



# Statements and Speeches

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## CANADA AND LA FRANCOPHONIE

Speech by the Right Honourable Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Prime Minister, to the Agency for Cultural and Technical Co-operation, Paris, November 10, 1982.

For over half a century there has been in the minds of men and women of good will among the peoples represented here a noble vision of all the world's francophone countries working together on behalf of peace and the welfare of humanity. They have envisaged a privileged form of co-operation among those groups in the world whose language is French. They have envisaged the formation of closer ties based on and furthered by this bond of language, and guided toward objectives of development and progress.

Fortunately for us, this worthy ambition has been carried beyond the visionary stage. Over the years, men and women of action have arisen and have shared it with a growing number of their contemporaries. Their enthusiasm was first ignited among some professional and scientific groups, after which it spread to the institutions of higher learning and finally to the echelons of parliament and government.

The Agency for Cultural and Technical Co-operation, under whose auspices we are assembled today, is the latest incarnation and one of the essential elements of this same idea, which is now known as La Francophonie internationale.

I readily accepted your invitation because the French language, which is spoken by some six million Canadians almost throughout Canada, is an integral part of Canadian life, and because internationally, the Agency is a major instrument of Canada's francophone policy.

**La  
Francophonie  
internationale**

I now wish to talk to you about the general theme of La Francophonie internationale — its nature, its mission and its dimensions, about the work that has been started and that which remains to be done. I will then go on to discuss how we Canadians perceive the Agency's role in carrying out this great project that is so near to our hearts.

In the opening session of your first ordinary conference, held in Canada in 1971, I unequivocally stated that La Francophonie was a thing of the future, not of the past. Today my viewpoint has remained unchanged. The pioneers of our great project were motivated not by nostalgia, but by a vision. We would do them a great injustice if we were to dwell on the past, either by condemning it or by wishing we could turn back the clock.

But it would be an even worse injustice if we were to reduce the scope of a project

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that from its origins embraced all the francophone communities throughout the world and all the countries in which they were found, regardless of whether they were entirely or partly French-speaking, provided that French played an important role in them. In this respect we are near the goal. Despite a few setbacks in our efforts to bring everybody together, despite some unfavourable circumstances and some misconceptions that are still preventing some francophone countries from joining us, we must not lose sight of our initial objective of universality. From a historical viewpoint, the setbacks that we have suffered so far are negligible. We are still at the very beginning of the adventure. Reality has its constraints that cannot be ignored, but I am sure that time will become our ally, provided that our will and our resolution remain equal to our design. What we are building is not a scale model; we want the real thing.

**Two basic realities**

We will also remain faithful to the concepts of unity and diversity inspired by the originators of this project. They have to do with two basic realities – the community of language on the one hand, and the extreme diversity that characterizes all the francophone countries on the other. La Francophonie internationale transcends regional, ideological, ethnic, religious, cultural and economic barriers; it is represented on many continents; it exists apart from all the groupings of states that so strongly characterize the international scene today. We do not need to complain about this, nor to act as if these differences did not exist between us, or even less to launch into some absurd endeavour to make us all the same. On the contrary, we are aware of the richness that lies within this diversity. In it we see a challenge that we accept with enthusiasm, convinced that in working to meet it, we shall release useful energy which today is held captive by ignorance and distrust, and we shall find treasures we did not know existed.

Our ambition is to initiate a free dialogue between partners who are quite different from one another but who are all equal as individuals, and to set up direct exchanges without intermediaries – not even interpreters – between non-aligned and aligned states, between former colonial powers and former colonies, between representatives of very diverse cultures with their beginnings, centuries apart from one another, between nations in Africa, Europe, America and Asia, between members of the Arab League and members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and between developing countries and industrial countries.

**A unique entity**

In the divided world in which we live, this ambition alone should be sufficient to mobilize those of us who wish to bring people together. We cannot remain indifferent to anything that contributes to unity or that builds bridges between peoples. Although much ground must still be covered, the francophone community is a unique entity and an eminently favourable influence which can bring about the cohesiveness we are all seeking and the co-operation that must exist if there is to be harmony among nations. Founded on undeniable natural affinities, on mutual respect and negotiation, the francophone community is not an intruder amidst the institutions that have

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preceded it. It is a member of regional organizations and of the United Nations, but it does not duplicate the work of any. It has a position and characteristics of its own; it is important for the world that it exist, that it develop and that it expand.

