If my review of the past has tended to emphasize wrongs, ruthlessness, and cruelty, this is not because I wish to subscribe to any myth of the guilt of the West. We have far too many myths already. The only purpose in looking at the past is to help diagnose the situation which confronts us now. I want here to stress some of the positive developments which owe their origins to the West.

We live in ‘a world of peoples’. That is my theme. One of the best illustrations of it is the fact that the world is more and more ready to recognize that the rights of the individual human being are a matter of concern for the entire international community. In themselves achievements to date constitute a delicate and fragile trend, which needs to be supported by faith in human values. We are undoubtedly witnessing the birth of a new conscience which will seek to protect and advance the well-being of the individual. Concern for the rights of human beings regardless of their status is a new enough phenomenon anywhere in the world. We would hope to see now that this concern should depend not ‘just on public opinion in this country or that, but on the opinion of the whole world.

Magna Carta, the Bill of Rights, the principles of the American Constitution, the French Declaration of the Rights of Man—these were all designed for domestic consumption only. In the United States of America, even the home market was limited; the ‘fundamental creed’ which states that ‘all men are born equal and are endowed by the Creator with certain inalienable rights’ was not allowed to embrace the Negro slave. In France Napoleon reinstated slavery in territories under French jurisdiction, though liberal principles had driven the leaders of the revolution to abolish it.

The growth of European nationalism which followed the Napoleonic upheaval was based on the idea of the right of peoples to self-determination. A century later this doctrine was given prominence in the proclamations of President Wilson during the first world war: ‘No peace can last or ought to last which does not recognize and accept the principle that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, and that no right anywhere exists to hand peoples about from sovereignty to sovereignty as if they were property’.

Stretching this idea only a little, Japan suggested at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 that the Convention of the League of Nations should include a provision specifically recognizing the equality of all races. The proposal was rejected. All the same, when the League decided to set up the International Labour Organization it implicitly accepted the principle that the economic and social welfare of the individual, to whatever race or country he belonged, was a matter for international concern. Later the League adopted a declaration on the Rights of the Child and set up
special commissions to deal with slavery, forced labour, traffic in narcotics, and traffic in women and children.

Already then there were the refugees. In 1921 the League named Fridtjof Nansen as the first High Commissioner for Refugees. Already during the Second World War Unrra was created to help refugees. The task has now passed to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. Starting with the travel document that came to be known as the ‘Nansen passport’, these agencies have gradually been able to secure for refugees some measure of protection under the law.

Before the League of Nations set up its Permanent Mandates Commission there was no international control over what colonial powers did with the peoples whom they governed. When in 1897 a Swedish missionary called attention to atrocities which were being committed by Belgium against the people of the Congo, it was left to a private organization, the Anti-Slavery Society of Great Britain, to lead the agitation for reform, so that eventually King Leopold of the Belgians was persuaded to set up an international commission of inquiry.

The slave trade
In 1913, Sir John Harris, Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society, reported on the slave trade in the Portuguese African territories, and described it as a crime against international law. The international law he referred to consisted only of a series of agreements signed by the great powers for the suppression of slavery and the slave trade.

The terms of reference of the Permanent Mandates Commission described a mandate as ‘a sacred trust to civilization’. Under the Mandates System, while the eventual independence of certain territories was envisaged, others were to remain under tutelage indefinitely. The cynic may point to the gap between the language of the commission’s terms of reference and what it actually achieved, but the experience which the Permanent Mandates Commission acquired during its twenty-odd years of existence made it possible for the question of dependent territories to be dealt with more effectively when the time came to draft the Charter of the United Nations. Chapters 11, 12, and 13 of the Charter placed the future of the dependent territories squarely in the arena of international responsibility and set self-government as the goal. Through the Charter, the concept of the self-determination of peoples—at one time applied to European peoples only—has been transmitted to the rest of the world. It is no longer possible to limit the application of basic principles to one nation or group of nations. President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill had scarcely reached their home ports after the Atlantic Meeting when a Mr Azikiwe of Nigeria dispatched cables to the Colonial Office in London asking whether the Atlantic Charter was meant to apply to Nigeria.

