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THE CONCEPTION OF A FRENCH-SPEAKING COMMUNITY

The following excerpts are from a recent address by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. Paul Martin, at the Banquet of the Governors of the Junior Chamber of Commerce of the District of Montreal:

...Among the various aspects of foreign policy with which the Canadian Government is currently concerned there is one to which it is particularly sympathetic - "La Francophonie" - the conception of a French-speaking community....

But what does "La Francophonie" mean? Perhaps the best explanation has been given by President Senghor [of Senegal]. He thinks of it as an intellectual or spiritual community of all the countries which have French as a national or official language or where it is currently spoken. The aim is to bring closer together those countries which, through the French language, share a cultural heritage and have certain ways of thought and action, of looking at problems and of solving them, in common.

The conception is cultural and linguistic. Above all it is a recognition of the richness of the heritage which we have in common with nearly 150 million people living in more than 25 countries throughout the world. These countries, like us, are anxious not only to preserve this heritage but to develop it. They realize today that they can do this better if they do it together.

As a French-speaking country, thanks to one of its two great cultures and one of its two official languages, Canada ought to welcome this idea warmly. I spoke on this subject in the House of Commons on October 24 last year when I said:

"...The Canadian Government fully supports the idea of developing closer links and more exchanges,

particularly in the cultural and related fields, with those countries which, like Canada, share the heritage of the French language and culture.

It is the policy of the Canadian Government to give full expression, in its international relations, to the bilingual and bicultural character of our country. The development of our ties with the 'Francophone' countries, which we have pursued vigorously over the last few years, represents a new and valuable dimension of Canadian diplomacy. We wish more particularly to participate actively in any effort to find an effective framework for further co-operation among 'Francophone' states...."

INTENSIFIED ACTIVITIES

Our bilateral relations have developed particularly with France. The visit which the Prime Minister and I made to France in January 1964 was a turning-point. On this occasion, General de Gaulle and Mr. Pearson agreed on the principles of broad co-operation at all levels between the two countries. Exchanges between the two countries were greatly stimulated as a result. There has been periodic consultation between the two governments since then concerning our bilateral interests and international affairs, just like the consultation we have with the United States or Britain. Two or three times a year, I meet with my good friend and colleague Mr. Couve de Murville. From time to time, other ministers of the two governments have exchanged visits to discuss problems of mutual interest. There have also been numerous meetings between officials. I should also mention the activities of the France-Canada Parliamentary Association which, since its creation a year ago, has held meetings in both countries....