

Statement

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**NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS BY
THE HONOURABLE CHRISTINE STEWART,
SECRETARY OF STATE (LATIN AMERICA AND AFRICA),
BEFORE THE STANDING COMMITTEE
ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

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The Situation in Rwanda and Burundi

The destruction of the Rwandan President's aircraft almost a year ago triggered what may be the worst human tragedy on the continent, with over half a million people killed in the space of a few months, two million people taking flight to the neighbouring countries and nearly as many displaced within the country. United Nations investigation reports now confirm that genocide did occur in Rwanda. Nearly two thirds of the population of this country of seven million people has been massacred or displaced, and for those who remain, the situation has become extremely difficult, since before they were defeated, the former government forces destroyed the infrastructures and then fled with the assets of its central bank.

The situation in neighbouring Burundi is hardly any better. The attempted putsch of October 1993 that took the life of the President resulted in at least 50 000 other victims, and the killings have continued since then. Before the influx of some 284 000 Rwandan refugees, Burundi already had half a million displaced persons within its borders and 184 000 refugees in neighbouring countries.

For some time, the difference in the treatment of refugees as compared to that of displaced persons, who did not enjoy the same advantages, created a good deal of tension. The victory of the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) over the former government forces in Rwanda last July confirmed, in the eyes of the partisans, Tutsi power in Burundi and provoked their intransigent stance against the Hutu majority, which won the first truly democratic elections since independence was gained in 1962. The Tutsi of Burundi are also afraid that Hutu extremists will recruit Rwandan refugees to attack them.

It soon became evident that the Rwandan and Burundian crises were threatening the whole region's stability. In addition to exerting tremendous pressure on the environment and on the already poor local people, the refugees in Tanzania and Zaire have caused serious security problems. The leaders of the former government continue to exercise considerable power over the population of the camps. They are preventing refugees from returning to their homes in Rwanda, through the use of terror. They are diverting humanitarian aid to finance an eventual return to power and are organizing harassment campaigns wherever they can against the new regime. Moreover, when humanitarian organizations like CARE and Doctors Without Borders [Médecins sans frontières] refused to co-operate with those responsible for the genocide and sought UN protection, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali was unable to obtain the peacekeeping troops required from UN members to establish order in the camps. Since that time, the UNHCR [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees] has taken things in hand by concluding agreements on military co-operation with Zaire and Tanzania.

The Regional Conference on Refugees

It was in this context that the OAU [Organization of African Unity] and the UNHCR organized a major conference – the Regional Conference on Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons in the Great Lakes Region. The purpose of the Conference, which took place between February 15 and 17, was to make it easier for the refugees to return. It sought to obtain firm commitments on measures to cope with the humanitarian and security problems in the region. The Conference approved certain basic principles such as respect for private property, the right of refugees to leave voluntarily in safety, and respect by governments of the principle of non-refoulement, that is, that refugees must not be forcibly expelled to their country of origin. The Conference adopted an action plan outlining the roles and responsibilities of the countries of origin, the host countries and the international community.

The countries of origin have a fundamental role consisting essentially of creating a climate of confidence to encourage the refugees to return voluntarily. In this respect, the Rwandan government, which has already taken measures in favour of national reconciliation, is being encouraged to continue its efforts. In both Rwanda and Burundi, impunity must no longer be tolerated if having people take the law into their own hands is to be avoided. The national judicial system must be restored. The International Tribunal for Rwanda can play a crucial role through establishing respect for impartial justice and implementing the principle that crimes cannot be committed with impunity. It is essential that innocent people be able to return freely to their country, without fear of reprisals.

As for the host countries, consisting mainly of Tanzania, Zaire and Burundi, they were asked by the Conference to restore public order in the camps and to ensure respect for individual freedoms. In addition, a regional summit held in Nairobi on January 7, 1995, called for the separation of those responsible for genocide and those faultless, which itself is no mean undertaking. As for the international community, the Conference has asked it to promote national reconciliation by contributing to the restoration of infrastructures.

