

Strengthening UN's Role in Conflict Prevention and Resolution: Canadian Responsibility

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Group of 78 Annual Conference

“Strengthening Multilateral Cooperation:

The United Nations at 70”

Ottawa, September 26, 2015

Wars, conflict and persecution have forced more people – 60 million -- than at any other time in recorded history to flee their homes and seek refuge and safety elsewhere. If refugees were the population of a country, it would be the world's 24th biggest. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres, said, "It is terrifying that...there is seeming utter inability of the international community to work together to stop wars and build and preserve peace."

The sober-minded Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs says the troubled U.S.-Russia relations are “now on life support.” Russia’s seizure of Crimea and the West’s determination to protect Ukraine at all costs have led NATO to virtually encircle Russia’s western border with war exercises. Russian President Vladimir Putin has stepped up nuclear weapons rhetoric. The U.S. continues to challenge Russia with the development of a ballistic missile defence system. The two countries, which possess 95 percent of all nuclear weapons, are idly watching the undermining of their nuclear agreements.

Sadistic jihadis fighting for the Islamic State in Syria have brutally executed more than 3,000 people over the past year, including 86 women and 74 children. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights says the extremists have carried out a huge number of sickening public executions -- ranging from beheadings and shootings to stonings and crucifixions. The destruction of priceless artifacts, testimony to the cultural heritage of the area, is additional evidence of barbarism.

Is there a link between these tragedies of our time?

The refugee numbers, the breakdown in U.S.-Russia relations, the terrorism in the Middle East are all rooted in the lack of a global social order. Well, that's obvious, some might say. People have always fought and produced human suffering and the best you can do is put out one war at a time. What nonsense.

States had the wisdom and foresight to create, out of the ashes of World War II, the United Nations. The organization was designed to stop the scourge of war and protect vulnerable people. The Security Council was given "primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security." The UN Charter, says former Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali "leaves no ambiguity that the U.N. is the authoritative central piece of the international system."

But what happened? The five permanent members of the Security Council gave themselves veto power over any Security Council resolution. When they agreed, they could accomplish great things, such as establishing peacekeeping forces in troubled areas and instigating peacebuilding measures with judicial and police systems. They even accepted the new idea of the Responsibility to Protect, by which the international system would intervene to stop a government committing genocide on its own people.

The progress toward a more peaceful world, however, has been jolted by the convergence of a number of complex factors: the rise of extremism, the incessant scare tactics of the military-industrial complex, an extraordinary array of pusillanimous politicians, a myopic, commercially-driven media, and the public discovery of an exploitative economic system. Perhaps most damaging of all is the breakdown in trust throughout the world community. Fear, not cooperation, is the leitmotif of modern politics. And the breakdown in trust shows up most tragically in the work of the United Nations.

This concerns me deeply because the United Nations is by far the best instrument we have to cope with the common threats the world faces in the twenty-first century. It should be regarded as a central dynamic organization helping populations everywhere to move forward. It is saving the peace in diverse regions and lifting millions out of destitution. Global poverty, child mortality, and maternal deaths have been cut in half in the past twenty years by UN agencies. The organization is trying to prevent nuclear warfare and environmental catastrophe. It is developing everyone's human rights. Its core message insists seven billion people can live together in a culture of peace and emphasizes non-violence as a starting point. It is the base of our hopes for lasting peace. And it is doing all this on a budget that is only 1.76 percent of what nations spend on their militaries.

When the Security Council acts in unity, it gets results: measures to curb the proliferation of nuclear weapons, elimination of Syria's chemical weapons, effective peacekeeping in the Central African Republic and other war-torn places. But when the Security Council is paralyzed by wrangling and protecting client states, as in the Syria and Iraq crises, bloodshed and immense human suffering occur. To assert that the UN is impotent in world

crises completely misses the point that the “UN” can only enforce peace when the P5 allow it to.

With all its limitations, the United Nations is the most successful world political body humanity has ever known. No other peace effort in history — including the Thirty Years’ Peace between Athens and Sparta in 446 BC, the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, which set up the nation-state system, or the ill-fated League of Nations, established after World War I — has had such a penetrating effect on the human journey.

