

**Canada's National statement at the General Debate during the opening of the
78th session of the UN General Assembly**

**H.E. Ambassador Bob Rae, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of
Canada to the United Nations**

26 September 2023

Bilingual Version – As Delivered

Mr. President,

I am very honoured to speak to the General Assembly on behalf of the Government of Canada. I recognize that I am doing so on the traditional territory of the Lenape people.

Mr. President, I would like to congratulate you on your election as President of the General Assembly. If I may say so, it is wonderful to see a member of the PR community taking charge. It has been a pleasure working with you and I am looking forward to working with you in the time ahead.

I would also like to offer our sincere condolences to all those who have lost loved ones in the terrible floods in Libya, as well as our dear friends in Morocco mourning the many lives taken by the devastating earthquake.

Let me assure you that, Canada stands ready to assist in whatever way we can, facing these challenging situations, and we are thinking today, as we see the very, very tragic photographs and videos, of the Armenians who are leaving Nagorno-Karabakh after such a challenging experience over the last several months and indeed years.

Mr. President,

Just before coming to New York, I had the opportunity to work with an indigenous council of leaders in Northern Ontario, Canada. They had what I thought was a very effective slogan that was quite simple. It talked about the power of unity and the dignity of difference. It is a theme we should perhaps think about.

Sometimes people talk about the failure of the United Nations, and I point out that, no, it is actually the divided nations that are failing. When we are united, we succeed. It is when we are divided that we fail. We need to seize this time and all the times we have to make a difference. But we will only succeed if we come together.

We are at the halfway point in trying to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, which we all agreed we would work on eight years ago.

We recently adopted the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction treaty.

And we are approaching the first global stock-take of the Paris Agreement.

In listening to the speeches over the last week – it has been very clear that there is a profound consensus that we are very far behind where we need to be to meet the commitments that we have all made to our populations and that we have all made to one another.

The health of our planet, of our people, of our institutions, the wellbeing of all our populations, and indeed our global economy are all at serious risk.

I met last week with Wilton Littlechild - a former Grand Chief of the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations and a member of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and, indeed, a negotiator of the UN Declaration of the rights of Indigenous People.

He has talked to me very directly about how it is so critical that we not look at the issues in isolation. As we speak here, we go from topic to topic and from things we have to cover to the next thing we have to cover. But it is important we see them all as a whole. We need to recognize how things are connected.

Comme bien des gens dans vos pays, je peux vous assurer que les Canadiens et Canadiennes aussi s'inquiètent du coût de la vie.

Ils s'inquiètent aussi de l'intelligence artificielle, de l'ingérence étrangère, et de la désinformation et désinformation.

Les Canadiens vivent aussi les crises climatiques et environnementales.

Comme vous le savez très bien, comme les citoyens de New York le savent très bien, cet été, les Canadiens ont connu les feux de forêt les plus destructeurs de l'histoire de notre pays. Ceci démontre à quel point nous sommes liés, tous ensemble.

Des feux à une échelle jamais vue, brûlant en même temps, partout. Mais le Canada n'est pas unique. Les incendies ont fait rage partout dans le monde à une échelle sans précédent.

Il ne s'agissait pas d'une fenêtre sur notre avenir, mais plutôt d'un témoignage de notre présent.

Notre réponse à ces défis difficiles ne doit pas être complaisante, divisée ou nostalgique du passé. Il ne s'agit pas de pointer du doigt ou de chercher des panacées.

Il s'agit de prendre des mesures concrètes pour aider à relever, tant au Canada que dans le monde entier, les défis auxquels nous sommes confrontés tous ensemble.

We are taking steps at the national level, of course. And it is entirely right and normal that all of us would be taking steps at home to deal with the crisis that we face.

For example in Canada, we have made a decision to admit more people into our country than ever before. Because we have found and discovered that immigration has made us a better country and it has made us a better place to live.

We have also decided to put a price on carbon. Because we know that we must do everything we can to stem climate change – even as we know we have to do more ourselves.

We believe strongly that reducing emissions is a duty that is shared. But so is the need to ensure something else and that is the access to capital - on longer terms and with more favourable rates - to help in the green transformation of the global economy.

That is why we have now agreed to donate more of our Special Drawing Rights at the International Monetary Fund, as the Prime Minister announced last week. We have made the decision to grant forty-eight percent of our own Drawing Rights to other countries. That is the highest number among those that have the Special Drawing Rights, and that we would encourage others to follow that example.

We also continue to search for ways to break down gender barriers and to end systemic racism. To not be afraid to describe it as such and to say it is something we have to continue to deal with.

