



Statements and Speeches

SS 83/12

TWO MIDDLE POWERS FACING THE EIGHTIES

Speech by the Honourable Charles Lapointe, Minister of State for External Relations, to the Nigerian Institute for International Affairs, Lagos, March 30, 1983.

... I want to consider with you the role which countries such as Nigeria and Canada may play in the world of the Eighties.

There are, of course, many differences between us. With four times Canada's population — living on one-tenth of its area — Nigeria faces a set of demographic and other problems radically different from those confronting our widely scattered population. We tend to use energy to heat our homes and you use it to cool them.

Despite these differences, Canada and Nigeria may, in some sense, be seen as middle powers — countries which are not members of the super-power club but which have an important place in international relations because of the influence they exert and because of their active involvement in regional and global affairs. It may be worth examining the responsibilities which face countries such as this, and the hopes they may entertain for the future.

And hope is important in these difficult times. I was, indeed, heartened by the optimism displayed on a truck (or lorry) which was recently seen in Lagos. It evidently proclaimed to all the world that "No situation is permanent". I even refused to be downcast when I was told the next one said "No telephone to Heaven".

While it may be bold of me to include Nigeria, as well as Canada, in these reflections, there are probably enough parallels in our situation as middle powers to draw some common conclusions. A privileged forum such as this does, in any event, encourages some broader reflections which go beyond our official consultations.

Nigeria and Canada are no strangers to one another. Personnel connections and private institutional links were the first to be forged, primarily by teachers, students and advisers. During the past two decades, co-operation between our two governments, private commercial activity, educational exchanges and a variety of development projects have added new dimensions to our friendship. We have lived through a number of historical events together, and in that process we have come to know and understand each other better.

One experience common to Nigeria and Canada is that of bringing many different people together in a political structure based on consent.

Nigeria and Canada are both large and diverse federations. We are plural societies in which regional,

ethnic and linguistic factors are of great importance. Our histories have been histories of nation-building in a very real sense. We rely on public debate and a representative democratic process to reconcile differences and to define national objectives.

That process may be tumultuous at times — Canada's recent constitutional debate was not always calm and measured. Its great merit, however, is that it forces governments to respond to the wishes of their people, clearly expressed in public debate.

Has the diversity of our two countries, have our domestic experiences, shaped our approaches to international relations? I believe they have. We have both learned that tolerance, understanding, and accommodation are needed to make our own political systems work. I believe that they are needed in our international relations as well.

One of the classic definitions of foreign policy is "the pursuit of national interest". That does not, of course, answer the question of what is one's national interest. Nor does it define the international environment in which states operate, or how to relate the pursuit of national interest to the international environment.

These are not purely academic questions. They have led to controversy within Canada. For it was under our present Prime Minister, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, that the government of Canada undertook a comprehensive review of foreign policy, in the early Seventies, which declared that foreign policy must derive from national interests. That declaration set off a lively public debate about whether Canada was abandoning the internationalist approach to foreign policy through which Mr. Trudeau's predecessor, Lester Pearson, had earned respect for himself and his country.

Of course, the answer to such criticism must lie in how a nation defines self-interest and how, in doing so, it balances short-term political and economic concerns with less tangible or longer run values and objectives — including the health and vigour of the international environment in which states operate. The desired result is a foreign policy based on what might be called a sense of enlightened self-interest. While none of us would lay claim to a state of perfect enlightenment, I would submit that Canadian foreign policy over the past 15 years has reflected no decline in concern for key international issues or for the strengthening of international co-operation.

We have, of course, had to cope with an increasingly complex and turbulent international environment during those years. That has, in fact, caused us to extend — rather than narrow — the range of our activities abroad.

For Canada, promoting our national interest must inevitably involve many activities and concerns.

— We must be concerned about maintaining crucial bilateral relationships, to the east and west and south of us. Our Prime Minister once remarked that living with our great neighbour to the south was like sleeping with an elephant. It is a positive and profitable but sometimes disturbing experience.

Our relations with the United States are, inevitably, of premier importance because of the intense interplay between our two countries. Seventy per cent of our trade is with the United States. Policy decisions taken there may profoundly affect our economy. The centres of power in that country are dispersed and the decision-making process complex. Our relations with our southern neighbour thus require constant attention. We cannot afford to ignore what happens there.

Europe and Asia are also major partners in trade and investment. We have worked assiduously to broaden and deepen our relations with these countries — for their own sake and because of the alternative opportunities they offer.

Other relationships are also important. We feel we have an important vocation in Africa of which I shall speak later. But we also have interests which go beyond our bilateral relations.

— Our security requires stability in East-West relations. We seek it both through participation in a common defence system with the United States and Western Europe, and by active support for arms control and disarmament.

