

Address by Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin to the General Assembly

22 September 2004

Mr. President, I want to talk today about UN reform, particularly about the way we should serve and the way we do business if the United Nations is to play the role we want it to, in the 21st century.

The world is organized into independent states, and the primary obligation of the governments is to look after their own people. This presents us with a fundamental dilemma. For unless we also act collectively on the basis of our common humanity, the rich will become richer, the poor will become poorer, and hundreds of millions of people will be at risk. Thus we need institutions whose primary obligation is to our common humanity.

Herein lies the importance of the United Nations. It comprises member-states, but its mission is indeed to serve the worlds peoples. Its charter makes this very clear: and I quote: e, the peoples of the United Nations (are) determined to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women.

Others quite properly will talk to you about structural reform.

What I want to talk to you about today, are reforms designed to put our common humanity at the center of the UNs agenda. Canada sees five areas where bold steps are required. The first area is the responsibility to protect the need to develop the rules and political will that would allow the international community to intervene in countries to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe.

Darfur is a human tragedy of immense proportions. We welcome the Security Councils support for expanded African Union engagement there, though we think the international response should be more robust. The African Union has agreed to lead this effort. Canada is offering \$20 million to assist, and we call on others to join in. It is good that the international community is finally moving, but it has taken far too long.

The Security Council has been bogged down in debating the issue. They have looked at whether Darfur is a threat to international peace and security. They are considering whether the tragedy qualifies as genocide, because either could provide justification in international law for intervention. The fact is though that while the international community struggles with definitions, the people of Darfur continue to suffer. They are hungry, they are homeless, they are sick and many have been driven out of their own country. Tens of thousands have been murdered, raped and assaulted. War crimes and crimes against humanity are being committed.

We must not let debates about definitions become obstacles to action. We should not have to go through such painful debates to figure out how to respond to humanitarian catastrophe. We need clear principles that will allow the international community to intervene much faster in situations like Darfur.

Our common humanity should be a powerful enough argument, and yet that is precisely what

is missing. Put simply, there is still no explicit provision in international law for intervention on humanitarian grounds. The responsibility to Protect is intended to fill this gap. It says that we should have the legal right to intervene in a country on the grounds of humanitarian emergency alone when the government of that country is unwilling or unable to protect their people from extreme harm as a result of internal war, repression or state failure.

The primary responsibility for the protection of a state's own population lies with the state itself, and we are not arguing for a unilateral right to intervene in one country whenever another country feels like it. It is always preferable to have multilateral authority for intervention in the affairs of a sovereign state. What we seek is the evolution of international law and practice so that multilateral action may be taken in situations of extreme humanitarian emergency.

International law is moving in the right direction. Existing instruments such as the Convention on Genocide and human rights treaties do acknowledge states' obligations to their people. The establishment of the International Criminal Court and criminal tribunals are further steps forward. Thus customary international law is evolving to provide a solid basis in the building of a normative framework for collective humanitarian intervention. To speed it along, member-states should now adopt a General Assembly Resolution recognising the evolution of sovereignty to encompass the international responsibility to people.

The Security Council should establish new thresholds for when the international community judges that civilian populations face extreme threats; for exploring non-military and, if necessary, proportionate military options to protect civilians. The responsibility to protect is not a license for intervention; it is an international guarantor of political accountability.

The second area is the responsibility to deny, it encompasses the need to ensure that weapons of mass destruction do not spread to states or terrorists prepared to use them under any circumstances, and especially against innocent civilians. Non-proliferation and disarmament remain fundamental pillars of the UN's commitment to international peace and security.

In both cases multilateralism has been challenged by dramatic changes in the security climate, and there is a clear need to make our systems stronger and more responsive. Strict verification is the key.

The UN's nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, needs stronger tools and political support. We need more rigorous controls on sensitive nuclear technology, and the Security Council must be prepared to deal with non-compliance effectively. The fact is that determined proliferators such as North Korea have been able to circumvent their treaty obligations. Iranian nuclear ambitions represent a serious proliferation risk. We need a multilateral watchdog to assist the Security Council in resolving weapons-related issues in states of concern.

The UN should establish a permanent inspection and verification mechanism that can reinforce and supplement existing verification systems.

More generally, and to show how far we have to go on the disarmament agenda, and on the

responsibility to deny, the UN Conference on Disarmament, charged with the responsibility for negotiating new multilateral instruments, has not even been able to agree on a work plan since 1998. The conference must get back to productive work.

