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STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

Speech by

The Right Honourable Joe Clark,
Secretary of State for External Affairs,
to the CSCE Conference on the
Human Dimension

Canada

Paris, France

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Mr. Chairman,

I wish at the outset to express our gratitude to the Government of France for hosting this important event, and our appreciation of the efficient work of the executive secretary, M. Dessaux, and his staff in organizing this conference in a very short time.

This conference opens a new chapter in European political dialogue and in the ongoing struggle for established and recognized human rights on this continent.

Little more than four months ago, we met in Vienna to finalize the Concluding Document of the CSCE. Since then a new negotiation has been launched seeking to reduce the level of conventional forces in Europe, the most heavily armed area of the world.

Today we inaugurate the CSCE Conference on the Human Dimension, a concept without precedent in the history of Europe and the world.

In the coming weeks here we will take stock of the progress made of the many commitments in human rights, human contacts, and humanitarian cooperation we collectively agreed to in the Vienna Concluding Document. It is an opportunity not only to assess what has been done but, just as importantly, to determine how we continue on from here to ensure further progress.

France will soon celebrate the bicentennial of the French Revolution, an event of cardinal significance in our common heritage. As we reflect on the history of Europe during the two centuries since the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, it is evident that the quest for human rights and human dignity has been a potent and incessant impulse. Europe is more than a geographical expression, it also represents a set of values and ideas which have contributed to our common heritage. Human rights take a central place among them.

Canada is fortunate to have been profoundly influenced by several important strands of this European tradition. We inherited British parliamentary democracy evolved over the centuries from Magna Carta. We are heirs to the rich cultural and political legacy of France. Our legal system has roots in both French and British justice. We have welcomed, and continue to welcome, people from every corner of this planet, many fleeing human rights violations or political upheaval elsewhere. These new Canadians speak many languages, profess different religions, and practice varied cultures. They have enriched our heritage and embraced our freedom.

Canada has made its own special contribution to the political experience of humanity. We have demonstrated that individual freedom and national independence need not be the product of violent revolution. They can be won gradually and peacefully without sundering the voluntary ties with those with whom we share a common heritage. We have also learned by experience, occasionally bitter experience, that a nation can be built only through tolerance of different traditions and points of view, respect for the inherent dignity of all human beings, the protection of laws, and a determination to promote liberty and equality.

Canada's contributions to the growth of international respect for human rights have been anchored in these fundamental lessons of our own history.

Canada has played an active and, at times, crucial role in the development of international law in human rights. A Canadian drafted the universal declaration of human rights. Its adoption in 1948 was an event of profound significance setting in motion the development of a comprehensive international legal framework for the protection of human rights. Canada is a party to the two human rights covenants and to a host of UN and ILO treaties and conventions touching on human rights. By ratifying the optional protocol to the international covenant on civil and political rights, Canada, along with many other countries, has gone the limit in recognizing the right of individuals to plead in the court of international opinion against violations of human rights by their governments.

Our quest for the promotion of human rights has been and continues to be global. It is an objective that we have pursued bilaterally and through our membership in a vast network of multilateral organizations.

Last week, in Dakar, Senegal, as a result of a Canadian initiative, the Summit conference of La Francophonie adopted, for the first time in history, a resolution committing all its members "to call for the respect of human rights as well as respect for the right to development both within and outside our community."

Within the Commonwealth Canada has been at the centre of the battle against the institutionalized evil of South African apartheid.

Canada has been deeply committed to the human dimension of the CSCE. From the outset we stressed the importance of family reunification and freedom of movement to the development of trust and cooperation in Europe. How, we have asked repeatedly, could our people believe that we wanted to heal the divisions of Europe when we could not bring divided families together? Canada's advocacy of human rights, human contacts, and humanitarian cooperation in the CSCE has been reinforced by the anguish of ordinary people arbitrarily cut off from normal contacts with parents, sisters, brothers, children. Canada proposed at Madrid, and hosted in Ottawa, the first CSCE Experts' Meeting devoted to human rights. In many ways, it began the process that led to success at Vienna, and to this conference.

Our particular interest in the human dimension is predicated on the conviction that human freedom, and the freer flow of people, information and ideas, do not threaten any well-founded ideology, government, or social order. Instead they promote stability and security. Our efforts to this end in the CSCE have resulted in commitments that would have been unthinkable only a few years ago.

These are meaningful steps forward if they are fully implemented by all participating states. The greater the expectations that are raised, the greater the disappointment if they are unfulfilled, and the greater the international pressure to comply. Only real change where it counts, in the lives of ordinary people, can provide a firm foundation for lasting progress in the dismantling of barriers, in the building of real and mutual confidence and trust.

It has been only months since the success of the Vienna conference. It may be unrealistic to expect that all good intentions have been fulfilled, all provisions fully complied with. But we have had time enough that we can take stock, ask who has taken steps in the right direction, who has stood still, who has moved backwards in implementing their Vienna commitments. With this we can set our course for the next conference, in Copenhagen, in less than a year. Then it will be fair to expect full compliance with all provisions by all participating states. By then the required laws, procedures, and practices can be in place. By then we will be able to measure progress in the difficult but vital task of confronting and changing the attitudes, habits, prejudices and fears that stand in the way of fulfilling our aspirations in human rights. At Copenhagen, we will see whether we have truly ushered in a new era in European history.

