

ADDRESS TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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an historical speech

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Twenty-seven years ago, as Emperor of Ethiopia, I mounted the rostrum in Geneva, Switzerland, to address the League of Nations and to appeal for relief from the destruction which had been unleashed against my defenseless nation, by the Fascist invader. I spoke then both to and for the conscience of the world. My words went unheeded, but history testifies to the accuracy of the warning that I gave in 1936.

Today, I stand before the world organization which has succeeded to the mantle discarded by its discredited predecessor. In this body is enshrined the principle of collective security which I unsuccessfully invoked at Geneva. Here, in this Assembly, reposes the best—perhaps the last—hope for the peaceful survival of mankind.

In 1936, I declared that it was not the Covenant of the League that was at stake, but international morality. Undertakings, I said then, are of little worth if the will to keep them is lacking. The Charter of the United Nations expresses the noblest aspirations of man: abjuration of force in the settlement of disputes between states; the assurance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion; the safeguarding of international peace and security.

But these, too, as were the phrases of the Covenant, are only words; their value depends wholly on our will to observe and honor them and give them content and meaning. The preservation of peace and the guaranteeing of man's basic freedoms and rights require courage and eternal vigilance: courage to speak and act—and if necessary, to suffer and die—for truth and justice; eternal vigilance, that the least transgression of international morality shall not go undetected and unremedied. These lessons must be learned anew by each succeeding generation, and that generation is fortunate indeed which learns from other than its own bitter experience. This Organization and each of its members bear a crushing and awesome responsibility: to absorb the wisdom of history and to apply it to the problems of the present, in order that future generations may be born, and live, and die, in peace.

The record of the United Nations during the few short years of its life affords mankind a solid basis for encouragement and hope for the future. The United Nations has dared to act, when the League dared not in Palestine, in Korea, in Suez, in the Congo. There is not one among us today who does not conjecture upon the reaction of this body when motives and actions are called into question. The opinion of this Organization today acts as a powerful influence upon the decisions of its members. The spotlight of world opinion, focused by the United Nations upon the transgressions of the renegades of human society, has thus far proved an effective safeguard against unchecked aggression and unrestricted violation of human rights.

The United Nations continues to serve as the forum where nations whose interests clash may lay their cases before world opinion. It still provides the essential escape valve without which the slow build-up of pressures would have long since resulted in catastrophic explosion. Its actions and decisions have speeded the achievement of freedom by many peoples on the continents of Africa and Asia. Its efforts have contributed to the advancement of the standard of living of peoples in all corners of the world.

For this, all men must give thanks. As I stand here today, how faint, how remote are the memories of 1936. How different in 1963 are the attitudes of men. We then existed in an atmosphere of suffocating pessimism. Today, cautious yet buoyant optimism is the prevailing spirit.

But each one of us here knows that what has been accomplished is not enough. The United Nations judgments have been and continue to be subject to frustration, as individual member-states have ignored its pronouncements and disregarded its recommendations. The Organization's sinews have been weakened, as member-states have shirked their obligations to it. The authority of the Organization has been mocked, as individual member-states have proceeded, in violation of its commands, to pursue their own aims and ends. The troubles which continue to plague us virtually all arise among member states of the Organization, but the Organization remains impotent to enforce acceptable solutions. As the maker and enforcer of the international law, what the United Nations has achieved still falls regrettably short of our goal of an international community of nations.

This does not mean that the United Nations has failed. I have lived too long to cherish many illusions about the essential high mindedness of men when brought into stark confrontation with the issue of control over their security, and their property interests. Not even now, when so much is at hazard would many nations willingly entrust their destinies to other hands.

Yet, this is the ultimatum presented to us: secure the conditions whereby men will entrust their security to a larger entity, or risk annihilation; persuade men that their salvation rests in the subordination of national and local interests to the interests of humanity, or endanger man's future. These are the objectives, yesterday unobtainable, today essential, which we must labor to achieve.

Until this is accomplished, mankind's future remains hazardous and permanent peace a matter for speculation. There is no single magic formula, no one simple step, no words, whether written into the Organization's Charter or into a treaty between states, which can automatically guarantee to us what we seek. Peace is a day-to-day problem, the product of a multitude of events and judgements.

Peace is not an “is”, it is a “becoming.” We cannot escape the dreadful possibility of catastrophe by miscalculation.

