

Statement

Secretary of
State for
External Affairs



Déclaration

Secrétaire d'État
aux Affaires
extérieures

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AS DELIVERED

AN ADDRESS BY
THE HONOURABLE PERRIN BEATTY,
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,
TO THE
ASEAN POST MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
SIX PLUS SEVEN MEETING

SINGAPORE
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Affaires extérieures et
Commerce extérieur Canada
External Affairs and
International Trade Canada

Canada

Foreign Minister Wong,¹ distinguished colleagues:

I feel privileged to represent Canada at this Post Ministerial Conference for the first time, and to reaffirm a reinforced Canadian commitment to the principles of peace, prosperity and political development.

To determine the importance of Asia to Canada, we need only look at the trade figures. But the relationship, and the bonds between us, go much further. Trade has created economic bonds, immigration has created bonds of family and culture, and the increasing movement of our citizens across the Pacific has created a strong and lasting bond of friendship.

Even as we meet in an atmosphere of collegiality, however, political and military conflicts plague many parts of the globe. There are unprecedented demands on the UN [United Nations] system, on regional organizations and on individual countries for intervention and assistance. Quite frankly, our international institutions have been tested and found lacking. Witness Bosnia. Witness Burma. The verdict is still unclear in Somalia.

There are examples where the international community has succeeded in spite of odds stacked against us and widespread predictions of failure. Some of the best of these reflect the spirit and processes that the community grouped around this table represent. Just look, for example, at the positive developments that international co-operation has helped bring about in Cambodia. We are proud to have participated in this effort under ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] leadership, and I believe that we can learn from this experience and build upon it -- both regionally and globally -- in dealing with conflict prevention and resolution.

Canada is an active, committed player in the transpacific community. Our role in the world enables us to bring issues that affect this region to the table in international fora such as the G-7 [group of seven leading industrialized countries], and to carry the results of such consultations back to meetings like this one. We equally value the opportunity to discuss the relevance of global issues in the regional context, particularly at this formative time and in this spectacular setting.

Reform of our international institutions, rehabilitation of the UN's capacity to anticipate and manage crises, and the renewed and critical importance of checking the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are the issues Canada took to the Tokyo Summit. We are convinced that they are equally relevant.

¹ Wong Kan Seng, Foreign Minister of Singapore.

Security

The global political changes of recent years have forced us to reassess our traditional assumptions about security. It's a sign of ASEAN's maturity and vision that security issues have been placed squarely on this week's agenda, and that ASEAN's partners and friends in the Asia-Pacific region have been invited to join the discussions at the ministerial level.

Canada agrees that an effective approach to security dialogue should be inclusive in its membership, engaging all relevant players. It also must be comprehensive in its agenda, reflecting the diverse challenges to security -- some traditional, some not.

While we are at a critical and formative stage in this ASEAN process, it has been long in gestation. My predecessor, the Right Honourable Joe Clark, recommended such a process at a special meeting with his ASEAN counterparts in Canada in 1990. We then proposed a similar although non-governmental process for the North Pacific or Northeast Asia -- a process that has borne real fruit in better understanding and dialogue. We have also, with our dialogue partner, Indonesia, sponsored a consultative process on the thorny issue of the South China Seas -- a process that could serve as a model for broader application.

We favour identifying a common set of principles upon which to build a regional security dialogue -- building perhaps on the Bali Declaration and drawing from the broader international agenda with which we are all charged.

In this regard, I want to commend Singapore for holding the first ASEAN-PMC [Post Ministerial Conference] Senior Officials Meeting [SOM] in May. Not only will the SOM lay the groundwork for our annual discussions, but it will also feed into the growing network of complementary opportunities for dialogue on security in the region. These consultations should become a regular feature of our preparations, and we should offer a clear political endorsement of this process.

We are also very pleased that our hosts took the initiative to organize last night's informal dinner, which brought together the foreign ministers participating in both the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting [AMM] and the PMC. We hope that this dinner will be the first step toward a substantive ASEAN Regional Forum that produces greater transparency, increased understanding and a better guarantee of regional security.

Political

In our global and regional foreign policy, Canada gives high priority to human rights, democratic development and the rule of

law. Canadians have upheld these values even when it was not in our immediate economic interests to do so.

There is no question, as we see from the shining example of Singapore, that stability is essential for economic advancement. However, we also believe that economic progress must be accompanied by political and social development.

