

# **The Green Helmets Initiative (GHI): Concept Paper 2.5**

## **A New Role for the CAF in Canada and the World**

**by Dr. Rémy-Claude Beaulieu**

### **1. Goal**

The current article aims to start a conversation regarding broadening the traditional mandate of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) linked to the physical protection of Canadians and Canadian borders and strengthening their role in global security, including sanitary and environmental dimensions, in Canada and abroad. This could include safety missions when natural disasters (flooding, hurricanes, fires, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, etc.) occur, including stressful humanitarian situations caused by climate change, in Canada and the rest of the world.

This article could also foster discussions on expanding the role of military armed forces around the world to become “salvation forces.” In such a case, one of the United Nations institutions could provide leadership (see below: From a Canadian to a Global Perspective). As a matter of brevity, we may call it the **Green Helmets Initiative (GHI)**.

### **2. Rationale**

In the last decades, the Canadian Armed Forces have played a role in peacekeeping in the context of Blue Helmets interventions led by the United Nations. This role has been so significant that, for the Canadian public, it became an aspect of the Canadian national identity.<sup>1</sup> Overall, more than 125,000 Canadians have participated in various peacekeeping missions in Kashmir, Palestine, Suez-Egypt, Congo, Cyprus, the Balkans and Rwanda. The last interventions in Haiti and Sudan, as well as various missions in the Middle East, have defined the role of the Canadian Armed Forces in peacekeeping. National Peacekeeper’s Day is commemorated each year since August 9, 2008.

However, in the last thirty years, the national and international contexts have changed drastically. Environmental issues were barely present in the minds of those, including Lester B. Pearson, who have defined the orientation of Canadian international policies after the Second World War. Since then, climate change has emerged as one of the main factors influencing national and global affairs. According to OXFAM, 125 million persons have seen their countries devastated and their lives totally changed by armed conflicts and natural disasters. A wake-up call has been launched in order to set an organized, coordinated and unified response to the military, social, political, economic, sanitary and environmental dimensions of these contexts.<sup>2</sup>

In May 2021, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), presented a documentary on the theme of “Who are the climate refugees?”<sup>3</sup> in the context of which, the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was quoted mentioning that 20 million persons had to leave their homes every year due to climate change and its catastrophic implications. In Canada, the Canadian Armed Forces, have been called upon to assist provincial and municipal governments during environmental crises (fires, flooding, etc.) and public health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, a role for which they were not or were under prepared.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>J.L. Granatstein, Tabitha Marshall, Daniel Panneton, « Le Canada et le maintien de la Paix », published February 7, 2006, updated by Richard Foot, on September 27, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> See: Oxfam, Comment le monde doit répondre aux crises humanitaires, décembre 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Radio-Canada, Qui sont les réfugiés climatiques? May 25, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Mylène Crête et Judith Lachapelle, Recrutement dans l’armée: militaires recherché (e)s, La Presse, December 2, 2021.

The current paper aims to review the mandate and role of the CAF, which would permit them to get the expertise, equipment and tools necessary to address the catastrophic consequences of natural and environmental disasters in Canada and abroad, especially in developing countries where means are often lacking. A global perspective of the concept of “defence and public security” is needed including, as suggested by OXFAM, the military, human, sanitary and environmental dimensions.

Canada currently allocates CAN\$37.7 billion (27.9 US\$) into military spending, or 1.37% of the Canadian GDP, while NATO requires its members invest 2% of their national GDP. Currently the Canadian GDP exceeds USD\$2.1 trillion. The NATO definition of “defence spending” includes the following: “If expenditures for operations, missions, engagements, and other activities are appropriated under the defence budget, they are included in the NATO definition. Expenditure for peacekeeping and humanitarian operations, paid by the Ministry of Defence or other ministries, the destruction of weapons, equipment and ammunition, and the costs associated with inspection and control of equipment destruction are included in defence expenditure.”<sup>5</sup>

Canadian international development assistance is currently CAN\$16 billion, which according to the DAC-OECD is approximately 0.36% of the Canadian GDP. The target set by the OECD in the early seventies is 0.7% of the national GDP. Many European countries, in particular the Nordic-Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark), as well as Germany and Netherland, have reached this target.

In 2022-23, a very minor part of official development assistance (ODA) goes to the Canadian National Defence (CAN\$8.74 million.)<sup>6</sup> If Canada was to dedicate a significant part of its Official development assistance (ODA) to humanitarian assistance related to natural disasters through the Canadian National Defence to those impacted by climate change, it could be a win-win situation. On one side it would contribute to reach the NATO target of 2% of GDP and on the other side the OECD-DAC ODA target of 0.7% GDP.