Despite its accomplishments, the UN is too often dismissed by those in a hurry for instant solutions to problems that lie deep within the psyches of peoples and nations across the globe. The new peacebuilding machinery the UN is trying to develop is in the hands of fallible people, but that does not mean the essential ideas of justice the UN is promoting are deficient. On the contrary, it is the very largeness of the UN agenda that requires more time for fulfillment than those wedded to the daily news seem willing to allow. Those who do see the value of the UN ideal need to exercise courage and patience and need to speak out against the inaction of the big powers.

We should take as a guide the excellent report, “Confronting the Crisis of Global Governance,” published by the Commission on Global Security, Justice and Governance (June, 2015), which called for all people to “rally around a shared, inherent need for security and justice.”

Applying these thoughts directly to our subject, “Strengthening the UN’s role in conflict prevention and resolution,” I offer five steps – certainly not an exhaustive list -- the international community should take to organize itself in an inter-locking way to build the conditions for peace.

1. A Permanent UN Peacekeeping Force. Establishing a permanent UN peacekeeping force for quick deployment in emergency situations is hardly a

new idea, since it was first proposed in the UN formational meetings and again by Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali in his 1992 *Agenda for Peace*. The efficacy of UN peacekeeping has been proven through the years.

Peacekeeping remains a critical element of a broader international peace and security architecture. The resources spent by the international community on UN peacekeeping are but a small fraction of global defence spending. But peacekeeping is done on an ad hoc basis. It often takes months, if not years, to assemble a force to respond to new aggression somewhere. A permanent, highly-trained rapid reaction force on stand-by basis is required for immediate deployment upon authorization by the Security Council. The concept of a “UN Standing Army” rankles the major powers, which fear a loss of their own dominance. Nonetheless, a UN emergency peace service (an international “911”) ought to be established to protect civilians and prevent regional conflicts from spreading into wars.

2. Institutionalize Responsibility to Protect. The responsibility of the international community to protect civilians from atrocities is starting to be better understood. Though still early, the Responsibility to Protect doctrine has a checkered track record. It worked reasonably well in Mali, the results are uncertain in the Great Lakes region of Africa, and it was mis-used in Libya. The international community must develop norms that can find widespread agreement in stopping human slaughters, and governments must put more resources into the prevention of such evils. The criteria for the use of the Responsibility to Protect need to be sharpened. While the principle of protecting people is firmly and globally established, the practice needs more time to become completely effective.

3. Nuclear Weapons Convention. It defies logic that the world has global treaties banning chemical and biological weapons but none banning nuclear

weapons. With the nuclear powers modernizing their nuclear arsenals despite giving lip service to nuclear disarmament, we face permanency in nuclear weapons unless a Nuclear Weapons Convention or a framework of legal instruments outlaw the possession as well as use of these instruments of evil. Three-quarters of the countries of the world have voted at the UN to commence comprehensive negotiations, but the three Western nuclear powers, the US, the UK and France, are adamantly opposed, while Russia will only participate when it is convinced the US will not attempt to maintain military superiority. All countries that profess to understand the “catastrophic humanitarian consequences” of nuclear weapons need to engage immediately in establishing the legal, political and military requisites for a nuclear weapons free world.

4. UN Security Council Reform. Efforts to reform the Security Council have been made in the past but floundered. The fault lies not just with the five permanent members, which want to hog their power base, but with regional powers competing for permanent spaces on an enlarged Council. The arrival on the international scene of the BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa -- with their over-arching new power should be recognized by the selection of Brazil, India and South Africa immediately. Germany and Japan should complete the enlarged Security Council.

