

2. Pursuing Our Own Agenda at the UN

The UN provides Canada with the ideal forum for its traditional mediating role, especially as a leading peacekeeper, and for its other priorities: greater efforts to control nuclear proliferation and transparency in disarmament; influencing the development of environmental control systems; continuing as leaders in the international human rights area (including concerns of women and aboriginal peoples); being actively involved in economic and social programs and the whole issue of refugees and migratory movements; and finally, not least, in the current efforts to reform the UN itself. It is the multilateral arena that will allow Canada to have a major impact in these areas.

3. Our Privileged Access: A Key Advantage

Our background and qualifications for this UN role - particularly the current campaign for reform - could hardly be better, since there are few if any countries that can match Canada's multilateral connections. Along with the G7, being a member of NATO, OECD, and the CSCE has established our credentials in Western security and economic affairs, and our membership in key groupings such as the Commonwealth, Francophonie and the OAS (added to participation in regional associations like APEC and ASEAN) has given us a special "family" relationship with the great majority of Third World nations.

This is an enormous potential advantage, of which Canada must be fully aware in order to make effective use of it on a day-to-day basis in United Nations fora, something which has not always been done in the past. It does involve time, hard work and determination to cultivate sometimes difficult colleagues holding other points of view, but the often-heard complaint that we are "losing our privileged access" because of changing aid policies (for example) simply means that efforts need to be redoubled and enough staff must be in place to do it. Without this we cannot hope to bring about the reform we seek; with it, it is a tool for change beyond price.

4. The Historical Tradition

It has been said that for Canadians, multilateralism is both an instinct and a vocation. At the League of Nations Canada was there testing the waters as a future independent nation, and at San Francisco, delegates like Lester Pearson, Norman Robertson, Charles Ritchie, and Escott Reid influenced key decisions such as those on the Security Council and ECOSOC. Since 1945 active involvement in the United Nations system has been a given of Canadian foreign policy. The eighth largest contributor (out of a total now of 180 nations) and a prompt payer of dues, Canada has held a seat on the Security Council at least once a decade, served as Vice-President of the General Assembly and in virtually all UN peacekeeping operations. For Canadians it has been a mix of geopolitical self-interest and an altruistic search for a more just, equitable and peaceful world.