

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY



STATEMENT DISCOURS

MINISTER
FOR
EXTERNAL
RELATIONS.

MINISTRE
DES
RELATIONS
EXTÉRIEURES.

85/68

Notes for remarks by
the Honourable
Monique Vézina,
Minister for External
Relations, on Canada
and UNESCO

House of Commons

November 18, 1985.

Mr. Speaker, forty years ago, Canada endorsed the founding of UNESCO. Why? To Canadians, the objectives of UNESCO, then as now, were of prime importance: it was created for the purpose of contributing to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations, through the educational, scientific and cultural relations of the peoples of the world, the objectives of international peace and of the common welfare established of mankind for which the United Nations organization was established and which its Charter proclaims.

Mr. Speaker, the reason why I am addressing this House today is to reiterate on behalf of the Government of Canada our faith in UNESCO and our desire to remain in it, now that the 23rd General Conference has come and gone. UNESCO's role is a unique and valuable one.

Please allow me to summarize activities in its mandate.

In education it fights illiteracy, trains teachers and educational personnel and builds schools. It strives to promote equal educational opportunity for girls and women, the handicapped and the elderly, and to improve education in rural areas. This is a work of primary importance that coincides with the priorities of the Government.

In science, UNESCO fosters the development of science and technology throughout the world. It is a promoter of science, supporting thousands of projects not by carrying out the projects itself, but by helping others to do them.

UNESCO also operates in the fundamental area of culture, which is also of great importance to the Canadian government. Affirmation of cultural identity is a must in the international community. We must learn to share our cultural wealth. UNESCO's interventions in Venice, Athens and Carthage to preserve historic sites were of benefit to all mankind.

Finally, UNESCO has also adapted to new roles. We have entered an era of global communications. Like Canada, UNESCO has been quick to recognize this. I trust that all Canadians feel justifiably proud of the pioneer work done in this field by Marshall McLuhan, one of our compatriots. In 1983 the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, in association with Teleglobe Canada, instituted a prize bearing the name of this great thinker. It is the world's highest distinction in the communications field.

As you can see, UNESCO, in undertaking the above activities, has become a modern complex international organization.

Mr. Speaker, the organization's membership over forty years has grown from 28 to 160. The majority of member states are developing countries many of them do not have the resources to plug into an international network for exchanging information and ideas in education, science, and culture. So, we are told by our friends from developing areas, UNESCO has an intrinsic value to them to protect their cultural identities, and to gain access to important information flows. UNESCO has been right in placing considerable emphasis on programs focussed on Third World activities. To that extent, Canada's support of UNESCO is an extension of our foreign aid programme, a role that is very much appreciated by Canada's friends in developing countries.

Mr. Speaker, six weeks ago UNESCO honoured one of our NGOs, The Canadian Organization for the Development of Education, which sends pencils, paper and books to the remotest areas of the world. I am pleased to point out that for many years this NGO has been supported by CIDA. I am equally pleased that there is a UNESCO to give recognition and encouragement to organizations like it.

Mr. Speaker, I have returned from Sofia with a determination to enhance cooperation between the Canadian International Development Agency and UNESCO, especially in small projects that cost virtually nothing but are a very valuable aid in development for the promotion of education, science and culture.

Mr. Speaker, in underscoring the special benefits which developing areas derive from their connection to UNESCO I in no way wish to underestimate the value to industrialized nation of this unique clearing house for ideas. UNESCO is important not only because it adds to the freer flow of information and ideas among peoples, but also because it contributes directly to the growth of knowledge during an era of increasing interdependence. UNESCO has a stabilizing influence on the world through this exchange. For example, through its publications, UNESCO is the largest publisher in the world, the values, aims, traditions of all societies are represented. Surely, this is an irreplaceable activity!

Mr. Speaker, as we all know, UNESCO has experienced some serious difficulties in recent years.

Canada has long maintained that 1985 is a make-or-break year for UNESCO, and that the 23rd General Conference of UNESCO is the most critical period within this time frame. The Conference has now ended, and what I wish to say to this House today is that the Government of Canada is pleased with the results. UNESCO has emerged with a renewed commitment to reform and with the image of an organization that knows what it means to accept responsibility.

As leader of the Canadian delegation in Sofia, I experienced first-hand the goodwill and moderation with which all member states approached this Conference and conducted its business. Canadian concerns on reform were widely shared. Member states want an effective UNESCO.

Why are we satisfied with the results? In a nutshell it is because our reasonable expectations for the outcome of the Conference were fulfilled in every area where we had demanded improvements over the past year and a half.

What was wrong with the organization so that its very survival was at issue?

Canada's diagnosis along with many other member states from all continent was that:

- it needed to more rigorously define its objectives and priorities;
- it badly needed to concentrate its activities, to weed out less crucial programs;
- its financial, administrative, managerial and other practices required refurbishment;
- it needed to reduce the level of political rhetoric.

Mr. Speaker, last spring's Executive Board -- of which Canada is an influential member -- laid the basis for a compressed and improved program to coincide with the concerns that I have just referred to. The program, the result of very difficult compromises negotiated during the past year, was made to fit within UNESCO's reduced budget ceiling -- required as a result of the USA withdrawal in 1984.

A 25% budget cut, as Honourable members will appreciate, is no easy task. UNESCO did this.

But this beginning can lead to revitalization and a reassertion of those core programs for which the organization was created. A now more modest UNESCO must try twice as hard to win over its sceptics over the coming two-year budget and beyond; and vigilance will still be the name of the game. All Member states, particularly major contributors, must maintain their pressure on UNESCO if the present progress is to be consolidated. It is in the interests of the long-term health of the whole UN system that the UNESCO reform experiment should continue. We must follow through on our commitment if the reforms are to work. It means a determined effort from within.

Canadians are interested in UNESCO. This measure of public opinion underscores the considerable goodwill in the general public towards organizations like UNESCO. I count on the innumerable non-governmental organizations, provincial and federal departments, which represent the many diverse constituencies for UNESCO activity in Canada, for continued support for this task. I will turn to the Canadian Commission for UNESCO especially to advise and to assist the Government in this painstaking endeavour. I will do this because there is perhaps no other country in the world which relies so heavily on its international links in all walks of life.

As I stated, Canadians feel an attachment to UNESCO. I might add that UNESCO feels an attachment to Canada, as attested to by the many compliments about Canada that I heard in Sofia.

One of the aspects of the UNESCO connection which I want to emphasize is the Commonwealth support for the institution, its aims, its rejuvenation, Commonwealth Heads of Government in Nafssau recently stated the value they placed in the reinvigoration of international organizations more generally. Armed with this, Commonwealth High Commissioners, including Canada's, wrote to UK Foreign Secretary Sir Geoffrey Howe on Friday November 15, 1985 to restate the value the Commonwealth places in the UK's membership in this valuable world body. They did this because Commonwealth members realize that many of the models institutionalized in our societies in the fields of education, science, and culture, are founded upon developments initiated by through international cooperation. UNESCO needs the wisdom of our British friends as well as from all of the peoples of the world.

The results of this General Conference are clear. We have examined these results against the Canadian position on reform. The Canadian Government is very pleased with the progress achieved to date in the reform of UNESCO. I can state emphatically that we will continue to work from within the organization for its reform. We will not abandon it. As the Prime Minister recently stated:

"We are not going to pull out of UNESCO. ... We have asked for internal reforms and we think they are coming. We want to bring about these reforms from within."

In short, Mr. Speaker, Canada, by remaining in UNESCO, intends to pursue the vision of those who created UNESCO.

It is clear that if no UNESCO existed, one would have to be invented.