

No. 61/19 Race Conflict in South Africa

Statement by Mr. Paul Tremblay, Canadian
Representative on the Special Political
Committee of the United Nations, on November
10, 1961

Mr. Chairman:

In order to set forth the position of the Canadian Delegation on the item before this Committee, I propose to deal with the problem of apartheid on two planes. One concerns the attitude of my Government toward the apartheid policy practiced by the Government of the Republic of South Africa. The other involves decisions which this Committee and the United Nations General Assembly may take, in the face of continued pursuit of this policy by the South African Government.

Mr. Chairman, over the many years that this vexatious problem has been before the United Nations General Assembly, the Canadian Delegation has made abundantly clear Canada's irrevocable opposition to racial discrimination. We oppose racial discrimination wherever it may be practiced. It represents the very negation of the equality of man, and of human dignity and freedom. It is contrary to letter and spirit of the Charter of the United Nations, and to universally accepted standards of human values. As the distinguished representative of Japan so aptly observed, racial discrimination, no matter when or where practiced, tends to weaken the international fabric of freedom, peace and justice.

It has been emphasized in the course of debate in this Committee that racial discrimination is by no means confined to any one nation or continent, but is a widespread problem. The practice of apartheid in the Republic of South Africa, however, surely constitutes a unique record of discrimination and prejudice; for there, not only has the practice of racial discrimination been enshrined in the legislative and legal structure of state but the theory has been consecrated as a philosophy of government. The Government of South Africa, far from devoting itself to eliminating this unhappy practice, is rather the deliberate and determined agent for promoting and consolidating discrimination between the inhabitants of its territory on grounds of colour. As the Prime Minister of Canada, Mr. Diefenbaker, has remarked, the apartheid policy of the South African Government has become the world's symbol of discrimination.

Canada deplores the suffering and frustration which the apartheid policy has imposed upon the non-white population of South Africa. Those who have sought to make a case for apartheid have referred to the physical benefits which it provides, or is intended to provide, for the non-white population - low-cost housing, hospital and medical facilities, economic improvements, and educational facilities. Mr. Chairman, I have no wish to disregard or minimize the importance of any alleged benefits that may have accrued to the non-white population of South Africa. Good as they may be in themselves, however, in the Canadian

view these benefits do not affect the basic issue, which concerns the intrinsic evils of a system that deliberately asserts the idea of racial superiority of one group over another within the national community.

The systematic restraint of human liberties which the practice of this policy involves has already given rise to tragic outbreaks of violence in South Africa. None of us would venture to speculate on the course of events in that unhappy country, if the present policies are perpetuated or intensified.

It had been our earnest hope that at this sixteenth session of the United Nations General Assembly, we might have had indication of a reversal of the direction of the South African Government's policy. As my delegation observed in this Committee at the fifteenth session, we all recognize the difficulties of the problem, and no one would expect that the apartheid system, developed and intensified over a long period, could be suddenly eliminated. What we must unequivocally insist upon is that the trend toward ever more harsh application of this evil doctrine should be halted, and that a progressive course back toward morally acceptable standards should be adopted by the Government of South Africa.

Unhappily, no such reassurance has been forthcoming. On the contrary, the distinguished Foreign Minister of South Africa has underlined before this Committee his Government's determination to continue to pursue its present policies. It is against this background that I turn now to the second aspect of the item before us - the question of what decisions we should recommend to the United Nations General Assembly on this matter.

In light of continuing refusal of the present South African authorities to heed repeated appeals from the international community for a revision of its apartheid policy, my delegation can well understand the depth of indignation that has led to the very far-reaching proposal contained in Document L71. We thoroughly share the sense of frustration expressed by the co-sponsors, over the failure of past appeals from the United Nations General Assembly to bring to an end the practice of apartheid. But we are dealing here with an evil philosophy which can, in the final analysis, only be overcome by moral suasion. It remains the view of my delegation, therefore, that our common purpose of bringing the weight of world opinion effectively to bear upon the South African authorities would not be advanced by the adoption of measures which would only further isolate South Africa from the world community.

We have, therefore, deep reservations about the measures proposed in draft Resolution L71, which involve considering the exclusion of the Republic of South Africa from the United Nations, and various sanctions which would similarly contribute to its isolation. I need not recount here the several specific arguments which have been adduced against the application of economic and other sanctions in the circumstances we are considering. My delegation sees validity in many of these objections. But our over-riding reservation about any proposal which envisages the expulsion of South Africa from this organization, or other measures which might lead to South Africa's departure from it, is that we would thereby defeat our fundamental purpose of bringing the maximum international pressure to bear on the Government in Pretoria.

Mr. Chairman, I think we cannot emphasize too strongly the point made by several delegates during our debate here, that we should never lose sight of our objective in this matter. The aim of whatever resolution we adopt must be, not relieve the feeling of member states about apartheid - however proper and

justifiable that indignation may be - but to contribute to ending the practice of apartheid in South Africa. It is the practical effect of our decision here on conditions in the Republic of South Africa which is important.

