

Canadians and the UN

There have been many Canadians at the UN past and present. Among the key players and their chief roles:

Louise Arbour: Appointed UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2004.

Lloyd Axworthy: Appointed Special Envoy of the Secretary-General to Ethiopia and Eritrea in 2004.

General Maurice Baril: Former Senior Military Adviser to the UN Secretary-General.

General E.L. Burns: Assembled and led the UN Emergency Force in the Suez crisis of 1956.

Margaret Catley-Carlson: Deputy Executive Director of Operations at UNICEF from 1981 to 1983.

Joe Clark: Served as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Cyprus.

General Roméo Dallaire: Directed the ill-fated UN peacekeeping operation in Rwanda in 1994.

Elizabeth Dowdeswell: Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme in 1992.

William Epstein: Former Secretary of the UN Disarmament Commission and Director of the Department for Disarmament Affairs.

Louise Fréchette: First Deputy Secretary-General of the UN, appointed in 1988.

John Humphrey: Organized the human rights division of the UN Secretariat and wrote the first draft of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Stephen Lewis: Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for HIV-AIDS in Africa, appointed in 2001.

Thérèse Paquet-Séigny: Undersecretary-General of the UN's information department in 1987; Chair at UNESCO.

Lester B. Pearson: Represented Canada at the San Francisco Conference in 1945 and developed the concept of peace-keeping, for which he won the Nobel Peace Prize.

Maurice Strong: Former Secretary-General of the UN Conference on the Environment, first Executive Director of UNEP, coordinator of the UN's Office for Emergency Operations in Africa, Secretary-General of UNCTAD, Chair of the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

Former Supreme Court of Canada Justice Louise Arbour was appointed UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2004.



Did you know? 59 UN peacekeeping missions have worked in areas of conflict and 175 international disputes have been resolved peacefully through UN offices.

It is useful to recall the mix of pessimism and hope that created the United Nations in 1945, for the UN of the modern age faces a similar brew of cynicism and optimism. To mark its 60th birthday—and the fifth anniversary of the Millennium Declaration on reducing global poverty—world leaders will gather in New York in September to consider a package of reforms proposed by Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

As they did in 1945, Canadians will work energetically to ensure that the UN effectively upholds its ideals in a changing world. According to Prime Minister Paul Martin, “this is a significant period for the United Nations, the best opportunity in memory to significantly improve an institution that is essential to our collective security and prosperity.”

Calls for reform

Just why is the UN so essential, and why is its 60th birthday the right time to improve it? First, its universal relevance is clear. From 50 founding states, the UN has grown to 191 members, the only international organization to which virtually every country belongs. Aside from traditional security, its programs today focus on a host of concerns such as the environment, development, children's welfare and women. Its vast array of specialized agencies subsumes groups such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

Second, for better or worse, the organization suffered what experts term a “crisis of credibility” in 2003 when the UN Security Council split over the use of force in Iraq to oust Saddam Hussein. “This shook the confidence of international publics in the ability of the UN to prevent war,” says David Malone, Assistant Deputy Minister of Global Issues at Foreign Affairs Canada.

It also weakened the Secretary-General, who was unable to forge compromise. These issues, combined with investigations into the UN's oil-for-food program and findings of serious sexual misbehaviour by both UN peacekeepers and managers, left the organization scarred. Canadian Louise Fréchette, the UN Deputy Secretary-General, feels the UN may have “slid back down the greasy pole” to where it was eight years ago when the last major changes were introduced. “Today, the calls for reform are stronger than ever,” she says.