

Dr. Polanyi, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,
colleagues and friends,

On behalf of the Government of Canada, I wish to thank you for accepting, with such promptness and enthusiasm, our invitation to participate in this international conference on the rapid-reaction capability of the United Nations.

This conference, and your participation in it, are of crucial importance to the Canadian government. In holding it, we hope to hear your ideas and your advice on what you think is the best way of approaching an fundamental issue: the United Nations' [UN] rapid-reaction capability.

Our Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Jean Chrétien, our Minister of National Defence, the Honourable David Collenette, and I are anxiously awaiting the results of your work. I have heard about the workshops you have held since your arrival here, and am sure that the coming ones will be every bit as productive.

The idea of a Canadian study on rapid intervention arose last year out of the terrible tragedy in Rwanda. I have seen nothing since that time that could make me doubt the necessity of such a study. On the contrary. Outbreaks of ethnic, religious and nationalistic antagonism are the root causes of much conflict throughout the world. Although they may be internal conflicts, they can in many cases become real threats to international peace and security. Regardless of its nature or scope, we cannot disregard the human and humanitarian dimension of war.

The situations in Rwanda, Burundi and Haiti tell us that preventive diplomacy, rapid reaction and peace building must be considered as part of the same strategy. They do not work in isolation.

It is clear that much work needs to be done in the field of preventive diplomacy. This is one of the main proposals I made to the General Assembly in New York last September. We must work to attack the root causes of conflict before they explode. Indeed, defining a clear mandate for peacekeeping forces involves understanding the nature of conflict. The UN could do a better job if it could respond more coherently to early warning signs by effectively deploying the instruments at its disposal.

A rapid-reaction capability must also exist as a part of a series of processes within the UN and regional organizations. As I said earlier, it will fail if it exists in isolation. There must, above all, be a capacity to re-build societies in a post-conflict phase if rapid-reaction is going to work. And there must be clear links between what a rapid-reaction capability can do in the short run, and what other parts of the UN system must do as they take over from a rapid-reaction group in response to crisis.