But we can reach the right decisions on the myriad subordinate problems which each new day poses, and we can thereby make our contribution and perhaps the most that can be reasonably expected of us in 1963 to the preservation of peace. It is here that the United Nations has served us—not perfectly, but well. And in enhancing the possibilities that the Organization may serve us better, we serve and bring closer our most cherished goals.

I would mention briefly today two particular issues which are of deep concern to all men: disarmament and the establishment of true equality among men. Disarmament has become the urgent imperative of our time. I do not say this because I equate the absence of arms to peace, or because I believe that bringing an end to the nuclear arms race automatically guarantees the peace, or because the elimination of nuclear warheads from the arsenals of the world will bring in its wake that change in attitude requisite to the peaceful settlement of disputes between nations. Disarmament is vital today, quite simply, because of the immense destructive capacity of which men dispose.

Ethiopia supports the atmospheric nuclear test ban treaty as a step towards this goal, even though only a partial step. Nations can still perfect weapons of mass destruction by underground testing. There is no guarantee against the sudden, unannounced resumption of testing in the atmosphere.

The real significance of the treaty is that it admits of a tacit stalemate between the nations which negotiated it, a stalemate which recognizes the blunt, unavoidable fact that none would emerge from the total destruction which would be the lot of all in a nuclear war, a stalemate which affords us and the United Nations a breathing space in which to act.

Here is our opportunity and our challenge. If the nuclear powers are prepared to declare a truce, let us seize the moment to strengthen the institutions and procedures which will serve as the means for the pacific settlement of disputes among men. Conflicts between nations will continue to arise. The real issue is whether they are to be resolved by force, or by resort to peaceful methods and procedures, administered by impartial institutions. This very Organization itself is the greatest such institution, and it is in a more powerful United Nations that we seek, and it is here that we shall find, the assurance of a peaceful future.

Were a real and effective disarmament achieved and the funds now spent in the arms race devoted to the amelioration of man's state; were we to concentrate only on the peaceful uses of nuclear knowledge, how vastly and in how short a time might we change the conditions of mankind. This should be our goal.

When we talk of the equality of man, we find, also, a challenge and an opportunity; a challenge to breathe new life into the ideals enshrined in the Charter, an opportunity to bring men closer to freedom and true equality, and thus, closer to a love of peace.

The goal of the equality of man which we seek is the antithesis of the exploitation of one people by another with which the pages of history and in particular those written of the African and Asian continents, speak at such length. Exploitation, thus viewed, has many faces. But whatever guise it assumes, this evil is to be shunned where it does not exist and crushed where it does. It is the sacred duty of this Organization to ensure that the dream of equality is finally realized for all men to whom it is still denied, to guarantee that exploitation is not reincarnated in other forms in places whence it has already been banished.

As a free Africa has emerged during the past decade, a fresh attack has been launched against exploitation, wherever it still exists. And in that interaction so common to history, this in turn, has stimulated and encouraged the remaining dependent peoples to renewed efforts to throw off the yoke which has oppressed them and its claim as their birthright the twin ideals of liberty and equality. This very struggle is a struggle to establish peace, and until victory is assured, that brotherhood and understanding which nourish and give life to peace can be but partial and incomplete.

In the United States of America, the administration of President Kennedy is leading a vigorous attack to eradicate the remaining vestige of racial discrimination from this country. We know that this conflict will be won and that right will triumph. In this time of trial, these efforts should be encouraged and assisted, and we should lend our sympathy and support to the American Government today.

Last May, in Addis Ababa, I convened a meeting of Heads of African States and Governments. In three days, the thirty-two nations represented at that Conference demonstrated to the world that when the will and the determination exist, nations and peoples of diverse backgrounds can and will work together, in unity, to the achievement of common goals and the assurance of that equality and brotherhood which we desire.

On the question of racial discrimination, the Addis Ababa Conference taught, to those who will learn, this further lesson:

- That until the philosophy which holds one race superior and another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned;
- That until there are no longer first class and second class citizens of any nation;
- That until the color of a man's skin is of no more significance than the color of his eyes;
- That until the basic human rights are equally guaranteed to all without regard to race;
- That until that day, the dream of lasting peace and world citizenship and the rule of international morality will remain but a fleeting illusion, to be pursued but never attained.
- And until the ignoble and unhappy regimes that hold our brothers in Angola, in Mozambique and in South Africa in subhuman bondage have been toppled and destroyed;
- Until bigotry and prejudice and malicious and inhuman self-interest have been replaced by understanding and tolerance and good-will;
- Until all Africans stand and speak as free beings, equal in the eyes of all men, as they are in the eyes of Heaven;
- Until that day, the African continent will not know peace. We Africans will fight, if necessary, and we know that we shall win, as we are confident in the victory of good over evil.

