

STATEMENT DISCOURS

MINISTER
FOR
EXTERNAL
RELATIONS.

MINISTRE
DES
RELATIONS
EXTÉRIEURES.



85/11

NOTES FOR A SPEECH BY
THE HONOURABLE MONIQUE VÉZINA,
MINISTER FOR EXTERNAL
RELATIONS, AT THE UNITED NATIONS
CONFERENCE ON THE EMERGENCY
SITUATION IN AFRICA

GENEVA
MARCH 11, 1985

Mr. Secretary-General, Distinguished Delegates,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Our meeting today convenes in an atmosphere of urgency, of crisis and of need for action. And rightly so. There can be no further question about proper timing, of delay, of further study. We, the nations of the world, are united by the same concerns and motivated by the same humanitarian impulse: to put an end to the intolerable suffering and death stalking millions in Africa. 1985 must be a year of action in Africa.

The famine in Africa is a tragedy unprecedented in modern times. The magnitude of its impact on African peoples, on our fellow beings, staggers the imagination and defies comprehension. The document, prepared by the UN Office for Emergency Operations in Africa, confirms the visions of despair we have seen on our television screens. More than 150 million people in 20 countries are facing serious food shortages. Last week, Mr. Secretary-General, during your visit to Canada, you yourself drew attention to the fact that some 30 million Africans are threatened with starvation. Countless other millions are forced to abandon their ancestral lands. The figures cannot translate the real horror. Each death is somebody's baby, son, daughter, mother or father. Each death is an incalculable loss of human potential. Each death is a stabbing pain in the human heart and conscience. In our modern world, how are such things possible?

The present crisis, to be sure, has its roots in a complex array of negative trends and does not lend itself to easy solutions. The worst drought in a century, environmental degradation, inappropriate national and international policies and rapid growth in population have all contributed to the food shortfall in Sub-Saharan Africa. They have prevented the achievement of self-sufficiency in food. Regional conflict and civil war have led as well to the destruction and dislocation of national economies. These tendencies, coupled with an international recession characterized by falling commodity prices, high interest rates, rising energy costs and inflation have led us tragically to the situation we face today.

Mr. President,

I have come here today to re-affirm the human

bond between the people of Canada and the peoples of Africa, and the support of the government of Canada for the historic effort which you are leading for concerted international action to address Africa's emergency needs.

Canadians and their government are acutely aware of the intense suffering of millions of Africans. The Secretary of State for External Affairs, Joe Clark, and myself have travelled to Ethiopia to get a first hand impression of what needed to be done. A specially appointed Canadian Coordinator for the African Famine, David Macdonald, part of my delegation here, has since returned to Ethiopia, visited Mauritania, Mali and Niger to understand the situation in the Sahel and has just recently come back from the Sudan. Mr. Macdonald will present in the near future his report on the African crisis. This report will be studied immediately by the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence of the House of Commons of which the Chairman, Dr. William Winegard, is participating at this conference as a member of my delegation. These fact finding missions, as well as the recent visits to Ottawa by you, Mr. President, and by your Director for Emergency Operations in Africa, Mr. Brad Morse, have underscored the impact the Africa famine has on the Canadian people and the government's agenda.

The Prime Minister of Canada, Mr. Brian Mulroney, has asked me to convey publicly our profound sympathy and solidarity with the African peoples and their governments in this dark hour. Canada has had strong and multiple ties with African countries since their accession to independence. These relations have grown through years of mutual development cooperation and through belief in common values. The Canadian government can only reiterate its undiminished and renewed commitment to work in harmony with the international community to meet this present challenge.

Mr. President,

Though the magnitude of the crisis is enormous, though the challenge frightening, despair and defeatism cannot and must not overwhelm us. The solutions are not and will not be easy. Our immediate priority now is to save lives, but lasting solutions must be found in long term development. Both require renewed commitment and a will to overcome. We must continue to take the necessary steps to respond to the emergency crisis which we face.

We must improve coordination of aid both among multilateral agencies and bilateral donors. African nations must give greater priority to ensuring the delivery of aid and to mobilize their own resources in the long term.

Amidst the immediate despair, Canada finds grounds for hope. Our purpose is to strengthen and build on this hope through determined effort.

Canada is encouraged, first and foremost, by the determination and will of the international community to mobilize to overcome the African famine. In this respect, Canada strongly commends the leadership of the United Nations Secretary-General. By its universal character, its moral leadership and the variety of its organizational activities, the United Nations has a pre-eminent role to play in orchestrating an international response. It is essential that this humanitarian effort should transcend the diversity of political, economic and social systems. Through his imaginative and determined measures the Secretary-General has put the United Nations at the forefront of efforts to save lives in Africa. He has put in place a better coordination of the various parts of the United Nations system. He has laid the groundwork for better assessment, planning and organization of relief aid and he has worked tirelessly to alert the international community to the needs of Africa. His work is a living testimony to the dynamism of the United Nations in this, its 40th anniversary.

