

**Address by the Honourable Marc Garneau, PC, MP,**

**Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada at the**

**General Debate of the 76th United Nations General Assembly**

**"In Our Hands"**

**New York, 27 September 2021**

*Introduction*

- [Mr.] President of the General Assembly, Excellencies,
- Before I begin, please allow me a personal observation.
- As I address you, I am conscious that I am speaking to virtually the entire world.
- In my previous career, I was an astronaut and I had the opportunity to see the entire world from the vantage point of space.
- I have flown over all of your countries and I have reflected a great deal on our planet, Earth.

- I have realized that Earth is the cradle of all humanity and that we all come from the same place and that we have nowhere else to go.
  - – and that we must find a way to get along with each other.
  - – and that we must take care of our planet- a planet that we are visibly damaging.
- Space offers the unique perspective of seeing beyond one's own national borders.
- In that sense, this body, the United Nations, offers that same perspective.
- I am honoured to be here with you today on behalf of Canada's newly re-elected Government, led by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.
- I would like to begin my address by respectfully acknowledging that the land on which we gather today is the traditional unceded territory of the Lenape (Le-NOP-ay) people.
- Fellow delegates, friends – we are assembled today at one of the most challenging times in generations.
- The world is facing simultaneous and cascading crises, including climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and threats to international peace and security, which serve to exacerbate inequalities, test our resilience and shine a bright light on the shortcomings of our systems and institutions.
- But not for the first time has this institution faced such formidable challenges. We must not be querulous or faint-hearted in the face of the hardships and difficulties of our modern world. That is not why we are here.
- We must learn from the vision and courage of those who have gone before, and we must think of the hopes and aspirations of those who will inherit the world we leave behind.

- From the ashes of World War 2, our parents and grandparents responded to the unprecedented social and economic collapse of the 1930's and 40's with its accompanying death and destruction, by building a new international order based on rules and strong international institutions to bring stability, prosperity and peace for the generations that would follow. They did not wring their hands in despair. They rolled up their sleeves and went to work.
- Climate change, COVID-19, the rise of authoritarianism and inequality – these are the challenges of our time. They are ours to solve and overcome.
- In doing so, we must look toward the future with optimism. Just as our parents and grandparents stepped up to the challenges of their moment, so too must we recognize and seize our own opportunity to shape the future.

### *Climate Change*

- [Mr.] President, there is no more perfect example of where multilateral solutions and political will are needed than in addressing the impact of climate change.
- Like all of you in this great hall, Canada is not immune to the climate crisis. Earlier this year, the west coast of Canada faced a record-setting heatwave – in some places reaching over 49 degrees Celsius – which saw hundreds of people lose their lives, and an entire town in the province of British Columbia destroyed.
- This is our new reality.
- We know that the world expects leadership from the United Nations.
- When we attend COP-26 this fall, young people around the world will be looking to us to increase our ambition and strengthen global cooperation.
- We cannot let them down. **It is in our hands.**

- In Canada, you have a steadfast and dedicated partner.
- We are doing our part at home – including putting a price on carbon that will rise to \$170 per tonne by 2030, and increasing our emissions reductions targets – and also internationally, including recently doubling our climate finance contribution to \$5.3 billion over the next five years.
- [Mr. President,] over successive generations, we have worked together to help multilateralism evolve to meet our needs. To expand to new areas, and refine old approaches.
- Together, we harnessed hope, confronted fear, and innovated to try to improve lives the world over.
- It was messy, it was hard, and it was often slow. But more often than not, obstacles were overcome by a combination of global ingenuity and political will.
- That same capacity for human ingenuity is still there. It is this collective political will that we must re-ignite. **It is in our hands.**
- There are those who stand at this podium and argue that national sovereignty is the sole bedrock of international relations, and that this is the essential purpose of the Charter.
- In response, I would say that challenges like climate change are a compelling reminder as to why a multilateral response remains necessary.
- Put simply: governments acting alone cannot overcome the problems facing our world. Our founders knew that. They said it, and they proved it right by their deeds.

### *Rising Inequalities*

- The cost of turning inward will be catastrophic for people around the world, and only lead to rising inequality.

