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Statement in the House of Commons by
the Right Honourable Joe Clark,
Secretary of State for External Affairs,
on the occasion of Namibia's independence

Ottawa, Ontario
March 20, 1990

In just six hours Namibia will become fully independent from South Africa. There has not been an independence celebration anywhere in the world for nearly six years. This event is particularly momentous as Namibia is the last colony in Africa.

Namibian independence is, in the first place, a success story for the United Nations. The UN, which for ten years previous had no new peacekeeping operations, has launched no less than five in the last two years, of which by far the largest was UNTAG, the UN Transition Assistance Group in Namibia. UNTAG was nearly stillborn last April when a tragic final outburst of fighting broke out between nationalist guerrillas and South African-controlled forces on the very day of the formal ceasefire. But reason prevailed and the transition process was accomplished without a hitch: military withdrawals and demobilizations, amnesty and repeal of apartheid legislation, repatriation of refugees and release of detainees, and finally registration of voters and the election of a Constituent Assembly in November. UN Special Representative Martti Ahtisaari and UNTAG now leave the country with the great satisfaction of having accomplished their mission - in full, on time, and within budget.

Namibian independence is also a success story for Canada. In 1977, Canada - with France, FRG, UK and the USA - took the lead in negotiating a settlement plan for Namibia that came to be universally accepted as Security Council Resolution 435. Several years of negotiations followed, with Canada centrally involved in what was called the Contact Group, to overcome obstacles to the implementation of Resolution 435 through a parallel agreement on constitutional principles and UN impartiality. The final obstacle - linkage to Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola - was resolved in the fall of 1988 through an American-mediated regional agreement.

Canada then pitched in to implement the plan it had helped to devise. We advanced 80 per cent of our UNTAG assessment of \$15 million to get the operation off to a fast start. Over 500 Canadian Forces personnel served in UNTAG in two rotations, later joined by 100 Royal Canadian Mounted Police members, 50 election supervisors from the federal and provincial electoral institutions and the national political parties, and 12 fingerprint and computer experts. The government established a diplomatic observer mission in Windhoek while our UN mission remained active in the search for solutions on the Security Council. Four Parliamentary observers went to Namibia last September for the elections, as well as a Canadian member of a Commonwealth group and a number of independent NGO observers throughout the process. Some \$3.9 million of development and humanitarian aid was provided, including \$2 million for the UN refugee repatriation. 4000 ballot boxes were supplied for the election.

Canada has invested over \$22 million to help Namibia secure its independence, and over 700 Canadians have participated and contributed personally. I know I speak for all members of the House in saying that we are very proud of, and grateful to, every one of them.

Above all, Namibia's independence is a success story for the Namibians. They are emerging from over a century of German and South African colonialism. When given the chance to participate in free and fair elections, their enthusiasm for democracy knew no bounds. They walked great distances and waited peacefully under blazing sun in lines up to a kilometre long, in order to elect their Constituent Assembly. The turnout in that election was 97 per cent. The new Assembly, animated by a strong all-party commitment to reconciliation and cooperation, adopted unanimously in just 80 days an exemplary constitution. It provides for fully entrenched human rights, a presidency accountable to a bicameral Parliament, an independent judiciary, regular multi-party elections, and the absence of preventive detention and the death penalty. Namibians are justifiably proud of their new constitution, and they are determined to make it work in practice and not just on paper.

Lastly, Namibia's independence is a success story for South Africa, and a harbinger of hope for the future. South Africa has decolonized with dignity, and shown the world that it can be trusted to fulfill international agreements. South Africans can now look to Namibia for persuasive proof that fundamental political change can be achieved through a peaceful, negotiated and democratic process. Namibia, long a hostage to apartheid, is now leading the way for South Africa in dismantling apartheid, by showing what is possible when reason overcomes emotion and compromise replaces prejudice.

And so Africa's last colony later today takes its long-awaited and rightful place among the community of nations. We will welcome the Republic of Namibia as the 50th member of the Commonwealth and soon as the 160th member of the United Nations.

Canada is represented at the independence celebrations by my colleague, the Minister for External Relations and International Development. The delegation also includes Parliamentarians of all three parties - the Members for Waterloo, Haldimand-Norfolk and Windsor-St. Clair - who have a long standing interest in Namibia and Southern Africa.

Namibia will need the continued support of its friends. I am pleased to announce today that Canada is opening a High Commission in Windhoek.

Canada is also ending the application to Namibia of certain economic sanctions which were directed at South Africa when it was in control. The ban on new contracts for the toll-processing of Namibian uranium, is lifted with effect from March 21, 1990. I am confident that uranium can become a field of productive cooperation with Namibia and that new contracts can soon be secured. The ban on importing South African uranium remains in place and will be stringently and effectively monitored.

Canada is also moving to normalize export promotion in Namibia. The Program for Export Market Development is now available there, and we will be active in promoting trade with Namibia. The Export Development Corporation has been told that there are no longer any barriers to export finance and investment insurance, and the chief executives of major chartered banks have been told that export credit restrictions and other voluntary financial sanctions on South Africa no longer apply to Namibia.

As for development assistance, the Minister for External Relations and International Development is advising Namibian leaders that CIDA will be providing a special independence contribution of up to \$1 million to support an expanded program of immunization through UNICEF. This is a high priority for the new Namibian government. With a further \$1 million already pledged by the Prime Minister through the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation and other aid, total Canadian assistance to Namibia is expected to exceed \$4 million this year. It will be delivered mainly through Canadian and Namibian NGOs and multilateral channels.

Finally, Namibia has a continuing need for security assistance. There is a requirement to strengthen and reorient the police force, so that the stability essential to economic development can be maintained in a climate favourable to human rights. With the concurrence of my colleague, the Solicitor General, the RCMP will soon be providing police training services funded through the Commonwealth, and the RCMP Director of Training will shortly lead a needs-assessment mission to Windhoek. Namibia is also being invited to join the Military Training Assistance Program already offered by the Canadian Forces to Southern African and Caribbean countries.

To mark the actual moment of independence - midnight in Namibia and 5:00 p.m. here today - a motion of congratulations will be proposed then for unanimous consent in the House.

Namibian independence is a success story for the UN, for South Africa, for Canada and, most of all, for its own people themselves. It is a world class achievement which this House - and all Canadians - proudly applaud.