

Foreword

THE YEAR 1998 was a singularly eventful one in the history of our Organization. The world lived through a period of high tension in February when Iraq seemed set on refusing to comply with its disarmament obligations. As some Member States prepared for military action to enforce compliance with Security Council resolutions, I signed a Memorandum of Understanding on 23 February with the Government of Iraq, which defused the immediate crisis. If fully implemented it would have set a valuable precedent, proving that by united action the United Nations can indeed prevent conflict while furthering its goals, as the founders of the Organization intended. However, renewed non-compliance later in the year led to military action by some Council members in December, and the year ended with the situation in Iraq still far from resolution.

The year also marked the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, bringing into special focus the role of the United Nations in defining and protecting human rights everywhere. It was therefore fitting that 1998 saw the adoption of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, a permanent court to judge crimes of the gravest concern to the international community—genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression.

Events during 1998 served to reaffirm that our work on human rights can never be seen as separate from the Organization's other activities. Rather, it is the common thread running through all of them. Indeed, the reforms of the United Nations which I introduced in 1997 designated human rights as a cross-cutting issue among the other four core areas of our work—peace and security, development cooperation, international economic and social affairs, and humanitarian affairs. In 1998, we saw new challenges emerge in our work to protect and promote human rights worldwide. We witnessed the growing impact of the forces of globalization—both positive and negative. Globalization had generated an unprecedented surge in prosperity, particularly in a number of Asian economies; but the consequences of the 1997 crisis that began in Asia, in which those same forces played a role, included declining gross domestic product, increased poverty, hunger, human rights abuses and violent social unrest.

The pages of the 1998 Yearbook of the United Nations reflect the efforts of the Organization to harness the positive potential of globalization while managing its adverse effects and to formulate the principles, norms and rules that are essential if globalization is to benefit people everywhere.



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