



No. 24

January 29, 1991

CLARK DETAILS CANADA'S RESPONSE TO GULF OIL SPILL

The Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Right Honourable Joe Clark, today released the text of a letter sent to the Co-Chairman of a Joint Meeting of the Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade and the Standing Committee for National Defence and Veterans Affairs.

During his testimony at the Joint Meeting of the two Committees, the Minister provided some information on Canada's response to the oil spill in the Gulf.

In his letter to Arnold Malone, M.P., Mr. Clark gives further details of Canada's response to the problems created by the spill. The text of the letter is attached.

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For further information, media representatives may contact:

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The Rt. Hon. Joe Clark, P. C., M. P.
Secretary of State for External Affairs



Le très hon. Joe Clark, C. P., député
Secrétaire d'Etat aux Affaires extérieures

Canada

OTTAWA, Ontario
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Dear Arnold,

At the joint meeting today of the Standing Committee for External Affairs and International Trade and the Standing Committee for National Defence and Veterans Affairs which you chaired, the subject of the oil spill in the Gulf arose.

I would like to provide the following additional information on Canada's response to this wanton act. Iraq has shocked the world by discharging vast quantities of crude oil into the Gulf.

Such massive and purposeless destruction of the natural environment cannot be tolerated by any one of us. The resulting oil slick contains millions of barrels of oil, a quantity vastly larger than the Exxon Valdez spill.

An international response to the disaster is being put together. This Government treats this calamity with the utmost urgency.

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Mr. Arnold Malone, M.P.,
Chairman
Standing Committee on National Defence and
Veterans Affairs
House of Commons
Room 774, Confederation Building
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As soon as the dimensions of the ecological crisis became known, the Government struck a senior inter-departmental committee headed by the Department of National Defence and comprising all relevant departments including External Affairs, Environment Canada, Transport Canada, Energy Mines and Resources and Fisheries and Oceans to review the options for Canadian assistance.

The committee reviewed what technical expertise and equipment was available in Canada to contribute to an effective response to this crisis. The latter included advanced skimmers, 80,000 feet of protective booms, and Innotech's highly sophisticated air-borne remote sensing device to monitor oil spills and slicks which had been used in the Exxon-Valdez crisis.

There is considerable equipment available in situ in the Gulf to protect facilities such as the desalination plants of Saudi Arabia. In addition, Aramco is already procuring equipment from the UK, Canada and elsewhere. However, the needs of smaller states in the area needed to be determined.

Our embassies in Bahrain and Qatar approached local authorities to offer Canadian technical assistance and this offer was accepted.

We see our contribution in three phases:

- a) We will assess the need, determine what others are contributing, and what the framework is for international cooperation.

Experts from Environment Canada and the Canadian Coast Guard will go to Bahrain and Qatar immediately.

We have been in touch with Mr. William O'Neill, a Canadian, who is the Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization and with the United Nations Environment Program, two key UN agencies involved in the fight against marine pollution. We are urging them to ensure that international coordination is carried out with utmost haste.

My colleague, The Honourable Robert de Cotret, Minister of the Environment, is in Paris where he will attend to-morrow a meeting of OECD Environment Ministers. This issue is now on the agenda of the meeting and will be discussed.

- b) The second phase will involve a specific response on both bilateral and multilateral levels, based on the report of the assessment team.

We would be in a position to provide the services of Innotech's airborne remote sensing device.

A decision will then be made regarding the shipment of skimmers and booms. We are ready to send this equipment if there is a need. On the multilateral scene, Canada would be involved in coordinated efforts to be established by UNEP, IMO and others.

- c) Further down the road, after the war, Canada will assist in the long term correction of the ecological damage. This will be a major endeavour and Canada will do its share.

I trust the above provides additional information of interest to the Standing Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Original signed by: MINISTER
Original signed par: JOE CLARK

c.c. The Honourable John Bosley, Chairman
Standing Committee on External Affairs and
International Trade