



**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY
VÉRIFIER AU PRONONCÉ**

**STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE JOHN BAIRD
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TO THE SIXTY-EIGHTH SESSION OF UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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**DÉCLARATION DE L'HONORABLE JOHN BAIRD
MINISTRE DES AFFAIRES ÉTRANGÈRES DU CANADA
À LA SOIXANTE HUITIÈME SESSION DE L'ASSEMBLÉE GÉNÉRALE
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Address by Minister Baird to the 68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

September 30, 2013 - New York City, New York

Check Against Delivery

As we gather near Ground Zero, site of the World Trade Center mass murder, I wish first to honour the victims of terrorism:

I honour all victims, everywhere, including those killed and wounded at the Westgate Shopping Mall in Nairobi.

Tragically, we lost two Canadians, including a Canadian diplomat.

There is no more fitting venue to honour the life of Annemarie Desloges and her service than right here, in front of these United Nations.

The crime of terror is an assault on all people.

And, in its wake, the human family is one.

One in pain. One in mourning. One in our resolve that evil will never triumph.

At this moment of grief, the oneness of humankind is the theme of my remarks today.

Allow me to begin with an observation drawn from the Canadian experience.

The Province of Newfoundland and Labrador was the last province to join Canada, but it is the site of the earliest known European settlement in the New World. L'Anse aux Meadows is more than a thousand years old.

We consider the province's capital city, St. John's, to be the oldest English settlement in North America, dating back to 1497.

The early Newfoundland settlements are the subject of significant archeological activity. Among the artifacts commonly found is a three-handled drinking mug, known as a "tyg."

The three handles are designed for sharing. During the 17th century, it was common to share eating and drinking utensils.

Further research reveals the tyg mug is not unique to Canadian and English history. On the contrary, cups with three or more handles are common to many of the world's cultures. Indeed, nearly three millennia ago, Homer wrote in the *Iliad* of a multi-handled mug.

The tyg and its many counterparts around the world are tangible reminders not just that eating and drinking are social activities but that, as long as human beings have inhabited this planet, sustenance and the necessities of life have been community endeavours.

Human beings share from necessity. We cooperate to survive. We form communities because that is our natural state.

As Cicero observed, "We were born to unite with our fellow men, and to join in community with the human race."

Animated by the same spirit of community, the Charter of the United Nations declares that our goals include "to live together," to be "neighbours," and "to unite."

The very first words of the UN Charter make clear that this organization is a body *of*, *by* and *for* human beings.

It begins, "We the peoples of the United Nations."

Not "We the countries."

Or "We the governments."

Not "We the political leaders."

"We the *peoples*."

An important reminder of why and on whose behalf we are here.

Here at the UN, Canada targets its efforts on securing tangible results for the human family. It is much more important to consider what the United Nations is achieving than how the UN arranges its affairs.

Canada's government doesn't seek to have our values or our principled foreign policy validated by elites who would rather "go along to get along."

The billions who are hungry, or lack access to clean water, or are displaced or cannot read and write do not care how many members sit on the Security Council. But they do need to know that their brothers and sisters in humankind will walk with them through the darkness.

Peace, prosperity and freedom—these are indeed the conditions that have been sought by human communities from the beginning of recorded time: To live in peace. To live in prosperity. To live in freedom.

Of these priorities, peace is the foremost objective of the United Nations.

It is no surprise that the UN Charter mentions the word "peace" four dozen times.

Sadly, "peace" the word is easier to locate than "peace" the condition.

Since the moment this organization was created, not a day has passed without the human family being pained by war somewhere on this planet.

Almost always, the suffering is felt by the most vulnerable among us.

And, far too often, this involves women and violence.

In the context of war, rape and serious sexual violence are war crimes. I have met girls who were victims of this very war crime, and their stories are horrific. The war criminals involved must be identified, pursued, prosecuted and punished.

Earlier this year, Canada and other G-8 nations agreed to treat sexual violence in conflict as a violation of the Geneva Conventions. I applaud the United Kingdom and U.K. Foreign Secretary William Hague for their work in this area. But he would be the first to acknowledge that the fight to eradicate this crime has been led by women, including Special Representative [of the UN Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict] Zainab Hawa Bangura.

Every year, millions of girls, some as young as age nine, are forced into marriage.

Since I began these remarks, 100 children have been forced into marriage; 1,100 per hour; more than 26,000 per day.

The effects of early forced marriage are documented and beyond dispute. Early forced marriage harms health, halts education, destroys opportunity and enslaves young women in a life of poverty.

A young woman once recounted her wedding date. She remembered, "It was the day I left school."

No country is immune from this scourge.

This is a global problem. A problem for humanity.

Forced marriage is rape; it is violence against women. Early forced marriage is child rape, violence against young girls. The practice is abhorrent and indefensible.

We condemn it.

Even though some might prefer that we kept quiet.