Canadian Participation

It was my task to lead the Canadian delegation to the Bujumbura Conference. In my speech, I reaffirmed the principles that must underlie the work of the Conference, such as the voluntary return of the refugees as a confidence-building measure, while pointing out that the international community would not be able to sustain the status quo indefinitely. I then mentioned the incentives put forward by Canada to encourage the return of the refugees. In addition to helping organize the Conference (we contributed \$50 000), Canada has helped Rwanda to restore its infrastructures and the operating

capacity of its government. We supported the creation of the International Tribunal and will be helping to rehabilitate the judicial system through the efforts of Canadian legal experts and funding from CIDA [the Canadian International Development Agency]. As an additional incentive, Canada encouraged the UNHCR to construct temporary camps in Rwanda to receive the refugees coming from neighbouring countries.

At the Conference, Canada piloted two initiatives adopted by consensus. The first is a letter of support to the President of Burundi, and the second, a declaration supporting the sending of a judicial commission to Burundi to cast light on the events of October 1993. In this regard, Foreign Affairs Minister André Ouellet has just written to the UN Secretary-General forwarding these documents and requesting that he expedite the sending of the international judicial inquiry commission.

The fact that it was possible to hold this conference in the existing climate of violence is something in itself. Extremist elements uncomfortable with a strong international presence did everything they could to prevent it. Not content to call a general strike, they went so far as to fire shots and explode grenades during the Conference. But the international community was not intimidated by these actions, expressing its moral support for the government in place. In some international circles it was hoped that the Conference would be deferred to the end of March for bureaucratic reasons, but Canada insisted it be held earlier, given the urgency of the situation. I personally wrote to the UN Secretary-General's assistant in this regard. I am proud that Canada contributed to the earlier scheduling of this meeting and thus participated in preventive diplomacy measures.

The Canadian Action Plan

Owing to its special ties with the region, Canada got involved in the crisis at its outset. Like its Western partners, Canada first evacuated its nationals, about 200 in number. It then provided humanitarian and food assistance to the people affected by the crisis through NGOs [non-governmental organizations] and international organizations, and contributed substantially to UNAMIR [United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda] II under the command of Major-General Roméo Dallaire. During the weeks of massacre, Canada called for action by the UN Commission on Human Rights. At the beginning of the Rwanda crisis, seven Canadians lost their lives. Last October, Father Claude Simard was assassinated under mysterious circumstances. We believe he had compiled information on the massacres prejudicial to the culprits. While I was in Rwanda, the Prime Minister promised me a report on this assassination. In the months following the defeat of the government forces, Canada adopted an action plan to ensure better co-ordination of its activities. Minister Ouellet approved a coherent strategy in August 1994, involving efforts by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, CIDA and the

Department of National Defence, among others. The strategy comprises the following measures:

1. Appointing Bernard Dussault as Special Envoy to Central Africa with a mandate to advise the government and to promote solutions for the vast array of problems through consultations with the governments of the region, donor governments and regional organizations;
2. Reopening the office of the Canadian Embassy in Kigali, re-establishing an official Canadian presence to monitor events in Rwanda and maintain regular contact with the new government;
3. Intervening in targeted ways in order to obtain faster deployment of UNAMIR;
4. Seeing that the return of refugees, under agreed criteria, remains a priority for our actions by ensuring that the UN's activities do not lead to permanent camps outside Rwanda and by encouraging confidence-building measures;
5. Putting pressure on Zaire to disarm Rwandan soldiers and militias;
6. Contributing to the re-establishment of essential services in Kigali (water, electricity, telephones);
7. Participating in the Bujumbura Regional Conference on Refugees.

Canada was among the first parties to emphasize humanitarian assistance within Rwanda rather than in the refugee camps. Consequently, our field hospital was set up inside the Rwandan border.

At the Ministerial Conference of La Francophonie, held in Ouagadougou last December, Canada played a leading role in getting a declaration on Rwanda approved. We then updated our strategy in preparation for a round table of contributor states held in Geneva in mid-January. We took advantage of this opportunity to outline our activities, specifying the financial implications of each. In all, we provided for a budget of about \$50 million for a development program spread over three years. The objectives we established in August have either been achieved or are on their way to being achieved.

