6th Session

344th Plenary Meeting, 14th November, 1951
by Sir Benegal N Rau

I should like to begin as so many others before me have done, by expressing my delegation's grateful appreciation of the warm welcome extended to us by the Government of France.

The United Nations has now completed the first five years of its life, a period long enough to permit a review of its activities and the drawing up of a balance sheet of its achievements and failures. Such a survey would show

that we have no ground for undue pessimism or for undue complacency, and that while there is room for hope, there is also need for ceaseless effort. I have, however, no time for a comprehensive review and must content myself with a brief reference to what appears to us to be the most promising

achievement of the Organization during the last five years, and then to one or two of our main failures.

Undoubtedly, our most important achievement has been in the economic and social field, particularly the systematic aid which the United Nations has begun to give to under-developed countries. The scale of this aid will have to be multiplied many times before it can perceptibly reduce the dimension of the problem, for two- thirds of the world's total population has still, amongst it, less than one-sixth of the world's total income, and nearly one-half of the world's population still lives well below the minimum necessary for health and efficiency. But the important point is that the United Nations has made a

beginning, and more important still, there is a general awareness today, as never before, of the responsibility of governments and individuals in the more advanced countries of the world for the uplift of the under- developed. The spirit of our Charter, with its promise of "better standards of life in larger freedom" has begun to influence the activities of governments and groups of governments, of private foundations and even private individuals. I have said that this spirit has begun to affect even private individuals I have had several proofs of this in recent months in New York; it will suffice to mention only the latest. A few weeks ago an American couple who have honoured me with their friendship offered in effect to make a gift of the cost of two tube-wells to be sunk in any Indian village where they were needed. Quite a small project: in terms of money it may mean some $10,000 to $15,000, but as a seed of goodwill between the peoples of the two countries it is of an incalculable value. It may inspire others to like generosity and there is also the possibility that the village receiving the gift may, in its turn, out of its increased crop production, repay the donors by making a similar gift to a neighbouring village, and so on, until there is a whole network of wells over a large area. Thus the original gift may multiply and spread from village to village, carrying with it a message of friendship and goodwill between people and people. In these days when there is so much depressing talk of international tension, it is well to remind ourselves that it is not the whole picture and that there is still a reservoir of goodwill among the peoples of the world, upon which we can draw if we will only try.

I have dwelt at some length and in some detail upon this part of the activities of the United Nations because it is of particular significance to India. India is now in the midst of a general election with a total electoral roll of about 175 million voters, based on universal adult franchise. It has been described as the biggest experiment in democracy the world has yet seen. This immense democracy will face formidable problems of low and deteriorating standards of life and if it fails to solve them

quickly, democracy as a form of government may be discredited among the vast populations of the East. We in India are therefore straining every nerve to make it a success, because of our fundamental faith in the ideals of democracy.

Let me now turn for a moment to what the United Nations has so far failed to achieve. We have not yet achieved universality of membership or representation and we cannot yet claim to be an organization fully and truly representing all the countries and the peoples of the world. This is not merely a formal defect; it may seriously impair the usefulness of our deliberations. For example, to mention only one point, we shall soon be discussing plans for reduction of armaments and armed forces, in the absence of any representative of the government controlling one of the most important armies in the world, namely, the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China. My Government's views on the subject of China's representation have been fully explained here more than once and are well known to you all. New China is a fact, and if the United Nations continues to ignore this fact, its deliberations may become somewhat unreal. It is therefore a matter of deep regret to us that the General Assembly should have decided to postpone almost indefinitely consideration of the question of the representation of China in the United Nations.

Another obvious failure is that we have not yet been able to implement the Article of the Charter relating to the regulation of armaments. This is an old theme and it is difficult to say anything new on it. I shall, therefore, repeat what I said last, apologising for the length of the quotation This is what I said:

"At the root of all the conflict inside and outside the United Nations is a pervading fear of aggression...

"We may be sure that the people of no part of the world, whether in the West or in the East or in the Far East or anywhere else, want war, and yet they feel compelled to spend vast sums of money on preparations for defence against aggression. Can we do nothing to dissipate this constant and wasteful dread of war?

"I speak with great diffidence, but the subject is so important that I cannot refrain from making a suggestion or two. The Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and France are all present [here]. Could they not meet... and discuss or re-discuss at least the most outstanding matters of disagreement between them? Could they not have something corresponding to one of those ... periodic meeting of the Security Council which are prescribed in Article 28... of the Charter?

