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Notes for a speech by the
Honourable Monique Vézina,
Minister for External
Relations, to the African
Chamber of Commerce and
Industry of Canada

OTTAWA

May 1, 1985

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished Guests and Dear Friends:

I was very pleased to accept the invitation from the African Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Canada to meet with you today.

Shortly after assuming my duties as Canada's Minister for External Relations, I had the honour of being asked to address the meeting of the Club de Dakar in Montreal. As Minister in a new Government with an overwhelming mandate for change, I looked forward to my new responsibilities. After eight months, it is time now to reflect on what has been achieved.

I shall attempt to view this question on a number of levels.

- To begin with, I should like to focus on our activities as a government.

- Secondly, with all the reservations necessitated by the fact that we are now reviewing our foreign policy, I shall discuss the state of our relations with Africa.

- Thirdly, I wish to inform you of the new spirit that I intend to impart to our programs of cooperation, mainly with Africa.

- Finally, since this is our reason for being here, I shall talk to you about our trade relations and the way in which I would like to see them develop.

1 - The Activities of the Mulroney Government

It is a challenge to try to tell you in a few words the meaning of our activities as a government. What I want you to know is that eight months after being elected, our determination as a government set our public administration in order is still unshakeable. The Prime Minister said at the Regina Conference that governments can no longer take the approach of always doing more: they must do better. And, he added, sometimes better means doing less.

The Prime Minister truly captured the essence of what occurred on September four when he said «Government must not necessarily do more, it must do better; and sometimes better means doing less».

This insight from the Prime Minister is very indicative of the spirit of September 4 and of the profound development that Canadian society has undergone. In the early '60s, we placed high hopes in the State and Government as ways of achieving our collective goals. This stage of development was a necessary one. Every society worthy of the name must use government as an instrument for its development.

However, by the end of the '70s, Canadian men and women found that their government had gone too far in this direction and had unduly multiplied the government services, Crown Corporations and regulatory bodies. They found that the government had taken an attitude of condescension toward groups, academic, research and business circles and social intervenors. Finally, they saw that the situation of our public finances might well be a very severe handicap for the coming generation.

The mandate that we have received from the Canadian people is to correct this trajectory, and we are determined to do so.

2 - Relations Between Canada and Africa

This leads me to the question of Canada's relations with the African countries.

I am aware of the extent to which a government with the intentions that I have just referred to can create uncertainty in the international community, especially in the countries of the south, and in international business circles.

Let me give you a figure that should allay such fears. Early in March I chaired the Canadian delegation to the United Nations Conference on the emergency situation in Africa. I announced that the Canadian government would during the current fiscal year spend more than \$850 million in the aggregate.

The firmness of my Government's commitment to Africa is beyond question. And the remarkable display of generosity displayed by Canadians when the extent of the African famine became clear, underlines this eloquently. We have realized, as a nation, that our future is tied to yours.

Thus it is clear that the substantial relations that already exist between Canada and the African countries are there to stay. We have some significant links with the Commonwealth and the international Francophone institutions. We also attach much importance to the links that our citizens, our businessmen, our government officials, union people, development workers and academics have created and fostered over the years.

Canada has not and will not ever concede, regardless of setbacks and problems in certain African nations, its fundamental belief in the continent's future. We believe that through their own initiatives, African countries will one day achieve their enormous economic potential.

Unfortunately, in the past this potential has often been either ignored or ill used. The World Bank has observed that the main reason for the African economic crisis is the low yield from capital investments. (As I said earlier, this is not just in Africa). The Bank has suggested some internal policy reforms. Two of its recommendations are especially important, namely, better management of the public sector and a greater role for the private sector and non-government organizations. Another encouraging sign is that the Lagos Action Plan for the Economic Development of Africa has drawn attention to the necessity of involving the public sector, local businesses, research establishments and community groups in all aspects of development planning. Clearly this development scenario is based on a determination to see the situation improve.

This supreme effort that every country, including ours, must make from time to time gives me a sense of confidence. It convinces me that as a government we are right in giving a high priority to our cooperative programs, because we can explain to the Canadian public these efforts made by the African countries.

In fact, I think the future of the African continent lies in the new thinking that is evident, and the new initiatives that are being undertaken. I want Canadians to know that many African Governments have taken difficult, even courageous, decisions - to raise crop prices, to reform Government agencies, to decentralize control and pay more attention to smallholder agriculture. This new realism - this willingness to look at problems objectively and to put aside some long-time preoccupations - will help reverse the present predicament certain African nations face.