- Last year, as all of our governments focused on our domestic response to COVID-19, we moved backwards on meeting some of our sustainable development goals. Extreme poverty spiked for the first time in three decades.
- The pandemic forced us to take stock of growing inequalities within our own societies, with seniors, racialized people, women, the LGBTQ2+ community and Indigenous peoples bearing the worst of the economic slowdown. The pandemic also fanned racism, antisemitism and Islamophobia, and exacerbated inequalities between countries, with the richest among us having speedy access to vaccines, while citizens in poorer countries struggle for their health and well-being.
- We know what must be done. We just need to choose to do it. **It is in our hands.**
- In the immediate term, as the pandemic continues to rage in most parts of the world, we must focus on scaling up production and equitable distribution of vaccines, and on the economic reality facing least developed and middle-income countries, such as rising debt levels and liquidity challenges.
- Addressing these inequalities and fostering a more robust spirit of global solidarity in the face of these daunting challenges reflects not only Canada's values and interests, but also the values and interests of the United Nations. **It is in our hands.**

### *Authoritarianism*

- We know that isolationism also contributes to growing authoritarianism.
- In the face of the COVID crisis, some have seized opportunities to erode civil liberties, freedom of expression and other universal human rights.
- Yet, we do not need to look far back in history to know that politics based on lies, deception, exclusion and inequality creates hardship and pain for people around the world. The spread of systematic misinformation and

propaganda on social media and through the internet has made us realize that the digital revolution comes with risks and dangers we cannot ignore.

- Canada will continue to stand firm against the forces of lying and fear, of oppression and hate, of criminality and corruption. For this is fundamentally who we are as Canadians.
- Our commitment to human rights and the rule of law extends well beyond our shores. Canada will continue its work to promote respect for the rights of people everywhere.
- For example, we will continue to press for democracy and the rule of law in Myanmar, where the overthrow of the elected government by the Tatmadaw has caused much hardship and suffering to the Myanmar people, and we support all efforts to end the military dictatorship and assure the rights of all peoples of Myanmar, including the Rohingya, whose lives are threatened by a genocidal regime.
- Canada will continue to lead efforts to maintain judicial independence, media freedoms, and the rule of law. We must all continue to fight against impunity.
- I stand before you to say this is not something we simply talk about. It is something we do. Two days ago, we welcomed back to Canada Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, who were imprisoned by the Chinese government after Canada applied both Canadian and international law in response to a request for extradition of a Chinese citizen.
- Canada observed the rule of law, and two Canadian citizens paid a heavy price for this commitment. We did so as a matter of principle, and we are proud of the courage of our two citizens, the good faith and resilience of their families, and the determination and creativity of our diplomats. We continue to oppose the way these two fine people were treated.

- And on that I want to recognize the support of our many international partners in standing with these Canadian citizens, as well as those who helped in developing and signing the Declaration on Arbitrary Detention in state-to-state relations.
- Our solidarity in defence of human rights and international law is an important signal. We must continue to stand together, united in our shared determination to defend our values and principles.
- There is a reason respect for human rights is one of the three pillars of the United Nations. Canada will never forget this experience and this lesson. We shall continue to press for an end to arbitrary detention, wherever and however it occurs.

### *Peace & Security*

- The institutions and rules that we have established over the 76-year history of the United Nations have underpinned decades of world peace and growing prosperity.
- There have been no world wars. Extreme poverty has been significantly reduced.
- But the benefits of multilateralism were not always distributed broadly, evenly or fairly. And the potential for peace remains unrealized in far too many places.
- For the truth is that every region of the world is affected by a lack of peace – whether in the Americas, the Middle-East, Africa, Ukraine, Haiti, the Sahel or Afghanistan – and we far too often lack the political will necessary to build peace.
- I had the opportunity to visit the Middle East earlier this summer, and listened carefully to Israeli and Palestinian leaders as well as representatives of civil society.

- Canada is deeply committed to Israel's right as a member of the United Nations to live in peace and security. We also believe that a two state solution is the better way to address the needs and concerns of both Israelis and Palestinians, and we encourage direct negotiations to reach this critical objective.
- Conflict, no matter its geography or cause, is not simply an issue of national sovereignty. Insecurity somewhere invariably leads to insecurity elsewhere and we all pay the price.
- Effective responses to these issues are also **in our hands**.

