



United Nations Association in Canada  
Association canadienne pour les nations unies

**2009 September 15**

**Speaking Notes: “Canadian Perceptions of the UN 2009”**

**By Kate White**

**Public Dialogue with Helen Clark, Administrator, UNDP  
National Arts Centre**

Miss Clark, Ms. Fréchette, The Honourable Joe Clark, Members of Parliament, Ambassadors, distinguished guests, UNA-Canada members and friends.

Bon soir et bienvenue tout la monde. My name is Kate White and I am the Executive Director of Canada’s United Nations Association - an historic institution promoting global citizenship and an effective United Nations with strong Canadian participation. We undertake this work through our professional team and partners but particularly through our 20 000 members and volunteer branches across this country.

I am so pleased to welcome each of you here today, the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual UN International Day for Democracy. It seems entirely appropriate that we should welcome our special guest the new Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme here today to engage with her in helping us understand more deeply the role Canada plays in the UN – through UNDP and the role that the UNDP plays in building both democracy and a safer more prosperous and fair world for all.

Internationally, UN activities & policies which support democracy are implemented most significantly by UNDP. Democracy as we know includes under international law –also the domain of UN bodies - such things as freedom of expression, respect for human rights, freedom of association and peaceful assembly; the right and opportunity to take part in the conduct of public affairs and – all things that we are engaging in today...along, of course, with the right to vote.

Canadians you will discover Miss Clark know a thing or two about democracy – especially the voting part.

Let me tell you a little bit more about Canadians and in particular, Canadians like the ones you are addressing today: the privileged Canadians that you see before you today.

UNA-Canada surveys Canadians like those with us and we are about to release new data on their perceptions of the UN and Canada’s role. (Stand by for the launch in the coming days!)

These privileged Canadians – marked in our survey by giving to charities, voting and giving in their communities give strong support for Canadian commitment to UN processes that address environmental problems like global warming. And I know that you will be deeply involved in preparations and negotiations for the 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties meetings in Copenhagen in December where we will attempt to Seal the Deal on addressing climate change.

We have a similarly high degree of support for the UN's Millennium Development Goals – particularly to halve extreme poverty worldwide. An issue this is profoundly central to each of us – but you UNDP and your remarks tonight.

When offered the opportunity to chose 'the three issues that concern you the most', global warming and poverty were cited most often, closely followed by global security and human rights. Amongst francophone respondents, global security and global warming received proportionally many more mentions.

Importantly, it is the UN's humanitarian agency activities that are seen as its greatest success – and that means your shop -- UNDP.

But neither your role nor mine is to be blind cheerleaders of the UN. **We know**, as you all do, that the UN remains for so many the home of their highest aspirations for fairness and equity – aspirations that are challenging – and frankly often impossible to meet.

And it is our job to ensure that we address the weaknesses of the organization where we find them – and work to find and address them. Our survey participants cited failure to deal with human rights abuses within member states the UN's greatest shortcoming.

Respondents feel that the greatest challenges facing the UN today are peace and security, chosen most often by a wide margin, followed by poverty alleviation, protecting the environment, and correcting human rights abuses in that order.

So Miss Clark you have come to us at a time when engaged Canadians have faith in UNDP and see the product and potential of the agency you now head.

It seems to me that we have voted with our feet today – we hoped for a strong turnout of engaged people today. We have twice as many of you than we anticipated and have turned many away.

I know that you and your colleagues sought to meet with Canadian political leaders early in your mandate and we applaud you for that. You have a reputation that precedes you as a careful listener and a person of action tempered with strategic patience. On behalf of each of us I wish you the strength to use both in the interests of those without privilege or access; and for our planet, its air and water. Good luck!

I'd now like to call on a very special Canadian with impeccable ties to the UN: Louise Fréchette the former Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations and current Distinguished Fellow at CIGI where she chairs a project on nuclear energy and the challenges of global governance.

Friends, I know that each of you knows and experiences the challenges of the financial crisis. Well that brings me to some very important thank yous! To CIDA and to David Malone and IDRC for their support and cooperation in bringing you here.

Thank you to the UNDP team – Jennifer Topping (a Canadian btw!); Bruce Jenks and Sam Choritz – it was a pleasure working with you.

I would also like to thank the UNA-Canada team of stalwarts – under Lynn Broughton’s baton – Amy Sandhu, Sarah Kambites & Mary Ann Gilchrist – and to our volunteers and interns Miriam and Sehr. And to the staff at the NAC. A special thanks to Mario Lessard providing protocol support from DFAIT!

Finally, on international day of democracy – tell your MP how important the UN is to Canada’s development and foreign policy and become a member of UNA-Canada!

Thank you Miss Clark, Ms. Fréchette and each of you for the investment of your time.