3 - Directions Taken by the Cooperation Program

I have dealt with this question more than once in recent months, and I will look at it very briefly today.

As I said at the meeting of the Dakar Club, our objective is to make our activities as efficient as possible. To do this, we wish to establish between all the Canadian participants active on the international scene a new partnership built on dialogue and cooperativeness. Without using any rhetoric, we have truly succeeded in achieving this partnership with the voluntary organizations in our response to the African food crisis.

In like fashion, we as a government are placing high hope in the review of our foreign policy that will soon begin when a green paper is tabled in the House of Commons. By thus putting our cards on the table, so to speak, we are really inviting all the people and organizations with an interest in the international scene to take part in this process. The Members of Parliament will play an important part. I hope that you will contribute toward this review by presenting and actively defending your ideas before this Parliamentary Committee.

Concerning our relations with Canadian businessmen, a priority group with us, I have already indicated that in terms of development potential, there are many business projects that do not have to take a back seat to the conventional type of aid project. The spirit of initiative combined with cooperativeness are the wellsprings of our country's dynamism.

You are no doubt aware of the CIDA program of industrial cooperation. It was created for Canadian businesses wishing to examine the possibilities of industrial cooperation involving a transfer of technology to the developing countries and for developing countries wishing to obtain the participation of Canada's private sector in the development of their economy. The success of this program has been such that project proposals for this year number 1,500, compared with 54 in 1977-78. Even last November, a significant reallocation of funds increased the budget of this program by 50%.

I am presently reviewing a number of new proposals designed to strengthen the linkages between CIDA and the business community. If successful, these changes will make more accessible information on existing and emerging business opportunities. They would also enhance the responsiveness of the Industrial Cooperation Program by making it more flexible.

4 - Canada's Trade Relations with Africa

Finally, allow me to talk to you about our trade relations with Africa.

The African continent offers significant opportunities for Canadian suppliers of goods and services to contribute to the ambitious development plans of many countries in this region. Although Canada's economic and commercial involvement in Africa is a fairly recent phenomenon, our trade with Africa rose from \$880 million in 1974 to more than \$2.7 billion in 1984. Our exports for the same period rose from \$403 million to \$1.5 billion, not counting the more than \$250 million worth of services provided annually.

Canada will enhance its efforts to expand trade activities in Africa. We will continue providing assistance to our exporters, and will continue supporting initiatives which help to create an environment suitable for and conducive to trade in African countries themselves. Over the next twelve months, the Department of External Affairs will organize a number of incoming and outgoing missions to support Canadian trade interests in Africa. There will be missions in the railway, hydraulic equipment and services sector. There will also be two undertaken in the agricultural equipment sector and numerous others. Moreover, our presence will also be felt at several trade fairs: the Nairobi and Kaduna shows; the Gabon and Kinshasa international fairs. And finally, two Canada trade weeks will be held in Abidjan and in Douala.

The balance of trade between Canada and Africa is heavily weighted in Canada's favour. Our African partners often express a desire to see it evened out. I do not feel that this problem is insoluble. For example, a study is presently being conducted on ways in which an agency such as CIDA might support Canadian companies looking for national partners in the Third World in whose companies they might obtain shares.

I also invite our African partners to make an effort to convince Canadians that they have something to offer. The Canadian government will help them, as we will shortly be doing for Cameroon in the economic days, when about sixty Cameroonian businessmen and government officials, along with five ministers, will visit Ottawa, Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal to publicize their country and to seek intensified trade relations. A few months ago we received a delegation of Tunisian exporters, and our Algerian friends will visit us this fall.

I invite Canadian exporters, thus, to make a serious effort to help their African clients penetrate Canadian markets. And at the same time, I invite Canadian investors to believe in Africa, to establish enterprises there, to help Africa prosper. When trade is a two-way street, the mutual benefits are enormous.

Allow me also to draw your attention to the special edition of Marchés Tropicaux et méditerranéens on Canada and Africa. This special edition gives eloquent expression to the policies, ideas and skills that we are talking about. I heartily congratulate Mr. Pierre Bonnefont, who is here today.

In conclusion, let me again refer to words spoken by our Prime Minister, who in Regina said that a willingness to consult and work with the provinces, the unions and business is not a sign of weakness; on the contrary, it is a test of

strength par excellence. I would add to this that cooperation between countries is far too important and complex to be left up to governments alone.

The invitation is open for you to take on a key role in the development of our international relations with Africa. The government is determined to support you. I trust that you will not hesitate to accept the challenge.

I thank you.