

STATEMENT DISCOURS

MINISTER
FOR
EXTERNAL
RELATIONS.

MINISTRE
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RELATIONS
EXTÉRIEURES.



86/11

Address by the Honourable
Monique Vézina, Minister
for External Relations,
at the opening of
National Forum Africa

OTTAWA

February 13, 1986.

MOMENTS LIKE THIS COME FAR TOO SELDOM IN THE LIFE OF A MINISTER. MY CABINET COLLEAGUES WOULD AGREE WITH ME WHEN I SAY THAT IN OUR 'METIER' IT IS RAPE INDEED TO REACH THE CULMINATION OF A PROCESS, TO REACH THAT POINT WHERE ONE CAN MEASURE THE RESULTS OF ONE'S ACTIONS, AND IN DOING SO, TO BE REPAYED A HUNDREDFOLD.

FIFTEEN MONTHS HAVE GONE BY SINCE NOVEMBER 1984, WHEN I MADE MY FIRST OFFICIAL VISIT TO ETHIOPIA. AND SINCE THAT TIME, SO MANY THINGS HAVE HAPPENED! SO MANY CANADIANS HAVE RESPONDED TO THE CALL FOR HELP! TODAY'S EXHIBITION TELLS THE STORY MOST ELOQUENTLY. THESE PICTURES SPEAK TO US. THEY REMIND US OF WHAT WAS, AND OF THE RESCUE OPERATION THAT INVOLVED US ALL.

IT IS MY HONOUR TODAY TO PAY HOMMAGE TO ALL THOSE MEN AND WOMEN WHO TOOK PART. IT IS MY RESPONSIBILITY TO ENCOURAGE CANADIANS TO CONTINUE IN THIS PATH. AND IT IS MY RESPONSIBILITY TO TELL THEM OF THE ACTIONS AND INTENTIONS OF OUR GOVERNMENT.

NOT TOO LONG AGO, THE INTERNATIONAL EMERGENCY CO-ORDINATOR, MAURICE STRONG, SPEAKING IN LONDON ABOUT THIS RELIEF OPERATION, COMPARED IT TO A WAR EFFORT IN A TIME OF PEACE. AND INDEED, WHAT TOOK PLACE WAS AN ALL-OUT MOBILISATION OF EFFORT, WHERE CANADA STOOD OUT FOR HER UNPARALLELLED GENEROSITY.

AS A QUEBEC JOURNALIST PUT IT, WE ARE PERHAPS A PEOPLE CUSTOM-MADE TO HELP AFRICA. WITH ALL OUR RESOURCES AND OUR WEALTH, WE COULD BE THE BIGGEST EGOISTS IN THE WORLD. BUT RIGHT FROM THE BEGINNING, WE HAVE RETAINED OUR SENSE OF SOLIDARITY.

RECENT POLLS SHOW JUST HOW MUCH CANADIANS CARE ABOUT THE PROBLEM OF HUNGER IN THE WORLD. OF ALL THE STATISTICS, I AM PARTICULARLY MOVED BY THE FACT THAT FORTY-FOUR PER CENT OF ALL RESPONDENTS WHOSE INCOME WAS LESS THAN \$10,000 GAVE TO HELP AFRICA.

THOSE PEOPLE WERE AMONG THE MORE THAN 800,000 CANADIANS WHOSE DONATIONS TOTALLED SOME \$60 MILLION. THIS MONEY, MATCHED BY THE GOVERNMENT, CAME FROM TOWNS AND FROM SCHOOLS, FROM PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS AND FACTORY WORKERS, FROM GROUPS AND ASSOCIATIONS OF ALL KINDS. FROM VANCOUVER, WHERE ONE MILLION DOLLARS WERE COLLECTED, TO HALIFAX, WHERE THE ETHIOPIA AIRLIFT TRANSPORTED ESSENTIAL GOODS TO ETHIOPIA. OUR ARTISTS AND OUR JOURNALISTS HELPED BY KEEPING THE CRISIS EVER PRESENT IN OUR HEARTS, AND AT THE SAME TIME, IN AFRICA, PEOPLE WERE WORKING IN THE MIDST OF THE DESOLATION, LIVING IN DAILY CONTACT WITH THE SUFFERING, WORKING AGAINST FATIGUE AND FRUSTRATION AND THE LIMITATIONS OF WHAT COULD BE ACCOMPLISHED IN THE FIELD.

