



Statements and Speeches

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CANADA'S ROLE IN AFRICA

A Speech by the Honourable Charles Lapointe, Minister of State for External Relations, to the Canadian Institute of International Affairs, Ottawa, April 12, 1983

I am very pleased to be able to talk to you today about Canada's role in Africa. I have often noticed how closely African affairs are tied in with every aspect of our foreign policy.

This is not surprising, especially when one considers the future. Canada has close relations with the United States, Europe and Japan — the industrialized countries that are the greatest economic and political powers. It is also forming increasingly closer relations with the Third World — relations that are already having quite an effect on our economic and political interests. I would like to discuss the reasons why Canada is becoming more and more active on the African continent.

But let us first look at some basic information as it applies to Africa and Canada. Africa is a developing continent, in the strictest sense of the word. With an area of 30 million square kilometres, Africa is the depository of vast undeveloped natural resources. It will soon have a population of half a billion. The 50 countries that it comprises represent almost a third of the world's sovereign states. They form the majority of the Francophone countries and almost half the non-aligned movement. They are an important group in the Arabic and Islamic worlds and in the Commonwealth. With its great physical and human resources, Africa will of necessity be called upon to play an increasingly crucial role in world affairs.

Africa is also facing some serious problems. I am not referring only to the conflicts that are shaking the continent in Southern Africa, the Western Sahara or the Horn of Africa. Africa's main problems are those of development, and they exist in every domain. Most of its countries suffer from economic vulnerability, the fragility of their institutions and the social tensions related to these factors and to their cultural and ethnic diversity. But Africa is a developing continent, and although it contains many deprived countries, there are also centres of growth, dynamic regions and capable peoples and governments who, with courage and dignity, are successfully going about building their countries. When I think of Africa, I think of it as a first-rate partner for Canada.

What are Canada's basic economic and political realities? We have an economy centred both on development of our natural resources and diversified industrial production. With a relatively small domestic market, we are compelled to base our prosperity on foreign trade. This allows us to produce more and to sell our products,

but it also makes us dependent on the stability and dynamism of our foreign markets. Politically we have democratic institutions, one requirement of which is to meet the aspirations of a population whose interests, for geographical and cultural reasons, are very diversified. Among these aspirations is the desire of Canada's Francophones to form close ties with the Francophone countries of the world, thus forming a balance with our ties to the Commonwealth. Another is seen in the willing generosity of most Canadians to help relieve poverty and injustice in the world.

This glimpse at some facts about Canada and Africa will help us to better understand Canada's role in Africa. We are used to compromise and moderation in our domestic affairs, and we are trying to generate a similar climate in international affairs. The African countries are seeking to consolidate their autonomy in regard to the former colonial powers and to East-West rivalry, and they greatly appreciate our pragmatic, conciliatory attitude and the absence of any desire on our part to form a hegemony. The large number of African countries in all the international forums amply justifies our policy of rapprochement and co-operation with them.

Since Canada is an intermediate power, we feel that it is important to increase the effectiveness of international institutions whose goals are the protection of everyone's interests. The African countries are in the same situation. Because of these affinities and the influence of the African countries within the international organizations, it is to our advantage to work with them to help them to function better.

As an exporting country, Canada must constantly reinforce and diversify its markets in order to have economic growth. Africa, despite its economic weaknesses as a developing continent, has many dynamic markets that Canadian firms have penetrated considerably. I am of course thinking of Arab Africa, but also of a growing number of sub-Saharan countries like Nigeria, Cameroun, Ethiopia and others. There is so much to do in this part of the world, the needs for equipment and infrastructure are so great, that our companies will always find a market there. The African countries have close ties with Europe, and for this very reason are interested in diversifying their sources of supply and their outlets. They react favourably to offers from Canadian businessmen, when they are competitive, of course.

For humanitarian reasons, for political reasons that have to do with the stability of institutions, and for economic reasons connected with the stability of our markets, Canada is convinced that there can be no real security in the world without a greater measure of social and economic justice. In other words, we are dependent on each other for our prosperity, and this requires an attitude of solidarity on all sides. Canada thus plays an active part in the North-South dialogue, both at the political level and in the realm of development aid. The African countries see us as a serious partner that understands and shares their aspirations. Moreover, the African countries represent nearly half the countries in the Southern Hemisphere, and it is under-

standable that North-South questions should be prominent in our bilateral relations with them.

