, the fundamental aim of the United Nations. We have come to recognize that peace is, certainly, more than absence of military violence. It is also stability in relations between states, based on the observance of legal principles. One field where coopera-

tion between states is absolutely necessary is the fight against terrorism in all its forms, these cruel slayings of innocent civilians.

The rule of law is of vital importance to peaceful international relations. In particular, this is strongly felt in smaller countries. When the integrity and independence of one small country is violated, it sends a vibration of anger and anxiety through the hearts and minds of citizens in other small countries. For them, the rule of law and the observance of our common commitments under the Charter are seen as imperatives of a future in peace and security.

My own country has experienced serious violations of its territorial integrity. To us this has brought home the seriousness of breaches of international law.

Mr. President,

Article 51 of the Charter entitles a Member State to self-defense if subjected to armed attack. Unfortunately this provision has many times been twisted to justify all kinds of military action. Should we continue on this road, the prohibition of the use of force, which is basic to the United Nations system, will become a farce, and the law of the jungle will become legitimized. You may sympathize with the motives behind some of these actions. They may serve national security interests, as perceived by the

different states. They may be caused by provocation from others. And they may be very popular among the citizens and voters of the respective countries.

But the fact remains that these acts break the rules of international law and infringe in some way or another upon the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other states.

In such situations, we must react and protest, in the interest of world peace and international law, but in the long run also in our own interest.

This is not a question of working against anyone's interests, of favoring one power over another. It is simply a question of upholding certain rules and laws which are there for the benefit of all.

Mr. President,

In our era of growing international interdependence we have to recognize that threats to peace frequently originate from conditions inside the countries. Misery, hunger, denial of basic human rights are the causes of political and social upheaval.

Many speakers at this session of the General Assembly have voiced their concern over the world debt crisis. I share

this concern. We sense a growing rebellion among the debtor countries against what they perceive as a lack of fairness in the international economic structure. Demands for international adjustment efforts are testing the limits of political tolerance.

We cannot allow heavy debt burdens to tear at the fabric of society. Relations between the developed and the developing countries must always be based on the realities of economic and political interdependence. The solution of the debt crisis will be a test case of the possibilities for a sensible cooperation between North and South.

Brutal violations of human rights occur in many countries, but in South Africa they are written into the very laws of the country. In this way, the policy of apartheid is unique in all its moral abomination. Apartheid is doomed, as is South Africa's illegal occupation of Namibia. While fearing that it will end in a chaos of destruction and bloodshed, for which the white regime will bear the full responsibility, we should not abandon hope that a peaceful transition to a non-racial, democratic society might still be possible through dialogue and agreement. And it is the duty of the outside world to assist this struggle for freedom, i.a. by applying sanctions.

We are witnessing massive migrations on an unprecedented scale, between states and between continents. The reasons



are many; hunger, war, natural disasters, persecution amongst them. The cultural clashes that are inevitable in this process have led in many countries to a renewal of chauvinism and racism. It is time that we become more attentive to this particular danger. We are helped in this task by the rising anger, enthusiasm and readiness to act that are demonstrated by some people in the younger generations. It does honour to them, in this International Youth Year, that they have adopted the watchword "Don't touch my pal". There are many adults, in and out of government, who should do well to listen and take notice.

Mr. President,

For many people around the world, the United Nations stands for something very concrete, a significant element in their personal everyday life.

A child in Africa learns to read in a UNESCO-financed school. A farmer in Asia receives a sack of seed labelled FAO or WFP. UNDP, with its technical projects, touches almost every developing country in the world. Refugees in all continents are protected by the activities of the High Commissioner for Refugees. Women fighting for equality and dignity are encouraged by discussions in United Nations fora, such as the recent Nairobi Conference. Many civilians in many countries have felt more secure due to the presence of United Nations peace-keeping forces. If, as we

sincerely hope, the initiative taken by WHO and UNICEF to immunize the children in the world against serious infectious diseases by 1990 is crowned with success, innumerable families will think of the United Nations as a benefactor.

Many of the people who have such direct experience of what the United Nations stands for may have scant knowledge of the intricacies of great power politics and the workings of the United Nations organs. But they instinctively feel that the United Nations is essential, in various ways, to their well-being, perhaps to their survival. It can be hoped that they will form, over time, a much needed United Nations constituency, that they will make their voices heard, claiming a say, demanding that power politics, high over their heads, do not jeopardize their lives.

But there is already now a large United Nations constituency. It is all those people who believe in the United Nations as an idea. There are tendencies, in times of cynical power politics, to underestimate this idea. But it carries a strong moral force. All people who believe in international cooperation, in peaceful solutions of conflicts, in solidarity with others, make up this force.

There are groups and organizations in many countries which actively work for the recognition of the imperative of peace. A fine example is the Nobel Peace Prize-winning

International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. Their members, doctors all over the world, say that there is no cure for the effects of nuclear war. The only way is prevention.

The United Nations must be permitted to succeed, succeed in the efforts to promote peace and disarmament, succeed in preventing ecological catastrophe, succeed in the fight against hunger and deprivation. There is simply no alternative to international cooperation. Only through joint endeavours can we hope to move from common fear to common security.