



CIDA photo: Peter Bennett

Canada and the United Nations

The United Nations is the only multilateral organization whose membership approaches universality and whose agenda encompasses all areas of human activity, in every region of the world. It is, in effect, the marketplace at which much of the world's multilateral diplomacy is conducted, and the mechanism through which the views of the international community are given expression.

It is also the forum in which grievances are aired and, with member state consensus, resolved. The UN's ability to live up to its founders' ideals, and to its potential, is almost exclusively determined by the 188 countries that collectively constitute the United Nations. Our successes are its successes; our failures, its failures. This organization can only accomplish what its member states allow it to.

Canada has been an active and committed participant in the United Nations since its founding in 1945 in San Francisco, where Canada took a leading part in the drafting of the UN Charter. Individual Canadians have played vital roles within the United Nations, and many of the UN's great accomplishments have had a Canadian dimension. For example, John Peters Humphrey was the principal author of the Universal Declaration of Human

Rights 50 years ago; Lester B. Pearson helped invent the concept of peacekeeping, winning the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to resolve the 1956 Suez Crisis; and Maurice Strong chaired both the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, in Stockholm, and the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, in Rio de Janeiro, serving as well as founding Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme.

Canadians have occupied key positions within the United Nations system, including the Presidency of the General Assembly (Lester B. Pearson, in 1952-53), and Canada served on the Security Council in 1948-49, 1958-59, 1967-68, 1977-78 and 1989-90. In January 1998 a Canadian, Louise Fréchette, was appointed the first-ever UN Deputy Secretary-General.

The UN's basic purposes and its other underlying principles have guided Canadian foreign and defence policy from the outset. Over the past half-century, Canada has made a significant, constructive and sustained contribution in all areas of UN activity: peace and security, development assistance, human rights, and social, economic and environmental affairs.