



Statements and Speeches

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THE SITUATION IN CENTRAL AMERICA: THREATS TO INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY AND PEACE INITIATIVES

Statement by Mr. David Lee, Deputy Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations, to Plenary at the Thirty-eighth Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, November 10, 1983.

Canada is very concerned by the deplorable violence affecting Central America and all the suffering it has caused to the people of the region, more so as we are a member of the hemisphere. We are dismayed to see that international law has become part of the rhetoric used by the parties of each side involved to bolster their case both domestically and internationally.

One cannot understand the political turmoil in the region, nor hope to resolve it, simply by blaming a clash of ideologies of great power interests. We believe that the tragic situation in Central America is the result of a long history of political, economic and social problems. The current situation is a product of poverty, the unequal distribution of wealth and social injustice. Instability feeds on poverty and injustice. East-West rivalries flow in its wake.

So, when we look at Central America today we cannot view this region exclusively through the prism of East-West rivalries because this is not the root of the problem but rather a symptom. Nor can we now view it uniquely through the prism of social and humanitarian concerns, because it is clear that East-West rivalries have now implanted themselves in the region. This is an unfortunate fact to which we cannot close our eyes. It should also provide us with a sense of urgency concerning what can be done now to prevent this situation from deteriorating further.

The internal systems adopted by countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, whatever these systems may be, do not in themselves pose a security threat to this hemisphere. It is only when countries adopt systems which deliberately link themselves to outside forces or seek to promote objectives outside of their sovereign territory to destabilize their neighbours, that a threat is posed. Canada has not changed its aid programs or support because a régime has shifted its political ideology.

The escalation of violence offers no true hope to the Nicaraguan people nor to the other neighbouring countries who stand to suffer from the flow of violence across international borders.

The government of Canada recognizes that Nicaragua is a sovereign state with the right to choose its form of government. At the same time, we are dismayed by the increasing tendency toward authoritarianism. The threat to the welfare of the Nicaraguan people and to the stability of the region, however, extends beyond the domestic effects of authoritarianism. Departures from professed non-alignment, and support for insurgencies in neighbouring countries only add to the risks of violence and impede progress toward peaceful change. For Canada, no ideology justifies the export of violence, or the use of violence to promote or prevent change.

Social change and economic progress in Central America cannot be achieved in an atmosphere of military confrontation. Canada, therefore, has fully endorsed the regional peace initiative sponsored by the Contadora Group since its very beginning, and continues to do so. This attempt made by Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela to find regional solutions to regional problems deserves the support of all concerned and is in full conformity with the UN Charter. We think that at an appropriate stage the Contadora process should be supplemented by direct dialogue between the parties concerned.

In spite of the progress achieved recently by the Contadora Group and the five Central American countries with the adoption of the document of objectives produced in Panama last September, the situation in Central America remains of serious concern.

We believe that escalation can be reversed, that the crisis in Central America need not move inexorably towards greater political danger. We believe that military responses and the export of violence will not serve the interests of the peoples of Central America, no matter what the political orientations of their leaders may be. By the same token, foreign intervention of any party will not assist the objectives of peace, stability, social and economic progress. If serious efforts are not made to open political dialogue within and among states, if military solutions are pursued at the expense of accommodating social and economic change, the results within states will be political oppression, increased violence and deepening misery. Among states the result will be dangerous confrontation.

Canada is ready to assist the parties to promote or facilitate political dialogue. Although we do not seek to involve ourselves directly unless requested to do so, our message to all who seek to restore peace in the region is to reverse the pattern of military escalation so that social change, economic progress and the exercise of freedom will not be stifled. We believe a lasting peaceful solution can only be based on an acceptance by all concerned of the principles of respect for sovereignty, non-interference in the domestic affairs of states, and non-use of force in international relations as well as acceptance of the need to withdraw all foreign military forces.

In conclusion I wish to reiterate my country's strong support to the effort of the Contadora Group and express our sincere hope for a negotiated political solution to the turmoil from which Central America has been suffering for already too long.

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