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CANADA ASSESSES THE BRITISH SETTLEMENT WITH RHODESIA

Statement by the Secretary of State
for External Affairs, the Honourable
Mitchell Sharp, in the House of Commons,
on December 1, 1971.

On November 24, the British Government announced proposals for settlement of the constitutional position of Rhodesia.

By now, Members will be familiar with the main features of these proposals, which include provisions on the franchise and the composition of the legislature designed to give an increasing political voice to Africans, provisions intended to reduce racial discrimination, including a justiciable declaration of rights, a large development program, and a test of acceptability to be conducted by a commission appointed by the British Government.

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From the beginning, Canada has held that the solution in Rhodesia should be a constitution providing for the rapid election of a government broadly representative of the Rhodesian people, of whom the overwhelming majority are black. The constitutional arrangements which have been announced fall short of this objective. The period for the transition to majority rule is not specified and the means for achieving it are highly complicated. Given the past experience with complicated constitutional provisions in Rhodesia and in various other parts of the world, there is inevitably concern as to how these arrangements will be implemented. Much will depend on the goodwill and co-operation of all concerned -- qualities not always evident in recent years in the conduct of the Rhodesian régime.

When I visited Africa last March, I was struck by the fact that two great contemporary dramas were being played out on that continent. Southern Africa is the scene of one of the most crucial chapters in the world-wide search for racial equality and human dignity, and the scene of the final stages in the liquidation of the European colonial empires.

Both of these themes are found in Rhodesia. In seeking to provide equitable arrangements for Rhodesian independence, Britain has had to face the fact that the white minority is at the present time unwilling to yield power to the black majority, and that British capacity to influence the situation

is very limited. Even mandatory United Nations sanctions have not been sufficient to produce this transfer of power. The only alternative means for bringing about a radical change would have been the use of force, a course of action which has been judged unacceptable by successive British Governments. Mr. Godber, the British Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, whom I saw on November 27, gave me to understand that, in the stalemate which has resulted, such factors as the political stagnation for the Rhodesian Africans, the drift towards *apartheid*, the isolation of all Rhodesians from the outside world, and the distortion of Rhodesian economic and social development had led the British authorities to believe that there were serious disadvantages to the perpetuation of the *status quo*. These were among the considerations behind the decision of the British Government to make these proposals, which they hope may establish a new point of departure for Rhodesia's political development.

We expect that there will be strong misgivings on the part of many African governments over the proposals. It is entirely understandable that they should wish all Africans in Rhodesia to have the same advantages which they themselves have obtained through independence on the basis of majority rule. Canada is completely in accord with the desire of Africans to achieve the abolition of all forms of racial discrimination throughout Africa and the realization of full political rights for all African peoples, a desire we and they have repeatedly expressed in the United Nations and at Commonwealth meetings.

The Commonwealth has not been successful in its attempts to solve the Rhodesian problem. In my view, this does not mean that the Commonwealth should be considered of lessening importance. In its brief existence as a multi-racial association, it has contributed greatly to the adjustments required by the accession to independence of its members from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. Canada is confident that the Commonwealth can continue to perform a vital role in the Seventies.

The proposals envisage seeking the views of the people of Rhodesia. It is entirely right that this should be so. This is obviously a vital element in the achievement of any settlement. The provision for a commission appointed by Britain represents a serious attempt to test the opinion of Rhodesian Africans. Nevertheless, there are inherent complications. The vast majority of the people have been given little opportunity in the past to express their political will, certainly not on complicated constitutional questions. There are definite physical limitations on the ability of the commission to consult everyone. Another cause of concern is the state of emergency which apparently will prevail during the commission's deliberations. African nationalist parties (such as have come to power elsewhere), notably ZAPU and ZANU, will, it appears, continue to be unable to operate, and their leaders will be prevented from influencing public opinion during the consultations.

I am sure that I speak for all Members of this House when I say that we hope that, notwithstanding these limitations, the commission will be able to ascertain the views of the Rhodesian people, and in particular the African

population, as to the acceptability to them of the proposed agreement. I feel confident that men of the integrity of those nominated to be chairman and vice-chairmen will report not only the views they hear but also on the adequacy of the procedures for ascertaining those views.

As Canadians we may view the proposals as falling short of what is desirable but we cannot substitute our judgment for the judgment of the Rhodesian people themselves as to whether they prefer to go on as at present or to accept the settlement that has been proposed.

Whatever happens, Canada will not cease to be concerned with the attainment of full democracy and social justice in Rhodesia.

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