

Statement

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**NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS BY
THE HONOURABLE CHRISTINE STEWART,
SECRETARY OF STATE (LATIN AMERICA AND AFRICA)
TO THE 49TH SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**NEW YORK, New York
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Mr. President:

We live in a shrinking global community where our interests are increasingly interwoven and our hopes for the future more and more dependent on one another. For this reason, Canada has from the outset welcomed the idea of an ambitious Agenda for Development. We agree with the Secretary-General that development is the "most pressing challenge of our time." We need a fresh framework for international co-operation for economic and social development, one that puts aside past rivalries and builds on shared values. If we are to be successful in forging this new vision, one of those shared values must be respect for human rights.

Development Vision and Framework for Co-operation

We can support much of the two parts of the Agenda presented by the Secretary-General. We agree that peace, the economy, social justice, environmental protection and democracy constitute central pillars of development. Solid building blocks for this new view of development are emerging from a series of important global conferences. The vision is a human-centred one, which sees development as being about the sustainable improvement of human well-being through the removal of hunger, disease, and ignorance, and through the productive participation in society by all.

On the threshold of the 21st century, we have come to understand that social and economic development are two sides of the same coin, that our real purpose is not simply economic growth, but human well-being. The United Nations has a particular role to play in fostering the integration of social and economic considerations, just as it does in underscoring the interconnection between development and peace.

The eradication of mass poverty must be a central goal of a renewed framework for international co-operation. As suggested by the Secretary-General, this framework would recognize the centrality of appropriate national policies to foster development. These include respect for human rights, systems of democratic and accountable governance, the full participation of women, and an enabling environment for civil society and the private sector. I refer, not only to values, but even more to the process. We therefore welcome the recognition within the UN not only of the vital role of civil society, but also of the importance of engaging it in the formulation of new policies.

A supportive international environment is clearly also required. It must pay particular attention to the needs of the poorest, while also recognizing the diversity among developing countries. An open and rules-based trading system is one of the key features of a supportive international environment. This is why we firmly believe in the need for the full and effective implementation of the agreements reached through the Uruguay Round. This is the

best way to ensure the access to global market opportunities that the Secretary-General rightly calls for.

Some of the poorest countries continue to struggle with unmanageable debt burdens. Canada fully agrees with the Secretary-General that more substantial measures need to be taken to reduce the debt load of severely indebted countries that adopt appropriate policy reforms. We also need to ensure that development programs reach people who need them. For its part, Canada is committed to providing 25 per cent of our ODA [Official Development Assistance] to basic human needs.

Canadian Reform Priority

The report of the Secretary-General makes important suggestions on broad approaches; there is also a need to be specific on priorities for the UN itself and on internal reorientation. The Agenda for Development is a vehicle for providing inspiration and a framework for the international community as a whole, as well as a blueprint for the UN role. The UN cannot successfully tackle every important issue. The challenge is to ensure that the value of the UN contribution represents more than its small share of financial flows.

Last month, the Canadian Prime Minister, Jean Chrétien, reiterated that Canadian involvement in the UN is a cornerstone of our foreign policy. The very importance we attach to the organization gives us cause to seek accelerated reform in its economic and social sectors.

The Canadian government is itself currently conducting a foreign policy review. The parameters for that review are dictated by available means, the interests of Canadians and relevance. What this means is that we will, in future, need to be more tough-minded about the choices we make. Our resources are limited, as are those of the UN. We must rethink the roles and mandates of all our multilateral institutions, including those of the Bretton Woods. These questions will be taken up at the next G-7 Economic Summit to be held in Halifax, Canada. We want to work on an urgent basis with the UN community as well, because these issues should be debated as widely as possible at every level concerned. The relevance of certain institutions must also be rethought and a real solution must be found to the problem of duplication, including in relation to the specialized agencies.

This is not to suggest that we are oblivious to the progress that has been made in recent years in promoting stronger coherence and direction. At the same time, it is increasingly clear to us that specific reform measures need to be situated in an understanding of the core functions and comparative advantages of the UN.

Comparative Advantages of the UN

Drawing on its universality, neutrality and physical presence in many parts of the world, the comparative advantages of the UN are: global objective-setting; advocacy and monitoring in areas such as human rights, population and the environment; the provision of neutral policy advice; collection and dissemination of information; providing access to the world for some of the poorest countries; and providing a framework for international humanitarian activities. These are not rigid categories, but rather are suggestive of a framework for channelling the energies of the UN to areas that can really make a difference.

Improving UN Effectiveness

One important step is to eliminate duplication and ensure complementarity with other institutions, such as the Bretton Woods group. We believe there is a need to re-examine how the trade and development function is handled in the UN in light of the emerging mandates of the World Trade Organization. The role and contribution of the UN regional economic commissions also merits close attention. Canada will wish to be certain that the vast array of intergovernmental machinery that has developed over time adjusts to future needs.

We advocate strengthening the human rights and environmental functions within the UN. Dealing more effectively with humanitarian needs is also important, through improved early warning arrangements, "preventive development" and a more seamless continuum between relief, rehabilitation and resumed development. This is especially pressing in conflict situations. The Rwandan tragedy has demonstrated that early warning capacity and conflict prevention should be further reinforced and dealt with in conjunction with development problems.

Strengthening the coherence and impact of the General Assembly and the ECOSOC [Economic and Social Council] in the economic and social fields is essential. ECOSOC must fulfil its co-ordination role within the UN system and be key in the follow-up to international conferences. We are open to the idea of an enlarged bureau of the ECOSOC, but that is no substitute for improved coordination with the specialized agencies. It is time to consider how better to reflect the greater integration of social and economic issues in the work of the Second and Third Committees of the General Assembly.

The deliberative role on global economic issues of both bodies can be improved, but they should not try to compete with more specialized bodies. The value of the General Assembly and ECOSOC lies in bringing moral and political force to global objectives, not in designing specific mechanisms. A further opening of the

General Assembly and the ECOSOC to a wider range of views, such as in the World Hearings on Development, should be encouraged.

Assistance programs can be improved. Consolidation and integration would give these programs greater impact and focus and reduce unnecessary overheads. Co-ordination with specialized agencies remains a vital concern. We should also ask ourselves whether assistance programs on the scale of the UN should not be geared even more to the needs of the poorest countries.

This debate marks the beginning of a new phase in our work on an Agenda for Development. I have sought here to set the Canadian view of some of the key issues that need to be addressed. In terms of next steps, we should look to the early establishment of a working group that would build on the good base offered by the Secretary-General. It could sharpen the expression of priorities within the UN and make suggestions on the changes required to act on them effectively.

As we near the UN's 50th anniversary, the Agenda for Development presents us with an opportunity to revitalize our approach to development and to reposition the UN in the centre of the development debate.

This is an opportunity that we cannot afford to let go.

Thank you, Mr. President.