

Remarks of welcome to be made by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Paul Martin at the opening of the 34th session of the International Statistical Institute (Centre Block) August 21, 1963

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Mr. President, your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen:

I am pleased and honoured to welcome you to Canada on behalf of the Canadian Government on the occasion of the 34th session of the International Statistical Institute. I bring you the greetings and the best wishes of the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable L.B. Pearson. Mr. Pearson regrets that he is unable to be here this morning, but he is looking forward to addressing your final dinner on August 28.

Je me réjouis de l'occasion qui m'est offerte de rendre hommage à l'oeuvre des statisticiens du monde entier, et surtout à l'Institut international de la Statistique pour le rôle capital que vous jouez dans la circulation des idées et l'appui que vous apportez au progrès ordonné des affaires politiques, scientifiques et commerciales. Cette conférence réunit un groupe impressionnant de sommités du monde académique et administratif, du monde des affaires et de la science, sous l'égide de la statistique, comme méthode de recherche, d'analyse et de compréhension. J'ai été frappé à la lecture du programme de la conférence par l'étendue des problèmes humains que vous allez étudier. Vous vous consacrez au développement et à la circulation de données précises dans l'intérêt du progrès humain.

We live in a world made small by revolutions in communication and transportation. In international relations the flow of ideas accurately presented and clearly understood is of paramount importance. It is a fact that statistics contribute to this objective in a unique manner. Numbers and symbols are not constrained by the barriers of language. Statistics can convey the most subtle facts with precision and clarity.

It is in this respect that the work initiated by the International Statistical Institute has been of such fundamental importance. It was this body which during the latter part of the 19th century began the vital task of developing international standards and definitions for the presentation of facts in statistical form. Others, of course, have contributed to international standardization of measurement in science and engineering, but it is my impression that the founders of your

institute were among the first to recognize and to take action in the social sciences.

Through the League of Nations and now through the United Nations Statistical Commission and other specialized agencies the work of international statistical and conceptual standardization has been carried on. It is clear, however, that we would not have reached our present degree of advancement had it not been for the great pioneering work of the International Statistical Institute.

The International Statistical Institute is a good example of international cooperation between nations. This cooperation comes because of an appreciation on the part of these nations that it is in their common interest to exchange knowledge and information in the area of statistics. This meeting takes place at a time when there is much cautious hope in the world that we might be on the verge of a new period in which there will be much more international cooperation in a great variety of matters. It may be that we have approached the time when nations with widely varying backgrounds and sometimes different ideologies are coming to appreciate the values for all men which can be attained through increased international cooperation.

I express the hope that we may see this realistic attitude manifesting itself in bodies like the United Nations and I assure you that Canada will be doing all that we can to pursue those areas of international cooperation such as the United Nations peace-keeping operations in the approaching session of the world organization. We will proceed not with any great illusions but in the firm conviction that mankind today stands to benefit greatly from improved international cooperation in the area of keeping the peace.

J'ai parlé du rôle de la statistique comme moyen d'information et de compréhension internationale, mais votre Institut se tourne de plus en plus vers un autre champ important de la connaissance humaine, je veux dire l'échange international des idées sur les méthodes et les procédés statistiques. Dans un monde

qui a été souvent victime des obstacles érigés contre la circulation des biens, des personnes et aussi des idées, les échanges internationaux en matière de connaissances statistiques se sont poursuivis sans entraves.

On peut donc dire que le libre échange existe. Tout pays peut accéder aux connaissances recueillies de par le monde par le moyen de cette science vivante et en plein essor. Des réunions comme celle-ci facilitent grandement ce nécessaire échange des idées.

Dans la vie moderne la connaissance exacte des faits joue un rôle essentiel au progrès humain. Les pays les plus développés ont un besoin croissant de mesurer exactement les données relatives aux sciences naturelles et sociales. Nous, Canadiens, sommes pleinement conscients de l'importance et de la valeur des statistiques. Le Canada n'est pas un pays très peuplé, mais il a eu à travers son histoire un besoin constant d'informations statistiques pour étayer son essor économique et politique. Nos méthodes d'informations nous sont venues en grande partie de l'étranger, grâce au libre échange en ce domaine.

Par ailleurs, la valeur de la statistique n'est-elle pas encore plus vivement soulignée, au moment où les nouveaux Etats, qui cherchent à développer des richesses souvent limitées, doivent formuler une politique aussi efficace que possible pour l'utilisation et la mise en valeur de ces richesses. Aussi avons-nous grand plaisir à reconnaître aujourd'hui ce que nous devons à cette discipline et à ses résultats en offrant l'hospitalité à l'Institut international de la Statistique.

I hope you will forgive me if I add just one word of caution. There may be a tendency in today's complex world when we are increasingly faced with the most intricate problems to rely too heavily on the science of statistics which by its very nature may be somewhat harsh and tend to overlook some very human considerations. Statistics are of immense value in

formulating policies, of this there can be no doubt. But those of us who are engaged in the formulation of policies, whether in business or in government, must always remember the individual with his feelings and his aspirations and not allow ourselves to be blinded by the sometimes brutal and sometimes cold presentation of statistics.

I might mention that in the field of practical politics statistics are coming to have an ever more important place. In public life we are always aware of the public opinion polls and all politicians approach with great trepidation that supreme statistical exercise -- the counting of votes in a national election.

I hope that you enjoy your time in Canada. I am sure that your presence here and the stimulus which it offers to the science of statistics will render this, your 34th session, a memorable event. We are honoured by your presence and we hope you will have a most successful conference.