

Quebec warned not to push cause at summit

BY JOHN STACKHOUSE
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ACCRA — The Quebec government should not try to internationalize its sovereignty campaign at a summit of French-speaking nations this weekend in the tiny West African nation of Benin, Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister André Ouellet warned yesterday.

"It is very difficult to ask for recognition of something that you were denied by your own people," Mr. Ouellet said in an interview during a stopover in Ghana's capital en route to the Francophonie summit.

Quebec and New Brunswick hold "participating government" status in the organization, which will hold its biennial heads-of-government meeting in Cotonou, Benin.

"We are happy they are there and participating, but as far as Canada is concerned, we are a united country," Mr. Ouellet said.

He referred to the Yes campaign in the Quebec referendum as one of "trickery" that relied on "a very sleazy question."

Mr. Ouellet said Prime Minister Jean Chrétien will push the international francophone organization to set higher standards for human rights and democratic development among its members, which include countries such as Zaire that are governed by repressive regimes.

"We're glad to see that the French authorities are asking that the Francophonie become more than ever before

a political instrument, a political organization," he said. "It therefore means that they will talk about political matters and not only development projects."

However, he said the Francophonie, like the Commonwealth and Organization of American States, should be allowed an evolution toward involvement in the domestic affairs of member states.

Mr. Ouellet said he has tried to gauge regional views on Nigeria during visits this week to Mali, Ivory Coast and Ghana.

As chairman of the Economic Community of West African States, Ghana has shown some restraint in its criticism of Nigeria, which is the regional organization's major power.

At the recent Commonwealth summit in Auckland, Ghana's president, Jerry Rawlings, called on member states to "let us do what we can to assist her [Nigeria]."

Mr. Ouellet said that during a meeting yesterday Mr. Rawlings gave him a historical perspective and specific advice on Nigeria, although he would not elaborate on the talks.

Canada and Ghana are members of the Commonwealth working group on Nigeria that will meet in January to discuss options, including sanctions.

Ghana may lobby against sanctions, because it purchases most of its petroleum from Nigeria and sees the giant nation as one of its best export markets.