The discomfort of the audience is of small concern, particularly in the context of a crime that calls to heaven for justice.

If this body does not act to protect young girls, who will?

Another way to protect the vulnerable is to improve the health of mothers, newborns and children so that we can reduce the number of deaths.

I am proud that our Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, has led a global effort—the Muskoka Initiative—to reduce maternal and infant mortality and to improve the health of mothers and children in the world's poorest countries. It's about half of the world's population; all of its potential.

While these efforts—to eradicate sexual violence in conflict, to eliminate early forced marriage and to improve maternal and newborn health—are essential, we must do more than react to crises.

We must invest in opportunities for women and girls.

We must ensure that women participate fully in all parts of our society and in all the countries of these United Nations. This will help us build a stronger, more secure, more prosperous and more peaceful world.

It is in every nation's self-interest to ensure every young girl realizes her full potential.

And it is from the perspective of the human family, one family, that we must address other threats to peace and security.

Among the most urgent crises remains the violence in Syria.

Canada's position is clear. We support the Syrian people, the innocent people caught up in this senseless violence, and those who work on their behalf. We will never support a brutal and illegitimate regime that has unleashed weapons of mass destruction on its own people. Nor will we tolerate extremism and terrorism as alternatives to Assad's tyranny.

The people of Canada have been generous in helping those most in need.

When success is achieved, it is important to recognize it. The near-impossible work of the UN World Food Programme must be applauded, and Canada has responded by being the second-largest single-country donor in the world. Their work in Syria is paramount and has not gone unnoticed. I also commend the work of the UNHCR [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees] in providing assistance to the refugees fleeing this terrible conflict, and the generosity of Syria's neighbours in providing safe haven.

Canada joins the entire world in seeking a political resolution to the conflict. Canada supports a peaceful, democratic and pluralistic Syria that protects the rights of all communities.

But let us not confuse a peaceful, negotiated outcome with equivocation or moral uncertainty. There can be no moral ambiguity about the use of chemical weapons on civilians.

Today, September 30, is a dark reminder of the price of accommodation with evil.

It is the 75th anniversary of the Munich Agreement, by which Czechoslovakia's freedom was sacrificed to appease the Nazi regime. The appeasers claimed they had won "peace for our time." In fact, their abandoning of principle was a calamity for the world.

Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor who was imprisoned in Auschwitz, has been even more blunt:

"Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere. When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant."

Just as we are not neutral or silent on the crimes being committed against the Syrian people, neither is Canada neutral on Israel's right to exist and to defend itself.

There can be no bargaining over Israel's existence. While dialogue is a virtue, there can be no virtuous discussion with anyone wedded to Israel's destruction.

Today, the Jewish people are masters of their own fate, like other nations, in their own sovereign Jewish state. Like other nations, Israel has the right to defend itself, by itself.

Canada fundamentally believes peace is achievable. That Palestinians and Israelis and their neighbours can live side by side, in peace and security.

We, like many nations, wish to see a prosperous Palestinian state living in peace with its Jewish neighbour.

That's why, although we sometimes have fundamental differences on how statehood is achieved, Canada is providing significant assistance to build the institutions that are vital to the establishment of a viable future state. In the West Bank, Canada is contributing greatly to economic, security and justice initiatives.

Recent developments in negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority are encouraging. I salute the leadership and courage of the Israeli Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu] and the Palestinian Authority's President [Mahmoud Abbas].

I commend U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry for his leadership in this area, and we must all commit ourselves to this cause, united by the prospect of peace.

I look forward to the day when Israeli and Palestinian children can live side by side in peace and security in a Jewish and a Palestinian state.

Ladies and gentlemen, dialogue is important, yes. But our dialogue must be a prelude to action. And action must mean achieving results and making a difference.

Take the recent statements coming from the regime in Iran.

Some observers see encouraging signs, but sound bites do not remove threats to global security. Kind words, a smile and a charm offensive are not a substitute for real action.

We will welcome and acknowledge reform, if and when it comes.

By this we will know when genuine reform has occurred: Has there been real, measurable, material improvement in the lives of the Iranian people and in the security of the world?

Not yet!

We will judge the regime on the basis of its action and results.

The P5+1 [the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany] has had five rounds of formal negotiations with Iran in the past two years. While everyone says the meetings have been "productive," the fact remains we haven't seen any change in Iran's actions.

Next year, nothing would make Canada more pleased than to see a change in Iran's nuclear ambitions. A change to its terrible human rights record. And an end to Iran's material support for terrorism.

Now is the time for the global community to maintain tough sanctions against Iran in order that it take a different path on its nuclear program.

The Iranian people want peace. And the Iranian people are suffering great hardship because of their government.

Canada wants the Iranian people to be able to access a life of freedom and prosperity for themselves.

And how do we as a human family achieve and maintain prosperity?

Through free trade among open societies operating under transparent, consistent and fair rules.

