

Statement

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**NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS BY
THE HONOURABLE CHRISTINE STEWART,
SECRETARY OF STATE (LATIN AMERICA AND AFRICA),
TO THE 25TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE
ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES**

**MONTROUIS, Haiti
June 6, 1995**



Government
of Canada

Gouvernement
du Canada

Canada

Madam Chairman, Excellencies, Foreign Ministers of the hemisphere, Mr. Secretary General, Mr. Assistant Secretary General, ladies and gentlemen, friends:

It is a great pleasure for me to attend my second annual General Assembly of the Organization of American States [OAS]. These OAS meetings are very special in that they provide foreign ministers from throughout the hemisphere with a unique opportunity to sit around the same table and engage in an open dialogue of equals on a wide range of issues. The very fruitful discussions we have had over the past two days are proof of the value of this sort of encounter and of all that we can accomplish through our hemispheric organization.

I must also extend our sincere congratulations to the Government of Haiti for their hosting of this event. When President Aristide offered last year in Belém to host the next annual meeting of the OAS, we all accepted in the fervent hope and expectation that, by then, his legitimately elected government would be back in power. That indeed has come to pass - democracy has been restored to the Haitian people and the rebuilding of the country is well under way. This is cause for true celebration. There could, therefore, be no more fitting place for this year's meeting than Haiti, "la perle des Antilles."

Madam Chairman, Canada has now completed five full years in the Organization of American States. We have found it to be a very productive and fulfilling experience, and we look forward to continued active involvement in the years ahead. Our future participation in the OAS will be shaped and influenced by three key events of the past 12 months: the issuance of the Canadian government's Foreign Policy Statement *Canada in the World*; the meeting of hemispheric leaders at the Summit of the Americas in December 1994; and the recent release of Secretary General Gaviria's *New Vision of the OAS*.

Canadian Foreign Policy Statement

Canada's Foreign Policy Statement found its origins in a commitment by the Canadian government to encourage more active public involvement in foreign-policy making. This commitment resulted in the creation of a multi-party Parliamentary Committee to seek the views of ordinary Canadians. After holding over 70 meetings, receiving over 550 submissions, hearing from 500 witnesses, and commissioning several studies, the Committee tabled its report. The Government then used this report to develop a comprehensive statement called *Canada in the World*, which will serve as a blueprint for our foreign policy as we move into the 21st century. The Canadian government considers this process to have been an extremely valuable and productive exercise in participatory democracy.

Canada in the World is important for our involvement in the OAS because it highlights the importance of Canada's relationship

with our partners in the Western hemisphere, calling this region one of the new poles of political and economic power. The Government's active interest in the region was highlighted by the major political and trade mission which our Prime Minister led to six countries of the region in January of this year. This visit provided added impetus to an already vital and productive relationship with the region, opening up many new areas of political, economic and cultural co-operation.

Another key element of the Foreign Policy Statement is the emphasis on Canada's participation in regional institutions, particularly the OAS. The document calls, in particular, for Canada to support the OAS in its efforts to reform and to increase its capacity for dealing with issues such as human rights, democracy, security and trade. In fact, these are the issues on which Canada has concentrated during its first five years in the OAS.

Canadian Priorities at the OAS

Respect for human rights is not only a fundamental value for Canadians, but also a crucial element in the development of stable, democratic and prosperous societies. It is precisely for this reason that Canada has always been a staunch supporter of the invaluable work of the Inter-American Commission and Inter-American Court of Human Rights. These bodies have been instrumental in fostering greater respect for human rights throughout the hemisphere, and they deserve the full and unstinting support - moral and financial - of the Organization and all its members.

Canada's democratic tradition is a fundamental component of our value system and underpins our stability and prosperity as a nation. Similarly, the strengthening of democracy throughout the region is important to promote peace and stability, both within and among nations. At present, all but one country in the region has a democratically elected government. However, there is still much work to be done to strengthen and consolidate recent democratic gains.

The OAS has made a name for itself in electoral monitoring and assistance, and this is very important. But true, lasting democracy goes beyond elections. It encompasses, among other things, civic education and public participation; effective legislative and parliamentary systems; an independent judiciary and respect for the rule of law; responsible government at all levels; and civilian control of police and military forces.

The OAS's Unit for the Promotion of Democracy [UPD] has the mandate to promote long-term democratic development and must, in Canada's view, devote more of its attention and resources to these other elements. However, in order to fulfil this role, the

UPD requires the co-operation, active interest and participation of member states. Democracy is a vital living concept for all OAS members and requires constant nurturing to be a successful system of governance.

