

U.N. WATCH

Happy Anniversary

On June 26 the United Nations turned forty years old—a milestone that has been “celebrated” with a flurry of meetings, debates, claims, and counterclaims over the value of the organization.

Of course opinions have shifted over the past four decades, but the views being expressed today have a disturbingly familiar ring, whether they come from the “capitalist” West or the “Communist” East. Averell Harriman, who was involved in the organization’s founding, credits the U.N. in part for the avoidance of World War III. Carlos P. Romulo of the Philippines, who helped draft the U.N. Charter and was for many years his country’s ambassador to the U.S. and the U.N., is disappointed by the increasing weakness of the organization. He thinks the only way to get the U.N. on track is by revising the charter, for which there is a provision in Article 109, if the major powers agree.

Under the charter, the U.N. is authorized to maintain a standing army, which could be called into action to prevent a war. People who tally such things report that there have been two hundred wars of various kinds since the U.N. was founded, with some twenty million victims. The possibility of a U.N. army marching into action against a major power—say, to help Afghanistan or Nicaragua—is today more remote than ever. A pale reflection of this proposed U.N. army are the peacekeeping units in the Middle East and Cyprus; yet even these units are subject to a Security Council veto.

In 1945 Ambassador Romulo tried unsuccessfully to deny veto power to the five permanent Security Council members—the U.S., the USSR, Great Britain, France, and China. But Romulo was told that the United States would not join the organization without the veto power. International scholars have filled library shelves with suggested charter revisions, but the permanent Security Council members have shown no inclination to make the U.N. stronger or more effective.

The General Assembly, at the close of the December, 1984, session, approved a fortieth anniversary theme: “United Nations for a Better World.”

To Nairobi, July, 1985

Most of the paper issuing from U.N. headquarters these days is about the Nairobi conference on discrimination against women. This marks the end of the U.N. Decade for Women, and all U.N. members have been asked to report on the actions they have taken to put an end to discrimination by sex. Since few women hold high positions in government, it can be assumed that the reports were written primarily by men.

Yugoslavia says its constitution, adopted in 1974, bars discrimination against women in political life, marriage, education, etc. Under questioning by members of the U.N. committee, the Yugoslav representative, a woman, said school texts still used sex-role stereotypes and that there were too few women in managerial positions. Literacy and education are seen by her country as the means to equal opportunity.

The Canadian report was highly praised for its frankness

and proposals for action. To break the pattern of economic dependence and low wages for women, Canada looks to higher education. Twelve years ago, only 30 per cent of those enrolled in college were women, and today the figure stands at almost 50 per cent. The low representation of women in public office is attributed to persisting customs and lack of training. The government has established a fund of over \$3 million to induce employers to hire women for non-traditional jobs.

The Bulgarian report maintains that “social conditions in Bulgaria leave no room for discrimination against women. A cardinal feature of our social policy is the full guarantee of constitutional rights to all citizens, including women, on the basis of equal rights for women and men.” So idyllic a picture of the life of women inside a tightly controlled country drew questions from the skeptical. The Bulgarian delegate admitted that overcoming sexual stereotypes was difficult and that rapid economic development had created problems concerning the status of women.

Of the smaller nations, Panama admitted that discrimination against women still exists. Although Panamanian laws prescribe equal pay for equal work, classification of jobs has resulted in lower pay for women. Women have the right to vote but few do and only rarely try for public office. The representative for Panama, a male, said equal access to education was considered by his government a major step in eliminating discrimination. An Office for Women has been established.

At the Nairobi conference, thousands of women from more than a hundred countries will try to put through a plan to achieve equal status with men. At preparatory meetings during the past year, knowledgeable women agreed that little had been accomplished in the U.N. Decade and that in some countries ground had actually been lost. If this conference is a repetition of the Mexico City meeting in 1975 and the Copenhagen session in 1980, the conferees will be bogged down in disputes over apartheid in South Africa and the treatment of Palestinian women. Non-governmental agencies, as they have in the past, will conduct a parallel forum; the one in Copenhagen ripped into the benign platitudes expressed at the official conference.

We'll Meet Again...

The Security Council held fifty-seven meetings in 1984, compared to ninety-eight in '83. Fourteen meetings concerned the Middle East—Lebanon, special problems of Beirut, the U.N. Observer Force, and the U.N. Interim Force; nine were devoted to Cyprus, where there has been a tiny step toward settlement; seven heard complaints by Nicaragua; six were concerned with South Africa; five involved Gulf state complaints against Iran; three heard charges by Angola against South Africa and another three charges by Libya against the U.S.; two considered charges by Sudan against Libya; two concerned the admission of Brunei Darussalam to the U.N.; one considered the charge that Iraq had used chemical weapons against Iran; and one involved a complaint by Laos against Thailand. The remaining meetings dealt with procedural matters.

The members of the Council in 1984, in addition to the five permanent members, were Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta), Egypt, India, Malta, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Peru, the Ukraine, and Zimbabwe.

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