



FOREWORD

In 1956, Lester Pearson helped to initiate the first real UN peacekeeping operation in response to the Suez crisis. Ever since, support for and participation in UN peacekeeping operations has played a prominent role in Canadian foreign and defence policy. It is therefore appropriate that in this, the UN's 50th anniversary year, the Canadian government should place a special emphasis on ways of improving the use of blue berets to help resolve conflicts.

At the 49th session of the General Assembly in September 1994, Canada announced its intention to conduct a study on ways of improving the UN's Rapid Reaction Capability. The study has led to a major report which will be offered to the 50th General Assembly as a significant contribution on the part of the Canadian government to the reflections on the UN's future at this pivotal juncture in its existence. In the course of preparing the report, considerable effort was taken to consult with other governments, non-governmental organizations and inter-governmental institutions in order to assess the validity and practicality of a variety of policy alternatives.

The central objective of the study was to consider practical and realizable ideas and proposals which would give the UN a capability to react more rapidly to crisis and thus enhance its effectiveness and credibility overall. In this report, we seek to recommend possibilities for pragmatic change within the UN system over the short to medium terms, while also addressing some of the more visionary, longer-term issues which the international community must confront if the UN is to remain capable of playing a central role in the field of international peace and security. We have framed the recommendations in the report in realistic terms. Many improvements are now underway and can continue to take place in the short to medium terms within the confines of current budgets. However, sustaining these changes and the promotion of longer-term improvements will ultimately require the UN to face the issue of securing new means of funding.

In the present climate these are sizable political tasks. Fiscal realities have forced all governments to be very cautious in dedicating resources; and domestic priorities tend to take precedence over contributions to international institution-building. The difficulties encountered in certain peace operations, particularly recent experience in Bosnia, Somalia and Rwanda, also give decision-makers pause. On the other hand, an effective rapid response capability in certain situations is not only appropriate, but highly cost-effective in comparison to the costs to all concerned, in both human and monetary terms, of not acting quickly.

We acknowledge that fundamental reform is not an easy task, especially in the midst of financial crisis. But headway can be made now. Many of the report's recommendations are framed with this in mind, while others are designed to have the collateral effect of making the full spectrum of peace support operations more effective. Still others focus on looking down the road where major change might be achievable. Together they represent a continuum of measures to advance the cause of global peace.