

# Statement

Secretary of  
State for  
External Affairs



# Déclaration

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d'État aux  
Affaires  
extérieures

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## NOTES FOR A SPEECH

BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JOE CLARK,

ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING

OF THE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR

HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT

Montreal, Quebec

October 19, 1990.

We are here to open a Centre. And in so doing, we are here to celebrate a cause and confirm a commitment. That commitment is to the defence and pursuit of human rights and democracy around the world. That cause is the development of a world where justice knows no borders and human rights no caveat. That cause and that commitment are central elements of Canada's foreign policy. And they have firm roots in our Canadian experience and Canadian values.

As we enter a new decade and approach a new century, never have there been such grounds for optimism that the observance of human rights around the world will become more the rule and less the exception. And never have so many societies embraced democracy, some for the first time and some once again.

But this is not a time for complacency or congratulation. For the process is just beginning. In some countries, old walls have been torn down. But new structures remain to be built. In those countries, the fabric is fragile and the future remains uncertain. And in many parts of the world, walls remain. Walls of the mind and walls of power. Walls that which deprive people of their rights and their prosperity. Walls that deny development and consign whole sectors of society to lives that are partial and poor. That some battles have been won tells us that there are many battles yet to be fought.

Those victories will be won through action, based on an attitude that does not see human rights as a luxury but as what that term says: rights which come with being human. An attitude that does not pose false choices -- development versus democracy, security versus human rights, stability versus justice. An attitude that does not see those as choices but as complements.

The past year has seen that new attitude in evidence in Europe, where in a matter of months, what we once feared was permanent came tumbling down, a triumph of the human spirit which took our breath away. That triumph represented the end of one system and the beginning of another. But that new system has yet to take form and tearing down is easier than building up. Democracy and human rights have been given an opportunity in Eastern Europe. It is up to the people of these countries -- and to us to ensure that opportunity becomes success.

The peoples of Eastern Europe did not reject communism because they thought it was illogical or immoral. They rejected communism because it did not work, it did not deliver. It denied people food for the body and food for the spirit. The collapse of communism is a victory not for ideology, but for common sense.

That attitude is in evidence elsewhere. In Asia, in Latin America and in Africa, brave governments and courageous people are embracing democracy because they know that what they have had does not work, that it does not deliver. They are recognizing that systems which suppress societies are systems which self-destruct. That systems which deny prosperity to their people are systems which will always be poor. That systems which deny human rights in the interest of social peace are systems where that peace is only a truce.

The battle for human rights and democracy will never be won if they are seen only as luxuries or as dangers. They must be seen as key components of societies which work, societies which are stable, societies which are prosperous. That realization is growing and it will be a key factor for success in our cause.

What can we do to encourage that attitude and promote those developments abroad?

First, it is essential that we avoid the easy trap of trying to impose our models on those societies. There is no blueprint for democracy, no how-to book for human rights. Democracies and human rights cannot be imposed from abroad anymore than they can be imposed from above. Political systems are homegrown. They must accommodate the traditions and history and dynamics of particular societies. If they do not, they will not work and they will not last.

Second, we must reject a notion of superior accomplishment, a notion that is both arrogant and misplaced. Our accomplishments, which are substantial, have been a product of providence, as much as will, a function of the way we have used the rare prosperity inherent in Canada. And our accomplishments are in so many cases recent and incomplete.

It was not until 1940 that women in every province in Canada could vote in provincial elections. Indians in Canada -- women and men -- did not have the right to vote until Mr. Diefenbaker changed the law in 1960.

And there are many rights still unfulfilled, still incomplete. The blights of poverty, of illiteracy, of violence against women, of prejudice and intolerance, of hatred and propaganda are phenomena that do not stop at the North/South divide. They are uncomfortably present in Canada.

And our own democracy requires development -- constant nurturing, repair and care. The constitutional impasse of this spring is ample evidence of that. So too is the fact that in many ways our institutions have ceased to represent what we as a society have become.

In some cases they have become caricatures -- not just in the collapse of self-respect in our Senate, but in the growing incivility in Parliament, and the casual denigration of other Canadians that is becoming more marked in our public commentary. Those imperfections should not freeze us into inaction. They simply mean we have a job to do at home and a job to do abroad.

Third, we must be prepared to move beyond rhetoric. Societies that are developing-politically and developing economically -- do not need cheerleaders. They need understanding friends -- people who will extend their hand and not turn their backs, countries who are willing to help them practise what we have so long preached.

Societies that are not democratic are unlikely to become developed. But so too societies that are underdeveloped are unlikely to become democratic. True democracy is not secured by building assemblies or buying ballots or crafting lofty laws. Democracy and human rights require a foundation -- a foundation of belief and a foundation of development. We cannot demand democracy and deny development. Teaching people to read fights illiteracy, but it can also be a step towards democracy. Making people productive fights poverty, but it also can be a step towards other human rights. Development assistance that is effective and efficient will do far more to promote democracy and human rights than any lecture or any admonition from the West or the North.

