

GENERAL
ASSEMBLY

SEVENTH SESSION

Official Records



PLENARY MEETING

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Headquarters, New York

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President: Mr. Lester B. PEARSON (Canada).

Address by Mr. Lester B. Pearson, President of the seventh session

1. The PRESIDENT: I have called this 377th meeting of the General Assembly to order with a gavel which has just been presented to the United Nations by the Government of Iceland, that country of free and representative government over so many centuries; therefore, to the list of gifts which were mentioned this morning by the Secretary-General, this gift should also be added.

2. My first words must be of appreciation to my fellow representatives for having conferred this great honour on me. I shall do my best to justify their confidence and to discharge to their satisfaction the responsibilities of the presidency. I realize, of course, that the choice of a Canadian for this office is not a personal one, but a recognition of my country's profound desire to serve the purposes of the United Nations and to fulfil loyally its obligations of membership.

3. A fine example of impartiality and efficiency has been set by my distinguished predecessors in this office. Possibly I may be permitted to make special mention of my immediate predecessor, Mr. Padilla Nervo, who has just vacated this chair which he has filled with such distinction.

4. As presiding officer I shall, no doubt, make mistakes both of omission and commission, but I give the Assembly my assurance that they will not be mistakes from prejudice or partiality.

5. The Assembly opens for the first time in our new and permanent headquarters. As was pointed out this morning by more than one speaker, we owe a great debt to all who have contributed their skills, their labour and their resources to the completion of these impressive—indeed, breath-taking—buildings whose facilities will so greatly aid our work in the years ahead. There is, I think, a happy symbolism in the structure of our new headquarters, part of it reaching upwards towards the heavens and part fixed firmly and steadily on the ground. The reconciliation of these two features is, I suppose, difficult in the art of architecture. It is even more difficult in the science of politics and in the conduct of international affairs.

6. It would be ideal to pretend that the Assembly has assigned to me an easy or an enviable task. The presidents of earlier Assemblies have spoken realistically and frankly of the atmosphere of tension and crisis in which those sessions have taken place. In doing so they reflected the deep and abiding concern which all of us have felt at the complexity—indeed, at times, the intractability—of the problems we face. Failure to solve these problems has enveloped the world in fear, and, in history, fear has always bred antagonisms, even hatreds, and has been the precursor of conflict. And so it is in our time. To avoid the ultimate tragedy of war, we must remove this black shadow of tension and anxiety by finding, through international action, a solution to present problems which will permit peoples and governments to live together, if not on the basis of close friendship, at least on that of mutual toleration and understanding. There is no organization, no mechanism, no procedure which can take the place of the United Nations in the search for this solution. This Assembly, therefore, will fail in its mission of peace if it does not take full advantage of every opportunity to lessen the fears that are in our minds and soften the animosities that are in our hearts.

7. The task will not be easy for the General Assembly of 1952 faced with its own crises. The effort by the United Nations to bring about an armistice in Korea on honourable terms—which would be the only ones acceptable—remains frustrated and unsuccessful. So the United Nations has not been able to move forward into the positive phases of peaceful settlement and reconstruction in the area which should be possible, on the basis of decisions already taken by us, once the aggression has been stopped and the fighting ended. Any who prevent this armistice—the first step in the process of healing and restoration—bear a heavy responsibility before history and humanity.

8. Nor have other conflicts—waged without arms—diminished in intensity since our last session. There is no armistice in what is called the "cold war", and without that armistice we cannot begin another essential work of international peace, the most essential work of all—the bridging of the deep and deadly gulf which, in the world today, so tragically divides peoples

and governments which fought together against aggression a few long years ago.

9. There is another major problem which confronts this Assembly, and possibly in a more acute form than previously. How can national self-expression—a dynamic and essential force in every part of the world—realize itself without setting in motion tensions which will endanger the whole structure of international co-operation? A year ago, in Paris, my predecessor, Mr. Padilla Nervo, pointed out [333rd meeting] that the freedom of nations and the freedom of individuals was an indispensable condition for peace. Of course, we all agree with him. But in the building of a peaceful and progressive world community, that freedom must, of course, be coupled with responsibility and restraint.

10. These are issues with which you will be called upon to deal at this session of the Assembly, and they may well impose as severe a test on our world organization as any it has faced in recent years.

11. The United Nations must, moreover, meet these tests without violating its Charter or without trying to do things it was not meant to do and has not the resources or power to do. The United Nations, we should not forget, is not a super-government. It is basically a multilateral treaty—though one of tremendous scope and authority—which has been ratified by the great majority of sovereign States and which, by the consent of its Members, has set up machinery to serve its purposes of ensuring peace and promoting human welfare.

12. Each of us, in helping to achieve this purpose, bears a responsibility towards the people in his own country. As Members of the United Nations, we also bear a responsibility towards each other. Finally, we share together a responsibility to the world community for seeing to it that the principles of the Charter and of the international law and procedure which we have slowly but surely been building, are interpreted with judgment as well as with vision, and with moderation as well as with justice.

13. I hope that we, at this seventh session of the General Assembly, shall discharge honourably and well

this threefold obligation. As the representative whom you have so greatly honoured by election to its presidency, I pledge by own best endeavours to this end.

Establishment of the *Ad Hoc* Political Committee

14. The PRESIDENT: The Main Committees, according to a practice which has been established over previous years, will hold successive meetings this afternoon in this hall for the purpose of electing their chairmen. These elections constitute one of the organizational steps which must be taken for the constitution of the General Committee.

15. However, before we proceed with that essential step, I should like to consult the Assembly with regard to the establishment of the *Ad Hoc* Political Committee. The General Assembly, at its last four regular sessions, established an *Ad Hoc* Political Committee, and delegations have always come to the Assembly—and I presume they have also come this year—prepared to assign delegation members to that Committee and subjects that can be allocated from our agenda to it.

16. I should like, therefore, to point out that before the Assembly takes up the question of the six other regular committees, we should decide now on two questions. The first is the setting up of the *Ad Hoc* Political Committee which, in accordance with precedent, has now become rather well established. The second is that, as this *Ad Hoc* Political Committee has now become a regular part of our work and promises to remain so, its Chairman should be accorded, during the seventh session, full rights of membership in the General Committee, which includes the right to vote. If the Assembly adopts these two proposals, the Chairman of the *Ad Hoc* Political Committee could be elected this afternoon during a series of committee meetings at which the other chairmen are to be elected.

17. If there is no objection to these proposals, I shall consider them adopted.

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 3.25 p.m.