



Statements and Speeches

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CO-OPERATION WITHIN THE FRENCH-SPEAKING COMMUNITY

A Speech by the Honourable Jean Marchand, Minister of State, to the Fourth General Conference of the Agency for Cultural and Technical Co-operation, Port Louis, Mauritius, November 15, 1975.

This fourth General Conference is unquestionably a turning-point in the life of this unprecedented but very necessary institution that our governments decided to create five years ago, since the Agency for Cultural and Technical Co-operation has already left behind the first stage of infancy; it is no longer a question of baby talk and first steps. It can be said that five years is a very short time in the life of an international institution, but this period has sufficed to demonstrate the vigour the Agency can acquire if it is allowed to develop normally, and has afforded a glimpse of the benefits it will provide for its members if they continue their collective action with determination, in the spirit of co-operation affirmed by the Niamey Convention.

It is true that we can see the difficulties and pitfalls in our path better today. Some problems of orientation and implementation have been identified; and during the discussion or execution of certain projects we have seen a variety of viewpoints among the members. In all this I see only signs of life; the Agency is alive and well, because it is not afraid to come to grips with reality. We should be grateful to the Secretary-General and his colleagues for having withheld nothing, when preparing their recommendations to the Council, that could have slowed the Agency's growth or limited the relevance of its activities. We should also congratulate ourselves because the Council did not try to dodge the differences -- minor ones, I think, but nevertheless requiring expression in order to put them into the proper perspective -- between the situation, and the perception of that situation, of each of the members.

But we, the delegates to the General Conference, the political authority of the Agency, were responsible for overcoming the difficulties and solving the problems raised by the very existence of the institution. We have done so without difficulty -- mainly, in my opinion, because each of us realized what makes the Agency unique and what makes it necessary.

In the first place, the Agency for Cultural and Technical Co-operation does not result from any political subordination or parental relationship between the member states, nor does any geographical

or economic necessity "compel" them to co-operate with each other. On the contrary, the Agency resulted from the will of its members, who chose freely to establish new forms of multilateral co-operation, to their mutual advantage, based on their common language.

We need only look round the table to see what an excellent forum for meetings and consultation our governments have thus created; of the states represented here, some are members of the Organization of African Unity or the Common Afro-Malagasy Organization, others of the Arab League, still others of the European Community and the Commonwealth. Each organizes its foreign relations as its particular needs require; and thus each perceives the aspirations common to various regional and international groups and so is able to make the other members of the Agency aware of them. Finally, they all meet in other world bodies, such as the United Nations and its affiliated organizations. In this way, the Agency has antennae in all corners of the world but may be said to transcend all the organizations to which its members belong, without seeking to supplant any of them.

Another original feature of the co-operation begun in the last five years within the Agency is that it is oriented towards cultural and technical development. So many specialists, from all countries and in all fields, have in recent years deplored the bricks-and-mortar emphasis in development that I need hardly emphasize the importance of these commonly-neglected forms of international co-operation. A society that, in trying to develop, contents itself with land cultivation and the exploitation of natural resources will necessarily remain an incomplete and dependent society in its relations with the world; it is only by cultivating minds with equal determination and exploiting brains with equal efficiency that a community can reach its full potential and achieve truly autonomous development. We Canadians are in a position to know this, because, until recently, our experience with development was too narrow -- that is, too much oriented towards agriculture, mining, forestry and industry -- so that, in recent decades, we have needed to work at double speed to accelerate our cultural development.

In the third place, the Agency's undertakings in the cultural and technical fields are unprecedented because these activities use the French language as their vehicle. In the end, it is perhaps from this that the historical necessity of the institution launched at Niamey derives. We all know of what treasures this language is the repository, and how efficient it is as a means of communication between peoples, for the French language is deeply rooted in one of the civilizations that have done most to enrich the heritage of mankind.

For various historical reasons, the French language spread to every continent. It was implanted in the heart of Africa, it took root in North America, in the West Indies and Asia, and in the Indian Ocean. Through the centuries, this dissemination caused the emergence of a cultural universe greatly exceeding the bounds of the European area that remains its rallying-point. In Canada, in the West Indies and in Mauritius, French has been spoken for more than three centuries; in Africa, for one or two centuries. French is spoken in all parts of the globe, but people in other places think differently from people in Europe, because life in each society is subject to differing economic and political conditions and is exposed to a different variety of cultural and technical influences. The great challenge for the Agency is exactly this -- to organize and develop the maximum possibilities of this very rich mosaic.

