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Statement by the
Honourable Monique Landry,
Minister for External Relations,
to the General Assembly of the
United Nations

Africa's continuing crisis

NEW YORK

October 27, 1987.

Mr. Chairman,

The magnitude and depth of human suffering caused by the economic crisis in Africa has jolted us all. It has moved the international community from complacency to concern, and from concern to action. Our purpose here is to examine how well we have acted - and what remains to be done.

My responsibilities for Canada's Development Assistance program and my special responsibilities for Canada's relations with Africa have made me fully aware of conditions there. This last year, I have had the opportunity to travel to Nigeria, Burundi, Rwanda, Zaire, Gabon and Mozambique. And I have witnessed there first hand, both the hardships and the courage of individual Africans and their governments. More recently, at the Francophone Summit in Quebec and at the Commonwealth Summit in Vancouver, I met with many African leaders and discussed with them the plight of their people.

For me personally, and I reflect the view of the Canadian government and people, these experiences have instilled an even firmer resolve to focus our own efforts on Africa. We are determined to do not only our part, but more. And, we intend to continue to work to focus the attention of the international community and our major economic partners on Africa. That is why I have made a point of coming to participate in this debate.

I would like to start by thanking the Secretary General for his thorough and insightful report on progress in the implementation of the African Economic Recovery Programme. He has provided us with a very frank and detailed review of how far we have come in the past year.

It is, to say the least, a very distressing report. We cannot express any great satisfaction at the results obtained from the combined efforts of the African countries and the international community in actually helping the people of Africa. Indeed, we can only express disappointment at the failure of our efforts to make significant changes in their lives.

However, at the time of the Special Session on Africa, when we discussed, considered and agreed on the African Priority Programme for Economic Recovery and Development, no one anticipated the economic situation we are in today. For most countries, growth has lagged far behind expectations. Most commodity markets have remained in decline, in real terms. Commercial credit flows have virtually stagnated, and official flows barely improved. Clearly, the world economic situation has adversely affected our efforts.

There is little point in seeking to ascribe blame for these realities. For, in fact, all countries, African and donor countries alike, have been affected. What has happened is that the international economic environment has altered. And what is abundantly evident is that no one country or group of countries can control all the factors at play.

Nevertheless, the Secretary General's report should not be cause for despair. We are, it is true, in a more difficult situation than last year. The crisis has deepened. The social and political risks and costs are higher. But, steps have been taken both in Africa and in the world community that merit recognition and commendation.

In Africa, some twenty-eight countries have undertaken significant and effective structural adjustment programmes. These countries have made great and far reaching sacrifices in the hope of improving their prospects for long term benefits and success. They have taken tangible action to introduce meaningful policy reforms and to adjust the ways their economies function. The Secretary General's report has given us many examples.

Some positive results are very slowly - and painfully - becoming evident. However limited these may seem in the light of current circumstances, it is from them that we must take heart. We must here recognize that the courage, energy and determination demonstrated by those African governments are making a difference - and deserve our full, unrelenting, support.

On the part of the international community, there has also been some movement. A number of multilateral initiatives are now at various stages of development:

- In the IMF, Mr. Camdessus has proposed a tripling of the Structural Adjustment Facility.
- In the Paris Club, special arrangements have been made, and others are under consideration, for the poorest debtors.
- In the World Bank, ideas generated in UNICEF on the need for adjustment with a human face, have been taken on board.
- The IDA VIII replenishment now will go forward as agreed.
- There is, finally, consensus on the need to negotiate a General Capital Increase for the World Bank.

- In the Uruguay Round, special attention is being paid to the need to involve and to assist developing countries, especially the poorest, to participate fully.
- Donor coordination has been strengthened. And World Bank Consultative Group have brought more relevant and effective assistance.

These developments represent movement. And in better times they might have produced results which we could look upon with satisfaction. But, in current circumstances, it is only too evident that the response is not adequate. It is partial, piecemeal and short term.

One of the outcomes of our deliberations here must be a renewed commitment to more concerted efforts to implement the Recovery Programme. We, the world community, must address ourselves to the possible. And we, in unison, must accomplish what now may appear impossible: more and better assistance, more quickly given. In this regard, we look forward to the ideas and recommendations of the Secretary General's Advisory Group on resource flows.

We in Canada have accepted our responsibilities. The tragedy of Africa has been acutely felt by Canadians and it is of the highest priority for the Canadian Government. In 1984 and 1985, we responded rapidly and generously to the immediate problem of famine. Early last year, Canada set in place the Africa 2000 programme, a \$150 million initiative to help build a strong and self-reliant Africa by the year 2000. We declared a moratorium on outstanding aid debt for Sub-Saharan Africa and converted our Development Assistance program throughout the world to an all grant basis.

This year, Canada has gone further:

- At the Venice Summit, our Prime Minister, Brian Mulroney, drew attention to (and presented ideas on how to relieve) the debt burden of the poorest countries.
- In the context of the Uruguay Round, Canada has begun a programme of consultations and training designed to enable developing countries better to pursue and protect their trading interests in the MTN.
- We have supported longer rescheduling periods and concessional interest rates for the poorest in the Paris Club.

- Canada has committed a total of US \$575 million to IDA VIII: our share, plus a special additional contribution.
- Canada will contribute SDR (Special Drawing Rights) 200 million to a tripled Structural Adjustment Facility in the IMF.
- And, at the Francophone Summit and Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, we undertook to forgive the remaining outstanding Canadian ODA debt of 13 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, a measure worth CDN \$672 million.

In addition, the Canadian Government has taken steps to orient our development assistance more directly toward the most pressing needs of the poorest countries, in particular in the area of human resource development and in respect of the role of women. In line with our concern for Africa, we have taken the decision to increase the percentage of our bilateral development assistance channeled to African countries to 45%.

And, we have taken the additional decision to untie that assistance up to 50% so that it can be more quickly and effectively used, and better adapted to local circumstances. As yet a further step to better aid delivery, we have decided to decentralize the Canadian International Development Agency and will be moving parts of the administration and decision making power to our representatives on the ground in developing countries and regions. We will begin this process in Africa.

Canada is but one country amongst many others. We are very much aware that measures we take alone will not solve the enormous problems of Africa nor provide the kind of relief and assistance that is so desperately needed.

But we are committed, wholly and completely, to finding ways to support Africa, both bilaterally and multilaterally. On other occasions, I have referred to "Constructive Internationalism" as the cornerstone of Canadian foreign policy. For us, this means making the process of multilateral exchange and cooperation work, at its best, and to the benefit of all. In the case of Africa, the multilateral system is faced with a formidable challenge: to make a greater whole out the sum of our individual efforts.

We in Canada are convinced that this can and must be done. We have noted the comments of the Secretary General. We will listen carefully to the views and ideas of others in this debate. And we commit ourselves to work with all others to make what we do more realistic, practical and effective.

At each of the economic summits he has attended, Prime Minister Mulroney has expressly raised with other leaders the concerns and problems of developing countries. As we prepare for the Toronto Summit next year, Africa is foremost on our minds. We intend to ensure, once again, that attention is given to the crucial needs of Africa and in particular to the urgency of concrete support for the efforts being made by African countries.

Mr. Chairman,

Africa's crisis is our crisis. Our common humanity demands that we act with compassion and with urgency to alleviate the terrible suffering and to break the vicious circle of hopelessness and decline. We must not fail.

Thank you.