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STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE JOHN BAIRD  
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TO THE SIXTY-SEVENTH 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 SEPTIÈME SESSION DE L'ASSEMBLÉE GÉNÉRALE  
DES NATIONS UNIES

NEW YORK, LE 1 OCTOBRE 2012

It is an honour to address the opening of the 67th regular session of the General Assembly of the United Nations of the world.

Allow me to begin by paying silent tribute to all diplomats, from so many nations, who have lost their lives in the pursuit of deeper understanding among countries and in the service of our common humanity. With the opening of this session, the General Assembly has passed a milestone. Since the first session was convened, in Central Hall, Westminster, London, in January 1946, until the calling to order of this new session, precisely 66 years and 8 months have elapsed. This General Assembly is now two thirds of a century old.

Two thirds of a century during which this Assembly—and the planet—have been witness to both great achievements and grave injustices; have seen both human triumphs, and human tragedies. Two thirds of a century during which the peoples of the world made powerful progress:

- We have launched humans into orbit.
- We have mapped the human genome and unlocked various mysteries of life and science.
- We have pulled hundreds of millions of people out of abject poverty.

And yet it has also been two thirds of a century during which we suffered deep disappointment:

- The worst incidents of terrorism in the world's history, including the largest terror attack ever, here in New York on September 11, 2001;
- The failure to anticipate and prevent genocide in Cambodia and Rwanda;
- The stubborn persistence of totalitarianism and despotism.

Some developments were predictable. Others no one foresaw, and nobody could have scripted. As we stand on the threshold of the next third of a century, we are reminded of that old adage "the only constant is change." Indeed, our world continues to change, and at a rapid pace in all domains. At the geopolitical level, change means a rebalancing of power and new opportunities. Not since the Cold War, has so much change occurred so quickly.

In these turbulent times, when change can be swift and unexpected, it is all the more important that we focus with precision on the constants that remain true. Canada is a maritime nation bordered by three oceans. Please allow me, then, to use a nautical analogy. At one time, sailors would navigate by the North Star. Winds and currents would shift; storms would blow; ships might veer off course. But the North Star remained fixed—as a guide, and as a goal. In the same way, the only way for us to navigate the seas of change is to follow fixed principles and chart a course for immutable goals. In our opinion, those goals are the well-being and prosperity, the security, and the dignity of humankind. These objectives are reflected in the Purposes inscribed in Article 1 of the UN Charter.

We owe it to those we serve, the people of this planet, to maintain consistent effort in that direction. They will judge our success by how well we further the ends of prosperity, security, and human dignity. You measure results by measuring the results. Not by weighing best efforts. Not by counting good intentions. Not by calculating inputs. I do not propose, therefore, to dwell extensively on reform of the United Nations. This organization is not a goal; it is merely the means to accomplish goals.

However, the United Nations must spend less time looking at itself, and more time focused on the problems that demand its attention. I make this observation in a constructive and positive spirit. Canada was an original signatory to the United Nations Charter, and Canada remains the seventh-largest contributor to the budget of this organization. Our commitment to the United Nations has been tested and is proven. Not in spite of our commitment, but because of our commitment to this body, we cannot and will not participate in endless, fruitless inward-looking exercises.

Canada's Permanent Mission to the United Nations will henceforth devote primary attention to what the United Nations is achieving, not to how the UN arranges its affairs. The UN spends too much time on itself. It must now look outward. The preoccupation with procedure and process must yield to the tracking of substance and results. If the UN focuses on the achievement of goals—such as prosperity, security and human dignity—then reform will take care of itself.

As the international community sets its sights on a post-2015 development framework, it should not forget the work that remains to be done and the commitments it has made.

The UN Commission on Information and Accountability for Women's and Children's Health, co-chaired by Prime Minister Stephen Harper and President Jakaya Kikwete of the United Republic of Tanzania, is the type of initiative that Canada would like to see more of in the future, and its recommendations need to be integrated into a post-2015 framework.

### **Well-Being and Economic Prosperity**

The Preamble to the United Nations Charter reflects our collective determination to achieve "better standards of life" for all humankind. It sets as a goal, "the economic and social advancement of all peoples." This is no mean ambition. Those of us who recognize a Creator accept the responsibility to use the Creator's gifts to improve the well-being of all. Openness and engagement are vital to progress and prosperity. Since before recorded history, societies have reached out, to their neighbours, and beyond.