The Organization has taken a number of other measures over the past few years to strengthen, defend and promote democracy in the hemisphere. Resolution 1080 of 1991 allows for special actions by the OAS in response to interruptions of democratic process. This year, member states have devised a system for the implementation and financing of such activities. In 1992, the Protocol of Washington was passed, allowing for the suspension of member states where a democratically elected government has been overthrown by force. Canada urges countries that have not yet done so to ratify this important instrument.

Canada continues to believe that it would be useful and appropriate for the OAS to develop a capability for the early identification, prevention and management of situations of potential conflict. The use of such a capability would, of course, imply the consent of the member state or states involved. Nevertheless, it appears obvious that the OAS needs to develop tools for early action in cases of both internal upheavals, such as that which occurred in Haiti, and conflicts between nations, such as the recent incident between our friends Peru and Ecuador, in order to prevent a damaging escalation of tensions.

Finally, democracy means participation by all sectors of society, including non-governmental actors. Countries of the region and indeed the OAS itself must find ways to be more open and receptive to the views of these potential partners. Canada is currently chairing an OAS working group on this matter and hopes that the group will be able to make recommendations to the Permanent Council in the coming year to facilitate interaction between the OAS and NGOs [non-governmental organizations].

Before moving on, I would like to say a brief word about the 35th member of our Organization - Cuba. Canada's policy toward Cuba has been one of constructive engagement - we believe that political and economic advances can be encouraged by maintaining a dialogue with the Cuban people and government. And while Canada recognizes that there is still much progress to be made in Cuba, in particular in the areas of human rights and democratic development, we believe that the OAS should begin to examine ways of opening up a similar dialogue with Cuba, looking toward the day when conditions will be appropriate for its reintegration into the inter-American system.

Peace and security is a central component of Canadian foreign policy and of Canadian activity here at the OAS. Indeed, it is also a fundamental purpose of the OAS under the Charter. It is for this reason that Canada wholeheartedly supports the

transformation of the Special Committee on Hemispheric Security into a Permanent Committee. The many valuable initiatives that have been undertaken over the past several years in the area of confidence-building measures, arms control registers, and anti-personnel landmines, to name but a few, have proven that security issues are an important and integral part of the overall OAS agenda.

In the area of confidence-building measures, Canada has been an active participant and looks forward to the upcoming conference in Chile as a constructive means of continuing this dialogue.

An issue that has not yet received the attention it deserves, in Canada's opinion, is the review of the Inter-American Defence Board. As I mentioned earlier, one of the components of democracy is civilian oversight of the military. This should apply at the OAS as well. If the OAS is to continue devoting scarce resources to the Inter-American Defence Board, there must be a well-defined mandate, the allocation of an appropriate budget, and clear accountability to the OAS. This makes sense in terms of not only political control, but also fiscal responsibility.

The promotion of prosperity and employment is at the heart of every government's, and indeed every region's, agenda. Canada is no exception, and as a trading nation, has made it a central foreign policy concern. Hemispheric leaders agreed at the Summit of the Americas to work toward hemispheric free trade by the year 2005, and gave the OAS's Special Committee on Trade a key role to play in supporting this objective. Canada endorses this involvement by the OAS in the area of economic integration, and in particular the creation of a Trade Unit to provide research and policy support.

Assisting countries to increase their level of development and prosperity has been a long-standing component of OAS activity and of Canada's relations with the region. The OAS took a major step in this area with the Protocol of Managua and the Partnership for Development concept, both aimed at streamlining and providing greater focus to the OAS technical co-operation program. Canada is concerned at the lack of progress made in this area and believes that new energy is needed. We would urge countries that have not yet done so to ratify the Protocol of Managua. Moreover, Canada believes it is essential to take steps to rationalize the activities of the various committees and working groups involved in this area, and thereby move the agenda along. We appeal to other member states to join with us at this General Assembly in supporting this important reform effort.

Protection of the environment and sustainable development are crucial issues for Canadians, and Canada has been an active participant in the Environment Committee's efforts to help

determine an appropriate role for the OAS, including strengthening its institutional structure in this area. As one of the first steps, Canada will be hosting a meeting of regional experts in environmentally sound technologies in Canada later this year. We have also had a Canadian expert in to talk to the OAS about the "greening" of organizations, a concept with which we have had much success in Canada. We intend to pursue this concept at the OAS in the coming year. In keeping with our leadership on the Convention on Biological Diversity, Canada is pleased to offer Montreal as the host city for the Permanent Secretariat for this Convention. The Government of Canada is prepared to provide substantial financial assistance to set up this Permanent Secretariat and we ask fellow OAS members to support Montreal's bid.

