

Statement

Secretary of
State for
External Affairs



Déclaration

Secrétaire
d'État aux
Affaires
extérieures

90/27

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS BY
THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JOE CLARK,
AT THE
OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE
1990 CANADIAN INTERNATIONAL FUR FAIR MONTREAL

MONTREAL, QUEBEC

May 2, 1990.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to participate in the 1990 Canadian International Fur Fair, and to offer a special welcome to our guests from abroad who are here, in Montreal, today.

I want to express the gratitude of the Government of Canada for the efforts of the Fur Council of Canada in defending and promoting the Canadian fur industry.

One of the realities of the modern world is that foreign policy isn't foreign anymore. Actions countries take at home can have serious implications for their interests abroad. And developments abroad can have a crucial impact on the citizens of any country.

That reality is clear to Canadians. Our prosperity depends on trade with the world. That means we must be alert to changes in attitudes, changes in public opinion around the globe. One of those changes is the new priority which international consumers assign to respect for the natural environment. Increasingly, consumers are demanding that the products they buy not be damaging to the environment - either in terms of the effects of the products themselves or the processes which went into making them.

It is these two factors - the requirement to trade and the requirement to satisfy environmental concerns - that have presented your industry with its greatest challenge of recent years. There is nothing automatic about the success of the fur industry. Furs are fashion - and fashions change. The market has to be continually earned, and this takes hard work. Hard work by governments and hard work by the industry itself.

Very few industries are affected more by foreign events than the fur industry. Decisions in other countries pose a direct and serious threat to what you do. That threat is based on the sentiment in some parts of the world that your industry is inhumane and that it breaks the balance of nature. That argument has to be met through action and through persuasion. The arsenal of the opponents of the fur industry is based on emotion. We can't shout them down or declare war on those countries which are taking action against your industry. Nor can we convince consumers that they owe it to nature to continue to purchase furs. What is needed is rational argument and purposeful action to bring the industry more in line with public expectations.

That has been the strategy of the Canadian Government in Europe and elsewhere. In Great Britain, the Government of Canada mounted a major campaign to convince the British government that this industry is important to Canadians, particularly its trapping component. We told them that it is especially important to remote communities and often to lower-income groups, including native Canadians. We told them that the industry contributes over 100,000 jobs to the Canadian economy and generates \$600 million in business. We also told them that 50,000 aboriginal Canadians are involved in the fur business. We won that battle. And we won it through sensible argument, high level political action and persistence.

But this battle was replaced by another one - this time with the European Community. The European Community also attempted to label furs caught in leg-hold traps. The Government of Canada won that battle as well by agreeing to implement more humane trapping standards and methods by 1996.

But this was a temporary victory. There is a deadline in place. It is my view that the future health of this industry depends on a sincere and concerted effort to come to an agreement on these standards by 1996. Canada has an opportunity here and we intend to pursue it vigorously. We are the world leader in the research and development of humane trapping standards. We also chair Technical Committee 191 of the International Organization for Standardization. These activities and these institutions provide us with the raw material to move forward to meet the requirements posed by the 1996 challenge.

That effort is part of the broader battle. Those of you who market furs have an intimate dependence on those who harvest them. In terms of consumer attitudes, that relationship will become increasingly intimate in the years ahead. The success of the trapping industry in developing humane standards and practices of trapping will have a direct bearing on your ability to market the garments made from those furs. And the future success of both elements of the industry will depend on a broader effort to convince consumers and countries that trapping can be, in many ways, a singular example of sustainable development.

'Sustainable development' has become a rallying cry and a slogan around the world. It refers to a mutual respect for economics and the environment. Yet this is precisely the principle on which the trapping industry, at its best, has always operated. Trappers are the original conservationists. This is the fundamental reality we all have to make the critics understand.

What Canadians - and others abroad - must continue to be taught is that this is a living heritage. That tens of thousands of Northern Canadians, many of them disadvantaged rely on this renewable resource. That responsible trappers are responsible conservationists. That your industry is a working model of sustainable development.

Government and industry in Canada have co-operated successfully thus far in bringing this message home. The work of the Fur Institute of Canada has been critical to this effort. They and we have lobbied hard in London. We have lobbied hard together in Brussels. We have invited a key group of European Parliamentarians to Canada to show them how we trap in Canada and how important trapping is for the dignity of the indigenous peoples of Canada. Professionals have been hired to argue the case in terms which European understand. John Crosbie, as Minister of International Trade, has carried the case to Brussels personally. I have done the same in my meetings with Foreign Ministers on many occasions. The Prime Minister himself has been fully involved in our strategy. That strategy has worked. And we will continue to work hard in the future to ensure that this industry survives and thrives in a world where trade is more important than ever and where developments elsewhere can have such tremendous implications here at home.

I wish you a successful trade fair. I assure you of our continued commitment as a Government. And I look to you for advice and dedication to winning the hearts and minds of consumers whose beliefs will determine your success and ours in the future.