Already there has been enough progress in certain areas to confirm that the expectations of Vienna were realistic. On the issue of family reunification, I am pleased to say that Canada now has no outstanding cases with Hungary, Poland and the Soviet Union. With three other countries the numbers are greatly reduced. With only one country Romania, do we continue to have a large and even growing number of cases.

We know that this is not yet the end of the story; thousands of people in several countries continue to be arbitrarily prevented from leaving their country or are punished or harassed for wanting to do so. But we have seen progress and we can only encourage those governments to liberalize their laws and procedures.

When we meet again in Copenhagen, we ought to be able to say that the need for governments to intercede to allow people to be reunited with their families can be regarded as only a past chapter of history.

Another welcome new development has been that persons and organizations outside of government are increasingly free to take an active role in promoting human rights within their own countries. Some countries are so represented for the first time here. A few years ago, some of those here today, would certainly not have been allowed to leave their country to attend a meeting such as this. We salute this progress, but we also note its fragility. We urge these countries to establish a firm legal framework to ensure that the activities of such people and their ability to have contacts outside their country, will not depend on the capricious vagaries of the intermittent goodwill of government or the arbitrary judgment of officials.

Paris was the cradle of the French Revolution. It is also the city of light. In recent months we have seen the light of reform flood into formerly dark corners of Europe. We have seen the awakening of ideas of freedom where it had been suppressed.

In Poland the Round Table Agreement between the government and the solidarity movement has refreshed the hope for human rights and progress towards democracy.

In Hungary the tearing down of fenced barriers to the West has been accompanied by expanding economic and political pluralism and freedom.

And in the Soviet Union we have seen remarkable elections. Elections in which party officials were soundly defeated. Elections where some victors would have been imprisoned only a few years ago for their advocacy of their heretical views. And last week many of us watched with some wonder as Andrei Sakharov, not long ago an exile in his own land, took the podium to publicly criticize the watching leader of the Soviet Union.

We look forward to the legal and constitutional reforms which will firmly secure the rule of law in the Soviet Union and work towards the fulfillment of the human rights obligations that its government has agreed.

We will continue to respond, constructively we hope, to any action or policy that we believe to run counter to the achievement of these fundamental aspirations. We shall watch closely, offer encouragement and wish the Soviet Union every success.

There are, unfortunately, some countries whose record has not matched their Vienna commitments. They have continued to repress critics, to prevent free movement, to punish the relatives of those who have allegedly left a country "illegally", to suppress information, and to argue that the right to deny their people basic freedoms is an attribute of state sovereignty. These politics are outmoded and unacceptable. These countries must be persuaded to join the rest of Europe on the path to renewal and reform.

One of them is Bulgaria, its treatment of its Turkish minority population is cause for particular concern. We very much hope that Bulgaria will abide by its CSCE obligations in bringing this issue to a prompt and acceptable resolution.

Another country, Romania, has formally declared that it is not bound by the important new human dimension undertakings in the Vienna Concluding Document. Yet these are obligations to which it joined in the consensus. Romania has defied all attempts to engage in dialogue using procedures established by that document. It has, in short, openly and conspicuously violated important elements of the Vienna Concluding Document. It has continued, with increasing heavy-handedness, to ignore the fundamental rights and freedoms of large numbers of its people. It justifies this conduct on the grounds that it is adhering to a purer concept of the CSCE principles than are all the other participating states.

This is not the place to discuss Romania's arguments, other than to say that we reject them totally. It is up to Romania to decide whether it wishes to participate in our collective search for new norms and dialogue benefitting our people and the peace and security of Europe.

Its alternative is to continue in its lonely and discredited human rights policies under the smokescreen of allegiance to principle.

Mr. Chairman, this is a time in the history of Europe when many things are possible. Fundamental assumptions are being challenged. The policies of decades are being rethought. The global perspectives of leaders and citizens alike are being changed.

The CSCE continues to be particularly suited to play a key role. Its all-embracing mandate, its ability to respond to a changing environment, its lack of institutional structure, have enabled it to evolve and grow and to continue to serve the needs of the participating states.

In the human dimension, our first task is to realize the promise of Vienna. Progress will not come of itself. There are hard choices for some of us to make. Some of us have serious continuing problems to be addressed, and laws, and practices, and procedures that must be changed. Our dialogue will intensify, not diminish, as this process continues. Issues must be faced squarely; problems must be discussed candidly.

We must all work together to encourage change and maximize the benefits of cooperation, but we must never compromise the standards we have set for ourselves.

What we need to achieve here, and what the many who are watching our deliberations will expect from us, is a renewed commitment to progress in the human dimension, a redoubled effort to implement our Vienna commitments, a clear determination that progress in the human dimension will keep pace with changes in other areas of the CSCE and reinforce the search for confidence and stability.

We have said many times that we do not seek to impose our ideology or our political system on anyone. What we seek is a secure and stable Europe in which people will be free to speak, to travel, to worship; where minority cultures and traditions are nurtured, protected, and freely practised; where the arbitrary exercise of state authority is curbed by the rule of law; and where trust and confidence grow with dialogue and the freer movement of people, information and ideas. This was the dream of those who wrote the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen; it is the attainable objective of all Europe today.