REPORT
OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
ON THE
WORK OF THE ORGANIZATION

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OFFICIAL RECORDS: THIRTY-SEVENTH SESSION

SUPPLEMENT No. 1 (A/37/1)

UNITED NATIONS

New York, 1982

[Original: English]
[7 September 1982]

Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization

The past year has seen an alarming succession of international crises as well as stalemates on a number of fundamental international issues. The United Nations itself has been unable to play as effective and decisive a role as the Charter certainly envisaged for it. Therefore, in this, my first annual report to the General Assembly, I shall depart from the usual practice of surveying the broad range of the work of the United Nations; instead I shall focus on the central problem of the Organization's capacity to keep the peace and to serve as a forum for negotiations. I shall try to analyse its evident difficulties in doing so, difficulties related to conflicts between national aims and Charter goals and to the current tendency to resort to confrontation, violence and even war in pursuit of what are perceived as vital interests, claims or aspirations. The general international divisions and disorder which have characterized the past year have unquestionably made it even more difficult than usual for the Organization to be, as it was intended to be, a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of common ends.

The problems faced by the United Nations in fulfilling its mission derive in large measure from the difficulties which Governments appear to have in coming to terms, both within and outside the Organization, with the harsh realities of the time in which we live. This question is, of course, highly relevant to the use, misuse or non-use of the United Nations as an instrument for peace and rational change.

I am of the view that we now have potentially better means to solve many of the major problems facing humanity than ever before. For this reason I retain, in the last analysis, a sense of optimism. This basic optimism, however, is tempered by our apparent inability to make adequate use of these means. Instead we sometimes appear still to be in the grip of the dead hand of a less fortunate past. As a result we often lack the vision to differentiate between short-term advantage and long-term progress, between politically expedient positions and the indispensable objective of creating a civilized and peaceful world order. While such attitudes do not affect the validity of the ideals of the Charter, they seriously impair the proper utilization of the machinery of the United Nations for the purposes for which it was set up.

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We live today in the presence of a chilling and unprecedented phenomenon. At the peak of world power there exist enough nuclear weapons to destroy life on our planet. It seems evident that nothing worthwhile would survive such a holocaust, and this fact, above all else, contains the nuclear confrontation—for the time being at least.

In the middle level of world power there exist vast quantities of sophisticated, so-called conventional weapons. Indeed we have seen some of them in devastating action this very year. These weapons are, by comparison with those of former times, immensely destructive, and they are actually being used. They are also the objects of a highly profitable international trade.

At yet another level we have the poverty of a vast proportion of the world's population—a deprivation inexplicable in terms either of available resources or of the money and ingenuity spent on armaments and war. We have unsolved but soluble problems of economic relations, trade, distribution of resources and technology. We have many ideas and plans as to how to meet the growing needs of the large mass of humanity, but somehow such human considerations seem to take second place to the technology and funding of violence and war in the name of national security.

It is for these reasons that our peoples, especially the young, take to the streets in their hundreds of thousands in many parts of the world to proclaim their peaceful protest against the existing situation and their deep fear of the consequences of the arms race and nuclear catastrophe. Who can say that these gentle protesters are wrong or misguided? On the contrary, they recall us to the standards and the duties which we set ourselves in the Charter of the United Nations. The States Members of this Organization should not ignore the significance of what they are trying to say.

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What in reality is the role and the capacity of the United Nations in such a world? Our Charter was born of six years of global agony and destruction. I sometimes feel that we now take the Charter far less seriously than did its authors, living as they did in the wake of a world tragedy. I believe therefore that an important first step would be a conscious recommitment by Governments to the Charter.

