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NOTES FOR A SPEECH BY THE
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,
FLORA MACDONALD,
TO THE INTER AMERICAN PRESS
ASSOCIATION,
TORONTO, OCTOBER 17, 1979

Mr. President,

It would be only natural, indeed it is almost obligatory, for me, as the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs, to tell an audience such as this one how important the government and the Canadian people think our ties with the rest of the hemisphere are. It would also be true the significance of our links with the United States are obvious and needn't be emphasized, but perhaps I could spend a moment or two explaining just why I think that the ties with the rest of the hemisphere are of increasing importance, and indeed are much more so than ten or fifteen years ago.

As I view the world over the past two decades or so I see an almost inexorable increase in instability - both politically and economically. In the nineteen fifties and early sixties the world was held in balance by the spheres of influence of the two major super-powers. In a manner not entirely dissimilar to the stabilizing effect of the imperialist powers in the age of colonialism, the USA and Russia for a period were able to exert a controlling influence on a very large portion of the globe. Through that influence, though it was not always appreciated by the countries subject to it, the powers were able to keep conflicting forces in a sort of balance. This balance was not complete, and certainly was not universal, but there is no question that it limited the scope for major conflict. Although there were outbreaks of intense animosities in various parts of the world, none of them approached global dimensions.

At the same time the empires of the European states were being disbanded, and most of the former colonies were gaining their independence. That process was not always peaceful, though often it was, but any conflict to which the process gave rise was pretty well contained within the borders of the states in question.

It was only natural that a country like Canada, a developed nation with no history of colonialism, would be called upon by many of the newly independent countries for support in a variety of ways. It was also only natural that we should respond. One unfortunate result of this may have been that in paying so much attention to these new countries in continents far away we failed to pay the attention we should to our neighbours in this hemisphere.

In any event we greatly increased our involvement and commitments in the new countries overseas at a time when the world was more or less stabilized by the spheres of interest of the two super-powers. But in the past decade those two powers have

lost much of their ability to control conflict on the world stage. We now have a situation internationally where there is a virtual nuclear stalemate - a situation that is becoming an increasingly absorbing part of the relations and competition between the two great powers. This stalemate has enormous implications for world order.

In describing this situation at the Heads of Government Conference in Lusaka this summer, Prime Minister Lee of Singapore described the phenomenon as a new Roman arch made not of bricks but of nuclear missiles. And under that arch there is a considerable amount of room for other countries to manoeuvre. Politics, like nature, abhors a vacuum, and it is only natural that forces have come into play as the influence of the super-powers has waned. One has only to look at any newspaper to see the reality of the instability that characterizes the world today.

Conflict has become once again an unfortunate but increasingly accepted element in world geography. In just the past nine months we have seen Viet Nam invade Cambodia, China invade Viet Nam, fighting break out between North and South Yemen, Tanzanian troops overthrow the Amin regime in neighbouring Uganda, and hostilities continue in Southern Africa. Internal strife, complete with guns and bombs, has occurred in such countries as Nicaragua, Iran, Lebanon, Afghanistan, the Central African Empire and Ethiopia. A number of other countries are in an uneasy state of anxiety because they fear the outbreak of violence. All this is happening without the direct intervention of the two super-powers. Fifteen years ago this would have been unthinkable. Both the United States and the USSR demonstrated their willingness to intervene to promote stability, as they saw it, in such countries as the Dominican Republic, Viet Nam, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. But not more.

I say all this without putting on it any value judgements. It is not my purpose today to discuss the morality of colonialism or of super-power domination of large parts of the world. I say it only as an evaluation of the present situation as it has developed in the past decade or so. We are now faced with a world where political instability seems to be a given, and there are no longer any global constraints put on conflict by dominant countries.

And of course the world economic picture is also characterized by great instability and change. The impact of OPEC in causing such sudden and enormous increases in the price of petroleum is still not completely understood. Nor is there any certainty that either supplies or prices will stabilize in the near future. One has only to look at the increase in the price of gold, or at the current level of the American

dollar on the international markets to realize that confidence in the prevailing economic system is not great. Uncertainty about nearly all aspects of international relations seems to be the only constant in today's world.

It is with this in mind that I think about the nature of the relationships that Canada has and should have with its neighbours in the Americas. Undoubtedly there have been historic economic and social ties that date back many years. I'm sure that in your sessions here you have already been treated to a detailed analysis of what these have been, and what they amount to at the present time. I shan't repeat these facts, nor try to compete in the way of presentation with the able speakers you have already heard. So I won't repeat what you already know, and I won't bore you with a list of statistics.

It is a plain and unavoidable fact that for Canadians our dealings with the United States are by far the most important of all our international ties. The USA is our closest neighbour, our preponderant trading partner, our closest friend.

