

# Time for Harper to take off the blinkers



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**I**t is astonishing how limited Stephen Harper's world-view is in comparison to other world leaders. That became clear after a speech by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on May 12 to a standing-room-only crowd of diplomats, academics, NGOs, students and interested Canadians in one of Ottawa's largest ballrooms at the Château Laurier hotel.

In the speech, the UN chief did not mince words in urging Canada to be a champion of climate change and accountability in the upcoming G8 and G20 summits in June. Ban reminded the audience that billions of dollars of commitments from previous G8 summits for Africa and alleviating the plight of the planet's poorest had not been fulfilled, and he urged the prime minister to demand that they fulfil their commitments before coming to Canada for the summits.

Throwing down a political and moral gauntlet, the secretary-general also urged the prime minister to make climate change the core of the agenda of the G8 and G20 summits, which Canada is hosting.

In addition, he called on the government to show leadership by living up to Canada's Kyoto Protocol greenhouse gas reduction targets, ignoring the fact that the Harper government has already repudiated Canada's legal obligations under that treaty. This direct challenge to the Harper government received unexpected applause from the audience.

The same applause followed when a questioner asked the secretary-general to reinforce the message to Harper that the child and maternal health initiative should be comprehensive. Ban praised the fact that Canada had joined the UN's efforts in this area, but diplomatically avoided the implied criticism on the refusal to fund any maternal health projects involving abortions.

Where there seems a potential clash between the view of the UN, as espoused by the secretary-general, and the limited world-view of the Harper government is the fact that the UN



Ban Ki-Moon faced a hard climb in Ottawa.

chief insisted that there is a connection between aid spending and climate change.

In response to a demand by the opposition during Question Period later that same day that climate change become a core agenda item for the G20, Harper dismissed the issue by claiming that the G20 deals with economic issues.

This is truly staggering given that climate change could have a devastating impact on the economies of the G20 countries, including Canada. Britain's chief economist Nicholas Stern has calculated that global warming may cost \$9.6 trillion worldwide by the next century due to the effects of famine, rising sea levels, storms and other environmental damage.

Ban also wants the G20 to discuss how the money could be found for developing countries

to deal with climate change. This could include the global bank tax, supported by most of the leaders of the G8 and the IMF but vigorously opposed by Harper and his finance minister. Indeed, Ban cryptically concluded that he is looking to the G20 to push for the green recovery to get us all out of the global economic crisis.

There is another irony in Harper and his finance minister touting the success of Canadian banks during the economic recession, which is being used as the prime argument to contest the global bank tax at the G8 and the G20.

The soundness of the Canadian banking system is due to the fact that successive federal government prevented foreign takeovers of these same banks and refused to deregulate them to allow domestic and foreign takeovers of these Canadian banking monopolies. In opposition, Harper and his Reform/Alliance party had opposed these restrictions on the Canadian banks. If they had been deregulated, they may well have been swallowed up by the same foreign banks that had to be bailed out.

There is growing evidence that the refusal to deregulate their own financial markets in accordance with the so-called "Washington Consensus" may well have also been the reason why China, India and some of the other Asian growth economies escaped the worst of the global financial crisis.

The moral gauntlet that the UN secretary-general seemed to be throwing down to Prime Minister Harper is to throw away the parochial blinkers and understand that the challenges facing the international community—from the environment to foreign aid to stabilizing the global economy—depends on a far wider worldview than Harper, the soon-to-be-host of the world's most powerful leaders, is exhibiting.

Perhaps the greatest injustice caused by the blinkers of the Harper worldview falls on the youth of Canada and the future generations of Canadians who will have to live with the consequences of the present failures to deal with the critical challenges of climate change and global economic disparities that produce mass movements of environmental and economic refugees.

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