



STATEMENT

94/28

AS DELIVERED

AN ADDRESS BY
THE HONOURABLE CHRISTINE STEWART,
SECRETARY OF STATE (LATIN AMERICA AND AFRICA),
TO THE 24TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE
ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES

BELÉM, Brazil
June 7, 1994

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, foreign ministers of the hemisphere, Mr. Secretary-General, Mr. Assistant Secretary-General, ladies and gentlemen, friends:

My first opportunity to participate in an OAS [Organization of American States] General Assembly came just a few short months ago in Washington. It is indeed a very great pleasure for me to be here at my second Assembly and to renew acquaintance with so many of my colleagues from around the region. I look forward to working closely with all of you over the coming months and years toward achievement of our common goals.

Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the Canadian delegation, I would like to congratulate you on your election and to assure you of the full support and co-operation of my delegation over the coming week of deliberations.

I must also extend our sincere thanks to the Government of Brazil for its generosity in hosting this major event, for the cordial hospitality which they have extended to all of us, and for the superb organization of the week's events in this unique setting. I am sure that I am not alone in being impressed at being here in Belém, at the mouth of one of the world's greatest rivers.

Belém bears another distinction and that is being the birthplace of the outgoing Secretary General of the OAS, Mr. João Baena Soares. On behalf of the Canadian government, I must extend to you, Mr. Secretary-General, our sincere appreciation for the tremendous service which you have rendered to this Organization over the past 10 years.

Your mandate has coincided with a period of tremendous change in the hemisphere — both economic and political — and the OAS has, under your leadership, evolved with those changes. Not so many years ago, it was commonplace to hear doubts and concerns about the relevance and usefulness of the Organization. Those days are gone — the OAS has truly come into its own — and you, Mr. Secretary-General, have had a large part in that transformation. Please accept our very best wishes for much success, health and happiness in your future endeavours.

I would also like at this point to offer my congratulations to the Secretary-General-elect, President César Gaviria of Colombia, even though he could not be here with us today. Mr. Gaviria has a challenging job ahead of him — the Organization is still evolving and there remains much work to be done. However, Mr. Gaviria's previous incarnation has shown that he is not afraid of challenges and I am confident he will rise to the task.

This General Assembly comes during a time of change for Canada as well. As many of you may know, the party to which I belong, the Liberal Party, came to power in Canada in late 1993. My appointment as Secretary of State for Latin America provided immediate and tangible proof of our Prime Minister's desire to

give priority to actively expanding relations with the region. Indeed, this was one of the components of our Party's election platform.

Since coming to power, our government has also initiated a major foreign policy review. In the course of these deliberations and in other fora, we have outlined a number of priorities for the Western Hemisphere — chief among these are sustainable development, democratic development and good governance, trade and economic integration, and security issues.

Promoting sustainable development in the region is a key issue for the Government of Canada. We must tackle the problems of poverty and under-development in the hemisphere in ways that are environmentally sound and sustainable. Sustainable development, democratic development and good governance, in combination with economic integration and trade, and security issues, must all be central to hemispheric community development. However, if we do not work together to reduce social and economic inequalities and develop economic benefits in a sustainable way, all other policy areas become irrelevant. There will be no environment to build upon.

Canada has been seeking, within the OAS Environment Committee, to encourage a more active role for the OAS in promoting the implementation of Agenda 21 at the regional level. We have before us at this General Assembly a resolution which proposes closer links with the United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development, a body created by the 1992 Earth Conference — also held here in Brazil. We will also have a resolution calling for the holding of an OAS meeting of experts, with the aim of complementing the Commission's ongoing work on Agenda 21.

In this spirit, I am pleased to announce the offer of the Government of Canada to host such a meeting of experts on the topic of environmentally sound technologies. This is a cross-cutting theme of the Commission's work program and was the focus of significant debate at its most recent meeting. The OAS will be the first regional body to respond to the Commission's invitation for organizations outside the UN system to contribute to its work. It is our hope that this initiative will serve as a shining example to the rest of the world of what can be achieved in terms of regional environmental co-operation.

