



Statements and Speeches

No. 84/3

THE UNITED NATIONS – A CANADIAN PERSPECTIVE

An Address by the Honourable Allan J. MacEachen, Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs, to the Empire Club, Toronto, March 22, 1984.

When I last spoke to you, in February 1978, I talked about the Multilateral Trade Negotiations. Those negotiations reflected a hard-headed assessment of Canadian interests. I would like, as much as possible, to use the same approach to my topic today.

Why have I chosen to speak to you on "The United Nations: A Canadian Perspective"? Because I believe that we in Canada should think more – argue more, if you like – about this multilateral system that Canadians have done so much to help build, that has greatly benefited Canada over the years, and that is now in a particularly difficult period in its development.

Since returning in September 1982 to External Affairs, I have met on several occasions with the UN Secretary-General, Javier Perez de Cuellar – a man we are fortunate to have at the helm of the UN at this time. He has pointed starkly to "the crisis in the multilateral approach in international affairs". He has warned that "we are perilously near to a new international anarchy".

What is Canada's stake in this crisis in the multilateral approach? Though it is often easier to assess the benefits from bilateral relationships, multilateralism remains central to the promotion of Canadian interests. This applies both to groupings of limited membership such as the Western Economic Summits, the Organization for Economic Trade and Development, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Commonwealth and Francophonie, and to global multilateral institutions. Canadian trade and Canadian jobs depend directly on the stability of the world monetary and trading systems underpinned by the International Monetary Fund and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. This link is direct enough and obvious enough that there is a well understood economic logic to support, for example, our \$300 million annual contribution to the various international financial institutions.

Our interests in the United Nations are more diverse but still closely related. What benefits do we receive from our contribution of about \$350 million in 1983-84 to the organizations and agencies in the United Nations system? It is an impressive contribution – sixth largest over-all and twice that of the USA on a *per capita* basis. By domestic standards, it is slightly more than the amount spent annually for police services in metropolitan Toronto, but we still have good reason to look closely at what we receive in return.

Three specific examples will serve to introduce what is naturally a wide-ranging answer.

First is the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, signed by Canada in December 1982. That convention was the outcome of over a decade of UN negotiations in which we took a leading role. The convention

offers Canada many direct benefits: a 12-mile territorial sea; a 200-mile exclusive economic zone; exclusive jurisdiction over the continental shelf, even when it extends beyond 200 miles; and environmental protection provisions particularly in ice-covered waters. Clearly this UN convention has been a central element in the promotion of Canada's national interests.

As a second example I take the International Atomic Energy Agency. The IAEA acts as the inspection agency in applying internationally-accepted safeguards on the sale of nuclear material and technology. For Canada to provide equivalent bilateral coverage for its nuclear exports would not only be prohibitively complicated from a technical and political point of view but also enormously expensive.

A third example is food aid. The Canadian development assistance program includes the provision of food aid which is valued at about \$325 million in 1983-84. Roughly 40 per cent of this is channelled through the World Food Program. This UN program not only produces developmental returns to the recipient country it generates valuable income for Canadian farmers and fishermen.

Moving to the broader questions about the role and functioning of the UN — what is wrong and what can be done to correct it — we must first recognize the sources of disillusionment. Many of these are all too familiar: the intrusion of political controversy into the work of the Specialized Agencies; the effect of attempts to isolate Israel in the UN system; and the general malaise that has afflicted UN bodies as a result of increasingly complex and conflicting interests associated partly with a greatly expanded membership. If these frustrations continue to mount they could lead to the unravelling of the system we have so painstakingly constructed.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) provides a striking example. While we take for granted the coldly calculated approach of the USSR toward the UN system, we become very concerned when the United States displays an ambivalent attitude. We would not like to contemplate any important UN agency without the USA as an active member providing positive leadership. This is why, despite sharing much of its exasperation, that we would prefer the USA to stay within UNESCO and continue working vigorously with countries such as Canada, radically to improve UNESCO's performance. Canada is determined, in working from within, to get UNESCO back to the priorities of its mandate: education, culture and science, that are of value to Canadians.

Our response is not simply an act of faith, an ingrained reflex from an earlier more positive era in UN diplomacy. It is based on a realistic analysis of what the UN is doing. Broadly speaking the main areas are peace and security and functional co-operation.

How well is the UN doing in the key area of peace and security? Not very, must be the answer. Wars rage in the Middle East. The occupation of Afghanistan and Kampuchea continues. A Caribbean island is invaded, and conflicts fester in Central America. Moreover, in recent years the Security Council has become increasingly paralyzed due to the unsatisfactory relationship between the two superpowers. This has resulted in some cases in the UN being deliberately bypassed on security issues. Clearly the UN has to do better on high profile peace and security issues if it is to gain maximum support in the international community and with our publics.

We must not, however, fall victim to exaggerated expectations. There is little point in blaming the UN itself for the sins and omissions of its member states — for the inability of those who wield a veto to agree among themselves. Equally important, we must not lose sight of the significant contributions that the UN has made, and can continue to make, to the maintenance of peace and security.

For example, if and when peaceful solutions do come to the Middle East and Namibia, they will be based squarely upon balanced Security Council resolutions. Resolution 242, passed in 1967, provides for withdrawal from occupied territories and the right of all states in the Middle East, including Israel, to exist in security and peace. This is the basic structure upon which the Egypt-Israel peace treaty was built, and upon which any peace settlement enabling the Palestinian people to achieve their legitimate rights will also have to be based. Resolution 435, passed in 1978, sets out in detail the steps which can lead to a Namibia truly independent of South Africa. Canada remains deeply involved in the efforts of the Secretary-General to implement the UN plan. No other scheme appears feasible and acceptable to the international community.