The wholesale abuse of human rights which occurred in Europe under the Nazi and other totalitarian regimes awakened the international community. Seven specific references to human rights are written into the Charter of the United Nations. It may be argued that here, as with the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations, a vast chasm separates the words from the works; but the nations meeting in San Francisco in 1945 did voluntarily adopt many specific obligations. The
Declaration of Human Rights, adopted on December 10, 1948, derived from the same international concern; it was followed, in 1963, by a Declaration on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination. The delegates of the Union of South Africa did not take part in the voting on this latter declaration.

**Incitement to group hatred**

Thirty-two countries already have legislation on their statute books to protect racial and other minority groups. In most of these countries incitement to group hatred is a crime. Some countries hesitate to introduce legislation of this kind for fear of infringing the right of free speech. It is a legitimate fear, but not I think an insuperable one. Increasingly, court decisions in different parts of the world cite the principles of the Declaration of Human Rights. The ideas and even the very words of the Declaration have been incorporated in the constitutions of several countries. It is becoming accepted practice to embody the objectives of the Declaration in international agreements.

The United Nations is currently at work on draft covenants on the observance of human rights. Among the civil rights will be freedom from arbitrary deprival of life; freedom from torture and cruel, inhumane treatment and punishment; the prohibition of the slave trade; freedom for aliens from arbitrary expulsion from a country; equal rights before the law; the right to recognition as a person before the law; freedom from arbitrary and unlawful interference with privacy, home, or correspondence; and freedom from unlawful attacks on honour and reputation. Among political rights are the right and opportunity to take part in the conduct of public affairs; the right to vote and to be elected; access to public offices; and prohibition of any advocacy of national, racial, or religious hostility that constitutes an incitement to hatred and violence.

Progress on the drafting of the United Nations Covenants has been slow; and the objections which the United States Congress raised in 1953 against their ratification have been a major setback. But the General Assembly has named 1968 as the International Year for Human Rights and has set up a committee to prepare a programme for it. The committee has already suggested that an International Conference on Human Rights should be held in that year. The immediate reaction of some people will be ‘Not another conference!’ But meetings are necessary. This one offers a unique opportunity for representatives of governments and voluntary bodies from all over the world to draw up a code for firm standards of conduct in human relations.

**A Court of Human Rights**

Meanwhile progress is, being made on a regional basis. In 1950 the Council of Europe adopted a convention for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and by 1961 the convention had been ratified by fourteen states. One significant feature of this convention is that it provides for a Court of Human Rights. For some years now attempts have been made to draw up an inter-American Human Rights Convention. The Organization of African Unity may follow these examples soon. If this were to happen we would have a series of regional human rights courts. Perhaps
this may prove to be a practical approach to the problems which have bogged down the work of the commissions set up by the United Nations.

At the moment the powers of the United Nations are limited to helping governments, at their request, in carrying out inquiries and in establishing services to promote human rights. But in some years as many as 25,000 letters reach the U.N. Secretariat on questions of human rights: there are the families which have been forcibly torn asunder, the relatives of people arrested and detained without trial, religious sects that have been persecuted, and the victims of racial and political injustices. For the moment, little can be done beyond referring their cases to the governments concerned. But redress is another matter.

In signing the Charter, all member states of the United Nations accepted obligations on the treatment of the individual human being. But considerably more than that is needed. Where the governments are not living up to their engagements, the ordinary citizen must seize the initiative, so far as it is open to him to do so. If that were easy, the problems would vanish. But indifference and inertia are all too human. Most individual citizens approach social and civic causes with a feeling that they are helpless in the face of mass opinion and popular prejudices. Even where they are conscious of injustice they may lack the civic courage necessary for action. They end up by admitting that they might have been able to take some action before the whole community had been swept into irresponsible and cruel acts. This is the feeling I get as I read extracts from Last Letters from Stalin grad—a collection of letters which Nazi soldiers sent to their families and friends.

Sir Winston Churchill recognized the power of ordinary citizens in his characteristic way; it is reported that when Field-Marshal Stalin asked him how many divisions the Pope had, Sir Winston replied: ‘A number of legions not always visible on parade’. When someone who had been a member of the Human Rights Commission since 1945 was interviewed in 1961 he had this to say: ‘People are waking up. They know how to complain. Years ago there was a vast silence. The most hideous crimes were ignored; people didn’t dare to complain’.

