



# Statements and Speeches

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## TOWARDS STRONGER TIES WITH AFRICA

Notes for an Address by the Honourable Monique Vézina, Minister for External Relations, to the Tenth General Assembly of the Dakar Club, Montreal, October 1, 1984.

I would like first to convey a warm and sincere welcome, on behalf of the government of Canada, to all the men and women who have come here from abroad, particularly those who are visiting our country for the first time. We are proud that the Dakar Club has chosen to meet in Canada, and we are particularly honoured to welcome to Montreal such eminent persons, many of them ministers, who are contributing their knowledge, expertise and prestige to the cause of development. It is a rare privilege for me, so soon after taking up my position, to speak to such a distinguished group.

The theme of your meetings, the development of agriculture and agribusiness on the African continent, is particularly timely because in our view it is at the heart of what we commonly call the "African economic crisis", a crisis on which the United Nations General Assembly will be deliberating during its current session.

I do not have to tell you the causes of that crisis. Besides the climatic catastrophes, there are the agricultural problems, indebtedness, unemployment, protectionism, some errors in orientation, and instability of prices for energy and basic products. You face those challenges every day, with the risk of losing in a few years the ground that has taken the last several decades to gain.

However, the economic aspect of this crisis does not affect only the developing countries, particularly the African continent. The industrialized countries have also been hard hit by it, and its effect is still being strongly felt today in our economies. Behind this recession, whose effects will be felt for a number of years yet, a profound transformation in the structure of the world economy is taking place. Old structures are crumbling, and we cannot yet tell what form will be taken by those structures that are to replace them. However, one thing is certain: besides the structural changes, there has been a change in our outlook — we have given up our utopian hope for continuous and unlimited material development.

To echo Paul Valéry, not only have we had to re-learn that civilizations are mortal, we are realizing once again that they are fallible, and that the path of progress is a zig-zag one, which does not always follow an upward curve.

I have become Minister for External Relations at a time when Canada is slowly recovering from this crisis, the most difficult one it has experienced in half a century. The challenge facing our government is a formidable one, not only for our domestic policy, but also for our foreign policy: besides resolving problems inherited from the past, we must seek new solutions to new problems.

Thus, as you might expect, I personally attach considerable importance to the question of the role of women in development. I am certain that the progress made in Canada can also be made in Africa. The question facing us is how to achieve that goal while respecting cultural and religious contexts that are different from those obtaining in the West, and without in the process denying the traditional importance of the role played by women, for example, in the commercial life of most African countries. For that purpose the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has set up a special branch to ensure that each of the Agency's programs will take into account the role of women in development, and I want to make certain that this concern will also prevail in our involvement in Africa.

Canada's presence in Africa is based on a number of principles that are useful to recall here.

- The first is to project our national identity abroad. This principle is applied through the ties we have made with the French-speaking nations and the Commonwealth countries.
- Furthermore, it has always been very important to Canadians that they express internationally the concept of social justice that motivates them within their country through a development assistance program designed to achieve a more equitable sharing of the world's wealth. The amounts Canadians contribute voluntarily to organizations involved in development bear eloquent testimony to this desire.
- Canada's economic health depends to a large extent on its exports. Our country's economy has been built through the vitality of its entrepreneurs and of its people, and Canada knows that a similar vitality exists in Africa. We intend to work to increase our economic relations with the African continent, knowing also that private investments and trading exchanges have just as much development potential as co-operation projects of the classical type.
- Finally, Canada intends to help maintain peace and security by contributing to the solution of certain questions either through direct participation, as in the discussions to settle the Namibian crisis, or through the United Nations (UN), for example by taking part in the peacekeeping forces sent a few years ago to the country that is now Zaire.

As the African countries gained their independence, Canada extended its network of embassies and high commissioner's offices. We now have these establishments in about 20 countries, where they are working to build close relations with each of the countries on the continent in accordance with the major objectives I have just outlined. Since those states have urgent needs in the area of their economic and social development, Canada's action was naturally concentrated first in that area, and we allocated to Africa approximately 40 per cent of our budget for bilateral co-operation, or about \$300 million a year. This sector is important; it is probably for each of you the most visible element in our day-to-day relations.

However, it should not be forgotten that this bilateral co-operation represents only 43 per cent of the budget Canada allocates to development assistance each year. Thus on the average, depending on the year, more than 40 per cent of our food aid and emergency assistance is also sent to Africa. The victims

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of the landslide in Morocco, the victims of famine in Uganda and Ethiopia, and the refugees in Zaire or Somalia are examples of people who have received such assistance from us.