As soon as human beings invented transport we invented trade, exchanging not just the fruits of the earth, but also goods, practices, and ideas. Informed by our successes and failures—that is, having benefited from engagement, and having paid the price of isolation—humankind has learned these lessons:

- You cannot develop understanding by building walls between cultures.
- You cannot achieve prosperity by erecting walls between economies.
- And you cannot advance a people by putting walls between them and the state.

No longer is it necessary for humankind to debate endlessly how to make people better off. There is no special alchemy required. Blessed with the benefit of human experience, we know what produces prosperity: Free trade among open societies operating under transparent, consistent and fair rules. As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon recently wrote: "Engaging in the world is the best path to a better future."

The fight for the economic and social advancement of all peoples is manifested in the struggle for open markets, open society, and open-mindedness. It is a struggle in which Canada is decidedly not neutral. We recognize that the well-being of Canadians depends both on openness at home and on openness to the world. Canadians know from experience the connection between trade and prosperity. After all, in order to support the world's 10th-largest economy with only the world's 36th-largest population, we must be a trading nation. We are expanding trade at a rate of unparalleled ambition, and consequently we're

looking for partners. But we recognize fully that sustained trade requires stability and security.

## **Global Security**

The United Nations will also be judged by how well it advances the security of humankind. The goal of security is not separate from the objective of well-being. Security is, after all, a vital part of people's well-being. Once again, openness and engagement are important means to achieve the goal. While there may sometimes be tension in the means of execution, there exists no fundamental conflict between national security and the open society: both seek to protect the same values, the same rights, the same freedoms.

It is not enough for a society to protect its own security. As members of the global community, global security affects us all. Or, as Nelson Mandela bluntly put it: "Freedom would be meaningless without security in the home and in the streets." Thus, our freedom is strengthened when others are free. And our liberty is diminished so long as any of our sisters and brothers are imprisoned by fear. Because a threat to one is a threat to all, our security is enhanced when we cooperate to protect fragile democracies or to block the forces of instability.

The crisis in Syria is a test of this organization's ability to achieve results. While the brutal and repressive regime of Bashar al-Assad continues the slaughter of its own people, the United Nations continues to fail to impose binding sanctions that would stem the crimson tide of this bloody assault. Until the last syllable of recorded time, the world will remember and history will judge Member States that are allowing the atrocities to continue.

Many people of the planet, including many of the citizens whom we represent, cannot understand why this organization—despite the sound and fury of debate in this great Assembly—has been unable to take concrete steps. What business is it of ours? Our citizens would argue that the business is our common humanity, and our mandate is the strengthening of humanity's bonds. It is difficult to fault their logic. The late Martin Luther King Jr. once said: "He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it. He who accepts evil without protesting against it is really cooperating with it." And if the collective interest in our shared humanity does not motivate us to act, then the self interest of our own security should.

After all, a stockpile of chemical and biological weapons does not respect national sovereignty or recognize territorial integrity. Who among us would be secure if the chemical and biological weapons of another Member State fell into the wrong hands? That's why Canada calls on the Syrian regime to ensure that its stockpile of chemical weapons remains secure against possible use or proliferation by those who would do evil. When a post-Qadhafi Libya declared its

willingness to destroy previously unknown stockpiles, Canada stepped in and provided \$6 million to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in order to achieve this vital objective.

Until such an opportunity arises in Syria, Canada stands ready to assist neighbouring states in taking measures to reduce the threat of proliferation of these weapons. Until that time, Canada continues to call for an immediate end to the violence. And Assad must be replaced by a new order that protects Syria's territorial integrity and respects all religious minorities. I've seen the despair of the Syrian people first hand on the Jordanian border. The heart-wrenching little girl who told me all she wanted to do was to go home. This experience will no doubt leave a lasting scar on the children caught in the middle. We must ensure they have an opportunity for a better life. For a life free of fear. For a life full of opportunity.

