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SPEECH TO THE  
"ASSOCIATION DE LA  
PRESSE DIPLOMATIQUE"  
BY THE SECRETARY OF  
STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,  
FLORA MACDONALD,  
ON THE OCCASION OF  
HER OFFICIAL VISIT  
TO FRANCE,  
PARIS, DECEMBER 11, 1979

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Mr. President,

For me, it is a particular pleasure and honour to be able to speak to you today. As a politician I am always acutely aware of the important role that the senior members of the fourth estate play in the interpretation and indeed the conduct of public affairs. After all, we as members of the government may make our decisions, and even make speeches, but the way in which what we do and what we say is transmitted to the public lies largely in your hands. As a result, I want to be as frank in what I have to say as possible, so that you will be able to carry my message to your audience.

It is not by accident that this is the first official visit that I am making as the Secretary of State for External Affairs of Canada of the new government. Perhaps many would think that I would have first gone to Washington, in light of the very great importance that any Canadian Minister must put on the relations that we have with our closest and most important international partner. Nonetheless, I could not be more pleased that it is to France that my first official visit is being made. Our close and traditional ties make this a natural place for me to begin.

I want to take this opportunity to say a few words about the way in which the new Canadian government approaches its responsibilities in terms of foreign policy.

The foreign policy of any country is a combination of continuity and innovation. It could hardly be otherwise. The element of continuity is based on fundamental interests: on geography; on history; on the demands of security and economics; on fundamental national value. But the world, alas, does not stand still, and the way these basic interests are pursued must be constantly reviewed and adapted to the changing circumstances of the world in which we live. And of course today this is ever more important than previously, with the growing interdependence of the international community, the recognition of the concept of the global village, the stark fact of the impinging of international considerations on so many of the decisions that must be taken on domestic issues.

Any observer of the international scene must recognize that the realities of the politics of the world are greatly different now from what they were a decade or more ago. And it is to ensure that Canadian foreign policy is now and in the future relevant to the international realities that we have committed our government to a full review of our foreign policy. But that is not the only reason. Our government is absolutely committed to the concept of marshalling public support for the programmes that we espouse. We firmly believe that if any foreign policy is to be effective, it must command and maintain public support. That is why, without abdicating our responsibilities as a government, we intend to involve Canadians fully in the new imprint we intend to give to Canada's foreign policy.

This foreign policy review will be conducted through a parliamentary committee, which will be inviting submissions from private citizens and many organized groups within our society. They will hold hearings across the country and will invite the provinces to participate in the process. By mid-summer of next year we hope to have a report from that parliamentary committee for consideration by the government.

I do not want to anticipate the outcome of the review, but there is one point that I can make to you with complete confidence: Canada's relations with Europe, which have always been of central importance, will continue to be so. As a country whose soldiers have crossed the Atlantic in two succeeding generations, we know that our security is inseparable from that of Europe. As a major trading nation, we are bound to take account of the coalescent of the largest trading community anywhere in the world. And as a people whose roots are undeniably embedded in Europe we shall continue to attach great importance to our links with countries that have contributed so much to Canada's cultural heritage.

I want to assure you that the new government in Canada has no intention of withdrawing from our involvement with Europe specifically, or with the international community generally. We feel a strong responsibility to reassess our priorities in light of the dramatic changes that are occurring throughout the world, but we are determined to continue to play as large and as responsible a role as is appropriate to us on the stage of world affairs.

You are undoubtedly also interested in knowing what the recent change of government signifies for domestic Canadian policy; what differences of emphasis we shall be putting on the way in which the country operates at home. I want to speak specifically about federal-provincial relations.

Many of our domestic problems are, of course, similar to those faced by all countries in the developed world. Inflation, unemployment, rapid social change, and of increasing preoccupation, energy -- these are as familiar in France as in Canada. In addition, however, we have certain problems of governmental management that result from our constitution as a federal state that just do not apply in such a unitary country as France. And I must emphasize this difference in organization of government between our countries, because it is fundamental to a complete understanding of the Canadian political scene.

Even though the division of powers between the provinces and the federal government are laid down in our written constitution, the political reality is that our federation is characterized by perpetual evolution. At some periods in our history the powers of the provinces have been overshadowed by the imperatives of the responsibilities given to the federal government. At other times the rights and responsibilities of the provinces have, for a variety of reasons, been more vital to the current concerns of our nation.

Wax and wane though the influence of the provinces may have done both collectively and individually throughout our history, it has always been the role of the federal government to represent the interests of the Canadian collectivity both abroad and at home. The issue for any Canadian federal government is not whether it should represent those interests, but rather how it should go about fulfilling its mandate.

As politicians elected to the Parliament of Canada, my colleagues and I have a responsibility to see to it that the interests and overall well-being of Canadians are raised to the highest possible level, regardless of where they live. But unlike our counterparts elected to the Assembly in France, we must recognize that we share governmental power with the people elected to the legislatures of the provinces, who have a similar responsibility to foster the well-being of the people living in their regions.

Undoubtedly the major preoccupation in Canada today, as in many countries, is the question of energy. We happen to be in the fortunate position of being an energy-rich country -- one whose resources ensure that our overall needs can be met for the far foreseeable future. We are even able to export substantial quantities of energy in the form of uranium and natural gas. Our problem at the moment is oil. Our production is less than our current requirements, though we predict that in a decade non-conventional sources of oil from such resources as our tar sands will bring us complete self-sufficiency in that area as well.

Under our constitution natural resources are a provincial responsibility. This means that we as a federal government have had to undertake a long and often very difficult process of negotiation with the oil-producing provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan to develop a national oil policy that will recognize the interests of the people who live in the oil-rich regions of the country, and at the same time ensure that the whole country will have an adequate supply both now and over the long term. This job is no easier for us than for the previous government -- I think the distinction that can be made is the intense and sincere effort that we have made to find a resolution through a process of negotiation rather than through the unilateral use of federal powers without prior and careful consultation.

Another example is in our approach to Quebec, and its desire to maintain its linguistic and cultural position in North America. The present federal government recognizes the aspirations of the people of Quebec. It recognizes the responsibilities of the Government of Quebec. We want to help the people of Quebec to satisfy, within the framework of the Canadian federation, in every way we can, their desire to maintain and foster their own identity. In those fields which fall within federal responsibility, the government in Ottawa must speak for all Canadians, those from Quebec, from Newfoundland, or from the Territories. But when the people of Quebec express special needs arising from their own heritage and their deep-rooted sense of their own identity, the federal government cannot impose on the Quebec government a standard, or even a point of view, which would unnecessarily hinder their progress and the attainment of their objectives. Our constitution is comprehensive and flexible. If necessary, it is changeable. In domestic affairs as well as in international relations, we recognize the need for innovation. We believe more in co-operation than in confrontation.

In general, then, I would say that our government wishes to restore a climate of confidence with the provinces. We share with them the responsibility for governing Canada.

Mr. President, I don't want to intrude any further on your generosity. I am sure that there are a number of subjects that the distinguished members of the audience will want to discuss. May I thank you for the chance you have given me to say my bit -- perhaps we could now allow others a chance.