Like all the other groups that I have referred to, the francophone community must also find its way in the world as it exists, without side-stepping any of the problems that it poses.

North-South issues are inevitably involved in the relationships between francophone countries. If there exists a natural solidarity between us, and we feel that there is, it must be channeled into a sustained effort to help those that are deprived through common action to promote a more equitable and more humane international economic order. There can be no solidarity without mutual assistance and no brotherhood without a desire to do away with the inequalities that divide us. To neglect this essential aspect of daily reality would be to divest the very concept of La Francophonie internationale of all its significance.

Some will feel that such a statement is imprudent, in view of the present economic crisis that is aggravating the problems of the poor countries and hindering the industrialized countries in their efforts at international co-operation. But the crisis is no excuse for inaction. On the contrary, it underscores the interdependence that unites us and the urgent need for a common effort, because it brings out the powerlessness of the North and of the South to overcome without each other the economic stagnation that is paralyzing both.

**Common  
undertaking**

Finally, within the concept of La Francophonie that we envisage, all the major international questions should be approached at the highest level. Let the only condition be that the francophone community one day provide its full, original and important contribution to solving the world's problems, be they problems of war and peace, East-West or North-South relations, temporary crises, long-term planning, or collective security and disarmament.

Here again, we should not restrict our ambitions or our activities to a few arbitrarily chosen sectors. For the time being, we are putting up with the limitations that reality imposes, but we still feel that regular multilateral consultations open to all sovereign francophone countries and embracing international problems as a whole will soon be seen to be the necessary political completion of our common undertaking.

What would the purpose of bringing together our artists, our technicians, our academics and our scientists unless the political leaders of the francophone countries were assembled at the top level to complete the structure? In La Francophonie internationale there must be a place where various viewpoints can intersect and from which the common political desire of the participating countries can radiate. Without this, there would be continued complaints about a lack of political leadership because

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no organ of self-determination and self-expression could be created.

Is our vision too broad when we say that La Francophonie must be complete in every respect and must reach its full potential as an influence on the world scene? I don't think so. In any case, we are following in the footsteps of the Senghors and the Bourguibas. And this is a response to the recent invitation of President Mitterrand, who in Rwanda said: "I would be very pleased if you introduced me as an architect of La Francophonie." France, which has always been present in our midst, is not accustomed to withdrawing from a challenge, even a formidable one, although it might take little interest in something mediocre.

#### Achievements

But let us now change our tone from one of speculation about the future to a consideration of the present reality, from grandiose projects to some very concrete achievements, that have already occurred. In the vast but specific area that its founders assigned to it, the Agency has been working for 12 years. I first want to consider how far we have come and to congratulate all those who have contributed to the important work of cultural and technical co-operation over these 12 years. From experience I can say that when you're involved in something, it is not easy to objectively gauge successes and failures, progress and setbacks. When all you have ahead of you is the goal and it seems to be getting farther and farther away, you run the risk of minimizing what you have already accomplished and of seeing as insurmountable the obstacles that crop up in the path ahead.

When viewed from the outside, it is clear that the Agency has come a long way. It has become an important place of assembly and reflection. It has given a start to many new projects. It has often spearheaded urgent activities in teaching and other fields, among countries requiring assistance. It has been responsible for establishing thousands of contacts among the young people of its member countries and has contributed toward their education. Through it hundreds of young and not so young people have become involved in specific international co-operation activities. It is not afraid to ask questions about itself and its role. This is a sign of health and is the best protection against stagnation.

Does the Agency receive criticism? Probably. But today what international organization is immune to the skepticism of the restless age in which we live? It is typical of our time that all the multilateral institutions are subject to the most bitter criticism. Perhaps it is paradoxically because the need for them has never been more obvious and because people expect them to do the impossible.

When questions are asked about the Agency, as one might expect after ten years of operation, it is the duty of all its member states and participating or associate governments to reply. I shall attempt to do so here in all modesty and with good will.

*First of all, considering its role, I will make a few observations that I hope will be useful.*

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Am I going to talk about the debate that we are hearing rumours about, between those who would like to emphasize only the cultural aspect, and others who would bypass the cultural and concentrate only on the technical? No. I do not feel that this is a valid issue. From the very beginning of the Agency, we have always considered these two functions to be complementary, and I personally would take exception to pitting one against the other. I even find it futile to try to say which half of this twofold mandate is more important than the other. It is obvious that in practice, no cultural undertaking is conceivable today without the technical facilities required to support it. Likewise any activity in the technical field that is severed from its cultural inspiration would be senseless.

