

The Department of External Affairs has taken note of the press release issued by the Embassy of France and reiterating the position of the French Government with regard to the meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers of French-speaking countries which was to have taken place on December 8 and 9 in Dakar. The meeting, which had originally been slated for November 5, had been postponed to these dates following a French request.

The Department has noted the interpretation given to this meeting by the Embassy "as it sees it". The Department observes that this interpretation is not in line with the spirit or the letter of President Senghor's proposal as set forth in the report he tabled before the Franco-African Summit, and that it contradicts the report of the Committee of Experts that met in Dakar on September 27 and 28, although that report was supported by the expert delegated by the French Government.

The Department recalls that the Organic Community for the development of cultural exchanges has been given the following definition: "It will be a flexible structure for dialogue among heads of State and government founded on the assent of the partners debating, freely and in private, issues and proposals of interest to their countries within the framework of a network of organized solidarity. An open and light structure, it will bring together a diversity of cultural communities with a view to establishing and strengthening solidarity between communities of many cultures and languages".

Recognizing that the definition of the word "culture" proposed by President Senghor goes considerably beyond the limited and traditional understanding of this term, and taking as a basis his proposal, the Committee of Experts that met in Dakar brought out the following three broad spheres of interest: the cultural sphere, the economic sphere and a contribution, seen as essential, to peace among the peoples. Above and beyond the work done by the experts, it seems inconceivable that a meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers as well as a possible Conference of Heads of State and Government from more than thirty countries could avoid dealing with the important international problems.

The Canadian Government recognizes the importance of the cultural objectives of the Community as mentioned in the Embassy's press release. It considers, however, that they cannot be attained without taking into account the concerns and aspirations of the vast majority of the countries likely to become members of the Organic Community. It considers that all the originality of President Senghor's proposal rests in his sweeping view of culture and in the possibility it offers of approaching from a new angle the important international problems, in particular the economic problems that arise out of relations between States.

The Department regrets that as a result of France's withdrawal the Dakar meeting could not be held on the dates planned. As a result all of the States invited have been deprived of hearing the point of view of France as well as that of the other States including Canada.