

Preface

In the statement he made on 31 May 1984 to the opening meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the Fortieth Anniversary of the United Nations in 1985, Mr. Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, Secretary-General of the United Nations, expressed the hope that on the occasion of the commemoration of that anniversary, every Member State would “take a searching look at the impact of the United Nations and of its work on international life. This should include objective assessment of the benefits, tangible and intangible, which have flowed to every Member State, as perceived in the perspective not of narrow short-term interests but of the entire human community and its evaluation. It will also understandably mean an examination of the weaknesses and shortcomings of the Organization and their cause or causes”. The Secretary-General added that he “would like to see each Member State call upon its best thinkers and prominent citizens conversant with world affairs to undertake such a review and to propose concrete programmes of action in order to strengthen commitment to the aims and purposes of the organization”.

The present book was written in the spirit of the Secretary-General’s appeal, and certainly serves the purpose for which the anniversary was commemorated. The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), whose purpose is to enhance the effectiveness of the United Nations, is pleased to undertake publication of this book. Its author, Mr. B.G. Ramcharan, a staff member of the United Nations based in Geneva, makes extensive use of the statements of representatives of Member States on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the United Nations as well as the United Nations Secretary-General’s annual reports and speeches to justify his own views. His defense and illustration of the United Nations deserves to be commended. Furthermore, Mr. Ramcharan expresses a number of ideas and suggests some approaches that are worth considering.

The quest for United Nations reform is born out of a desire to see the world Organization discharge its responsibilities effectively. We all share a responsibility to assist the Organization in identifying practical avenues for responding to the needs of the international community and of organizing its work in such a manner as to enhance its effectiveness. The debates analysed in the present work indicate that practical options are available and that the issue seems to be one of making the necessary decisions in areas where consensus is possible.

I am confident that this book, which represents the views of the author and does not necessarily reflect the view of UNITAR, will be welcomed as an interesting additional input to the ongoing debate concerning the image and the future of the United Nations.

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