



**Statement by Mr. Glyn Berry
Minister-Counsellor
to the United Nations General Assembly
during the informal meeting of the plenary
on the High-Level Plenary Meeting
of the General Assembly of September 2005**

New York, 21 June 2005

We applaud you, Mr. President, and your ten facilitators for the incredible effort you have put into this high-quality document before us. You have Canada's support.

Through dialogue and consultations, we have broken real new ground since the report of the High-Level Panel was tabled last December.

We are optimistic that at the World Summit in September, our leaders will succeed in reinvigorating the United Nations. There is much for them to do. Revamping our multilateral infrastructure with new institutions such as the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council, and the reform of existing bodies, will permit the UN system to far better address new challenges. But this will not be enough. We would also expect that our leaders will wish to provide further impetus to advancing the principle of the responsibility to protect. We anticipate, too, that they will endorse the need for a comprehensive approach to development, and reiterate and strengthen our collective commitment to fight terrorism.

We do think that we need to spend more time on, and attention to, the human rights dimension of the outcome document, as well as come out more boldly on Secretariat and institutional reform.

In the spirit of cooperation, Canada will come to the table with some suggestions for improving language in key areas. We wish to emphasize that any proposals we make will in no way alter the forward-looking nature of this document.

Responsibility to Protect

Since the High-Level Panel's report, we have had extensive and constructive discussions with Member States on the responsibility to protect.

We have made significant progress in developing a common understanding of this emerging norm, which is reflected in the draft outcome document.

Bitter lessons such as those of Rwanda and Srebrenica have shown us in tragic terms that there are situations where the international community must take collective action, using all the means available through international law.

In today's world, sovereignty is no longer exclusively about rights, it is about responsibilities.

The primary responsibility of a government to protect its own people is integral to the very concept of sovereignty. When that responsibility is not or cannot be exercised in the face of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, including ethnic cleansing, there can be no realistic option but for the international community to take collective action, including, as a last resort, the use of force through Chapter VII.

We call on leaders in September to give an unreserved embrace to the responsibility to protect, as a means to bring new purpose to the UN and to underline to our peoples that the international community will not stand idly when called on to exercise that responsibility.

The following elements must be reflected in the leaders' declaration:

- that sovereignty entails responsibility, particularly for the protection of civilians,
- that there are catastrophic situations where, in the event a state is unwilling or unable to protect its population, the international community has a responsibility to protect,
- that the international community has the responsibility to use the full means available to it under international law, including under Chapters VI, VII and VIII of the UN Charter,
- that the responsibility to protect includes, as a last resort, the use of force by the international community, authorized by the Security Council under Chapter VII, and as appropriate in cooperation with relevant regional organizations.

Development

The draft text provides an extremely good start on development. In September, leaders should renew their commitment to a broad development partnership based on the Monterrey Consensus.

The draft would be further strengthened by recognition of the importance of cooperation with the international financial institutions, with the private sector and with civil society organizations.

We welcome an ambitious approach to development financing issues. Concrete commitments from Canada and others in the donor community are continuing to grow, based on the understandings reached in Monterrey. Canada for its part is on track to double its Official Development Assistance (ODA) by 2010.

Our text must also recognize that the international and domestic private sector has an enormous contribution to make to development financing, and that governments must create conditions that encourage this contribution.

Discussions on debt should focus on real progress on debt relief—the kind of progress we achieved last week within the G8, which gives priority to countries which need it most and are best able to use debt relief effectively towards achieving the MDGs. Debt sustainability, defined in terms of economic and financial factors, as reflected in the new debt sustainability framework, remains important in determining where and how debt relief can contribute most effectively to this objective.

We should remain open-minded about exploring potential new sources of financing for development and member states should determine which approaches best suit their circumstances. We do, however, have reservations about “front-loading”, or deficit financing ODA. The Canadian Government is committed to balancing its budgets.

With regard to trade, Canada appreciates the document's recognition of the importance of trade and the efforts to not pre-negotiate Hong-Kong. However, it will be important to ensure that the document is consistent with Doha and does not attempt to prejudice the negotiations in any way.

Health

We are very pleased by the emphasis given to health, including the references to the fight against HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases and to strengthening both national capacity and the WHO's Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network. In September, leaders can also welcome the recent adoption by the World Health Assembly of the revised International Health Regulations. We would also welcome further emphasis on the health needs of women and children including appropriate language on reproductive health.

Terrorism

Canada welcomes and strongly supports the commitments outlined on terrorism. We know the wording represents a challenge for some, but we sincerely hope that world leaders can rally around this language as a political declaration.

We need to move forward the discussion on terrorism and come to common understandings. Canada supports efforts towards concluding a comprehensive convention on terrorism by June 2006.

