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The Francophone Summit
and the Francophones outside Quebec

Address by Mrs. Monique Landry,
Minister for External Relations,
to the Richelieu clubs
of the Ottawa area

Canada

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Mr. Chairman,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to speak to the Richelieu Clubs of the Ottawa area this evening. Ever since the Richelieu club was founded here in Ottawa in 1944, it has played an important role in promoting the French language across Canada. Today, the movement has extended to eight countries on three continents. This meeting is therefore an especially appropriate setting in which to talk about the role that the Francophones outside Quebec should play in the Francophone Summit.

First of all, I cannot overemphasize the historic significance that the year just begun will have for Canada. At the Francophone Summit, to be held in Québec next September, Canada will show, more vividly than at any other time in its history, that it is a country where the French language is a major instrument for its development and for its relations with a large community of foreign countries.

Only a few years ago, an event of this sort seemed barely possible. But thanks to the open-mindedness and determination of our Prime Minister, Mr. Brian Mulroney, who has effectively implemented a

policy of national reconciliation, Canada this year will host some forty heads of state and governments all having the use of the French language in common.

At one time, the concept of such a Summit, frequently mentioned and long desired by such great African leaders as Presidents Senghor of Senegal and Bourguiba of Tunisia, among others, could never have become reality. Let us be quite frank: one of the obstacles to such a meeting of Francophone countries had always been the difficulty of having the federal government and Quebec sit down at the same table in a spirit of respect for each other's legitimate powers, given that both would be participating in an international meeting.

It was high time that this burden weighing on the development of Canada-France-Quebec relations was removed. Thus, in November 1984, on the occasion of the visit to Canada of Mr. Laurent Fabius, the French Prime Minister of the time, Prime Minister Mulroney recognized the legitimacy of direct links between Québec and Paris, inasmuch as they would not infringe on matters under federal jurisdiction. This new attitude cleared the way for the start of negotiations which, scarcely one year later, led to the conclusion of an agreement allowing

the participation of Quebec and New Brunswick in a Summit of heads of state and governments.

Thus, one year after being elected Prime Minister of Canada, Mr. Mulroney had succeeded in resolving the imbroglio that for 15 years had prevented the organization of a Summit of Francophone nations. In doing so, he gave the Canadian French-speaking community an opportunity to play an expanded role in connection with the issues that concern it most.

In February 1986, at the first Francophone Summit, which was held in Paris, Mr. Mulroney, representing Canada, showed that we were an important partner for all the countries that are home to the 200 million Francophones around the world.

And at this first Summit, in addition to giving the international community indisputable evidence of the uniqueness of our cultural and linguistic identity, Canada also exercised its undeniable right to participate as a full-fledged member in two great movements, the Commonwealth and the community of French-speaking nations, which by themselves encompass more than half the countries of the world. This dual membership resulting from the bilingual nature of our country will be underscored this year when the

Commonwealth Summit is held in Vancouver, one month or so after the Francophone Summit.

I have already alluded to Mr. Mulroney's courage and vision, which allowed the birth of the new international forum that the Francophone Summit would become. But we must also pay tribute to the determination, the perseverance and the wisdom demonstrated by several generations of Canadian Francophones.

Very early in their history, the Francophones of Canada understood the need for solidarity if they were to preserve their cultural and linguistic heritage. The Franco-Ontarians, for example, are aware of the potential influence of cultural, economic, educational, corporate, humanitarian and regional associations. The Richelieu clubs are a shining example of the desire to join together which unites those Francophones living in provinces where French is not the language of the majority.

While the Francophones of Quebec were asserting the originality of their culture with ever-growing assurance, Francophones in the other parts of Canada were resolving to make their voices heard with greater firmness, for example in 1975 when their

provincial associations united to form a single federation, that of the Francophones outside Quebec.

As Minister for External Relations, hence minister responsible for international Francophone institutions and for the Summit of French-speaking nations, I want to assure you that I shall lend an attentive ear to any suggestion or request from the Federation, and from other associations of Francophones outside Quebec, regarding the Quebec Summit.

Prior to the Paris Summit, my predecessor in this portfolio, Mme Monique Vézina, had invited various Canadian Francophone associations and personalities to attend a working session. The Prime Minister subsequently invited the then President of the Federation of Francophones Outside Quebec, Mr. Gilles Leblanc, to join the Canadian delegation to the Paris Summit.

Last 11 December, I myself met with the executive committee representing some 40 Francophone organizations. That meeting gave us an opportunity to examine a variety of avenues for involving Francophones outside Quebec in the Québec Summit. I intend to continue that dialogue and those consultations with all diligence.