The decisions involved are often difficult ones. We took part in the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) decision to follow a two-track policy: to seek a reduction (or the elimination) of intermediate-range nuclear weapons in Europe and, failing that, to proceed with the deployment of such weapons by NATO, in response to those already installed by the Soviet Union. Let there be no doubt that Canadians, and the Canadian government, favour the arms-reduction rather than the arms-deployment option, and unreservedly endorse the proposal for an interim agreement which the United States tabled in Geneva on March 29.

— To grow as an industrial economy, Canada must find markets for its manufactured, high technology products as well as for its raw materials and semi-processed goods. That means building constructive relations with potential trading partners, and working for a liberal trading environment. It means keeping our markets open to foreign goods — no easy task, for politicians, when foreign imports disrupt local production and cause unemployment.

— As individuals, Canadians welcome cultural, political and economic ties with countries which share our languages and traditions. That is a major motive for working with our Francophone and Commonwealth partners.

Our lives, as Canadians, are richer and fuller as a result of our exchanges with them. As you know, I visited your West African neighbours in Guinea, Mali and Cameroun before coming to Nigeria, in order to promote co-operation with them, as well as with your country.

That reflects Canada's dual vocation as a bilingual country. It is part of the fabric of our relations with West Africa. It heightens our interest in the efforts you are making to strengthen co-operation within West Africa.

— Last, but far from least, there are key issues which derive from our society's fundamental commitment to social justice — the issues of political liberation and North-South relations. I would like to return to these later.

You, Mr. Director-General, and other students of Nigerian affairs, could no doubt identify similar objectives within Nigerian foreign policy. It may be a matter of avoiding or resolving conflict in the region; or sustaining the price and volume of your petroleum exports; or seeking markets for your tropical products.

I have, indeed, heard something of the last point during this trip. I should perhaps recall that Canada included processed cocoa products in its generalized system of tariff preferences because of representations from Nigeria and other cocoa producers. The signing of our Joint Economic Agreement and the creation of a Joint Economic Commission, one of the highlights of this visit, will provide a ready forum in which we can raise and pursue questions of this kind with one another in the future — in the pursuit of our national interests.

I have outlined a number of areas in which Canada and Nigeria may pursue their national interests bilaterally or with other countries. There are no doubt many others. But even the most exhaustive inventory of immediate concerns will not, of itself, represent a fully coherent approach to foreign relations. We obviously cannot leave out of the picture the international environment in which we operate.

Nigeria, the ninth most populous country in the world, a leader in Africa with great economic potential, has an evident stake in the broader framework. And so has Canada, as a major trading country with world-wide ties. What can countries such as Nigeria and Canada do to support and shape a favourable international environment in the world of the Eighties? A world in which, I would note, national governments are absorbed by slow growth within their own economies, high levels of unemployment, the slackening of the demand for their exports and the danger that newly erected trade barriers will block their access to markets. Paralleling these concerns are the concerns which have been expressed about the continued ability of our major international institutions to resolve disputes and find solutions, including the United Nations itself.

Let us look at some examples of what we are already doing to shape the international environment.

Nigeria has played a leading role in building and sustaining the Organization of African Unity (OAU) as a regional centre for consultation, co-ordination and the resolution of disputes. That effort embodies a far-sighted view of how this continent should grow, co-operate, and deal with conflict. May I say, from a Canadian standpoint, that we endorse your objectives and applaud your efforts. For an effective OAU, by strengthening co-operation within Africa, will enlarge the opportunities for co-operation between African states and their friends overseas.

A second example: Canada and Nigeria have taken a keen interest in decolonization and national independence in Africa — a matter, above all, of human dignity and human rights. Speaking for Canada, I would echo the points made by my Prime Minister when he visited Nigeria in 1981. We shall not waver

in our opposition to the policy and practice of *apartheid* in South Africa. It is an abhorrent system of discrimination and an affront to us all. We know that justice must – and will – come for the victims of racism. We hope that those in power will have the wisdom and foresight to bring about the needed changes in a peaceful way. And that they will not delay – for change will come.

We also share common goals with Nigeria in Namibia. You have worked with the Front Line States and we with the Contact Group to bring Namibia to independence. We have no other goal than that. We do not link the implementation of Resolution 435 to any other issue. We recognize Angola's sovereign jurisdiction over its territory and its right to live free from outside attack. We have condemned South Africa's incursions on its territory.

Our objective, then, is to see South Africa's illegal occupation of Namibia end. We have taken our stand on Resolution 435 and shall continue to do so. We hope that current consultations will lead to its early implementation. Like you, we are saddened that in March 1983, that has not happened. We deplore the intransigence that prevents it. We hope that South Africa will recognize that here, too, change must, and will, come.

We cannot fail to repudiate such denials of human dignity and human rights, whether in Africa or elsewhere. That reflects a pragmatic calculation as well as a moral concern. For a world which accepted such practices without protest (in Namibia – or in Afghanistan) would be a cold and dangerous world for us, a world where violence and conflict would inevitably grow.