THE CHALLENGE FACED BY THE GOVERNMENT WAS TO TRANSFORM THIS FLOOD OF MONEY, OF IDEAS, OF PROJECTS AND ENERGY, INTO AN ORGANIZED AND EFFICIENT OPERATION. IT WAS THE CHANCE TO PUT OUR PRINCIPLES TO THE TEST. FOR THE FIRST TIME, A NON-GOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE WAS GIVEN THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ALLOCATING PUBLIC MONEY FOR AID. THIS COMMITTEE

CARRIED OUT ITS DUTIES WITH ADMIRABLE RESULTS, UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF THE FEDERAL CO-ORDINATOR, DAVID MACDONALD, TO WHOM I PAY HOMMAGE THIS AFTERNOON.

BUT RELIEVING THE VICTIMS OF THE FAMINE WAS JUST THE BEGINNING.

LAST SEPTEMBER 4TH, IN OTTAWA, I REMINDED CANADIANS THAT "WHAT HAPPENED IN AFRICA MUST NOT HAPPEN AGAIN. ON THAT DAY I LAUNCHED FORUM AFRICA, WHICH REPRESENTED THE SECOND PHASE OF THE MANDATE OF DAVID MACDONALD.

THE AFRICAN PEOPLES STILL LIVE WITH THE DANGER. WE HAVE TO KNOW THAT, AND WE MUST KEEP REPEATING IT. AND THAT IS THE MAIN REASON FOR THIS SERIES OF MEETINGS AND EVENTS ORGANIZED JOINTLY BY LOCAL AND REGIONAL GROUPS, AND OUR CO-ORDINATOR.

A SPECIAL THANKS TO ALL THOSE WHO TOOK PART. I AM THINKING OF THE SCHOOL IN WHITEHORSE WHICH LENT ITS FACILITIES, AND OF THE YUKON COMPANY (NORTHWEST TEL) WHICH PROVIDED TELECOMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT. I AM THINKING OF THE JOURNALISTS, WHO GAVE DEPTH AND INSIGHT TO THE DISCUSSIONS, AND OF THE SCHOOLCHILDREN OF CALGARY WHOSE SONG DEMONSTRATED THEIR SENSE OF SOLIDARITY WITH THE CHILDREN OF THE THIRD WORLD. I AM THINKING OF THE ORGANIZERS OF THE "MARDIS D'AFRIQUE", THE AFRICA TUESDAYS IN SHERBROOKE, AND OF THE SERIOUS INTEREST OF THE HALIFAX ACADEMIC COMMUNITY... AND OF SO MANY OTHERS.

ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT, THANKS TO ALL THOSE MEN AND WOMEN WHO PARTICIPATED IN THESE MEETINGS, AND TO THOSE WHO ORGANIZED THEM.

FORUM AFRICA HAS BEEN PART OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS UNDERTAKEN IN THE CONTEXT OF OUR REVIEW OF FOREIGN POLICY. WE WANTED TO GIVE THE FLOOR TO CANADIANS WHO WERE INVOLVED IN RECENT MONTHS IN THE AFRICAN CRISIS. THEIR CONTRIBUTION WILL BE INVALUABLE TO THE PARLIAMENTARIANS WHO ARE CHARGED WITH MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT.

LAST YEAR, FORTY PER CENT OF OUR AID BUDGET WAS DIRECTED AT AFRICA - THAT IS ABOUT EIGHT HUNDRED MILLION DOLLARS. WE INSISTED THAT INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS PUT THE PRIORITY ON AGRICULTURE, AND ON THE NEED TO COORDINATE INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS.

BUT ABOVE ALL, WE LISTENED TO AFRICA. OUR ANTENNAE WERE OUT. DURING MY VISITS TO AFRICA, I MET WITH SEVERAL HEADS OF STATE. SIMILARLY, DAVID MACDONALD TRAVELLED TO AFRICA ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS. LAST SUMMER, HERE IN OTTAWA, REPRESENTATIVES FROM EACH OF THE REGIONS STRICKEN BY THE DROUGHT PRESENTED THEIR ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION TO A SYMPOSIUM ON THE AFRICAN DROUGHT. AND, IN A FEW DAYS, THE SUMMIT OF FRANCOPHONE HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT LEADERS WILL COME TOGETHER TO DISCUSS THE PROBLEMS OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IN AFRICA.

