

Statement

Secretary of
State for
External Affairs



Déclaration

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AN ADDRESS BY

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Canada

Last week in New York, I made a very strong statement before the United Nations General Assembly on a number of important issues that are close to the hearts of many Canadians -- most notably the protection of individual human rights, the development of democratic values and institutions, and the promotion of responsible public policy choices within individual nations, as well as a range of views on peacemaking, peacekeeping, non-proliferation and disarmament.

Every year the development of this speech takes on almost a life of its own as we try to distil down to 25 or 30 minutes the essence of Canadian foreign policy, now and for the future.

It is a task that I and my officials take up with some gusto, as both an intellectual and a physical challenge, but one, I am pleased to say, that once again has confirmed the importance of Canada's voice at the United Nations and its universal respect among the members of that organization.

This year I pulled no punches before the United Nations.

- Canada called for a strengthening of the United Nations and, particularly, for members to pay up past dues so that this premier global forum could operate to its full potential.
- Canada called for immediate consideration of the Secretary General's Report, "Agenda for Peace," specifically expansion of preventive diplomacy and peacemaking initiatives.
- As the inventors of "peacemaking," we called for a new examination of this concept -- which does not even appear in the UN Charter -- including the potential for more active forms of peacekeeping, based on our recent experiences in Sarajevo and other parts of the former Yugoslavia.
- We called for an urgent review of the financing of peacekeeping missions -- the recent decision to charge only participating countries for the new forces in the former Yugoslavia goes against the UN principle of collective responsibility.
- We called for the urgent review of certain longstanding peacekeeping arrangements, most notably in Cyprus, where the entrenchment of institutionalized peacekeepers threatens to become a norm, rather than a means to a peaceful end.
- Realistically, we called for the urgent consideration of the parameters for "peace enforcement" by the United Nations.

- Finally, we encouraged the United States, the United Kingdom and China to follow the lead of France and Russia in implementing an immediate moratorium on nuclear testing and to summon up the will to negotiate a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

We also kept up the pressure on the United Nations in a number of other areas, including the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, where our Prime Minister took the lead in bringing a number of major powers to accept Conventions on Biodiversity and Climate Change; and our continuing demands for more women to be appointed or elected to key positions in the United Nations and other global and regional organizations.

A major part of my speech to the General Assembly was devoted to the problem of resolving conflicts within nations. As we have seen, the anticipated calm of a post-Soviet Union, post-Cold War world has already been ruptured too frequently by vicious and violent local and regional conflicts that have the potential to spread to neighbouring areas and beyond.

Old ethnic rivalries, festering jealousies and the inevitable lust for property and power have created new warlords, many out of control, whose actions threaten the peace and security of the world.

They also threaten many of our old notions about national sovereignty. The continuing situation in post-Gulf War Iraq, especially the treatment of minority groups such as the Kurds, continues to cry out for expanded thinking on the obligations for and the limits of interventions by the world community.

For Canada's part, we put forward very specific recommendations for eliminating the potential for conflict within nations, based on a trilogy that may already be familiar to some of you: the promotion and protection of individual human rights; the development of democratic values and institutions; and the establishment of responsive and responsible choices in the development and management of public policy, what we have come to call "good governance."

It is our contention that these three elements are essential for peace and self-sufficiency.

And we made the point -- again with no holds barred -- that our own assistance to developing countries would be increasingly tied to their own progress in these three areas.

Some may question the imposition of our own Western ideology, our own particular social and economic structures, and our political and judicial practices on societies that do not share our intellectual traditions, our historical experience or our economic achievements.

It is not our intention to impose a universal model on all developing countries. Nor is it our intention to withhold assistance until countries have established perfect internal systems. Of course we recognize that the process is evolutionary and incremental.

But can the world community show absolute inertia, inaction, even indifference, as was the case in the 1970s when the Khmer Rouge were ravaging Cambodia?

Can we allow countries like Somalia to deteriorate to such a point that they become structureless, lawless, hopeless groups of people whose only commonality is lines drawn on a map of the world?

The Gulf War made famous the image of "drawing a line in the sand." For many Canadians, this idea and the idea of war in general are abhorrent. While we are valiant in war and have come to the defence of freedom and democracy on many occasions during this century, we do not glorify war or measure our international stature by our ability to wage or win wars.

We are justly proud of the men and women who have served in the Canadian Armed Forces through two world wars, in Korea and the Persian Gulf, and in more than four decades of peacekeeping activities. Every year on November 11, right across Canada, we pay tribute to all those who have died serving this country and all that it represents.

But Canadians are profoundly uncomfortable with war. That is why we have placed such an emphasis on what the Secretary-General has called "post-conflict peacebuilding."

Today's peacekeepers must operate on a number of fronts at the same time in order to ensure more stable and humanitarian conditions in a country. In addition to providing troops for ongoing traditional peacekeeping operations in such places as the former Yugoslavia and the Middle East, Canada has sent Royal Canadian Mounted Police to Croatia, election observers to Angola, and human rights experts to El Salvador and Cambodia. I will also be sending representatives to a Commonwealth inspection team that will work in conjunction with a UN team to monitor racial tensions in South Africa.

