

Statement

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**NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS BY
THE HONOURABLE ANDRÉ OUELLET,
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
AT THE INTERNATIONAL FRANCOPHONE MEETING
ON CONFLICT PREVENTION: AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE**

**OTTAWA, Ontario
September 20, 1995**



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Ministers,
Ambassadors,
Mr. Chairman of the Permanent Committee of la Francophonie,
Mr. Secretary-General of the ACCT,
Distinguished guests,
Dear friends:

Welcome to Canada. I see some familiar faces in the room, colleagues that I had the honour of meeting in Ouagadougou in December and at other meetings here or elsewhere. I am also meeting some of you for the first time. I hope that your stay will allow us to get to know one another well. I know that we will all benefit from the atmosphere of honesty and friendship that characterizes meetings of la Francophonie and that the result will be productive discussions.

Unlike other regional and international organizations, la Francophonie has not yet had to play a leading role in conflict prevention and resolution. As I said at the last Ministerial Conference in Ouagadougou, however, the recent events that have shaken some Francophone countries concern and directly affect us all. I said then that la Francophonie was summoned to take action as far as its means would allow. I still believe this to be the case. This observation prompted Canada to propose that a meeting be held in Ottawa to consider establishing a conflict prevention process within la Francophonie. I am happy to see that la Francophonie has answered the call.

We are joined by representatives of the United Nations [UN] and the Organization of African Unity [OAU], as well as ambassadors of Commonwealth countries. Their presence underscores the critical nature of our discussions and clearly highlights the importance of conflict prevention in Africa.

Our meeting is innovative and seeks to achieve ambitious objectives. On the one hand, it is the first Francophone meeting of this nature and thus confirms the desire of Francophone countries to move in this direction. On the other hand, we regard the conference as part of the preparatory process that will lead us to the Cotonou Summit, where I feel that security issues will have an important place.

Allow me to take this opportunity to share a few thoughts on the very timely topic that you have started to discuss this morning.

For 45 years, the security of nations was threatened by the other side, the enemy, whose very existence challenged our territorial integrity, our way of life, our political system and our national values. Divided into two ideological camps and obsessed with the danger of atomic war, many nations ignored their own deep, internal social, political and economic divisions and their consequences for too long. Since 1945, more than a hundred conflicts have resulted in the deaths of 20 million people. The fear of nuclear holocaust meant peace for only a few.

With the break-up of the Soviet Union and the rejection of Communism, many saw the dawn of a new era in which the demands of national security would give way to economic and social security and to democratic progress. The most optimistic spoke categorically of the end of History. Others spoke, too hastily, of a new world order. The tragic events in Somalia, Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia have shown us a more painful reality.

The new international environment is reminiscent of the bloodbaths of what we thought were bygone eras. Despite the similarities, the basic facts of the current situation have radically changed. Allow me to outline the most important of these facts, which affect all of our countries:

- 1) The end of bipolarity has transformed the nature of power in international relations. The number of stakeholders has increased and military force has lost its significance in favour of economic strength.
- 2) Technology and communications have speeded up economic globalization and increased the pace of deregulation. Until recently, economic policy was exclusively a matter of national jurisdiction. It must now be considered in conjunction with a range of external factors.
- 3) Thus, problems that transcend national boundaries are erasing the dividing line between domestic and foreign policy.
- 4) Problems formerly identified with the effects of war, such as mass migration and environmental destruction, to name only two, have become factors of instability and conflict.

The power of emerging nations now stems from the vitality of their economy, the influence of their culture and values, and the commitment of all stakeholders in civil society to the conduct of public affairs. To develop this participation, it seems to me that nations must promote national unity based on equality for all and respect for political, economic and cultural diversity.

The enemy that threatens us is no longer the other side. The enemy lies within. In my opening remarks, I talked about the new situation with regard to international peace and security. Human security is clearly the very foundation of real peace. Peace and security now depend on the ability of nations to promote the economic and social development of all citizens, both women and men, with respect for differences and for the environment. Factors such as soil depletion, deforestation, and desertification have been left out of the security equation for too long. They now dramatically remind us that we are threatened by far more than flags and firearms.

The economic slowdown of recent years has hit developing countries hard, especially in Africa. The continent's collective wealth has decreased, leaving each nation and each individual in a more tenuous situation. Unless we are willing to manage the allocation of national wealth closely, the scarcity of resources and the disparities will lead to the breakup of nations, population shifts and inevitable friction between nations and ethnic groups.

