FROM the day the United Nations came into being, it has had to face diverse issues arising from massive changes in human affairs. As this transition has generated new demands and expectations, global concerns have vastly multiplied. These range from banishing the spectre of a nuclear holocaust to reducing poverty, eradicating racial discrimination and promoting the rights of the disadvantaged such as women and children, the handicapped and the elderly. Added to them have been emergencies of various kinds: some man-made like armed conflicts, others the result of natural disasters including famine and drought. On all these questions, the United Nations is the central instrument through which States can jointly devise the appropriate policies or courses of action.

Decisions made at the United Nations are often inadequately reported in the world press. It is understandable, therefore, that only those professionally involved are well acquainted with the working of the world Organization. Far removed from the headlines is the quiet drama, the unsung heroism infusing the enterprise of the United Nations in far-flung lands. Unarmed, a blue-bereted soldier dies while trying to keep apart warring parties in a country not his own; a tree is planted to hold back the encroaching desert; a shelter is built for refugees to provide against the coming monsoon; and a malnourished child receives the food vital to her very existence. This is the human face of plans and programmes launched by the world body.

I commend the Yearbook of the United Nations to everyone who wishes to study how, in a particular year, nations addressed the complex problems confronting them. The tale is told without embellishment; the record is of success as well as stalemate but it has to be judged on a continuous basis. At any rate, the direction of the effort—towards a world with steadily less fear, misery and violence and greater order, justice, respect for human rights and compassion—is beyond question.

Javier PÉREZ DE CUÉLLAR
Secretary-General