An area in which the OAS has always been active, and indeed in which it would appear to have a comparative advantage, is in the development of multilateral legal instruments. Many subjects have been covered by OAS conventions, including human rights, violence against women, forced disappearances, and serving sentences abroad. And it is precisely because these instruments deal with such important issues that Canada has suggested that the OAS develop a more defined methodology for their consideration and development. We believe this will not only rationalize the process, but also result in instruments of more impeccable quality.

Summit of the Americas

Another important event this year for Canada, other countries of the region and the OAS was the Summit of the Americas, hosted by U.S. President Clinton in December 1994. This was a very productive hemispheric meeting, which resulted in a range of national and multilateral commitments, as outlined in the Summit Declaration of Principles and Action Plan.

Canada was an active participant in this process. In addition to promoting a number of thematic issues - free trade, human rights, democratic development, the fight against the drug trade, and sustainable development - Canada had two central concerns. One was to ensure that all countries - big and small - were given an opportunity to contribute. The other was to ensure that the OAS and other regional organizations were incorporated into the process.

The OAS emerged from the Summit with a clear endorsement as the primary forum for hemispheric dialogue and co-operation in a variety of spheres, and a paramount role in implementing many areas of the Action Plan. It is imperative now that the OAS rise to the challenge and prove itself capable of responding to the needs and priorities identified by the leaders of the hemisphere.

This will require decisive and timely action on the part of the Organization.

With this in mind, Canada is now proposing the creation of a more formal management mechanism at the OAS – a Special Committee on Summit Management. We believe this mechanism will demonstrate the importance the OAS ascribes to Summit follow-up, provide the Organization with the tools it needs to produce concrete, practical results, and thereby help it to consolidate its position as the hemisphere's foremost political forum.

New Vision of the OAS

The third significant development of the year was the tabling on April 6 of Secretary General Gaviria's *New Vision of the OAS*, which formed the basis for our informal dialogue on Sunday. In February, we had the honour of hosting a visit by the Secretary General to Canada, at which time he shared with us some of his ideas for the Organization. These ideas have now been given concrete form in the Vision Paper, which Canada believes to be an extremely valuable document. Not only does it identify some of the OAS's weaknesses, an often difficult and thankless task, but it also seeks to identify priority activities and means of focussing the OAS on these areas.

Canada is pleased to see that many of the items that we judge to be priorities for our own action at the OAS are also those deemed by the Secretary General to be priorities for the Organization. Human rights and democratic development, trade, environment, and hemispheric security are all signalled as being deserving of more OAS attention and resources.

The Secretary General also discusses, in his Vision Paper, several areas needful of administrative reform, including the technical co-operation system. Canada strongly supports many of his proposals in this regard, including having fewer priority areas, fewer individual projects and fewer recipients; increasing the emphasis on multinational projects, horizontal co-operation and partnerships; and overhauling the system of delivering such assistance. The new technical co-operation body – CIDI [Inter-American Council for Integral Development] – must, as the Secretary General noted, not only capitalize on the successes of its predecessors but also avoid repeating their mistakes.

The Vision Paper also notes the need for serious structural changes in the OAS's human resources and financial management systems. Canada wholeheartedly concurs in this assessment and is looking forward to more detailed proposals to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and transparency of those systems.

There is still, in Canada's opinion, a need for the Organization and its members to do some soul-searching and make some difficult

decisions. The Vision Paper includes a very broad range of activities, and there is not, as yet, any clearcut definition of which will be the top priorities in the years to come, which will be more secondary activities, and which areas may have to be dropped or severely scaled back. The Secretary General has alluded to some areas where major savings could be achieved, including national offices, which account for 10 per cent of the total OAS budget. Canada agrees with this assessment, and urges other member states to put aside their individual interests and work with the Secretary General in this and other reform areas.

The process of renewal which the Secretary General has launched is aimed at making the OAS a more efficient and responsive organization. However, it cannot, and will not, be accomplished without the active participation and support of the membership. The process will, of necessity, entail some difficult choices and perhaps even sacrifices. We have an important window of opportunity to breathe new life and vigour into the Organization, under the creative and energetic leadership of Secretary General Gaviria. Let us not allow this opportunity to elude us under the combined forces of ambivalence and lack of political will.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.