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Notes for a speech by
the Right Honourable Joe Clark,
Secretary of State for
External Affairs,
to the Royal Commonwealth
Society

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I am here in two capacities. The first is that it is now my honour to lead Arnold Smith's old Department, and there is a particular Canadian pride in the anniversary and success of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

My second credential is as a reformed skeptic about the Commonwealth - made skeptical originally by a suspicion that a club of old colonies would be better at talking than acting; and reformed by the best teacher - the experience of seeing the Commonwealth at work. I represented Canada at the Heads of Government Meeting in Lusaka, when the Prime Ministers of Great Britain, Tanzania and Zambia, with encouragement from the rest of us worked out the agreement on Zimbabwe. That was action, not talk - historic action reflecting great courage and skillful compromise. Many leaders contributed to that result, but I think it appropriate to note the particular determination and vision of the Prime Minister of Great Britain, in choosing the right time to move her country and our Commonwealth forward on a crucial issue. The example should remind us that the Commonwealth can be an instrument of profound change, if its members work steadily together.

A determination to work together that way is more important now than ever - not simply in the face of urgent current issues, but also because the world needs international institutions that work. If I may be immodest on my country's behalf, Canada is well placed to make that observation. Through forty years and governments of both our parties, Canadians have been unusually active in helping to extend international order - in Indo-China and in Cyprus; in development and on arms control; in response to the crisis of refugees or famine; and in preparing the way for new regimes of international law. Whatever that says of our character, it is testimony to our prudence because we know that the interests and security of Canada depend on making constant progress against the poverty and prejudice, the fear and zeal, that are the enemies of international order.

No one is immune to the consequences of disorder. The bomb at Narita Airport was in baggage shipped from Canada. The breakdown of world trading arrangements costs Canadian jobs. Local conflicts that escalate, or become infected by larger rivalries, threaten the security of all of us equally.

There is nothing new about these observations except, perhaps, that they have become so familiar that we take less account of them than we should. Forty years ago, freshly conscious of the devastation that can grow when nations go their separate ways to war, world leaders established the United Nations system. Much of our successful history since that time has been a history of alliances - the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the European Community, and a multitude of more local arrangements - whether bringing together the nations of South-East Asia, or keeping peace in Cyprus or the Sinai.

Shocked by war, we found ways to work together. Now, sheltered by relative peace, we are drifting away from the international system that helped build that peace. The United States, Great Britain and Singapore, after careful consideration of their national interests, have served notice on UNESCO. India and Brazil and others resist renewal of multilateral trading negotiations. Greece is reconsidering its role in NATO. Instead of sending signals of leadership, the European Community is characterized by its bureaucracy and disputes, the General Assembly by its cacophony, the Security Council by willful impotence. In Central America, the Contadora process seems stalled. In Namibia, the Contact Group, including Canada, has taken no effective initiatives. While bombs kill baggage handlers, and the hostage taking at Beirut is treated as live soap opera, all civilised nations lament terrorism, but are slow in finding practical ways to fight it.

Against that trend, of course, there are solid new international initiatives - the response to the famine in Ethiopia; the refreshing possibility of a summit of Francophone countries; the new attention that is being paid to terrorism and to the trade in drugs.

And there are brilliant, unsung, successes. I spent part of last week in a refugee camp just inside Thailand, where UNBRO - The United Nations Border Relief Organization - is working with some of the bravest people I have ever met - Cambodians uprooted from their homes and, with UNBRO, building literacy and hope and health in the shadow of Vietnamese shelling.

The world works. UNICEF is saving 400,000 children each year from death by malnutrition and disease. The crushing debts of Mexico and Brazil are gradually being worked down by international agreement, as was India's earlier. While local wars have taken countless lives, and atrocities continue daily in Afghanistan, and South-Africa, and Cambodia, and Chile, the striking fact of these last four

decades is that we have escaped the devastating global wars that twice destroyed the world in the forty years before 1945.

But one does not save children, or reschedule debt or avoid world war by accident. That is the hardest of work, and requires, in addition to dedication, a continuing commitment to international systems and institutions.

That brings me directly to the Commonwealth, whose success is particularly important in an age where other international institutions are less successful, but which is also vulnerable to skepticism and complacency.

It is fair to say that the modern post-war Commonwealth came of age with the establishment of the Secretariat in 1965. It found its mandate then with the launching of its highly successful aid and development programs - and it found a new vocation in the active role it assumed in facilitating the process toward Zimbabwe's independence. In that case, and with the Gleneagles Agreement, the Commonwealth demonstrated a capacity to achieve significant political change. That capacity must be exercised with care, but it characterizes the Commonwealth as an agency of action not just talk.

So does the quieter progress made on other issues - the survival of small island nations; the pioneering studies on the world financial and trading system, and on indebtedness among developing countries; the nurturing of nearly 300 non-governmental Commonwealth organizations.

