
PM-Francophonie
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Francophonie head avoids questions about Quebec referendum

By Nick Spicer

PARIS (CP) Boutros Boutros-Ghali will try to interest English Canadians in the Francophonie during an 11-day trip to Canada starting Sunday, but the organization's first secretary general will do his best to steer clear of Canadian constitutional politics.

The former head of the United Nations, who will be travelling through New Brunswick, Ontario and Quebec, says his main job will be to prepare a two-day September 1999 summit of the group's 49 member-nations, which all use or share an interest in the French language.

The summit's theme will be youth.

During his coming trip Boutros-Ghali will be making speeches before the Toronto Board of Trade and the New Brunswick legislature.

The Egyptian diplomat plans to meet Prime Minister Jean Chretien and Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy, as well as Quebec officials, although he was not sure whether he would be meeting with Quebec Premier Lucien Bouchard.

"I have heard rumours of a disagreement about my visit between the federal government and Quebec but I don't know all the details."

One person Boutros-Ghali said he was certain to meet in Quebec's provincial capital was his "old friend," Gov. Gen. Romeo Leblanc.

"When I was secretary general of the United Nations, he did me the honour of inviting me to stay at the governor's residence, explaining that that I could stay in the bed that the Queen had spent the night in," he joked.

Boutros-Ghali was reluctant to discuss the possibility of a new referendum on Quebec sovereignty.

"That's a problem that has to do with two members of the Francophonie, it's up to them to find solutions to their problems," he said.

"If they ask me, as secretary general, to play a role, I'll be at their disposal, either on a personal basis or as secretary general. Above all we are asked, in conformity with . . . the United Nations charter, not to interfere in the internal affairs of a state."

Boutros-Ghali's itinerary takes him from Montreal, Moncton, Fredericton, Toronto, Quebec, then on to Sudbury and Ottawa before he returns to Paris.

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