Clearly, building the peace and keeping the peace require much more than theoretical notions sketched out by politicians, diplomats and academics. They need some philosophical and moral basis as well, and I made it absolutely clear to the General Assembly that we in Canada feel fully justified in bringing forward our ideas on the internal workings of other countries, because we have been absolutely transparent in the process of our own constitutional renewal.

In fact, in New York, I was "out front" and "up front" on our own experiences in Canada in the past year. And I can tell you that there was much interest in the United Nations about the domestic situation in Canada -- not simply because Canada is a leading supporter of that organization or internationally respected as a mediator, peacekeeper and partner in trade and development.

We in Canada are also seen as a model of democratic thinking and practice. After all, it was the United Nations itself in its recent report on Human Development that deemed Canada to be the number one country in the world in which to live.

So, despite all the naysayers in this country who seem to have an uncanny ability to generate headlines from what is wrong with Canada -- at least, the domestic media -- there are a lot more people outside of this country who have a strong interest in finding out what is right with Canada.

I will tell you what I told the General Assembly, because there is a good deal of interest there in the "why's" and "wherefore's" of our protracted process of renewal. I told the United Nations: "In true democracies, people constantly strive for improvement."

As Canadians, we have learned that democracy and freedom can be maintained only by vision and constant vigilance. New ideas for the future must be grounded in the fundamentals that were the original basis for unity. As Prime Minister Brian Mulroney told Canadians: "What Canada's leaders have produced is a series of constitutional reforms that strengthen the bonds that brought us together in 1867. These reforms renew the concepts that are at the core of Confederation. They provide a strong framework, a solid foundation, to let us move confidently into the future together."

I spelled out the "overriding values to which virtually every Canadian subscribes":

- unswerving respect for the rights of the individual, supported by the rule of law;
- a strong and deep attachment to democracy, its values and its institutions;
- a passionate commitment to social justice and economic progress for all;
- respect for national and international obligations; and
- a will to resolve differences peacefully through conciliation, compromise and consensus.

I told the United Nations that "I have no doubt that the Charlottetown Agreement reached on August 28 will be accepted by Canadians" because of what is actually in the Agreement.

This is an agreement that will build upon the values and rights that are already a proud part of the Canadian reality.

This is an agreement that will strengthen existing guarantees and protection for the rights of minorities.

This is an agreement that will improve the functioning of our already highly regarded democratic institutions.

This is an agreement that will bring greater social and economic justice to our native peoples.

This is an agreement that will eliminate overlap and duplication and reallocate fundamental roles and responsibilities among levels of government.

This is an agreement that will allow Canada to take advantage of the opportunities of the new global reality -- and to fulfil its obligations.

Earlier this week I spoke to groups of students in Toronto about Canada's role in the world and the importance of the upcoming referendum in ensuring our continued strength domestically and internationally.

Many of these young people wanted to know why they should vote "yes," as if all the reasons I have just outlined were some sort of preamble to something else.

I have come to believe that we take many of our freedoms here in Canada for granted. As Major-General Lewis MacKenzie told an audience here in Toronto earlier this week: "If I could have one wish, it would be to dump the entire population of Canada in Sarajevo for about six hours. Perhaps then they would truly appreciate that this is really the best country in the world and that we are uniquely blessed to be its citizens."

I know that many of you have been to similar places and seen similar situations. We must share that experience with our young people. We cannot allow modern-day sophists to throw away our history, to cast aside our traditions, to negate our influence on world events over the past 125 years.

That is why I spoke up for Canada at the United Nations, and that is why I will continue to speak up for Canada here in Toronto or in Quebec City or in Saskatoon or Dartmouth or wherever Canadians and others have to hear our message.

This is a country that has always said "YES" to each other.

"YES" -- we will help you to clear that field.

- "YES" -- we will support you if you have a bad year on the farm, or in the mines, or at sea.
- "YES" -- we will accept your right to speak your own language and develop your own culture.
- "YES" -- we will honour our treaty obligations.
- "YES" -- we will sit together and work out ways to accommodate each other's visions for Canada -- peacefully and honourably.

And this is a country that has always said "YES" to the world.

- "YES" -- we will provide our brave sons and daughters to make peace and to keep the peace.
- "YES" -- we will share our wealth and expertise with others who are less fortunate so that they can improve their lot.
- "YES" -- we will commit ourselves to international treaties and be bound by their provisions.
- "YES" -- we will take our place at the United Nations, the Commonwealth, la Francophonie, the Group of Seven Industrialized Nations, the Organization of American States, the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization -- whenever and wherever we can be a force for peace and progress in the world.

October 26 is an important day for Canada, but it is also a very important day for the world community -- because we are, as a country, the world standard for the promotion and protection of human rights; the development of democratic values and institutions; and the provision of responsible and responsive government and public administration.

The world truly is watching Canada.

We must overcome our differences and say "YES" to Canada.

There will be no second chance. The world has become too unforgiving a place for those countries who cannot recognize their own strengths, who cannot see their own destinies.

Canada's destiny is to work for peace and prosperity throughout the world, leading by example, secure in our own values and strengths at home.

That is what Canadians meant when they said "YES" in the past, and that is what we mean when we say "YES" for the future.