

STATEMENTS
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Notes for a speech
by the Honourable Barbara McDougall,
Secretary of State for External Affairs,
to the General Assembly of
the Organization of American States

Santiago, Chile
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Affaires extérieures et
Commerce extérieur Canada

External Affairs and
International Trade Canada

Canada

Mr. President of the General Assembly,
Mr. Secretary General,
Mr. Assistant Secretary General,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen and Friends,

I am delighted to be in Santiago to lead the Canadian delegation to this 21st General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS).

I wish first of all to congratulate you on your election as President of the Assembly and to assure you of the full support of the Canadian delegation in the fulfilment of your heavy responsibilities. We very much appreciate the warm hospitality extended to us and the excellent conference arrangements that have been made for our meeting.

I should be grateful if you could convey to the Government and people of Chile and to the OAS Secretariat our deep appreciation.

The Canadian delegation is very pleased that this General Assembly is meeting here in Chile. Like Chile, Canada shares a strong commitment to the OAS even though we are a relatively new member. Our links in diverse fields, in trade, as Pacific Ocean partners, go back many years. Most importantly, the dedication of Canadians and Chileans to democratic values has strengthened these bonds even more.

Mr. President, this year marks Canada's second year as a full participant, but the Organization's second century. It is indeed appropriate that the OAS reaches this important anniversary with a full complement of 35 members.

This year we are delighted to welcome our Commonwealth partners, Belize and Guyana, to our midst. We are made stronger and more complete by their presence. We look forward to the time when the vision of the founders of the OAS for a universal hemispheric forum can be realized and Cuba will retake its place in the Organization as a full member of the hemispheric family.

One year is a short period in the history of the world's oldest regional institution. In the year since Canada joined the OAS, we truly have come to feel part of the hemispheric family. We have been touched by the warm welcome we have been given by our Latin American friends.

Joining with our Caribbean partners in the OAS strengthens even more a long and traditional relationship. Drawing on these ties, we can make a unique contribution to hemispheric community-building.

When the Prime Minister announced our decision to join the OAS, he said that Canada should at long last become a nation of the Americas, a full partner in the hemisphere. The partnership we

embraced is one of opportunity. It is an opportunity to share in the values of the OAS community and to work with our hemispheric partners in preparing for the future.

In joining the OAS we share a commitment to strengthening and consolidating democracy and human rights. We seek a more secure and peaceful hemisphere without the threat of conflict.

We are working toward a hemisphere that is at home with its environment and freed from the scourge of drugs. And we are part of a hemisphere preparing for an era of increased globalization and competition.

The role of the OAS is more important today than ever before.

The world has found the pace of change over the past two years breathtaking. Much attention has been rivetted on the revolutions that have swept Eastern Europe and are still unfolding in the Soviet Union.

The resurgence of democracy has been startling and profound. The Gulf War signalled a radical shift in the Middle East and in the way the international community reacts to crises.

Changes in this hemisphere may have attracted less global attention, but are equally profound. In Latin America, democratic government has replaced dictatorship, and open economies are rapidly displacing the closed economies of the past.

These fundamental changes in the world order now present a challenge to our role in the hemisphere. The changing world landscape, both political and economic, means that our hemisphere and the OAS must be prepared to play a new role.

Today in the OAS we are defining that role. We have much more to do if we are going to have an Organization that will lead us into the next 100 years. By reaffirming the fundamental values of the OAS we are strengthening our hemispheric community.

Mr. President and fellow delegates, the Preamble of the Charter of our Organization states that "representative democracy is an indispensable condition for the stability, peace and development of the region." This concept is of fundamental importance to our Organization and to all of our member countries.

It is important that we remind ourselves of these facts and it is fitting that we do so here in Chile where the long tradition of democracy has, by the free vote of the people, been restored.

Mr. President, the fact that all hemispheric countries present in these meetings now enjoy the benefits of democratic government is

exciting. It is a time to celebrate. It is an extraordinary moment. But it is essential that this Organization and its members seize this unique opportunity to consolidate democracy throughout the region.

Last year Canada proposed the creation in the OAS of a unit for democratic development within the General Secretariat. We were very pleased that this proposal was given unanimous support. We believe this represented a reaffirmation by OAS members of the fundamental values of the Organization.

During the past year, the Secretariat has performed an invaluable service to democracy by monitoring elections. It contributed effectively to the electoral processes in Nicaragua, Haiti, El Salvador, Surinam and Paraguay. But the mechanics of holding elections are only a part of a healthy democracy.

The Charter says that one of the aims of the OAS is to promote and consolidate representative democracy. We believe that the OAS, through the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy, can play a role in strengthening the range of institutions essential to democratic societies.

I wish to reaffirm our offer to assist in the full establishment of the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy as soon as possible.

The resurgence of democracy and a growing respect for human rights in the hemisphere have strengthened the foundations of the OAS.

Canada applauds and supports the good work of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

A concrete demonstration of our commitment to the inter-American human rights system is the candidacy for the court of Madam Justice Bertha Wilson, one of Canada's foremost jurists and until recently a judge on our Supreme Court.

Fundamental also to the future of the hemispheric community is the quest for peace and security. Indeed, the OAS Charter underscores this task. Security, in its broadest sense, has ceased to be something to be achieved unilaterally.

Security is multidimensional; it addresses themes such as arms control, the promotion of democracy, the furtherance of economic and social development, the protection of the environment, and the safeguarding of human rights. To be effective, it must be built in a co-operative framework, by us all.