To protect and promote the rights of Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual individuals and communities, in all their diversity. And let me say from this platform why we do that and why I describe it in this way. It is because it is so fundamental to human nature itself – to let people be themselves.

To let people be who they are and to have the right to celebrate their own identity, without repression, without division, without discrimination. It's foundational for us.

And yes, so is walking the path towards reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

Because, with full humility and in recognition of our own faults, we have found strength in diversity, purpose in equity, and unity in inclusion. And like many others, we have found greater peace in finally admitting the truth of who we are.

Mr. President,

Late last month, at the invitation of the Government of Panama, I had the opportunity to visit the Darien Gap – the jungle that serves as the border between Colombia and Panama.

I saw the irregular migration crisis unfolding there, as we call it - where in real terms, it is hundreds of thousands of men, women, and especially children who are risking their lives to cross the Gap.

The sheer number of people who are crossing and on this journey is shocking. And it must be seen in a broader light.

I had the chance to speak with individuals from many different countries – of course from the region, but also from Afghanistan, from China, and from Syria.

And this regional crisis, which is now very much in the Americas, is part of a global crisis.

There are today over 108 million people that are forcibly displaced around the world.

Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya remain displaced in Bangladesh and in their native Rakhine, as the military junta continues its brutal and illegal crackdown in Myanmar.

In Afghanistan, where the de facto authorities are repressing the rights of women and girls, over five million people are displaced or refugees.

After more than 12 years of war, more than 12 million Syrians are internally displaced or refugees in neighbouring countries.

Two million have now been displaced by the conflict in Sudan, including those already scarred by the genocidal violence in Darfur.

Les conflits sont le principal moteur de cette crise mondiale, tout comme les changements climatiques, les catastrophes naturelles et l'insécurité économique.

Les personnes qui cherchent à traverser la région du Darién fuient tous ces facteurs de déplacement.

Les nombreuses personnes qui cherchent à traverser m'ont fait voir les conséquences de notre action – ou notre inaction – ici aux Nations Unies.

Ma visite a renforcé ma conviction profonde que ce que nous disons et ce que nous faisons ici aux Nations Unies est profondément important dans la vie des gens que nous représentons.

Nous devons nous rappeler de notre pouvoir collectif. Tel que mentionné précédemment, le pouvoir est dans l'unité, et non dans la division. Et notre responsabilité est d'en faire le plus de bien possible pour le plus grand nombre de personnes. J'ai été touché par le travail remarquable des Nations Unies et des toutes les organisations humanitaires que j'ai visitées.

Nous voyons partout dans tout le monde que les besoins humanitaires ont atteint des sommets historiques. Pourtant, le financement est nettement insuffisant.

Nous connaissons tous que les solutions les plus durables sont politiques. Ils doivent s'attaquer aux causes sous-jacentes des crises humanitaires, tout en trouvant des solutions durables qui respectent la dignité humaine et les droits de la personne et créent les cadres durables pour le développement économique et la prospérité.

C'est aussi vrai en Afghanistan qu'au Myanmar, en Syrie qu'au Soudan.

We are also at a crossroads, as you said Mr. President in your opening address. We are at a "***crossroads in history***" on two issues that are closely linked: gender equality and democracy.

I was in the Hall when the President of South Africa was speaking, and he eloquently reminded us in his speech that the achievement of the SDGs depends on the empowerment of women in all spheres of life.

He called for the provision of adequate health services to every woman, child and adolescent, and made a passionate plea for the equal representation of women in decision making.

President Ramaphosa is absolutely right.

Yet, sometimes today, we are told at the UN when we are in our negotiations that gender is "*too divisive*" an issue.

We are told that to seek ambition in this area is "*insensitive.*" I have heard these words myself.

That it should be put aside for "*compromise.*"

Well, I could not disagree more.

For us, gender equality is not an issue to be bartered against perceptions of progress, nor is it just a “*nice to have*” or something that can be said but always must be qualified.

Gender equality - the equality between men and women, the equality between all human beings - is core to our dignity. It is the foundation of freedom. It is the foundation of justice, and it is the foundation of peace. If we cannot treat ourselves as equals, we will never achieve the things we want to achieve.

It is also essential in our work on Financing for Development and in the reform of the global financial architecture.

And we are committed to responding to the calls of developing countries in these discussions. As I have mentioned before, it is not just what I say, it is what we do.

And what we have done, is to indicate and to take the decision that we are moving forward in respect to the SDRs, as we have been asked to do.

Sustainable economic growth cannot be realized if the opportunities for women – who represent half the population – are suppressed.

At the same time, as we put great emphasis on the importance of equality, we must also have to uphold the values of free and democratic societies.

We cannot bend the rules of state-to-state relations for political expediency.

