

Statement

Secretary of
State for
External Affairs



Déclaration

Secrétaire d'État
aux Affaires
extérieures

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AS DELIVERED

AN ADDRESS BY

THE HONOURABLE BARBARA McDOUGALL,
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,

TO THE

XXIII OAS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

DELIVERED BY STAN GOOCH,

ASSISTANT DEPUTY MINISTER,

LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN BRANCH

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE CANADA

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Affaires extérieures et
Commerce extérieur Canada

External Affairs and
International Trade Canada

Canada

Mr. President, Excellencies, foreign ministers of the hemisphere, Mr. Secretary-General, Mr. Assistant Secretary-General, ladies and gentlemen, and friends:

As many of you know, the Honourable Barbara McDougall, Secretary of State for External Affairs, who was to have led the Delegation of Canada to this General Assembly, had to leave last evening to attend an urgent meeting in Europe on the Bosnian crisis, where Canada has more than 2500 peacekeepers under United Nations (UN) command. She asked me to thank you, Mr. President, for your warm hospitality and that of the Government of Nicaragua, and also to express her sincerest regrets to you and her colleagues, their Excellencies, the foreign ministers of the hemisphere, that she could not participate personally in this important assembly. She has asked me to read her speech as her personal speech, which very much represents her vision of this organization, for which she has the highest respect.

Her words are:

I very much regret that I cannot deliver my message in person, for reasons that have just been explained to you. This is a bittersweet occasion for me; it marks my third General Assembly, but also my last, for I have made the decision to leave Canadian political life and pursue other goals. I can assure you, however, that I will take with me a great deal of personal satisfaction from my participation with all of you in the activities of this, the world's oldest regional organization.

I would like, on behalf of the Canadian delegation, to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election and to assure you of the full support of the Canadian delegation during what promises to be a very active week of deliberations.

I would like to extend our sincere thanks to the Government of Nicaragua for the warm hospitality it has extended to all the delegations. I must also take this opportunity to applaud the process of national reconciliation that is under way in this country, and underscore Canada's support for this process. The government and people of Nicaragua are to be commended for their efforts to build a better and more secure future for themselves and their children.

I hope you will allow me, Mr. President, to reminisce a little bit. Canada joined the Organization of American States (OAS) three and a half years ago. As many of you know, it was not a decision we made lightly. But we were encouraged by the signs of progress and renewal, not only in the hemisphere, but within the organization itself, and we felt the time had come to abandon our role as passive observer. We owed it to ourselves, and to our neighbours, to take a seat at the table, to become full and active participants in the hemisphere.

What were our priorities in joining? Why did we think the OAS and the region were important to Canada? What do we see as the primary areas of accomplishment over the last three and a half years? All these questions can be answered in terms of three broad themes: democratic development and human rights, economic development, and co-operative security.

Democratic Development

The most significant development that inspired Canada to join this organization was the wave of democracy sweeping across the Americas. Once a region of the world dominated by authoritarian rule, it was turning increasingly to civilian governments, holding regular elections and building a true culture of democracy.

Two years ago, when we met in Santiago, I was extremely gratified to find myself sitting among the representatives of 33 other democratically elected governments. Only Cuba remained outside.

But we have learned that the continuation of democracy in the hemisphere cannot be taken for granted. Last year, when we assembled in Nassau, we felt a shared pain at the blow that had been dealt to democracy by the events in Haiti and Peru. Over the past year, with the holding of elections, Peru appears to be back on track.

The situation in Haiti, I regret to say, has yet to be resolved. But lately there have been some very encouraging signs and I am convinced that the solution is within reach.

Just over a week ago, Canadians were extremely saddened and deeply disturbed to learn of another "self-coup" -- this time by President Serrano in Guatemala.

I was extremely pleased to see the OAS respond swiftly and effectively. In so doing, notice was served that such breaches of democracy will not be tolerated by the OAS.

