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SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
RESPONSE TO REPORT OF SPECIAL COMMITTEE OF
THE PEACE PROCESS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

The Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Right Honourable Joe Clark, responded today to the report of the Special Commons Committee on the Peace Process in Central America, which tabled its first report in July. Mr. Clark wrote the Chairman of the Committee, the Honourable John Bosley, replying to the principal recommendations of the report, specifically Canadian support to verification and control measures for the peace process, contributing to and strengthening human rights and democratic development; economic and humanitarian assistance; and diplomatic representation in the region. Included in the government's response was a commitment to increase substantially, over the next six years, funding for economic development and reconstruction.

Mr. Clark expressed the Government's agreement with the main thrust of the report including most of its recommendations. He praised the work of the committee, especially the care and consideration that went into formulating a consensus. "The report reflects", said Mr. Clark, "the importance that Parliament and all Canadians attach to peace in Central America. The government will continue to seek ways in which we can encourage a just and lasting peace".

A copy of Mr. Clark's letter to Mr. Bosley is attached.

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Secretary of State
for
External Affairs

Secrétaire d'État
aux
Affaires extérieures

The Rt. Hon. Joe Clark, P.C., M.P.
Secretary of State for External Affairs



Le très hon. Joe Clark, C.P., député
Secrétaire d'Etat aux Affaires extérieures

OTTAWA, Ontario
K1A 0G2
September 23, 1988

Dear John,

I wish to congratulate you and the members of the Special Committee on the Peace Process in Central America on your excellent report, which was tabled in the House of Commons on July 5. The unanimous agreement of all parties to establish the committee reflected the deep concern felt by the House, indeed, by all Canadians, about the situation in Central America. It clearly demonstrated the desire of the Canadian people to contribute in whatever way possible to the realization of peace in that troubled region.

Your committee did not request that the government respond formally to the report. Nonetheless, I would like to take this opportunity to comment on the main recommendations. As a general comment, I should first say that the work of the Committee has been warmly appreciated by my colleagues and me. I have reviewed the report with the Honourable Monique Landry and with senior officials of External Affairs and CIDA. We have found it positive and challenging in its view of Canada's relations with Central America and imaginative in its recommendations as to where we might go. I should be grateful if you would convey my gratitude to the other members of the Committee and to the staff who have done such an outstanding job in a short period of time.

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The Honourable John Bosley, P.C., M.P.
Chairman
House of Commons Special Committee on the
Peace Process in Central America

I would like to offer the following comments on the recommendations of the report, starting first with the measures for the verification and control of the Peace Accord. Successive Canadian governments have been supportive of the Central America five in their search for peace. Central America has been on the agenda for virtually every bilateral meeting I have had over the past year or more. We have taken a leading role in discussions in the UN, where we were an early co-sponsor of the U.N. Special Plan for Central America. There has been constant contact with the countries of the region and consultation on a regular basis with the Summit seven countries, the Rio Group, the EC and other international partners. The government will continue the tempo and intensity of this dialogue wherever it can help to further the peace process. It has always been important, however, and will continue to be important that we not attempt to impose solutions. The driving force for this process must be found in the Central American countries themselves.

On Verification and Control measures for the peace accord, Canada remains ready to participate in the Auxiliary Technical Group (ATG) for the design of appropriate peacekeeping mechanisms. I believe the Parliamentary Committee would agree that Canada was chosen for this role because of our credible, active, and evenhanded approach to the region. We await a confirmation of this invitation from the five Central America countries. It is for the Central Americans to decide whether or not they wish to proceed with that offer. We agree entirely with the Committee that a clear mandate is always necessary for the effective operation of a peace supervisory group. We consider that UN or OAS involvement in the auxiliary technical group (ATG) is desirable, but not necessarily essential if the other components for a viable mechanism are in place. However, a responsible political authority to whom a verification and control commission would report is indispensable. We agree with the Committee that the implementation phase should involve more countries than just those of the ATG.

Turning to human rights and democratic development, it should be noted that no outside country has been asked to involve itself in the political aspects of Esquipulas II; the Commission for Verification and Follow-up, which presented its report to the Five in January 1988, was suspended precisely because it did not limit its mandate to security issues. If asked, Canada would consider offering technical assistance requested by the Five, for example, for the more effective cooperation of the National Reconciliation Commissions.

We would also agree that, if requested, Canada should offer assistance in the development of institutions and conditions which will help guarantee human rights; that is technical assistance for the judiciary; advice on the administration of elections; technical assistance to auditors. In principle, we agree with the committee's constructive approach to the question of technical assistance to military and police but there are limitations due to inadequacies in Spanish language training capabilities and the fact that there are few additional places available in appropriate Canadian training institutions. We will examine further the possibilities in this area.