However, for the time-being, as indicated in the report to Parliament, a major part of Canadian international assistance goes to Ukraine. The Report indicates that Ukraine receives CAN\$5.437 billion, Nigeria receives CAN\$277 million, Ethiopia receives CAN\$251 million and Bangladesh receives CAN\$234 million. This means that Ukraine received more international assistance than the nineteen other countries in the top 20 beneficiaries of Canadian international assistance (CAN\$3.126 billion). We recognize that this is a political decision that would be difficult to reverse.

Moreover, we are quite convinced that the Canadian public would be more willing to accept a substantive increase in Canadian investments in defence, if the terms are defined broadly as “public security,” including assistance in the context of natural disasters. This statement could also be applied to any member of NATO, which could also widen the scope and role of its armed forces to play a humanitarian role domestically or internationally.

### **3. From Blue Helmets to Green Helmets**

After the Second World War, Canadians saw themselves represented around the world when Lester B. Pearson promoted the Blue Helmets at the United Nations. 125,000 Canadians have played peacekeeping roles in various missions, of those, 130 Canadians have died.

A few decades ago, the CAF created the Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART).<sup>7</sup> Between 1994 and 2015, the Petawawa-located force completed eight humanitarian interventions in various parts of the world that were affected by human-generated and natural disasters (Rwanda: civil war, Honduras: Hurricane Mitch, Northern

<sup>5</sup> NATO Press Release, Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2024), by the Public Diplomacy Division, 2024, p.16

<sup>6</sup> Statistical Report on International Assistance, Fiscal year 2022–2023, Global Affairs Canada, 2023, 53 pages.

<sup>7</sup> See: [Disaster Assistance Response Team \(DART\) Deployments - Canada.ca](https://www.dart.ca/Deployments).

Turkey: earthquake, Sri-Lanka: tsunami, Pakistan: earthquake, Haiti: earthquake, Philippines: typhoon, Nepal: earthquake). The Canadian Disaster Assistance Team (CDAT), a group of experts from GAC and the CAF, which was created to assist DART in assessing the level of effort required for the various interventions.<sup>8</sup>

An evaluation of these operations was undertaken in 2013.<sup>9</sup> In the Executive Summary, the authors indicate that Humanitarian Operations (HO) and Disaster Relief Operations (DRO) are fully consistent with the mandate of the National Department of Defense (NDD): “The Program aligns with federal government priorities and department strategic outcomes. This includes a safe and secure world through international engagement and the promotion of Canadian Values.” It also indicates that “Multiple lines of evidence indicate the performance of HO, DRO, NEO is presently very good,” (Executive Summary, p. iv). In this context, we could ask why so few interventions were undertaken. None since 2015, while the number of environmentally related catastrophes are increasing. Is it a question of financial or human resources? Is it a question of lack of recognition of DART’s existence?

This call is for us to face the environmental and humanitarian crises that Canadians and people around the world are facing. Hurricanes, flooding, fires, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, rising ocean levels and global warming are all pushing millions of people to escape their countries where living conditions are unsustainable. The time has come to call on “**the Green Helmets**” to address such issues, and Canada could spearhead such a process.

#### 4. Legal and Conflict Litigation and Mitigation

While developing the GHI Concept Paper, we have been made aware by Judge Louise Otis that “legal mitigation” could be one of the areas of expertise that would be necessary and useful to the Green Helmets, given that litigation often arises when natural disasters take place, especially in cross-border disasters.<sup>10</sup> We could use as an example the situation of the displaced Rohingyas, settled in the border regions of Myanmar and Bangladesh, an area often affected by monsoons and flooding.

The IUCM would provide high level, experienced mediators who are familiar with international climate change. These experts would work and travel in real time to complete the negotiations. The IUMC will consist of two types of mediators:

1. **Governance mediators** to assist climate negotiations.
2. **Field mediators** assisted by scientists to help resolve conflicts generated by the displacement of people and populations following floods, cataclysms and desertification.

Their tasks would be made more complex and urgent given the context of climate change. They may assist the Green Helmets and the affected countries’ authorities to determine where, when, with whom and how assistance may be provided.

The initiative called International Unit for Climate Mediation (IUCM)<sup>11</sup> could be implemented in conjunction with the Green Helmets Initiative (GHI), or independently.

<sup>8</sup> See: [How the DART responds to emergencies - Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca/en/gov/department-of-national-defence/eng/operations-and-missions/canadian-disaster-assistance-team.html).

<sup>9</sup> Evaluation of the National Department of Defence (DND) Contribution to Humanitarian Operations (HO), Disaster Relief Operations (DRO), and Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO), 1258-180, National Defence-Chief Review Services, October 2013, 78 p.

