

Mulroney to speak for all Canadians at francophone nations' first summit

By SUSAN SEMENAK
of The Gazette

Prime Minister Brian Mulroney yesterday defended his role as chief representative of French-Canadian rights at next month's summit of francophone nations, but promised Quebec a privileged role. Mulroney repeated pledges that Quebec Premier Robert Bourassa will be granted a "high-profile and important role," and New Brunswick's Richard Hatfield also will participate — but only the prime minister will represent Canadians.

"I will speak for all Canadians at all times and in all circumstances," he told reporters before delivering a speech to the Montreal Council for

International Relations.

Mulroney shrugged off past squabbles between Ottawa and Quebec over Quebec's status, which had stalled earlier attempts to organize international francophone summits.

"We will be going there as gentlemen to conduct ourselves on the world stage the way Canadians want their representatives to conduct themselves," he said.

"Not fighting over little flags — we're going there as friends."

Agreements signed last fall grant Quebec and New Brunswick, which is officially bilingual, the special status of participating governments.

Bourassa said last week he would defer to Mulroney during the Paris summit Feb. 15-17, and will speak

only at the end of the meeting.

It has taken 15 years to organize the meeting of 43 nations.

Mulroney heralded the first francophone conference as the beginning of a solid alliance which will parallel the Commonwealth.

"The conference must go one step further than nostalgic speeches on what the francophone world has not been and what it could have been," Mulroney said.

Specifically, he said the summit will devote itself to international co-operation and economic development, with advanced members such as France and Canada sharing technological and telecommunications expertise with members "who are among the poorest of the earth."