

"Statement by Ambassador Paul Meyer of Canada to Special Session of the Human Rights Council, Geneva, August 11, 2006"

Mr. President,

Today we are asked to take up an issue, the conflict between Israel and the terrorist militia called Hezbollah based in Lebanon, that is already the subject of active consideration by the UN Security Council. It is our hope that the Security Council will soon take action that will lead to a sustainable resolution of the crisis, and the restoration of international peace and security in fulfillment of that body's role and responsibilities.

The far-reaching impact of this conflict on civilians in both Israel and Lebanon is of great concern for Canada. We are concerned for the loss of civilian lives; the displacement of individuals and communities; the destruction of civilian infrastructure; the social and economic impact of ongoing hostilities; and the implications of this conflict on longer-term peace and security in the region. This is a conflict caused by Hezbollah and its state sponsors that has resulted in widespread death and devastation.

As the UN's principal body responsible for human rights, this is an opportunity for us to focus specifically on the human rights concerns emanating from the conflict, reflecting our mandate and our competence. The armed conflict that is occurring in Israel and Lebanon has resulted in actions that are contrary to international humanitarian law and these should be pursued in other appropriate contexts by the international community.

This Council's mandate is clear: "promoting universal respect for the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of any kind and in a fair and equal manner". This draft resolution fails to respect this requirement, is manifestly one-sided, and does not condemn the indiscriminate launching of Hezbollah rockets into Israel, a democratic member of the United Nations, aimed solely to kill civilians. It does not recognize that under international humanitarian law it is incumbent upon Hezbollah, as a party to this armed conflict, to refrain from targeting civilians and using civilians as human shields in its military operations.

Moreover, it fails to focus on the impact of the conflict on the enjoyment of the civilian population in the region of their human rights and fundamental freedoms – the very subject that should be of paramount interest to this body.

Canada firmly reiterates our desire to employ this new Council for constructive not divisive ends. We believe that this body's procedures and its output must respect the principles upon which the Council was founded. Rather than fall back into non-productive habits, it must work to ensure universality, objectivity and non-selectivity in the consideration of human rights issues, and to eliminate double standards and politicization.

Unfortunately, neither this session nor the resolution presented take into consideration the respective roles and responsibilities of all parties, and thus is not constructive in promoting the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all peoples in the region, the rule of law and ultimately encouraging the widely agreed goal of securing long-term peace and stability in the Middle East. Canada is committed to these goals and for this reason we will oppose the resolution.

Thank you