#### *Refugee & Humanitarian Crises*

- We know that climate change, food insecurity and conflict will continue to exacerbate the challenge of forced migration and humanitarian need in the years to come.
- Make no mistake: this will affect all of us, and requires that we address these issues together.
- The numbers of refugees and other forcibly displaced people are already hitting record highs year after year. We must listen to their voices and give them a place at the table.
- Humanitarian assistance must keep pace, but should not be viewed as a substitute for addressing the root causes of the problems forcing people to flee in the first place.
- For our part, through dedicated asylum policies, Canada will also provide refuge for those who put themselves at personal risk by defending democracy and upholding human rights.
- Canadians are a welcoming people. When we saw the tragedy befalling the Syrian people, Canadians opened their hearts and their homes, bonding together to personally help people rebuild their lives. Where some see risk, we see opportunity.



- In just a few short years, in communities across Canada, Syrians have built businesses, raised their children and become part of the fabric of our country – just as many other communities did before them.
- This is Canada’s competitive advantage. We welcome people in need, but also understand that their hard work, talents and cultures enrich us all. Many come to Canada to flee, and find a place in which they can not only build a new life, but from which to build a better world.
- Now, faced with a heart wrenching situation in Afghanistan Canadians have once again shown their openness to those who do not wish to live under Taliban rule but prefer to stand up for democracy, human rights and gender equality.
- In fact, Canadians overwhelmingly called on us to do more. And in response to their generosity and welcoming spirit we have now committed to welcoming 40,000 Afghan refugees to Canada – so that they too can contribute to our success, while we continue to support their efforts for a more peaceful, tolerant world.

#### *Gender Equality & Indigenous Rights*

- [Mr.] President, our participation in the United Nations comes with a commitment to freedom, truth, and the rule of law.
- We also have the responsibility to speak for those who have been marginalized, discriminated against, or shunned.
- We are proud of Canada’s achievements toward achieving gender equality – both domestically and internationally. But we are not complacent.
- We will continue our focus on these issues at home – including removing barriers that prevent women from fully participating in the workforce and our economy, such as working to provide access to affordable, \$10 a day childcare for every young family in Canada.

- A recovery that does not promote the full participation of women in the economy will not be fully successful.
- And we will continue our focus on these issues internationally –through improving girls’ education, reducing early and forced marriage, and through our significant support to local feminist movements around the world.
- We also have the responsibility to hold each other and ourselves to account.
- The rights of Indigenous Peoples have been an area of profound national reflection in Canada due to greater awareness of past failures and persistent challenges faced by First Nations, Inuit and Metis Peoples.
- We are committed to continuing on the path to reconciliation and know the eyes of the world are on us.
- Earlier this year, we adopted the National day for truth and reconciliation and we made the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People the law of the land.
- Prime Minister Trudeau has committed to mandating each member of his Cabinet with implementing it. We also committed to support systemic change to address the tragedy of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.
- By doing so, we are fully recognizing the hardship that racist colonial policies have inflicted on successive generations of Indigenous people.
- The Government of Canada remains fully committed to protecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples and improving their living standards.

## *The future is in our hands*

- Colleagues, friends, I am optimistic.
- We have heard over this past week of the urgent and confounding problems that we face as a global community. We know there is a digital divide, that millions of children have been locked down and locked out of schooling, that pluralism faces a struggle against the forces of extremism and even terrorism, that many are bewildered in the face of new technologies that can invade our privacy, uproot our families, and change the face of work.
- But we have the solutions and tools at our disposal. If we listen to each other and bring these critical issues to the centre of our work together, we can make progress. **It is in our hands.**
- We have a United Nations that, over this past year, has proven that it is up to the operational challenge of delivering in the most difficult of situations.
- We have a menu of bold ideas and proven solutions. And here I would like to thank the Secretary-General for putting forward his Common Agenda, which we must all consider seriously.
- We know what must be done. We must marshal the political will to do it.
- This will require a shift in mindset. It is no secret that we spend too much time talking and not enough time making decisions.
- Our parents and grandparents rose to the challenge in 1945. Now it's our turn to work together to set the course for a fairer, more just and sustainable future for all.

- **It is in our hands.** My most distinguished predecessor as Foreign Minister, Nobel Prize winner Lester Pearson, put it this way: “The fact is that to every challenge given by the threat of death and destruction, there has always been the response from free people: **It shall not be.** By these responses we have not only saved ourselves, but have insured our future”.
- In this noble effort, you can count on Canada today and in the days, months, and years ahead.
- Thank you.