I do want you to know, however, that it is my own personal and very strong view that our relations with the other countries of the Americas are also of vital importance to Canada. I feel this particularly strongly in the context of the general world situation that I outlined a moment ago. With so much uncertainty and instability characterizing large parts of the globe, it is important to us to reinforce our ties with those areas and those countries that seem most likely to offer continuing and stable relationships. This does not mean, of course, that we intend in any way to turn our backs on the rest of the world, or that we have decided to diminish our interests in aid and trade elsewhere. It does mean, however, that we shall be paying particular attention to the countries represented in your association's membership.

At present we are undertaking a review of all our foreign and aid policy, and I have asked that the western hemisphere be given particular attention in that review. It is, of course, far too early to say just what the specific outcome of that review will be, but I think it's safe to say that in future the Government of Canada will be paying more attention than it has in the past to its dealings with its neighbours on this side of the globe.

Mr. President, that may be the longest build-up in history, or at least in my history, to saying how pleased I am to be asked to address you today. You come from countries that, as I have said, are of particular significance to Canada, and you are joined in a cause that is very close to my own heart.

The whole field of human rights is one that I have been interested and involved in for a number of years. Indeed it is my sincere conviction that the very purpose of being in political life is to foster the cause of human rights. For surely this is what governments are for - to help their people achieve the highest level of which they are capable in physical, political and economic terms. That is just another way of saying that governments are in the business of fostering human rights. So strongly do I feel this personally, that I took that as my theme in addressing the United Nations General Assembly three weeks ago in New York. It is a subject to which it is impossible to pay too much attention.

And there is no aspect of rights more vital to the maintenance of freedom, nothing more integral to the proper functioning of democracy, than freedom of expression and freedom of the press. There is no need for me to tell you here that the right to publish without political restraint is absolutely essential if tyranny is to be prevented.

There is no lack of public declarations of agreement with the principle of freedom of the press. It is recognized in such international instruments as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and in the more recently adopted declaration on mass media by the 1978 General Assembly of UNESCO. Many countries have their own Bill of Rights or similar document enshrining this principle, often in the formal constitution.

We have learned from bitter experience, however, that solemn declarations are not always accompanied by similar actions. Anyone who has had anything to do with government must realize that occasions arise where the exercise of one freedom or right by one individual or group in society may actually impede the rights of others. Some of the most difficult decisions any government makes are in cases where two legitimate rights are in conflict. I remember one occasion when faced with a clear conflict between two equally valid and important rights, one of my colleagues said "Ladies and gentlemen this is clearly a case where we must rise above our principles".

Thus it is not surprising that in certain instances in certain countries the government of the day may find it convenient, and perhaps even in its own mind justifiable, to circumscribe the freedom of the press. It is to your very great credit that you have formed this association devoted to fighting this tendency wherever it may arise.

Journalists are often leaders in movements concerned about basic freedoms, even when they pay a personal price for their convictions. Their own freedom is essential to the working of democratic institutions. Freedom to publish and distribute news stems from freedom of opinion - an essential condition of democracy. Freedom of the press has been hard won, and is far too precious to be subjected to the whims of any government.

On every continent there are some people who think that governments should regulate journalists, that it is in the public interest to tell them what they should write and to pass judgement on their accuracy. Canadians do not believe that either politicians or civil servants should have anything to say in the management, direction or correction of the media. Quite the contrary, in our view, only a free press can guarantee that the decisions of the state are in harmony with the wishes of the people. An informed public is needed both for honest democratic government, and for the sensitivity a government needs to serve its people well.

In Canada, the government does not control or censure what journalists write, nor does it presume to set itself up as an arbiter of public taste. It does not decide what should be transmitted by the media, and does not interfere in the management of media enterprises. The media are answerable only before the courts for the observance of our laws concerning obscenity, libel and slander.

I think I can safely say, therefore, that in Canada we enjoy complete freedom of the press. And Canadians would not have it otherwise. As a result it is natural for us to deplore the lack of press freedom and the abuse of human rights that occur from time to time in other countries. It is with the full support of the people, therefore, that the Government of Canada is committed to support the cause of freedom of the press, and to try to protect and promote human rights not only here in Canada, but also elsewhere to the extent that our influence can be effective.

Canadian church groups, labour organizations, intellectuals and the media, as well as the public at large are asking more and more often for the Canadian government to intervene on the human rights front. Such things as the murder of a leading journalist, the closing down of a respected newspaper, the arbitrary imprisonment or execution of individual citizens - all these arouse a natural concern among Canadians, and they quite properly urge their government to express these concerns through official representations to the governments involved.

