



Statements and Speeches

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APARTHEID – A VIOLATION OF FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS

Statement by Stephen Lewis, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations, to Plenary, United Nations General Assembly, New York, November 20, 1984.

I do not think it an exaggeration to say that *apartheid* is one of the single most intractable issues facing this body. It is not solely a political issue; its social and economic ramifications are rightly reflected in debates and discussions in the committees of this General Assembly as well. The Canadian government has condemned, and will continue to condemn with every fibre of moral strength which we possess, the policy and practice of *apartheid* in South Africa. It constitutes an unconscionable violation of fundamental human rights. Change must – and will – come. The question facing us today is how to promote change and to hasten the end of the abhorrent system of *apartheid*.

Sad reality requires that we recognize that racism exists in many places on this less than perfect planet, but only in South Africa do we find *apartheid* enshrined in the law of the land. Only in South Africa is it government policy to divide the population on the basis of race. Only in South Africa is segregation supported by the full range of powerful government institutions. Only in South Africa is racism extended to every area of human existence, social, cultural, economic, and political. Only in South Africa are people herded into isolated, often impoverished and arid areas far removed from every economic opportunity. Only in South Africa, in other words, does the state debase the human spirit and the human condition on the basis of colour alone.

And what are the results of South Africa's policy of *apartheid*? In the most elementary terms, it has condemned the vast majority of the population to poverty – economic poverty – intellectual poverty – even spiritual poverty. No matter what its proponents may argue, *apartheid* cannot be justified as some form of separate but equal development – just witness the South African government's own statistics on *per capita* educational expenditures or the allocation of arable lands to the so-called homelands.

But of course, it's far more than that. *Apartheid* also corrodes the institutions most prized by white South Africans, the democracy and freedom of expression which they treasure within their own community. Why? Because inequality breeds anger. Anger breeds unrest. Unrest begets violence. Violence is met by more violence and suppression.

Suppression requires vast police powers, government control of movement and assembly, and increasingly, intervention by the armed forces. The cycle of inequality, anger, and suppression shreds the fabric of society. The entire coercive apparatus of the state is enlisted in the service of injustice. I remind you of the words of Bishop Tutu before the Security Council just last month: "...my beloved country is wracked by division, by alienation, by animosity, by separation, by injustice, by avoidable pain and suffering. It is a deeply fragmented society, hag-ridden by fear and anxiety, covered by a pall of despondency and a sense of desperation, split up into hostile, warring factions. It is a highly volatile

land, and its inhabitants sit on a powder keg with a very short fuse indeed, ready to blow us all up into kingdom-come. There is endemic unrest, like a festering sore that will not heal until not just the symptoms are treated but the root causes are removed."

Even if the prospects for peaceful, positive change in South Africa sometimes seem hopeless, we cannot afford to give up hope. This United Nations was built on hope for the future. The Charter reflects the faith that a better future can be found through peaceful means. Through the smoke of burning shanty towns in South Africa, we can still see some faint signs of change. Over the cries of the wounded and dying, we can still hear whispers of good will within all elements of South African society. To be sure, the recent constitutional changes really mean that *apartheid* has been embedded even more deeply in the fabric and laws of South Africa. It was all a sorry exercise in tokenism. The testament to that lies in the overwhelming rejection of the new constitutional arrangements by the so-called coloured and Indian communities.

And yet, and paradoxically, a smidgin of encouragement can be found. If a constitution can be changed once, it can be changed again. The art...the object...is to achieve it peacefully before this unjust and implacable system forces a horrific convulsion.

There is some hope to be drawn from the fact that the labour movement, especially among black South African workers, is exerting more economic, and therefore more political, influence. The future prosperity of South Africa, and of all South Africans, can only be assured by the development of an integrated, educated work-force. Urbanization is another powerful contemporary force for change involving all communities in South Africa.

Because the Canadian government still believes — must believe — that peaceful change is possible, our approach incorporates two basic premises. First, the Canadian government and people oppose and abhor *apartheid*. Second, we leave the way open for contacts and dialogue which, in themselves, increase Canada's capacity to encourage some process of change in South Africa.

