

Statement

Secretary of
State for
External Affairs



Déclaration

Secrétaire d'État
aux Affaires
extérieures

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AS DELIVERED

AN ADDRESS BY
THE HONOURABLE BARBARA McDOUGALL,
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,
TO THE
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Affaires extérieures et
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Canada

Mr. Chairman:

At our last meeting in Paris, November 1990, we remarked at the extraordinary events that had brought Europe through Cold War and confrontation to unity and co-operation. Today's contrast with that political environment could not be more brutal.

As we meet in Helsinki, Canadian soldiers continue to do their job in Europe -- twelve hundred of them, in Bosnia and Croatia. Canada is here in Europe again, as we were in 1914 and 1939, because Canadian security is European security. We take our commitment to European security seriously.

That's why a Canadian Battalion is in Sarajevo, protecting the airport, so that children and old people, women and men -- of all ethnic groups -- can survive in the midst of a tragic, evil and destructive war.

That's why all of us are urging a peaceful solution for the equally afflicted people of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Our Paris meeting was, in many ways, a much easier occasion. Not just because the political circumstances were more pleasant, but because our task was somehow simpler. We came with a unity of purpose to outline a new vision for the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) in a new Europe.

Here we have a different and more difficult task. We have to take the concepts of Paris and turn them into practical steps that will begin to provide real security.

I believe that here in Helsinki we are taking steps that will fundamentally change the CSCE from the one our predecessors launched 16 years ago.

It will require a change in thinking and behaviour by all of us. This does not mean that the commitments we have seriously undertaken over these years are no longer valid. It does not imply a dilution or retreat from the fundamental principles of peace, sovereign equality, security and stability that underpin the CSCE. On the contrary, never have these principles been more important, or relevant, or attainable.

What it does mean, is that we must now adapt our ways to new realities. This is never easy. It involves compromise. It involves trying to reason in the way others reason. It involves political responsibility.

Candidly, we haven't had enough of it in the CSCE.

The 1992 Helsinki document weighs about half a kilo but does not even mention the torment in Bosnia-Herzegovina. During the weeks that our officials negotiated and bickered over the political statement, thousands were killed in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Often our delegations were more concerned to reaffirm the view that the rights of minorities are collective individual rights -- not group rights needing special sensitivity. Or they were trying to ensure that the new office of High Commissioner on National Minorities would have no real impact. Or pretending that what the public calls ethnic violence has nothing to do with minorities. Or that minorities and majorities don't get along because they don't want to, or can't.

We all have preconceived notions about what we can and should do in the CSCE. There are traditions, positions and a diplomatic language that have their own mystique and philosophy -- and rigidity.

But publics everywhere are demanding more from multilateral institutions: more action, more decisiveness, more leadership. That is why we have a special responsibility to make sure the CSCE works.

In the past, we have dedicated ourselves to the promotion of what I would call certain basic propositions: the right of people to freedom of thought, conscience, travel, expression, religion, human contacts and things that we really believe in.

Back in 1975, the mere fact that we, as so-called ideological adversaries, could sit at a common table and reach agreement on some issues was a security-giving exercise in itself.

Our world has become more complex and so have our security needs. We now have a CSCE community where, ostensibly, democratic pluralism, human rights and the rule of law are accepted as our common foundation.

Our task now is to entrench our CSCE commitments and take steps to implement them, promote them and protect them. Then and only then will we have meaningful security.

In other words, we have to mean what we say, and as members of this organization we are going to hold each other to it.

Pledges to protect the rights of minorities must be respected. More than one war of conquest has been launched to liberate an embattled minority. New, liberal, co-operative governments can be replaced by vengeful xenophobes, dangerously undoing the transformations of recent years but seizing office on the promise to use force to protect their ethnic minorities abroad.

The stakes are very high -- not just the credibility of this organization to be sure, but the credibility of political leadership with the people as well. It isn't easy.

The CSCE is being challenged to deal with some of the most difficult and intractable problems in Europe: ethnic hatreds

that date back centuries; arbitrarily drawn borders; a legacy of economic bankruptcy and environmental destruction; the social dislocation of people who grew up in the misleading certainty and false security of Communism and who are now faced with the frequently frightening reality of freedom.

There are still too many remnants left over from this tormented past: tragic conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, the presence of foreign troops on the soil of the independent Baltic States -- and what was once Yugoslavia.

As has been pointed out, freeing the human spirit has brought new spontaneity, richness and creativity to the European scene, but it has also revealed the depths of nastiness that we can reach.

Security in this sort of world -- the world we live in -- must be underpinned by basic values. The CSCE, as our security framework, has to be able to act -- to intervene -- if these values are trampled.