Another priority for the Government of Canada in our relations with the region is encouraging democracy and the strengthening of democratic institutions and processes. Virtually all of the governments in this hemisphere are democratically elected and that is a feat of which we should all be very proud. However, this does not mean we can afford to be complacent. Democracy is absolutely fundamental to the well-being of our nations in terms of peace and stability, social and economic growth and human

rights observance. We must ensure that we create the conditions necessary for it to take root and flourish throughout the hemisphere.

Elections are critical but only the first step on the path of democratic development. All democratic nations, including Canada, are continually pressed to implement new legislation, policy and regulations to enhance freedom, equality and peace within their borders.

The OAS has taken a number of very positive steps in this regard over the past few years. Indeed, it has proven itself a veritable guardian of hemispheric democracy. The political commitments to democracy given by the membership at recent General Assemblies, culminating last year with the Protocol of Washington and the Declaration of Managua, are evidence that the countries of this hemisphere cherish democracy and all that it represents. Canada was the first country to ratify the Protocol of Washington in October 1993, and we would urge all our fellow members to join us in this concrete expression of the OAS's dedication to upholding and preserving democratic rule.

Canada remains convinced that the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy, created in 1990, has a crucial role to play in helping governments of the hemisphere to lay the appropriate foundations for long-term democratic development. Its current work plan, with its focus on practical training for legislators and senior officials, grassroots education campaigns, and so forth, is extremely promising. The OAS can do more to assist national governments in strengthening democratic institutions including the parliaments and judiciaries.

The continuing impasse on Haiti is a potent reminder of the importance of these sorts of efforts. I think we would all agree, in retrospect, that had Haiti's fledgling democratic institutions been provided with more support following the election of President Aristide, we might not still be in the difficult situation we are in today. As one of the Friends of the Secretary-General, we have taken a leading role for some time in promoting sanctions, dialogue and our own nation's participation in UN-sponsored presence in Haiti, in order to restore democracy in that country. As members of the United Nations, we pressed for the recent Security Council resolution imposing a strengthening of sanctions against the de facto regime. Canada believes that firm signals of our collective commitment to democracy and our determination to see President Aristide restored are the best means, at present, to convince the illegitimate regime to relinquish power.

I would like to say a word about another country in our hemisphere whose people do not enjoy the benefits of democracy — that country is Cuba, whose membership in our organization has

been suspended since 1962. Canada believes that isolation by its nature is unhealthy, especially at an important time of transition in Cuba. It is in all our interests, individually and as an organization, as well as in the interests of the people of Cuba, that we support a process of change in Cuba that is positive and orderly. We in the Canadian government are examining ways in which we can enhance our own dialogue with Cuba. We also believe it is important for the OAS and Cuba to examine how we can fulfil the vision of the founders of this organization for universal hemispheric participation. Cuba is a part of that vision. In looking ahead, it of course will be essential to take full account of our resolutions and our determination with respect to human rights and democratic development.

The strengthening of human rights instruments and institutions in the hemisphere is another key issue for the Canadian government. In our view, the Inter-American Court and Commission are unique and extremely important mechanisms for protecting and promoting human rights in the region. The defence of human rights is one of the fundamental principles of the OAS and, as a membership, we must ensure that these institutions are given the wherewithal to execute their mandates fully, effectively and objectively. This implies not only increased human and financial resources — although these are indisputably in order — but also increased moral support from all member states.

Canada has been an ardent and steadfast defender of the Commission since joining the OAS. The fact that this year two cases were opened by the Commission against Canada has not changed our attitude. Canada believes that the essential test of a member state's commitment to human rights promotion within the OAS is its readiness to co-operate and participate openly and fully in the deliberations of the Court and Commission. Canada was pleased to see, during this year's debate on the Commission's report, that many of the countries which were the subject of country reports, or of specific cases, took a more constructive approach than in the past: they acknowledged that their systems were not perfect, provided clarifications where they thought appropriate, and, in so doing, demonstrated the ultimate value and significance of the Commission's work. We would urge all member states to follow their example.

In the area of women's rights, Canada has been actively involved — over the past three years — in the drafting of an Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women. This involvement is consistent with the steps Canada has taken in other multilateral fora to address one of the most pervasive and serious forms of human rights abuses. These actions have included the initiation of a United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, adopted by the 48th Session of the United Nations General

Assembly in December 1993, and our success earlier this year in securing agreement by the UN Commission on Human Rights to appoint a Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women.

