



**STATEMENT**

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**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

**AN ADDRESS BY**

**THE HONOURABLE ANDRÉ OUELLET,**

**MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS,**

**TO THE**

**NORTHERN FOREIGN POLICY CONFERENCE**

**OTTAWA, Ontario  
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I wish to thank the participants and the organizers of this conference. I understand that a number of different groups are represented here today. As you know, the Government has initiated a major review of its foreign policy. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), government, academics, Aboriginal groups, experts and lay persons alike all have an essential contribution to make toward this review. Let me say that I am delighted to see such a conference take place; it will be an important contribution to our review process.

I want to share with all of you today some thoughts as to the new Liberal government's views on circumpolar Arctic affairs, and possible directions in Canada's Arctic foreign policy. I understand that my colleague Ron Irwin, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, has touched on some points already.

Let me begin by saying that in any discussion of this subject, I have four questions in mind.

- Is there a fundamental purpose that should guide us in our Arctic international relations?
- How can an Arctic focus in our foreign policy contribute to Canadian unity?
- How can we construct a northern foreign policy that has the largest possible impact at the least cost, given our financial limitations?
- What must we do to ensure that a policy framework is in place that provides for consultation, co-operation and co-ordination, both among Canadians and with our Arctic neighbours?

The North has been overlooked somewhat in Canada's international activities in recent years. Part of the foreign policy plank of our electoral platform was our firm desire to assume a more active role in circumpolar affairs. Upon its election, the Liberal government made a commitment to enhance the northern focus of Canada's foreign affairs.

The North must be part and parcel of Canada's foreign policy, because the stakes and interests that Canada has in the North are vital to its sovereignty and security.

If you will, let us now examine these stakes and interests, and also look at what we can do together to address them.

### **Stakes and Interests**

Canada occupies 30 percent of the Arctic land mass. Eight-five thousand Canadians inhabit this immense area. But of course, the Arctic is far more than a vast, glacial expanse. This desolate

area is home to a number of small, but tightly knit communities. The cool temperatures of the Arctic circle cannot dampen the warmth of its inhabitants! Yet the harsh and rugged northern landscape masks a fragile ecosystem. I think every one of us here remembers all too well the severe damage that occurred when the Exxon Valdez ran aground off the coast of Alaska. Yes, the North must be an integral part of our foreign policy. Air pollution knows no boundaries, and, though we would like to think otherwise, PCBs, radioactive substances and even insecticides have all found their way into the ice and snows of this once pristine environment.

Canada's Arctic foreign policy must be premised not only on protecting the fragile environment, but also on preserving the traditional way of life of Aboriginal peoples. To do this, we must ensure that Aboriginal peoples have a direct role in decision making on the full range of Arctic issues.

As you are well aware, the Government is building a new partnership with Aboriginal peoples based on trust, mutual respect and full participation in the decision-making process. A more comprehensive process for consultation between government and Aboriginal representatives must be developed. I want to assure you today that in matters of foreign policy that have an impact on the circumpolar Arctic, I will be insisting upon full and ongoing consultations with Canada's Arctic peoples, and in particular, Aboriginal peoples.

The interest we have in the circumpolar Arctic is to ensure that policy making is as coherent and integrated as possible. It is essential that we give ourselves the necessary means to address environmental concerns in the Arctic region, to conduct proper scientific research, to develop transportation networks and to ensure sustainable economic development that is attuned to the Arctic's unique character. A framework must be established to guarantee the full participation of our Arctic Aboriginal peoples in this process.

Coherence and integration also require close attention to developing co-operative relations among all our circumpolar Arctic neighbours. Canada is one of eight states bordering on the Arctic circle, the others being Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, the United States, and Denmark, which has responsibility for the self-governing territory of Greenland. We must count on our very good bilateral relations with all of these countries, and on a shared commitment to multilateralism, to move ahead on such issues as pollution prevention, sustainable economic development, policy co-ordination and a full role for Arctic Aboriginal peoples.

