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STATEMENT MADE IN THE
HOUSE OF COMMONS BY THE
HONOURABLE ALLAN J. MACEachEN,
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

THE FIFTH UNITED NATIONS CONGRESS
ON CRIME PREVENTION

I have advised the Secretary-General of the United Nations that Canada does not wish to proceed with the Fifth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders this year. I have sought the Secretary-General's cooperation in obtaining a postponement of the Congress and he has undertaken to study the situation in order to clarify his position. In the Government's view, this Congress cannot be held successfully anywhere this year.

Honourable Members will recall that at the Fourth Congress held in Kyoto, in 1970, the Government of Canada, in consultation with the Province of Ontario, proposed that the venue of the next congress be Toronto, in September of 1975. This proposal was accepted by delegations and subsequently confirmed by the General Assembly. Since that time, however, there has been a steady deterioration of the atmosphere in which international conferences are held. I need hardly mention the discord which marred the Sixth Special Session and the last regular Session of the General Assembly, the recent conferences of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and of the International Labour Organization (ILO) as well as the International Women's Year Conference in Mexico, a few weeks ago.

Whereas a minimum of cooperation is essential to any progress in the international field, we have witnessed lately excessive confrontation on issues that were not related to the subject matter of conferences. The ingredients are well-known: racialism in Southern Africa, the Middle East conflict, producer-consumer relations and the full range of economic development problems subsumed under calls for a "New World Economic Order". Canada believes that these are very real and difficult problems which must be dealt with urgently, in the appropriate international institutions, before they poison the body politic of the United Nations family; and let there be no doubt that we consider it necessary and desirable that political factors take their proper place even in the most technical of conferences. But they must meet some test of relevance, and in recent U.N. conferences this has clearly not been the case.

Honourable Members are well aware that in respect of the Toronto Congress on Crime Prevention, which was to take place next September, one of these issues had already become paramount. It arose from the resolution adopted in November 1974 by the General Assembly, with Canada dissenting, inviting the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) to attend its sessions as a permanent observer and, in a similar capacity, conferences convened under the auspices of the General Assembly or other organs of the U.N. Accordingly, the Government of Canada was informed by the United Nations Secretariat

some time ago that observers from the PLO had been invited to attend the Fifth Congress on Crime Prevention and that the Canadian authorities were expected to allow entry, sojourn and exit to these participants.

Needless to say, it is with reluctance that the Government has decided to seek postponement of the Congress, but we concluded that it would not be possible, in present circumstances, to hold a successful congress on crime prevention in Canada or anywhere else.

We are all aware of the public outcry for or against the admission to Canada, for this congress, of observers from the Palestinian Liberation Organization. We have all been worried by its divisive effect upon Canadian public opinion. We could not ignore the risk of public disorders. These factors would have led any government to reconsider a decision to host an international conference. But in the final analysis, two factors dominated in our discussions. The first was the inevitable intrusion of unrelated political considerations into the proceedings of the Congress. The second was the re-escalation of violence in the Middle East and the consequent spread of its bitterness into Canada and subsequently into the Congress itself.

It is obvious that such intrusion of the Middle East conflict, by adding to the already hopeless confusion between civil crimes and acts of war, would distort and

subvert the purposes of what has essentially been up to now, and should remain, a technical meeting of experts from all countries, striving to develop international cooperation in a field of vital importance to the rule of law and to public order everywhere. As host country, we felt that Canada had assumed a major responsibility for the success of this Congress; and in such an unfavourable political climate, we did not see how we would possibly carry out our responsibility. I should add that we were also concerned about the coincidence of the Congress with the Seventh Special Session of the General Assembly on Development and International Economic Cooperation, since the contentious atmosphere of one would in all likelihood seep into the other.

However, after an extensive review of the Government's domestic and international obligations, we decided to inform the Secretary-General of the United Nations that we did not want to be relieved of the responsibility for holding this Congress, but rather wished to postpone it. We did not want to withdraw our invitation to the United Nations; and we tried to avoid any steps which might have called into question our long-standing commitment to the principles of the United Nations. I emphasize that Canada's willingness to participate in and contribute to the operations of United Nations agencies remains undiminished.

The respite obtained by postponement must be effectively used by all to bring about sufficient improvement

in attendant political conditions so that we may have reasonable assurances that technical conferences such as the Fifth U.N. Congress on Crime Prevention will be useful and productive. We hope that current negotiations for the reduction of tensions between some of the parties to the Middle East conflict will prove successful in coming months; and we will actively support the continuing efforts of the parties directly involved and of the United States Government toward that goal.

Furthermore, the next General Assembly of the United Nations will provide an opportunity to affirm the principle of universality, as a fulfilment of what ought to be a basic aim of the United Nations. More specifically, we will resist any attempt to exclude Israel or any other country from the proceedings of the General Assembly. Acceptance of this principle would guarantee the status of Israel within the community of nations, and thus remove one cause of instability in the area.

So that in requesting the postponement of the Congress, Canada is not shirking its responsibilities but actually taking on new ones. Through new initiatives, both bilateral and multilateral, the Government will try to improve the political situation in the Middle East and in the U.N., notably through our participation in the next session of the General Assembly, which may be crucial for the future of the organization, given the fundamental character of the issues on which debates are expected to focus. Canada will consult

with other interested countries on the ground rules governing technical discussions in U.N. arenas. Either independently or in cooperation with others, we will attempt to formulate and seek support for an effective resolution in the General Assembly on this question.

I also intend to accept during the autumn outstanding invitations to visit a number of countries in the Middle East. These visits, which the Government already considered most useful for strengthening our relations with this region of the world, have taken a new urgency following the difficulties we encountered in holding the U.N. Congress on Crime Prevention. The House can be assured that I will take this opportunity to solicit the views of my hosts on these difficulties and seek their support for the United Nations as a universal forum and an effective international instrument.

Honourable Members should note that our decision to seek the postponement of the Congress, for the reasons stated, is consistent with the policy of the Government on the Middle East. We will continue to cultivate, as we have done in the past, friendly and cooperative relations with all states in the region and to attach great importance to the development of these relations. Likewise, Canada has tried in the past to maintain a balanced and objective approach to the Middle East conflict and will continue to do so. We have always supported and defended the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace with its neighbours,

behind secure and recognized borders. We have stated our conviction that no peaceful and stable solution to this regional conflict can be found without the participation of the Palestinians and the just settlement of their claims. We have condemned the use of violence as a political instrument or as a means of retribution. We have participated in all U.N. peacekeeping and ceasefire supervision missions in the Middle East and contributed to the United Nations' relief operations for Palestinian refugees. We have advocated and continue to advocate the full implementation of Security Council Resolution 242. All of this therefore continues to be Government policy.

We are confident that the initiatives to be taken by Canada and other countries on the future of the United Nations and the Middle East will lead to a different atmosphere, in which the postponed Fifth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders can be held in Canada, at a time to be decided upon, with sufficient assurances of success. It was agreed with the Secretary-General of the United Nations that we should consult further on this question and I expect to be in touch with him later this week.