Certainly we have strayed far from the Charter in recent years. Governments that believe they can win an international objective by force are often quite ready to do so, and domestic opinion not infrequently applauds such a course. The Security Council, the primary organ of the United Nations for the maintenance of international peace and security, all too often finds itself unable to take decisive action to resolve international conflicts and its resolutions are increasingly defied or ignored by those that feel themselves strong enough to do so. Too frequently the Council seems powerless to generate the support and influence to ensure that its decisions are respected, even when these are taken unanimously. Thus the process of peaceful settlement of disputes prescribed in the Charter is often brushed aside. Sterner measures for world peace were envisaged in Chapter VII of the Charter, which was conceived as a key element of the United Nations system of collective security, but the prospect of realizing such measures is now deemed almost impossible in our divided international community. We are perilously near to a new international anarchy.

I believe that we are at present embarked on an exceedingly dangerous course, one symptom of which is the crisis in the multilateral approach in international affairs and the concomitant erosion of the authority and status of world and regional intergovernmental institutions. Above all, this trend has adversely affected the United Nations, the instrument that was created specifically to prevent such a self-destructive course. Such a trend must

be reversed before once again we bring upon ourselves a global catastrophe and find ourselves without institutions effective enough to prevent it.

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While I do not propose here to review in detail specific situations and developments, it is, of course, my deep concern about them that leads me to examine the underlying deficiencies of our present system. The tragedy of Lebanon and the imperative need to resolve the problem of the Middle East in all its aspects, including the legitimate rights of the Palestinians and the security of all States in the region; the war between Iran and Iraq; the political situation relating to Afghanistan; the prevailing convulsion of Central America; questions relating to Kampuchea; painful efforts to reach a settlement in Cyprus; the situation in Western Sahara and in the Horn of Africa—these and other potential conflict situations, although often differing widely in their nature, should all be responsive to a respected international system for the peaceful settlement of disputes. Even in the sudden crisis over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas), despite the intensive negotiations which I conducted with the full support and encouragement of the Security Council and which endeavoured to narrow the differences between the parties, it nevertheless proved impossible in the end to stave off the major conflict.

Yet in all of these cases, all of the parties would have gained immeasurably in the long run from the effectiveness of a system for the peaceful settlement of disputes. In the case of Namibia we now see some signs of the possibility of a solution after many setbacks. Let us hope that this will prove a welcome exception to the general rule. But the lesson is clear—something must be done, and urgently, to strengthen our international institutions and to adopt new and imaginative approaches to the prevention and resolution of conflicts. Failure to do so will exacerbate precisely that sense of insecurity which, recently, cast its shadow over the second special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. Despite present difficulties, it is imperative for the United Nations to dispel that sense of insecurity through joint and agreed action in the field of disarmament, especially nuclear disarmament.

I must mention here some of the other main sides of our work. There is the promotion and protection of human rights throughout the world, to which I intend to devote, as a matter of high priority, the attention that is called for by the Charter and made all the more imperative by the current state of world affairs. There are the great humanitarian challenges, often involving large numbers of refugees and displaced persons, whose plight in many parts of the world is the tragic reflection of political strife and economic distress. There is the grave and as yet unsolved problem of *apartheid.* There is, furthermore, the whole spectrum of issues related to social and economic development, which so vitally affect both present conditions and future prospects. My statement to the Economic and Social Council on 7 July of this year provided an opportunity to review the latter, to call for action and to express my concern on the stalemate in the North-South dialogue and the difficulties encountered in furthering global negotiations and measures to promote world economic recovery.

In our endeavour to carry out this extremely wide and demanding range of tasks, a fundamental requirement is the continued dedication, integrity and professionalism of the international civil service. I expect the highest standards from the staff of the Secretariat and, for my part, am determined to protect their independence and to ensure that performance and merit are the essential criteria for professional advancement. I have already defined as one of my first priorities the attainment of enhanced efficiency in the Secretariat, which must be worthy of the full confidence of Member States. I will continue to devote every effort towards an improved, unified and coherent administration.

