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SPEECH BY THE SECRETARY
OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
THE HONOURABLE ALLAN J.
MACÉACHEN, AT THE
UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE
ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS
(HABITAT)
VANCOUVER,
JUNE 1, 1976

Mr. President:

HABITAT will thread a new design in the fabric of the global aspirations of the community of man. Conferences, such as ours, dealing with socio-economic problems of concern to the whole of humanity are a new phenomenon in international life. They reflect the quest for greater equality and justice among nations and individuals made more pressing than ever by decolonization, the assertion of human rights, and the spread of modern technology and communication.

HABITAT has its origin in a proposal advanced by Canada at the Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in 1972. The quality of the environment, we were convinced, had to be matched by the quality of human life. Since then, the international community has endeavoured to come to grips with other basic aspects of the human condition on our earth. Those aspects that have the most direct bearing on the problems of human settlements were population, which was discussed at Bucharest in 1973; food, at Rome in 1974; and development, raw materials and economic cooperation, notably at the Sixth and Seventh Special Sessions of the General Assembly in New York. Out of this cumulative confrontation and harmonization of widely diverging national experiences and aspirations is slowly but unmistakably emerging a body of concepts and values which find a growing universal resonance.

HABITAT, our Conference dedicated to human settlements, will be expected, as Barbara Ward has said, to address the most vital and urgent needs of the millions of human beings who are living - and dying - in conditions that can only be described as inhuman. It will aim at mobilizing the necessary spirit of cooperation and political will, and at establishing innovative forms of sharing knowledge, experience, and essential ways and means towards more effective national and international action.

Canada wholeheartedly endorses the fundamental recommendation before the conference that national governments should establish a human settlement policy as an essential component of an overall national strategy of socio-economic development. This proposition, it seems to us, is valid regardless of the political ideology and of development of the country concerned.

In the past, improvements in living conditions have been seen as a consequence of development, as a benefit to be derived from advances in the more productive elements of the economy. I believe that this conference will recognize and proclaim that the creation of adequate living conditions and building of better settlements are the basic foundation of any real and meaningful development. To produce more, our farmers, our miners, our industrial workers and our office workers must have decent shelter, food, health services, education and the other elements which maintain and improve the human condition and happiness.

In developing a human settlement policy, Canada must take into account a number of factors and circumstances peculiar to our own situation:

- (a) First, unlike most of the participants at the Conference which are unitary states, Canada is a federation. Our several levels of government - federal, provincial, territorial and municipal - all have significant responsibilities for human settlements. Coherent and effective human settlement policies in Canada can only be achieved through intergovernmental cooperation. The HABITAT Conference will no doubt further encourage national debate and intergovernmental consultation in the field of human settlement and stimulate in particular the further development of national, provincial and metropolitan land use policies.
- (b) Secondly, we believe that settlement policies and strategies should focus on the problems of growth and decline, that is to say, on the improvement of the quality of life in larger human settlements and the maintenance of a vital community life in smaller towns and villages and in rural settlements. In Canada, as in many other countries, we are faced with an increasing concentration of population growth in a few large cities and metropolitan areas, such as Edmonton, Calgary, Toronto, and Vancouver. The frequent result of rapid growth has been sprawl, loss of the best farmland, and - too often - sub-standard living conditions. Concurrently, many of our smaller towns and rural areas have remained static or have declined, losing many of their most productive people to the big cities. This has been the case in many other parts of our country.
- (c) Thirdly, while the major portion of our population growth is the result of natural increase, immigration plays a critical role in shaping the growth of Canadian human settlements. With the sharp decline in our birthrate, immigration is becoming even more important.
- (d) Fourthly, one of the objectives of human settlement policies in Canada must be to overcome the major differences in the economic conditions and the quality of life enjoyed by Canadians in different parts of the country. Our human settlements must be able to offer to our citizens in various parts of the country comparable, if not equivalent, employment, housing, education, health and other basic facilities.

- (e) Fifthly, resource conservation will be one of the key factors shaping future Canadian human settlements. We are terribly concerned with the urban despoilation of some of Canada's best farmland. This resource is irreplaceable and requires a more responsible stewardship, and we are determined to rehabilitate our existing built environment. Canadians have learned that the costs of indiscriminate demolition and redevelopment are too heavy both in economic and in human terms.

