



Statements and Speeches

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REVIEW OF CANADA'S ROLE IN LA FRANCOPHONIE

A Speech by the Honourable Pierre De Bané, Minister of Regional Economic Expansion, Ottawa, June 15, 1981

...Canada has played a basic role and continues to be at the forefront of the creation, support and implementation of...co-operation and dialogue among the peoples and nations which make up the international francophone community. Canada has acted and continues to act jointly and simultaneously both multilaterally and bilaterally with all these countries which share the French language as a means of communication.

This expression of closer ties, co-operation and mutual assistance required in a world of complex and interdependent relationships in all its human and technical aspects has led to the creation on the international level of many intergovernmental institutions, of which the most important is the Agency for Cultural and Technical Co-operation, without forgetting the annual conference of ministers of education and that of the ministers of youth and sports, as well as to the creation of non-governmental organizations and associations which are also very active in the international francophone movement.

The Canadian government has been very active within the francophone community from its very beginnings. It has played a major role in the creation and development of its many institutions since the 1960s. The development of the French fact in Canada and its extension externally has been a profound motivation for Canadian involvement. The extension of Canadian bilingualism on an international level and the participation of Canada in the international French-speaking community are a fundamental and permanent element of its foreign policy. The existence and vitality of French-language Canadians provide a means and an opportunity to develop relationships and bonds of solidarity and co-operation with many countries in Europe, Africa, the Near East, Oceania, North America and Asia, which for a diversity of historical reasons and to various degrees, use French as their language of communication. The same can be said about the opportunities for fruitful contacts and exchanges with a great many countries throughout these same continents which, like the English-speaking community of Canada, speak the language of Shakespeare. It seems to me that for a young and dynamic country, Canada is placed in an exceptional situation by having what could be described as natural bonds of understanding with more than half the countries of the world.

In this context, we have established a network of bilateral diplomatic representation with all French-speaking countries. We have developed with them an important program of co-operation for development purposes. We have initiated a political dialogue on major international issues and we have finally become members of all multilateral French-speaking organizations.

In fact, the central government is not solely responsible for this effort at creating closer ties. This concerns all Canadians and indeed benefits all Canadians, since the Commonwealth implies the Canadian population as a whole. While Quebec naturally became interested in the French-speaking community very early, the federal government on the other hand has tried to urge the governments of the other provinces with large French-speaking populations to also play an active role in this regard. For instance, representatives from the four provinces, Ontario, New Brunswick, Manitoba and, of course, Quebec were part of the Canadian delegation to the conference that established in 1970 the Agency for Cultural and Technical Co-operation. The major centre of French language and culture in Canada, the province of Quebec, in agreement with the Canadian government, has held from the start a special place in the governmental francophonie, through its status of participating government.

**Provinces
participation
status**

In December 1977, New Brunswick, as a 42 per cent French-speaking province, applied to the Canadian government for that same status of participating government. What exactly is involved by the participating government status? That status allows the Quebec government and the New Brunswick government to participate on their own behalf, but within the Canadian delegation, in the Agency's activities and programs. That status allows them to have a seat and an identification plate at the discussion table, with the right to speak. It allows them to communicate directly with the Agency on matters involving program planning. These two governments contribute financially to the Agency's budget. Their contributions, also identified, are computed as a fraction of the Canadian contribution of which they are an integral part.

That type of status, developed by the Canadian government is absolutely unique. Nowhere else in the world is to be found a similar arrangement, under which the federal government grants to the government of one of its provinces or federated states a special status to participate on its own behalf in an international or regional organization. This is to be found nowhere else in the world, and I suggest it is the most perfect example of the flexibility of the federal government to allow provincial governments, within their own fields of jurisdiction and to the extent compatible with Canada's foreign policy, to fully participate in international organizations.

Information and consultation mechanisms have been established between two participating governments and the national government to ensure active and genuine participation from the three governments, while ensuring united Canadian action within the community of the Agency's members.

