

This is a year of important anniversaries. UNICEF begins its 40th anniversary year next December and the Canadian UNICEF Committee marks its 30th anniversary this year. And this Wednesday will be the 40th anniversary of the signing of the United Nations Charter in San Francisco. Stephen Lewis will lead a Canadian Delegation, including some of the Canadians who were at the signing in 1945 and three young Canadians active in United Nations affairs.

In those forty years, Canadians have become accustomed to the successes of the United Nations, and preoccupied by its weaknesses. In 1960, 77 per cent of Canadians polled thought it was "very important" to try to make the United Nations a success; this March, this number was down to 58 per cent. Some 25 per cent think that purpose is "fairly important", compared to 12 per cent in 1960, so there is still overwhelming Canadian support for the United Nations. Those of us who support the system must recognize that, left to its own devices, skepticism will grow, in an age when people know more about hostages and hijackings than they do of children saved from starvation.

Last September, in my first speech as Secretary of State for External Affairs, I spelled out the determination of the Mulroney Government to help strengthen the United Nations system. That is a continuing tradition of Canadian Governments, and is above politics. The issue, which I expect will be examined during the current general review of Foreign Policy, is not whether Canada should downgrade our participation in United Nations activities, but how we can be more creative in revitalising the United Nations system.