Canada also believes that we could strengthen the language by underlining the importance of not only adhering to the principles of good governance and the rule of law in the fight against terrorism, but also ensuring full respect for obligations under international law.

Human Rights Council

Over the course of extensive consultations we have broken ground on the idea of establishing a new Human Rights Council. In statement after statement, we have heard a very large and representative number of countries agree that the current Commission badly needs reform.

The language in the document is good—here, it is essential we do not move backwards. We applaud your efforts in seeing that important elements have survived, such as the ability to conduct a peer review.

We also strongly support the Council as a standing body, responsible for addressing human rights situations on an urgent basis. In this respect, we should avoid tying the hands of the Council by requiring that its recommendations be approved by the General Assembly.

Canada supports the creation of the Human Rights Council as a main body of the United Nations. It must have the status and authority that reflect the centrality of human rights to this Organization's work, and the independence of action to allow it to fulfil its responsibilities in a timely manner.

One of the key elements, in our view, to an improved and credible human rights body is how we determine its membership. We want to see greater accountability from members, and we believe they should be elected by the entire membership of the United Nations. We will need to elaborate further on election procedures.

Peacebuilding Commission

Canada strongly supports the language on the creation of a Peacebuilding Commission.

The case has been made by an overwhelmingly majority of countries that the UN needs a mechanism which can assist post-conflict societies in making the critical transition from peacekeeping to long-term reconstruction.

We must be careful to set up an institution which works well not only on paper, but in practice. Canada welcomes the proposal to hold consultations with a view to ensuring that the Peacebuilding Commission is operational by the end of the year.

Canada also strongly supports the establishment of a Peacebuilding Support Office within the Secretariat without delay. This office would serve to coordinate and strengthen essential UN capacities that are fragmented and dispersed among the Secretariat, human rights, humanitarian and development operations of the UN.

Human Rights

Although the section on the Human Rights Council is robust and forward-thinking, other references to human rights do not do justice to the many accomplishments and commitments undertaken by Member States, in particular on gender equality and children's rights.

We need to ensure that this document is one from which we can work, as we continue to build a stronger human rights system.

Canada proposes that leaders decide to renew their efforts to ensure that women enjoy full and untrammelled human rights. This will imply effective and equitable gender mainstreaming in all the activities of the United Nations.

We believe it is also important to underline the vital role that the High Commissioner for Human Rights has in the UN system, and to support her continued involvement in the deliberations of the Security Council and the proposed Peacebuilding Commission. It would also be helpful to add a specific reference to the OHCHR Plan of Action and its recommendations to strengthen field presence.

Canada also welcomes the reference to supporting the International Criminal Court and other international criminal tribunals. Leaders should send out a clear and united message that no one should escape justice for the most serious international crimes, regardless of their position.

We were pleased to see language on migration and internally displaced persons, but are concerned that the formulations used should not prejudge the results of ongoing discussion in appropriate fora.

Secretariat Reform

The draft document stresses the urgency of Secretariat and management reform to enable our staff "to do what matters"—as the Secretary-General has repeatedly urged. The outcome document must be clear and specific about our need for transparency, efficiency, and competence, supported by systems to ensure oversight, accountability and ethical conduct. We see four overarching themes.

Excellence in human resources must come first. The Charter's emphasis on merit in staff selection is the fundamental starting point. Further, we must ensure that performance, both good and bad, has consequences. A properly conceived staff buyout can accelerate staff renewal.

Second is a sharper focus on results. This requires allowing the Secretary-General some flexibility in how to go about implementing the mandates we confer. Budgeting should be changed so that member states earmark resources to priority objectives rather than to organizational structures.

Flexibility must be linked to significantly improved accountability at all levels, including through enhanced assessment of the performance of senior managers.

Finally, strong and independent oversight is essential, including budgetary independence and independent legal counsel for the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

Security Council Reform

We would be remiss if we did not mention Canada's increasing concern at the way discussions on Security Council enlargement are proceeding. Reform of this most important body deserves to be done properly and we must be prepared to spend the time to ensure that the result is a more effective Council. We should not let ourselves be driven by artificial deadlines.

General Assembly

We have talked long enough about rationalizing the work of the General Assembly to make it more relevant and effective and many useful ideas are already on the table. It is now time to put them into practice.

Economic and Social Council

Mr. President, the ECOSOC has become something other than the body intended by the Charter. It spends far too much time repeating the discussions and negotiations that go on its subsidiary bodies. It is time to reduce this unproductive burden and to restore the ECOSOC to the role of coordination of the economic and development activities of the UN system. We recognize that we cannot accomplish this task by September, but leaders should make a commitment that the ECOSOC will be transformed into the forum for discussion of economic and social policy that we need.

Mr. President,

Our time today is short, and we have therefore only focussed on some of the key elements of the outcome document.

The time is also short before the Summit. We must ensure we have something to show for it.