

Statement

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**NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS BY
THE HONOURABLE CHRISTINE STEWART,
SECRETARY OF STATE (LATIN AMERICA AND AFRICA),
AT THE 10TH ANNUAL CONSULTATION
BETWEEN NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AND
THE DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE
IN PREPARATION FOR THE 51ST SESSION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
(JANUARY 30 - MARCH 10, 1995)**

**OTTAWA, Ontario
January 17, 1995**



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Ladies and gentlemen:

I am pleased to be here once again for the consultations between the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and human rights NGOs in preparation for the 51st session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. These consultations are integral to the process of formulating Canada's foreign policy with regard to human rights. I therefore want to thank you for participating and to assure you that the Minister [of Foreign Affairs] and I look forward to hearing the results of these consultations.

The Canadian NGO community has a deservedly high reputation internationally. Indeed, much of the progress Canada has achieved on the international human rights front has been due to the highly effective partnership forged between the Government and the NGO community. A good example of this was our collaboration to secure the establishment, at last year's Commission, of a Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women. Over the past year Canadian officials and organizations have continued their leadership in this area, for example by working with the Rapporteur in developing an approach to her important mandate.

While these NGO consultations are the largest and most formal the Government holds on human rights issues during the year, I know most of you are engaged in an ongoing dialogue with the Department - be it through correspondence and meetings with Minister Ouellet, Mr. Chan or myself, or through discussions with departmental officials. While there are often differences over strategy, I believe that as Canadians we share a fundamental belief in the importance of promoting universal respect for human rights. This ongoing dialogue is critical to defining the Government's position both in multilateral fora such as the Commission on Human Rights, and with respect to our bilateral policies.

The promotion of human rights and democracy is a tenet of Canadian foreign policy. It is a reflection of Canadian values. As was demonstrated by the report of the Special Joint Committee reviewing Canadian foreign policy, Canadians expect their elected leaders and government officials to uphold the democratic principles upon which our society was founded. Respect for human rights is a key to international peace and prosperity and thus crucial to creating a world environment in which Canadians can best pursue their interests. Furthermore, the UN Charter obliges all members to promote universal respect for human rights and Canada regards the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as entrenched in customary international law binding on all governments.

Human rights is not only a UN Charter goal in its own right, but an objective of direct relevance to the UN's security, development and humanitarian aims. Canada played an important role in creating the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights with a broad mandate for promotion, protection, prevention, and technical

assistance, and for co-ordination of human rights activities throughout the UN system. I would like to know your thoughts on how this new position can be made as effective as possible because the challenge we face now is to give practical effect to this mandate, to integrate the activities of the High Commissioner and other human rights mechanisms into the UN's political, security and developmental work and into the preventive, peacekeeping and peace-building operations of the organization.

I emphasize this last point because one of my strong convictions, based on my wide travels this past year as Secretary of State for Latin America and Africa, is that peace and security are inextricably linked with the challenge of ensuring respect for human rights.

This is a two-way street. War and civil unrest clearly produce major violations of human rights at the most basic level. We all remember the flood of refugees fleeing Rwanda last summer. Our television screens were filled with the horrible pictures of men, women and children dying of cholera in the mud of the refugee camps, and many more who were massacred at home and continue to be threatened now. At the same time, it is often unchecked violations of human rights that lead to such tragic conflicts in the first place.

Consequently, my personal belief is that while the nations of the world cannot always intervene to stop these human tragedies, governments with a concern for human rights, such as our own, must turn their attention to the area of conflict prevention and mediation. This has traditionally been the role of the peacekeepers, but more and more, those of us who travel to distant parts of the world for our government are convinced that the "soft" end of conflict prevention - the early warning, the mediation, the confidence building and education - needs to be developed.

The interplay between human rights and conflict prevention has been outlined ambitiously by the UN Secretary-General in his *Agenda for Peace*. Most of you know this important document, but many of you may not know Minister Ouellet's statement in Ouagadougou, the Prime Minister's comments in Budapest, or my own at the Miami Summit, which directly link Canadian concerns for human rights to new thinking and new initiatives on conflict prevention. Now we as a government, and groups such as your own, need to co-operate with the many communities concerned with this issue to design strategies, fund and act to put conflict prevention together with human rights on the agenda.

The tragedies in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia underline the importance of human rights in early warning and preventive diplomacy. We must continue our efforts to strengthen these linkages at the Commission - for example, in the resolutions on

mass exoduses and effective functioning of treaty bodies on which Canada traditionally takes the lead.

We are all convinced of the connection between human rights and the need for more effective action on conflict prevention. Can we afford it? In my view, the real question is whether we can afford to look the other way until it is too late. The Worldwatch Institute, a research group based in Washington, has published a study to challenge this thinking. When the Rwanda crisis began, a \$115-million peacekeeping effort was viewed as too expensive. A few months later, the U.S. alone had pledged half a billion dollars to cope with the humanitarian disaster. Canada's own contribution has mounted to nearly \$70 million, including peacekeeping.

For these reasons, we will also continue our efforts to secure more resources for the UN Human Rights Program: one per cent of the UN regular budget is a dubious reflection of the priority given human rights by the Charter and is clearly inadequate to the real demands faced by the High Commissioner and the Geneva Centre for Human Rights. Of course, we must also improve the performance of the UN in this area and encourage greater co-ordination among the diverse human rights mechanisms throughout the United Nations system.

Similarly, as we prepare for the World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen in March and the World Conference on Women in Beijing in September, we must work to ensure that issues of women's equality are fully integrated throughout the UN system. At the Commission we will pursue our efforts to ensure that women's rights are incorporated into the broad range of human rights instruments and mechanisms.

You have already begun to discuss specific country situations. I know that in many of these cases you share my frustration with the politics and seemingly arcane procedures of the Commission. However, it is important to remember that, imperfect though the Commission may be, its deliberations and actions do carry the moral authority of the international community. The Commission is the pre-eminent forum for consideration of human rights situations around the world and for engaging governments in serious debates and negotiations on specific problems. This government believes that such multilateral channels generally offer more prospects for truly influencing government attitudes than do isolated bilateral actions.

Human rights is also fundamental to creating an environment for sustainable development, for only where men and women can actively participate on an equal basis in decision-making within their communities can real and lasting progress be achieved. We must not only continue to support human rights, good governance and democratic development in practical ways through our bilateral assistance policies, but encourage the integration of these priorities into multilateral programs. We must also support the

work undertaken by the UN that focuses on constitutions, electoral systems, and judicial and human rights institutions and training.

The Canadian government raises human rights issues at every appropriate opportunity at the international level. We must go beyond the rhetoric, however, and give substance to our words by offering creative and practical assistance to other countries - as we are doing in Haiti, for example, through institution building, police training and support for a truth commission. We run the risk of being hypocritical unless we address all the elements that make up a free and democratic society that puts respect for human rights high on its list of priorities.

As you know, Mr. Léonard Legault, one of the most experienced and distinguished members of the Foreign Service, has been appointed Canada's new representative to the Human Rights Commission. I have met Mr. Legault and have the utmost confidence that he will do a good job. He is hoping you will take the opportunity at these consultations to meet with him and discuss your particular concerns. We as a government, and you, the NGO community, must continue to work together to promote and protect human rights throughout the world. I am sure these two days of consultation will assist in furthering this goal during the 51st session of the Commission on Human Rights.

Thank you.