

Statement

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Discours

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Address

by the Right Honourable Joe Clark,
Secretary of State for External Affairs,
at a luncheon given by
the United Nations Environment Program

NAIROBI, KENYA

January 30, 1988.

Secretary of State
for
External Affairs

Secrétaire d'État
aux
Affaires extérieures

Canada

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Kenya, I am told, has a unique vantage. In a world of rapid change, where the future appears to become more and more uncertain, it is the place from which to draw near, again and again, to the cradle of humankind. From here it is possible to gaze back in time, to retrace the journey and measure past evolution, and to find inspiration to take on today's global problems.

I am in Kenya, principally, to consult with His Excellency President Moi and with Foreign Minister Onyonka. Their advice has been very helpful in preparing me for meetings that begin Monday on the Commonwealth actions against apartheid. I am glad as well for the opportunity to talk with you today about what Canada is doing to protect both our very large share of the world's environment and to encourage you in your efforts to advance environmental concerns in Kenya and globally.

I particularly appreciated the opportunity for a long conversation with President Moi at Eldoret. His experience and judgement are very helpful in understanding how to deal with major challenges facing Africa and the world.

President Moi was among the Commonwealth Heads of Government whose meeting in Vancouver adopted a plan of action on South Africa, and created a Committee of Foreign Ministers to give impetus to the issue. I have the honour to chair that committee whose first meeting begins Monday in Lusaka.

The Committee will concentrate on four major areas. We will seek to ensure that the Commonwealth strategy of pressuring South Africa to make fundamental changes is reinforced through the widening, tightening and intensification of sanctions. We will continue to encourage a more comprehensive response by the international community to the desperate plight of South Africa's neighbours. We intend to reach into South Africa, to increase support for the victims of apartheid, by efforts to encourage dialogue with and among the opponents of apartheid, and by means to counteract the powerful weapon of South African propaganda and censorship. Finally, we will look for ways to ensure that South Africa complies with Security Council Resolution 435, and grants Namibia its long overdue independence.

Canada is active in the world by choice, by history and by necessity. We take individual initiatives on a range of issues - from establishing our control of our northern waters, to offering our hard-earned expertise in the design of peace-keeping arrangements in Central America. But we have

learned that nations act most effectively in concert, and are active supporters of multilateral organizations and initiatives. That has been demonstrated dramatically this year, when Canada hosted the summits of la Francophonie and the Commonwealth last fall, and will preside over the Economic Summit of the seven major industrial democracies in June in Toronto. So we are committed multilateralists. We are particularly convinced of the importance of United Nations agencies - they allow us to attack together problems which are too large for any one country to resolve alone. Too often their work is taken for granted.

The work of the World Health Organization has eradicated smallpox. Perhaps as a result, it has become the focal point of the global response to the Aids pandemic.

UNICEF, working with the World Health Organization, has set 1990 as the target to achieve universal immunization against the six major child-killing diseases; measles, diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, polio and tuberculosis.

The UN provides auspices for peacekeeping where otherwise none might exist. Canada alone has 834 persons deployed in these peacekeeping forces under UN auspices, and another 131 Canadians in the Sinai Multinational Force.

The UN has been the catalyst of world awareness of the particular problems facing this continent. A year and a half ago, the Secretary General appointed Canada's representative at the UN, Stephen Lewis, as his Special Advisor for Africa. Ambassador Lewis has taken up the promotion of African interests with enthusiasm and vigor, while also being an eloquent advocate of the continent on matters such as humanitarian and emergency assistance, the serious economic problems that Africa is facing, and the major issues of structural adjustment and their social implications.

Because the United Nations is so important, it must be effective. In December 1986, with full Canadian encouragement, the General Assembly adopted the reform recommendations presented by an expert group chaired by the Norwegian Ambassador. The Committee on Program Coordination has been re-structured to deal better with UN management and budget issues. ECOSOC has begun rationalizing relations among the approximately 150 bodies which report to it. Old prejudices have finally been broken by the appointment of outstanding women to positions as Deputy Secretary General. Action has been taken to cut expenditures. For example, two-thirds of the targets for personnel reductions have been achieved.

Nairobi is a key city in this process of revitalizing the UN. The historic Women's Conference held here in 1985 produced the landmark "Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for Women to the Year 2000". Since that conference, women's issues have been one of the few consensus items on the UN agenda.

Nairobi is the headquarters of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (HABITAT) which grew out of the Vancouver Conference of 1976. The very nature of its work and projects exemplifies the central importance of environment.