Because we have seen, and continue to see, the extent to which democracies are under threat through various means of foreign interference.

But the truth is, if we don't adhere to the rules that we have agreed to, the very fabric of our open and of our free societies may start to tear.

We must also protect and promote the principles of equality and universality of access to health care for all, including sexual and reproductive health and rights for all women.

By building open, inclusive societies, and by promoting and protecting human rights for all, everyone benefits.

This is how we get closer to equality, and get closer to justice.

Monsieur le President,

Je tourne maintenant à la situation en Haïti. Nous devons également travailler ensemble pour faire face à une autre crise urgente. La crise humanitaire, politique et civile en Haïti.

La semaine dernière, le premier ministre Trudeau a convoqué une réunion du Groupe consultatif spécial sur Haïti, que le Canada est fier de présider.

Nous sommes reconnaissants de la participation des dirigeants d'Haïti, des pays des Caraïbes et de bien d'autres. J'ai beaucoup apprécié le discours prononcé ici ce matin par la ministre des Affaires étrangères de la Jamaïque.

Nous avons entendu très clairement que la situation en matière de sécurité en Haïti va mal. Le viol est systématiquement utilisé comme arme. La violence, la corruption et l'impunité sont la norme.

Nous appuyons sans réserve l'intensification des efforts déployés par le Conseil de sécurité des Nations Unies pour régler la situation en priorité.

L'offre du Kenya de diriger une mission d'assistance de soutien à la sécurité en Haïti témoigne de son leadership et de sa solidarité. Nous saluons également les promesses de contribution faites par la Jamaïque, les Bahamas et d'autres pays.

Et nous félicitons les pays et organisations internationales qui se sont joints au Groupe de coordination de l'aide à la sécurité internationale annoncé en juin dernier par la ministre des Affaires étrangères du Canada, Mme Mélanie Joly.

Le Canada a beaucoup investi dans le secteur de la sécurité en Haïti et continuera de le faire. Nous encourageons les autres à se joindre à nous dans cet effort.

En même temps, nous poursuivons également notre appel pour un dialogue politique inclusif et encourageons toutes les parties prenantes à travailler ensemble dans un esprit de compromis pour le bien du peuple haïtien.

C'est essentiel pour rétablir l'ordre constitutionnel, ouvrir la voie à des élections libres et équitables et, ultimement, s'attaquer aux causes profondes de la violence.

Une approche globale – une approche qui appuie les solutions dirigées par Haïti et qui comprend des mesures urgentes en matière de sécurité, d'aide humanitaire et de développement – est absolument essentielle.

Security for everyone living in Haiti is a precondition for all else that we must do. But in so doing, we must reinforce the security by working on the humanitarian crisis, on the development crisis and on the political crisis. We have to show what we can do in this joined up effort.

Mr. President,

Over the past decades, the Middle East and the wider world have struggled with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

It was an issue in 1945, it is an issue today.

Today, Canadians are greatly concerned by the trajectory of the conflict, noting in particular the rising levels of violence in the West Bank and in Israel, the continued risk of escalation between Israel and Gaza, and groups in Lebanon, and the continued growth of Israeli settlements that do not have a foundation in international law.

The measures and rhetoric that make two states impossible must stop.

We are committed to the goal of a just, a comprehensive and a lasting peace in the Middle East, which includes the creation of a Palestinian state living side by side in peace and in security with Israel.

We urge both parties to return to the negotiation table and make the difficult compromises that will be required to achieve this result.

We firmly believe that unilateral actions that jeopardize efforts for peace and the failure to embrace all that is entailed in creating two states - two states that are not bickering or at war and fighting each other, nor that are threatening each other but two states that are living in peace, in mutual recognition and with this concept of the dignity of difference. Unless we get there, we will only have deeper conflict. And this has to be avoided.

Monsieur le Président,

Le chemin que nous emprunterons ensemble à ce « **carrefour de l'histoire** » déterminera l'avenir de notre organisation – et il aura une incidence dans la vie de tous nos citoyens.

Nous avons vu le pouvoir de veto des membres permanents du Conseil de sécurité utilisé pour empêcher le Conseil de réagir aux atrocités et aux agressions.

Nous appuyons l'autolimitation du veto par tous les membres permanents dans les situations où des civils risquent de commettre des crimes atroces.

Nous soutenons également les efforts visant à élargir le nombre de membres élus du Conseil afin de garantir une représentation plus équitable d'un plus grand nombre de pays en développement dans le monde.

Et nous mettons au défi tous les membres permanents d'accepter plus pleinement et publiquement la nécessité de devenir plus efficaces, plus inclusifs et plus transparents.