In regard to the refugee problem, we advocate continuing the Canadian diplomatic offensive and maintaining the role of the Special Envoy for Central Africa. Our Kigali office has reopened under the management of a senior CIDA official. UNAMIR has now been deployed throughout the country and can strengthen security. We provided for emergency humanitarian assistance to facilitate the creation of way stations and are studying the possibility of helping the OAU to establish its crisis prevention system. We are also ready to fund

several justice initiatives. We have already offered to provide human resources for the International Tribunal, have approved a contribution to the UN's Centre for Human Rights to dispatch observers, and have offered to contribute to a fund for the promotion of human rights. We are helping, as well, to restore the government's ability to function by absorbing the arrears of the ADB [African Development Bank] and the World Bank, and are contributing to social recovery through support for UNICEF [the United Nations Children's Fund] and reconciliation. A project to restore the electrical system is already under way. In addition, a CIDA mission is now in place examining the best method of co-ordinating our projects with local officials.

On my last trip to Central Africa, I took advantage of the opportunity to pass along certain messages to the highest authorities during bilateral visits. We delivered firm messages to Rwanda on having a government that is representative and on the need to expand its base in order to foster a climate of confidence that will encourage refugees to return. We also informed the government of our expectations regarding the rule of law and respect for human rights.

In Burundi, we expressed our hope that the radical elements in the political classes would rally behind the moderate forces. In a release dated February 3, Minister Ouellet urged the armed forces of Burundi to continue supporting the coalition government and called upon the militias of the opposing factions to lay down their arms and renounce violence. Canada supports UN and OAU preventive diplomacy initiatives towards avoiding a conflagration in Burundi similar to that in Rwanda. For this reason, Canada agreed to send three experts from its armed forces to train their Burundian counterparts in the respect for human rights and democratic development.

The Situation Remains Disturbing

The internal situation in Rwanda is still a source of concern. The most recent reports of UN observers continue to tell of arbitrary arrests based on denunciations without sufficient verification. Thousands of prisoners are crowded in jails under inhumane conditions, and there are numerous crimes against and obstacles facing owners trying to recover their possessions. During my stay in Rwanda, I received some assurances from government authorities in these regards. Unfortunately, however, the reports of uncontrolled abuse continue.

Although we understand the very difficult circumstances in Rwanda, our commitments cannot but be affected by these events.

The situation in Burundi is even more disturbing and difficult to contain. If not for the persistent efforts of Ambassador Abdallah, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, Burundi might already have plunged into the abyss. The extremists did their best to prevent the holding of the Bujumbura Conference. They forced the

resignation of the Prime Minister, but the authorities were able to allow the Conference to proceed as planned. At the Conference, we heard a dramatic appeal by the President for an international judicial inquiry into the assassination of President Ndadaye. For the time being, extremist elements have apparently succeeded in rendering inoperative the September 10 government convention. The problem stems to a large extent from those political leaders who are determined to seize power through confrontation, extortion, intimidation and the use of militias. These hotheads are employing the entire array of terrorist methods. The most recent example of their extremism was the assassination of the Minister of Energy and Mines, barely 12 days ago. This moderate leader visited Canada last December.

As you can see, Canada has not remained indifferent to the suffering of the people in this region. It has contributed \$35 million in emergency assistance to Rwanda through UN agencies, the Red Cross and Canadian NGOs (27 per cent of the total), and has approved a \$40-million bilateral co-operation program, \$3 million of which has already been spent. The Canadian response to this humanitarian challenge took the form of a joint effort on the part of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, CIDA, and the Department of National Defence, in addition to the equally important initiatives of our NGOs and the Canadian public, which has provided more than \$16 million in private donations.

In my view, only concerted action on the part of all parties involved can make a substantial contribution to finding a lasting solution for the entire region. In regard to Burundi in particular, I would like to quote the opinion of Ambassador Abdallah in his efforts to keep the situation under control. He said that "it is necessary for the international community, and especially the five permanent members of the Security Council, to assume their responsibilities toward this country, which has been living in a state of permanent crisis since the assassination of President Melchior Ndadaye in October 1993." In this regard, it should be remembered that the Security Council conducted a mission to Rwanda and Burundi last month and is continuing to follow the situation very closely.

The international community is well aware of the potential for disaster in Burundi and has taken the steps I have described to encourage Burundi's politicians to settle their differences constructively and peacefully. The international community, as represented by the UN, cannot impose peace and security - it can only respond at the invitation of governments. For instance, after the coup attempt the UN offered peacekeeping services but these were refused by both the government and the military. Most regrettably, too many of Burundi's political and military leaders assign a higher priority to vendettas and tribal agendas than they do to the national interest. Without the unstinting collaboration of Burundians themselves, outsiders cannot help them in their search for solutions in their country.

Thank you.