"Perhaps such discussions have not been very fruitful in the past; they may fail again; but the attempt is worth making. Even if nothing else came of them, the Ministers could at least reaffirm jointly what each of their countries has already affirmed separately in signing the Charter, namely, that they would settle all their international disputes by peaceful means, and the psychological effect upon an anxious world would be far from negligible [286th meeting, paras. 93-96]."

That is the suggestion which I ventured, very diffidently, to make last year. I am emboldened to repeat it now, because a somewhat similar suggestion occurs in the inaugural address of the President of the French Republic to which we had the privilege of listening last week [333rd meeting]. Two good reasons can be adduced in favour of the suggestion. The first and most obvious reason is that once war, as a possible solution of

any question, is finally ruled out-the minds of those concerned must inevitably turn to peaceful solutions. And as peaceful solutions emerge, tension will ease and progressive disarmament can be expected to follow. So long as existing tensions continue unabated, it would be unrealistic to expect disarmament.

The other reason is that there is a point beyond which "open disagreements openly arrived at " merely vitiate the atmosphere and retard a solution. We appear to have reached this point now and it is therefore better that outstanding questions should be first discussed privately between those chiefly concerned; any agreements reached can be put forward publicly in the United Nations. This would make discussion less acrimonious and more fruitful. Particularly, as regards disarmament, unless there is a plan agreed

to by all the Powers having large armed forces, a proposal to reduce or abolish armaments or forces would necessarily be unilateral and therefore impracticable. The smaller Powers would probably readily agree to any programme of control of armaments upon which the great Powers were agreed. My delegation knows only too well the difficulties as well as the importance of this subject and will consider most carefully every plan put before us. If any particular plan does not go far enough or is otherwise defective, by all means let us examine the defects and if possible remove them.

So much importance does my delegation attach both to disarmament and to the aiding of under-developed areas that we brought forward a draft resolution linking the two together in the First Committee last year. The idea of the draft resolution was to create a United Nations fund for war against human misery in the underdeveloped areas of the world and to divert to the fund at least a fraction of the vast sums which nations now spend, or feel compelled to spend, on armaments for war against each other.

Even a social

fraction would go a long way. The draft resolution was ultimately withdrawn, because a number of delegations that were sympathetic to the proposal wanted time to study it in detail. If sufficient support is forthcoming, my delegation may revive the proposal during the present session.

Of the subject on the agenda of this session, India is directly concerned in the one relating to the treatment of Indians in the Union of South Africa. It will be recalled, as I said a day or two ago, that in December last the General Assembly adopted a resolution [395 (V)] containing two recommendations the second of which was to be operative if the first one failed. The first one has unfortunately failed because the Union of South Africa was unable to accept it as a basis for any conference and so the General Assembly has

now to consider what should be done to implement the second recommendation. It is no pleasure to my delegation to have to bring this subject year after year before this Assembly. If the Union of South Africa

would accept those ideals of partnership and brotherhood in the Commonwealth of which the distinguished Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom reminded us two or three days ago, the problem would be largely solved.

We in India have been witnessing for some years the rising tide of nationalism not only in our own country but also in various other parts of Asia and Africa. Our own experience shows us that nationalism when thwarted creates difficult problems; but if it is dealt with sympathetically and with understanding and in good time, it responds with friendship and generosity. We greatly hope that this will be borne in mind in dealing with those remaining areas of the world where the natural urge of nationalism has not

yet been satisfied.

I started by referring to the manner in which the activities of the United Nations were influencing even private individuals, but the reverse is also true. During the past twelve months, scores of men and women have come to me with their hopes and fears for the United Nations, with plans and suggestions for the solution of this or that problem, with proposals for improving our system of representation or our mode of voting, with draft resolutions on disarmament and the creation of a world peace force, and so on. I remember, in particular, one old man of ninety, hardly able to walk without support, or even with support, coming to my apartment repeatedly with detailed suggestions for ending the war in Korea. He was a

distinguished lawyer in his day and, in spite of his years, his mind was as active and clear as ever. All this shows how keen and anxious is the interest which a good many people outside the United Nations are taking in its affairs. The United Nations is their great hope and, in some measure, they are the hope of the United Nations. Let the United Nations not fail them.