Mr. President, the third area is the responsibility to respect human beings, their dignity, their freedom and their culture. I would like to talk about a broader notion of human rights, one that can encompass individual rights, the protection of collective rights, and pluralism as reflected in the concept of cultural diversity. In fact, the recent UNDP report on human development stresses that cultural diversity is also tied in with freedom. That is why we favour a UNESCO instrument on cultural promotion.

Since the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, humanity has made remarkable strides in the area of human rights. Conventions are now in place to protect a number of rights: civil, political, economic, social and cultural.

But we must remain vigilant in the face of new forms of abuse, such as international trafficking of people and the child sex trade.

In addition to the protections afforded individual rights, various conventions have also been concluded to better protect minorities, to denounce racial discrimination and to combat marginalization.

Nevertheless, it is apparent that the most divisive conflicts result more often than not from attempts by one group to prevent other groups from realizing their perfectly legitimate aspirations from an economic, religious, social or political standpoint. Entire communities are threatened. Violence, civil strife and even failed States ensue. Kosovo, Bosnia, the Great Lakes region in Africa, and today Darfur are the most chilling examples. The international community must take vigorous action to protect the individual as well as minority communities. It is not enough to simply possess various legal instruments they must be put into practice. Institutions responsible for human rights must reveal to the entire world those guilty of abuse, be they armed groups, communities or governments, and take the necessary measures to bring a halt to this abuse.

The United Nations is our moral conscience. The time has come for us to act.

The fourth area is the responsibility to build. The objectives of the Millennium Summit on poverty, disease and global insecurity will come to naught if we do not follow up on the Monterrey consensus, to wit: genuine development requires a holistic approach to such issues as debt, market access and social investment.

That being said, as we have seen in Haiti, all the aid in the world will have only a fleeting effect if a country does not have functioning public institutions. We must build countries governance capacities and take the time to do it right. The same is true for economic institutions. Those that work well marshal the creative energies of local entrepreneurs.

That is the message of the UN Commission on the Private Sector and Development: a thriving

economy is the product of citizens trust in their countrys public institutions. In a nutshell, development depends on governance.

Lastly, there is responsibility for the future, which is to say the obligation we have to leave a better world for our children. This is no small challenge. It involves all aspects of our common heritage health, the environment, oceans, space.

The new pandemics demand our most urgent attention. AIDS, SARS and the Ebola virus are sounding a terrifying alarm. But scientists are predicting even worse diseases. The World Health Organization must bolster its surveillance systems. It must do a better job coordinating its actions with those of other UN bodies.

Beyond health issues lies the whole question of managing our environment. It is gravely threatened. Only international cooperation and technical assistance can bring lasting solutions to such problems as access to clean air and water.

Furthermore, we need an oceans policy that allows us to rebuild our fish stocks. But access to fisheries must be better regulated under international law. Simply put, the pillage of these global resources must stop.

Space is our final frontier. It has always captured our imagination. What a tragedy it would be if space became one big weapons arsenal and the scene of a new arms race.

In 1967, the United Nations agreed that weapons of mass destruction must not be based in space. The time has come to extend this ban to all weapons.

Mr. President, I have talked today about responsibilities; let me mention one more responsibility to act.

We await the report of the Secretary Generals High Level Panel, and we anticipate substantial recommendations for reform. Many countries are focused on Security Council reform. We should support reforms that will make the Security Council more effective, and will permit those countries who actively support UN peacekeeping, development and other activities, to continue to have a meaningful opportunity to serve.

But we also look forward to recommendations that go well beyond the Security Council. For example, the need to set out measures to facilitate an integrated response to the diverse range of security challenges we face from the proliferation of terrorism to improving UN coordination on development, health, and environment. As individual countries, as members of regional organizations, as participants in various international groups that form around specific interests, we all must act to bridge the differences that divide us and forge an international consensus for reform of the United Nations.

In another context, for instance, Canada has proposed a special meeting where leaders from 20 or so countries in the developed and developing world would get together to discuss our collective challenges and responsibilities. This could very well include providing a major boost to

UN reform efforts.

In any event, no matter how you come at it, the time has come for real reform of the United Nations. We must put aside narrow interests and work to common purpose to strengthen this universal institution, whose activities give force to our common humanity.

Four years ago, at the Millennium Summit, the leaders of the world agreed and I quote that e have a duty...to all the worlds people, especially the most vulnerable. That duty will not be discharged, unless we, as governments speak to the dignity and freedom of every human being on earth, here at the worlds meeting place of nations.

Thank you.