I WOULD LIKE AT THIS POINT TO SAY HOW HONOURED WE ARE TO HAVE WITH US TODAY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY, MR IDE OUMAROU, WHO WILL TAKE PART IN THE NATIONAL FORUM AFRICA PROCEEDINGS.

THUS, SLOWLY BUT SURELY, A VAST PROGRAMME OF RECOVERY IS BEING OUTLINED -- A PROGRAMME IN WHICH CANADA WILL PLAY HER PART.

CONFRONTED WITH THE GREAT NUMBER OF DECISIONS TO BE TAKEN, MY UNDERLYING PRINCIPLE IS THAT WE MUST NEVER LOSE SIGHT OF THE ULTIMATE OBJECTIVE: FOOD SELF-SUFFICIENCY: AND OF THE FACT THAT IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE FOOD SELF-SUFFICIENCY, WE MUST WORK AT ALL LEVELS.

WE HAVE TAKEN THE FIRST MAJOR STEP, IN THAT WE HAVE REALIZED THE GRAVITY OF THE SITUATION... OUR ROLE IS TO ENCOURAGE, TO SHAPE, TO HELP GOVERNMENTS AND PEOPLE THEMSELVES TO MAKE THE NECESSARY CHANGES. ECOLOGICAL REDRESS, INCREASE IN FOOD PRODUCTION, THESE THINGS WILL ONLY HAPPEN IF ACTION IS TAKEN ON ALL FRONTS: AGRICULTURAL AND RESEARCH POLICIES; TRAINING AND EDUCATION OF PEOPLE; AID IN PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES...

THROUGH DIALOGUE, THROUGH ASSISTANCE, WE INVITE AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS TO REFORM THEIR AGRICULTURAL POLICIES. WITH FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE, WE ENCOURAGE RESEARCH. AFRICAN AGRICULTURE COULD BENEFIT GREATLY FROM NEW TYPES OF SEEDS THAT ARE BETTER ADAPTED TO THE ENVIRONMENT, AND FROM APPROPRIATE AGRICULTURAL METHODS AND TECHNIQUES. TO THIS END WE ENCOURAGE INTERNATIONAL COORDINATION OF EFFORT, AND OUR OWN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE (IDRC) PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THIS FIELD. WE ALSO BELIEVE IT IS ESSENTIAL TO TRAIN AFRICAN RESEARCHERS AND TECHNICIANS, AS WELL AS TO UNDERTAKE A PUBLIC EDUCATION PROGRAMME.

IN THE SHORT TERM, IN ORDER TO INCREASE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION, WE MUST SUPPLY FERTILIZERS, SEEDS, AND TOOLS. TO ENCOURAGE THE FARMERS THEMSELVES, WE MUST INVEST ABOVE AND BEYOND PRODUCTION... WITHOUT

FORGETTING THE MOST URGENT TASK OF ALL, THE FIGHT AGAINST
DESERTIFICATION, EROSION MUST BE STOPPED, SOIL MUST BE REVITALIZED,
REFORESTATION MUST TAKE PLACE.

BUT THE PEASANT HIMSELF, AND HERSELF, MUST BE THE PRIME MOVER IN THIS
STRATEGY. WE MUST RELY ON THE HUMAN POTENTIAL OF AFRICA, AS WELL AS ON
THE ABILITIES AND THE COMMITMENT OF CANADIANS WHO ARE WORKING TOWARDS
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONTINENT. AND THE ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL
ORGANIZATIONS HAS BECOME OF SPECIAL IMPORTANCE IN THIS PROCESS.

IT IS MY CONVICTION THAT REAL DEVELOPMENT IS NOT A METAMORPHOSIS BUT AN
EVOLUTION - A SLOW EVOLUTION, I WILL ADD, THAT MUST DEPEND FIRST AND
FOREMOST ON HUMAN RESOURCES.

AND THIS, WE NEED THE PARTICIPATION OF ALL MEN AND WOMEN.

THAT IS WHAT I ASK OF YOU.

THAT IS WHAT I HOPE FOR AFRICA.

IT IS WITH GREAT PLEASURE AND ANTICIPATION, THEREFORE, THAT I WELCOME
YOU HERE TO THE NATIONAL FORUM AFRICA. I WISH YOU A USEFUL MEETING, AND
I LOOK FORWARD TO THE RESULTS OF YOUR DELIBERATIONS.