

Statement by the Prime Minister of Canada

**to the
Committee of
International Relations
Montreal (Corim)**

Thursday, February 6, 1986

In less than two weeks the heads of state and the heads of government of the Francophone world will for the first time gather at a summit meeting.

My government attaches great importance to this summit. From the international standpoint it is a step forward in the difficult and sometimes turbulent evolution of La Francophonie. It provides an opportunity to complete a significant stage in building, within that community, a solidarity based increasingly on concerted action. To Canada it also offers the possibility of extending its influence and enlarging its role on the international scene. At home, our renewed commitment to La Francophonie is a further step towards our goal of national reconciliation. We see in it a means of enhancing the growth and achievement of the Francophone communities of Québec and of the other Canadian provinces and of promoting their broadly based association with the Francophone community in the broadest sense of the term. For all these reasons Canada will be strongly represented on this historic occasion. I shall be there, accompanied by the Premier of Québec and the Premier of New Brunswick, which has recognized French as an official language.

La Francophonie is still seeking to define the path it should follow. Too often it has been looked at from a strictly linguistic point of view, or has been seen as one more way of maintaining the influence of French culture. The great vision of a fraternity extending between continents, sustained by the goals of La Francophonie and bonded together by a common language has not always aroused

enthusiasm. The very breadth and daring of the views of those who first inspired this movement meant that there had to be a slow process of maturation before those views would prevail. Even today, La Francophonie is far from having overcome all obstacles. One cannot yet with any assurance assign to it precise geographical boundaries or attempt to define it strictly. The diverse peoples who compose it, remote from one another, many of them recognizing two national languages and sometimes using more, in no way constitute a whole of one nature and one kind. For, while one language unites the Francophone countries, they are differentiated by their very unequal shares of the world's wealth, reflecting the classic division between the North which has and the South which has not.

The Francophone community does in fact include some of the poorest countries on earth. Some of them are indeed on the threshold of subsistence.

We must face the reality: the Francophone world is not like a bloc of rich countries, such as the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries or the European Economic Community. With the exception of the Western countries, and a very small number of countries in the Third World, it is a universe in which co-operation and mutual aid must play a decisive role in the future of some two hundred million human beings.