

Statement

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REMARKS BY THE  
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,  
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JOE CLARK,  
AT A LUNCHEON  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING OF  
THE CANADA-ASEAN CENTRE

SINGAPORE

July 10, 1989.

Secretary of State  
for  
External Affairs

Secrétaire d'État  
aux  
Affaires extérieures

Canada

My colleague Wong Kan Seng,

Your Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

I am honoured that you would join us today to celebrate the opening of the Canada-ASEAN Centre.

I have had the privilege of attending five Post-Ministerial Conferences of ASEAN and her dialogue partners. Often we talked of the need to build a tangible bridge between Canada and ASEAN. We both felt we needed a permanent institution in the region to encourage and enlarge ASEAN's growing connections with Canada. Today, thanks to your unanimous and positive encouragement, these wishes have become a reality. At last, the Canada-ASEAN centre is born.

It is far more than an office and a set of rooms. It is a symbol of a relationship founded on cooperation and mutual trust.

Mr. Wong and I have just come from the Post-Ministerial Conference held in Bandar Seri Begawan. We covered a lot of ground in Brunei: Cambodia, the security situation in Asia-Pacific, refugees, international economics and trade, the environment and a meeting of Ministers later this year in Australia to discuss Pacific Economic Cooperation. Naturally we also discussed our growing trade and development cooperation programs.

That was all done openly, frankly, directly. That is the natural style of relations between Canada and ASEAN. Like individuals, nations confide and freely discuss with their closest friends. It is indeed an honour that ASEAN chooses to discuss with us these matters of regional importance to you.

Canada has had a long and valued association with ASEAN, beginning with the contacts initiated by Canada some fifteen years ago. Since then we have made substantial progress in identifying common interests and objectives. We have promoted greater trade and commercial links between our countries - and, through our development cooperation program, we have assisted in the tremendous economic growth of the ASEAN region. We continue to work closely together in seeking an end to regional disputes which threaten the prosperity and stability of the entire South-east Asia region.

Fundamental to our mutual interests is our common desire to promote peace and prosperity -- in Asia, and elsewhere in the world. Canada has consistently supported and collaborated in ASEAN's search for a peaceful solution to the Cambodian problem. Like you, we have pressed for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. And like you, we feel a deep respect for international law and a strong desire to promote the peaceful resolution of disputes.

We also share a strong belief in free market economies and open societies. Our relative prosperity is the result of our respect for the individual, and our conviction that promoting people-to-people contacts is an essential step toward international understanding and global prosperity.

These shared beliefs have forged stronger economic and commercial relationships between us. Two-way trade between ASEAN and Canada has tripled over the last decade, amounting to \$2.6 billion in 1988 - a healthy increase of 33 per cent over the 1987 figure. You will be happy to know that our imports from ASEAN have grown even faster than our exports, leaving a balance-of-trade surplus of \$336 million in ASEAN's favour last year.

On the international scene, both Canada and ASEAN are active participants in the GATT and the 1986 Uruguay Round of the Multilateral Trade Negotiations. We also share, with Thailand, Malaysia, Philippines and Indonesia, membership in the Cairns Group, which has shown leadership in seeking to remove subsidies and barriers that distort agricultural trade.

I see development cooperation as very much a means to promote closer collaboration between Canada and ASEAN. By working together in worthwhile development efforts, we not only promote economic growth in the region, but also create an opportunity to understand and learn from one another.

Although we as Canadians are justifiably proud of our advanced technology, we have learned that when we come to your region to share our knowledge, we return home much enriched by the process. Our development program with ASEAN is cooperation in the truest sense.

We will continue to emphasize human resource development and the building of institutional capacity. We will remain active throughout the entire ASEAN region. The Centre will serve as a catalyst for our activities in all ASEAN member countries.

Together over the last several years, we have forged, in my view, a productive and balanced relationship. We have worked together and consulted on the MTN, GATT and Cairns Group. At our most recent senior officials meeting, our then Ambassador for International Trade, Sylvia Ostry, participated in a lively discussion with you on MTN issues. We were also delighted to receive a delegation of ASEAN officials who came to Canada in order to study our approach to MTN negotiations.

We have also established an ASEAN Canada Business Council in 1986. This body representing our private sectors participated in the Canada-ASEAN Joint Cooperation Committee meeting in Ottawa in April 1988. I expect them to join again in these deliberations on how to expand our commercial and investment links at the next meeting in Brunei this November.