Fourth, we must be patient and we must be understanding. We cannot demand democracy or perfect human rights overnight anymore than we ever demanded that of ourselves. We cannot blindly pursue policies of structural adjustment which do not acknowledge that those policies, if misguided, can themselves erode the roots of democracy and social stability. Structural adjustment is necessary for growth that is not inflationary and development that is sustainable. But those policies must be constructed to preserve the social foundations required for future growth.

Fifth, we must face squarely the issue of the links we make between development assistance and government behaviour. Part of that challenge is to recognize that there are no easy choices. We may detest regimes and abhor governments. But people should not be punished for regimes they do not support, regimes that are punishing them already. On the other hand, those regimes should know that there are limits and there are fundamental standards which we will not discard.

I believe Canadian development assistance reflects that approach. We look at human rights records in deciding on the level of aid we give and on what type of aid that should be. But we do not demand miracles. We do not expect a society that has been a prison to become a paradise overnight. So we look for trends of improvement, and we review those trends regularly.

Similarly, rather than cutting off aid completely, we will often alter the type of aid given. When a regime becomes a systematic, gross and continuous abuser of human rights, we may cease to deal through that regime. But we will not cease to deal with the people, as long as they can be reached. We will not cause them to suffer more than they suffer already. So we work through Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and churches and local organizations where possible to allow assistance to get through without assisting those governments. I do not pretend that this always works perfectly or that the choice is easy. But I do believe that it is the only approach that is correct.

Sixth, we must provide the practical tools and expertise to make democracy work and to assist in the observance and strengthening of human rights. That can be done bilaterally and multilaterally. That can involve election observers, constitutional experts, human rights monitors, ballot boxes and books.

It is for this reason that this year alone Canada assisted in elections in Romania, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia. That is why we are assisting Benin as it moves towards democracy. That is why we worked with the UN in sending observers and RCMP officers to Namibia. That is why we are offering constitutional expertise to both black and white in South Africa. That is why we have sent election observers to Malaysia through the Commonwealth, why we participated in the OAS and UN efforts in Nicaragua, why we are working with both those organizations in Haiti and why we are prepared to assist the UN in constructing democracy in the Western Sahara and Cambodia.

Multilaterally, we have moved to make democracy and human rights a feature of regional organizations which have great potential in building confidence and trust in so many parts of the world. At the first Annual Assembly we attended as members of the Organization of American States, we proposed a Unit for Democratic Development. That proposal was accepted and we are pursuing similar ideas within the Commonwealth and la Francophonie. And in Europe, we took the lead in Copenhagen at the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) Conference on Human Dimension in proposing strengthened commitments to the rule of law and the rights of minorities and proposed that NATO assume a role in sharing its democratic experiences with its old adversaries in the East.

Those are practical steps. They are not grand designs and they do not in and of themselves convert despotism into democracy or torture into tolerance. But they are steps that move us forward. They are designed to educate, to build institutions, to build trust and, in so doing, to make the roots of democracy stronger and to strengthen the observance of human rights.

Finally, I believe it is important to emphasize the requirement for partnership in the pursuit of democracy and human rights. Just as those goals demand action across a broad range of political, social and economic fronts, so too they will only be secured through partnerships within societies and partnerships between societies. That involves governments, business, labour unions, churches, international organizations, independent institutions and individuals.

That is why this Centre is so important. It can tap resources, develop links and initiate programs which can complement what others are doing in different ways. And the Centre will be able to do things which governments cannot do.

Central to success in what the Centre does will be its independence, something we sought to enshrine from the outset, something which cannot be challenged. That independence gives the Centre a vital freedom, a crucial credibility. It requires the government to respect its limits; it requires the Centre to respect its broad responsibility to the whole Canadian community concerned with human rights. Of course, that means there will be occasions on which the views expressed by this institution will not match those of the government. But it would be odd -- indeed perverse -- if that were not the case.

But while our paths may sometimes diverge, they are parallel paths, paths leading to the same destination. A world where human rights and democracy are celebrated not as goals but as realities, a world where rights are not the province of the few or the wealthy, but the province of all, a world where our children -- and children around the world -- might live in freedom and prosperity through justice without fear.

We Canadians sometimes denigrate our own accomplishments. And indeed, sometimes we have failed ourselves. But what we have built here is unique. We have built a country by inviting the world to come and share in our luck. We have built a democracy with millions who have fled tyranny and sought freedom. We have built a community through tolerance, through compromise, through understanding.

Others recognize the Canadian commitment to justice and human rights, the Canadian accomplishment. Nelson Mandela does. Soviet refuseniks do. The governments of China, of Sri Lanka, of Nicaragua, of Kenya, of Haiti have done. We can look to this Centre to carry that message forward in its own way -- a Canadian message, a message of persistence and insistence, but also one of help and hope. A message which will also remind us of our own achievements at home and push us on where we have yet to succeed.

On behalf of the Government of Canada, I extend to you my best wishes for a challenging future, a future of opportunity and of hope, a future in which we all have a stake and which your efforts will make brighter.