

the Government's concern for the building and securing of peace in our hemisphere.

Finally, Canada's resources and strong traditions enable and indeed require us to play such a role.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Guy Hudon (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to bring the House up to date on progress accomplished in the peace process in Central America. I am all the more pleased that "progress" is the right word, if recent events are taken into account. As Hon. Members would know, the presidents of the five Central American countries recently agreed on a new peace plan for the region, supported by the other major interested countries, particularly the United States, Cuba and the Soviet Union. This is an extremely positive development.

Still I would not want to create the impression that this plan will solve all the problems of the region. In recent years the negotiations sponsored by the countries of the Contadora Group—Mexico, Panama, Columbia and Venezuela—raised expectations which too often turned into disillusion. Of course this does not take anything away from the efforts of the countries of the Contadora Group which, despite huge obstacles, displayed resolution and determination.

It seems to us that the worst of these obstacles is the existence of serious socio-economic disparities. Guerillas in Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala also stand in the way of a peaceful settlement. Finally, and this may be the key factor, the influence fight between the two superpowers tends to make regional conflicts even worse. Canada sincerely hopes that the good will shown by all parties in recent weeks will lead to an honest effort to overcome the obstacles.

Canada has a clear policy as concerns the situation in Central America. In his speech last year before the Inter-American Press Association, the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) described the Contadora initiative as the best tool for reconciliation in Central America. The Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Clark) has also expressed in public statements both in Canada and abroad the firm support of Canada for the Contadora process. Mr. Clark re-affirmed his position during his visits to Argentina, Uruguay and Venezuela in 1986. In January 1987, in a message addressed to the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Contadora Group and the Lima Support Group, as well as the Secretaries General of the United Nations and the Organization of American States on the occasion of their mission to the countries of Central America, Mr. Clark stated that the efforts of the Contadora Group have sustained the hope of the international community to see a lasting solution to the crisis in Central America. Moreover, in 1986, the Canadian delegation to the General Assembly of the United Nations made a statement in support of the Contadora Group.

Contadora Treaty

Canada has also provided constructive and practical support to the Contadora Group and the peace process in general. During his visit to Mexico in 1985, Mr. Clark had an opportunity to discuss the situation in Central America and the Contadora Group plan with President de la Madrid and his Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Sepulveda. He emphasized the firm support of Canada to the Contadora initiative and its desire to play in due time a constructive role in the peace process. Mr. Clark stated that Canada is willing to share its peace-keeping operations experience with the parties involved. Since then, the Canadian Government has written at the request of the Contadora Group countries a series of comments on the provisions of the draft act on security and follow-up.

These comments are based on a number of considerations, such as the need to impart to our observations a neutral, objective and impartial character.

We also were aware of the need to ensure the viability of any verification and follow-up commission that could be established under the Contadora Act. More specifically, we thought that the funding for such an operation should be closely examined by all the parties involved for the selected mechanisms to be as efficient as possible in the circumstances.

We believe that the concept of a regional solution to that problem needs to be emphasized. In that respect, we feel that the Central American parties themselves should be involved as much as possible in the peacekeeping mechanisms, inasmuch as such involvement contributes to the efficient operation of a verification and follow-up commission. The commission should have specific and firm guarantees as to its freedom to travel within the area, and should also enjoy unimpaired communications with the media. Finally, we believe that a political authority should of necessity be appointed to sponsor the commission, whose mandate would be for a specific period.

The Government feels that the principles stated two years ago for the follow-up and verification are still relevant and should be applied to the present peace plan.

On August 7, at the end of the historic Guatemala Summit, the Central American nations' Presidents announced the conclusion of an agreement on a new peace plan for the area. The plan provides that the Ministers of Foreign Affairs will meet within fifteen days after the agreement is signed, to initiate the implementation of provisions dealing with an amnesty for the insurgents, a cease-fire, a dialogue with the unarmed opposition groups, which should come to an end after ninety days, that is November 7. The Contadora Group countries among others will be called upon to set up a verification and follow-up commission that will be responsible for monitoring the level of forces in place.

Mr. Speaker, the same day it was signed, we welcomed that Agreement which was supported by Mr. Clark. Later on, two envoys sent by Mr. Clark went to the area to express Canada's support and to offer technical advice on the development of the peace-keeping mechanisms. Countries in the area welcomed the envoys and Canada's offer.