Canada continues to diversify its markets because it is a trading nation.

We are aggressively pursuing free trade agreements with other nations.

Bounded by three oceans, with the second-largest land mass in the world, Canada literally is open to the world.

We are both deepening existing economic relationships and building new ones. Whether with China, now Canada's second-largest trading partner, or the ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] countries, where Canadian trade and investment ties are dramatically increasing, or the Pacific Alliance, which provides new and exciting opportunities, or the European Union, where we are negotiating a comprehensive free trade agreement, Canada and Canadians are supporting market liberalization. In the process, ordinary lives are becoming enriched, and entire societies are becoming stronger.

But the quest for prosperity must never come at the expense of our commitment to freedom.

Prosperity is also inextricably linked to peace. After all, those who lack security usually lack the means to provide for themselves and their families.

With economic opportunity, a fruit vendor in Tunisia may not have felt compelled to end his life seeking the dignity to provide for his family.

A young man in Afghanistan may never feel compelled to join terrorist elements simply to raise his children—to ensure their lives are better than the one he lived.

I will always remember the seven-year old girl I met at Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan. Her parents had made the difficult decision to leave their home and to seek refuge in another country—braving

hardship because they were motivated, like all parents, by the desire to keep their family safe.

I asked how she was doing. With tears in her eyes, she said, simply, "I don't like it here. I want to go home."

Heart-wrenching.

And millions of people are in the same tragic position—millions of members of the human family who cannot even begin to contemplate prosperity until a more basic need, their need for security, is addressed.

The global family will never achieve the prosperity that is our full potential unless we address the peace and security concerns that shackle human opportunity.

Everyone has an interest in contributing to the solution, because peace and security ultimately ensure the freedom of the individual. That's why we need the people of these United Nations gathered here to promote this freedom.

For the people of these United Nations, no minority is more sacred than the individual, and the freedom of the individual.

Freedom from oppression. Freedom from discrimination. Freedom to worship, to think, to speak, to love, to believe. Freedom to be.

Human freedom can be exercised, and sadly limited, in countless ways.

Religious persecution continues in too many places.

Since we gathered here last year, the world has witnessed:

- bombings of mosques in Iraq and Pakistan and a Catholic church in Tanzania;
- attacks against Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim places of worship in Burma and Bangladesh;
- the bloody persecution of Christians in Syria;
- attacks on Coptic Christian churches in Egypt;
- attacks on a mosque and on a Catholic church in Sri Lanka;
- the detention of Sri Lankan Muslim leader Azad Sally;
- the murders of Catholic worshippers in Nigeria; and

- the Iranian regime's ongoing persecution of the Bahá'í.

Canada just this year opened an Office of Religious Freedom. Its mandate: to promote freedom of religion and belief as a foreign policy priority. To combat the enslavement into fear, by those who seek to intimidate and undermine the right to worship freely. In peace—and in harmony.

We reject the pernicious notion that human dignity can be sliced up, compartmentalized or compromised.

In a pluralistic society it is impossible to protect some human rights and freedoms while infringing others.

All freedoms are rooted in the inherent dignity of human beings.

Whether the issue is religious freedom, sexual freedom, political freedom or any other freedom, some people ask:

What business is it of ours? What interest do we have in events outside our borders?

Our business is a shared humanity. Our interest is the dignity of humankind.

Many assaults on human dignity have common roots. I refer to neo-fascist ideology, masquerading in different forms, and the threat that it poses to individual freedom.

I spoke earlier of the anniversary of the Munich Agreement.

What the signatories claimed as a triumph of practical politics was in fact a craven capitulation that betrayed human dignity and bankrupted the peace it purported to secure.

It was wrong then to underestimate and to appease fascism, just as it is now to underestimate its modern incarnation.

Extremism that subjugates human dignity and crushes individual freedom beneath rigid ideology must be opposed for what it is.

One year ago today, the world lost the great Somali poet known as Gaarriye. Though his pen has been silenced, the inspiring lyrics remain.

It was Gaarriye who wrote:

“And tell them this: our purpose is peace; our password
‘Freedom’;
Our aim, equality;
Our way the way of light.”

In other words: Peace. Prosperity. Freedom. Three universal human priorities.

Like three handles of a mug from which we all drink. Three values that all humanity shares.

As I close, I cannot help but reflect on three young girls, and my heart breaks for them:

The child bride: “It was the day I left school.”

The girl who was a victim of rape and sexual violence.

The refugee: “I want to go home.”

We are not here to achieve results for governments or political leaders.

We are here to protect and defend these three girls and seven billion other members of the human family. Let us remember this as we embark on discussions to shape a new global agenda, focusing on those most in need.

I am confident that everyone here feels the overwhelming honour and privilege it is to serve our people. It is not without great challenge and responsibility. But we all must stand up and deliver on this unique mandate for the people, for it is the people who expect nothing less.

Thank you.

