

United Nations Reform

Canadians see the United Nations as a visionary global enterprise. These three words — *vision, global, enterprise* — symbolize the UN, underline its importance, and explain the need for attention and reform.

First and foremost the United Nations was based on a vision. It was created over 40 years ago to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, to reaffirm faith in human dignity, to practise tolerance, and to promote the economic and social advancement of all peoples. The UN's founders wanted to build a better world at peace with itself. Although they realized that their goal was ambitious, they also knew that it was essential if the world was to become a better and more secure place.

The years since then have witnessed a vast increase in the UN's concerns, activities and membership. Through it all, however, the United Nations has remained the global amphitheatre for considering and discussing the ideas, beliefs, proposals and policies promoted by its various members. Since the 1960s, membership has grown from 45 to 159; today, virtually every country belongs to the organization. The UN system has yet to recover fully from this rapid expansion in membership and must learn to function with the cohesion and sense of purpose required to meet the goals of its Charter.

The United Nations, as an enterprise, has not always been successful in translating its vision into reality. Unfortunately, one sometimes finds gaps, confusion, overlaps, and lack of common purpose and direction. In addition, the UN has taken a long time to realize that merely throwing money at a problem will not resolve it. Understanding political, economic, and social phenomena and learning to influence them constructively is a tasking enterprise.

Why is reform necessary? Because, from time to time, the vision has to be rekindled, the world community reunited, and the enterprise reactivated. In its 40 years of existence, the UN has successfully met numerous challenges, but none, apparently, as deep and potentially as divisive as the current financial and confidence crisis.

At first, the crisis provoked shock, dismay, and discouragement. UN supporters, however, quickly rallied to its defence. The word *reform* began to echo in the corridors of UN headquarters in New York City and gradually around the world. At the 40th General Assembly in 1985, resolutions were drafted by Canada, Japan, Austria, and the group of non-aligned countries, the G-77. The reform movement gained momentum and 18 experts were appointed to draft a report and launch the reform process.

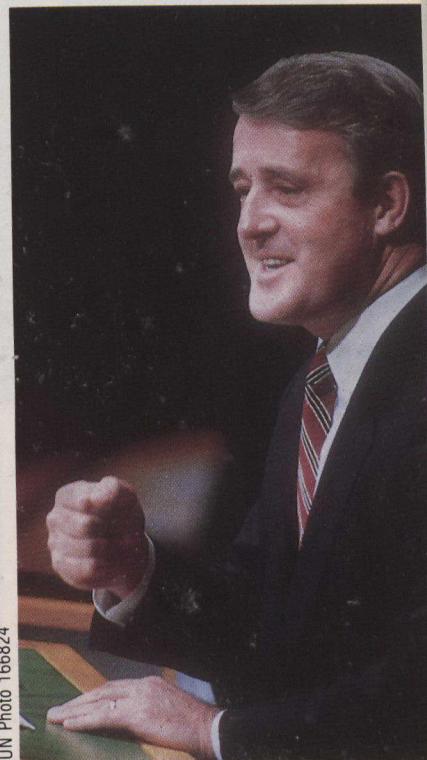
Over the past two and a half years, Canada has devoted considerable time and attention to the ongoing process of repair and renewal of the UN. Reform efforts now extend to four fields:

- First, to resolve the financial crisis, emphasis has been placed on restraint and on improving budgetary and financial practices. Canada has devised a full set of budgetary systems and procedures that promise the UN greater financial stability and monetary effectiveness.

- Second, the process of setting priorities and making decisions has also been reviewed. The conditions are now set for the 34 members of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC) to address these problems. Canada is working closely with other members of the CPC to strengthen and re-invigorate the UN.

- Third, the Special Commission of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is working to simplify and rationalize the structure of the UN in the economic and social fields. Canada was among the first to suggest how the commission could undertake its task and assisted ECOSOC in assuming its responsibility for overseeing the entire economic and social sectors. Although not yet complete, this exercise shows great promise and could do much to revitalize a key dimension of the promise of the UN Charter.

- Finally, the specialized agencies — the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; the Food and Agriculture Organization; the World Health Organization; and others — have embarked on a process to reduce



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Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney: a strong supporter of UN reform.

expenditures, to improve programs and to set new and effective directions. In this area too, Canada participates actively in the committees and commissions responsible for bringing about reform and improvement.

In all, progress has been made. And what has made it possible is the widespread realization that the vision, the global community, and the enterprise are worth fighting for. Will reform succeed and the United Nations emerge even stronger? Canada is betting it will.