I pledge to you that Canada will work to address the urgent humanitarian crises wrought by the violence of that last 18 months. It behooves all member states that can, to improve conditions for Syrian civilians affected by this great struggle against tyranny and for dignity.

Today, the most significant threat to global peace and security remains the regime in Iran:

- It refuses to comply with Security Council Resolutions.
- It routinely threatens the existence of Israel.
- It foments hatred against the Jewish people and incites genocide.
- It provides aid, comfort and support to terrorist groups.
- And it is guilty of widespread and massive repression of the human rights of its own people, including the repression of gays and lesbians and religious minorities.

A nuclear Iran would embolden an already reckless regime and perpetuate a destabilizing factor for not just an already fragile region but the entire planet. Not only has the Government of Canada formally listed the Iranian regime as a state sponsor of terrorism, under Canadian law; We have also suspended diplomatic relations. Some may ask why a country committed to openness and engagement would suspend relations. We don't take these decisions lightly.

On a practical level, the regime's blatant disregard for the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations created legitimate concern for the safety and security of our civilian diplomats. But there is also a great principle at stake. While Canada prizes engagement and open relations, there can be no open engagement with a regime that dishonours its word, repudiates its commitments, and threatens to perpetuate crimes against humanity. Canada's philosophy is captured by the wisdom of former UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, killed 51 years ago while fighting for peace and justice. He advised: "Never for the sake of peace and quiet deny your convictions." That's why Canada has imposed some of the toughest economic sanctions against the Iranian regime. But let me be absolutely clear, our quarrel is not with the people of Iran, but instead with the regime that aims to silence their voices. Canada urges Iran to comply with its international nuclear obligations and to cease sensitive enrichment activities. We support the P5+1 process. Iran needs to seize the opportunity provided by the P5+1 and negotiate in good faith, by showing demonstrable progress in meeting its nuclear obligations.

The Iranian regime still has a chance to redeem itself. In fact, I encourage Iran to look to some of its neighbours, some of whom Canada has supported in building peaceful-purpose nuclear energy programs. We will continue to work closely with the United States and other allies to put pressure on Iran to comply with its international nuclear obligations. Rather than accept as inevitable the conflict Iran seems intent on provoking, Canada seeks a peaceful alternative. Iran must act immediately to stop all enrichment and abandon technology that could be used for weapons. Iran is thoroughly testing the will of the international community. This, too, must end.

## **Human Dignity**

The world's security is closely linked to the third goal that should animate this organization: protecting the dignity and worth of every person by upholding and protecting fundamental freedoms. The great poet Kahlil Gibran inspired us to remember that, "safeguarding the rights of others is the most noble and beautiful end of a human being." This is not simply a question of beliefs and values. It is a requirement for action. Protecting human rights and human dignity is an obligation that each state owes its citizens, and a mutual obligation of all members of the international community. History teaches that the open society—tolerant, pluralistic and free—is the best guarantor of human rights and dignity.

Often, a threat to the security of humankind is coupled with the crushing of human rights. Yet human rights abuses that don't threaten security still concern us. The enslavement of others is a vicious human rights abuse, and it takes many forms: Whether the notorious political prison camps of North Korea; Or forcible recruitment by the "M23" group in the Democratic Republic of Congo; Or the early and forced marriage of young girls, a truly barbaric form of slavery. Another, despicable type of enslavement is the criminalization of sexuality: jailing, torturing and killing people for who they are, and whom they love. Other abuses enslave the soul, by suppressing—sometimes suppressing with brutal force—the rights to worship freely, to practise a faith, and to hold religious beliefs.

Wherever they occur, assaults on human dignity are unacceptable. At the start of my address, I observed that results matter. This organization was created to achieve certain goals, and will be measured on its success in doing so.

No one ever said that it would be easy to make real progress in advancing the prosperity and well-being, the security, and the dignity, of humankind. It is not easy. But it is essential. Despite the challenges, despite the frequent setbacks, despite the often heavy price, we know that the nations and people of the world are up to the challenge. As we celebrate Mohandas Gandhi's birthday tomorrow, let us be inspired by his words: "You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty."



Emboldened and bolstered by our faith in humanity, let us move forward. Let us move forward, together, to secure the results that this organization was established to achieve.

Thank you.