I am particularly pleased by the informal practice of having Commonwealth Ministers meet just before major U.N. conferences, to explore the possibility that this particular family might find agreement that could elude larger assemblies. Special Commonwealth consultation in UNESCO has helped bring both progress and perspective to the process of reform required in that organization. The meeting of Commonwealth Ministers responsible for Women's Affairs, just before the end-of-decade Conference in Nairobi, helped focus attention on the basic questions of access to technology and credit and ownership of land.

That practice takes advantage of the two characteristics which make the Commonwealth successful. The first characteristic of course is that we reach across oceans and languages and races and conditions of development. The second characteristic, as important, is precisely that we have developed the habit of working together, or looking beyond differences, instead of seeking refuge in them. To return to my own experience, the Conference at Lusaka was one

of three that summer. It was preceded by an Economic Summit at Tokyo in which Great Britain and Canada participated. It was followed by a Meeting of the Non-Aligned in Havana, in which Great Britain and Canada did not participate, but much of the rest of the Commonwealth did. Of the three meetings, the rhetoric was calmest, the perspective broadest, at Lusaka. That ability to find common ground, in a world tempted by extremes, is what makes the Commonwealth invaluable.

Our great challenge now, of course, is to apply that tradition to make progress against the scourge of apartheid. Many of our national governments have taken individual actions respecting South Africa. In early June, I announced a series of measures by Canada, ending our double taxation agreement and the application of our global export insurance; tightening our Code of Conduct and requiring the publication of compliance reports; stopping exports of sensitive equipment like computers; and increasing substantially our funding of the education and the training of blacks in South Africa and Canada. In our case, these actions and others were the first result of a policy review our new government is conducting. I made it clear that other steps would follow, and that they would be considered in close consultation with other members of the Commonwealth.

Our late Prime Minister, John Diefenbaker, was a leader in the decision by the Commonwealth Conference of 1961 to expel South Africa. He said, at that time, that there would always be a light in the window for South Africa - an opportunity to resume old ties when apartheid was abandoned, and all South Africans were treated on the same basis under their law and constitution.

That conference of expulsion was nearly a quarter century ago and apartheid continues and violence grows in South Africa, as the revulsion against apartheid grows in my country. We cannot accept that the majority of South Africans should remain on the outside, deprived of dignity and basic human rights, harassed by police, arbitrarily held in detention, denied citizenship, some separated from their families, all deprived of a true voice in their own country's affairs.

These next few weeks seem likely to be marked by more violence within South Africa, and more condemnation outside. The worst result would be for the solitudes to deepen, the violence to grow. The special duty of the Commonwealth and its member governments is to point the way to reforms that will both end apartheid, and rebuild relations with South Africa.

One can never judge with certainty the weight of international opinion. We must assume that leaders of government and industry in South Africa want their country to live in harmony with others, not in deepening hostility. And we must remember that our practical purpose is to change opinion and behaviour within South Africa.

That requires unflagging firmness in the condemnation of apartheid, and a determination to find ways to bring different parties together toward reform.

I applaud the initiative of Bishop Tutu in offering to meet the President of the Republic of South Africa, and have been encouraged by what appears to be a positive response to that initiative by South African authorities. Other similar actions by South Africa, would improve the rate of progress, and reduce the risk of violence.

Serious dialogue must begin with leaders who have the trust of the black community. The release of Nelson Mandela, and his involvement in such a serious dialogue, would be a significant step towards trust and peaceful reform.

The Government of Canada urges South Africa to stop the arrests and end the detention without trial of those who have called for, and participated in, non-violent protests. Imprisoning hundreds is no way to start a dialogue. Those who are detained, and forced to be silent, cannot contribute to reconciliation, or help to achieve a true and equal partnership. In the interests of peaceful change, and as a prelude to genuine dialogue, we urge the Government of South Africa to state clearly now that its objective is to end apartheid, and to replace it by a system based on full partnership and equality.

No one mistakes the determination of the Commonwealth to end apartheid. There is no doubt that determination remains sharp and clear. We have a particular responsibility now, as events take new momentum, and the choice is between violent and non-violent reform. It is to explore every avenue that may lead quickly to reform, and to use our special influence and experience to prepare the way for progress, after apartheid is ended.

Particular steps may commend themselves to the Commonwealth as an organization. It may wish to explore whether it, or some of its members, can contribute to opening that dialogue between the South African Government, and those

who stand in opposition to it. That could perhaps be done by providing an occasion for exploratory talks. If there are any possibilities for opening the door to peaceful change, we should not be deterred by fear of rebuff.

Nor should we assume South Africa will resist real change forever. The recent actions to allow blacks permanent residence in certain urban areas and suspension of forced removals of blacks, are, at least, a step away from the past. As we urge basic reform, we must also emphasize our belief that a change of direction is possible within South Africa and in South Africa's relations with other countries. Of course, the prospect of change will seem frightening to some, and we must encourage an understanding that it is better to abandon conflict and to enter into partnership with all South Africans, and all the world, than to persist in the present course. Among the duties of the Commonwealth is to keep the light in the window for South Africa, to urge and facilitate reform, yet keep alive the prospect of reconciliation once apartheid is disavowed and undone.