

# Briefing Paper



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## CANADA AT THE UNITED NATIONS

### THE FOUNDING OF THE UN SYSTEM

The Right Honourable W.L. Mackenzie King, Prime Minister of Canada, signed the United Nations Charter on June 26, 1945. With his signature Canada laid one of the cornerstones of its foreign policy that would last for at least the next forty years.

Even before the Charter was ready and open for signature, Canada played an important role in the formulation of the United Nations system. Canada participated at the Dumbarton Oaks Conferences in 1944 and at the United Nations Conference on International Organizations in 1945 at San Francisco.

At the opening of the San Francisco Conference, Prime Minister Mackenzie King outlined the Canadian approach. He said that Canada's sole objective would be "to help in creating an organization which over the years and decades would be strong enough and flexible enough to stand any strain to which it may be subjected". Moreover, Canada was determined that "middle powers" would play an important and effective role in maintaining peace and security through the United Nations system. Canada also participated in the establishment of the principal organs of the United Nations.

Regarding the **Security Council**, Canada's main aim was to ensure that the security provisions of the new organization should be as effective as possible. Canada insisted that whenever the Security Council decided to use force the Member State that had been asked to contribute a peacekeeping contingent shall be invited to participate in the decision-making process.

Canada accepted the necessity of the veto of the Security Council but wished to place certain limitations on its use which were not accepted by the conference. In general, it was and has been the Canadian position that the veto power was a necessary compromise for the establishment of the United Nations system.

Regarding the **General Assembly**, the Canadian delegation at San Francisco tried to ensure that powers of the General Assembly would be as wide as possible. Canada did not feel that the General Assembly should be empowered to deal with matters of international peace and security. Canada sought to strengthen the

relationship between the General Assembly and the Security Council by requiring the Security Council to submit annual reports to the General Assembly, which it now does.

Canada played a very important role in the creation of the **Economic and Social Council**. It sought to re-define the role and the powers of the Economic and Social Council and many of its suggestions were incorporated into the final version of the Charter.

There were three major contributions that Canada made to the creation of the **Secretariat**. The first was that the members of the Secretariat would form an international civil service that would not be subject to control of any outside authority including the States of nationality. Canada also suggested that the staff be appointed solely by the Secretary-General using highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity. The third proposal was to give representatives of Member States and Secretariat officials the diplomatic privileges and immunities that would be necessary to carry out their functions.

Canada played a less important role in the creation of the **Trusteeship Council** and the **International Court of Justice**, the other two major organs of the United Nations. Canada made no major contributions to the Trusteeship Council never having been a colonial power.

Since the drafting and signing of the Charter of the United Nations, Canada has been involved in the few changes that have occurred. The principal change reflected the increase in membership of the United Nations. When Canada signed the Charter in 1945, it was one of 51 members of the United Nations. Today, there are 158 members of the United Nations. Canada therefore joined with about 40 other Member States in 1960 to co-sponsor a draft resolution recommending the enlargement of the Security Council by two seats and the Economic and Social Council by six seats.

The resolution sparked a widespread debate with the USSR being opposed because the People's Republic of China (PRC) was not represented in the United Nations system. In 1963 the PRC itself announced that it would not be opposed to amending the Charter to increase the two Councils, and so the resolutions were proposed and