

Stephen Gill in search for peace

CANADIAN BLUEPRINT FOR PEACE

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In 1945, after the Second World War, Prime Minister Mackenzie King declared that now "Canada should play a part in shaping the peace." That is what Canada did when she helped in forming the United Nations and international financial institutions as well as when she helped in the birth of NATO, chaired the First Committee on Peace and Disarmament in 1988, and when she carried out several related actions through other means.

Peaceful coexistence and respect for human rights are two main areas that shape Canada's foreign as well as domestic policies. Here is a quote that indicates the thinking of the Canada's policy-makers even in 1948 when the chairman of the Canadian delegates spoke in the General Assembly at the time of voting for the acceptance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. He said, "we shall, in the future, as we have in the past, protect the freedom of the individual in our country where freedom is not only a matter of resolutions but also of do-to-day practice from one end of the country to the other."¹

The same Canada received top marks from the United Nations for being the best country in the world as far as living conditions are concerned. The country

was surveyed several times from this angle and always topped the list. This angle can be affirmed from the extent of the eagerness of the citizens of South Asian countries and others to settle in Canada. The United Nation's Human Development Report 1992 says that "By every indicator-- life expectancy, educational attainment, income levels--- Canada is the choicest place to live of all the 179 countries that make up the U.N."²

Canada becomes the choicest place largely because of her recognition of peaceful co-existence and human rights. The hands of such recognitions continuously look after the Canadian garden to grow the fruits of the best living conditions. This reduces the wasteland of the unnecessary tension between and among religious and ethnic groups.

Canada expressed her desire for peace more vehemently long before that however through her child Lester B. Pearson. He was instrumental in establishing the United Nations, and he was also instrumental in transforming Canadian society into a United Nations in microcosm. Lester Pearson, born in 1897, influenced the domestic and foreign policies of Canada considerably. He describes his path to achieve his ideal society in *The Four Faces of Peace* :

"How can there be peace without people understanding each other? How can there be cooperative coexistence, which is the only kind that mean anything, if men are cut off from each other; if they are not allowed to learn more about each other? So let's throw aside the curtains against contacts and communications."³

Pearson's emphasis is on multiculturalism. Before him, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, another Prime Minister of Canada, said in a more poetic way:

"I have visited in England one of those models of Gothic architecture which the hand of genius, guided by an unerring faith, has moulded into a harmonious whole. This cathedral is made of marble, oak and granite. It is the image of the nation I would like to see Canada become. For here, I want the marble to remain the marble; the granite to remain granite; the oak to remain the oak; and out of all these elements I would build a nation great among the nations of the world."⁴

The above is one way to express the multi racial character of Canadian society. Another way to express the same thought is that of Prime Minister John G. Diefenbaker. He said in 1961:

"It is rather a garden into which have been transplanted the hardiest and brightest flowers from many lands, each retaining in its new environment the best of the qualities for which it was loved and prized in its native land."⁵ Mr. Pearson, a Nobel Prize laureate for peace, puts in a different way :

"We are now emerging into an age when different civilizations will have to learn to live side by side in peaceful interchange, learning from each other, studying each other's history and ideals and art and culture, mutually enriching each other's lives. The alternative, in this overcrowded little world is misunderstanding, tension, clash and catastrophe."⁶

And this is the Canadian identity as described by Dr. Charles Hobart, a sociology professor, at the sixth conference of the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews in Winnipeg:

"Search for identity? YOU are almost the multicultural society of the world and this is your identity. It is the contribution you as Canadians have to make to the world. This system of multiculturalism has now worked for almost 100 years and you should be missionaries in this type of cause."⁷

In a country of thirty million people, there are about two hundred and fifty ethnic news media, and around one hundred and fifty languages spoken and understood. Senator Paul Yuzyk from the Ukrainian community, known for his service to multiculturalism, deserves to be noted when he says :

"By their perpetuation of the best of their cultural heritage, these groups have made Canadians more conscious of cultural values, out of which there has emerged the principle of unity in diversity, or, stated in another way, unity with variety as a rule of governance. This principle, in keeping with the democratic way, encourages citizens of all ethnic origins to make their contributions to the development of a general Canadian culture as essential ingredients in the nation-building process."⁸

This is the Canadian way, a bilingual, multicultural society which permits free development of every culture, language and religion, working together to achieve a higher form of the principles of freedom and democracy, equality and justice. These principles in Canada are assuming realistic form. This is the blueprint that structures the Canadian identity-- and I believe, this is the blueprint to structure the rest of the emerging world.