Moreover, nearly half of CIDA's budget is allocated to multilateral assistance through UN agencies, bodies like the International Monetary Fund or various regional banks, not counting the various programs for French-speaking and Commonwealth countries. Africa also receives a large part of the money Canada pays directly to such international organizations as the International Monetary Fund and various regional banks. To those must be added the large number of non-governmental organizations that receive a major part of the funds for their projects directly from the Canadian government, not to mention those that conduct research on development questions. The International Development Research Centre works to adapt science and technology to the needs of the developing countries. Among the thousands of projects it has financed since it was founded in 1971, a large proportion has been connected with the agriculture and food sectors.

Given this range of tools and activities, and in the light of Canada's economic situation, I will not conceal from you the fact that the present government of Canada plans to review all its activities to see whether they can be made more effective.

It is with those facts in mind that I have taken up my mandate as Minister for External Relations. I assure you that it is my firm intention to do everything possible to further strengthen the ties between Canada and Africa. I and my Cabinet colleagues intend to make certain that the resources we deploy for that purpose will reflect the desires of our respective peoples and also be the most appropriate means of achieving those objectives. I am undertaking my duties without any preconceived notions; I am certain that in the coming months I will have the opportunity to review both the design and the choice of the main tools of our foreign policy respecting Africa.

To that end, there are a number of premises we are already aware of that are unlikely to change in the short or medium terms.

By that I mean, for example, the fact that the Canadian people as a whole have always been, and continue to be, favourably inclined towards development assistance programs, while wanting to be certain that the assistance is truly going to those who need it and that the projects are cost-beneficial in terms of development, in the social sense of the term.

Secondly, bilateral relations always develop according to a certain cultural affinity. Our attraction for Africa is certainly based in part on the fact that we share a common trait: the same "mother countries". Our membership in the Commonwealth has certainly taught us to understand English-speaking Africa better; the French language and culture have brought us closer to Francophone Africa, and have led us to play an important role in the Agency for Cultural and Technical Co-operation. In addition, we feel that it is in our own interest to project Canada's bicultural character abroad.

Thirdly, along with bilateral relations, Canadians attach considerable importance to the multilateral institutions. The Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr Clark, stated that fact again when speaking

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to the UN; he suggested a number of ways to make that world organization more effective. Besides the UN, the Commonwealth and the French-speaking countries I have just been talking about contribute in many ways to the strengthening and diversification of our relations with Africa. I will not take the time to list all the multilateral institutions in which we are active members, but it is a fact that Canada could not have developed without them.

Fourthly, Canada is facing a number of constraints that it must take into account to be realistic in its action. There are budget constraints, to begin with; these oblige us to concentrate our efforts both in terms of the number of countries where we can claim to be working effectively and in terms of the fields in which this activity is being carried on, which are those in which we have acquired abilities that are acknowledged world-wide. Unlike other countries that are more populous or have gained a greater understanding of the Third World countries over the centuries, Canada does not yet have enough managers with the experience needed to direct projects implemented in geographical, cultural and economic contexts different from our own. That is why we want to give increasing importance to non-governmental organizations, some of which have staff members who have had the experience of spending large parts of their lives in Africa, Asia or Latin America.

Fifthly, in the last few years Canadian business people have shown a growing interest in doing business on the African continent. Of course the figures are still modest, but the trend is significant. Consider, for example, that over the five-year period from 1978 to 1982 the volume of both our exports and our imports has tripled, and that Algeria, for instance, is now one of our major trading partners on a world scale. We are hoping that this new trend will grow in the coming years.

Finally, regional peace and stability are essential conditions for economic and trade development. When requested, Canada will continue to assist in solving the great conflicts that arise on the continent. Similarly, the Canadian people attach considerable importance to the question of human rights, the fate of the refugees and the dignity of the person; Canadian foreign policy will necessarily be inspired by those values, whatever the location or the circumstances.

As I said earlier, I am assuming my responsibilities, and in a sense the study of relations between Africa and Canada, with an open mind. However, on the basis of the facts I have just listed, a certain outline is already evident. I can assure you that development problems will always be among our government's top priorities. My colleague Mr Wilson confirmed at the recent Commonwealth Finance Ministers' Conference in Toronto that Canada is maintaining its objective to allocate 0.7 per cent of its gross national product to development programs until 1990. However, changes may prove necessary in the means our government employs to make the tools available to us more effective.

In the coming months, I intend to visit some countries to see at firsthand the effects of this economic crisis that is particularly affecting the African countries and to discuss with some governments how Canada could play a more effective role in this area, and in all areas involved in close international relations. I will find out about the work and conclusions of groups like this one, and I will not hesitate to discuss frankly what share and what responsibility each bears in building a better world. You may rest assured that in this endeavour I will devote all my energy to improving all our programs in the mutual interest of Africa and Canada....

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