

disasters in the former Yugoslavia, the Great Lakes region of Africa, and various regions of Asia and Latin America.

As a member of the Security Council since January 1999, Canada has made the protection of civilians in armed conflict a priority. Under our Council presidency in February, a special debate was held on this topic.

Canada's annual contribution to the different humanitarian aid programs in the UN system varies depending on the the conflicts and natural disasters of the day. On average, however, this contribution may range from \$200 to \$300 million per year. It is channelled mainly through UNDP, WFP, UNICEF, the UNHCR, and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Canada's Department of National Defence (DND) is also often called upon in natural disasters or within the framework of UN peacekeeping missions. Canadian military aircraft transport emergency relief, and Canadian troops often distribute the aid directly to disaster or conflict victims. Canadian soldiers particularly distinguished themselves in this respect in the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, bringing in provisions and medical supplies often at the risk of their lives.

International law

The United Nations has greatly contributed to extending the primacy of law by codifying and developing international law. The UN has been behind hundreds of treaties and conventions dealing with virtually all realms of human activity, from international trade to environmental protection, and including international terrorism, civil aviation and telecommunications. It has given particular attention to protecting basic rights.

Among the most important of these instruments, the number of which is now approaching 500, are the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (which enunciates the principle of equality of the sexes), the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (an essential tool in the struggle against the drug trade), and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. This last has been called the most complex of all legal texts developed by the UN to this day; it aims to ensure access to the riches of the sea for all countries under equitable conditions, to preserve the marine environment from pollution, to promote freedom of navigation and to facilitate research.



CIDA photo: Roger LeMoyne