We all make commitments to respect the rights of minorities. Yet millions are threatened, or perceive themselves to be threatened, because they live on the wrong side of a border, or the wrong side of a mountain, or the wrong side of a river -- even though their parents and grandparents lived there.

Ensuring the equal treatment of all citizens, whatever their ethnic or religious origin, must be the first task of all governments.

The time for clever arguments in this forum has passed. The minority issue in Europe is not a question of definition; it is a question of basic human rights and in many cases basic human survival.

Our CSCE commitments in this regard are clear. The time has come to hold governments to these commitments -- in bilateral relations and multilateral programs. Otherwise, Canada's co-operation with any offending country will be affected.

Mr. Chairman, we condemn in the strongest terms so-called "ethnic cleansing." This odious practice is going on right now -- this very moment -- in many parts of the former Yugoslavia, despite our speeches on peace, security and human rights. We call on the governments of Serbia and Croatia to respect commitments and to ensure respect for international humanitarian law, including the protection of people's lives, whatever group they belong to.

We do not accept that thousands and thousands of people are expelled each week from their homes by thugs. We do not tolerate the horrors endured by former Yugoslav citizens being tortured, violated or forced into horrible conditions to induce them to leave their homes in their own land.

Mr. Chairman, the world recalls with shame the Nazi atrocities. Now we are witnessing similar horror daily. Are we going to let racist and expansionist ideologies prevail? We must stop the offenders.

We request the United Nations to exert all efforts to ensure a long-lasting ceasefire. We support the European Community Peace Conference and CSCE efforts to send special missions to monitor the strict implementation of human rights in Kosovo, Vojvodina and Sandjak. We will share the burden that results from mass flows of refugees and displaced persons.

There is some useful machinery in the CSCE -- the Human Dimension Mechanism and the new High Commissioner on National Minorities. We can take action without consensus and we can send missions to fact-find and to expose violations.

We have to continue to strengthen the machinery and to use it effectively. Countries that are concerned about their minorities outside their borders must seek recourse through these types of mechanisms.

Unilateral action through military force will never be accepted by this community, but neither will the flagrant abuse of human rights.

A first, essential step is to entrench the rule of law, not simply in dry texts but in reality. The law-writing process is central to a truly democratic society. The independence of the judiciary is key if people are to have faith and confidence in their institutions. There is much we can share in these areas through the CSCE.

Mr. Chairman, the CSCE framework also offers us a way of dealing with conflict -- not simply resolving conflict but, more importantly, preventing conflict.

Canada continues to believe that the best conflict prevention mechanism is the implementation of our commitments. To enhance that, we need other tools.

Early warning through the Committee of Senior Officials, the Office for Democratic Institutions or the High Commissioner is essential, but we must respond promptly once we have been warned. We must be prepared to dispatch fact-finders or a good offices mission to sit on the ground and work patiently to bring parties together before they get too far apart.

This most important task must not be held hostage to national political agendas. There has already been too much death in Europe. We must remain vigilant about Kosovo and about other troubled spots which may seem remote but which are at the heart of the CSCE.

The CSCE has already taken the first steps on an ad hoc basis. Canada has helped out -- an aircraft and expert to Nagorno-Karabakh, a chef de mission to Kosovo. We strongly believe in the value of these missions, but we must all be prepared to do more.

We also need the means to interposition forces, before or during a conflict. Canada has been a leading force in developing CSCE peacekeeping. Our credentials on this issue are, I believe, beyond question.

Some months back we said we needed to reconcile the ability of the CSCE to create security with NATO's ability to provide security. I believe we have finally done it.

The Helsinki document gives us the political mandate for CSCE peacekeeping. The procedures in that document, coupled with the willingness of regional and transatlantic organizations to support our efforts, give us the means. This is an important step forward in giving the CSCE the operational ability it needs to take action.

It also gives life to the notion of the interlocking elements in European security. Not simply the CSCE and NATO, but the European Community, the Western European Union and the Council of Europe all contribute to our security blanket.

Mr. Chairman, protection for minority rights, effective conflict prevention, a positive security forum -- these are all keys for the 1990s.

The drafters of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act have indeed been vindicated in the comprehensive approach they took to security so many years ago. Canada strongly believes in the enduring validity and importance of the CSCE.

Our challenge, now, is to translate the unique political and moral authority of the CSCE, which we struggled so long to establish, into effective machinery to manage our problems.

Mr. Chairman, I call on all distinguished colleagues to personally take measures on their return home to implement CSCE commitments. These commitments are not only obligations for others but for everyone of us here today. No country can claim to have achieved perfect implementation, and much work needs to be done.