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STATEMENT BY
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE STEPHEN HARPER
PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA

AT THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE 61ST SESSION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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DÉCLARATION DU
TRÈS HONORABLE STEPHEN HARPER
PREMIER MINISTRE DU CANADA

AU DÉBAT GÉNÉRAL DE LA 61^E SESSION
DE L'ASSEMBLÉE GÉNÉRALE DES NATIONS UNIES

NEW YORK, LE 21 SEPTEMBRE 2006

Mr. Secretary General,
Mr. President,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me, as Prime Minister of Canada, to speak to you today about the important issues confronting us as members of the United Nations.

The United Nations was born from a combination of the essential needs of nations for stability and security and the higher ideals to which we all should aspire – freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

Our responsibilities in this organization are as varied as they are important and I cannot mention them all or do each the justice it deserves.

Nor can Canada be effective by diffusing our efforts across all of these matters. We must focus our considerable but limited resources where we can make a real difference.

So let me turn to one particular and key area where global interest and higher purpose come directly together: the mission in Afghanistan.

The United Nations recognized shortly after the attacks of September 11th, 2001, that the Taliban regime, by its promotion of terrorism, was a threat to international peace and security.

Kofi Annan, our distinguished Secretary General, whom we thank for his ten years of loyal service, summed up in a few words the reason why we must combat terrorism.

Terrorism, he said, “is a direct attack on the core values the United Nations stands for: the rule of law, the protection of civilians, mutual respect between people of different faiths and cultures, and peaceful resolution of conflict.”

That is why we in the United Nations have the responsibility to defeat terrorism. That is why, with unity and determination, the United Nations undertook its responsibility and its role in Afghanistan. And that is why Canada, which lost 24 of its own citizens on 9-11, answered the call.

And there we are. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan is the UN's single largest special political mission.

It is also, by far, Canada's biggest and most important overseas engagement. So the UN's mission is Canada's mission.

No fewer than 19 UN agencies are in Afghanistan. They are working tirelessly to help the Afghan people and their national government shake off the perpetrators of terrorism and build a democratic and secure society.

At the same time, approximately 20,000 troops from 37 countries – roughly 2,500 Canadians included – are contributing to military efforts to help stabilise Afghanistan and eliminate the remnants of the Taliban regime once and for all.

All our actions in Afghanistan – civilian and military – are being taken in accordance with the mandate of the United Nations Security Council.

In short, we all stand together with the democratically elected government of Afghanistan under the banner of the organization that represents our collective will.

Let us be realistic. The challenges facing Afghanistan are enormous. There will be no quick fixes.

Moreover, success cannot be assured by military means alone. This we all recognize. For success also requires a strong and unwavering civilian contribution: educators, engineers, elections advisors; direct aid and technical assistance. The list is lengthy, but the contributions essential.

That is why Canada is engaged in work like the rebuilding of girls' schools, ripped down and destroyed by the Taliban in their frenzy of hate.

That is why this spring we increased our development assistance, raising Canada's total contribution to nearly \$1 billion over 10 years, to assist the people of Afghanistan.

These two actions – rebuilding a shattered society and providing a stable security environment – go hand in glove.

And we are making progress – of that there is no doubt - 5 million refugees repatriated; over 5 million children enrolled in primary schools; 10 million Afghans registered to vote in successive democratic elections.

More than one-quarter of the seats in Afghanistan's Legislature are now held by women – remarkable in a nation where a few short years ago girls could not attend school and women had no human rights of any kind.

The success of this mission, in providing both security and development, is vital to the safety, livelihood and very future of the Afghan people – but it is also vital to the health and future of this organization.

Let us recall that the democratically elected government of Afghanistan – led by President Karzai – requested the assistance of the United Nations and its member states in the struggle against terror, intimidation, violence and oppression.

We have responded. But we haven't made Afghanistan's progress irreversible. Not yet.

Canadian defence personnel, diplomats, and development officers are on the front lines of the fight for the future of Afghanistan. Canadians feel tremendous pride in the leadership role they have assumed and we share equal grief for the casualties they have taken.

We are therefore acutely aware that the United Nations' job in Afghanistan is not done. We have no illusions about the difficulties that still lie before us. Difficulties don't daunt us. But lack of common purpose and will in this body would.

After all, if we fail the Afghan people, we will be failing ourselves. For this is the United Nations strongest mission and, therefore, our greatest test. Our collective will and credibility are being judged. We cannot afford to fail. We will succeed.

The United Nations is also facing other challenges.

In Haiti, for example.

Canada has played an important role in this country, dispatching troops, police and development officers to support UN activities aimed at restoring stability and establishing democracy. And we are offering this country \$100 million in economic development assistance.

However, we must act together to ensure that our multinational force paves the way for stability and progress, and empowers the Government of Haiti to help its citizens, the poorest in the Western Hemisphere.

Darfur too is a significant challenge – as multinational security efforts are transferred from the African Union to the United Nations. It is also a test of the principle that this body endorsed last year – the Responsibility to Protect.

The United Nations has authorized a mission there with a robust mandate. But will the government of Sudan accept it?

In the Middle East, Canada has joined the international community in the reconstruction of Lebanon. But will UNIFIL ensure security on Israel's northern border and lead to progress in the Middle East Peace Process?

Nuclear proliferation threatens us all. Are we prepared to ensure that Security Council decisions will be implemented fully? Will we act to halt activities that have no reasonable purpose other than the acquisition of nuclear weapons?

These are some of the tests the whole world must face. And there are other challenges internal to this organization.

Will the new Human Rights Council become a forum where human rights are genuinely put above political manoeuvring? Or will it emulate the fate of its failed predecessor organization?

But I must tell you, the early signals suggest that too little has changed, that the page has not yet been turned.

And what will be done to make progress on UN management reform?

Earlier this year, Canada's New Government was given a mandate to make our national government more accountable, to ensure taxpayers get full value for their money, and to pursue a clear, focussed agenda that produces tangible results.

The United Nations should accept nothing less. This organization must become more accountable and more effective. Management reform must continue, and at an accelerated pace.

The taxpayers of member nations, Canadians among them, make significant financial contributions to this organization. They have the right to expect stronger, more independent oversight mechanisms, more robust accountability for how funds are spent, and human resources practices that are based on merit.

I have just described the tests by which this organization will be judged.

Canada wants this to be a positive judgment.

We were there when the United Nations was founded. Like the other countries, we were motivated by a pressing need to establish a new international consensus in a world devastated by war.

And like the others, we were motivated by our own pragmatic interests and noble aspirations for all of humanity.

More than 60 years later, the formula remains the same.

The challenge has always been to bring nations together to build a better world by forging consensus on common purposes, and by finding the political will to translate these into action.

When these goals have been achieved, Canada has always been with you – through the war against fascism, the Cold War, dozens of UN-sponsored peacekeeping missions, and more recent multinational military engagements in the Balkans and the Persian Gulf.

Today, Afghanistan leads the list of challenges that we face collectively – peace-building in a nation where there is not yet peace, and where progress requires a wide range of capabilities undertaken by a wide array of our member-states.

My earnest hope is that we will say with pride to future generations of leaders: we, the United Nations, took up that responsibility in Afghanistan, rose to the challenge, and met it firmly, collectively, successfully.

In this endeavour, as with the others I have outlined, Canada will be there with you at every step along the way.

Thank you.