Nairobi's importance will grow because the UN Environment Programme is also headquartered here. Sixteen years ago, at the time of the Stockholm Conference, some observers may have considered the environment as merely a fashionable issue. Today we know that environmental issues are central and urgent - as important as arms control, as challenging as the eradication of disease. UNEP has been central to an awakening global consciousness, not only of the importance of environmental concerns, but of their impact on every decision we take and on its consequences.

Actions we began innocently have had implications no-one thought to anticipate. A wide use of chlorofluorocarbons threatens to destroy the ozone layer. One molecule of chlorine set free can destroy thousands of molecules of ozone. As the ozone layer, which affords protection from the sun's ultraviolet rays, gradually disappears, the dangers to aquatic life, the risk of skin cancers and the prospects of reduced crop yields all increase. The warming of the globe's climate, accelerated by the enormous volume of pollutants discharged into the air, increase the risk that fertile agricultural areas may be turned into arid zones. With receding polar icecaps and alarmingly higher sea levels, shorelines may disappear. Great cities like San Francisco and Mombasa could be at risk.

In the name of economic development, the rate of extinction of plant and animal life is increasing. Tropical rainforests contain, at a minimum, half of all the earth's species. Yet, present trends of forest destruction are estimated to spell extinction for 750,000 species in the next twelve years. The 2000 tropical forest plants identified as having cancer-fighting potential are among the species the world might irreversibly lose.

These are genuine world problems. But they are national problems too.

In terms of land mass, Canada is the second largest country in the world. Perhaps because we are thinly populated, we are perceived by others as having an environment that is pristine. Yet, pollution is now found in our Arctic. 300,000 Canadian lakes are vulnerable to our most important environmental problem, acid rain, and 14,000 lakes have already been acidified. Acid rain from the United States is threatening our apple and maple trees, each producers of important agricultural earnings.

The breeding grounds of northern caribou are threatened by resource development. Beluga whales in the Gulf of St. Lawrence are endangered by the flow of pollutants, including toxic chemicals, from the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes river system. The food supply of the loon, one of the symbols of the Canadian wilderness, is affected by acid rain.

The protection of the environment is a top priority for the Government of Canada. For example, the Canadian Parliament in the coming months will be dealing with an environmental protection act which is to be one of the strongest in the western hemisphere. The Act will increase the power of the Federal Government to protect the environment, impose tough penalties on polluters and introduce life-cycle management of toxic chemicals. We have recently adopted a new water policy which recognizes the value of this essential resource and provides a framework to manage it in an environmentally sound manner.

We recognize the value of preserving significant wilderness areas in Canada. That is why we created a park last year in the magnificent archipelago off the west coast of British Columbia known as South Moresby. Often described as the Canadian Galapagos, it harbors species of flora and fauna unique in the world and it contains some of the last virgin rainforests on the North American continent.

The care for the protection of the environment extends to our foreign policy. We are devoting special attention to a proper follow-up of the Brundtland Report, not only in the UN but in all international organizations to which Canada belongs: the OECD, UNEP and others. We are particularly concerned about global climate change, and will be very active in developing a comprehensive multilateral treaty on a law of the atmosphere.

Canada is committed to increasing the share of its development assistance dedicated to environmental protection. Environmental concerns are now a priority for the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and we will

continue to press multilateral development banks to devote more attention to environmental concerns in the design and implementation of projects.

The Brundtland Commission was another major milestone. As a result of its efforts, we now have a far greater understanding of "sustainable development", and a strategy that we must apply to achieve it, nationally and internationally. The focus must be on structural changes needed to integrate environmental and economic decisions both in government and in business. Brundtland's advocacy of the involvement of an informed public should spur such integration - and it certainly justifies the UNEP's existence.

We cannot let the momentum of the Brundtland Commission stall.

It may seem odd to have come to Africa to talk of caribou and acid rain, but the interdependence between the environmental and mankind's activity knows no regional or continental bounds. Cattle raising techniques in Southern Africa and in East Africa threaten wildlife habitat. The overuse of fertilizers by farmers in western countries threatens to poison the water table and thus the long-term arability of the land. Deforestation in Africa is contributing at an alarming rate to soil erosion and desertification. Lakes I flew over yesterday, near Nakuru, bear witness to this phenomenon.

A world-wide consciousness must be developed and maintained. The United Nations is essential to that task. Canada wants to restate its priority and commitment to the environment as an issue, and to the United Nations as an instrument.