We congratulate the new U.N. Office for Emergency Operations under the able leadership of Mr. Bradford Morse on the speed and determination with which it has established its presence as the key international coordinator. We believe that its assessment document and this conference are valuable weapons in our battle against the crisis. They are providing at last a clearer indication of what has been done and what still needs to be done. Canada intends to continue to work closely with this office to further improve the coordination of aid. We have provided grants to the World Food Programme and United Nations Development Programme in support of the coordination of relief efforts in the field. We have been and remain a firm believer that coordination is the best way of maximizing the effectiveness of aid.

Mr. President,

Canada is also encouraged by the desire of African nations to take the lead in finding solutions to the famine. They have acknowledged the prime responsibility for their own development and have courageously shouldered the onerous burden of coping with the large scale of the disaster. We congratulate the Organization of African Unity for establishing a Special Emergency Assistance Fund for Drought and Famine in Africa. We are pleased by the adoption at the last General Assembly of the Declaration on Africa. We are also encouraged by the realism demonstrated by the just completed meeting in Addis Ababa of the 41st session of the CAU's Council of Ministers. There is recognition among African leaders that the solutions to the famine must be viewed in the long term perspective as well as short term and that adjustment of domestic policies which have been ineffective or inappropriate is as essential as the provision of more financial assistance.

In our united fight in this war on famine, Canada asks Africans to take another indispensable step. We plead with all sides who are engaged in internal conflict to take steps to allow aid to go through to the victims. We also call for borders which have been closed to be opened so essential aid can be delivered to affected neighbours.

Finally, Mr. President, Canada is encouraged by the response of the ordinary citizen who has heard the cries of help from his neighbour in our global village. In this, the International Year of Youth, it is worth mentioning how young people have contributed to the victims of the famine, whether through their own fund raising efforts or their support for benefit records. Canada believes that special efforts must be taken to encourage and nurture the generous outpouring of assistance from individuals and groups. There must be a recognition that all governments face budgetary restraints and cannot do everything. The dynamism of the private sector and the voluntary contributions of non-governmental organizations, communities, groups and individuals must be acknowledged and tapped.

Mr. President,

I now turn to what Canada has done and intends to do. The message of Canadians and their government is

clear. We wish to live in a world of communities in which each feels a sense of responsibility for the other. In November our government took the unusual step of naming a Coordinator for the African Famine to provide a focal point for the mobilization of assistance from groups, individuals and communities wanting to help. Massive numbers, - over 500,000 - Canadians of all ages, of all works of life, men and women from all regions including the communities of the Arctic have demonstrated their concern and compassion by donating more than \$35 million in relief to Ethiopia and Africa. The government has contributed another \$65 million to the relief efforts through a Special Emergency Fund. These contributions top up the \$150 million in food aid given through a variety of channels - bilateral, multilateral and NCCs as well as \$18 million in humanitarian assistance targetted for Africa in the last year.

Canada recognizes that the first priority must be to save lives, but at the same time, believes it is imperative to maintain - indeed to intensify - efforts at long term development. The Canadian response to the African crisis will continue to reflect both these emphases. Permit me to set out more specifically what Canada intends to do.

With respect to the immediate relief requirements, \$165 million in food aid will be provided to drought affected African countries, bilaterally and multilaterally. This should be sufficient to supply more than 400,000 tonnes of cereal. An estimated \$18 million in non-food emergency assistance will be provided as well.

On the development front, 40% of Canadian bilateral development assistance is earmarked for Africa, a level which is estimated at \$230 million over the next year. These flows will be complemented by about \$245 million through international technical and financial cooperation institutions. More than \$120 million will be provided to support the programmes of voluntary agencies, research institutions and other channels of development cooperation.

All together, then, during the Canadian fiscal year starting in three weeks time, Canada will provide more than \$850 million in emergency and development assistance to Africa. This represents a commitment of more than \$30 per capita.

Canada has also announced a contribution of \$100 million to the World Bank's Special Facility for Sub-Saharan Africa which is linked to policy and institutional reform. This special contribution underscores our strong belief that the appropriate domestic policies conducive to economic growth and production must be adopted by African countries as an essential step for long term development. We shall be meeting with other partners in the CECD/DAC this week and in ECOSOC in the spring to try to focus our efforts more effectively in addressing these longer term problems.

Mr. President,

The magnitude of the crisis presents a challenge to the human values we hold dear, and to our shared political and economic institutions, including the United Nations system as a whole.

When people are dying from hunger, no country, no institution has the right to stand aside. Canada will continue to make determined efforts to ensure that the United Nations responds fully to the challenge. We urge others to join us in this task.