

When I last appeared before this Committee in March, several of you expressed interest in my trip to Central America. Indeed, someone suggested that all members of the Committee might wish to accompany me. Today, I would like to provide the Committee with a report on my trip to Central America and provide you with specific comments on Canadian policy in that region. In addition to this report, I am making available to members a compendium of statements I have made on Central America in the past year which includes transcripts of my statements to the press during and immediately after my trip.

At the invitation of their Governments, I visited Costa Rica, Colombia, Nicaragua and Honduras between April 3 and April 13, 1984. This was the first visit of a Canadian Foreign Minister to Central America and I was warmly and graciously welcomed in all countries. In each of the three Central American countries, in addition to Government Ministers and officials, I also met with members of the opposition, media, unions, churches, Canadian business and non-governmental organizations.

In preparing for my trip, I met with Members of Parliament, the Central American and Contadora Ambassadors in Ottawa, and representatives of a number of Canadian non-governmental organizations active in the region, who outlined to me their concerns about the situation in Central America. My programme was arranged to ensure that I was able to meet persons representing a wide spectrum of interests and views, and in this way, I was able to pursue the particular concerns raised prior to my departure.

The primary objective of my visit was to test the adequacy and direction of Canada's policies in Central America. Another purpose of my visit was to sharpen and extend my understanding of the area as well as to explain Canadian policy to the leaders of these countries.

My visit to the region also provided a timely opportunity to review the relevant recommendations made by the Sub-committee on Canada's relations with Latin America and the Caribbean in mid-1982. In general, Canadian policy was confirmed, particularly the requirements to encourage peaceful economic development, to support regional peace initiatives, to pay greater concern to the plight of refugees, and to remain sensitive and responsive to the problems of poverty and the objectives of our aid program. The issue of external involvement in regional conflict, which was highlighted last week in Washington by the former chairman of the Sub-Committee, Mr. Maurice Dupras, was also a subject of my discussions.

The visit also reinforced my appreciation of the fragility of the vitally important task faced by the Contadora group. The Contadora process was a major item discussed