And this proves just how much our hemisphere and this organization have changed. The day when a blind eye is turned to a coup d'état in a neighbouring country is long past. No longer can those who wrest power from the people expect to be welcomed with open arms into the councils of the Americas. The examples of Haiti, Peru and now Guatemala have strengthened the will of the OAS to take ownership of the issue and the ideal of democracy.

With the political commitment of its members and the new instruments adopted by the OAS in Asuncion, Santiago and

Nassau, the OAS has proven itself a willing and able guardian of hemispheric democracy. And if we have not quite succeeded with Haiti yet, the fact that it is still an issue in the world's eye is because the OAS has not given up on it. Because we believe that the Haitian people and their elected leaders deserve our continuing support. Because we share a conviction that such a flouting of democracy cannot be tolerated.

Haiti, Peru and Guatemala have taught us another lesson, that democracy -- fragile flower that it is -- must be nurtured. Experience has now shown us very clearly the danger of relying too heavily on elections. Elections alone do not guarantee democracy. They are a beginning, not an end. Secretary-General Baena Soares was recently quoted in a Canadian newspaper as having observed, quite aptly, that, "There is no such thing as instant democracy. It is not coffee."

The OAS has made some very useful and effective contributions in the area of electoral monitoring, most recently in Peru and Paraguay. However, our vision must extend beyond such short-term measures. We must ensure, in all nations of the hemisphere, that the conditions are created, the institutions are built, and the traditions are established that will make it possible for democracy to take root and flourish.

In creating the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy, the OAS has established a special mechanism for such longer-term actions. Canada was proud to have been one of the countries that advocated the creation of this unit. Last year, convinced of the vital importance of its mandate, Canada announced a special \$1-million contribution to the unit to provide it with added impetus.

Regrettably, Canada feels that the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy is still not being used to the fullest. I sincerely hope -- particularly in light of recent events -- that the membership at large will regard the unit as a priority, get behind it, and insist that it be endowed with the resources and the flexibility needed to carry out all aspects of its mandate.

Respect for Human Rights

Inextricably linked to democratic development is respect for human rights, and again we have seen great strides made in the hemisphere over the past few years. Newly democratic governments have quickly come to the realization that not only is respect for human rights a moral obligation to their

people, but it is also one of the best defences against violence, misery and political instability.

The OAS has a unique system for the protection and promotion of human rights. We believe that the nations of the hemisphere should take great pride in this system and make every effort to ensure that it is able to carry out its activities in the most complete, effective and objective way possible. This implies both moral and financial support.

Canada has been vocal, even ardent, in its defence of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and we have been heartily encouraged by some of the allies we have encountered along the way. We would hope that as all countries in the hemisphere become more confident and secure in their defence of human rights, they will all become more openly and fully supportive of the commission and its work.

Economic Development

For Canada, a second positive sign of hemispheric renewal was economic. By 1989, several countries were beginning to emerge from the previous "lost decade." Spendthrift nations, crippled by huge debt loads, runaway inflation and severe structural problems, were starting to realize that their behaviour was unsustainable.

One by one, they began, and have continued, to undertake major fiscal and monetary reforms -- to open up their economies, to shed their protectionist policies, and to privatize their inefficient state-run enterprises. And they have found that the sacrifices -- the short-term pain -- were worth the long-term gains: increased investor confidence, enhanced productivity, heightened trade flows, and opportunities for joint ventures and technology transfer, all harbingers of economic growth and prosperity.

Canada, for one, has seen enormous potential for investment, trade and economic co-operation with the new, more competitive, strengthened economies of the region. And in expanding the free trade agreement with the United States to the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which includes Mexico, Canada has alerted the rest of the world to the potential for trade and investment with this region.

The NAFTA is a testament to the confidence our three nations have in the benefits of freer trade. We are convinced that this is the road to a more prosperous and a more secure future, not only for North America, but for the hemisphere and possibly beyond.

For this reason, it was Canada who proposed that the NAFTA include an accession clause: so that other countries could join, and so that we could ultimately realize free trade among all nations of the Americas.