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It seems to me that our most urgent goal is to reconstruct the Charter concept of collective action for peace and security so as to render the United Nations more capable of carrying out its primary function. It was the lack of an effective system of collective security through the League of Nations that, among other factors, led to the Second World War. Although we now face a vastly changed world situation, Governments in fact need more than ever a workable system of collective security in which they can have real confidence. Without such a system, Governments will feel it necessary to arm themselves beyond their means for their own security, thereby increasing the general insecurity. Without such a system, the world community will remain powerless to deal with military adventures which threaten the very fabric of international peace, and the danger of the widening and escalation of local conflicts will be correspondingly greater. Without such a system there will be no reliable defence or shelter for the small and weak. And without such a system all of our efforts on the economic and social side, which also need their own collective impetus, may well falter.

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There are many ways in which Governments could actively assist in strengthening the system prescribed in the Charter. More systematic, less last-minute use of the Security Council would be one means. If the Council were to keep an active watch on dangerous situations and, if necessary, initiate discussions with the parties before they reach the point of crisis, it might often be possible to defuse them at an early stage before they degenerate into violence.

Unfortunately there has been a tendency to avoid bringing critical problems to the Security Council, or to do so too late for the Council to have any serious influence on their development. It is essential to reverse this trend if the Council is to play its role as the primary world authority for international peace and security. I do not believe that it is necessarily wise or responsible of the Council to leave such matters to the judgement of the conflicting parties to the point where the Council's irrelevance to some ongoing wars becomes a matter of comment by world public opinion.

In recent years the Security Council has resorted increasingly to the valuable process of informal consultations. However there is sometimes a risk that this process may become a substitute for action by the Security Council or even an excuse for inaction. Along the same line of thought, it may be useful for the Council to give renewed consideration to reviewing and streamlining its practices and procedures with a view to acting swiftly and decisively in crises.

Adequate working relations between the permanent members of the Security Council are a *sine qua non* of the Council's effectiveness. Whatever their relations may be outside the United Nations, within the Council the permanent members, which have special rights and special responsibilities under the Charter, share a sacred trust that should not go by default owing to their bilateral

difficulties. When this happens, the Council and therefore the United Nations are the losers, since the system of collective security envisaged by the Charter presupposes, at the minimum, a working relationship among the permanent members. I appeal to the members of the Council, especially its permanent members, to reassess their obligations in that regard and to fulfil them at the high level of responsibility indicated in the Charter.

There is a tendency in the United Nations for Governments to act as though the passage of a resolution absolved them from further responsibility for the subject in question. Nothing could be further from the intention of the Charter. In fact resolutions, particularly those unanimously adopted by the Security Council, should serve as a springboard for governmental support and determination and should motivate their policies outside the United Nations. This indeed is the essence of the treaty obligation which the Charter imposes on Member States. In other words the best resolution in the world will have little practical effect unless Governments of Member States follow it up with the appropriate support and action.

Very often the Secretary-General is allotted the function of following up on the implementation of a resolution. Without the continuing diplomatic and other support of Member States, the Secretary-General's efforts often have less chance of bearing fruit. Concerted diplomatic action is an essential complement to the implementation of resolutions. I believe that in reviewing one of the greatest problems of the United Nations—lack of respect for its decisions by those to whom they are addressed—new ways should be considered of bringing to bear the collective influence of the membership on the problem at hand.

The same consideration applies to good offices and negotiations of various kinds undertaken at the behest of the Security Council. Very often a Member State or group of Member States with a special relationship to those involved in such negotiations could play an extremely important reinforcing role in promoting understanding and a positive attitude.

In order to avoid the Security Council becoming involved too late in critical situations, it may well be that the Secretary-General should play a more forthright role in bringing potentially dangerous situations to the attention of the Council within the general framework of Article 99 of the Charter. My predecessors have done this on a number of occasions, but I wonder if the time has not come for a more systematic approach. Most potential conflict areas are well known. The Secretary-General has traditionally, if informally, tried to keep watch for problems likely to result in conflict and to do what he can to pre-empt them by quiet diplomacy. The Secretary-General's diplomatic means are, however, in themselves quite limited. In order to carry out effectively the preventive role foreseen for the Secretary-General under Article 99, I intend to develop a wider and more systematic capacity for fact-finding in potential conflict areas. Such efforts would naturally be undertaken in close co-ordination with the Council. Moreover, the Council itself could devise more swift and responsive procedures for sending good offices missions, military or civilian observers or a United Nations presence to areas of potential conflict. Such measures could inhibit the deterioration of conflict situations and might also be of real assistance to the parties in resolving incipient disputes by peaceful means.

