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For 80 years, the United Nations has made our lives healthier, settled refugees, provided food during famines and built economies. But it is failing in its mission to maintain peace, Brian H. Cameron writes.

The UN Charter at 80

We don't need to give up loyalty, we need to extend it

BRIAN H. CAMERON

Thursday is the 80th anniversary of the signing of the United Nations charter.

In 1945, Canada and 50 other nations adopted an agreement to "unite our strength to maintain international peace." The world was tired of war. Leaders were ready to imagine a different world.

If you've lost confidence in the UN recently, you're not alone. Only 63 per cent of Canadians still view the UN favourably, which is still higher than much of the globe. But the UN is losing its shine. Many say war is just part of human nature. But unity is also part of our nature. Let me explain.

As children, we naturally fight to survive. If we're lucky, as we grow up we learn to get along with our family and neighbours. We learn to use our words.

My ancestors are from Scotland, where families were fighting each other for centuries. Eventually, five warring Cameron families buried their grievances and formed a larger clan to protect themselves. They chose the motto "Unite" and a clan symbol of five bound arrows. One arrow breaks easily, but five are stronger together.

Fast forward to the mid-1800s, when my impoverished great-grandparents migrated from Scotland to Ontario as farmers. Canada existed only in imagination. Not far away lived the nations of the Hau-

denosaunee Confederacy, now our neighbours at Ohsweken. Their symbol of unity was a cluster of six arrows bound together, representing the strength that came from the joining of their nations for mutual security. They had agreed to live under the Great Law provided by the Peacemaker.

In 1867, the settlers and First Nations joined peacefully together in the new country of Canada. A nation of shared values, still evolving, but made stronger by uniting against external threats. Family to clan to nation.

Are you seeing a historical trend?

Hamilton's early settlers included many Scots. My high school, S.A.M., was named for Sir Allan MacNab, the builder of Dundurn Castle. Now S.A.M.'s alumnus S.G.A. (Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, the NBA's MVP) is more famous than MacNab. Canada has changed, and we are stronger together.

So what about the United Nations? It's imperfect, but can you imagine the world without it?

Hamilton has one of the country's oldest chapters of the UN Association of Canada (UNAC). Its vision is "a city of engaged global citizens who work collaboratively to create and sustain a culture of peace."

They are showing that anyone can be involved in building a better world, starting locally with action supporting the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

See the UNAC website if you want

to get involved!

For 80 years the UN has made our lives healthier, settled refugees, provided food to famines, brokered ceasefires and built economies.

It has moved us toward "peace, dignity and equality on a healthy planet."

But the UN is failing in its main mission to maintain peace, and now we are all at risk again in this warring world.

The UN needs to be reformed and there are workable proposals on the table under the UN80 initiative. Just imagine the joint strength of 193 countries — 193 arrows bound together against global threats.

No one wants a tyrannical world government. But, like those Iroquois chiefs and Cameron chieftains of old, we need leaders with imagination. We are stronger together. We don't need to give up loyalty — we need to extend it.

A wise man said, "The Earth is but one country and mankind its citizens." What will it take to get there? A famous songwriter said it starts with the imagination. Can we imagine one country for our grandchildren? "You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one." Imagination needs to be followed by action.

Happy birthday Canada, and happy anniversary to the UN Charter.

I'm proud of my country. And I'm proud of my planet.

BRIAN H. CAMERON IS A RETIRED SURGEON LIVING IN DUNDAS.