

The conference dealt with a number of important issues, foremost among them the contentious issue of arms sales to the Republic of South Africa. I am relieved, as I am sure are all here, that, following consideration of factors affecting the security of maritime trade-routes, the members agreed to the formation of a committee to study these questions as they relate to the Indian and South Atlantic Oceans in hopes of resolving some of the complex variations and differences of view. I am also pleased that an amended Declaration of Commonwealth Principles, which had been presented earlier to the meeting in its basic form by President Kaunda of Zambia, received the unanimous support of the meeting. Each of these measures confirmed to a large extent the belief by most heads of government that the Commonwealth association is important -- one that is capable of contributing significantly to a better understanding among men of their common ideals and aspirations, their fears and problems, and their increasing interdependence in a technologically complicated world.

The agenda at Singapore permitted wide-ranging discussions of political and economic trends in the world, of the possible consequences of the entry of Britain into the European Economic Community, of a variety of Commonwealth programs, and of the immediate future of the Commonwealth association. Canada disclosed at the meeting that it was prepared to support up to 40 per cent of the financial burden of an expanded Commonwealth fund for technical co-operation. Canada also supported a less rigid format for future conferences -- one which will relieve some of the unnecessary pressures now present in the preparation of an acceptable communiqué, one that should reduce the number of pre-prepared statements and thus permit heads of government to take advantage of the particular nature of the meetings. There was general agreement that these changes are desirable, and that the unprecedented opportunity for so many heads of government to meet regularly and informally should be jealously protected.

It is my view now, as it was prior to Singapore, that Canada could get along without the Commonwealth but it remains my strong view that we could not get along nearly so well. No problems would be solved by the break-up of the association; not one member would find it easier to advance its own interests in its absence. The Commonwealth benefits all members and harms none. It is my firm expectation that with the help of the important Commonwealth Declaration the association will prove to be a major contributor to the enrichment of human relations. Commonwealth members share a common language. Even more important, they share a common idiom. In the result, there is permitted an informality of encounter and a meeting of minds that surely must be the envy of other countries.

The journey to and from Singapore gave me an opportunity to travel briefly in four of the many countries which have issued invitations to visit over the past several years. Three of those countries -- Pakistan, India and Ceylon -- are Commonwealth members and long-time major recipients of Canadian economic assistance. Together with the journalists and photographers who accompanied me, I travelled to several of the more important of our aid projects. Through the pens and cameras of these reporters, Canadians are now more aware of the way in which Canadian funds have assisted persons less fortunate than ourselves. I found, too, that in each of those countries the earlier visits of Canadian Prime Ministers St Laurent and Diefenbaker were well remembered....