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A speech delivered by Mr. D.M. Johnson, High Commissioner for Canada in Pakistan, to the Institute for International Affairs, in Karachi, on April 7, 1950.

I thank you for the honour you have done me in asking me to speak before this distinguished gathering. Let me say that I am no stranger to meetings of the Institute of International Affairs. I have been a member of both the parent Institute in London and the Canadian Institute in Ottawa. This, however, is the first meeting that I have ever attended in Pakistan and this is also the first meeting of the Institute that I have ever addressed anywhere. My fellow countrymen in Canada and my British friends in London often invited me to their meetings but never took the risk of asking me to address them. I assure you, therefore, that I appreciate very much the privilege of speaking to you today.

I am glad to see that in Karachi you have a large and flourishing Institute of International Affairs. To my mind the Institutes in the various Commonwealth countries and similar organizations in the United States and other democratic countries have a very important role to play. No democratic country can safely embark on a foreign policy in advance of public opinion in its country. To do so is to invite disaster. Though we all recognize the need for an informed public opinion, it is not easy to bring this about. Members of a government can do a great deal in their speeches and by making available information on foreign affairs, but deliberately to attempt to mould public opinion smacks of propaganda and may misfire. Hence the need for independent bodies devoted to the study of international affairs. Here in gatherings such as this, views of all kinds can be advanced and debated and members with accurate information at their disposal can gradually form their own opinions.

One of the happier and more rewarding tasks of the Institutes in developing public opinion has been the calling together every few years of unofficial Commonwealth conferences to discuss the problems of the Commonwealth in the setting of world affairs. It has been the privilege of my country to have been the host at two of these meetings, one at Toronto in 1933 and the other at Bigwin Inn last year. The last conference, like its predecessors, was a great success. Several members of the Pakistan Institute were, I am very glad, able to attend. Though I was not there myself, the many reports I have received differed about many things but were unanimous in their praise of the delegates from Pakistan. They spoke of the high calibre of your representatives and of the valuable contribution which they were able to make to the debates.

You have not, however, come here to hear me toss bouquets to the Institute of International Affairs, but for the