Public opinion can take bizarre forms. One is shocked to learn, for example, that there are people in England who seriously plan to set up an association to finance the wholesale repatriation of coloured immigrants. We must do better than this in the twentieth century; we are in a position to know that whole peoples cannot be wished into oblivion. The British Isles cannot be completely isolated from our multiracial world. Many new states have emerged since the end of the Second World War. Their creation is a result of an alteration in the attitude of the Great Powers. Prime Minister Harold Macmillan summed it up in his famous ‘wind of change’ speech at Capetown, South Africa, in 1960.

But the Great Powers have not completely acclimatized themselves to this wind. There is no paradox here: nations, like human beings, will often act at the top of their moral bent, so to speak, only to find that continuing at this high pitch is a strain. Perhaps this explains recurring expressions of regret that the changes in membership at the United Nations have meant a lowering of standards in diplomatic relations and a loss in the effectiveness and prestige of the Organization. This is not the first time that an exclusive club has bemoaned an increase in its membership. During the Berlin
Congress of 1878 Lord Salisbury wrote home: ‘At Potsdam there are mosquitoes—here there are minor powers. I don’t know which is worse’. In those days the ‘minor powers’ were European.

There are some people who now long for the quiet days of the almost all-white League of Nations. What they forget is that they never cared much for the League either. One European diplomat thought of it as ‘the evil eye’. ‘You may not believe in it’, he said, ‘but it is necessary to take precautions against it’.

A new quality infused international diplomacy after 1960. In the United Nations General Assembly the newly independent states sounded a note of radicalism and directness. The urgency of the needs of under-privileged peoples forces their representatives in the councils of the world into strident postures which contrast rudely with the slower, more subtle and formal diplomacy of the past.

The new generation of small powers do not always see eye to eye with the old ones. The circumstances in which the Dutch left Indonesia, Dr Moussadeq’s nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, and the Suez crisis—each in its different way brought to a head the clash of interests.

Some of the arguments that are used to defend old-established interests do not carry much weight with new nations. The presence, not necessarily the numbers, of non-European states in world assemblies does raise new issues, and none more sensitive and more potentially dangerous than that of equality among nations.

The policy of neutrality and non-alignment of the new states has received varying degrees of condemnation. It has even been described as ‘immoral’ and ‘irresponsible’. But world peace would surely not be made more secure if the new states committed themselves to one or other of the big powers. There is some fear on the part of the big powers of being outvoted on vital issues by the numerical weight of those who bear a lesser responsibility for financing and executing the work of the United Nations. But the big powers are protected in their responsibilities by the unanimity rule of the Security Council.

What is at issue is fundamental. There is the danger that merely ‘counting heads’ may deprive the world of strong leadership which can be provided only by a few great powers. On the other hand, from ignoring the views of small powers it is only a step to the use of force to resolve issues. The small nations, it must be admitted, sometimes seem to forget that they have a vested interest, perhaps the biggest interest of all, in firm standards of international conduct and in the functioning of machinery for enforcing these standards. But the big powers also are ultimately dependent on good international relations.

During recent incidents in the Congo, there were fears that the United Nations intervention, heavily supported by the United States of America, might lead to a racial war which would envelop the whole of southern Africa. The fear was that communists might take advantage of the situation and support black Africans. The possible involvement of all Afro-Asian states was not ruled out. And the same commentators were putting forward the theory that the next world conflict might not be between East and West but rather between white and non-white countries. The idea was that Russia, in spite of her ideological differences, might align herself with Europe and
America against China and the rest of the Afro-Asian world. Speculations of the same sort were given some semblance of probability during the Goa incident in 1961. During a press conference at that time, Mr Nehru observed that international reaction and attitudes towards India had followed along racial lines. He said: ‘I do not like this division of opinion—to put it very crudely, white and black…We are developing a mentality of black against white, distrust of each other, dislike of each other, suspicion of each other’.

The action of the minority government in Rhodesia in seizing power on November 11 pushed to the surface some of the emotions which influence race relations. For a time African organizations appeared to have been stunned. A month has passed in which their frustration has, perhaps, only been increased by the inconclusiveness of the protracted and impassioned discussions in the United Nations, the first channel for the natural desire of the sovereign states of Africa to exercise some influence on events in their continent. Now they feel deceived.

