

Address given by Paul-Henri Spaak (New York, 23 October 1946)

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Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

So here we are, meeting once again. I am happy to welcome you and offer you my best wishes for the success of our proceedings. Since San Francisco, the wisest among us have very often, and with good reason, expressed their satisfaction at seeing Soviet Russia and the United States of America, in contrast to what used to happen after the last war, taking their place among us and playing an active part. And now here is the United States welcoming us on its own soil. Here we are, for the first time, the 51 nations who make up our Organisation, meeting together there. For that reason alone, 23 October 1946 is a historic date. May it be the start of a long period of understanding, cooperation and peace among nations! How proud it makes me to be able to speak for you and tell the men and women of this country about the feelings we have for them, to express the admiration we feel for their passion for work, their genius for organisation, their technology and the prosperity which, thanks to them, reigns over their enormous country. But I would also, in particular, like to mention the gratitude, the thankfulness we owe them for having twice in 25 years deliberately put all their wealth at risk and, through the sacrifice of so many of their children, helped so powerfully to save freedom in the world. They were democracy's arsenal and soon became what was certainly the most powerful part of its army. And we who saw them in our towns and cities, on our roads, in the countryside, rushing to protect us and liberate us, we who have piously kept thousands and thousands of them in our cemeteries, we who know what a joyful, strong, brave nation they are, we are asking them today to help us build peace just as they helped us win the war. Our appeal is not just a selfish appeal: if they respond, it is also, for those who are alive, a way of keeping faith with their dead. Your presence here, Mr President, is telling evidence of the importance the people of the United States attach to our work. So it is not only a great honour, for which we thank you, it is in itself a reason for trust and hope. At what was still a very difficult period of the war, you succeeded to a post held by one of the greatest men of modern times. You were the friend and associate of President Roosevelt and you are, I am sure, the faithful interpreter of his thinking in honouring this first meeting of ours with your presence. Allow us, as we greet you, to extend the tribute we pay you to the great figure of your predecessor and to express the wish that in future, at all times and whoever they may be, the Presidents of the United States will follow the magnificent path of understanding, clear-sightedness and international generosity opened up by Franklin Delano Roosevelt. That was the kind of atmosphere in which they started working. In his report, so sincere and for that very reason so interesting, the Secretary-General has not attempted to hide the fact that we have not so far, as he puts it, succeeded in capturing, as we should have done, the imagination and awakening the enthusiasm of the world's peoples. What a golden opportunity, wouldn't you agree, for the sceptics, the pessimists, the deniers to say: 'Well, what did we tell you!' All the more reason for us, gentlemen, not to be discouraged but to redouble our efforts, correct our mistakes and improve. There are people who cast doubts about what we do, make jokes about it and, pointing to what is difficult, complicated and, of necessity, less than perfect in what we do, are already announcing that we have failed. Have they actually thought about what that would mean? Have they anything to suggest instead of the United Nations? And have they failed to grasp that the dilemma is a simple one: either we succeed or the world will sink back into disorder, chaos and finally war. If that is the alternative, then I think we are fully justified in persevering. Some day in the future, the pessimists may be right for all I know, but I do know that today they are wrong. In San Francisco, they said that the Charter could never be drafted. In London, they said that the Organisation could never be brought to life. Over the last few weeks, they were saying that we would not meet again and now, no doubt, they are saying that we will tear each other to shreds. The Charter has been ratified; the Organisation is working. We are here and we are going to work. Let us try to work well. Working well does not necessarily mean talking a lot. It means having an effective method for achieving practical results — results, something tangible and positive! That is what our people are attentively and anxiously expecting of us. Let us avoid overly lengthy general discussions, speeches better suited to propaganda than to enlightening those who disagree with us, endless bickering over procedure. Let us address the issues squarely, quickly and bravely. Most of all, let us address them in the right spirit. The more I think about it, the more experience I accumulate, the more I come to this conclusion: what we must create and nurture is a genuine, living international spirit. As long as we sincerely, deep down, fail to be convinced that, for better or worse, the 51 of us are no more than a single human community, we will not be able to achieve our aims. This international spirit we so badly need is not something we will acquire straight away. Like all great things, it

can only be the reward of a long effort. To acquire it, we must first practise the virtue of understanding. Our aims are the same and in our heart of hearts we are all, I am quite sure, seeking the good and the happiness of the peoples we represent. Our reflexes, though, our ways of thinking and debating will not always be exactly the same. There are differences between us in terms of race and mentality; our immediate interests are sometimes actually contradictory. Those are obstacles that it would be foolish and even dangerous to disregard. But there is no obstacle which cannot be overcome by generosity, intelligence and pressing need. We all have our faults and our virtues. Understanding each other means, first of all, enriching ourselves. In the difficult task we face, the press has an enormous part to play. On it depends, I think, in the final analysis, the success or the failure of our endeavours. When it comes down to it, it is the press which reports what we say. Every morning and every evening, it comments on our words and our deeds for millions and millions of our fellow humans. The way it sees us is how we end up appearing. In times like these when diplomacy is conducted in public, the objectivity of the press, its sense of proportion, its awareness of the part it plays and the enormous responsibilities it bears can be decisive. I call on it to do us a great service: let it agree not to pointlessly make a drama out of our discussions, even when passions run high; let it, insofar as is humanly possible, drop the sensational side of the news it reports and, instead, be a powerful, active agent of mutual understanding. Most of all, let it not depict any statesman who seeks conciliation and accepts compromises as a weak statesman. That is why we are here, let it not forget: to seek and find the point of balance between our respective interests. We will never find our way there if we fail to grasp that there is almost always something legitimate in the other person's point of view and then refuse to take it into account. To fight and win the war, we had to rely on everyone to help. We need to do the same to build the peace. Let our peoples be resolute but patient. Let the journalists who keep them informed be active but objective. Let the statesmen who lead them be firm but show understanding. How many virtues we will have to possess, gentlemen, if we are to succeed! The object to be achieved is noble enough, great enough, fine enough, it seems to me, to inspire us, to force us to surpass ourselves! Let us, to support and encourage our endeavours, think of the reward that awaits us if we can prove equal to the task we have to perform and succeed in bringing the world that peace which it deserves after so much suffering and so many sacrifices. Gentlemen, let us buckle down to the work with confidence.