



Statements and Speeches

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(Corrected version)

A DEMONSTRATION OF BEAUTIFUL EQUALITY — COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING IN OTTAWA

An Address by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Mitchell Sharp, to the Commonwealth Association of Architects, Ottawa, November 5, 1973.

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Over the past 20 years, to use extravagant language such as excellent, or extraordinarily successful, to describe a Commonwealth heads of government conference would have invited accusations of being, at best, diplomatic to a fault or, at worst, dishonest. However, this conference was excellent. And this was not because it was held in Canada or because the Canadian Prime Minister or the Canadian delegation dominated the proceedings. It was partly because no one person or issue dominated the proceedings. As Prime Minister Trudeau said at the time: "I think there is what I would almost describe as a beautiful equality. The people who get the most done are those who make the brightest interventions and on one subject it might be one country and on another it might be another." All leaders had their say, and it would be invidious to pick out star performers.

A most striking aspect of this past heads of government conference was the change from the meeting held in Singapore in 1971. That meeting, as you may recall, had been marked by acrimonious and protracted debate, chiefly over the question of the sale of arms to South Africa. As that debate developed, so did the risk of a Commonwealth polarized in large part along racial lines into antagonistic camps.

In contrast, the Ottawa meeting was relaxed. It allowed easy and frank exchange of views. It was an atmosphere in which *rapport* and understanding between the leaders had an opportunity to develop — and this, more than specific agenda items, is one of the primary objectives of a heads of government meeting.

But how was this change brought about? The answer lies partly in careful preparation — in applying the lessons of past conferences to the framing of new ground-rules. The decision to exclude all but the most immediate advisers from the heads of government discussions had a very beneficial effect. There was no gallery
