

Differences arise at U.N. anniversary

UNITED NATIONS—In the largest gathering of world leaders in history, kings, presidents and premiers marked the 50th anniversary of the United Nations on Sunday by demanding the organization change so it can fulfill the dreams of its founders.



But differences that long have divided the world's only truly global organization surfaced as 200 heads of state, prime ministers, foreign ministers and representatives of international groups began three days of speeches.

Cuban President Fidel Castro, who shed his trademark fatigues for a business suit, talked of the gap between rich and poor and domination of the United Nations by powerful countries.

"How long shall we wait for the democratization of the United Nations?" Castro asked, to enthusiastic applause, mostly from leaders of developing nations.

Zambian President Frederick Chiluba said the Security Council should not serve as a sanctuary where the five permanent members become "high priests to the rest of the globe."

Even permanent members were not entirely pleased. Russian President Boris Yeltsin complained that the Security Council and his own country have been bypassed in recent U.S.-led initiatives to end the war in Bosnia.

The U.N. charter ratified 50 years ago Tuesday espoused ideals of fostering peace and security throughout the world and economic progress for all peoples.

The anniversary is taking place as the United Nations faces its greatest financial crisis, brought on by demands for peacekeeping operations in the former Yugoslavia, Somalia, Angola and elsewhere, as well as the failure of member states to pay their dues.

Members owe the United Nations \$3 billion. The biggest debtor is the United States, \$1.3 billion in arrears.

President Clinton, who spoke nine minutes beyond the five-minute limit allotted each speaker, said he was

determined to meet the United States' financial obligations to the United Nations.

But he added: "The U.N. must be able to show that the money received supports saving and enriching people's lives, not bureaucratic overhead."

As the gathering progresses, the leaders will hold scores of one-on-one meetings on issues ranging from the war in Bosnia to U.S.-China relations and peace in the Middle East.

Outside the U.N. complex, city police and federal agents mounted one of New York's biggest-ever security operations, wrapping a thick defensive blanket around the dignitaries. Streets were closed, anti-sniper teams were deployed on rooftops and police boats patrolled the nearby East River.

Thousands of protesters rallied on a plaza behind blue police barricades, including anti-Castro demonstrators who marched on Cuba's U.N. mission, Tamils who came by bus from Canada to show support for ethnic brethren in their separatist war with Sri Lanka's government and supporters of the Mohajir underclass in Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan.

Clinton targets smugglers

UNITED NATIONS — President Clinton urged world leaders Sunday to join a crackdown against international drug smugglers, announcing the United States will freeze assets of Colombia's biggest cocaine cartel and punish countries that tolerate money laundering.

"We must win this battle together," the president declared in a speech opening a three-day celebration of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations.

Clinton signed an executive order targeting the four leaders of Colombia's Cali cartel and 43 associates. The order also blacklists 33 businesses, including Colombia's biggest drugstore chain, holding companies, import-export firms, pharmaceutical companies, automobile dealerships and various stores.

The order freezes any assets they

have in the United States, bars them from any business with Americans and cuts them off from the U.S. financial system. The Cali ring is believed behind 80 percent of the cocaine smuggled to the United States and 15 percent of the heroin. Officials said Clinton's order would have a major impact, although they declined to offer a precise estimate.

Clinton also put nations suspected of money laundering on notice that the United States may impose sanctions on them if they persist in helping criminals. He said criminal enterprises are moving "vast sums of ill-gotten gains through the international financial system with absolute impunity."

"We must not allow them to wash the blood off profits from the sale of drugs, from terror or organized crimes," the president said.

California inmate lawsuits cost \$25 million in taxes

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Lawrence Bittaker's cookie was broken. Richard Burton's stomach hurt after eating chili. Kevin Howard thought his thoughts were broadcast on prison loudspeakers.

These woes may seem trivial or bizarre, but not to these prison inmates. So they did what hundreds of convicts do each year: sue the state.

Lawsuits filed by California prison inmates cost taxpayers more than \$25 million in the past year, according to an Associated Press analysis of state, federal and county budgets.

While not all such lawsuits are frivolous, advocates of restrictions on the lawsuits say the caseload is taking a toll on courts, prisons, the attorney general's office and taxpayers.

For example, 51 lawyers with the attorney general's office do nothing but defend the state against prisoner claims. The amount the office spends on prisoner lawsuits has risen tenfold in the past decade.

"It's the single largest chunk of cases coming into the system," said David A. Sellers, a spokesman for the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts.

A total of 53,312 inmate lawsuits were filed nationwide in federal courts in 1994, according to Sellers' office — about twice as many as a decade ago.

"Some real needs get lost in the flood," said Joan Cavanagh, who oversees a team of state lawyers in Sacramento that works exclusively on prisoner litigation. "Everybody is tied up with diarrhea, electric brain waves, soggy sandwiches and everything else."

California Attorney General Dan Lungren is backing legislation to deter prisoners from filing frivolous law-

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JOAN CAVANAGH

oversees prisoner litigation lawyers

suits. Two such bills are moving through Congress, and there are other proposals to require inmates to exhaust administrative appeals before filing lawsuits.

"For too long, taxpayer money has been wasted on defending the state against inmates who are not afraid to abuse the judicial system," he said.

However, Edward Koren, a prisoner rights lawyer with the American Civil Liberties Union in Washington, cautioned that the government risks throwing out the baby with the bath water.

"Yes, it does cost money to do these types of things," he said. "... But the state has to separate out those that have some constitutional merit to them."

However, studies show that 2 percent of prisoner lawsuits reach settlement; and 1 percent go to trial.

"When 99 plus percent of those are determined by the court to be invalid it suggests that the problems are minimal at best. ..." Lungren said. "It's obvious we're spending tens of millions of dollars on frivolous prisoner lawsuits."

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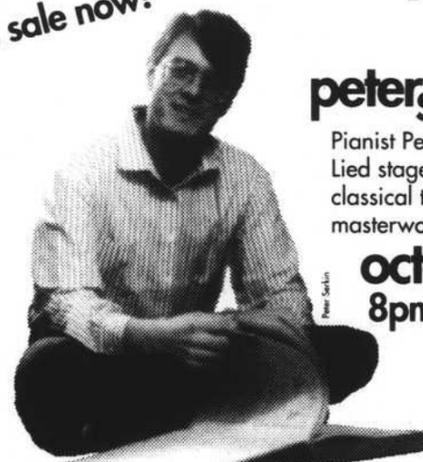
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FAX NUMBER 472-1761
The Daily Nebraskan (USPS 144-080) is published by the UNL Publications Board, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68586-0448, Monday through Friday during the academic year; weekly during summer sessions.
Readers are encouraged to submit story ideas and comments to the Daily Nebraskan by phoning 472-1763 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. The public also has access to the Publications Board. For information, contact Tim Hedegaard, 436-9253, 9 a.m.-11 p.m.
Subscription price is \$50 for one year.
Postmaster: Send address changes to the Daily Nebraskan, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68586-0448. Second-class postage paid at Lincoln, NE.
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