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Statement in the House of Commons by  
the Right Honourable Joe Clark,  
Secretary of State for External Affairs,  
on his visit to Southern Africa

Ottawa, Ontario

March 7, 1990

A week ago today, I had the distinct privilege, on behalf of Canada, to meet with Mr. Nelson Mandela on his first voyage outside South Africa since he was confined to prison 27 years ago. I want to report to Parliament on our conversations, and also on my brief visit to Namibia, in whose struggle for independence Canada has played so vital a role.

Lusaka, Zambia is the headquarters of the African National Congress in exile. Mr. Mandela came to consult with his National Executive, some of whom he had never met. He wanted also to meet those countries and institutions which have played a leading role in the struggle against apartheid. The Prime Minister, whom I represented, was one of the first invited to Lusaka, which is a sign of the respect that Canada has won among the people on the front lines of the fight against apartheid. That is a tribute to the resolve of people throughout this House and across the country. It creates a responsibility for Canadians to continue our leadership in new circumstances which, while more promising than the decades of impasse on apartheid, are also more challenging and complex.

The House knows the changes which have swept South Africa in recent months:

- the historic Harare Declaration of the African National Congress which accepted the desirability of peaceful, negotiated change in South Africa;
- the election as President of South Africa of F.W. de Klerk, a man who seems committed to initiating real change;
- the unbanning of the African National Congress;
- and the triumphant release of Nelson Mandela from prison on February 11.

The stage is now set for historic progress towards a truly democratic and non-racial South Africa. But we have only just begun. The state of emergency is still in force. Political prisoners remain detained. The pillars of apartheid remain. As Kenneth Kaunda said in Lusaka, Mr. Mandela is now free, but he is free only to live in an apartheid system.

I think it important that Canadians understand the spirit in which Nelson Mandela approaches this phase of events in South Africa. He referred to his meetings with President de Klerk, and the Ministers of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, and said he is convinced that they are true reformers who seek a new social contract in South Africa. But, he noted, these are but three men who face the same party structure responsible for the development and maintenance of the repressive regime of apartheid. They deserve to be encouraged, but neither he nor the world could ignore the history of the National Party or the forces of retrenchment which lie in waiting. Mr. Mandela believes that pressures must be maintained until real change occurs. Expressions of intent are not enough to warrant relaxation of pressure.

Mr. Mandela was unambiguous on this issue: the greatest assistance which could be offered by the outside world to the ANC is to maintain sanctions. Indeed, he spoke of intensifying sanctions, and I have asked him to indicate where and how this should occur.

Commonwealth Heads of Government, in Kuala Lumpur last year, agreed that Commonwealth pressure would remain unyielding until there was "evidence of clear and irreversible change." The Commonwealth Committee of Foreign Ministers, which I chair, will meet in Nigeria, in May, to assess the evidence of change. The African National Congress has agreed to work with us in that process.

The headquarters of the African National Congress will return to South Africa and the organization, unbanned, will lead the effort to secure a non-racial democracy in South Africa. Thousands of ANC members and followers will have to be re-located inside South Africa. Offices will have to be established. A new infrastructure must be built. And the ANC, at the same time it is negotiating, will also have to focus on equipping the black leadership in South Africa for the responsibilities of economic management and political governance.

The ANC asked me for Canada's direct assistance in meeting the costs of its re-integration into political life inside South Africa. I noted the firm policy of successive governments of Canada not to support political parties in other countries. We will, naturally, continue to support specific humanitarian, education and other programs which meet the needs of the ANC. A delegation from the African National Congress will come to Ottawa within a month to discuss specific areas of cooperation.

But I also made the point that there are thousands of private citizens in Canada who would want to support the return home of the ANC. This resource should be tapped, and I have initiated discussions with representatives of the three parties in Parliament to identify individuals and strategies which can be offered to the ANC to help them secure substantial private Canadian support.

A great challenge facing the ANC is to level the playing field as it approaches negotiations with the government. The government will be able to draw on all the wealth, expertise and resources which apartheid has put at its disposal. The ANC is dispossessed and disadvantaged in these terms. Successful negotiations will require a greater equality of resources and expertise. That is an area where Canada can help.

Finally, the ultimate success of a non-racial South Africa will depend on the capacity of both blacks and whites to exercise both political and economic power. Economic exploitation lies at the heart of apartheid and, by and large, black South Africans have been shut out of the experience of running industries and businesses. Therefore, I told Mr. Mandela that we will look urgently at additional programs to provide potential black leaders of industry with practical experience in running large corporations in both the private and public sectors.

In their telephone conversation February 13, the Prime Minister invited Mr. Mandela to visit Canada. He has suggested that it might be appropriate for Nelson Mandela to address this free Parliament. Mr. Mandela looks forward to coming to Canada, to express directly his appreciation of the support of Canadians.

The impression I took away from two days of meetings is of a man who is strong, serene, wise and generous. He is a person of principle, but also of practicality and flexibility. To emerge from prison after so long a punishment and to retain an understanding of the concerns of his jailers is extraordinary. Mr. Mandela disproves the notion that history is made only by impersonal forces. The course of South African history will be determined in large measure by this man - and by his counterpart in Pretoria.

Canada will maintain sanctions until there is clear evidence of irreversible change in the apartheid system. But we intend also to encourage President de Klerk in his courageous and moderate course. Foreign Minister Pik Botha has written to me suggesting that Canadian experience might be particularly helpful in developing negotiated solutions for South Africa. I have responded by proposing that Mr. Ted Lee, the Head of our Legal Branch, and Canada's former Ambassador to South Africa, visit the region to assess areas where Canada's expertise might be of use. I made it clear to Mr. Botha that any expertise we might offer must be available to all parties in the negotiations. Mr. Lee will be in South Africa in early April to consult with the government, the ANC and other relevant parties.

The nature of the South African challenge has changed. The opponents of apartheid outside South Africa must be as sensitive and generous in encouraging the process of change as Nelson Mandela has been in leading it. Canadian non-governmental organizations have brought great honour to Canada in their fight against apartheid. I will be meeting with them within the next two weeks to discuss how Canadians together can best pursue the fresh prospect of finally ending apartheid.

After my meetings in Lusaka, I paid a brief visit to Namibia, which will celebrate its hard-won independence on March 21st. Canada will be represented at the independence celebrations by my colleague, the Minister for External Relations and International Development and by a small all-party delegation from Parliament. For years, Namibian independence was a hostage to apartheid; now Namibia is leading the way for its neighbour, South Africa. It is a remarkable example of a successful transition to a non-racial democracy, the holding of free elections, the drafting of a constitution without peer in Africa. The Namibian success points to what is possible when reason overcomes emotion and compromise replaces prejudice.

During my conversations with President-elect Sam Nujoma and his Ministers-designate, I expressed both Canada's congratulations and our intent to continue to contribute to the development of a stable and prosperous Namibia.

Mr. Speaker, when I was called to the platform to welcome Nelson Mandela to Zambia, President Kaunda said that Canada, though far away, had earned the right to be considered a "Front Line State" in the battle to end apartheid. Because we are a Western democracy, a diverse society, a successful economy, our role may be even more important in this sensitive new phase of the campaign to establish a non-racial democracy in South Africa.