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STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

Statement by the
Right Honourable Joe Clark,
Secretary of State for External Affairs,
on Official Contacts with the PLO
and Self-determination

Canada

Ottawa, Ontario

March 30, 1989

I am announcing today the results of our review of recent developments in the Middle East relating to the Palestinian issue. We have come to certain conclusions in this matter, in accordance with the objectives which have guided successive Canadian governments over the years. The fundamental principles have long been

- support for the security, well-being and rights of Israel as a legitimate, independent state in the Middle East;
- support for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement based on Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories as enunciated in Security Council Resolution 242 of 1967;
- recognition that for there to be a just peace, the legitimate rights of the Palestinians must be realized, including their right to play a full part in determining their future;
- insistence that for the PLO to play a role in Middle East peace negotiations, it must accept Israel's right to exist within secure and recognized boundaries.

Over the past year and a half, developments in the Middle East have altered longstanding assumptions about the nature of the peace process. The intifada in the occupied territories has demonstrated that Palestinian nationalism is a reality that must be taken into account. King Hussein's withdrawal from Jordan's former responsibilities for the West Bank acknowledged this fact and served notice that Jordan would no longer speak for the Palestinians.

In recent months, constructive and helpful statements by the Palestine National Council and by Chairman Arafat have addressed some of the basic Canadian concerns about the position of the PLO. The PNC accepted Security Council Resolution 242 as a basis for a peace conference on the Middle East and disavowed the recourse to violence against civilians. In Stockholm and Geneva, the Chairman of the PLO explicitly recognized the State of Israel.

I welcomed the developments at the time. The PLO decisions and statements of recent months, declaring their recognition of the State of Israel and their readiness to find an accommodation with it, represent a revision of traditional PLO policy.

After careful consideration, we have concluded that the changes in PLO positions largely address the reservations Canada had expressed. Canadians naturally remain concerned about extreme elements associated with the PLO, but it is our view that a peaceful settlement requires the participation of the PLO and Canada wants to encourage that Organization to play a consistent and constructive role in the peace process. We have therefore decided to lift as of today our existing restrictions on contacts with representatives of the PLO.

This action will allow us to continue to encourage constructive actions by the PLO, and to suggest further measures, such as the amendment of obsolete rhetoric in the Palestine National Charter, that can contribute to the climate of confidence required for negotiations in good faith.

I want to take this occasion to reiterate that Canada does not recognize the Palestinian state proclaimed last November. However, the proclamation of a state does cast a different light on the question of Palestinian self-determination. Canada has long accepted the right and need for Palestinians to play a full part in negotiations to determine their future. We had been concerned that the phrase "self-determination" was being used as a code-word for an independent state, and that Canadian endorsement of the principle would be interpreted as Canadian advocacy of an independent state. That interpretation is no longer possible, because an independent state has been declared, and not recognized by Canada. That allows Canada to endorse the principle that the Palestinians have the right to self-determination in accordance with the International Human Rights Covenants. That must be exercised through peace negotiations in which the Palestinians play a full part.

Those negotiations may lead to an independent state, or to a federation with an existing state, or to some other result. We do not prejudge the results of those negotiations, but affirm the rights of Palestinians to participate fully and directly in that process.

I indicated to my Israeli counterpart, Foreign Minister Moshe Arens, when we met in Paris in January, that the Government of Canada strongly supports the early launching of a process of negotiations, which would require the participation of the PLO as the principal representative of the Palestinians.

The Canadian Ambassador to the United Nations, Mr. Yves Fortier, will meet with a representative of the PLO Mission to the United Nations. Other contacts will take place elsewhere as appropriate as part of the ongoing pursuit of Canadian foreign policy objectives.

We take these actions in the expectation that they will encourage the PLO to continue on the course indicated by its recent statements and actions and with the hope that ultimately this will help bring security to Israel.