

Embassy...UN/Trudeau

By Douglas Roche

Even before Prime Minister Justin Trudeau began his speech welcoming UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at a dinner last week at the Canadian Museum of History, the major statement of the evening had been made. The very assemblage of high-powered figures in government interspersed with a wide range of civil society activists, all celebrating Canada's "return" to the United Nations, conveyed an unmistakable message to Mr. Ban: Canada wants the UN to succeed in building the conditions for peace and Canadians will help.

The dinner was an extravaganza. Former prime ministers (Chretien and Clark), cabinet ministers past and present, senators, diplomats, journalists, and numerous civil society leaders both old and young jostled with one another in an over-crowded reception as Trudeau and Ban, with their wives, paused to greet those who could get near them. Star power, swing music and the magnificent native art that dominates the museum provided an energetic setting.

The two dominant figures represented a generational shift: Mr. Ban is departing (his second term is up this year), Mr. Trudeau is arriving. Their speeches were linked by the references to Trudeau's father, Pierre Elliott, whose presence at the UN, Ban said, is still felt. The "partnership" role Canada has traditionally played at the UN was nostalgically recounted, though in this diplomatic

setting nothing, fortunately, was said about Canada's performance over the past ten years.

It is not easy to overcome the decade of disregard Stephen Harper displayed to the UN. At the earlier press conference, the media wanted to know when Canada would win a non-permanent seat on the Security Council (the 2010 defeat still stinging). Regaining the confidence of the international community will take some time, though the new Prime Minister's enthusiasm for key UN work areas — peacekeeping, refugees, climate change — will undoubtedly cast Canada in a better light as the General Assembly looks around to see who's doing what.

Before Canada can *get* anything out of the reinvigorated relationship with the UN, it will have to *give* quite a bit. Some commentators have speculated this means money for the vast amount of work the UN has launched through the Sustainable Development Goals. A higher budget for Canada's participation in UN programs will likely be necessary. But Canada's role and potential contribution to UN success far exceed a monetary measurement.

Canada's foreign policy was built on two main pillars: our relationship with the United States in all the financial and trade matters vital to Canada's prosperity, and the expression of our country's influence in the world arena via the United Nations. Every Canadian prime minister — Pearson, Trudeau, Clark, Mulroney, Chretien, Martin — has understood this and used the UN to express Canadian

values for peace and development.

Although Harper did advance maternal health in developing countries, he essentially turned his back on the UN's human security agenda: economic and social development, environmental protection, arms control and disarmament, and human rights. It is this inter-locking agenda that advances the UN's quest for common security. Canada cannot achieve any of these goals by itself; it can only effectively express its ambitions through the tedious work of multilateral diplomacy.

Justin Trudeau has yet to express himself, let alone formulate his government's policies, on such a comprehensive agenda for peace. He's facing a great deal of public skepticism, if not cynicism, about the effectiveness of the UN. Yet, with all its limitations, the UN, through its seventy years, has become the most successful political body the world has ever known. There is not a person on the planet unaffected by the UN's vast range of economic, social, environmental and security programs.

The attitude of the new Prime Minister to the UN, the dinner being merely a glitzy expression of renewal, suggests that he has an instinctive recognition that the UN can serve his purposes of leading a politically new Canada through the thorny bushes of the 21st century.

Trudeau has immediately set his sights on restoring Canada's place in the UN's peacekeeping machinery.

Lester Pearson won the Nobel Peace Prize for being a principal inaugurator of UN peacekeeping, which today deploys 120,000 personnel in sixteen missions. The decline of Canada's participation started well before the arrival of Harper, but it was the past ten years that saw a drastic Canadian withdrawal from UN peacekeeping (the military now numbers a paltry 30). Trudeau assured Ban this number will be greatly increased, especially with French-speaking troops to serve in war-torn areas of French-speaking Africa.

The training of such contingents is critical, and a foremost Canadian authority on peacekeeping, Walter Dorn, argues that here Canada can shine: "A new Canadian Peace Operations Centre (CPOC) should be created that truly makes police and civilians equal partners in training alongside the military, just as they are in UN field operations."

Ban's visit to Ottawa came during the same week he released his report, "One Humanity: Shared Responsibility," in preparation for the first ever World Humanitarian Summit, to be held in May. This huge effort (23,000 people in 153 countries have participated in the run-up) is aimed at developing individual and collective responsibilities to prevent and end conflicts. Ban is convinced that the answer to the turmoil in today's world lies in greater global leadership to find political solutions.

The World Humanitarian Summit and the seventeen measures for the Sustainable Development Goals are the

UN at its best. The UN needs to find better ways to communicate why investing in prevention is far more rewarding than cleaning up after wars. Prime Minister Trudeau seems to sense this. He needs to be backed up by his cabinet and officials in planning a realistic Canadian contribution to building the conditions for world peace.

A sparkling dinner and warm embraces ought to provide the inspiration.

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