

Statement

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STATEMENT BY

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JOE CLARK,

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,

IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

DURING AN EMERGENCY DEBATE ON THE SITUATION IN CHINA

OTTAWA

June 5, 1989.

Secretary of State  
for  
External Affairs

Secrétaire d'État  
aux  
Affaires extérieures

Canada

Mr. Speaker,

I know that all Members of this House, and indeed all Canadians, share with me a deeply-felt sense of horror and outrage at the events that have unfolded over the last few days in China.

We have watched a country's armed forces turn on its own citizens in an indiscriminate and brutal fashion. We have seen unarmed students and citizens gunned down and over-run by tanks. We have witnessed troops shooting from behind at fleeing crowds. We have heard of military units dealing summarily with even non-violent acts of resistance. Tiananmen Square, which has been the site of so many important historical events over the decades and centuries, now adds to its legacy one of the most tragic occurrences of modern China.

Mr. Speaker, the situation is evolving very rapidly. The latest news we have from our embassy in Beijing only minutes ago is that the violence started in the Chinese capital is spreading across the country. There is growing evidence that the military is at odds with itself and we have received reports that there is now fighting between various factions of the military. The appearance is one of military chaos. Those forces who unleashed the initial program of violence against the students in Tiananmen Square appear to have set in train a chain of violence that cannot now be easily contained.

How could this have happened? We had hoped and believed that China was on the road to extensive and fundamental reform. For eleven years the Chinese leadership has been pursuing a range of policies aimed at opening China up to the outside world. Hallmarks of this welcome reversal of earlier centralism and isolationism have been the decentralization of decision-making, the encouragement of private enterprise, and the welcoming of increased trade and economic exchanges with Canada and other western democracies.

During the past few years we have also seen welcome change on the political front, even if the depth of reform has been somewhat less than in economic areas. We have seen more freedom of the press, more freedom of speech, more freedom of association, less control on travel, more flexible policies on emigration, and even some tentative signs of willingness to accept legitimate political action expressed through vehicles other than the Communist Party.

Indeed, the last few weeks of political difficulty were in some ways a great signal of the strides China had seemed to have taken. Students in great numbers were tolerated in the non-violent expression of their desire for further change. Their cries for greater democracy, for the establishment of basic rights and freedoms appeared to be

getting through to the government, and we watched some of China's leaders express sympathy, understanding, and most importantly respect, for the objectives and intentions of the students. These were positive signs of a nation in the process of change, and many among us believed that China would somehow manage this pressure for such change by becoming more democratic, more open and more respectful of its own people.

When the tanks and the troops moved in Tiananmen Square on Saturday night it was clear that the forces of darkness and not of light had triumphed. It was clear that leaders who had urged restraint were being brushed aside. It was clear that the interests of a few were being placed ahead of the aspirations of the many. It is very much in part because of the great strides forward China has taken over the last decade that the events of the last few days are so tragic for China. And so tragic for those principles and freedoms which we hold dear and which we had thought were starting to find their proper place in Chinese political life as well.

Mr. Speaker, Canada's relations with China have been and continue to be important to us. In 1970, we were among the earliest of western countries to reestablish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic after almost two decades of isolation. Since that time our relationship has grown to the point where what happens in China is of very real and direct concern to Canadians from every part of this country and from every walk of life. Exchanges with China of scientists, students, cultural groups, and sporting teams have become common and have been welcomed by Canadians and Chinese alike. Canadian cities and provinces have become twinned with Chinese counterparts. We have talked with senior Chinese leaders how we can collectively address issues of common concern, be they regional disputes, protection of the environment, or ways to make the world's trading system more sensitive to the needs of both of our economies. Our trade has benefitted both economies, our development assistance program has served to increase China's ability to modernize and has additionally served to introduce the Chinese to Canadian ways of doing things. I believe very deeply that the breadth and intensity of our relationship with China has enriched both of our countries.

The extent of the friendship between Canadians and Chinese that has grown over the last decade makes the carnage in the streets of China's capital particularly sad and particularly difficult to accept without any response. As we examine what our response should be, however, we must remember that we will cherish our friendship with the Chinese people, that we are not going to become "anti-China", that our condemnation and our outrage should be focussed on the violent and aggressive actions that we cannot and will never condone and on those who initiated and encouraged those actions.