Canada is involved in all of the Agency's programs, with a view to maintaining a balance between cultural and technological activities. To that end, in 1975 Canada proposed the establishment of the Special Development Program, or SDP for short, patterned after the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation. Financed through voluntary contributions, the SDP reviews and carries out modest technical assistance programs geared to the needs expressed by any ACTC member, especially in the fields of education, training, research, agriculture, health and social communications. By establishing the SDP Canada wanted to revitalize the ACTC and turn it into a concrete instrument of solidarity to complement more significant bilateral

and multilateral aids.

North/South
relations

I might even say that in the 12 months I have been acting as adviser to the Prime Minister and to the Secretary of State for External Affairs on relations with French-speaking countries, a number of them told me that their interest in the Agency is directly related to that aspect of co-operation at the social, technical and economic levels, and a great many of them would be much less interested if the Agency were to restrict its activities solely to the defence and the renown of the French language. That is another way of saying that Canada was right to insist that the Agency be also directly involved in socio-economic co-operation in addition to its cultural vocation. Very recently the Agency has become the site for sectorial ministerial meetings. The first of those meetings was held in Luxembourg in 1977 for ministers of science and technology. The second took place in September 1980 in Paris, where justice ministers gathered and there I acted as representative of the Canadian government; similarly, there was a conference of agriculture ministers in March 1981 and I had the opportunity to attend as spokesman for my colleague who holds that portfolio. The ministers for cultural affairs will get together in Cotonou this coming September. Other ministerial meetings are scheduled for 1982 and the following years. Slowly but surely the ACTC is getting to be the foremost and privileged centre for French-speaking communities. One of the objectives of the Canadian government is to have the Agency regroup, under various forms, most of the activities of international French-speaking communities.

However, when we speak of international French-speaking communities we must be very careful not to see today's reality solely through the prism of language. Many of my counterparts whom I had the honour to meet during my various trips, and a great number of the participating countries which are full members of the Agency, told me that on several occasions. Several of those countries have barely 2 or 3 per cent of their people who speak French. It would therefore be a serious mistake to try to look at reality solely through the prism of language. To the extent that language will help us to communicate and draw closer together, we will extend, enrich and deepen those relations which should be developed and bear fruit in all areas.

On the other hand, it must be kept in mind that the international French-speaking community emerged from various private French-speaking associations, some of which go back to some 40 years. Most of them had a professional basis, such as the *Association internationale des parlementaires de langue française* (AIPLF), of which I have been appointed delegate for the Americas, or *l'Institut de droit d'expression française* (IDEF), which will hold its fourteenth convention in Montreal in September following the joint invitation of my colleague, the Minister of Justice of Canada, and the Quebec Minister of Justice. Others regrouped according to their common goals such as AUPELF, the Association of Partly or Fully Francophone Universities, which is to hold its convention both in Quebec City and Ottawa in September of this year, or CIRTEF, the International Council of Francophone Radio and Television Stations, which was created in 1978 at the suggestion of the Canadian government. CIRTEF comprises most of the francophone radio and television stations in the world.

The government of Canada of course provides financial assistance to a large number

of these organizations which are either Canada-inspired or include a major Canada participation. At a time when co-operation among the people and cultures of the world is ever increasing, the importance of non-government international organizations is also increasing, and our financial contributions are a tangible encouragement to various Canadian groups actively involved in international activities.

While this new form of multilateral co-operation was developing, Canada was therefore establishing diplomatic relations with all the francophone countries, and slowly but surely we have set in motion a program of co-operation which, I hope, will be in full swing very soon. So will it be with all exchanges at every level, whether commercial, economic, social or cultural, and to crown this effort at *rapprochement* based on a better knowledge of and co-operation with these various countries, it will surely be possible eventually to consider jointly with these countries means of bringing about a *rapprochement* in the world and ensure peace on earth.

Objectives

What are in fact the goals we are pursuing in our bilateral relations with these countries, especially African countries to which I feel particularly attracted? Our first goal is obvious: Canada seeks to affirm and show its French personality as well as its sincere interest in the cultural development and enrichment which we are likely to get from contacts with others. Needless to say, Canada as a whole should be involved in this undertaking. Our second goal is also clear: to help these countries which are among the neediest in the world. It is both our duty and our responsibility within the world community.