There are, of course, certain limits to the effectiveness of an official complaint or inquiry by one country about the actions of another. That's why it is important to act jointly with other members of the international community when really major violations occur. This is exactly what happened in regard to the Vietnamese boat people, when pressure was brought to bear by so many of the countries represented at the conference in Geneva this summer.

More and more frequently the question is being asked by Canadians if there is not more that the government should do in regard to violations of rights in other countries. More and more the suggestion is being made that we should take these factors into account in determining our aid and trade policy with the countries concerned. There are, of course, strong arguments against such proposals. Our aid programs, for example, are designed to assist the people in the recipient country, not to support the governing regime. To cut our aid may only have the result of further depriving an already oppressed people.

Like so many issues, this is not a simple one. The nature of the programs varies enormously, and it may be that we shall find it impossible to come to any hard and fast rules. But we must ask ourselves the question. Is it right, for example, that we should provide aid in the form of newsprint to a country that does not allow that newsprint to be distributed to a paper whose editorial policy is opposed to the government? It is questions such as this that we shall be dealing with in the review of our foreign and aid policy that I mentioned a few minutes ago.

Whatever the outcome of that review may be, however, you may be assured that as long as this government is in office, Canada will be committed to fostering the cause of human rights with all the energy and strength at our disposal. I trust that in these efforts we shall have the support of the media both at home and abroad.

But I hope that these matters will not be the only ones that you will find worth reporting in the years ahead. It is my intent to reinforce our relations with the United States and we do all we can to increase the ties we have with Latin America and the Caribbean. For example, I would like to see us increase the number of cultural exchanges within the region so that our citizens can learn to appreciate and enjoy each other's cultural heritage. I know that a great

deal of effort has already resulted in an increase in participation by Canadian sport teams in dual and multinational competition. The Pan-American Games is only one example.

I would like our students to learn from each other's experience in fields as diverse as agriculture, engineering, archeology, literature and the theatre. In this connection I must mention the admirable efforts of the Venezuelan foundation "Gran Mariscal Ayacucho", which finances no fewer than 450 Venezuelan students in Canada. Moreover, I need not emphasize to an audience such as this the need for a larger number of journalists to cover news events in each other's countries. I would like the major Canadian papers to give greater attention to events in the Caribbean and Latin America, at least by encouraging contributions by stringers or by appointing roving correspondents if the economics won't allow the establishment of permanent regional bureaux. I can assure you that my own department will continue to encourage journalists from the region to become familiar with Canada through our visits program, and I am looking forward to welcoming a number of journalists from both the Caribbean and Latin America later this year.

Our mutual trade has been good, but perhaps you will agree it has not been good enough. Canada's exports to Latin America and the Caribbean in 1978 represented less than 5 per cent of Canada's total exports worldwide. It is obvious that our mutual trade could be vastly expanded and we in this government will be concentrating special efforts to this end.

That is why I welcome and commend the efforts of such groups as CALA, the Canadian Association for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Canada Brazil Chamber of Commerce, and the "Forum Das Americas", all of which have concluded arrangements and businessmen's committees in many countries. I am convinced that the private sector must play a major role and take major initiatives on its own in the conduct of Canada's foreign trade.

Nonetheless, the Canadian government will provide all the encouragement and assistance it can. Canadian Ministers will visit Latin American and the Caribbean countries more frequently. Indeed, my colleague, the Minister of State for International Trade, the Honourable Michael Wilson, has already paid two visits to Latin America, and I hope to visit as many of your countries as I can in the months ahead. Similarly, Commonwealth Caribbean Islands will also receive frequent visits as our Finance Minister, Mr. Crosbie, promised recently when he met with his Commonwealth counterparts. My colleague Senator Asselin, who is responsible for CIDA, the international aid arm of the government, will also be visiting

countries in the area to discuss the best method of developmental assistance.

Canada is looking forward to developing its ties with collective trade groups such as the Caribbean Common Market with which we signed a Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement earlier this year. The Canadian government has also established Joint Economic Committees to stimulate trade and technology exchanges with a number of Latin American countries. We are also looking forward to developing similar cooperation with SELA and the Andean group of countries where Canada has established a presence at the ANDEAN Development Corporation.

These are some of the things I expect to happen in the near future - things that the Government of Canada can help bring about. But these are not the only contacts Canadians will have with our neighbours in the Americas. Individual Canadians have discovered the countries to the south.

Thirty years ago - even twenty years ago, Canadians took summer holidays, and those who travelled normally went to Europe. Maybe our educational system is finally working, but now Canadians are increasingly taking holidays in the winter, and discovering the warmth, the welcome, and fun and, yes, the challenges of the Caribbean and Latin America. Businessmen who go south to holiday often return to do trade. Many of you from these countries already see quite a number of Canadians in the usual course of events. Well, Mr. President, I can tell you, you haven't seen anything yet.