

Statement

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NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS BY
THE HONOURABLE RAYMOND CHAN,
SECRETARY OF STATE (ASIA-PACIFIC),
TO THE
SOCIETY IN SUPPORT OF DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT
VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA, MAY 28, 1995
AND FOR
A MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
BEFORE THE HOUSE OF COMMONS
OTTAWA, JUNE 6, 1995



Ladies and gentlemen:

Six years ago, the world watched in horror as the tragic events in Tiananmen Square unfolded. For many Canadians these events changed our lives forever. They propelled us into action. We rallied. We spoke out. And we made a difference.

As I once again commemorate the anniversary of the June 4, 1989, Tiananmen tragedy, I am overcome by emotion.

I will never forget June 4th, 1989. It was a typical sunny Vancouver spring day and I was out having lunch with my wife Maureen and my children Justun and Christina. Someone at the next table said: "the soldiers have opened fire in Tiananmen." We rushed home and as we watched the horror unfold on television I turned to my wife and said: "We must do something."

I quickly learned that many Canadians, and people around the world, were thinking the very same thing. Within hours many Canadians, including myself, were beginning to work together to organize in support of those brave men and women in Tiananmen. I made great friends in the movement and eventually, my friends and I founded the Vancouver Society in Support of Democratic Movement [VSSDM].

Indeed, along with the Chinese Student Association of UBC [the University of British Columbia] and the Alma Mater Society, the VSSDM erected the beautiful statue and plaque at UBC to record and honour the courage of the Chinese people during that extraordinary and painful time.

My decision to run for political office was in large part due to the events of June 1989. For as I watched Chinese men and women risk their lives for something we all too often take for granted here in Canada, I realized that I needed to give back something to the country that welcomed me with such open arms in 1969.

Following the federal election of October 1993, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien appointed me Secretary of State (Asia-Pacific). When I first met with the Prime Minister to discuss my appointment, he made it quite clear to me that he respected the fact that I stood up for what I believed in.

I realized that my new position would offer me a unique opportunity to address these issues at the highest levels of government both within Canada and China. While my new position would involve a new approach to these issues, the goal of human rights and democratic development would still be a priority. A year and a half later, I am proud to say I am still fighting for human rights improvements both in China and around the world.

Unfortunately, the human rights situation with regard to human rights advocates in China has not improved significantly since 1989. Indeed, the recent arrest of several Chinese dissidents in

the run up to the sixth anniversary of the Tiananmen Square crackdown and the strict surveillance imposed on others once again demonstrates that China continues to violate international standards of human rights.

We Canadians are concerned about fundamental human rights. During my first year in office, André Ouellet, our Foreign Affairs Minister, and I developed a coherent and effective policy towards China. Three equally important goals were outlined: prosperity and employment, peace and security, and projecting Canadian values and culture – which is what I want to focus on in my discussion today.

One of the most enduring values uniting Canadians is our common commitment to freedom, democracy, and human rights. Respect for human rights is a key to international peace and prosperity, and it contributes to a global environment within which we Canadians can best pursue our interests.

As I have long believed, the issue, therefore, is not whether but how to promote most efficiently good governance and the rule of law in China. We believe there are a number of ways to accomplish our goals, and they incorporate efforts of both a multilateral and bilateral nature.

Among the most effective channels of influencing is collective action through multilateral institutions. In this regard, at the most recent United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, Canada co-sponsored a resolution on human rights in China. The resolution expressed concern about continuing reports of human rights and fundamental freedom violations.

In the speech given by Canada at the UN Human Rights Commission, we declared: "Canada believes that China falls short of international standards in incarceration of political detainees, and with respect to equity and transparency in the judicial system, freedom of expression, and freedom of religion."

In another multilateral area currently under way, we are working closely with Canadian non-governmental organizations to support their efforts to encourage the Chinese government to reverse a decision to move the International Conference on the Status of Women to a venue far from the city centre of Beijing. We want this conference to be an open forum and we have said as much to the Chinese government.

On the bilateral front, when Prime Minister Chrétien and I met with Chinese leaders, the Prime Minister raised the issue of human rights with several of them, including Li Peng and Jiang Zemin. Our Prime Minister clearly explained that Canada intends to maintain a constructive dialogue with China on human rights issues. Foreign Affairs Minister André Ouellet has told his

Chinese counterpart the same thing, and I continue to discuss these issues whenever I meet Chinese leaders such as Vice-Premier Zou Jiahua.

Of a different bilateral nature, but in many respects more important, is the area of development assistance. Indeed, development assistance is an increasingly important way of advancing human rights. Human rights projects, such as the strengthening of legislatures and independent judiciaries, are a major priority of our aid program.

In China, we are co-operating in legal reform areas related to justice, equity and participation. Examples of these areas include women's rights, labour laws, criminal law and employment equity. We are also working with China to improve the generation, circulation and dissemination of information and are endeavouring to strengthen civil society by improving the capacity of non-governmental organizations to engage in development activities.

We are focussing on such things as the transparency and accountability of government operations, public accounting and auditing, and public consultation mechanisms. We believe this approach will ultimately contribute to the development of the rule of law and the respect of human rights in China.

Our government is focussing on undertaking specific and progressive initiatives to engage decision makers at all levels in programs that facilitate positive changes in China. We are undertaking these multilateral, bilateral and development initiatives because we believe they are the right course of action. Our government is working diligently to help improve the human rights situation in China.

In particular, Canada has been working to promote human rights, good governance and the rule of law. A program between the University of British Columbia and Beijing University is preparing a plan to help reform China's criminal procedure to protect the rights of the accused. As well, the University of Ottawa's Human Rights Research and Education Centre and the Beijing University of International Law are helping to foster the development of joint research and education in the area of human rights, international law and human development in China. The Canadian and Chinese Bar Associations are organizing conferences on bar and legal practices in Canada.

Already in the planning stage are programs to improve the skills of women entrepreneurs, a statistical information management program and a project to support the equality of women in China. Canada will be supporting the development of the China Institute of Judges, and helping Chinese institutions to develop economic and social policy options.

In closing, there are a number of ways to help influence and encourage China to better respect human rights. Multilaterally, we take steps in organizations such as the UN to make our point. Bilaterally we discuss human rights issues with our Chinese counterparts. Development assistance lets us work with China to strengthen areas vital to human rights development.

Trade is also a powerful tool. It encourages co-operation, and co-operation leads to understanding and appreciation, with which we can better manage concerns such as human rights development.

Furthermore, initiatives undertaken by human rights groups in Canada continue to emphasize to all concerned that Canadians care about human rights. Rest assured, I will continue to work for the improvement or respect for human rights and democracy in China. As I tell both my Cabinet colleagues and my Chinese counterparts, I am a friend of China. Yes, I will continue to speak out against human rights violations in China, but at the same time I will continue to work within my means as a federal minister to help China develop in a meaningful way.

Pointing out when human rights are violated is essential. So too is dialogue between Canada and China. Dialogue lets Canada and China share concerns and provides the foundation to address important issues such as human rights proactively.

This is the effective way to promote change in China, and this is the course my government and I will continue to follow.

Thank you.