

Canada and the United Nations

In the spring of 1945, Canada and 49 other nations gathered at the San Francisco Conference. These countries drafted and adopted the Charter of the United Nations, a new international body created to prevent, through negotiation and discussion, military conflict and to promote human rights and economic and social development.

Canada's delegation to the conference included Prime Minister William MacKenzie King and two future prime ministers: Louis St. Laurent, the Secretary of State for External Affairs, and Lester B. Pearson, his deputy. All took an active role in defining the mandate of the organization.

Canada quickly earned a reputation as an objective mediator and an effective conciliator capable of identifying common ground and purpose in the midst of diversity. Canada remained prominent as the UN organization and its agencies began to evolve. It was at a conference in Quebec City in 1945 that the Food and Agricultural Organization was conceived. Two years later, Montreal was chosen as the headquarters for the International Civil Aviation Organization.

Canada remains a strong supporter of international co-operation through the United Nations. The UN system has been the key forum through which Canada has sought to influence world affairs, advance peace and security, promote its trade and economic interests, and share Canadian values such as liberty, democracy, equality of opportunity, and fairness.

Over the years, Canada has been involved in almost every peacekeeping operation mandated by the United Nations — in Cyprus, Bosnia, Afghanistan and elsewhere. These activities have built Canada's international reputation and enabled it to play a significant role in maintaining peace in the troubled spots of the world.

Canada has been elected to the Security Council six times. During its most recent term (1999-2000), Canada consistently supported greater accountability, transparency and effectiveness in the working of the Security Council and led the way on sanctions reform. Canada supports a security council that allows its non-permanent members to make a contribution.

Canada, working with others and with the United Nations, has led in bolstering human security by helping to rid the world of anti-personnel mines, halting the traffic in light and small weapons, and ending the use of children as soldiers. Canada has also been active in promoting international treaties that complement the work of the United Nations, such as its leadership on the Ottawa Convention, an international agreement signed by 122 countries to ban anti-personnel landmines.