I believe that cultural pluralism, including the co-existence of multi-faiths, is an enriching factor that provides a base for the experiences on which the world can build a future and add zest to life. I believe that multiculturalism is the spirit of sharing-- the spirit for knowledge to be widened to the boundaries of other creeds. I believe that multiculturalism is the opening of the eyes to the beauties of other places. Ultimately, it brings health to the life of a nation--to the life of a community--to the life of every citizen. This was the blueprint of the dream of Lester B. Pearson illustrated in *The Four Faces of Peace*.

The dream of Mr. Pearson assumed a more realistic form in the area of civil liberties under Prime Minister John Diefenbaker when the Parliament of Canada passed the Canadian Bill of Rights in 1960. Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau took a further step to translate that dream into reality. He was against policies which were "based on race and religion"⁹. He wanted a Canada in which "justice

and freedom were supreme, a society in which all Canadians could develop themselves fully."¹⁰ On the 8th of October of 1971, he announced a multicultural policy to assure cultural freedom to all the Canadians. He said :

"Such a policy should help to break down discriminatory attitudes and cultural jealousies. National unity, it is to mean anything in the deeply personal sense, must be founded on confidence in one's own individual identity; out of this, can grow respect for that of others and a willingness to share attitudes and assumptions. A vigorous policy of multiculturalism will help create this initial confidence. It can form the base of a society which is based on fair play for all."¹¹

That dream is a reality also in any shopping centre in Toronto, Mississauga, Vancouver and any major city where one notices Canadians in orthodox to most modern ethnic dresses. The grace of that dream has been portrayed through several symbolic devices by politicians, poets and others, comparing it to a mosaic, a garden, a rainbow, and a symphony orchestra.

Canada has emerged indisputably among the countries which realize the importance of multiculturalism, recognize it officially and promote it actively. It is the spirit of tolerance that is behind this recognition. Canada promotes this concept in every possible way to shape her citizens for the multicultural world of today. One of them is through exchanges.

It is important to keep in mind that our students have a future and that our earth has a future. Cultural exchanges play a dominant part in shaping a peaceful world of tomorrow. Exchanges build fortresses of friendship. Interchange of students and teachers at the international level is a means of promoting global understanding.

International cultural and educational exchanges build solid alternatives to wars. The participants know no borders. They wean the sacred cow of nationalism, becoming the diamonds in the crown of harmony. They turn the globe safe for diversity. Such alternatives help to shape friendly foreign policies under democracies, and make electorates more cosmopolitan in their outlook.

International scholarships to promote exchanges were almost non-existent before the 20th century. Cecil John Rhodes made a significant contribution in this field when the Rhodes scholarship was established in 1902. He believed that a good understanding among England, Germany and the United States of America would help to secure international peace. The move was followed by other nations. The Fulbright Act (1946), which established the program in the United States, signed into law by President Truman, resulted in academic exchanges between the United States and several other nations. Now the nations realize that exchanges develop a sense of common humanity which promotes cooperative endeavour to achieve peace. John F. Kennedy declared exchanges as "the classic example of beating swords into ploughshares."

Canada is aware that mobility helps students to develop a global perspective and to produce leaders of tomorrow to make decisions. This awareness has produced hundreds of local and national organizations. At present, according to

one estimate, there are over sixty thousand foreign students in Canada for the purpose of furthering their studies. The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade encourages the introduction of new as well as reciprocal activities. Some of these cultural exchanges are managed by the embassies.

Exchanges is one way to reduce the phobia of the unknown, to find beauties in others, to foster tolerance, and to familiarize young Canadians with new skills. Another way to achieve these objectives is by accepting refugees. Refugees bring something new that enriches the existing culture. They help to dispel the fog of suspicion. They root out myths by removing the curtain of ignorance which often is the breeding ground for hatred and tension.

Canada opens her doors for refugees from third world nations, although Canada is relatively a small country--one-half of one percent of world population, with a growing number of aging citizens. Since the end of world war two, Canada has made a significant contribution to easing the refugee problem.