5. Women in Peacebuilding. Peace processes generally have a gender bias i primarily involving male leaders of contending armed forces and groups and mostly male mediators or facilitators. When crucial decisions about post-conflict governance are made, women usually lack a seat at the table despite the different impacts of war on men and women. In short, we need a more human-centered peace leadership built on the principles of Resolution 1325. Women’s participation in peacekeeping missions would

be a significant step forward. Also, I look to a highly qualified woman to be the next Secretary-General of the United Nations. There can be no guarantee that more women in positions of authority will automatically produce a more peaceful world, but given the record of men in producing a culture of war over the past few centuries, the possibility, if not the promise, of a more feminine-inspired world order is dazzling.

In my few remaining moments, I want to turn to the role of Canada in "strengthening the UN's role in conflict prevention and resolution." Though we are in the midst of a federal election campaign, I am not speaking in any partisan sense. In fact, I was appointed a Canadian ambassador by the Prime Minister of one political party, and named a Senator by the Prime Minister of another. I served in the Senate as an Independent and long ago shed any sense of partisanship.

In my forty years in political affairs in one role or another, I have stood for a Canadian foreign policy whose multilateral aspects were rooted in the broad United Nations agenda for peace. This meant a thorough involvement in the pillars of that agenda: arms control and disarmament, economic and social development, environmental protection, and human rights. These past few years have been, for me, an enormous disappointment. The Canadian government has virtually turned its back on the U.N. The international regard for Canada as a consistent player in the international arena, working in a reasonably even-handed way, has been shattered. Small wonder that Canada was rejected for a seat on the Security Council.

This audience is well aware of the deterioration of Canadian foreign policy in the past several years, so I am not going to give chapter and verse,

which could indeed fill a book. Instead, I want to look forward and propose action a new Canadian government should take to implement a renewed foreign policy that Canadians could be proud of. This renewal would start with an unambiguous commitment for Canada to be actively and responsibly involved again in the United Nations programs for common security. A high-profile Canadian of experience in international affairs should be appointed Ambassador to the U.N. with a mandate both to increase Canada's participation in U.N. work and bring news of U.N. work to Canadians in periodic public speeches and panel discussions.

In this new framework, I suggest three steps, again not exhaustive.

1. Re-commit Canada to U.N. Peacekeeping. There are now 130,000 personnel in 16 U.N. peacekeeping operations. Of this number, only 90 are Canadians – 30 soldiers and 60 police officers. From a peak of 3,300 Canadians deployed in U.N. peacekeeping, the number has dwindled to this shamefully low figure. At the very moment when a new global consensus on the legitimacy and effectiveness of peacekeeping is forming, Canada has switched to a combat role. Our country is well placed to bring peacekeeping technology into the 21st century. What we need is the political will to do so.

2. Sign and Ratify the Arms Trade Treaty. A seven-year effort to regulate the international trade in conventional arms, from small arms to battle tanks, combat aircraft and warships produced, in 2013, a treaty which, far from perfect, set new international standards for regulating the \$70 billion business that fuels conflict, undermines peace and security, threatens economic and social development, and causes widespread human suffering. Today, 72 states have ratified the treaty and a further 59 have signed.

The Canadian government has refused to sign, largely because the gun lobby doesn't like it. One of the first actions of a new government should be to sign and ratify the treaty and put Canada back in the ranks of opponents of the gun lobby.

3. Explore a Legal Path to Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. In 2010, both the Senate and House of Commons unanimously adopted a motion supporting U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's call for a Nuclear Weapons Convention and calling for a major Canadian diplomatic initiative for the elimination of nuclear weapons. It is time to implement this motion. The recent Canadian Pugwash conference, in a major recommendation, said the Government should host an inclusive international meeting to explore effective legal measures for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons. In other words, Canada should live up to its obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty and work actively for nuclear disarmament.

I conclude with quotations from two of my favourite people. In his recent, widely-acclaimed encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis called for political planning with a breadth of vision: "What would induce anyone, at this stage, to hold onto power only to be remembered for their inability to take action when it was urgent and necessary to do so?" I commend these words to Canada's politicians.

And Carolyn McAskie, the Canadian who led UN efforts to develop the Peacebuilding Commission, pointed to who is responsible for peace. She said: "...We all have a joint responsibility for ensuring the sustainability of global peace based on peace within individual countries and regions."

