

True North Strong and Free Addresses Arctic Issues

The following is the speech given by the Honourable Mary Collins, P.C., MP, Associate Minister of National Defence to the True North Strong and Free Arctic Inquiry held on March 18, 1989 in Edmonton, Alberta. The Disarmament Fund of this Department provided financial assistance to the organizer of the Conference, the True North Strong and Free Inquiry Society.

"I am pleased, on behalf of the Government of Canada, to congratulate the True North Strong and Free Society for organizing and promoting this second meeting in its continuing dialogue about Canada, the world and the future.

On a cold and blistery November weekend in 1986, we witnessed an event, unique in contemporary Canadian public policy — the first True North Strong and Free Conference. Five thousand Canadians, from all walks of life and shades of opinion, participated in a public discussion of defence policy and nuclear arms issues. The stuff real democracy is made of.

Your deliberations then, as they do today, touched upon many of the social and political issues that are before Canadians. I am impressed by the broad coverage of Arctic affairs to be offered by the distinguished panel of speakers that you have gathered here for your Conference; and in particular I am pleased to see that my colleague Johan Holst, the Norwegian Minister of National Defence, is with us for the Conference.

My participation in your deliberations today is not pure coincidence or based on the luck of the draw. Over the five years which I spent working in the Arctic, I came to know, and be part of the people of the north, their hopes and dreams, as well as their concerns. I am here not only as a Minister of a Government committed to the preservation and enhancement of life in the north, but also as an individual who seeks to be part of a solution, and not part of the problem.

Having said that, the central issue facing any government is to seek consensus and to find the right balance between the competing interests. Prudence and patience are inextricably

linked to this delicate balancing act, as we seek out solutions on issues that are not always absolute.

Those of us whose nations lie around the Arctic Basin must become more involved in and informed about Arctic affairs if we are to make clear judgments about peace and security. The pace of technological, political and climatic developments which affect the Arctic is also increasing.

New developments in communications, transportation, resource extraction and in military capability have increased the strategic importance of the Arctic. Discoveries about the ozone layer and the greenhouse effect underline the very sensitive environmental role of the Arctic region. These developments are drawing together the northern peoples of the world and focussing attention on common interests and opportunities.

It has been said that this is the age of the Arctic, and it is most appropriate that the focus of this Conference is on the choices for peace and security in that region.

In 1985, the Joint Parliamentary Committee that reviewed Canada's international relations pressed for a northern dimension to Canada's foreign policy. The Government's response to these recommendations, in 1986, focussed on four broad policy themes. They were:

- buttressing our sovereignty over Arctic waters;
- modernizing our northern defences;
- preparing for the commercial use of the Northwest Passage; and
- expanding our circumpolar relations, including contacts among northerners of different nations.

The Government's response also stressed the need for consistency between foreign and domestic policy initiatives to ensure a comprehensive and coherent Arctic policy.

Canada has been and continues to be active in circumpolar cooperation. Recent agreements have been entered into with Denmark on environmental

cooperation and with the Soviet Union for the exchange of Arctic scientists and scientific data.

Additionally, we are supporting the development of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference which will meet this June. We have intensified our cooperation with Norway on northern issues, resulting in a bilateral conference held in Tromsø in 1987, led by our respective foreign ministers.

On the home front, the Government is pursuing a domestic agenda that includes the devolution of provincial-type

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programs to the governments of the Territories, and moving toward an early settlement of native land claims. In doing so, we must make every effort to preserve the traditional values of our northern peoples as we focus on political and economic change, and as we look for security and prosperity in the north.

Limiting excessive militarization of the Arctic in the interests of strategic stability, within the context of our arms control and disarmament effort is of particular interest to this Government. However, as we pursue these goals, we must temper our idealism with realism. We cannot gamble with our freedom and security — they are too precious.

Over the next two days, we will hear a lot about security, freedom and prosperity — they are, after all, the handmaidens of peace. But they do not exist for nations in an abstract sense — they are highly dependent on:

- the extent to which the rights, values and freedoms of the people and the environment in which they live, are protected;
- the economic and social health of the people, individually and collectively; and
- the degree of military security enjoyed.