



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 50/6

THE COLOMBO CONFERENCE

Statement by Mr. L.B. Pearson, Secretary of State for External Affairs, in the House of Commons on February 22, 1950.

...The Colombo conference took place in the week of January 9. Its official title was: "Commonwealth meeting on foreign affairs." It was the first meeting of this kind that has been held. Of course Commonwealth meetings on foreign affairs have taken place in the past. We have discussed foreign affairs at meetings of prime ministers; we have had discussions between heads of Commonwealth delegations at United Nations assembly meetings; but this was the first time that a Commonwealth meeting was held which was composed mainly of foreign ministers of Commonwealth countries, and which dealt exclusively with questions of foreign affairs.

It was the first time also, that a meeting of Commonwealth ministers had been held on the territory of an Asian member of the Commonwealth. This is a fact, I think, of some significance. It is a recognition of the fact that today the Commonwealth has no fixed centre in London or anywhere else. It is a recognition also of the importance of the Asian members of the new Commonwealth, whose culture and traditions are very different from those of the rest of us, but whose association with us in the Commonwealth is of such great value and is so highly esteemed by the other members.

The fact that we met in Ceylon is also a recognition of the importance of Asian problems today, and of the necessity of looking at world problems from an Asian point of view as well as from that of Europe and the north Atlantic. It is just as well to remember that the three Asian members of the Commonwealth at Colombo represented 440 million people, while the rest of us, in our home territories, represented only 75 million. This new Commonwealth is providing not only a link between the Asian and the other nations that comprise it, but also a very valuable link between the east and the west.

During our conference, we were the guests of the government of Ceylon; and we were grateful, as I am sure the other delegations were, for the hospitality that was shown to us by the government of Ceylon and for the arrangements which it so efficiently made.

The chairman of the conference was the Prime Minister of Ceylon, Mr. Senanayake, who presided over our deliberations with urbanity and good nature, and did much to make our meetings a success. He introduced one custom which to me, at least, was new at international meetings, and I am not sure that it would not be a good idea to copy it at other meetings which I have attended and which have not always been characterized by the good nature and the friendliness of the one we had in Ceylon. When the discussions