Both negative and positive considerations suggest that measures which tend further to cut South Africa off from the rest of the world are not in line with the fundamental objective of this Committee. Such measures may well have direct adverse consequences for the non-white inhabitants of South Africa whose unhappy lot is our deep concern. They may make the role of the forces of moderation within the Republic even more difficult than it is at present. This is an important consideration, for an effective and peaceful change from the ways of apartheid must, of course, originate within South Africa; it cannot be imposed from outside. Finally, however, dismayed we may be at the failure of all efforts so far to persuade the present South African authorities to amend their racial policy, we must not help to insulate them against the continuing and indeed ever-increasing pressure of the worldwide condemnation of apartheid. Instead we must seek new and more effective channels for imposing weight of our views upon them.

It is for these reasons, Mr. Chairman, that my delegation intends to vote against the suggestion in Document L71 that the Security Council should discuss at an early date the continued membership in the United Nations of the Republic of South Africa. Similar considerations make it impossible for us to support the far-reaching proposals for sanctions against South Africa in the draft resolution, however much we may sympathize with the desire of its sponsors to find some means of achieving practical results in an issue on which there is undoubtedly an almost unanimous agreement in principle among the members of the United Nations. We shall, therefore, abstain on operative Paragraphs 6 and 7 of Document L71 since, in our opinion, the effectiveness and justification of such specific steps as may be taken in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations are better left to the judgement of the individual governments concerned.

It is in this light, Mr. Chairman, that the Canadian delegations finds the draft resolution contained in Document L72 particularly suited to the requirements of the situation. While it expresses in most emphatic terms the regret and concern of this Assembly that the Republic of South Africa has continued to pursue its reprehensible policies, it seeks in a positive and realistic manner to mobilize the persuasive force of world community for the purpose of bringing about a change in these policies. If the 102 nations represented here are prepared to unanimously express their common abhorrence of the practice of apartheid, and to exercise their influence as well at the national level, we may venture to hope that the voice of the conscience of mankind may yet be heeded in Pretoria.

This is a hope which we must not abandon, Mr. Chairman. Even at this stage, when the swell of indignation and impatience with the policies of the Government of South Africa not surprisingly has risen to new heights, we would still appeal to the South African authorities to reverse their course, and to work toward a policy of true racial partnership. Only thus can the potential promise of that richly endowed land be fully realized. Surely we may assume that the people of South Africa, of whatever race and colour, must feel the stirrings of national pride which demand that they consider the effect which conditions in their country have on the esteem and respect in which it is held among the community of nations.

Statements of African representatives who have spoken in this Committee suggest that a display of moderation and flexibility by the South African authorities could be expected to evoke a positive response. Only through such co-operation can an atmosphere be developed from which there can emerge the vital multi-racial society on which South Africa's future must depend. It is our earnest hope that present authorities in Pretoria, mindful of the weight of the judgement of history which will turn on the decisions now so urgently demanded of them, will rise to this challenge.



It is for these reasons, Mr. Chairman, that my delegation intends to vote against the suggestion in Document LVI that the Security Council should discuss at an early date the continued membership in the United Nations of the Republic of South Africa. Similar considerations make it impossible for us to support the far-reaching proposals for sanctions against South Africa in the draft resolution, however much we may sympathize with the desire of its sponsors to find some means of achieving practical results in an issue on which there is undoubtedly an almost unanimous agreement in principle among the members of the United Nations. We shall, therefore, abstain on operative Paragraphs 6 and 7 of Document LVI since, in our opinion, the effectiveness and justification of such specific steps as may be taken in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations are better left to the judgement of the individual Governments concerned.

It is in this light, Mr. Chairman, that the Canadian delegations find the draft resolution contained in Document LVI particularly suited to the requirements of the situation. While it expresses in most emphatic terms the regret and concern of this Assembly that the Republic of South Africa has continued to pursue its reprehensible policies, it seeks in a positive and realistic manner to mobilize the persuasive force of world community for the purpose of bringing about a change in these policies. If the 102 nations represented here are prepared to unanimously express their common abhorrence of the practice of apartheid, and to exercise their influence as well as the conscience of mankind may yet be heeded in Pretoria.

This is a hope which we must not abandon, Mr. Chairman. Even at this stage, when the swell of indignation and impatience with the policies of the Government of South Africa has risen to the point where it is tempting to reverse their course, and to work towards a policy of true racial partnership. Only thus can the potential promise of that richly endowed land be fully realized. Surely we may assume that the people of South Africa, of whatever race and colour, must feel the stirrings of national pride which demand that they consider the effect which conditions in their country have on the esteem and respect in which it is held among the community of nations.