



Statements and Speeches

No. 79/15

CANADA'S FOREIGN POLICY AND RELATIONS

A Speech by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Flora MacDonald, to the Canadian Club of Canada, Montreal, September 17, 1979

I think it is appropriate that I speak to you today about certain aspects of Canada's foreign policy and relations. I know these matters are of immediate importance and concern to everyone in this room.

The conduct of Canada's external affairs has not been subject to an over-all review for ten years. And in those ten years the world has been changing fast. Power relationships have changed remarkably: the super-powers are subject today to quite different constraints. The emergence of China onto the world stage after a period of relative isolation has changed the political map strikingly. The process of decolonization has almost been completed, with the resulting appearance of many new states — a number of which are recognizing that their small size jeopardizes their aspirations to economic prosperity and even their national security. The enormous price increases by the international oil cartel known as OPEC alone have so changed the economic balance of the world that our perceptions of ten years ago are bound to be obsolete.

As the Government of Canada we have the responsibility, and as a government so recently elected to office we have the opportunity, to take a fundamental look at what the world is like today and where Canada fits in it. I certainly would not prejudge the results of such a review by saying we shall find that our existing policies will all be found wanting or inappropriate. Indeed, I have been impressed with the flexibility with which we have met many of the challenges of the changing world scene. Nonetheless I take it as part of my responsibilities as Secretary of State for External Affairs that we do a solid re-thinking of where we are going.

Perhaps you might be interested if I spend just a minute talking about the way in which I expect to have this review conducted. I cannot prejudge the results, but I can foresee the route by which we shall get them.

One of the ways we plan to carry out our commitment to more open and responsive government is by revitalizing our parliamentary institutions. Elected MPs are, after all, the direct representatives of the people and are the best channel the government has for keeping in touch with the thoughts and concerns of the electorate.

In the period from 1970 to 1973 the Commons Committee on External Affairs and National Defence held inquiries into fourteen major subjects, including such important matters as the Nigerian-Biafran conflict, the establishment of the International Research Development Centre, the United Nations and peacekeeping, Canada-U.S. relations, and the major policy-review paper "Foreign Policy for Canadians". These inquiries were valuable, and they gave an opportunity to many
