

Routine Proceedings

I had the honour of addressing the United Nations General Assembly in New York last month. I outlined what Canada believes should be the UN's main priorities for the years ahead. This government believes the UN should pay particular attention to three main objectives: preventive diplomacy, rapid reaction and peace building.

All of the components of the UN system must help identify and resolve tensions before they generate into conflict. When preventive diplomacy efforts fail, the UN must be able to intervene quickly and effectively on the ground.

In New York I tabled Canada's report on how to increase the UN's rapid reaction capability. I was encouraged by the positive attention given to our recommendation.

Alongside these efforts, the UN must continue its ongoing work of peace building and articulate the visions of development centred on the individual and one that balances the economic and social agendas for the purpose of improving the well-being of society.

Just as the world has undergone many changes since 1945 and has had to adapt to new requirements, modern technology and fiscal restraints, so must the United Nations greet its future with a strategy for revitalization to meet the challenge of the next century. Those challenges often arise quickly and harshly. Canada will continue to hold out its hand to the UN to help ensure that the general assembly, the security council and indeed the whole UN family are best able to meet the needs of the future in a co-ordinated, efficient and fiscally responsible manner.

• (1010)

The UN has accomplished great things in its first 50 years. There have of course been setbacks. We can make the UN better, however we cannot hope to make it better when some countries do not pay their dues. Countries can pay their dues and they should now. That is not to say that we cannot reform the scale of assessments to reflect current economic realities. We should and without delay.

The UN at 50 should take stock of what it has done, how it has done it and how it can do things better in the future. We must look back and reflect on the spirit that carried the architects of the UN forward. Their vision was bold. Their challenges were great.

Today we are faced with universal problems that threaten the achievements of the last 50 years. Unlike 50 years ago, we have a proven universal mechanism that can help us meet those challenges. Let us make it stronger and better. That is the challenge for the years to come.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to have this opportunity today to speak on behalf of the Bloc Québécois on this fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations Organization.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs gave a relatively appropriate picture of the past achievements of the UN, the challenges facing it today and the role played by Canada.

In my comments on this anniversary, I would like to focus on two main issues which I feel are fundamental and which may have been purposely avoided by the minister.

First, the matter of promoting human rights and democracy. Second, since this is the era of globalization, I would like to discuss that very typical characteristic of the UN, its universality. The UN's membership includes nearly 200 countries, 28 of which joined since 1990.

First, human rights and democracy. As I listened to the Minister of Foreign Affairs say how proud he was, and rightly so, of Canada's contribution, adding that it was a Canadian, the late John Humphrey, who wrote the first draft of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, I could not help thinking of this government's lax approach to promoting human rights and democracy.

Considering that this government has refused to commit itself to recognizing the results of the referendum to be held next week in Quebec, it is somewhat surprising to see the minister holding forth at the United Nations and recalling the UN's achievements in promoting human rights and democracy.

That takes some nerve, I must say. And coming from a government that has decided from now on to focus exclusively on business interests and literally to turn its back on promoting human rights and democracy, it is downright embarrassing.

The late John Humphrey must be turning over in his grave today. The Bloc Québécois has strongly criticized and condemned Canada's abdication of its historic responsibility for human rights and democracy.

Before I finish my comments on this first point, I will read one of the most interesting recommendations made by the Bloc Québécois in the dissenting report of the Special Joint Committee reviewing Canadian foreign policy. The Bloc Québécois recommended that the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and CIDA, working in co-operation with NGOs and business corporations, draw up guidelines to give concrete expression to the key components of Canada's foreign policy respecting democracy and human rights.

Among other things, these guidelines could include a mandatory framework for analysing situations involving gross and reliably attested human rights violations. They were to be formulated as soon as possible and made public no later than the