Co-operative Security

The desire to contribute to hemispheric peace and security was the third main reason for Canada's decision to join the OAS. Moreover, in the wake of the Cold War, these concepts are beginning to take on a new and broader significance. They are also intrinsically and increasingly linked to economic growth and development, good governance, the war against drugs, environmental protection, and small arms control, among others.

Moreover, at a time when threats from our neighbours, and even from outside the hemisphere, are almost non-existent, the role of the militaries in our countries must change. We must find ways to define their role in relation to civilian rule.

Canada is convinced that the OAS has a growing role to play in co-operative security and we are committed to working with our partners to move this agenda forward. At last year's General Assembly, a hemispheric security committee was established on the initiative of Canada and a number of other nations. In the past year, this committee has made an excellent start.

We believe the committee should now intensify its work, building on its current foundations. Among the specific areas we would like to see addressed in the coming year are confidence-building measures, mechanisms for conflict prevention and management, support for the UN Conventional Arms Register, and the strengthening of the global non-proliferation regime.

The committee must also examine the relationship between the Inter-American Defence Board and the OAS. As a body that receives approximately \$2 million each year from the OAS and yet remains largely outside the system, the board is long overdue for such a review. Canada will be guided in these discussions by the following principles: clear political and civilian control, strict guidelines for accountability, a revised and well-defined mandate flowing from this political process, and the allocation of a modest budget appropriate to these newly defined tasks. If this new role is not deemed acceptable, we would advocate that the board be abolished. The status quo is not acceptable to Canada.

This kind of reform can only strengthen the OAS. One of the factors that tipped the scales in Canada's decision to join three and a half years ago was the sense that the OAS, mirroring the hemisphere, was changing. It was becoming more open to reform, determined to become a more relevant organization, more responsive to the needs of its democratic members. We have tried to contribute to this process during our brief tenure in this organization, and we have already seen some very tangible and encouraging results.

We must ensure that the OAS responds to the changing needs of member nations, which, after all, have themselves changed and developed. At the same time, we must recognize that these are times of restraint for all of us, and that the OAS must be fiscally responsible. We must ensure that we are getting value for money. This often means making difficult choices, sorting out our priorities, even eliminating some long-standing but perhaps less useful activities. Unfortunately, there is no other way. Resources are scarce. We must use them well.

One of the ways in which we can maximize resources and, at the same time, enhance our effectiveness is through co-operation with other agencies. The Secretary-General has been examining ways of increasing co-operation and co-ordination with the United Nations, for example. We should continue to encourage this type of activity and view it not as detracting from our own autonomy or importance but, rather, as a means of sharing expertise and resources. Again, in the case of Haiti, it has been shown that such collaboration can be fruitful and help to advance our own interests.

Canada waited a long time to join the OAS. Some may have mistaken our caution for complacency, and may have expected us to start off as rather quiet students of the organization. I think it is fair to say that we have shown ourselves to be neither quiet nor complacent, but, rather, innovative and active partners in this association.

If I can make a small personal observation, Mrs. McDougall would strongly endorse the comment made by President Chamorro, when she opened this General Assembly this morning, that the OAS must be "capable of taking on tasks never before attempted, with new and daring actions, leaving behind the timidity that has so often affected our organization."

Canada will continue to play a strong and active part in the years ahead. We believe that, as the prime forum for political, economic and social progress in the hemisphere, this organization has still more exciting potential waiting to be tapped.

Mr. President, Mrs. McDougall wanted to close her remarks on a very personal note, since this would have been her last OAS meeting. Her words were:

I would like to say how much I have enjoyed and benefited from my own participation in the OAS. It has allowed me not only to further Canadian foreign policy objectives, but also to establish a wide range of interesting and valuable friends. Finally, it has afforded me exceptional opportunities to visit the different regions of the hemisphere -- first South America at the Santiago Assembly, last year the Caribbean at Nassau, and this year Central America. It has been a privilege and a pleasure and one that I will look back on with pride.