In acknowledging this broad context, we must continue to address priority concerns in the traditional security and arms control fields.

An extremely disturbing development of the last decade has been the accumulation by some states, in other regions, of enormous quantities of conventional arms, often coupled with efforts to acquire weapons of mass destruction.

We witnessed this year, in the Persian Gulf, the unfortunate consequences for states around the world of the virtually unrestrained build-up of arms in one country.

Iraq's immense conventional armaments, its declared readiness to use chemical and biological weapons and uncertainties concerning its nuclear intentions highlighted the need for increased global attention to these issues.

It is this concern which led the Canadian government, over recent months, to address with increased attention the problems associated with proliferation. In February, Prime Minister Mulroney pointed to the need for a new political will, a new momentum on the part of the international community to deal urgently with these issues.

Canada believes that the Organization of American States is well placed to demonstrate leadership in promoting co-operation to enhance security.

In addressing these problems, member states will be continuing a strong hemispheric tradition, and will send an important signal to all regions of the world about our commitment to international peace and security in the post-Cold War era.

In this spirit, we are proposing that the General Assembly adopt this week a resolution on security condemning the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the world, as well as excessive build-ups of conventional arms, and establishing a working group to study this issue and report back to this Assembly with recommendations for action.

Mr. Chairman, fellow heads of delegations, the Gulf conflict has provided us with a unique opportunity to take action regarding the threat of arms proliferation. That conflict brought home to us all, each day, the global risks and costs of such uncontrolled accumulations of weapons. All citizens now expect us to take steps to ensure that such a situation does not -- and indeed cannot -- occur again. We must not disappoint this expectation. We must respond to this challenge using every opportunity to find solutions to these issues. And, we must act quickly, at this precious moment of opportunity.

The promotion of hemispheric security, of human rights and democracy, have been the tasks of the OAS for the last century. They will be no less important into the next century. Now, as the OAS enters its second century, new challenges have emerged which will have to be met if our hemispheric community is to survive and to prosper.

Co-operation in the OAS on environmental matters will have a direct bearing on the future of all our countries. Industrial accidents and acid rain know no borders. Loss of bio-diversity, whether in the Amazon or in Canada's Arctic, is a loss to the whole world.

Next year, one of our members -- Brazil -- will be hosting a major international conference on the environment, headed by Maurice Strong, a distinguished Canadian internationalist. We welcome this initiative and we are giving it our full support.

Co-operation in eliminating the scourge of drugs is vital to the health and stability in our region. It threatens the social fabric and stability of consumer and producer countries alike. Progress is being made. The OAS and related bodies such as the Inter-American Committee on Drug Abuse are vital to our efforts of both producer and consumer countries.

Canada's official development assistance program in the hemisphere and within the OAS responds to these pressing issues. Environmental sustainability and natural resource development are the focus of a variety of projects.

We support a number of activities that promote closer regional integration and strengthen democratization and human rights. The first initiatives we have undertaken this year within the OAS include environmental protection in the Amazon and human resource development through the technology of long-distance education.

Human resource development is especially important in our development programs. The role of women in development in particular is integral to securing a more equitable future. Over one half of this hemisphere's human resources are women. No community can face the immense challenges of the future without the full application of all its resources.

The greatest challenge, and indeed the greatest opportunity, in the new hemispheric partnership is economic reform and trade.

Mr. President, the economy of our region is in an exciting process of transformation. Unproductive policies of the past are being rejected. A commitment to freer trade and national policies which encourage investment and competitiveness are a recognition of what works.

They are a recognition of the best way to secure a prosperous future for our hemisphere. Greater regional cohesion, however, is not directed at excluding others. It is a recognition that the nations of our hemisphere must equip themselves to meet the challenge of globalization and competition.

In this spirit, we have welcomed President Bush's proposal "Enterprise for the Americas," an initiative directed at harnessing the collective economic energies of the hemisphere.

Already Canada, Mexico and the United States have embarked on the negotiation of a free trade area. Other member countries are working toward similar arrangements amongst themselves.

Now the possibility of a free trade zone embracing the entire hemisphere is no longer a visionary's dream, but a distinct possibility. The OAS has served as a useful forum for the discussion of these initiatives.

The OAS is adapting to a changing world and we are proud to have been part of that process over the past year. We must continue to adapt if the OAS is to meet the profound challenges of the next century.

We welcome the work that has been done by the consultation group on the inter-American system. Two issues taken up by the group are fundamental to the future of the OAS. They are, first, the need to set clear priorities and to allocate resources accordingly; and second, the need to establish a system that will encourage member states to meet their financial obligations. The OAS will have little capacity to prepare for the future if we are in a constant state of catching up on obligations of the past.

Mr. President, Canada's decision to join the OAS was an act of political will to link our future more closely with the future of this hemisphere. That decision was based on a strong belief in what the future can be for us here in our hemisphere. It is a future where democracy and human rights have a firm hold.

It is a future where the problems of drug trafficking and environmental degradation will find solutions through joint efforts. It is a future where we will meet the challenges of economic interdependence and global competition through co-operation. It is a future with a vision of a more prosperous, equitable and peaceful hemisphere.

We have many issues before us at this Assembly which will determine the type of community in which we will live over the next 100 years. Let us show that we have the collective wisdom and the will to reaffirm that the Organization of American States will be at the centre of determining that future.