The United Nations has done much, both directly and indirectly to speed the disappearance of discrimination and oppression from the earth. Without the opportunity to focus world opinion on Africa and Asia which this Organization provides, the goal, for many, might still lie ahead, and the struggle would have taken far longer. For this, we are truly grateful.

But more can be done. The basis of racial discrimination and colonialism has been economic, and it is with economic weapons that these evils have been and can be overcome. In pursuance of resolutions adopted at the Addis Ababa Summit Conference, African States have undertaken certain measures in the economic field which, if adopted by all member states of the United Nations, would soon reduce intransigence to reason. I ask, today, for adherence to these measures by every nation represented here which is truly devoted to the principles enunciated in the Charter.

I do not believe that Portugal and South Africa are prepared to commit economic or physical suicide if honorable and reasonable alternatives exist. I believe that such alternatives can be found.

But I also know that unless peaceful solutions are devised, counsels of moderation and temperance will avail for naught; and another blow will have been dealt to this Organization which will hamper and weaken still further its usefulness in the struggle to ensure the victory of peace and liberty over the forces of strife and oppression. Here, then, is the opportunity presented to us. We must act while we can, while the occasion exists to exert those legitimate pressures available to us, lest time run out and resort be had to less happy means.

Does this Organization today possess the authority and the will to act? And if it does not, are we prepared to clothe it with the power to create and enforce the rule of law? Or is the Charter a mere collection of words, without content and substance, because the essential spirit is lacking? The time in which to ponder these questions is all too short. The pages of history are full of instances in which the unwanted and the shunned nonetheless occurred because men waited to act until too late. We can brook no such delay.

If we are to survive, this Organization must survive. To survive, it must be strengthened. Its executive must be vested with great authority. The means for the enforcement of its decisions must be fortified, and, if they do not exist, they must be devised. Procedures must be established to protect the small and the weak when threatened by the strong and the mighty. All nations which fulfill the conditions of membership must be admitted and allowed to sit in this assemblage.

Equality of representation must be assured in each of its organs. The possibilities which exist in the United Nations to provide the medium whereby the hungry may be fed, the naked clothed, the ignorant instructed, must be seized on and exploited for the flower of peace is not sustained by poverty and want.

To achieve this requires courage and confidence. The courage, I believe, we possess. The confidence must be created, and to create confidence we must act courageously.

The great nations of the world would do well to remember that in the modern age even their own fates are not wholly in their hands. Peace demands the united efforts of us all. Who can foresee what spark might ignite the fuse? It is not only the small and the weak who must scrupulously observe their obligations to the United Nations and to each other. Unless the smaller nations are accorded their proper voice in the settlement of the world's problems, unless the equality which Africa and Asia have struggled to attain is reflected in expanded membership in the institutions which make up the United Nations, confidence will come just that much harder. Unless the rights of the least of men are as assiduously protected as those of the greatest, the seeds of confidence will fall on barren soil.

The stake of each one of us is identical—life or death. We all wish to live. We all seek a world in which men are freed of the burdens of ignorance, poverty, hunger and disease. And we shall all be hard-pressed to escape the deadly rain of nuclear fall-out should catastrophe overtake us.

When I spoke at Geneva in 1936, there was no precedent for a head of state addressing the League of Nations. I am neither the first, nor will I be the last head of state to address the United Nations, but only I have addressed both the League and this Organization in this capacity.

The problems which confront us today are, equally, unprecedented. They have no counterparts in human experience. Men search the pages of history for solutions, for precedents, but there are none.

This, then, is the ultimate challenge. Where are we to look for our survival, for the answers to the questions which have never before been posed?

We must look, first, to Almighty God, Who has raised man above the animals and endowed him with intelligence and reason. We must put our faith in Him, that He will not desert us or permit us to destroy humanity which He created in His image.

And we must look into ourselves, into the depth of our souls. We must become something we have never been and for which our education and experience and environment have ill-prepared us. We must become bigger than we have been: more courageous, greater in spirit, larger in outlook. We must become members of a new race, overcoming petty prejudice, owing our ultimate allegiance not to nations but to our fellow men within the human community.



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