To be successful, governments must also recognize the fundamental role of women in economic and social development. Women continue to feed large populations, to convey the cultural values of peace and solidarity, to rebuild their countries at the grass-roots level. Without the participation of women in the political and economic decision-making process, countries deprive themselves of an indispensable resource.

Encouraged by the commitment made in Cairo in June 1993 by the Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity as well as by the action taken by the OAU in Burundi and by certain regional organizations, as in Lesotho, Canada is now actively involved in a dialogue with the OAU Secretariat to develop avenues of co-operation to help achieve the objectives of the conflict prevention, management and resolution mechanism. Canada encourages the OAU to promote complementarity with the African regional organizations, the UN, la Francophonie and the Commonwealth. Today's conference will help pave the way toward implementing this co-operation.

La Francophonie cannot remain silent in the face of the challenges that ongoing and potential conflicts are posing to regional and international security. There is reason to suggest that la Francophonie, in support of the OAU mechanism, should adopt institutional means of playing a preventive and mediatorial role. Of course, we already have programs for the promotion of democratic institutions. But these programs are no longer adequate. It is imperative that member states of la Francophonie make use of the tools available to them by working in concert with the ACCT [Agency for Cultural and Technical Co-operation], the OAU and the UN to devise courses of action to respond to the new realities. When conflicts break out or are on the verge of degenerating into violent confrontations, someone must act quickly.

The power to act is nothing without the will to act. Rwanda and now Burundi afford proof that the weakness of preventive diplomacy lies not in a lack of ways to identify conflict situations, but in the international community's inability to decide how best to prevent and contain conflicts. In order to play a part equal to its means, la Francophonie needs a mechanism whereby it can make the necessary decisions to contribute toward the efforts of the UN, the OAU and regional organizations.

Let me now summarize:

First, today's and tomorrow's discussions must continue in each of our capitals and culminate in Cotonou in a solemn declaration by la Francophonie on conflict prevention and preventive diplomacy.

Second, I wonder whether we shouldn't think of setting up a select ministerial committee in Cotonou to support the initiatives in this area and provide the necessary political impetus.

Third, at the level of preventive diplomacy, la Francophonie should make greater use of its parliamentarians; they can play an invaluable role of mediation and observation, as was the case in Burundi. I would like to see an active role for the AIPLF [International Association of French-Speaking Parliamentarians] strongly encouraged and recognized;

Fourth, to add an element of flexibility, mobility and rapidity to the actions of the select ministerial committee and to give more substance to the Francophone instruments already available to us, including the AIPLF, we should perhaps contemplate establishing within la Francophonie what for the time being I will call a "facility for peace."

Fifth, given the crucial importance of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in conflict prevention, I feel that where they do not exist or are functioning less than optimally, we should promote the creation or strengthening of national human rights advocacy institutions throughout la Francophonie. This could be incorporated in bilateral and multilateral co-operation.

Sixth, in an environment where military power is giving way to economic dynamism, the security and stability of nations hinges increasingly on the economic and social development of their people. Should our governments not therefore undertake to courageously review the level of military expenditures with a view to reallocating defence resources into fields such as health and education in order to secure a better future for our people?

Seventh, according to the United Nations, more than 90 per cent of the victims of intra-state conflicts are non-combatants. Unless the proliferation of small arms and the use of mines cease, the civilian population will continue to be the victims of sectarian wars. It is imperative that the international community and the governments and groups involved work together to end the use of such weapons. Furthermore, should we not make the political commitment to rid Francophone countries of mines?

Canada will continue to apply pressure and suggest changes within the international institutions to secure peace and stability.

Looking strictly at security, in a few days I will be tabling before the United Nations General Assembly the results of a Canadian study on the establishment of a rapid reaction capability in the UN. Applying the main recommendations of this study would, in our view, result in a tangible improvement in the UN's peacekeeping performance. I invite you to read this study and promote its recommendations.

The nature of conflict has changed. Faced with threats from outside, many Francophone countries, like the rest of the world, have placed their reliance on military power for protection. These countries must now take a fresh look at the question of internal security. Order without public consent and participation is a perversion of internal stability and good governance. In my view, the absence of conflict at the expense of freedom is not true peace.

Thank you.