

It is particularly opportune to have this occasion to discuss the crisis in Central America with the Foreign Minister of a Contadora country. There is a growing Canadian public interest in Central America. There is every reason for Canadians to be interested and to be concerned. Geography alone is a reason. It is the area closest to us of serious instability and East/West confrontation. We have been and continue to be appalled by the human rights violations that take place, most particularly in El Salvador and Guatemala. We are concerned about the need for economic development in order that the root causes of so many of the region's problems can be addressed.

You will not be surprised to learn that the Canadian public do not speak with one voice on Central America. For this reason, it may be useful for me to re-state briefly the Government's position on Central America.

We believe that any meaningful and enduring solution to the problems of Central America must come from the region. Accordingly, we believe that Contadora, in close and active collaboration with the five countries of Central America, offers the best opportunity to achieve a solution. We have been impressed by the remarkable efforts which have been made by Contadora and the Central American countries to build a framework of reconciliation. The Contadora meeting in Panama last month marked the first anniversary of this initiative with solid progress in approaching seemingly insurmountable political differences.

I would like to congratulate Colombia and the other Contadora members for their initiative and courage in taking on the complex and potentially explosive situation in Central America. You and your colleagues are realists. You recognize that you have not found a magic formula for the resolution of conflicts in Central America any more than you have a panacea for the underlying socio-economic causes of so many of these problems. Nevertheless, what you have achieved is not simply statements of good intentions. It is already significant that on bringing together all of the countries of Central America to discuss and agree upon a series of socio/political security objectives, you have found a consensus which over-rides deep and continuing conflict. By this means and by making the international community more sensitive to the dangers inherent to the situation of Central America, you have already forestalled a wider conflagration.

I indicated at the United Nations General Assembly that once political consensus had been reached Canada would respond sympathetically to invitations to help with