Canadians continue to serve in UN peacekeeping forces and observer missions that are making positive contributions to stability in the Middle East and Cyprus. We are ready to participate in Namibia to help oversee the independence process and would expand our participation in the Middle East if the conditions for effectiveness were achieved.

Though decolonization is almost complete, we should not overlook the UN's very respectable record in this process, particularly in making it less violent than it might have been.

Finally, we should not dismiss the UN's function as a useful safety valve. Despite the limitations of the UN, I believe the international situation would be infinitely more dangerous without it.

The maintenance of peace and security in the UN system may capture the headlines, but much valuable work goes on in the technical parts of the system.

In 1984 the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) will provide about \$1 billion in technical assistance funds to developing countries of which \$61 million will come from Canada. Other agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund and the UN Fund for Population Activities also respond effectively to specific development needs. These efforts are of direct relevance to Canada not only because of our humanitarian commitment to the development process, but also because a growing and healthy world economy provides markets for Canadian goods and services.

Despite the Soviet veto in the Security Council, the International Civil Aviation Organization has been able to investigate the Korean Airline disaster and to work towards ways of preventing future recurrences. Due to the work of the World Health Organization in eradicating smallpox Canadians need no longer carry vaccination certificates when they travel abroad.

In human rights the distance still to go should not obscure the steady progress. No longer can a government claim that human rights abuses are solely within its domestic jurisdiction; no longer can it

be immune to positive UN pressure. Canada through nine consecutive years of membership on the UN Commission on Human Rights has been deeply involved in this process.

The UN also co-ordinates humanitarian assistance to refugees, responses to disasters, and works on social issues, such as the status of women, youth, the aged, the disabled, and the use of narcotics. progress in these latter fields relates directly to programs in Canada.

The UN has pioneered legal regimes in crucial fields, such as trade, law of the sea, outer space, the environment, civil aviation, and telecommunications.

These then are the current realities of the UN system, both its shortcomings and its positive features. What about the future? I do not see much merit in being distracted by consideration of radical institutional reform.

As I said to the UN General Assembly last September, what we must do is strengthen our existing institutions in practical ways. Canada and other states such as the Nordics are trying to convince a wide cross-section of UN members to recognize the dangers and act now.

First and foremost what is needed is an attitudinal change — the need to improve the working relationships between the superpowers. As Prime Minister Trudeau has emphasized, the five permanent members of the Security Council are also the five nuclear-weapon states. They have special responsibilities for international security under the Charter. Their contacts can be furthered through private UN meetings under the auspices of the Secretary-General. In the specific area of arms control and disarmament we must work to ensure that the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva becomes a more productive forum as it now appears to be in its work on chemical weapons.

The UN has grown rapidly in size, but the members have yet to show the maturity that must accompany the new relationships created. Developing countries should recognize and accept the responsibility that goes with their numerical superiority in the system. Developed states who provide most of the funds should recognize the legitimate objectives of the majority. Important issues should go forward on the basis of mutual respect of each other's concerns in the give-and-take of negotiation. Canada seeks to promote such a pragmatic approach.

The North-South dialogue provides a specific example. At the Versailles Summit in 1982, the major Western developed countries agreed to proceed on global negotiations, provided this would not impede the work of the existing specialized bodies of the UN system. Since then, Canada has sought to encourage the sense of realism and moderation that has been growing among developing countries. We have taken an active part in the most recent attempt to reach an agreement, but it is still too early to say whether a successful outcome can be achieved.

Last Septemeber, I proposed to the General Assembly three specific measures for improving the effectiveness of the Security Council and the Secretary-General's role to deal with peace and security issues.

First, I suggested that the Secretary-General should make greater use of his authority to bring current or potential crisis situations to the attention of the Council and expand his "fact-finding capacity". As an example I welcome his very recent initiative to dispatch at short notice a specialist group to Iran to investigate the alleged use of chemical agents.

Second, I suggested that the Security Council should meet privately and informally with the Secretary-General to examine and perhaps avert crises. The Security Council has had a number of informal private discussions to examine possible changes in their procedures, but as yet nothing concrete has emerged. Member states, particularly the permanent members of the Council, must accept their responsibilities, but mustering the political will for change is difficult. We should seek every opportunity to help generate the necessary political commitment, as the Prime Minister's initiative is doing. In this respect I believe Canada should seek re-election to the Security Council before the end of the decade.

Third, I suggested that the Secretary-General be given increased staff and resources in support of his "good offices" role in the resolution of disputes. In particular, I personally offered to make available to the Secretary-General, as appropriate, information which we believe might assist him in dealing with conflicts. This offer of support was warmly received.

The UN Secretary-General has made clear to the Prime Minister and me that he is looking particularly to Canada for help in revitalizing the UN system. We shall soon have an opportunity to continue our dialogue when the Secretary-General is able to accept our invitation to visit Ottawa.

Since 1945, active support of the UN system has been a cornerstone of Canadian foreign policy. A hard-headed assessment of current Canadian interests confirms that support. A stronger UN is necessary if we are to meet successfully the growing crisis of multilateralism in international affairs.