

Statement

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Statement

in the House of Commons

by the Right Honourable Joe Clark,

Secretary of State for External Affairs,

on South Africa

OTTAWA

March 2, 1988.

Secretary of State  
for  
External Affairs

Secrétaire d'État  
aux  
Affaires extérieures

Canada

Mr. Speaker, I have been away from the House, and wanted to take the first opportunity available to me to report to Parliament upon recent events in South Africa, and discuss what Canada should do. Canada's position in the international fight against apartheid is both important and well-known. Part of our strength is that we have taken our decisions deliberately, and generally kept this issue beyond the normal divisions of domestic Canadian partisanship. I report today in that spirit.

One week ago the Government of South Africa banned political activities by seventeen organizations, including trade unions, and the major coalition committed to nonviolence. Three days ago, it arrested peaceful marchers. Yesterday, it introduced legislation to prevent foreign funding of anti-apartheid activity, and to restrict peaceful dissent still further. Pretoria seems intent on closing the door to peaceful change. Its actions invite violence, because they leave nothing else.

Those actions are perverse and brutal. One might hope that they are designed merely for temporary electoral advantage, but we feel they reflect a policy of deepening repression. A situation already bad has been made much worse.

In these circumstances, countries like Canada, which oppose apartheid, must review the nature and effect of all our relations with South Africa. We hope that will happen in all countries that prize democracy.

This Government of Canada, under the Prime Minister's leadership, has assumed a leading role in the fight against apartheid. Former Canadian governments followed Western consensus; this Government has tried to lead it, because of our extensive interest in Africa, our role in the Commonwealth and La Francophonie, our commitment to human rights. We believe this to be an issue where we have both influence and power, and we have tried to deploy our political influence and our economic power to have the most effect in the fight against apartheid. Certainly we are disappointed by the response of the Government of South Africa, and certainly we have had to consider again whether there is any point continuing our economic and diplomatic relations with a Government which seems determined to act like an outlaw.

Canadian policy has been and is to do everything we possibly can to help avert a disaster, and bring about an end to apartheid, and the introduction of non-racial representative government. The Prime Minister and I have made it clear repeatedly that, if these efforts fail, we will end absolutely our diplomatic and economic relations with South Africa. Our policy has taken a number of forms: economic and other sanctions; diplomatic pressure; assistance to the opponents and victims of apartheid. I want to deal with each of those elements individually.

In terms of diplomatic relations, the choice is basic. Do we walk away in disgust, or try to use and build our influence, despite our profound disappointment? The powerful temptation is to walk away, to conclude that the South African regime is so profoundly anti-democratic that only violence will change it. Certainly the latest actions by the Pretoria Government carry South Africa away from any pretense of democracy as Western nations know it. South Africa's apologists claim their society is part of the West; if so, their actions now betray their heritage.

Some Members of the House call for the end now of diplomatic relations. I wonder, with respect, whether they have considered what that would mean.

For example, the South African Government has embarked upon an intensified campaign of censorship and propaganda designed to mask the reality of apartheid. Maintaining an Embassy in that country is, effectively, the only way in which we can continue to know what is really going on. There is a value to that, and a real cost if we close.

Again, a large part of our \$5 million aid program is delivered through the Embassy. Without representation on the ground, it would be much more difficult to identify, supervise and monitor projects which bring real help and visible support to the victims of apartheid. Literally hundreds of small people to people projects would be ended.

The growing use of travel restrictions imposed upon South African opponents of apartheid means that we can only maintain contact with them through our Embassy. They cannot come to us; we have to go to them. We can only do that if we're there.

Again, in the world as it is, if we were absent from Pretoria, we would have more difficulty mounting an aid program in Namibia; more difficulty advancing Canadian and Commonwealth interests in South Africa and no ability to demonstrate within South Africa itself our solidarity with anti-apartheid leaders.

There are countless other examples that must be considered in any serious discussion of the future of our Embassy.

