

Statement

Department of
External
Affairs



Discours

Ministère des
Affaires
extérieures

89/40

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

NOTES FOR A SPEECH

BY THE HONOURABLE MONIQUE LANDRY,

MINISTER FOR EXTERNAL RELATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

AT THE OFFICIAL CEREMONY COMMEMORATING THE SIGNATURE

OF THE CANADA-UNESCO AGREEMENT

QUEBEC CITY

September 18, 1989.

Minister for
External Relations and
International Development

Ministre des
Relations extérieures et du
développement international

Canada

Mr. Prime Minister (if present), dear colleagues, Mr. Assistant Director-General, Mrs. Representative of UNESCO in Quebec City, distinguished guests and dear friends,

It is with great pleasure that I will, in a few moments, and on behalf of the Canadian government, sign an agreement between Canada and UNESCO calling for the opening of an information office in Quebec, a city designated as a world cultural heritage site. This signals another in a long list of impressive international events that have taken place in this historic city. It was right here in Quebec that the Food and Agriculture Organization, commonly known as the FAO, was founded in 1945, as the plaque at the entrance to the Chateau Frontenac indicates. More recently, Quebec hosted the Superfrancofête of 1974 and the Francophone Summit of 1987, and was the city where the Energy Institute for Countries Using French as a Common Language was set up. International agreements such as this enable Canada to exercise its full sovereignty in harmony with the provinces. The one being signed here today is not the first of its kind, but it gives confirmation of Canada's ability to integrate more with the world, with the support of the provinces.

I am especially pleased to see so many representatives of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO here. The Commission is one of the most important links - in fact, the most important as far as the UNESCO program is concerned - between Canada and the headquarters of the organization in Paris. We are convinced that the excellent relationship between the Commission and UNESCO will be paralleled in that between the Commission and the UNESCO office in Quebec City. Quebec will seek to keep the Canadian media and public informed about the many programs and activities of UNESCO and will act as the organization's official representative and spokesman in Canada.

The mandate of UNESCO, as set forth in its founding statute, is immense. As has often been pointed out, UNESCO's role is often a catalytic one - it opens new avenues, in its areas of competence, by activities that inspire and encourage states, communities and individuals to undertake long-term action. Mr. Frederico Mayor, the Director-General of UNESCO, capsulized this thought when he said, "UNESCO's product is not bread, but yeast." Canada shares this point of view.

On behalf of my government, I am pleased to express a vote of confidence in UNESCO. We desire to play an active part in it. Mr. Perez de Cuellar, the UN Secretary-General, has described UNESCO as the brain of the entire United Nations system. I subscribe to this concept, which can be proven in every respect if one examines its major programs.

In the field of education, UNESCO is involved in the effort to eradicate illiteracy; it contributes toward the planning of education and the development of teachers, and

constructs and equips schools. It devotes considerable effort to promoting equal access to education for girls and women, the handicapped and the elderly, and to improving education in rural areas.

One of UNESCO's major educational tasks coincides with the priorities of our government and with those of the provincial and territorial governments. The United Nations General Assembly has declared 1990 to be International Literacy Year. Activities are being prepared by the provinces and territories throughout Canada to contribute concretely toward achieving the objectives of this event.

The strategies planned for this year are designed to increase public awareness, to improve existing programs and to encourage various partners, both existing and new, to plan and to introduce innovative projects to combat illiteracy.

In another area, UNESCO encourages the development of the natural and social sciences throughout the world, by supporting thousands of projects.

UNESCO is also involved in culture, an area of great importance to the Canadian government. An affirmation of cultural identity is essential to the international community. We must learn to share our cultural resources. UNESCO's intervention to preserve the historic sites in Venice, Athens and Carthage have benefited all of mankind.

UNESCO has also shown its ability to adapt to new realities. Mankind has now entered the era of global communication, a fact which UNESCO, like Canada, has been prompt to recognize. From experience Canada understands the crucial link that exists between communication and development, and places high priority on this relationship in its cooperation with the countries of the Third World.

Human rights is also an area of heavy involvement for UNESCO. I would first like to point out that UNESCO's human rights activities coincide with Canadian values in this regard. In fact, human rights is a subject that lies at the heart of Canadian democratic life. The issues arising from respect for and protection of fundamental rights and freedoms are woven into the very fabric of daily life in Canada.

By affirming its status of member state in UNESCO, Canada intends to help fulfill the vision of the organization shared by those who created it. Canada supports the Director General as he endeavours to reform the body. It was in this spirit that Canada offered its candidacy for the Executive Board at the next session of the General Conference.

As for Canada's role in UNESCO, Prime Minister Mulroney said that we have asked for internal reform, to be generated not from without, but from within.

I am now pleased to extend the warmest welcome from Canada to Dr. Breda Pavlic, who will be responsible for the UNESCO office in Quebec City, and to assure her of my government's support as she performs her duties.