The reason it seemed appropriate for me to recall these fundamental facts, which many would undoubtedly consider obvious, is that, after this General Conference, the Council must apply a new general policy and change the orientation and practical methods of its programs. So that this undertaking may give the Agency the second wind that it will need from now on, it must be carried out within the limits that defines its field of action. The Canadian delegation has had the opportunity, throughout this conference, of detailing the positions of our governments on the various topics that the Secretariat and the Council have brought to our attention; however, it is useful to recall some motivating ideas that Canada considers very important.

First, the emphasis the members want to put on development, it seems to us, not only responds to present needs -- witness the resolution adopted in the seventh special session of the United Nations General Assembly -- but is, moreover, entirely appropriate to the Agency's purpose. In addition, those who are acquainted with the new international development strategy announced in September of this year by the Honourable Allan J. MacEachen, Secretary of State for External Affairs and Minister responsible for the Canadian International Development Agency, cannot doubt that Canada will immediately support the attempts to orient the Agency's activity more towards rural areas, for that is precisely one of the new directions for Canadian co-operation. However, it is obvious that the Agency's activities should be limited to cultural and technical development, which constitute a very broad field -- the one most often left fallow. Moreover, so that these activities can be effective, we think it necessary that they be carefully conceived and planned, that they be in proportion to the resources available to the Agency and that they be adapted to the methods within its capabilities. Furthermore, if we wish to conform to the specific purpose of this institution, we

should make sure that the Agency's programs, while meeting the expectations of the majority of its members, maintain a certain equilibrium between technical development and cultural development.

In this regard, the organization of real exchanges appears essential. As my colleague, the Honourable Allan J. MacEachen, declared when announcing the Cabinet's adoption of a five-year plan for cultural exchanges, "the multiplication of contacts among artists of all countries, and between them and audiences of countries other than their own, will contribute greatly to bringing different cultures and peoples together and will, in the end, encourage the production of works that satisfy the aspirations of our era".

Given the linguistic, ethnic and cultural structure of its population, and its own historical experience, Canada must support the Agency's efforts to promote the national languages and cultures of those member countries that have chosen this path toward socio-cultural development. Our country takes its place among them; in fact, the federal authorities in Canada have for several years been applying a policy called "multiculturalism". A number of community development and subsidy programs, many still in the experimental stage, are designed to maintain and encourage a great variety of ethno-cultural traditions within minority groups: first the truly indigenous Canadian traditions, those of the Amerindian and Eskimo populations, and then the traditions of recent immigrants -- that is, the traditions carried by the successive waves of immigrants that have swelled the Canadian population over the last century.

In all, Canada's ambition with respect to culture is to become what it already is in geography, "another America". We all know what vigour and vitality the United States of America has gained from blending in a single crucible -- the famous "melting-pot" -- the great variety of cultural material that came to them from all continents, but especially from Europe and Africa. Canada intends to achieve the same vigour and vitality, not by repeating the American experience but rather by creating the "Canadian Mosaic". In other words, Canadians are not trying to melt down the variety of cultural heritages they have received into a single alloy but rather to keep the characteristics of each while putting them side by side in the grand design of multiculturalism.

The Canadian Government, however, retains the conviction that, in order to realize this great plan, programs to stimulate multiculturalism must not weaken the two major cultural affiliations (the British and the French) that have made Canada what it is today, and must not weaken the foundations of the country's two official languages, English and French. On the contrary, our general policy

in this area is intended to demonstrate that it is possible to put two official languages on an equal footing and keep them there, while also maintaining a variety of ethno-cultural traditions. Many signs are already appearing that this general policy will, in the long run, encourage the cultural minorities of Canada to study the two official languages, especially French, more willingly, and to use them with more confidence, since doing so will no longer be seen as a menace to their cultural identity.

These preliminary statements are not without relevance to the experience of a number of African countries over the last few years -- namely, that the propagation within their borders of common languages of European origin, especially French, has accelerated since they gained independence, even when the authorities have deliberately tried to promote national languages and culture. We do not see any *a priori* contradiction between the increasingly-general use of French as an international language, an official language, a common language or a working language -- according to the situation in each country -- and this other new orientation that the General Conference of the Agency for Cultural and Technical Co-operation has decided to apply to its programs. The federal authorities of Canada will, accordingly, provide the Agency with the results of the research studies and experiments that have been done in the Canadian context, if this seems useful.

In conclusion, I can only express my satisfaction with the positive results of this fourth General Conference of the Agency for Cultural and Technical Co-operation. We have every reason to expect a renewal of its activities, especially in the development field, a reaffirmation of its cultural role and an accentuation of its technical role. Finally, I thank the Government of Mauritius for the hospitality and warm welcome it has provided to the delegates from Canada and from the other member states.

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