



■ Canadian Lt.-Gen. E.L.M. Burns was the first commander of UNEF I from 1956 to 1959.
(UN Photo)

Taking the Lead

In 1956, Canada played an instrumental role in the formation of the first United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF I), whose mandate was to "secure and supervise the cessation of hostilities" in the Suez region, and was an important contributor to UNEF for the next 11 years. In fact, the Canadian delegation to the UN, led by Lester B. Pearson, introduced the General Assembly resolution that led to the establishment of UNEF I.

Mr. Pearson, as Canada's Secretary of State for External Affairs, saw the Suez crisis as an opportunity to involve major powers and Middle Eastern countries in a long-term, negotiated political solution for the region. "What is the use of passing a resolution which brings about a ceasefire and a withdrawal?" he asked the Assembly. "What are we withdrawing to — the same state of affairs? ... If we do not take advantage of this crisis to do something about a political settlement, we will regret it. The time has now come for the UN not only to bring about a ceasefire, but to move in and police the ceasefire and make arrangements for a political settlement." Mr. Pearson was later awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his leadership in the Suez debate.

Canadian Lieutenant-General E.L.M. Burns was subsequently appointed as UNEF's first Chief of Staff, and was the first commander of the United Nations Emergency Force in Gaza and the Sinai from November 1956 to December 1959. At its peak, Canada's contribution to UNEF I totalled 1 172 troops, including an air transport squadron and 300 administrative personnel. In a dispatch to Mr. Pearson, Lt.-Gen. Burns wrote that the Canadian contingent "made all the difference in the world in the efficient operation of the administrative side of the military effort. We just could not have done without them." On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the first United Nations Peacekeeping Force, the International Peace Academy presented Lt.-Gen. Burns with the first distinguished Peace-Keepers Award in recognition of his outstanding service to the cause of peace.