"More than half a million people were allowed to enter and settle in Canada for humanitarian and compassionate reasons during this period. In the 1980's more than twenty thousand refugees have been sponsored annually through government schemes and the private sector. But this is not Canada's only contribution. Since the late 1940's, the country has donated more than one billion dollars in cash and kind to intergovernmental and non-governmental agencies for the care and maintenance of millions who have fled their homelands in search of a haven from persecution, imprisonment, even death. In 1986, Canada was awarded the Nansen medal (by) the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in recognition of the humane and generous policy pursued by the public and private sectors."¹²

In addition to refugees, Canada admits millions of immigrants who seek better social and economic conditions. Today, Canada is in the same situation in which Alexandria and Byzantium stood. Byzantium flourished for more than a thousand years from 330 AD to about 1400 in Eastern Roman Empire. The location of Byzantium provided the city with some excellent advantages. Byzantium emperors gave a home to refugee scholars and found time to build lending libraries. It was a cosmopolitan society full of vitality, a half-way house between the East and the West. They grew culturally wealthy.

Canada is also growing wealthy. Canada is a cosmopolitan society, alive and vibrant-- a United Nations in microcosm.

"In the world of the late twentieth century, the possession of the language skills which our new Canadian have brought, is a very great asset to us, not only in the areas of international trade but in the areas of international peacekeeping, in the contributions to the United Nations, in the general development of the awareness of a world community. The heritages, cultural, social, and other, which the new arrivals on our shores have brought, have enriched our nations."¹³

It is encouraging that Canada promotes multiculturalism through a government department. The spirit of tolerance as well as the spirit of sharing is behind this recognition that sets an example for the world community. Nearly all the provinces and several municipalities have also such departments. Some departments in major cities fund the writing and publications of novels,

anthologies and works of non-fiction which are based on the experiences of newcomers for the benefit of others.

Minorities, including religious and ethnic groups, are proud of being citizens of Canada. One strong reason behind their pride is their freedom to have their places of worship the way they want them to be and to arrange their conferences to discuss their religions, and problems about language and cultures. In Canada, they receive assistance from the government to finance their schools to teach their ethnic languages. Canada is a country where religious groups can take the boards of education to court to have their rights and even holidays. Canada is a country where The Canadian Citizenship Council in 1964 proclaimed that "the maintenance of human rights should be the basic objective of the citizens of Canada."¹⁴

Moreover, It is fun to have flowers and fruits of different shades and kinds in the same orchard. Expectation of homogeneity in the political and religious spheres is a utopian thought. Tolerance, understanding, and co-existence is the way to peace and progress.

Canada shares these recognitions and values with another apostle of non-violence. The Second World War produced two apostles of peace in two different countries of two different continents, from two different religious backgrounds and of two different colours. Both used the same weapon for two different purposes, which is the hope of the human of today. One of them is Mahatma Gandhi, who used the weapon of non-violence to free India from foreign domination. Another is Lester B. Pearson who advocated non-violence to end future wars. One of them fell a victim to intolerance; another wove a fabric for tolerance which is the base of the mosaic nature of modern Canada.

Tolerance is becoming more commendable because of the prevailing religious and ethnic unrest in some countries. The formation of an unholy marriage between science and fanaticism digs a grave for the quest for harmony. Prince Karim Aga Khan, a Muslim spiritual leader of 12 to 15 million people in 25 countries said in Lisbon that "social harmony combined with religious freedom is a prerequisite for attaining human progress."¹⁵ But religious freedom is possible if there is tolerance in society which should be encouraged through legislation as well as from the beginning in the schools.

History has proven over and over again that violence has never been able to solve problems. Violence also raises a crop of poison and revenge for more bloodshed. We are living in an age of the most sophisticated engines of death which are within an easy reach of anyone. The adoption of violent means is the road to self-destruction.

On the other hand, dialogue paves the way for peaceful solutions and adjustments. Mahatma Gandhi condemned violence. Mr. Pearson, a Nobel Laureate for Peace, also condemned violence because he had seen its ugly head in the war. He suggests in *Democracy in World Politics* "So we must continue the hard and often seemingly hopeless task of trying to convince those who have made a creed of violence, that now at last violence cannot possibly pay because its end result will be universal destruction."¹⁶

We know that the globe of today is no longer the globe of yesterday-- that the

world has come out of feudal and isolated states to become a village-- and that due to advancements in transportation, people keep moving from one area to another rapidly for employment and other purposes. Everywhere, there are people of diverse creeds, colours, customs and traditions. The various nations due to the speed of transportation live face to face now. Not only that, they depend on one another for existence. The world needs a mental and psychological unity that can be acquired largely through the realization of the pluralistic nature of today that needs tolerance. Tolerance is the key to peace-- tolerance builds bridges of harmony--- tolerance is the foundation of democracy. Tolerance for the faiths of others as well as for the cultures of others gives birth to a legitimate child of bliss.

