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NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS

BY

THE HONOURABLE MAXIME BERNIER,

MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS,

TO THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Mr. President, esteemed colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, it is an honour for me to address this illustrious assembly.

The UN is the very manifestation of the commitment we have all made to contribute to peace and security and to create better living conditions in a climate of greater freedom.

For its part, the government I represent is always striving to make a stronger contribution on the international scene.

The Canadian government is a responsible interlocutor, and we do not take our commitment lightly. We are guided by unshakable principles.

Canada's commitment is not solely a function of our interests, but also, and above all, of the values Canadians hold dear—values such as freedom, human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

These are the values underlying our presence in Afghanistan, Haiti, Sudan and elsewhere.

And these are the same values and aspirations that are embodied in the Preamble to the Universal Declaration on Human Rights: “the inherent dignity and the rights of all members of the human family are the foundation of freedom, justice and peace.”

Article 1 of the Declaration says further, “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”

These are not abstract concepts. They are concrete, with effects both immediate and profound.

Promoting them is not enough. They must be protected and defended, particularly when they are under assault—in Afghanistan, in Burma, in Sudan, in Iran and elsewhere.

Mr. President, in Kabul, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has confirmed the UN's desire to stabilize Afghanistan.

Canada has engaged its political commitment and practical capabilities to rebuild security, democracy, human rights and prosperity in that country.

Canada believes a united international community must support efforts to rebuild Afghanistan. International organizations, including the UN, NATO and the World Bank, must work toward this common goal.

No one country can do this alone. To fully implement Security Council decisions, we must work in close partnership, both with the Government of Afghanistan and with our friends and allies.

To ensure a successful commitment, we deploy the necessary resources, as with our mission in Afghanistan.

It was in the name of a clear UN mandate that Canada joined the international security assistance force coalition in Afghanistan.

More than 60 countries and international organizations have undertaken to help the Afghan government rebuild the country.

We feel that the efforts of these countries and organizations are commendable, and speak to the core principles espoused by the UN.

The challenge may be great, but the principles we are defending are greater still.

The countries assisting Afghanistan are united in the conviction that there can be no reconstruction without security.

Democracy and political stability cannot flourish in a climate of terror. Where anarchy reigns, there can be no health services or education. Economic development is impossible when chaos is all around.

Security is the foundation on which everything lies.

But long-term security requires a sustainable investment in the country's development—the two go hand in hand.

Thanks to the assistance of Canada and the international community, Afghanistan is making strides. Afghan police officers are being trained, Afghan refugees are returning home and Afghan children are learning to read and write.

Canada is making a real difference in the lives of the Afghan people and is contributing to the vision of the future expressed in the Afghanistan Compact. Strong UN stewardship of the Compact, alongside the Afghan government, is critical to realizing this vision.

Despite flare-ups of intimidation and violence, there is progress in Afghanistan.

Last year, Prime Minister Harper emphasized here that the United Nations assistance mission in Afghanistan was the UN's most important special political mission.

The Canadian government continues to support the leadership role of the UN in Afghanistan.

This is why Canada supports having a new high-level UN special envoy for Afghanistan.

In the past year, our government has demonstrated its multi-faceted commitment to this mission. We have increased our development spending, our diplomatic presence and our military engagement .

We welcome Security Council Resolution 1776. It extends the authorization of the international security assistance force in Afghanistan and it calls on member states to contribute personnel, equipment and funding. The Canadian government encourages members of this assembly to actively support this Resolution and its implementation.

And there are other challenges we must also meet. In Haiti, the Canadian government has asked the Security Council to extend the UN stabilization mission in that country.

This represents Canada's largest development program and stabilization mission in the Americas.

In Burma, it is imperative to restore democracy and human rights.

We expect the UN to be at the forefront of these efforts. Although we have disagreed on occasion with the decisions—and at time with the processes—of the UN Human Rights Council, the initiative to hold a special session of the Human Rights Council on Burma is an example of the sort of activism and engagement that Canada expects of this body in dealing with human rights violators.

In Sudan, innovative peacekeeping missions are forming a security framework around which a durable peace can be built.

The international community must demonstrate the political will to find new solutions. These must be aimed not only at immediately ending the daily litany of horrific violations of human rights in Darfur, but also at addressing the issues of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law that must form the foundation for a durable peace.

Canada's substantial contribution to Sudan continues in the form of humanitarian assistance and equipment.

Of course, we condemn the intolerable attack against soldiers of the African Union force.

Mr. President, the scope of the challenges we must overcome to maintain our security is such that no country can hope to tackle them alone.

We, the member states, can and must show the determination, political will and commitment that are crucial if the UN is to truly reflect the principles that its founders wanted it to embody.

Canada is and will remain a committed partner for all those who seek to work for freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Thank you.