There are other areas where we seek to shape or change the international environment. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea represents a commendable effort to bring international order to the conduct of maritime affairs. The negotiations were thorough and comprehensive. They were, as you know, intended to establish an equitable basis for the use of ocean resources by all countries. None of us achieved all we wished. It is a matter of deep regret that some countries are unable to accept a convention which is a balanced and hard won compromise. I believe we should all accept the convention as the sole contemporary source of the international law of the sea.

Canada and Nigeria have long been involved in another arduous negotiation – in the Disarmament Committee in Geneva. Here, too, we should not falter in our efforts because progress is slow, and the decisions are not all in our hands. Progress towards arms control and disarmament will benefit every region. Both developed and developing countries will profit from reductions in military spending. Canada and Nigeria must work together to overcome the obstacles placed in our path by mistrust and suspicion.

I want to pay tribute, in this context, to the leadership given by Ambassador Adeniji in preparing the Second United Nations Special Session on Disarmament. We look forward to continued co-operation with your representatives.

There is one other major effort to alter and adjust the international environment in which Canada and Nigeria have been deeply engaged. That is the North-South dialogue. It has been pursued in various

bodies over a period of years — from UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) and the Conference on International Economic Co-operation in Paris to UN plans for global negotiations and the Summit meeting at Cancun. Now a further UNCTAD meeting is pending.

It is not, of course, the forum that is crucial, but the commitment to work together in order to reduce inequities and foster economic growth — to bring justice to a world where economic dislocations strike hardest at the poorest and most vulnerable. That commitment must remain high on our agenda for the Eighties.

For the recovery of the world economy cannot be realized without co-operation in an inter-dependent world. Demand in developing countries is an important engine of industrial growth. Debt and financing problems are a continuing obstacle to trade. Controlling inflation is necessary to stimulate investment and industrial growth. And commodity producers such as Nigeria and Canada must look to renewed vigour in their export markets.

Selfish beggar-thy-neighbour policies only afford temporary relief. They increase inequities and weaken our capacity to work together. They multiply the distress of the poorest. It is unrealistic to expect the poor and the underprivileged to acquiesce in measures which may bring prosperity to others but not to them.

I should like to put these concerns in a particular perspective. We all know that funds available for concessional assistance from Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development countries have not increased sufficiently to meet the urgent requirements of international development during the past two years. Neither have the amounts available from capital-surplus Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

Canada, for its part, remains committed to reaching a target of 0.5 per cent of gross national product by 1985. We shall make our best efforts to reach 0.7 per cent by 1990. Despite domestic difficulties our aid is growing in real terms.

Last year we contributed \$1.3 billion to assist developing countries. More than half was untied. One-third of the program was devoted to multilateral assistance. More than 70 per cent went to the less advanced developing countries.

So far as Africa is concerned, we provided bilateral assistance amounting to \$340 million, almost half of our total bilateral assistance. By way of comparison our imports and exports stood at \$1.2 and \$1.5 billion respectively. I hope both will continue to grow. For it is not easy to provide growing amounts of assistance at a time of high unemployment in Canada, when we have much spare capacity in our own economy. You may be sure we shall persist, but those who support development co-operation need all the backing they can get.

Let me note, as well, that we have 22 diplomatic posts in Africa. Half of them have been opened during the past 15 years. We were early supporters of the African Development Fund and we have been happy

to join the African Development Bank as a non-regional member. We have intensified our relations with the countries of the Continent, and expanded our co-operation with them in many fields.

Beyond the North-South dialogue, there is the multilateral system as a whole. It is obvious that countries such as Nigeria and Canada have an important stake in the operation and evolution of a stable and effective trade and payments system. We have an equal stake in the pursuit of justice and the maintenance of international security.

There is, unfortunately, a tendency in troubled times to take for granted the instruments of international co-operation: to assume that the United Nations, the international economic institutions and the specialized agencies will do their job while we pursue our own immediate and pressing concerns. That inclination may be heightened by a sense that we, as individual countries, can do little to influence events. Some countries may turn inwards and neglect the instruments of co-operation.

That would be a great mistake. It is, after all, the time and effort we put into the multilateral system, at some cost to ourselves, that will shape the world of the Eighties and beyond that. The effort requires patience and persistence. To achieve results, we must not lose that sense of tolerance, understanding and accommodation which we have learned in running our own countries. None of us can hope to shape the world in his image. But Nigeria and Canada – each in its own way fortunate in resources and potential – cannot escape the obligation to sustain and strengthen the international institutions which enable us to work together. That, too, is in our national interest.

The members of this institute study these matters closely. I would not wish them to take it amiss if I suggest, at this point, that foreign policy is more than calculation or systematic analysis. It is also a matter of human contacts and personal understanding. We turn naturally to those we like. We follow natural affinities and historical ties.

This magnificent country, dynamic and varied, conveys a sense of vitality to every visitor. Nigeria commands our attention as an important political and economic force, but it also engages our affection and respect. With this in mind, we very much look forward to strengthening our co-operation with you both bilaterally and in the international sphere.

S/C