On the other hand, intolerance leads to a fearful circle of revenge, opening doors for anarchy, making day-to day life miserable. Intolerance leads to unnecessary tensions which lay the foundation for insecurity and where there is no security there is no chance for prosperity and peace-- neither personal nor political. Intolerance leads to unnecessary tension and tensions leads to unnecessary divisions in the communities and nations. Intolerance was the sword that divided India in 1947 and established Pakistan. Intolerance was the sword that divided Pakistan and established Bangladesh. The same sword poses a serious threat again.

Intolerance leads to unnecessary tension and fear. And fear leads to insane actions. In extreme form, fear becomes terror. Suspicion and fear split people into opposite camps, each trying to collect more poison to annihilate the other. No one will know how to get rid of the thunders of fear-- where and how to end that maddening race of intolerance-- how to ease the climate of tension that eats into the flesh of peace.

Tension and fear play havoc with the economic life of the nation. The citizens of intolerant lands look for green pastures in a country like Canada. Those who come here find pride in the citizenship of Canada. When they go back for visits, they proudly display their Canadian passports to others. They keep most of their savings in Canadian banks; they get actively involved in the development of their new land.

Those who advocate that security comes from the mouth of a gun or terrorism or repressive laws are wrong. In the world of today, minorities are no longer extremely weak and majorities in power are not exclusively powerful. Security of a nation cannot last long if ethnic or religious groups are insecure. A realistic approach would be to give a chance to every ethnic and religious group; to basic human rights; to sharing.

Force is not the answer for having a homogenized citizenship. Russia even with all its awesome power could not eradicate churches and synagogues. The state oppression of the communists of Poland could not crush the devotion of the people to the Catholic Church. The same repressive regime produced a Pope. In India, intolerant policies of Aurangzeb hammered nails in the coffin of the Mughul empire. Obviously, religious intolerance is a cancer that eats the healthy bones of society.

Happy minorities contribute towards the building of the nation. If minorities

feel secure, they will do everything to feel proud of their heritage. Absence of security and harmony leads to economic/ political disaster that endangers the stability of the majority. Protection of minorities is in the interest of the majority and the whole nation, even the world. That is why Mahatma Gandhi believed in safeguarding the rights of minorities. "That is a legitimate safeguard"¹⁷, he said. I have no doubts whatsoever that Mahatma Gandhi's approach is realistic even for repressive regimes-- this approach is for their own prosperity-- for their own survival.

However, it would be absolutely wrong to assume that Canada does not have her own problems. What singles out Canada from various other nations is her attitude towards minorities. In Canada anyone can say anything without the fear of persecution and the citizens are free to pursue their faiths the way they want as long as they refrain from spreading hatred and as long as they refrain from violating at least the basic human rights of others. Canada is a country where opportunities abound for every ethnic group-- for every religion-- for every individual in every field. The recognition of these freedoms makes every minority proud.

These freedoms, along with others, are guaranteed by The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms which came into effect on the 17th of April of 1982 and which was part of reforms codified in a law called the Constitution Act, 1982. After three years, section 15 of the Charter, which protects equality rights, came into effect on the 17th of April of 1985.

In the *Guide to the Charter*, Prime Minister Jean Chretien says "the Charter guarantees freedom of religion and freedom of thought." He adds that "it reflects our pride and our cultural diversity."¹⁸ In the same *Guide to the Charter*, Sheila Copps, former Minister of Canadian Heritage, points out "The Charter is proof that Canadians believe the success of a society can only be built on the freedom of its people."¹⁹ And the former Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Lloyd Axworthy, states in a letter that "human rights issues are a priority in Canada's foreign relations." Canada is working hard to be a compassionate and considerate society even more. There will remain difficulties here and there, because solutions do not pop up overnight. What is vital for the health of a nation is a firm commitment which Canada provides with legislation and practical steps. This commitment gives religious and cultural freedom to the residents to work together for a common goal. Canada believes in living side by side with the people of many colours, customs and faiths. This is the Canadian way for progress-- this is the Canadian belief for prosperity--this is the Canadian blueprint for peace.

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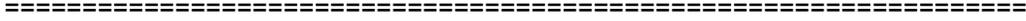
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