The third objective is to promote Canada's interests in major areas tied up with political, social economic and commercial elements. Therefore we must establish with these countries relationships that will be as extensive and varied as possible. As adviser to the Prime Minister and to the Secretary of State for External Affairs for relations with French-speaking countries, it is a pleasure for me to give you some detailed information regarding the state of our relations with these francophone countries and prospects for the future.

On behalf of the Secretary of State, I have already been on official business to France, Belgium and above all to a great many countries of Africa. Last January, for instance, I went on official business as Canada representative to express our goodwill and intentions of co-operation to four countries in the Sahel, namely Mali, Upper Volta, Niger and the Ivory Coast. I just returned last week from an official visit to Guinea and Gabon.

I can tell you about all the admiration and esteem that these countries feel for Canada and the Canadian people. Everywhere, no matter in which countries I had the honour to represent my fellow citizens, there was a tremendous expression of sympathy for Canada because all these countries acknowledged that neither by tradition nor by inclination were we interested in creating a sphere of influence, we wanted simply to express in a concrete manner our feeling of solidarity towards mankind. Canadian aid which amounts at present to about \$150 million a year just for Francophone Africa is appreciated because, as I just stated, it is given with no ulterior motives and it meets needs and priorities as defined by the governments with which we enjoy close relation-

ships. Canadian aid, which is administered by highly capable Canadian representatives and experts, is considered to be very effective in all those countries. Besides this bilateral aid, Canada contributes substantially to multilateral and regional organizations operating in Africa. For instance, for a long time Canada was the greatest contributor to African development funding and I think that today we rank second or third with regard to our contributions to the entire African continent.

Friendly
relations

I must also add that our relations with those countries have been open and friendly. Everywhere I have been, like my predecessors, I have had open and constructive discussions with local officials. Canada's advice and support are sought and solicited everywhere. The meetings that I have had with each head of state of those friendly nations (and only last week I spoke with President Sekou Toure of Guinea and President Omar Bingu of Gabon), show that our relations are diversified and that we are aware of all the latest problems. Guinea is reaching out for Canada while at the same time Canada, through this African state, is widening its audience in Africa. My meeting with the President of Guinea marked the first official visit by a Canadian minister since the country became independent in 1958. I saw that the President of Guinea is considered, not only in his own country but also throughout the continent and the Islamic world as a great leader who was able to forge a nation in his country, where private Canadian interests have been represented for many years. He was kind enough to grant me four meetings with him and we discussed various current issues. I also met with the President of Gabon, and of course all the signs of friendship which were expressed were not directed to me personally but to the Canadian people as a whole.

There exists between Canada and the French-speaking countries, both at the bilateral and the multilateral levels, common grounds for co-operation and understanding. In this world which is divided in rich and poor nations, industrialized and developing countries, along a North/South or an East/West axis, Canada is in a good position to effect a *rapprochement* between both sides, and to define, with those countries, the means to help achieve harmony and make development a success. The trips of the Prime Minister as well as my own trips have convinced me that we stand to gain in every way from building closer ties with French-speaking countries like Canada.

In closing I should like to emphasize that many Canadians, missionaries, volunteers, businessmen, have worked and invested everywhere throughout the francophone world....

I intend to pursue my work especially in Africa. I urge my friends, ministers and members to go there and concretely foster ties that are not only dear to us but, let us admit it, useful in every way. I have had the opportunity to discuss topics which are of common interest to ourselves and our African hosts in a very positive way, such as the United Nations, the law of the sea, disarmament, trade, peace in the world, first and foremost on African soil, because Canada is implementing a policy of co-operation, mutual aid, assistance and friendship with those countries, in short, one of concrete political presence. We must strengthen our role in support for and contribution to the international francophone world and our co-operation with all the countries involved. Every part of Canada will be the richer for it.

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