

## CANADA AT THE UNITED NATIONS IN THE REFORM DECADE

### SUMMARY

Never has the United Nations, since its establishment in 1945, had to deal with such daunting challenges as those facing it today. It is not simply a question of trying to develop an effective new international peace and security system to cope with the fragmentation and chaos left in the wake of the collapse of communism. The years and decades ahead also threaten world-wide nuclear and environmental disasters if global mechanisms that work are not in place to contain them. The struggle to assist developing countries overcome poverty and disease, and to adopt human rights and democratic institutions will become increasingly urgent in the light of rising population levels, migratory pressures and ethnic tensions.

There is no substitute for the UN - nothing else can do its job. Yet ironically, now that the end of the Cold War has set it free to realize its full potential after more than 40 years of paralyzing vetoes, the United Nations' structures, operations and financing have, in many particulars, been found wanting, and this at a time of great change and turmoil with formidable demands ahead.

What is required is a modernizing and updating of its key structures such as the Security Council (geared to 1945 realities) and in some cases the introduction of entirely new machinery to deal with changing times. On the other hand, there are institutions which should go, and considerable paring down must take place, along with a more efficient and less baronial style of management on the part of the Agencies. Greatly improved internal coordination will be essential to strengthen performance and avoid waste. Not least, a firmer hand and more energetic forms of fund raising are needed to give the UN - perpetually on the edge of insolvency - some basic financial stability.

The role for Canada in this process of renewal is clear. Canadians have been reformers and innovators at the UN since its inception, a tradition that has much to do with geopolitical imperatives: multilateralism has offered both an invaluable counterweight to the superpower next door and an opportunity to pursue an agenda of Canadian priorities on the international stage, within a global system: peacekeeping, disarmament, and human rights, among others. In short, the UN has long been, and remains a key element of Canadian foreign policy.

Beyond this, there is the matter of performance and privileged access. Canada is one of the few countries that pays dues fully and on time. Through its membership not only in NATO, OECD and the CSCE but also in the Commonwealth, Francophonie and regional associations like APEC and ASEAN, Canada has both strong credentials in the industrialized world and a special "family" relationship with the great majority of Third World nations, a unique position. This will be an enormous potential advantage in efforts to achieve consensus in bringing about fundamental change at the UN.