

Statement

95/58

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS BY
THE HONOURABLE ANDRÉ OUELLET,
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
ON THE OCCASION OF
THE INAUGURATION OF PLACE DE LA FAO

QUEBEC CITY, Quebec
October 10, 1995



Government
of Canada

Gouvernement
du Canada

Canada

Mr. Mayor,
Mr. Premier
Mr. Director General of the FAO,
Mr. Pearson,
Madame Lapointe,
Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen:

I am both pleased and honoured to be here today to participate in the inauguration of Place FAO [UN Food and Agriculture Organization] in Quebec City, and in the unveiling of a plaque in honour of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson, one of Canada's greatest diplomats and prime ministers.

Mr. Mayor, I believe we can take this opportunity to highlight the important role played by Quebec City in the contemporary history of Canada and the world.

Quebec City is not only the birthplace of the FAO; among other things, it also hosted the allied leaders on two occasions during the Second World War, enabling them to co-ordinate their efforts to liberate Europe and to recognize Canada's importance in the Alliance.

On October 16, 1945, 42 countries met in this city under the chairmanship of Lester B. Pearson, then Canadian Ambassador to the United States, to sign the Constitution and take part in the first Conference of the new Food and Agriculture Organization. In view of the important role that our country would play in building the UN system, it was fitting that Quebec City's name should be linked with the creation of a specialized UN agency.

But Canada's involvement in creating the FAO dates back earlier than the Quebec City Conference of 1945. Two years earlier, in 1943, Mr. Pearson accepted President Franklin Roosevelt's invitation to chair the commission responsible for setting up the FAO.

In 1945 the world had just experienced the worst conflict in the history of humanity. The world's nations were confronted with famine, mass destruction of food reserves, inflation, shortages, the destruction of arable land - in short, the ravages of a terrible war.

Today, with 171 members, the FAO is an international forum without equal. Operating not only in the field of technical assistance, it is also involved in various activities aimed at agricultural development and improving the nutritional value and security of the world's food supplies.

Since its creation on October 16, 1945, remarkable progress has been achieved in this respect. However, we realize that much remains to be done, and many challenges must be faced. Current events remind us that hunger and malnutrition are still with us.

We also know that no one country or group of countries can remedy these serious problems by itself.

More than ever, our world needs strong, credible multilateral institutions capable of meeting the hopes, so high and yet so simple, of mankind. Mr. Director General, you may be assured of Canada's willingness to help the FAO, like the other components of the UN system, to face the challenges confronting it.

As Canadians, we can be proud of our country's unique contribution toward building the UN system. The UN has been, and will continue to be, the cornerstone of Canadian foreign policy. We support it because it represents values we cherish: co-operation, sharing, peace and justice.

Of course, we are not unaware of its weaknesses and shortcomings. But we are taking pains to remedy them. If the international community is responding favourably to our call to reform the UN, it is because it sees Canada as one of its most faithful servants and staunchest defenders. Our voice has been and will continue to be heard, because our participation in all the UN's peace missions has earned us the respect of the international community. Nor can we forget that the concept of peacekeeping operations originated with the vision of Lester B. Pearson, the man we are honouring today.

Although there was no reference to peacekeeping in the United Nations Charter, Pearson proposed that the UN undertake such operations for the first time in 1956, during the Suez Crisis. This earned him the Nobel Peace Prize.

We also know that the only way of successfully facing the challenges before the world, such as securing a food supply and protecting agricultural and natural resources, is to share our strengths and our successes with the peoples of the world. We stand only to learn more by doing so.

Canada has long been a leader in agriculture, fisheries and forestry, and we believe that sharing this knowledge is essential.

For this reason, we are pleased with the fact that, in addition to the FAO ministerial meeting, Quebec City will also host the FAO Symposium, bringing together more than 1000 representatives from governments, the private sector, the NGOs [non-governmental organizations] and academia.

Among those present are representatives from well-known Canadian and Quebec institutions such as Desjardins International Development, McGill University, Laval University and the University of Montreal. We also have the Fédération des Producteurs de bois du Québec, among many others. The expertise

of these stakeholders in sustainable development, natural and agricultural resources is recognized and sought after worldwide.

We believe that hunger is a global problem requiring a solution of co-operation at all levels of society and the international community. Only a genuine partnership that will contribute to the exchange of knowledge will enable us to achieve our objectives of world food equilibrium and sustainable development.

I conclude by taking advantage of this opportunity to reaffirm Canada's commitment to the FAO. This is a commitment not only to reinforce international co-operation for world food security and sustainable development, but to underline our attachment to the basic principles of the United Nations.

The international community must, in a common effort, continue to fight against the scourge of hunger, malnutrition and poverty that has plagued our world for far too long.

Thank you.