In the conflict between the determination of the white Rhodesians to maintain a system which does injustice to the majority of their fellow citizens, and the African determination to reject and repudiate white supremacy, the good intentions of Britain, aimed at finding a solution which will ultimately do justice to all, seem to satisfy neither side. Reactions such as the decision of the Organization of African Unity to break diplomatic relations with Britain are inspired by memories of the transfer of power to a minority government in South Africa, and the subsequent years of discrimination and humiliation. These feelings have to be taken into account. They may easily explode into one of several kinds of violence; and that violence may well, as President Kaunda of Zambia has pointed out, engulf all of Africa and affect the rest of the world.

**Passions long repressed**

For years Negro spirituals have expressed the feelings of the oppressed; perhaps the world has become too used to the litany of those who appeal to a ‘God of weary years and silent tears’. Now the mood has changed. The Negro poet, Claude McKay, gives notice of this change in his poem ‘If we must die—let us nobly die, so that our precious blood may not be shed in vain . . .’, Waves of passions long muted or repressed are surging to the fore not only in Rhodesia but also in conflicts in other parts of the world. But world opinion too has changed. Until recently the transfer of power to a white minority group might have caused little or no stir. Today it is a problem of international importance. Let us hope that we shall be able to take the next step to recognize without any doubt the rights of man everywhere.

No simple answer can be found. The dilemma calls for statesmanship. In the words of the late Adlai Stevenson: ‘We travel together, passengers on a little space ship dependent on its vulnerable reserves of air and fuel; all committed for our safety to its security and peace; preserved from annihilation only by the care, the work, and, I will say, the love we give our fragile craft’.

We are living in an age of transition, and are undergoing the pains that traditionally accompany this process. The fact that most of the smaller powers are coloured may give the impression that there are vestiges of racial discrimination in international
organizations. The residue of bitterness left over in some cases from the struggle for independence can find its way into international forums. Two instances come to mind: the demonstrations that took place within the buildings of the United Nations after the death of Patrice Lumumba, and the sharp and acrimonious debates provoked by the joint U.S.-Belgian intervention in Stanleyville in December 1964. But relations between the races are not the exclusive breeding-ground of acrimony, and not every quarrel between black man and white man is a racial quarrel. We easily overlook that there are as many quarrels and conflicts within races as between races. There have been European wars, African wars, Red-Indian wars, fought by communities and nations belonging to the same race. Not all modern wars are by any means inter-racial wars. The world, in spite of racist theories, is not instinctively and irretrievably divided into hostile racial camps.

A major conflict of our age is the conflict of ideologies. This, too, may be transitory, because ours is also an age of technology and science, in which objective observation of the phenomenon of life and the systematic application of reason to many aspects of human existence are flourishing as never before. Is it too much to expect that ours can also be an age when the world accepts the fact that ‘our true nationality is mankind’? We live in one world and share a common fate. This truth batters at us at every moment; negatively, we now live in the shadow of nuclear destruction, and have done so for twenty years; positively, our age is also the age when various experiments with systems of government have shown that once the atom of oligarchic society can be split, there is released the truly nuclear energy of the human being.

Too late to plead ignorance
If we allow ourselves to be blindfold by the irrelevancies of race, class, and colour, we can only do so wilfully, for it is too late to plead ignorance. Experiences of the past have taught us that security of the individual must be the concern of the community, and that we must see man in all his rich variety of racial and cultural differences. As I read them, the signs are that the blindfolds of the past are coming off one by one.

In the end we come face to face with the fact that a world of peoples is made up of individuals with their differences and human weaknesses. But when all allowances are made we cannot—individually or collectively—afford to indulge in a false delusion of innocence by hiding behind popular prejudice or the power of the state, and use these as an excuse for betraying standards which we know are vital. We must be prepared to accept full responsibility for what happens now, and for the consequences which will affect our children and our children’s children. Coming generations will live in a world much smaller—in terms of speed and relative distance—than our own, and they will need all the tradition of tolerance that we can build now to give meaning and purpose to human existence.