

Canada Weekly

Volume 3, No. 32

August 6, 1975



Ottawa, Canada.

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Fifth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention – postponement sought

Canada has sought the co-operation of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to postpone the fifth UN Congress on Crime Prevention which was to have been held in Toronto in September.

In a statement to the House of Commons on July 21, the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Allan J. MacEachen, said that, "in the Government's view, this congress cannot be held successfully anywhere this year".

Mr. MacEachen explained as follows the reasons for Canada's decision:

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Whereas a minimum of co-operation is essential to any progress in the international field, we have witnessed lately excessive confrontation on issues that were not related to the subject matter of conferences. The ingredients are well-known: racialism in Southern Africa, the Middle East conflict, producer-consumer relations and the full range of economic development problems subsumed under calls for a "new world economic order". Canada believes that these are very real and difficult problems which must be dealt with urgently, in the appropriate international institutions, before they poison the body politic of the United Nations family; and let there be no doubt that we consider it necessary and desirable that political factors take their proper place even in the most technical of conferences. But they must meet some test of relevance, and in recent UN conferences this has clearly not been the case.

Honourable Members are well aware that in respect of the Toronto Congress on Crime Prevention, which was to take place next September, one of these issues had already become paramount. It arose from the resolution adopted in November 1974 by the General Assembly, with Canada dissenting, inviting the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) to attend its sessions as a permanent observer and, in a similar capacity, conferences convened under the auspices of the General Assembly or other organs of the UN. Accordingly, the Government of Canada was informed by the United Nations Secretariat some time ago that observers from the PLO had been invited to attend the fifth Congress on Crime Prevention and that the Canadian authori-

ties were expected to allow entry, sojourn and exit to these participants. Needless to say, it is with reluctance that the Government has decided to seek postponement of the congress, but we concluded that it would not be possible, in present circumstances, to hold a successful congress on crime prevention in Canada or anywhere else.

Two main factors

We are all aware of the public outcry for or against the admission to Canada, for this congress, of observers from the Palestinian Liberation Organization. We have all been worried by its divisive effect upon Canadian public opinion. We could not ignore the risk of public disorders. These factors would have led any government to reconsider a decision to host an international conference. But in the final analysis, two factors dominated in our discussions. The first was the inevitable intrusion of unrelated political considerations into the proceedings of the congress. The second was the re-escalation of violence in the Middle East and the consequent spread of its bitterness into Canada and subsequently into the congress itself.

It is obvious that such intrusion of the Middle East conflict, by adding to the already hopeless confusion between civil crimes and acts of war, would distort and subvert the purposes of what has essentially been up to now, and should remain, a technical meeting of experts from all countries, striving to develop international co-operation in a field of vital importance to the rule of law and to public order everywhere. As host country, we felt that Canada had assumed a major responsibility for the success of this congress; and in such an unfavourable

1976 suggested for crime conference

In a note to the United Nations on July 25, the Canadian Government proposed that the conference on crime be held at "a suitable site in Canada" at "a mutually convenient date in 1976". The meeting should take place, said the note, "under normal conditions for participation in United Nations conferences".