

Statement

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**NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS BY
THE HONOURABLE ANDRÉ OUELLET,
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
AT THE MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE OF
LA FRANCOPHONIE**

**OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso
December 9, 1994**



Government
of Canada

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Canada

Mr. President,
Ministers and heads of delegations,
Madam President of the Permanent Council,
Mr. Secretary-General of the ACCT [Cultural and Technological
Co-operation Agency],
Dear Friends:

The representatives of La Francophonie once again find themselves meeting on African soil.

That is to say, our meeting takes place in the midst not only of those who most desired it — I am thinking here of the Senghors, the Dioris, the Bourguibas — but also of those who, in many ways, have best illustrated steadfast devotion to the ideal of solidarity that La Francophonie embodies.

We are also among those whose continuing allegiance is an important guarantor of La Francophonie's permanence, its richness and the diversity of its values. In the series of Summits, Ouagadougou represents another landmark after Bujumbura, Dakar, Mauritius and Bamako. Meanwhile, Cotonou awaits us. . . .

I am therefore very happy that the first time I have the pleasure of taking part in a ministerial conference of La Francophonie, it is here in Burkina Faso.

A sincere "thank you" to you, Minister Ouedraogo, and to the authorities and people of your country, for the warm welcome extended to us. Our Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Jean Chrétien, and I have fond memories of your recent visit to Canada.

In the name of the Prime Minister, I would like to reiterate Canada's unwavering commitment to La Francophonie. I can assure you as well of my own commitment to this fraternal alliance, which is as noble as it is necessary.

History has made Canada a country whose unity, specific nature and very existence as a unique entity have always depended and will continue to depend on the dynamism of its linguistic and cultural heritage. Hence our natural affinity toward countries that share the French language in common with us. Hence also the importance we attach to promoting La Francophonie and seeing it developed and strengthened as a community that is itself multilateral and respectful of diversity.

Léopold Sédar Senghor, one of the fathers of La Francophonie, described it as "integral humanism weaving itself around the world." Canada is well-placed to realize that La Francophonie is not a question of territory. The greatest lesson we have learned is that La Francophonie is not defined by borders; it is universal. Our Canadian Francophonie — in Quebec, New Brunswick, Ontario, Manitoba and elsewhere — needs the support of a strong, vigorous, credible and worldwide Francophone community.

This outward projection of a fundamental aspect of Canada — our membership in the Commonwealth plays a similar role — has a double advantage. It contributes to strengthening and fortifying our own identity and thereby to making Canada an indispensable partner in the great Francophone project. Furthermore, it provides all those who speak French in Canada greater access to the world, provides them with an opportunity to shine, to share and be enriched by their contact with the French-speaking countries.

I would like to take advantage of my presence here on your continent, which has contributed so much to the establishment and development of La Francophonie, to assure you, our African partners, that Africa remains a pre-eminent and priority region for Canadian co-operation. The review of our foreign policy and co-operation programs that is currently under way confirms that Canadians want us to maintain our commitment to your region.

Prime Minister Chrétien and I had an opportunity to make these assurances once again to President Soglo of Benin during his visit to Canada last October, when I advised him of Canada's \$4-million contribution to the next Summit, to be held in his country. At the Economic Summit in Casablanca in November, I announced the creation of a \$60-million development fund to support the private sector in the Maghreb. I also recently announced our decision to reopen the Canadian Embassy in Beirut in early 1995. In addition, I have the pleasure of announcing today that Canada will undertake a number of projects over the next five years to fight AIDS in western Africa. These projects, financed by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), will be administered by a Quebec university, Université Laval, whose competence and excellent reputation are certainly known to many of you. We must struggle against this pandemic disease, with its enormous social and human costs and immense impact on development. Finally, I am sure you are aware that most Canadian bilateral aid goes to Africa, particularly the countries of the Francophone community. The basic aims of this aid continue to be sustainable development, the reduction of poverty, social action, the advancement of women, and good governance.

As you know, I do not number myself among the "afro-pessimists." As that knowledgeable observer of the African scene, President Mitterrand, observed in Biarritz a few days ago, undeniable progress has been made, including in the area of democratization and human rights, despite the problem areas with which we are all familiar.

Canada is all the more encouraged to continue its support for Africa in view of the fact that many countries have made major changes in direction. Through the devaluation of the CFA franc and the establishment of structural adjustment programs, a number of these countries have demonstrated their desire to courageously

confront the problems that face them and thereby contribute actively to carving out a place for themselves in the world economy. Canada has participated directly in funding certain programs that accompanied these reforms.

Mr. President, a beautiful African proverb says, "No paths lead to trees that bear no fruit."

If there are so many of us gathered here around this table, it is surely because we all share the firm conviction that La Francophonie generates activities of considerable significance and inspires hope for our community.