In sum, Canada is an important economic and political partner in Africa, and owing to our community of interests in the areas I have just mentioned, the Canadian presence is seen by the African countries to be mutually beneficial. Canada performs its role by way of programs, especially in development aid and trade. Both are complemented by a deepening political dialogue.

The development aid program is undoubtedly the most visible of all. Our African friends often tell us that our co-operation is second to none in terms of generosity and quality, and after visiting many of our projects, I know we have reason to be proud. Whether it be a dam in Tunisia, a technical school in Senegal, wheat in Tanzania, an aqueduct system in Ethiopia, a highway in Niger, or transmission lines in Egypt, not to mention dispensaries, wells and market gardens in hundreds of villages, Canada's activities contribute effectively toward improving the lives of Africans and providing their governments with tools for development.

Over the past 20 years, Canada has provided bilateral financing of over \$2 billion for development projects in Africa. Our present funding amounts to some \$300 million a year, to which must be added the amounts channelled through the international agencies and non-government organizations. Ever sensitive to the priority needs of the recipient countries, Canada, today, is placing emphasis on rural development, especially increased food production, an area in which we have recognized expertise, and on the training of human resources. Development is long-term work, but the results already achieved provide ample confirmation of the usefulness of our activities.

Canada has also succeeded in establishing solid and significant trade links with a growing number of African countries. In 1981 our exports to Africa were \$1.5 billion, and our imports over \$1.2 billion. As our businessmen come to learn about Africa and its equipment and machinery needs, our sales in goods and services are multiplying. Canadians are also investing more and more in joint stock companies with Africans. Today a considerable number of Canadian firms and consulting engineering companies are operating in Africa, where they have found a receptive and flourishing market, despite the distance and the keen competition from other countries. A continent under construction and a continent of the future, Africa is destined to become a privileged partner for Canada, thanks to the pioneer work done by all the businessmen whom I have often met while staying in various African countries.

The enthusiasm I feel when I think of what we have accomplished in Africa does not make me forget the difficulties we are finding in making our programs work there. For example, we are always looking for ways to improve the effectiveness of our development aid. Although our projects are being better planned and managed, and

are meeting our objectives, do we always choose those that best contribute to the advancement of the recipient countries? Are our aid credits in the various countries being distributed fairly and in accordance with our interests? How should we approach the question of recurring costs? The field of development aid is in a constant state of change. The same applies to our trade programs, in which our interests must be harmonized with the needs of countries and their capacity for indebtedness, while reconciling our policy as an exporting country with our North-South policies.

Political dialogue is another key aspect of Canada's role in Africa. It provides much of the framework for the orderly operation of our co-operation programs and the promotion of our commercial interests. Thus, during my visits, much time is spent reviewing our aid program and supporting the projects of the businessmen and women who go with me. But there is much more than this. I have already spoken of the obvious importance of Africa in Canadian policy concerning North-South questions and the strengthening of international institutions. Canada is equally engaged in various questions of security which directly affect the African continent: Namibia is a major example. Canada provides substantial aid to refugees and other victims of local conflicts. My meetings with African ministers and heads of state bring an essential dimension to the development of our policy, by allowing for a greater understanding of the problems and greater co-ordination in matters of common interest.

This dialogue, apart from its content, has an intrinsic value. The African countries value personal exchanges and are concerned with integrating political and economic aspects with their foreign relations. In forming closer political links with the African countries, we are learning much from them in the areas that interest us mutually, but we are also contributing towards strengthening the role of Africa on the international scene. I am convinced that in doing this, Canada is also contributing to the stability of African institutions, and I feel that our example is also helping them to further democratize their institutions and especially to enhance respect for human rights, which is one of the main elements of our foreign policy.

To summarize, let me say that Canada has decided to play an active part in Africa because it is in her interest to do so and because Canada has confidence in Africa. Thank you.

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