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STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

Statement by

The Right Honourable Joe Clark,
Secretary of State for External Affairs,
in the House of Commons on the
Occasion of NATO's 40th Anniversary

Canada

Ottawa, Ontario

April 4, 1989

Mr. Speaker,

I rise today to pay tribute to the 40th anniversary of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization which has been a cornerstone of Canadian foreign policy for successive Canadian governments. What we celebrate is not only 40 years of uninterrupted peace in Europe but also the values which brought us together then and which still unite us today.

When he signed the treaty on behalf of Canada, the Right Honourable Lester Pearson stated:

"This treaty, though born out of fear and frustration, must, however, lead to positive social, economic and political achievements which will extend beyond the time of emergency which gave it birth, or the geographic area which it now includes."

We must keep in mind the situation prevailing at that time: fully armed Soviet troops were still stationed in Europe; the West Berlin blockade was on; a Communist takeover had just crushed Czechoslovakia's nascent democracy; and the nations of Western Europe, barely through with the war, were openly threatened by a similar fate. There is a striking contrast with the prosperous times we are experiencing today, and NATO has been and still is an essential instrument of such progress.

The unity and determination of the Alliance have often been put to the test: recurrent troubles in Eastern Europe, the uprising in Hungary, the Suez Canal crisis, the crushing of Prague's springtime demonstrations, detente in the Seventies, Afghanistan and the double decision. In every instance NATO came through stronger and more relevant.

Today NATO provides for the common security of over 600 million people in 16 nations on both sides of the Atlantic. The modern era is marked by conflict, yet Europe, the region with the highest concentration of sophisticated weaponry in the world, is enjoying the longest sustained period of peace and stability since the height of the Holy Roman Empire. That peace was made possible through NATO's persistent commitment to pursue complementary goals: first, to maintain adequate defences to deter aggression; second, to control and limit armaments through carefully negotiated and verifiable agreements; and third, to constantly promote dialogue with the countries of eastern Europe.

Has the Alliance met the test that Lester Pearson set for it 40 years ago? Has it led to positive social, economic and political achievements? Is it more than just a military alliance? Clearly the answer is yes to all questions.

It was through NATO in 1972 that we and our Allies set down our objectives for the conference on security and co-operation in Europe. Through that process, we have secured from the Soviet Union, and its East European Allies, real commitments in human rights, economic co-operation and military security. Today, in the East, there is greater respect for the rights of individuals, greater freedom to travel to visit friends or relatives and greater freedom to worship. That progress would not have been made without the tenacity with which the Allies pressed the East to extend to their publics the privileges and rights which we take for granted.

We are at an historic juncture now. The two superpowers have agreed to eliminate an entire class of nuclear weapons. Significant progress has been made on a treaty to reduce by approximately 50 per cent the size of their strategic nuclear arsenals. A new sense of purpose has been injected into their efforts to control and ultimately ban chemical weapons. And perhaps most important of all, new negotiations to reduce conventional forces in Europe are under way in Vienna. With imagination and good will on both sides we have every reason for optimism.

President Gorbachev is claiming credit for much of this success and certainly he deserves a good deal of credit. After all, he is redefining the Soviet Union. However, it is important to remember that President Gorbachev has been responding to ideas and proposals originally made by the West. He has been responding to the unity and to the fidelity to Western values which are at the heart of the success of the North Atlantic Alliance.

Every Canadian of good will celebrates the changes that are appearing in the Soviet Union and in parts of eastern Europe. They represent the kind of genuine progress toward the social, economic and political achievement that Mr. Pearson described. The challenge is for NATO to continue to bring down the tensions between East and West and to continue to build up confidence and co-operation. That will require the same unity and determination which have allowed the NATO alliance to contribute so strongly to the progress so far.

Some have suggested that Canada should step aside from the responsibilities of membership in this Western alliance. Had we stepped aside before, NATO would not have been able to contribute as constructively to the progress the

world sees now. Canada has many means to influence peace in the world. One of those, which has worked for 40 years, and is essential to continued progress in East-West relations, is the NATO alliance whose anniversary we mark today.

NATO has been good for Europe, good for North America and good for Canada. This government is committed to ensuring that Canada continues to play a full and leading role in NATO in helping to shape a new era in East-West relations.