Canada has an enviable record in regard to sending recognized experts, such as experienced Elections Canada and provincial officials to observe elections in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, in response to invitations by the governments concerned. Clear and reasonable criteria have been developed accepting such invitations. Support for the proposed Central America Parliament is of course, an initiative for Parliament. The government would favourably consider sending expert observers to the Central American Parliamentary elections, if asked, and in good company with other democratic countries.

One of the principal themes of the Committee's report is the central importance of economic development to both realizing and sustaining peace in Central America. The government fully supports this view; indeed, the belief that the root causes of conflict in the region are economic and social has for some years been one of the main underlying precepts of Canadian policy toward the region. Since the early eighties, we have substantially increased our economic assistance to the region. Canada has played an important role multilaterally in focussing the attention of the international community on the need for both more effective coordination and clearer priorities for economic assistance and for extraordinary additional assistance for economic reconstruction. We have responded consistently and generously to the plight of the thousands of refugees and displaced persons through contributions to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and other international relief agencies in Canada, as well as admitting to Canada almost 21,000 Central American refugees over the last 5 years.

As the Committee has emphasized, this is not the time to slacken our efforts. If we in Canada are serious about our commitment to the achievement of a resilient peace in the region, we have to consider seriously how we can most appropriately

further strengthen our contribution to the reconstruction and long-term economic development of the area. The Government accepts the Committee's recommendation that \$100 million, in addition to currently planned expenditures, be allocated to assist Central America reconstruction and economic development efforts at this critical period in the region's history. Although an increase of this magnitude cannot be accommodated over a 5-year period as suggested by the Committee, we will make such commitment for the 6-year period 1988-1994. The full implementation of this commitment could, of course, be affected by developments in the peace process. This undertaking, given within current budget projections, will represent substantially more than a doubling of bilateral assistance to the region over that of the previous 5-year period, which in turn represented a tripling of bilateral assistance over the preceding five years.

In addition, we will continue to work actively in multilateral fora such as the UN and the World Bank to promote more effective coordination and prioritization of development assistance to the region. We are now thoroughly reviewing our aid programming strategies in the five Central American countries to ensure that our aid programs are targeted to the highest priority sectors and groups. This review takes fully into account the priorities established in Canada's new aid strategy, particularly poverty alleviation, the priorities identified in the UN Special Plan, the individual countries' structural adjustment programs, and the role of regional institutions in the reconstruction effort.

By this autumn we will have opened aid offices in Tegucigalpa, Managua and San Salvador. These offices, in conjunction with our Embassies in San Jose and Guatemala, will ensure that our aid program will have a physical presence in all countries in the region. Further, as outlined in the new aid strategy, over the next few years a number of CIDA programs will be decentralized to the field. The Central America aid program is one of the programs which will be decentralized in fiscal year 1989/90. These steps should substantially enhance the timeliness and effectiveness of our economic cooperation programs.

Finally, we would agree with the committee on the need to strengthen diplomatic representation in the region, and measures have been taken in some areas to this end. In addition to the aid offices mentioned above, new Honorary Consuls have recently been approved for Tegucigalpa and Managua, and a recommendation has been made for an Honorary Consul in San Salvador. The recommendation to open mini-posts in Managua, San Salvador and Tegucigalpa, however, cannot be endorsed at this time in view of

personnel and financial resource constraints. I hope to be able to respond positively to the recommendation that the position of Chargé d'Affaires at our post in Guatemala be upgraded to the level of Ambassador.

The work of the Special Committee and its visit to the region took place at a time when the peace movement had greater vitality and better short term prospects than it does now. Since then, the Sandinista-contra talks have stalled, there has been an escalation in tensions between Managua and Washington and between Honduras and Nicaragua. The tragic illness of President Duarte has added another element of uncertainty to that already troubled country. Sadly, the last meeting of the Executive Commission of Central America Foreign Ministers broke down at the end of June and no agreement was reached to proceed with verification and control.

This does not in any way invalidate the work of the Committee, for its task was to see how we could continue to promote the peace process. Many observers have already dismissed Esquipulas as moribund. Since the inception of the Contadora over five years ago, on many occasions, the peace process has been pronounced dead. In spite of their differences, however, I think all five countries of Central America still share a unity of purpose in their desire for peace. It is significant that no party has renounced the process, no matter how elusive progress seems. The Special Committee's Report shows what Canada has done and what we can still do. The task they assumed was difficult and complex. The work is all the more valuable in the present circumstances. It gives us hope, and it provides concrete ideas upon which we can try to build in our attempts to encourage a just and lasting peace, and a more prosperous future for Central America.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature consisting of a single, bold, sweeping stroke that curves downwards and to the right, ending in a small hook.