Indeed, how much progress there has been since Niamey! How can we fail to pay homage here to that veritable backbone of La Francophonie, the Agency for Cultural and Technical Cooperation (ACCT), for its work over the past 25 years? Mr. Secretary-General, receive our gratitude and expressions of confidence in the future of your agency. How much the Association of Wholly and Partly French-language Universities (AUPELF) has changed! It is now known as the University of French-speaking Networks (UREF) and is one of the driving forces in La Francophonie. Who would have thought 10 years ago that by 1995 our movement would give birth to a world television network? And already we are knocking on the door of world telecommunications in French. Together, we will project our voice, in all its various accents, over our rainforests and snowy plains, over our mountains and rice fields.

The French-speaking countries can and must participate more actively and with more imagination in shaping the world of today. The recent tragic events in French-speaking countries concern us directly and pose a challenge to us. La Francophonie is summoned to take action, as far as its means allow, together with the large international institutions. We clearly do not lack for challenges. As I stated at the 49th General Assembly of the United Nations in New York on September 29, "These challenges are peacekeeping and international security, as well as development, justice, democracy, human rights and the fight against inequalities."

Canada will vigorously pursue the idea of a permanent UN standing force in the hope that the international community will hear our call, just as it did nearly 40 years ago, when former Canadian Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson proposed the creation of the first UN force. This new proposal aims to give hope and confidence back to those societies subjected to violence and all its terrible consequences.

Last October 15 in Port-au-Prince, I was privileged to witness the return to Haiti of President Aristide. Hope is returning to this courageous people, who have always supported their

legitimate, elected president. I am convinced that La Francophonie will continue its support for Haiti, as it faces its enormous task of national reconstruction.

Canada, for its part, announced on October 15 that it would inject \$30 million into various programs over the next six months to meet the immediate needs of the people, especially programs that create jobs. In response to a request from President Aristide and the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Canada has begun to train Haitian police officers in Canada and Haiti in order to create a new police force that truly serves the population. We agreed to take part in the United Nations Mission in Haiti (UNMIH), and when authorized by the Security Council, Canada will deploy about 100 RCMP officers and between 450 and 600 members of the Canadian Armed Forces in Haiti.

Although we are comforted by images of the democratic renaissance in Haiti, other images are unbearable. Who among us has not been haunted by the pictures of massacre victims in Rwanda and of the men, women and children packed into camps tormented by sickness, hunger, and now exactions of all kinds?

Faced with conflicts that threaten the lives of millions of innocent people in its own member countries, and that expose them to the worst violations of their fundamental rights, La Francophonie cannot remain indifferent. Have we ourselves not solemnly reaffirmed the primacy of these rights in the resolutions passed and the statements issued at the last Francophone Summits, in Dakar, Chaillot and Mauritius?

Canada fully supports the various actions that have been taken by many Francophone countries to help the people of Rwanda and Burundi. As I pointed out at the United Nations, for two months Canada was the *only* country airlifting supplies to Kigali. To date, 360 Canadian soldiers have served in these countries under the UN flag, and numerous Canadian NGOs [non-governmental organizations] have mobilized to bring relief to these populations in distress. I am also heartened by the support provided by the people of Canada, who have directly contributed over \$18 million in a spontaneous gesture of solidarity with the people of Rwanda.

I would like to take the opportunity offered by this conference to announce that Canada will provide \$8.5 million to aid in the reconstruction of Rwanda and to continue our support for the repatriation of Rwandan refugees and for the resettlement of displaced persons within Rwanda. This money will be used for purposes such as financing a social development fund, supporting the International Committee of the Red Cross, and setting up projects to encourage good government and democratic development. These funds are above and beyond the \$21.8 million that Canada

has spent since last April on emergency assistance for the Rwandan people.

In light of the tragic events I have just mentioned, La Francophonie has a duty to examine ways that it might attack the root causes of such conflicts, instead of deploring their effects... La Francophonie must try to contribute to the prevention of conflicts.

Mr. President, let me once again quote Léopold Sédar Senghor, this time a remark that he made at Université Laval in Quebec in 1966: "La Francophonie is a way of thinking and acting, a certain way of formulating problems and seeking solutions to them." I think that we should draw inspiration from this thought even today, if we wish to prevent conflicts and give La Francophonie a new dimension.

Together, we surely have vast reserves of creativity and imagination. Why shouldn't we be able to draw on these many varied resources to try to eliminate evils before new crises erupt? Special services already exist to protect harvests against bad weather and pests. Why couldn't La Francophonie create services through which countries who request it could receive the help of "sages" — conciliators and peacemakers who would work to reduce the causes of tension and violence? Providing such services is one concrete way that La Francophonie could respond to the urgent appeals made by the UN Secretary-General to institutions such as ours in his *Agenda for Peace*.