The Cotonou conference, held under the auspices of the Agency from October 28 to 30 last, and the UNESCO conference held last summer in Mexico, both concluded that culture is a fundamental aspect of the developmental process. It was even suggested that cultural identity might constitute the motive and the primary mobilizing force of all initiatives taken within human societies. No closer relationship could be established between the cultural and the technical.

**Agency goals**

Having said this, what objectives do we feel the Agency should concentrate its activities on in the coming years?

There is one need that is self-evident and that is already being pursued by the Agency. I am referring to cultural promotion. Let me be more specific: given the extreme diversity of the international francophone community, there is a need to promote all the cultures that coexist within it, whether they use French or some other language as their mode of expression.

The international language common to us is a valuable instrument that is so flexible yet so precise that it opens the way for all kinds of inter-cultural exchanges, be they literary, scientific or philosophical. It also gives us hope for the day when all the world's francophones will be conscious of belonging not only to a given people or a given country, but to a vast and prestigious fraternal community whose resources they share.

It is obvious that our francophone communities, many of which still exist in relative isolation, have a pressing need to communicate with one another, to put an end to their solitude, to pool their resources, to receive and to give. It is equally obvious that every form of cultural progress takes its sustenance from contacts and comparisons, and from confrontations too. Finally, it is a fact that the free circulation of ideas, of cultural property, of persons, of artists and of scientists is a condition essential to the success of any such undertaking.

**Canada pledges help**

It is with this view that Canada is prepared to make available to its partners in La Francophonie the considerable knowledge, experience and technical resources that

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it has acquired through its vocation as a bilingual country. Wishing to serve with fairness its French-speaking population in Quebec and outside it, and to harmoniously blend North American culture and the French language, Canada realizes that it is in a privileged position to help other multicultural countries to adapt the French language to suit their needs. But it is the Agency that must plot an original course suited to La Francophonie in this area.

This cannot be accomplished overnight. It is a work that will require much patience and reflexion. It cannot be improvised. It will require extensive consultation, careful identification of the needs, an order of priorities, and goals limited in number but attainable in their entirety with the means available to us. Nothing would be achieved by a helter-skelter approach. But this is unfortunately a danger that threatens all cultural undertakings, given the immense scope of the field itself.

**Under-  
development**

The second objective that I wish to discuss is the immense area of underdevelopment in all its forms, including cultural underdevelopment. Combating underdevelopment involves so much and the needs are so great that the Agency will find no difficulty finding a place for this cause, provided that it very carefully determines in advance the role that it can play.

You might ask yourselves, for example, whether you should concentrate on the use of computerization, through which so many pressing needs can be met and which is a factor in all areas of development, including cultural enrichment. Or should the emphasis be on the field of information?

Under the present circumstances and for some time to come, it is obvious that the Agency will not have the resources that the large organizations now working within the international community have. However, it could rank with any of them in terms of quality, efficiency and adaptation of activities to specific needs. This is the objective that I propose.

Imaginativeness, innovation and a careful approach can compensate for modest resources. This seems to be the route that we should take. It is not an easy one, but it has the great advantage of being within our reach.

**Committee  
of five**

From this point of view, the idea of a committee of eminent men, which your Secretary-General and I discussed in Canada, seems to be highly appropriate. Now that it has completed its first decade, it is fitting that an organization like ours should concern itself with getting its second wind, taking a look beyond its daily activities and mustering its forces before launching into a new phase. The input from the studies and recommendations of a few individuals selected for this purpose might be very useful.

If I may be permitted to think aloud, I would say, speaking only for myself, that

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this committee should consist of five outstanding men whose dedication to La Francophonie would be proven beyond question by a distinguished record of services rendered in the upper echelons of their respective countries and on the international scene. Their immediate task would be to think of ways in which to provide conditions for the Agency's full development. But it would be advisable, I feel, to ask them to consider La Francophonie internationale as such, in order to better situate the role of the Agency within it. This might shed new light on the Agency's objectives and might help to achieve them, thus giving La Francophonie its full and universal dimension.

The Agency for Cultural and Technical Co-operation is the cornerstone of the structure we wish to build for La Francophonie. It is important to us all that it perform its role in an exemplary way, that its activities in the fields of key importance in which it is involved inspire the architects and craftsmen working on other parts of the project. For it is a vast project that we are dealing with. And all who have a part in it must prove collectively that the originators of La Francophonie were right in setting their sights high.