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Peace-keeping operations have generally been considered to be one of the most successful innovations of the United Nations, and certainly their record over the years is one of which to be proud. They have proved to be a most useful instrument of de-escalation and conflict control and have extended the influence of the Security Council into the field in a unique way. I may add that United Nations peace-keeping operations have traditionally shown an admirable degree of courage, objectivity and impartiality. This record, which is a great credit to the Organization, is sometimes overlooked in the heat of partisanship.

The limitations of peace-keeping operations are less well understood. Thus when, as happened recently, a peace-keeping operation is overrun or brushed aside, the credibility both of the United Nations and of peace-keeping operations as such is severely shaken.

It is not always realized that peace-keeping operations are the visible part of a complex framework of political and diplomatic efforts and of countervailing pressures designed to keep the peace-keeping efforts and related peace-making efforts effective. It is assumed that the Security Council itself and those Member States in a position to bring influence to bear will be able to act decisively to ensure respect for decisions of the Council. If this framework breaks down, as it did for example in Lebanon last June, there is little that a United Nations peace-keeping force can by itself do to rectify the situation. Indeed in such circumstances it tends to become the scapegoat for the developments that follow.

Peace-keeping operations can function properly only with the co-operation of the parties and on a clearly defined mandate from the Security Council. They are based on the assumption that the parties, in accepting a United Nations peace-keeping operation, commit themselves to co-operating with it. This commitment is also required by the Charter, under which all concerned have a clear obligation to abide by the decisions of the Council. United Nations peace-keeping operations are not equipped, authorized, or indeed made available, to take part in military activities other than peace-keeping. Their main strength is the will of the international community which they symbolize. Their weakness comes to light when the political assumptions on which they are based are ignored or overridden.

I recommend that Member States, especially the members of the Security Council, should again study urgently the means by which our peace-keeping operations could be strengthened. An increase in their military capacity or authority is only one possibility—a possibility which may well give rise in some circumstances to serious political and other objections. Another possibility is to underpin the authority of peace-keeping operations by guarantees, including explicit guarantees for collective or individual supportive action.

In recent months, two multinational forces were set up outside the framework of the United Nations to perform peace-keeping tasks, because of opposition to United Nations involvement either within or outside the Security Council. While understanding the circumstances which led to the establishment of these forces, I find such a trend disturbing because it demonstrates the difficulties the Security Council encounters in fulfilling its responsibilities as the primary organ for the maintenance of international peace and security in the prevailing political conditions.

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We should examine with the utmost frankness the reasons for the reluctance of parties to some conflicts to resort to the Security Council or to use the machinery of the United Nations. The fact is that the Council too often

finds itself on the sidelines at a time when, according to the Charter, its possibilities should be used to the maximum. Allegations of partisanship, indecisiveness or incapacity arising from divisions among Member States are sometimes invoked to justify this side-tracking of the Council. We should take such matters with the utmost seriousness and ask ourselves what justifications, if any, there are for them and what can be done to restore the Council to the position of influence it was given in the Charter.

This last problem also applies to other organs of the United Nations and brings me to the question of the validity and utility of the United Nations as a negotiating forum. We have seen, in the case of the law of the sea for example, what remarkable results can be achieved in well-organized negotiations within the United Nations framework, even on the most complex of issues and even though there was no unanimous agreement. On the peace and security side, the Security Council has shown and continues to show that it is often capable of negotiating important basic resolutions on difficult problems. The General Assembly also has to its credit historic documents negotiated in that organ and in its subsidiary organs, not only on the political but also on the economic and social side.