I foresee more such meetings occurring in the future; not just between our businesspersons but between our educators, our artists, our media, and other groups which will benefit from the sharing of ideas.

Our development cooperation program has also matured to the point where we are engaging in much more ambitious projects either as further phases of successful projects, or as new initiatives in response to emerging development priorities of the region.

As I speak, ASEAN officials are in Canada acquainting themselves with Canadian telecommunications technology and studying at our universities. Meanwhile, Canadians are working with ASEAN experts here in the region, promoting and introducing Canadian technology in a variety of areas including fisheries, forestry and telecommunications.

Today marks the beginning of a new phase in Canada - ASEAN relations. I have felt for some time that Canada should be more visible within the ASEAN region. The new Centre will give us that higher profile. In particular, it will provide a focus and an anchor for our regionally-based initiatives and will expand our relationships beyond the official programs underway between our governments.

I see the Centre and its activities as serving both your own and our objectives. I want your guidance and suggestions on how it can help bring us closer together.

For you, it will provide easier access to Canadian organizations anxious to expand ties with the region. It will be a catalyst and the centre of a network linking Canadian and ASEAN interest groups in a wide range of activities designed to promote better understanding of our respective institutions, cultures and ultimately our peoples.

During its first year, the Centre will provide a home for CIDA's development cooperation program with ASEAN and with the regional institutions. I am sure that this will result in a much more effective management of the programs, and more frequent and effective communication between ASEAN and Canadian officials involved.

The decentralization of CIDA's program, however, is only the first step in the Centre's evolution. I expect it will evolve with a much broader mandate. To define the next steps, I intend to create an Advisory Council made up of experienced people who have a profound knowledge of areas where ASEAN and Canada can develop closer linkages. Both Canadians and ASEAN representatives would be appointed. Together, they would establish priorities for the Centre.

The detailed planning for the Centre's operation will thus take place where it should: here in ASEAN. The day-to-day management of the Centre will be entrusted to an executive director. I expect the Executive Director, along with the Advisory Council, to be appointed by October. His or her first task will be to undertake consultations within the region and in Canada to chart out priority activities for the Centre.

Let me leave you with some ideas as to what the Centre might do. I see the Centre's role in the future as building bridges between groups in Canada and ASEAN with common interests in a variety of fields, as a complement to our official relations.

Education and training will form a large part of the Centre's future work. I have had many conversations with ASEAN Ministers and with Canadian business persons working in the region. There is a clear consensus that if there were more direct exchanges and visits between the people of Canada and ASEAN countries, including our companies, universities and colleges, both our peoples would benefit through enhanced skills, deeper knowledge and understanding, and, of course, close friendships.

I want to stress that mutual interest must be served in the field of education and training, as it must be in the new business partnerships we are developing. Canada's intention is to share the talents of our people and the facilities of our country, not with a view to encouraging the outflow of talent to Canada but to enriching both your and our peoples through the contacts that they will share. We believe that our mutual interests will be best served by the linkages which will be there after the participants return.

One of the most successful new initiatives which the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada has undertaken was to organize a Seminar in Banff, Alberta, my home Province. The session brought together Japanese and Canadian businesspersons to spend two weeks getting to know one another and talk about common problems and how to build new business relations between Canada and Japan. They were able to go back to their organizations with a better understanding of each other's business practices, perspectives and opportunities for building new links. I am told that at least one business deal was launched from the experience.

The next such session will take place in September, this time involving executives and business people from Thailand. I can see the Canada-ASEAN Centre playing a catalytic role in multiplying these kinds of new and specialized seminars across the ASEAN region.

To maximize contact between our people, we must look beyond traditional areas of cooperation. We must look beyond our official programs. The Centre can promote contacts between our cultural groups, our media, our sporting associations and other non-governmental bodies. The Centre's role will in many respects be that of a match-maker. I am confident that many lasting marriages will result.

I anticipate that next year at this time, the Centre will be embarking on new programs, beyond development cooperation which have been created through our mutual planning efforts. The Centre will be what we choose to make of it. I am inviting you to be part of this process.

I believe most sincerely that the future of our relationship hinges on the expansion of contacts and links which will increase familiarity trust and friendship between our respective peoples. We should consider that to be our common goal. The Canada-ASEAN Centre signifies Canada's commitment to the future that we will share together.