I believe that there could be no better representative of Francophone Canadians at the Summit than Prime Minister Mulroney, who was able to reach agreement with Quebec and New Brunswick, as I mentioned earlier, so that the Canadian reality might have a voice in the community of French-speaking nations.

Yet the Francophones of Ontario could become full and direct participants in the accomplishments of a worldwide Francophone community. Indeed, my government continues to hope that the government of Ontario will soon recognize French as an official language. We are of course aware of the significant progress already made with regard to improving access for Francophones to services and education in their own language. The culmination of such progress might be recognition of French as an official language in Ontario. In thus recognizing the important contribution, past and present, of Franco-Ontarians to its development, the most populous and most prosperous province of Canada could benefit from the same agreement that defines the participation of Quebec and New Brunswick in the Francophone Summit. At the Paris Summit, the Ontario minister Bernard Grandmaître had been invited to represent the government of Ontario. The Canadian delegation would have much to gain from the contribution of a representative of the government of the province in

which resides the largest concentration of Francophones outside Quebec. And Ontario would have everything to gain from full and complete participation in the Francophone community.

It is above all a matter of justice and logic. But I believe that any future decision by Ontario to participate directly in the work of the Francophone Summit would also be based on practical considerations.

Indeed, the meeting of the heads of state and governments sharing the use of French should not be seen as a sort of political/folk festival in which the beauties of the French language are extolled.

Canada's position is utterly clear: the work of the Francophone Summit, if it is to benefit the greatest number of participants, must focus on the planning and implementation of concrete, feasible projects. A few days before leaving Canada to attend the first Francophone Summit, Prime Minister Mulroney had said that it was of primary importance that the meeting be marked by effectiveness and concreteness. The Francophone community would either be active or it would not be at all.

As a matter of fact, during the Paris Summit, the heads of state and governments divided the projects that had been submitted into five main networks, selected as a function of the major axes for development and enhancement of the international Francophone community. Canada was thus assigned responsibility for the Culture and Communications network, where our expertise could be put to good use. Some projects are already well under way, for example the extension to North America of TV-5, the international French-language television network, which should begin broadcasting in the fall. Imagine the role that TV Ontario could play in this regard, and the benefits it could draw.

Quebec, for its part, will be responsible for the Energy network. The federal government is making an important contribution in this regard too; for example, I recently announced the conclusion of an agreement with the Ecole des hautes études commerciales for the training of petroleum industry managers from Third World countries, a project that had been put forth by the participants at the Paris Summit. We have also taken on a number of initiatives from the three other networks - agriculture, scientific and technical information, and language industries.

As you can see, participation in the Francophone Summit can lead to international application of Canadian skills, which can only be beneficial to our economy.

We must nevertheless guard against viewing our participation in the international Francophone community as a commercial venture, a subtle means of cornering foreign markets. Let us not forget that most of the countries participating in the Francophone Summit are developing countries. As minister responsible for the International Development Agency, I shall see to it that first and foremost, the immense and urgent needs of the people of the Third World are given the attention they deserve.

The Francophone Summit is also a new forum for international consultation. Canada is able and willing to expand its sphere of political activity. It is in a unique position for working towards enhanced multilateral consultation and the reduction of the antagonisms that too often stand in the way of a common quest for solutions to major problems. We saw this at the Paris Summit when, at our instigation, the participants adopted a joint declaration against apartheid, a fundamental element of our policy on Africa.

But perhaps you are still wondering: what exactly is this Francophone Summit that everyone seems so keen about?

We are told that it is not a cultural get-together, that it is not a trade initiative. It discusses politics and economics but it is also very interested in development assistance. It is not exactly like the Commonwealth, nor is it an abstract idea; it is rather an instrument for concrete, modern realizations, designed to help the international Francophone community to cope with the challenges of modern-day living.

I shall answer simply and directly: the Francophone community is what we Francophone Canadians are and will be.

And in this respect, you, the Francophones outside Quebec, have already made your contribution. Because to this day you are still what your parents, your grandparents and your great-grandparents wanted you to be; you have already helped to fashion a rich, unique country, one that arouses the admiration of the other Francophone nations.

Because, through sometimes trying and always difficult circumstances, you have kept the French

language alive in America, Canada is now able to take its place in the forefront of the Francophone countries of the world.

If I had to find a definition of "Francophonie" this evening, I would not have very far to look. Wherever a human being uses the French language to express himself, to fulfill himself, that is where you will find "Francophonie".

And this Summit is where these dynamic forces will come together, where they will exchange ideas, where they will act. Every one of you in Ottawa, Vanier, Orleans or elsewhere, who is living in French, is richly deserving of the Francophone Summit.

It is high time that this fact was recognized, right here.