[Opinion](http://www.thestar.com/opinion.html) / [Editorials](http://www.thestar.com/opinion/editorials.html)

**Revive Canada’s UN role: Editorial**

**On Stephen Harper’s watch we have fallen a long way from the days when we were a strong UN player with a Security Council seat, more generous aid, and a commitment to peacekeeping.**

Share via Email

Print

Sean Kilpatrick / THE CANADIAN PRESS

Published on Wed Sep 30 2015

http://www.thestar.com/etc/designs/thestar/images/policard/next.png

http://www.thestar.com/etc/designs/thestar/images/policard/back.png

Canadians worry that our image in the world is taking a drubbing, and not just because Prime Minister Stephen Harper was unconscionably slow to respond to the Syrian refugee crisis.

Fully 41 per cent of people polled in a recent [Angus Reid survey](http://angusreid.org/election-2015-foreign-policy/) said they believe Canada’s reputation has gotten worse during a decade of Conservative rule. That’s twice the number, 21 per cent, who feel it has improved.

Harper may claim he stands for a more principled, values-driven foreign policy, but he’s not carrying the public along with him. And a good part of the problem can be traced to his chronic [lack of interest](http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2012/09/28/stephen_harper_chooses_the_waldorf_over_the_un_in_new_york.html) in the United Nations and how we can work with it to promote democracy, good governance and human rights.

Canadians agree with Harper that trade is our No. 1 foreign priority, insofar as it underpins our economy. But the public breaks sharply with the Conservatives by ranking foreign aid and humanitarian causes second. Military preparedness, a key Tory preoccupation, ranks a distant third.

And Canadians have always regarded the UN, flawed as it undeniably is, as a forum in which to do good.

Little wonder, then, that senior officials in the foreign affairs, trade and aid areas are quietly advising whoever takes office after Oct. 19 to [re-engage with the UN](http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2015/09/29/foreign-affairs-officials-urge-new-directions-for-canada-in-secret-transition-memo.html) to reverse the “erosion” that our reputation as a “principled actor,” “middle power” or “honest broker” has suffered.

On Harper’s hawkish, neo-conservative watch — focused on the United States and a few select “Anglosphere” allies — we have fallen a long way from the days when we were a strong UN player with a Security Council seat, a more generous aid policy, a commitment to peacekeeping, and strong ideas on international justice, genocide and the protection of the weak.

In secret briefing documents leaked this past week, the officials urge the incoming government to reverse Canada’s slide by reaffirming that we intend to seek a seat on the Security Council as soon as possible, after failing in 2010. By getting more Canadians named to senior UN posts. And by signaling our interest in playing a stronger role in international security by getting more involved in peacekeeping and disarmament. It’s sound advice.

The officials also counsel the new government to restore cuts in funding to aid programs that promote good democratic governance, economic development and gender equity. And to help curb global warming by bankrolling poorer countries to wean themselves from fossil fuels and adopt clean technology.

Canada brings cash to the UN table as a top financial supporter. We also have credibility as a diverse, open democracy and expertise as a technologically advanced country. What’s been missing is the will to play a bigger, more constructive role. That’s got to change.