We were therefore pleased to see the Inter-American Commission of Women take up this important theme and have been very supportive of the efforts which have led to the Draft Convention before us at this General Assembly. That being said, I must note that Canada would have preferred additional consideration of this precedent-setting instrument in order to refine and clarify its provisions even further so that, in the end, it could be held up to all the world as an unassailable model of excellence.

My government is intent, as well, on increasing our trade and investment links with the region. NAFTA [the North American Free Trade Agreement] is an example of the fruitful co-operation which can be achieved in this area, and we are encouraging other countries of the region to consider taking the steps which will allow for their eventual accession to NAFTA. Canada is also encouraged by the transformation of the former CECOM — which had basically become a narrow forum for airing trade complaints — into the new Special Committee on Trade. This committee will have a broader, more forward-looking agenda and will promote dialogue and co-operation on a wide range of trade policy issues. Canada believes that, backed by solid technical analysis, the Special Committee on Trade will be able to play an effective role in fostering regional trade and economic integration.

Finally, building a framework for co-operative security in the hemisphere remains a key goal for Canada. The OAS has moved ahead steadily in providing a forum for consultation, dialogue and practical co-operation in a number of important areas including non-proliferation, conventional arms transfers, conflict prevention and confidence- and security-building. The Buenos Aires seminar on confidence- and security-building measures, jointly sponsored by Canada/Argentina and the OAS, was an excellent example of what we can accomplish in this area.

We believe that our work can be further intensified in the coming year. Canada would welcome the evolution of the Special Committee into a Permanent Committee of the OAS. We would like to see smaller working groups established within the Committee to look at specific areas of interest, such as conventional arms transfers. Moreover, we look forward to sending our experts — civilian and military — to participate in specialized meetings, such as a Regional Conference on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures which the Government of Chile has offered to host.

In addition, Canada is looking forward to participating actively, during the coming year, in a review of existing hemispheric security institutions, including the Inter-American Defence

Board. This review must take account of the profoundly changed political situation in our hemisphere. It should recognize that our military establishments have an important role to play within our security discussions and in the ongoing consolidation of democracy in our hemisphere. Indeed, the strengthening of democracy, the rule of law and the institutions which underpin our democratic systems should provide the essential foundation for this critical review.

I spoke of this being a time of change for Canada. It is also a momentous time for the OAS with our new Secretary-General set to take up his duties in the coming months and a major hemispheric summit of our nations' leaders at year end.

The Secretary-General-elect has articulated a vision of the OAS which touches upon many of the priorities I have mentioned. We must ensure that the OAS addresses these issues in the most effective and efficient way possible. President Gaviria has also spoken a great deal about the need for organizational reform, a view Canada shares. Canada will be looking to our new leader to continue the crucial process of OAS revitalization which has begun over the past few years.

In particular, we will be looking for the allocation of appropriate resource levels — human and financial — to activities which go to the heart of the Organization's *raison d'être*, in particular those of the human rights institutions and the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy. This will necessarily imply reductions in less important areas of the OAS's current work, since the current conditions of fiscal restraint in all of our countries — Canada among them — do not allow us the luxury of major budget increases. The Organization will have some difficult but vital choices to make.

Canada will also be looking for on-going reform and streamlining of existing bodies and a focussing on comparative advantage. The area of technical co-operation at the OAS is an example of this. At last year's General Assembly, the membership passed the Protocol of Managua, which allowed for the merging of the two technical co-operation councils. It bears mentioning, at this point, that this merger cannot take place and the new Council cannot begin operations until two-thirds of the member countries have ratified the Protocol. Thus far, only a very few countries, led by Canada in October 1993, have done so. We would therefore urge the remaining countries to ratify the Protocol at their earliest opportunity, so that concrete action can be taken.

The grant funds at the disposal of the OAS for technical co-operation are relatively minor compared to those available from bilateral donors and multilateral institutions. Therefore, it is essential that we avoid dispersing these limited resources and duplicating the efforts of other organizations. The OAS must

concentrate on its comparative advantages. Canada believes that this means providing a forum for discussion of shared development issues and concerns, facilitating exchanges between member states, and emphasizing multinational projects in a limited number of priority areas. At this year's Special General Assembly in Mexico, representatives of all our countries made definite strides in streamlining the activities of the proposed new Council. We must now work collectively to ensure that the momentum we have created on this issue is maintained, in order to ensure a timely and effective transition to the new system.