It goes without saying that in this collaborative effort, each state must maintain respect for the sovereignty of others. The

Canadian government is committed to maintaining our sovereignty in the Arctic. Of course, Canada has no intention of closing its Arctic waters, including the Northwest Passage, to other countries. However, we insist that any voyage be made with Canadian consent and be subject to Canadian law, particularly the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act.

### **A New Approach**

Let me touch on a couple of means by which the Canadian government believes it can advance the various interests I described.

As I said earlier, the Arctic's unique environment must be protected. Canada is a strong supporter of the Arctic Environment Protection Strategy (AEPS), adopted in 1991 by the eight Arctic nations. This Strategy illustrates both a successful experiment in multilateral co-operation and our commitment to integrating Aboriginal peoples in the decision-making process. Three indigenous organizations, the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC), the Sami Council and the Association of Russian Aboriginal Peoples, were given permanent observer status.

Indigenous peoples in the Arctic not only have a vested interest in protecting the environment they inhabit, but also have an invaluable expertise that we can, and indeed, must, learn from. There is work currently under way by Canada and the ICC on how to integrate indigenous knowledge into the AEPS. Achievements on the multilateral level have been complemented by similar successes at the bilateral level.

These successes include the 1992 Canada-Russia Agreement on Arctic Co-operation and some of the initiatives launched under the AEPS. I want to take steps to further develop our co-operation on the basis of this framework agreement, and I am very much looking forward to working together with my colleague Ron Irwin in this regard.

We have to go beyond the existing mechanisms. We must develop both our bilateral and our multilateral relations. In short, Canada will continue to seek out the best possible avenues of co-operation between the various circumpolar nations.

For example, there has been much discussion between Canada and the United States about ways to preserve a wilderness area that straddles the Northwest Territories, the Yukon and Alaska. As you know, the Great Porcupine caribou herd inhabits this area. I believe we must move quickly with the Americans to formalize arrangements for preserving this herd and the surrounding wilderness.

As far as multilateral co-operation is concerned, our government wants to move quickly to establish a more formal means of managing the circumpolar agenda. This government intends to push forward the creation of an Arctic Council by the end of this year, in which all eight circumpolar states and their Aboriginal peoples will be represented.

The Arctic Council is the best forum in which to address issues of common concern to Arctic communities. In my meetings with United States Secretary of State Christopher earlier this year, I specifically asked him to support the creation of the Council. I am pleased to report that the Secretary of State responded positively to my request. We are now in the process of discussing the next steps with the United States and our other Arctic neighbours. I know that many of you here have been working actively on this issue. I look forward to very close co-operation with you as we move ahead.

The threats to Arctic security are global in scope. Solutions to these threats can only be achieved in a multilateral context. Therefore, Canada is working without respite toward the creation of an Arctic Council uniting all eight circumpolar states.

These examples of positive initiatives must be followed through. What is needed in Canada is a means by which we can pursue these initiatives in a co-ordinated fashion. As it is now, different federal departments share the responsibility for implementing Canada's Arctic policies. This government believes we must have greater co-ordination. It is therefore with great pleasure that I am announcing today the Government's intention to create the position of Arctic Circumpolar Ambassador within my department. In making this announcement, we are joining our Nordic neighbours in creating a special ambassadorial position for circumpolar Arctic issues. The Arctic Ambassador will be responsible for co-ordinating Canada's contribution to circumpolar affairs.

The appointment of an Ambassador will be the fulfilment of one of our foreign policy platform commitments. After consultation with my colleague the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, I will be making a further announcement on this position.

Let me conclude by congratulating the organizers of the conference for their effort in bringing together a group of such distinguishing Arctic experts. I want to assure you that I value your input very much.

Your deliberations yesterday and today have, I am certain, resulted in many good ideas, which my officials have no doubt noted. I look forward to hearing your advice as to how we can move forward to implement our circumpolar Arctic strategy. Indeed, the results of this conference will provide a useful first set of guidelines for the new Ambassador!