

## **Group of 78 Annual Policy Conference 2007 Global Stewardship: A Vision for Canada in the World**

**Keynote address by Cristina Remond  
September 28, 2007**

Good evening,

It is an honour and a pleasure to be speaking to a room full of so many people who have inspired me, and it is indeed fitting that we are here, having a cross-generational discussion, about Canada's future in the world.

When I was asked to speak at this event, the Group of 78's executive asked me to give 'my generation's perspective' on Canada's place in the world. I thought a great deal about what I believe that should be. I wondered whether 'my' generation and the original group of 78 share a common vision for the world. Looking at the original group of 78's statement, and the statement for this conference, it seems that we do, indeed, share much of the same vision.

The theme of this year's conference is global stewardship, a vision for Canada in the world.

My father has worked for Air Canada for the past 35 years, and he started his career there as a steward (now known as flight attendants). If you recall the safety demonstration that is done on board an aircraft, you know that in the event that oxygen masks are needed, you must put on your own mask before assisting others. Whether or not the oxygen mask was his inspiration, my father taught me that if you hope to care for others effectively, you must have your own affairs in order.

The same analogy applies to the domestic and international affairs of the state. We would be sceptical if, for example, Iran claimed to foster democracy abroad, Zimbabwe championed human rights at the African Commission, and China advocated for freedom of religion.

Legitimate Canadian global stewardship in the 21st century requires a solid record of domestic success. To date, Canada's human rights record, functioning social democracy and high standard of living have given credence to our most innovative international work. But the issues are evolving, and Canada must keep pace domestically if it hopes to spearhead international innovation in the future.

On the domestic front, my first concern is that we have failed the people who first cared for the land now called Canada. The deplorable standards of living experienced by First Nations and Métis populations have become known as "Canada's Apartheid." This year, despite strong domestic support, Canada voted against the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In Maude Barlow's words: "By failing to support such an important international declaration, the government has seriously damaged Canada's international reputation as a leader in Indigenous and Human rights." Canada's failure to uphold and protect the rights of the country's first stewards goes hand in hand with its reticence to become a steward of the land itself.

Although the environment has topped the polls as Canadians' number one priority, successive governments have failed to act meaningfully in response to both public concern and the onerous consequences of failing to slow or stop global warming. As we speak, Environment Minister John Baird is in Washington concluding a round of US talks on global climate change which aim to establish voluntary carbon emissions caps. Also as we speak, the shrinking of arctic ice has shattered all known records. The UN panel on climate change has predicted that Polar Regions could be entirely free of ice by 2070. In response to this news, Canada, the US, Russia, Norway and Denmark are racing to secure rights to the oil reserves thought to be hidden in the north, and cheering the possibility of an open shipping lane to extract it!

From my generation's perspective, global warming is not an abstract concept, and the decision to resort to more talk, instead of action, is baffling. I share the concern about survival articulated in this year's statement, and I wonder: what possible political advantage is gained by undermining our capacity to survive on this planet? Our stewardship of the environment has incredible potential to avert catastrophe. My most fervent hope is that Canada will begin to take meaningful and effective action on the environment domestically, and become an environmental champion internationally. Whether that happens in my life time is our joint responsibility.

Now that I have dealt with some of Canada's homework, I'd like to turn to the other two principles expressed in the Global Stewardship statement, namely peace and justice. In particular, Canada's work on peace and justice initiatives at the UN.

In 2004, Peggy Mason expressed the importance of our relationship with the UN most elegantly. She said:

“There is no substitute for a multilateral system .... It is fundamental, not incidental, to world security. Canada works multilaterally because we do not have enough influence to work any other way. And a multilateral system is the only way to work for sustainable results.”

There has, with this government, been a shift away from the UN in favour of efforts spearheaded by the US and multilateral organizations other than the UN, and to me this is a great cause for concern. While Canada may have shifted away from the UN over the past few years, I believe that the international tide of UN reticence is slowly turning, and that Canada must maintain a strong presence there if we are to continue our historical involvement in peace and justice efforts.

In preparing for this speech I spoke with a number of people who know the UN Secretariat intimately to gauge their perceptions of Canada's involvement. By and large, the feedback I got was that Canada is not participating at the UN the way it used to, and is not innovating the way it used to. In fact, since the Responsibility to Protect was published, there seems to be very little activity at all!

In an email to me, Richard Harmston asked me to consider what contribution I would like Canada to make to the international community, and what contribution would make me proud to be Canadian. I consider myself among the 69% of Canadians who consider peacekeeping “a defining characteristic of Canada”: Not only did we invent the practice in 1956, but we continued to make peacekeeping our international bread and butter, and area of expertise.

In 1991, Canada contributed more than 10 per cent of all peacekeeping troops to the UN. Sixteen years later, its contribution is less than 0.1 per cent

In August of 2006, Canada's total contribution to all UN peacekeeping missions including police, military observers and civilians was 128 people. This ranks Canada as 60th on the list of contributors to UN peace operations, behind Zimbabwe at number 59, and just ahead of Mali, at number 61. The list of countries contributing more troops than Canada to peacekeeping operations includes Nepal, Ghana, Benin, Niger, Zambia, Togo, Rwanda, Fiji, Qatar, Malawi and Cambodia.

Contrary to what some may say, Canada's contribution to peacekeeping missions is not a question of it being too expensive. The cost of Canada's participation in peacekeeping missions this year amounted to \$6.2 million dollars. In contrast, the bill for Canadian involvement in Afghanistan this year alone is 1.4 billion, for a total of \$5 billion spent in Afghanistan since 2001.

Worldwide, the total number of non-UN peacekeepers is 68,000 including NATO, the EU the AU and others, combined. In contrast, the total number of UN peacekeepers worldwide today is 125,000! Estimates say that if blue helmets are deployed to Sudan as expected and possible missions to Chad and Somalia materialize, there could be a total of 140,000 UN peacekeepers deployed by the end of this year: Almost double the number in place in the 1990s!

The numbers show: Peace keeping is back in a big way, but Canada is largely absent. Peace operations have also become more complex and more politically sensitive. If Canada wants to shape the direction and outcome of UN peace operations, we must be present on the ground.

In the United States, the tide is also turning back to the UN. On several occasions, the US has appealed to the UN to support its nation building efforts in Iraq. In each case, the UN has responded. This includes assistance in drafting the new constitution and holding constitutional referendums, as well assistance with holding democratic elections in Iraq. There are rumblings south of the border that the US may approach the UN to send peacekeepers to Iraq, and this will certainly be cause for contentious debate, both between UN member states and within the Secretariat itself.

The signals are clear: Popular opinion, the renewed and growing interest in peace operations, budgetary realities and the turning political tide back to the UN tell us that Canada's ship has come in ... If we don't get back on board quickly, it may well sail without us!

My vision for the international community includes Canada's active participation and expertise, It is a vision where Canada's credibility is bolstered by its domestic performance, its long history of international innovation, and a continued commitment to principled engagement in peace, justice and the environment. The Group of 78's work in these fields has inspired me, and I look forward to making this vision a reality.