Another example of an OAS organization which is looking at reform is CICAD, the Drug Abuse Control Commission, the members of which are also looking at means of streamlining operations and re-evaluating priorities with a view to focussing on CICAD's comparative advantage in addressing the drug problem in the hemisphere. Together with Mexico and the CICAD Secretariat, Canada has been an active member of the drafting group tasked with: first, assessing both the scope of the drug problem in the region, including the aspects of supply and demand reduction and the effectiveness of existing strategies; and second, developing a draft policy document on priorities and administrative reform. This paper was considered by CICAD members last week in Washington.

One of the bodies most in need of reform, in Canada's view, and on which we have had limited success thus far, is the Inter-American Defence Board [IADB], to which I alluded earlier. Canada was among the countries that could have supported radical change to the IADB at this General Assembly. Unfortunately, this did not prove possible. Canada believes it is imperative that decisive action on this question — including issues of mandate and linkage — be taken by the OAS in the coming year.

Canada believes that there are other potentially useful areas of reform that the new Secretary General could consider. Among these are: reform of the staffing system to make it more transparent and equitable; greater delegation of authority to the senior managers of the Organization; stricter budgetary accountability; review of the audit function to turn it from a mere accounting exercise into more of a program audit; and a full review of the role and utility of the national offices (as many of you know, Canada has thus far declined to have a national office, since we are not convinced that they have a meaningful role which justifies their expense).

I would like to say a brief word about partnerships. As I mentioned earlier, in the continuing context of scarce resources, both in our domestic economies and in our international organizations, we simply cannot afford duplication of effort. Rather, we must be seeking to establish co-operative links with other organizations active in the hemisphere and in similar

fields of endeavour. These include United Nations organizations, the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank, and even farther-flung partners such as the European Community and the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe — all of whom might have meaningful experiences to share or might usefully benefit from our experience.

Moreover, we need not limit our partnerships to governmental or political organizations. Many other multilateral organizations have co-operative links with non-governmental organizations [NGOs]. NGOs with consultative status at the United Nations and the Council of Europe, for example, serve not only as a source of expertise and new ideas, but also as a mechanism for disseminating information on the organization in question to a broader public. Canada believes that NGOs could play a similarly useful role in the OAS, and for this reason we have requested that the Juridical and Political Committee give consideration, during the coming year, to the possibility of the OAS granting consultative status to NGOs.

Finally, I would like to emphasize the importance which I attach to the Summit of the Americas. I think we must thank President Clinton for inviting us all to Miami in December and for giving our heads of government this important opportunity to assess our common concerns and agree upon certain political and economic objectives as we move toward the 21st century.

Canada believes — as I think all of us here do — that the OAS must have a central role in the Summit. As the region's foremost political forum, it is essential that the OAS be engaged both in the setting of the Summit's agenda and in the implementation and follow-up of its recommendations.

On Sunday, I was very pleased to participate in the Informal Dialogue and put some of these ideas forward. Today, I would like to make a clear suggestion to you — that this Assembly direct the new Secretary General and the Assistant Secretary-General to make every effort to secure this type of involvement for the OAS.

I would also like to recommend that OAS members establish a preparatory committee at the ministerial level to discuss specific agenda items. Such a "prepcom" is important for several reasons: first, to ensure a key role for the OAS in the Summit; second, to ensure that the broad range of hemispheric concerns are taken into account; and third, to ensure that the views of some of the smaller states are heard on issues of importance to them.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, my delegation and I are looking forward to an active General Assembly here in Belém and to fruitful co-operation in working with all our partners toward our common

objectives in the years ahead. I personally will leave here with a vision of hope and promise — that of a regional community capable of dealing effectively with a wide range of priority issues revolving around poverty alleviation and sustainable development, democratic development and human rights, security, and trade and economic integration. A community which is dedicated to reducing the threat of regional insecurity and enhancing regional prosperity for all. A community which is mutually supportive and promotes equality of opportunity for all its members.

I very much look forward to meeting you all again in the coming months.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.