We are also beginning to recognize how better settlement design can effect major reductions in our rate of energy consumption. Energy conservation in human settlements will have to play the major role in achieving my government's target of reducing the annual growth in Canada's energy consumption from its current 5.5% to 3.5% by 1985. We will have to achieve better insulation standards; put more reliance on renewable forms of energy; perhaps adopt more compact forms of urban settlement, and thus reduce our dependence on the automobile for city transportation; and encourage innovation in housing construction. As evidence of our preoccupation with this question, Canada will, in October 1977, host a seminar under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe which will deal specifically with the question of energy conservation and the planning and development of human settlements.

- (f) The Canadian government wishes, in the context of HABITAT, to underline the special needs, aspirations and rights of our indigenous population. Many aspects of the distinctive cultures and life styles of Canada's native peoples, such as a strong attachment to the land and its resources, the sharing of community wealth, and a strong sense of community life are particularly relevant to the concerns of HABITAT. Canada has provided support to allow its native groups to develop political strength and to articulate their grievances and their aspirations. Our respect for the traditions, culture, and special needs of Canada's native people does not imply any restrictions in the freedom of individuals to participate fully in Canadian society.
- (g) Finally, we believe that it is highly desirable, indeed essential, to involve the business community, citizen groups and the public at large in the planning and implementation of human settlement policies. The ultimate test of whether our human settlements are good is whether they are congenial to those who live in them.

Out of the process of intergovernmental cooperation and public involvement, there is emerging in Canada the recognition that future settlement policies must emphasize the reduction of waste and the importance of conservation: conservation of energy, of prime agricultural land, and of the natural and the built environment. To illustrate this point, I should like, before commenting on the international aspects of our Conference, to show a capsule version of one of our audio-visual presentations that is particularly concerned with new and more environmentally appropriate designs for Canadian human settlements.

Canada will examine sympathetically and constructively the various programmes for international action which will be provisionally endorsed for further consideration and definition within the United Nations system.

At this time I would wish only to mention four aspects of international cooperation in the field of human settlements to which Canada attaches particular importance:

First, we will be prepared to respond favourably, through our bilateral aid and cooperation programmes, to proposals for assistance in the field of human settlements from our partners in these programmes. In addition, we shall use our influence within the multilateral development agencies to encourage a similarly positive response from them. We think that existing bilateral and multilateral financing institutions should be ready and willing to participate in expanded human settlement programmes.

Second, we see particular merit in the proposal to establish regional training centres for those who must plan and manage settlements. For some years now, Canada has supported the Asian Institute of Technology in Bangkok and its Faculty for Human Settlements. We consider that this programme deserves continuing support and, indeed, that it might become a model for similar programmes in other regions.

And third, Mr. President, we are also particularly interested in the proposal to establish an international information programme to continue and to further develop the exchange of ideas and experience which will take place here at HABITAT. We think it important that the Conference recommend the creation of a United Nations Audio-Visual Library on human settlements and consider it a matter of some urgency that interim arrangements be made for the preservation and use of the valuable material prepared for HABITAT.

Fourth, we anticipate that the Conference will have before it a proposal that all nations adopt as a minimum target the provision of potable water in every definable community by 1986. Canada will lend strong support in principle to such a target and to practical programmes to achieve it.

Finally, Mr. President, this conference has a mandate to make recommendations to the General Assembly on the institutional arrangements within the United Nations system which will enable the organization to participate fully, and indeed to take the lead, in extending international cooperation to the field of human settlements.

Discussions in the preparatory meetings for HABITAT have indicated wide agreement that the existing Secretariat structures require organization, through consolidation of the existing posts and resources into a single organization, one which would consist of a small, centrally-located headquarters and a number of regional units. This consolidation and redeployment of the Secretariat's resources would occur in parallel with the establishment of a central intergovernmental body and the establishment of Committees on Human Settlements in each of the Regional Economic Commissions of the United Nations.

Canada supports, in general, the proposals to this end that are reflected in Conference documents. We expect the conference to make a clear recommendation on this issue, and shall be offering more detailed comments and suggestions at the appropriate time.

In closing, I should like, Mr. President, once again to welcome all delegates in the name of the Government of Canada, which is honoured and pleased to be your host, and to promise you our full cooperation in making HABITAT a memorable success.