The world increasingly expects not only economic leadership from ASEAN, but political and social leadership as well. As ASEAN countries continue their spectacular economic development, Canadians are encouraged by parallel progress in the areas of human rights and democratization. Peace, tolerance, freedom and respect for the individual are fundamental responsibilities of all governments -- and are precious rewards in their own right.

I recognize that there is often a need to balance individual rights with the collective rights of communities and of societies as a whole. Individuals have social duties and responsibilities to their societies, as well as having individual rights as citizens. We are, however, passionate believers in the principle of universality, of the inviolability of certain rights and freedoms, as expressed in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

I want to underscore a comment [U.S.] Secretary [of State Warren] Christopher made earlier: regional and cultural variations simply cannot be used as a blind behind which a regime can justify torture, summary executions and the systemic disrespect of the rule of law. We are pleased to note great similarities between our views on this issue and those you expressed in your AMM statement last week.

In the end, the institutional disrespect for universal rights unravels the very fabric of a society. Without an acceptable balance between rights and duties, there can be no peace, either within or between nations. We have seen this in too many tragic cases from Bosnia to Burma, from Somalia to South Africa.

As we have in the past, we call once again upon the regime in Burma to restore democracy, to release all political prisoners, and to face up to the reality of change. Along with others we have called upon Burma to release Aung San Suu Kyi, and we renew this call today.

Let us be honest. Despite the appointment of a new chairperson, the State Law and Order Restoration Council in Burma has not demonstrated commitment to genuine reform in human rights and democratic development.

We urge all nations in the region to follow the strong lead of Singapore and to convey a clear and consistent message that continued intransigence is unacceptable.

Economic

We have all seen a great change in the economic and trade patterns developing across the Pacific. Our economies are becoming increasingly interdependent, and we have a very real sense of partnership, which allows our business communities to engage in joint ventures and equity arrangements that benefit millions of people on both sides of the Pacific.

Before making this trip, I spent some time speaking with a number of prominent Canadians who do business in this region. The message I heard was very clear: the best environment for any business is one of reliability and transparency. Business must know the rules of the game, and be confident that the rules will not be subject to arbitrary, unpredictable change. It is the job of our respective governments to create such a climate.

The very same point was made at a recent meeting of the Canada-ASEAN Joint Co-operative Committee, which brought together private-sector representatives from our respective nations. While such endeavours indicate just how much our economic partnership has grown and thrived, we cannot take this growth for granted.

We see an exciting future for APEC [Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation], building a transpacific community committed to transparency and fair and open trading throughout the region, in which business can expand and natural economies can prosper.

This transpacific community will best thrive in a world where global disciplines and trade liberalization have been assured through a successful conclusion to the Uruguay Round [of multilateral trade negotiations]. But beyond the Round, it is only logical that countries of this most dynamic region enhance and extend understandings achieved globally. It may also be via APEC that we help build better understanding about sub-regional arrangements like the NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement] and AFTA [ASEAN Free Trade Area], and ensure that they are consistent with both the GATT [General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade] and with the open regional community we are trying to build.

To underline our commitment to this regional prosperity, on Wednesday I will sign with my ASEAN colleagues a revised Canada-ASEAN Economic Co-operation Agreement. This new agreement will be the basis for our economic and commercial relations, and highlights the commitment of Canada and ASEAN to a more active

role for our respective private sectors as we forge even stronger links across the Pacific.

Today, we see Canada-ASEAN co-operation as a relationship of mutual benefit and shared interests -- indeed, of real economic partnership.

Before concluding, let me reflect for a moment on important changes on the political scene in Canada. Ten years since our transpacific trade surpassed our transatlantic trade, and, at a time when Chinese has become the third most widely spoken language in Canadian homes, it is only fitting that our new Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Kim Campbell, is the first Prime Minister born and raised on Canada's Pacific coast. This background has profoundly shaped her view of Canada and the world.

No one can walk down a street in Vancouver without being struck by the impact of Asian trade and culture on that part of our country. Just as Canadian history and development has moved westward from Europe, across the Atlantic and over the continent, our vision and our vocation for the future have increased inexorably in the Pacific. Kim Campbell is uniquely aware of our economic and cultural ties with Asia, and I can assure you of a renewed and intensified focus on Asia-Pacific issues, challenges and opportunities.

In building the transpacific community of which we all speak, ASEAN dialogue is key. I am confident that ASEAN's success will produce a ripple effect, as the causes of peace, prosperity, human rights and security move forward both within this region and well beyond its boundaries.

A key focus of the 21st century will be on the Pacific region and its nations. It's a tremendous honour for me to join you today in the ASEAN PMC process, a process at the very heart of this new Pacific century.