

Building a world community

# mondial

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**Let Canada take the lead at the UN – As it used to do**

John E. Trent

Canada must once again take the lead on the United Nations and global institutions in general – as it used to do. In the past Canada was a leader, not a follower or an absentee.

**The Need:** The world has a desperate need for global institutions capable of making decisions about the multitude of global problems. Ask anyone and they will tell you the world is challenged by one or several of the following problems: conflicts, climate change, the inequality gap, terrorism, pollution, the plight of women and children, fundamentalism of many kinds, mass migrations, pandemics, financial crises and enfeebled states etc. But, many do not seem to recognize that each one of these global challenges has one common denominator: the world is incapable of taking decisions that will command respect in order to resolve the problems. Syria: no decisions. Ukraine: no decisions. South Pacific: no decisions. Israel and Palestine: no decisions. Nuclear weapons, no decisions. But arms sales flourish and thousands die. Why can't the UN make the big, urgent decisions? In one word, because of sovereignty – the belief that each state can do as it wants with impunity. Worst of all, the major powers which should be leading the world are hobbling the Security Council by threatening to use their vetoes to stop any possible action. The five Permanent Members use their sovereignty to preserve their own power and spheres of interest rather than promoting cooperation.

**What would effective global institutions look like?** This is the question experts are trying to answer. But it is putting the cart before the horse. Some two centuries ago, when the United States and then Canada wanted to form continent-wide federations they first of all had to set the political table. They had to convince each other that a change in their political institutions was necessary before they could decide on the nature of the institutions. They had to decide *how* to get from A to B. That is our most important challenge today. There are lots of learned tomes on what international organizations should look like but few about *how* we can get them.

But this we can say: neither states nor citizens will allow global governance to be authoritarian. Any new institutions will include the techniques of democratic state-craft developed over the past two hundred years including: dividing and controlling power, promoting rights and equality, constitutional safeguards, democratic institutions, elections, federalism, liberalism, rule of law, local police and militias and decentralization.

**How can Canada move the world ahead?** A forward looking government of Canada will make 'Rethinking the United Nations' a central program of the Department of Foreign Affairs and give it the resources required to promote this quasi-constitutional process and to encourage other 'like-minded'

countries to become partners. Civil society organizations and academics can plan, push and prod, and will be important partners in the process, but only governments have the resources to initiate the global diplomatic processes.

If such a unit existed today, it would be expected to help steer Canadian policy and engagement with a growing number of studies and initiatives for global governance reforms. These include:

- The High-level International Panel on UN Peace Operations and the Peacekeeping Summit being convened in September by President Obama;
- The Advisory Group of Experts reviewing the UN's peacebuilding architecture;
- International reform efforts such as the Commission on Global Security, Justice and Governance, and the Independent Commission on Multilateralism of the International Peace Institute;
- Building support for the goal of having UN development, humanitarian and peacebuilding activities in countries to be administered through one budget and lead agency;
- Implementing recommendations from the Secretary General's report on his 'Ten Year Reflection' on the 'Responsibility to Protect' normative framework;
- Restructuring of the UN Human Rights machinery being led by the High Commissioner for Human Rights.
- Effort for a UN Parliamentary Assembly, supported by more than 65 Canadian parliamentarians, from all parties;
- Proposals for the creation of a United Nations Emergency Peace Service;
- Practical steps to make selection of the UN Secretary-General, and other high level UN posts, more transparent and merit-based.

On June 16, 2015, the [Report of the Commission on Global Security, Justice & Governance](#) was launched at the Peace Palace in The Hague. In presenting their report, Co-Chair, former Nigerian Foreign Minister and UN Under-Secretary-General of Political Affairs, Ibrahim Gambari noted that "the UN and global governance institutions are ill-suited to address many modern, evolving threats and must reform or risk prolonging and deepening global crises." According to co-chair former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, the world requires "more capable tools of global governance, with different kinds of public, private, and mixed institutions designed for twenty-first-century challenges."

Their report includes many recommendations for improving the UN system in the short term. But they also acknowledge the need for a longer term approach to global governance reforms. They call for "a transitional strategy that includes building coalitions to initiate and nurture reforms . . . to martial, monitor and sustain support for the reform agenda."

Canada must embrace the need for reform, dedicate resources within the federal government and help lead the way.