
Introduction

Canada esteems the United Nations, its record and its potential. Our commitment to the principles of the Charter and to international co-operation is no fashionable pose. For four decades, it has been a motive force of our foreign policy.

— Brian Mulroney to the United Nations General Assembly
October 23, 1985

Canada has been a strong supporter of the United Nations (UN) since that body's founding more than 40 years ago. But there are signs that this commitment has become quite unfashionable with some major Western countries. In the last five years, the United States has, with Britain, refused to sign the Law of the Sea Convention and has withdrawn from UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). The United States has also stopped paying its annual contribution to the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, and in 1986 it cut more than \$100 million from its assessed contribution to the UN's regular (core) budget. It has refused to accept the ruling of the International Court of Justice that Washington's aid to the Nicaraguan rebels violates international law. Britain, for its part, has done its utmost to keep the United Nations away from any mediatory role in the Falkland Islands issue.

With these chill winds blowing, it is much to the credit of Canada that it remains open-minded and active in all the affairs of the United Nations. Indeed, this partial withdrawal by some Western countries places more responsibility on countries like Canada to take a lead, not only in long-running activities, but also in the necessary process of change and reform.

Canada is well placed to undertake this role. The work of Canadians at the United Nations and in its agencies has been far more extensive and influential than most people realize. This book focuses on the work of fewer than 60 Canadians, leaving the activities of hundreds of others unrecorded. Canadians have been influential because, for the most part, they have been strong-minded individuals who were not content to do set jobs unquestioningly, but (whether they were in top or middle-level positions) went about improving their bit of the system. The comments they make in this book bring out something of that character.

This is not a reference book about the United Nations; there are several good books of that kind already available. Nor does this book offer detailed case studies about significant events in UN history; Professor Franck describes the difficulties of such research, pointing out that United Nations archives—where they exist—are in appalling disorder. Rather, this book attempts to do something that has not been done before in Canada and seems not to have been tried in any other country. It might best be called a prose anthology, for it is a gathering of recollections, reflections, and critical comments from more than 50 Canadians who have either worked in some part of the United Nations system or whose job—whether as diplomat or journalist or non-governmental activist—has involved them with the organization. It is told, more or less