But in spite of all this I am concerned that the possibilities of the United Nations, especially of the Security Council, as a negotiating forum for urgent international problems are not being sufficiently realized or used. Let us consider what is perhaps our most formidable international problem—the Middle East. It is absolutely essential that serious negotiations on the various aspects of that problem involve all the parties concerned at the earliest possible time. Far too much time has already elapsed, far too many lives and far too many opportunities have been lost, and too many *faits accomplis* have been created.

I feel that the Security Council, the only place in the world where all of the parties concerned can sit at the same table, could become a most useful forum for this absolutely essential effort. But if this is to be done, careful consideration will have to be given to what procedures, new if necessary, should be used and what rules should govern the negotiations. I do not believe that a public debate, which could well become rhetorical and confrontational, will be enough. Other means will have to be used as well if negotiations on such a complex and deeply rooted problem are to have any useful outcome. The devising of such means is certainly well within the ingenuity and capacity of concerned Member States.

A related question to which we should give more consideration concerns what are productive and what are counter-productive approaches to the different aspects of our work. Obviously, a parliamentary debate may generate rhetoric, and sometimes even a touch of acrimony. But negotiations and the resolution of urgent problems require a different approach. Debate without effective action erodes the credibility of the Organization. I feel that in the United Nations, if we wish to achieve results, we must make a more careful study of the psychological and political aspects of problems and address ourselves to our work accordingly. It is insufficient to indulge in a course of action that merely tends to strengthen extreme positions.

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The United Nations is now 37 years old. It has survived a period of unprecedented change in almost all aspects of human life. The world of 1982 is vastly different from that of 1945, and that difference is reflected in the United Nations. In other words, the Organization has had to adapt to new circumstances to a quite unexpected extent. But it is not enough for the United Nations merely to reflect change or conflict. The Organization was intended to present to the world the highest common denominator of international behaviour and, in doing so, to develop a binding sense of international community. It was to that end that Governments drafted and ratified the Charter. Amid the various perils that now threaten the orderly progress of humanity, I hope that we can rally once again to the standards of the Charter, beginning with the peaceful settlement of disputes and steadily branching out towards the other objectives of that prophetic document.

Finally let me appeal to all Governments to make a serious effort to reinforce the protective and pre-emptive ring of collective security which should be our common shelter and the most important task of the United Nations. The will to use the machinery of the Charter needs to be consciously strengthened, and all Governments must try to look beyond short-term national interests to the great possibilities of a more stable system of collective international security, as well as to the very great perils of failing to develop such a system. For these reasons I would suggest that consideration be given to the usefulness of holding a meeting of the Security Council at the highest possible level, one object of which might be to discuss in depth some of the problems I have mentioned.

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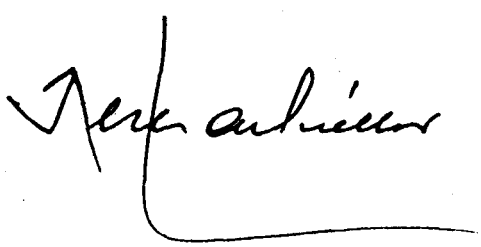
Member States will, I hope, understand if I end this report on a personal note. Last year I was appointed Secretary-General of this Organization, which embodies the noblest hopes and aspirations of the peoples of the world and whose functions and aims under the Charter are certainly the highest and most important ever entrusted to an international institution. This year, time after time we have seen the Organization set aside or rebuffed, for this reason or for that, in situations in which it should, and could, have played an important and constructive role. I think this tendency is dangerous for the world community and dangerous for the future. As one who has to play a highly public role in the Organization, I cannot disguise my deep anxiety at present trends, for I am absolutely convinced that the United Nations is indispensable in a world fraught with tension and peril. Institutions such as this are not built in a day. They require constant constructive work and fidelity to the principles on which they are based.

We take the United Nations seriously when we desperately need it. I would urge that we also seriously consider the practical ways in which it should develop its capacity and be used as an essential institution in a stormy and uncertain world.



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