Mr. Speaker, as soon as the military strike against the civilians in Tiananmen Square became known to us on Saturday we made clear our abhorrence at the unnecessary and indiscriminate use of force being used against unarmed students and citizens. As the events unfolded and the extent of the violence and the killing became clear, we called on the Chinese Government in the strongest possible terms "to urgently and immediately take steps to stop the aggressive and senseless killing by its armed forces". Yesterday at noon I had the Chinese Ambassador called in to underline the seriousness with which we viewed the situation and to ensure that he passed to his authorities our call for a stop to the killing and the depth of our outrage.

We have not been alone in calling on the Chinese leadership to stop the carnage and to return to peaceful methods to resolve their political crisis. Most western governments, governments from around the world, even Communist parties in other countries, have joined in condemning the brutality of the methods chosen to clear Tiananmen Square and to crush all and every expression of dissent by the students and other civilians once the military action had begun.

Although we have not been asked, and indeed such a request may be unlikely, the Government remains ready to offer humanitarian assistance or medical supplies if needed.

In assessing the actions which should accompany our condemnation of the violence and the killings, we must bear in mind the need to safeguard Canadian lives as well as the need to build pressure on the Chinese Government.

At the time of the outbreak of violence, there were approximately six hundred Canadians resident in China, roughly half of whom were in Beijing. In addition, there were a number of business visitors and tourists scattered around the country. Our first concern, because of the violence, has been the security of those in the capital. As a precautionary measure in case of further military action against the universities, our embassy evacuated all Canadians from the city campuses, and is currently providing temporary accommodation to the seventy-five or so students affected. We are in constant contact with our Ambassador, Earl Drake, and we have contingency plans for the evacuation from Beijing for the students, other Canadians, and the staff of the Embassy should it prove advisable. We have put into place arrangements whereby aircraft can be made available to us at short notice for evacuating Canadians to nearby Asian cities, and onward transportation arrangements are being explored.

In fact, Mr. Speaker we have just decided to advise Canadians to leave Beijing now. Our Embassy will be assisting them in making their departure. I will of course keep the House advised if we decide to proceed with a complete evacuation.

With respect to bilateral actions that we might take in response to the crisis, we have already deferred or cancelled all events that were planned in the immediate future.

We have postponed the signing of a series of memoranda of understanding on development assistance projects which were to be signed later this week.

We have suspended nuclear cooperation consultations which were to proceed early next week and we will be taking similar action with respect to other scheduled negotiations and discussions. We are advising the provinces and non-governmental organizations with planned consultations with Chinese counterparts to follow suit.

Although there are no high-level visits in either direction planned for the coming few weeks, we would deflect such visits until a more appropriate time.

At the multilateral level, I have asked our Ambassador to the United Nations in New York to begin immediately consultations with other U.N. members, and with the Secretary General, means by which the moral suasion of the United Nations might be brought to bear to support the voices calling for moderation and restraint in China. Canada fully supports the statement issued by the Secretary General today calling for restraint.

With respect to the large numbers of Chinese students in Canada - I believe there are some forty-five hundred here at the moment - I am sure it is a most troublesome time. While we trust that before long the situation in China will no longer be repugnant to them, we understand their concerns. As my colleague, the Honourable Minister for Employment and Immigration announced earlier, we will be sympathetic to any requests for extending their stay until calm returns to their homeland.

My colleague has also taken steps to suspend, for at least a two month period, all removals to China under the terms of the Immigration Act.

Some countries have announced the suspension of programs of bilateral military cooperation and sales to China. Canada does not have any such formal arrangements, and has sold in the past only very small amounts of non-lethal equipment to the Chinese military. I can assure you, however, that the government would not grant export permits for military sales of any sort in the current situation. Furthermore, I have asked that the modest program of defence relations between the Canadian Armed Forces and the People's Liberation Army, which saw a visit to China last year of the Chief of Defence Staff, be suspended immediately.

Mr. Speaker, what is transpiring in China is tragedy of global proportions. Let us hope that the events of the coming weeks see China, and its great people, emerge without unnecessary bloodshed, and with a renewed commitment to fundamental rights and freedoms in an increasingly democratic country. I only wish that I could find greater cause for optimism at the moment.