As the Prime Minister of Canada, Jean Chrétien, declared in his recent speech to the French Senate: "If La Francophonie wishes to establish its authority, it will have to strengthen its ability to intervene politically and acquire some instruments of preventive diplomacy," because "without such instruments, it will be a mere figurehead." I therefore propose that, in co-operation with the United Nations and the Organization for African Unity (OAU), we organize a meeting of senior officials and specialists in preventive diplomacy, to be held in Canada. The purpose of this meeting would be to define a process for preventing conflicts in French-speaking countries. This process would then be presented at the next Francophone Summit, in Cotonou. The meeting in Canada would also provide the opportunity to prepare a Declaration of the Heads of State and Government of La Francophonie on the Prevention of Conflicts. Canada is prepared to facilitate the participation of representatives who would otherwise be unable to attend this meeting.

Mr. President and respected colleagues, the economic and social problems that many of our countries face do not make the headlines as often as armed conflicts do. But that does not make these problems any less pressing.

The Dakar, Chaillot and Mauritius Summits all recognized the importance of economic co-operation within La Francophonie. As the world celebrates the 50th anniversary of the Bretton Woods agreement and looks back on the progress made, La Francophonie must consolidate its own achievements and continue its own efforts in the area of greater economic co-operation.

The creation of the World Trade Organization is a step in the right direction. But we must support the less-developed countries so that they can participate more fully in this organization and derive greater benefit from it.

Many other issues must be considered as well: the need to make markets in the Francophone community more open, the burden of debt, the environment, economic management, developing the private sector in less-advanced economies. All these things must be a cornerstone for growth and renewal.

But we must not stop there. It is essential for us to consider other issues, such as international migration, population growth, democratic development and sound social and political management, because they also strongly influence the economic development of every country.

For millions of Francophones, however, life's most fundamental necessities go unmet. The Cairo Conference reminded us of the urgent need for effective action to grapple with the problems of population and development. We cannot solve these problems without fully recognizing the role of women. I therefore consider it essential for La Francophonie to work to establish a new development strategy focused on women at the Fourth UN World Conference on Women in Beijing. We must also actively help to prepare the new *Agenda for Development* proposed by UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

Mr. President, at the Mauritius Summit, our heads of state and government recognized that the time had come to more clearly identify the ambitions of La Francophonie. Toward this end, they created a study group on strengthening La Francophonie. New challenges such as those I have just mentioned make the time ripe for such a group. We are all looking forward to the interim report that this group's chair, Mr. Dehaybe, will present to us tomorrow.

This extremely important committee still has a year until it submits its final report, and I do not want to make any presumptions about its findings. But I do want to stress the need to clearly define the mission of La Francophonie. We must target areas of co-operation based on the characteristics that unite us. We must concentrate on a few major programs in these areas and mobilize our efforts around them. Only in this way can La Francophonie hope to become a credible, respected player on

the world scene, one whose influence cannot be ignored. The areas where we should concentrate are becoming increasingly obvious: the French language, education, culture, communications, computers and the rule of law. I am convinced that, together with the economic activities they support, these programs will provide the energy to galvanize La Francophonie for the next 25 years to come.

Canada believes that to bring new dynamism to La Francophonie, the time has also come for all parties concerned to seek ways of better co-ordinating their programs. Our programs all operate in the same countries, but they could support each other better than they do, especially in these times when we all must learn to make better use of our resources and affirm our political co-operation.

Since La Francophonie has set high aspirations for itself, and dreams of even higher ones, there has been much talk of its "political deficit." I will not hide my agreement with those who say we need more credibility in this regard. The structures that we have put in place since the Francophone Summits first began can still be improved upon. No doubt the study group will devote some time to this question between now and the Cotonou Summit.

We cannot sit idle, we cannot stagnate. We must do what has to be done. I think that the Chaillot Summit blazed the right trail. Now we must explore it further, with imagination, pragmatism and generosity, to put La Francophonie on a firmer political footing. I am confident that we will achieve this goal.

Mr. President, I have tried to express the strong attachment that Canada feels to La Francophonie. I also wanted to contribute to our common search for the best ways to safeguard those principles so essential to the progress of La Francophonie.

I would be remiss if in closing I failed to recognize the tireless contributions that the Republic of Mauritius has made over the past two years in chairing the Permanent Council of La Francophonie and the Ministerial Conference. Mauritius has shown us yet again that in La Francophonie, there are no small countries or large countries. There are only partners working for a common cause. Madam President of the Permanent Council of La Francophonie, Canada applauds the excellent work you have done.

Thank you.