C'est le moment pour la réforme. Cet appel ne s'arrête pas au Conseil de sécurité. Tous les processus intergouvernementaux de *tous* les organes des Nations Unies doivent devenir plus efficaces. Nous devons être ouverts à apporter les changements nécessaires.

C'est à nous maintenant de décider.

Oui, nous sommes à mi-chemin de l'Horizon 2030. Et oui, nous sommes avants pris du retard.

Mais nous sommes aussi capables de corriger la situation et d'aller de l'avant ensemble.

Le Canada est convaincu que nous pouvons le faire.

Le multilatéralisme a toujours évolué. Ce fût le cas dans le passé et ce sera le cas à l'avenir. Mais nous devons agir. Nos institutions n'ont pas besoin d'être statiques, y compris l'architecture financière internationale.

Nous avons travaillé avec la Jamaïque, avec la Barbade, la Première Ministre Mottley et le Secrétaire général. Nous croyons tous à la possibilité de changement et à la réalisation nos efforts et d'avancées importantes.

Nous allons continuer à investir, comme nous l'avons fait le passé, car nous croyons en l'organisation des Nations Unies et nous croyons que cette organisation peut aider à bâtir une paix durable.

Mr. President,

I must conclude on a somber note. What remains the greatest threat to global peace and security today. There is no getting around it, there is no avoiding it, and not calling it for what it is. And that is: Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

We wake up every morning, our time, to the news of which city has been bombed, which children have been maimed and which communities have been destroyed.

The Charter clearly commits us all to end the scourge of war. Those are the first words of what we were determined to do. The Russian Federation signed the Charter.

And yet, despite that signature, for 580 days the Russian Federation has waged an illegal and immoral war of aggression against a fellow member of this organization, Ukraine.

The Russians went to the International Court of Justice and claimed it was not an invasion but rather self-defence and they were exercising their jurisdiction under Article 51. And further claimed there was a genocide caused by the Ukrainians.

The only problem with these arguments is that the court has looked at them and refuted them. This is an invasion of one country by another country. It is the most fundamental breach of the Charter one could imagine.

The costs of this war are staggering.

There is, first, the unimaginable cost counted in lives. Thousands and thousands.

Hospitals, schools bombed, people displaced, children abducted, forcibly deported.

President Zelenskyy was right when he said that it is a global natural disaster.

It has caused volatility to food and energy prices, at a time when the global economy is already struggling.

And what is Russia's response to this?

Well, to deny that it is happening and to call it a special military operation that is generated by Article 51. These are simply lies. It is not compatible with what we know and can see are the facts.

Russia has blocked the Black Sea Grain Initiative. It is holding the world's food supply hostage. It is causing the cost of living to go up in every single country in the world. It is putting millions of people unemployed in countries all around the world. It is turning countries against each other.

We must realize; Russia does not have the best interests of any of us in mind.

We simply cannot allow President Putin and his enablers to pretend the Charter doesn't exist and make a mockery of this foundational law in the relationships between us.

The truth is, Russia has committed a terrible aggression. It is committing a terrible aggression each and every day. A report published earlier this week states that tortures are being committed as a matter of State policy.

We believe Russia must be held accountable. And we are determined to see justice served.

Canada welcomes the indictments by the International Criminal Court against President Putin and his Commissioner for Children's Rights. Because we believe no one - no one - is above the law.

But what have the Russians done, even this week? This week, they issued arrest warrants against three senior officials – judges of the International Criminal Court. The president of the International Criminal Court - who speaks from this dais every year, describing the work of the Court, is under an arrest warrant from the Russians.

Imagine if we lived in a world or if in all countries a charged criminal can simply take out the Chief Justice.

These are terrible things.

We are going to do everything we can to support Ukraine as it continues to defend itself, its people, its identity, its sovereignty, and its territorial integrity.

We believe this is fully in line with our commitments under the Charter and international law.

We believe as well that it is the war that is not legal. And it is the war that is fundamentally immoral. It is a war that has been started by Russia and Russia can end it.

Russia could end it right now by simply pulling its troops back. This would be the end of war. It's over! Peace would come.

People call for peace. Tell that to the Russians! They are the ones that can create peace, with a snap of a finger.

Allow me to go back to where I started, Mr. President, by saying that we must seize the time that we have to make a difference.

Nous devons saisir les opportunités qui existent et qui sont devant nous pour faire une différence.

We must find within ourselves the ability to create unity where there is division. We must find inside ourselves the capacity to recognize the importance of accepting differences.

If we can do that, then we can create a United Nations that will be worthy of the name.

This is our job. This is our obligation. And that is the work we have to do.

Thank you very much.