Allow me briefly to list the measures which the Canadian government has taken to reflect our opposition to *apartheid*:

- Canada does not recognize the governments of the so-called independent "homelands";
- the Canadian embargo on arms and military equipment to South Africa dates back to 1963: we have enforced, and we continue to enforce, the embargo rigorously;
- Canada has ended active trade promotion in South Africa and closed consulates in Johannesburg and Capetown;
- special preferential tariff arrangements for South Africa in the Canadian market were terminated;
- a voluntary code of conduct for Canadian companies was issued concerning their employment practices in South Africa;

- South African athletes or sporting officials are not allowed to enter Canada to participate in events on a nationally representative basis; and
- no government funding is provided for Canadian athletes participating in nationally representative competitions abroad which involve South Africans.

The Canadian government's support for peaceful change in South Africa goes beyond statements of opposition to *apartheid*. To put it bluntly, we have put our money where our mouth is in providing educational opportunities and assistance to self-help projects. Examples over the past year include:

- \$25 000 to the UN Trust Fund for South Africa;
- \$350 000 to the UN Educational and Training Program for Southern Africa;
- \$141 000 to Canadian non-governmental organizations to assist in self-help community projects; and
- \$618 700 contributed over a longer period for black or integrated labour union training projects via the Canadian Labour Congress.

Our commitment continues. This year, for example, my government has doubled the allocation of funds for small self-help projects within South Africa to a total of \$300 000. We are also allocating \$1.5 million for a special education project providing scholarships for training inside South Africa.

The Canadian government rejects the concept that total isolation of South Africa would somehow promote fundamental reform in that country. It wouldn't happen. Racist mentalities feed on isolation. Isolation breeds the kind of defiance which further fans the flames of oppression and hatred. We therefore maintain diplomatic relations with South Africa. That is one means by which we can tell the South African government, the white minority, and the population as a whole that Canada opposes *apartheid* and supports social and political change. It also allows us to assess the situation and to inform the Canadian government and people accordingly. Those assessments are particularly important since the Canadian government is now beginning a major foreign policy review.

Canada also supports the right of South Africa to participate in the activities of the United Nations. We attach great importance to the principle of universality of membership within the UN system; if governments are not allowed to sit down and discuss their differences, however profound, no solutions will be found. South Africa must be exposed to the pressures of world opinion. Better that their delegates should walk into the Security Council and make a speech of indignation and hostility, than that they should never have to respond to international condemnation.

Far more difficult, perhaps, is the question of sanctions – a question about which we have thought – and will continue to think – long and hard. Canadian reservations about comprehensive economic sanctions against South Africa stem from our belief in the leverage of dialogue and contact, and also

from our doubts whether such sanctions could be effective. All of South Africa's major trading partners would have to be involved and, even then, the size and strength of the South African economy would probably enable it to withstand such economic pressures. Indeed, it might be argued that comprehensive sanctions may hasten rather than avert conflict. Setting aside for the moment the continuing controversy over whom would suffer most by the application of sanctions, we must still squarely face the present reality; if we know that sanctions won't happen or won't work, there must be alternative ways to keep the pressure inexorably on.

One of those ways is through this Assembly. That is why we have these debates year after year. South Africa is not impervious to the international criticism heaped upon its head, nor to the various selective boycotts and black-lists applied to its activities. South Africa's leaders are a beleaguered oligarchy — beleaguered by the growing resistance within; beleaguered by the obloquy without. Pressure is what does it, tenacious and unrelenting.

It is traditional that speeches have a conclusion, but this is one area where our statements and our actions cannot end until every person in South Africa enjoys full and equal rights. In 1960 and 1961, some of my time in Ghana was spent assisting refugees from South Africa. I remember it vividly. That was over 20 years ago. Since then there have been some changes in South Africa, but somehow each step forward seems to be followed by hesitation and retreat. The South African government and those who support *apartheid* must recognize that they cannot retreat into their past. There is no solace in regression. There is no stopping the waves of history. We have been lucky so far; it is truly remarkable that the great black leaders of South Africa — the Luthulis, the Mandelas, the Tutus — have always sought change by peaceful means. Remember Bishop Tutu's words: "We deplore all forms of violence, the violence of an oppressive and unjust society and the violence of those seeking to overthrow that society, for we believe that violence is not the answer to the crisis of our land." Time is running out for those who oppose violence. We too must not rest while peaceful change still has a chance. The Canadian government and the Canadian people stand ready to help.