<sup>10</sup> Environmental Mediation in the Age of Climate Crisis, by Louise Otis, Canada, 2025, 10 pages.

<sup>11</sup> NEW: International Unit for Climate Mediation (IUCM), by Louise Otis, Canada, one page.

## 5. Many Questions to Address

This proposal raises numerous questions, which would require the participation of experts in various domains to answer: defence, environment, international humanitarian assistance, etc. This project would also involve the collaboration of various entities, be they academic, political—which could involve GAC, Defence, Environment and Climate Change Canada, etc. In order to prepare a formal proposal to be presented to the Canadian authorities, various questions, both retrospective and prospective, must be addressed:

- i) What positive and feasible role could the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) or others play to address the challenges posed by climate change and natural disasters in Canada and abroad?
- ii) How could the mandate of the CAF or others be modified to assume such mandates and responsibilities?
- iii) Which countries or regions of the world could be beneficiaries or providers of such interventions?
- iv) What kind of expertise would be needed, and what kind of training should members of the CAF or others receive to assume such a mandate?
- v) What types of equipment would be needed to ensure quick and appropriate responses? Canadair planes, motorboats, material to rebuild roads and bridges, sandbag machinery, water-filtering systems, etc.?
- vi) How could the CAF or others manage such interventions, which by definition have an unpredictable character? Centre of research and communications, Centre of logistics in eastern and western Canada? Should the Canadian Disaster Assistance Team be revamped? <sup>12</sup>
- vii) What international agreements would the CAF or others need to consider for quick interventions in Canada (Federal, Provincial, Municipal) and abroad (UN, DAC-OECD, OAS, NATO, etc.)?

Answering these questions could provide a basis for a formal proposal to Canadian authorities or for undertaking an international call for proposals (see below).

## 6. From a Canadian to a Global Perspective

The revival of the DART or the creation of a new structure would promote the Canadian perspective of a response to global warming in Canada and abroad. However, the initiative to create “**the Green Helmets**” should not remain solely Canadian. As with the Blue Helmets, the **Green Helmets Initiative (GHI)** should become part of a global agenda, therefore making the United Nations the centre of this initiative.

Given the fast-changing political situation in Canada, it may not be feasible to envision such a scenario at this time. However, at the international level, an institution in the United Nations system, be it the UNEP (United Nations Environment Program) or the UN Peacekeeping, could take the lead and promote this initiative. The Task Force could be composed of representatives from various institutions including NATO and the Intergovernmental Group on Climate Change (IGCC).

The same questions regarding the definition of the “contours” of the role of the Green Helmets should be addressed, including: i) the definition of their mandate; ii) the countries of the world that could be involved; iii) the knowledge and expertise needed to carry out such a mandate; iv) the equipment required; v) the location of early response facilities; vi) the administrative and decision-making structure of the new entity. Although

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<sup>12</sup> See: [Disaster Assistance Response Team \(DART\) Organization - Canada.ca](http://Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) Organization - Canada.ca).

Canada could be a prime candidate, considering its tradition regarding the “Blue Helmets,”<sup>13</sup> a call for proposals could be launched to identify country(ies) interested in participating in this endeavor.

## 7. Preliminary Task Force

The role of the Task Force would be to better define and promote the GHI. The Task Force should include professionals from different areas of expertise related to the initiative: i) bilateral and multilateral international cooperation; ii) environment & climate change specialists; iii) military issues; iv) humanitarian assistance; v) response to natural disasters and civil defence; vi) international conflict mitigation. The participation of an individual in the Task Force should not imply that the institution to which they belong supports the initiative.

### Members:

1. Head of the Task Force: the author Dr. Rémy-Claude Beaulieu (Canada), is a specialist in bilateral and multilateral international cooperation
2. Deputy-head: Honorable Judge Louise Otis (Canada), specialist in international mitigation
3. Specialist in environment and climate change (member to be determined)
4. Specialist in military issues (member to be determined)
5. Specialist in response to natural disasters and civil defence (member to be determined)
6. Specialist in humanitarian assistance (member to be determined)

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The author has a PhD in Social Sciences from the EHESS of Paris. He worked for 27 years at the Canadian International Development Agency (1985–2012), six years for the OAS (2012–2018) and recently he has provided quality assurance of evaluation products for the World Food Programme and UNICEF (2018–2024).

Judge Louise Otis is a Canadian and international active judge, arbitrator and mediator in administrative and commercial matters. She is President of the Administrative Tribunal of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). She is President of the Administrative Tribunal of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

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<sup>13</sup> **Disclaimer:** Although this Concept Paper refers to Canada, it does not represent the opinions of Canadian Authorities.