Of course, it is valid to ask, as the Member for Windsor Walkerville did yesterday, when would it be appropriate for Canada to withdraw. I don't know the answer to that question. Probably no one does today. But, in all the circumstances, it is the Government's considered view that this is the wrong time for Canada to walk away, or to cut ourselves off.

The question of economic relations is less clear-cut. The South African Government is extremely sensitive to both its economic links with the world, and its growing isolation in the international community. Economic sanctions undoubtedly have an impact, economically and psychologically. That impact is greater when those sanctions are more broadly supported. As I told the House on February 5th, the Commonwealth Committee of Foreign Ministers is gathering evidence and recommendations which could result in a wider, tighter, more intense application of sanctions. That work becomes even more urgent now, and I have been in touch with my colleague Commonwealth Ministers to see how we can speed up that program.

In addition, there are independent economic and political actions which Canada might take, including the relatively small measures for which I already have Cabinet authority. Our experience is that, since Canada's trade with South Africa is less than one percent of South Africa's total trade, our action is more effective when it is in concert with, or as catalyst to, actions by nations whose economic impact is greater. We are actively reviewing two aspects of that policy - first, to see if there are new economic measures which Canada might take effectively alone; and second, to encourage broader action, particularly by countries who prize democracy, in specific response to South Africa's multiple assaults on freedom during the last week. With that in mind, on the political side, we have contacted several other Western governments. Those discussions must remain confidential for the moment, but I would certainly be prepared to discuss privately with the two Opposition spokesmen, the kind of thing we are considering.

A third focus of our activity has been upon the opponents and victims of apartheid. Their need is suddenly more urgent. The peaceful opponents of apartheid are under renewed attack. They need our assistance, and we intend to provide it. We have already increased our aid - for education, to the labour movement, for humanitarian and legal aid. The challenge now is to move more money more quickly to the opponents and victims of apartheid.

An obvious priority is the labour movement. We provide funds to various unions in South Africa and will provide more. Most of these funds will be channelled through the Canadian Labour Congress, the Canadian Teachers Federation, and the Confédération des syndicats nationaux. I have instructed my officials to act urgently on precise programs submitted by those organizations.

We will also provide new forms of assistance. For example, undoubtedly there will be challenges in court to the regulations and laws just introduced. We will take up with anti-apartheid organizations in South Africa the ways in which we would be able to help fund those challenges.

Canada has objectives which we must pursue in support of peaceful change and dialogue. They are legitimate and reasonable objectives. We intend to pursue them. Up to now we have been able, through our Embassy, to carry out our programs in South Africa. That is why the Embassy is there. If the implementation of the various measures announced this past week by Pretoria prevents us from accomplishing our goals, we will have to consider again whether our presence is justified.

The struggle in South Africa has entered a new stage, more dangerous, more frightening. The Eminent Persons Group warned of massive bloodshed and, last week, the South African Government pushed the region closer to that nightmare. As new rules repress opponents of apartheid within South Africa, those of us outside must become more effective and imaginative in our initiatives. The response of Canada is particularly important, because of the practical leadership we have exercised since the Nassau Conference. This is not a time for Canada to withdraw. Quite the contrary. Our position is known and respected. What we need, what I need from this House and other Canadians, are practical suggestions and initiatives we can take - little steps and large ones - to make progress against apartheid. An interesting suggestion was made yesterday regarding the Security Council of the United Nations, and we are examining that proposal. We are increasing our help to the victims of apartheid; considering how we respond specifically to the Draconian new measures of last week; and are discussing with our allies of the Commonwealth, the Summit and elsewhere, what new actions nations might take together. Our Ambassador to South Africa has been back in Canada for a meeting of Africa Heads of Post, and will be staying here a little longer for consultation. As there are new developments, I will report them to the House.

This Parliament has shown an active and nonpartisan interest in the fight against apartheid. The Prime Minister and I accept and exercise the Government's responsibility to lead on this issue, but naturally we would continue to be interested in practical suggestions from other Members and parties of the House of Commons.