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IN: Second Committee
ITEM: 25, 88(a) 153
SUBJECT: Emergency Assistance
DATE: October 25, 1989

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Canadian Statement to the Second Committee
44th General Assembly on Items 25, 88(a) and 153

25 October 1989
delivered by Jerry Kramer (Counsellor)

Mr Chairman,

I take the floor briefly to speak about the international decade for natural disaster reduction, the problem of flooding in Bangladesh and emergency assistance to the Sudan.

My delegation joins earlier speakers in extending condolences to the many victims of natural disasters which have recently affected numerous countries. These events have brought home very clearly the importance of the objectives which the General Assembly set out in Resolution 42/169 for an International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. During this General Assembly our task will be to define the scope of the Decade, the machinery required to support it and the role of the United Nations system. I wish today to signal the support of my delegation for the proclamation of the Decade and our intention to work constructively with other interested delegations in finalizing the mandate of the Decade.

We owe our thanks to the ad hoc Group of Experts which put forward important proposals concerning the functioning of the Decade as well as to the U.N. Steering Committee, the interagency working group and to the Secretariat working in association with UNDRR for their efforts in developing our thinking on priorities for the 1990s. The work done so far has heightened awareness of the fact that the negative impact of certain natural phenomena can indeed be mitigated by the application of predictive technology, improved construction design and other measures. The fact that the human and social cost of disasters so often falls on economically vulnerable communities and on the geographically disadvantaged, underscores the need for urgent supportive action.

We appreciated the report of the Secretary General made available just before the summer session of ECOSOC because it put forward organizational arrangements that situate the support structure for the Decade more directly within the UN system, partly by including UN experts in the IDNDR Committee, maintaining the UN steering committee under

the Chairmanship of the Director General, and situating the Secretariat in association with UNDR0. The question of the High Level Board of Trustees was left open. We understand that a new addendum to that report is being distributed today, unfortunately too late to be of use for this debate.

In our view, the voluntary efforts of national scientific and technical entities are key to the success of the Decade, within which the U.N. is envisaged to play a facilitative and catalytic role. The structure must be tailored to reflect the specific role envisaged for the UN and must be as lean as possible given the need for cost effectiveness, the overall environment of restraint and the consequent competition for resources among compelling priorities. The structure should not be overly cumbersome, which requires that the function of each committee be examined prior to establishing it. It would also be useful for action to be taken in the context of consideration of the variety of related initiatives being put forward under the environment item. Finally, I would add the need to build in strong technical cooperation elements into the Decade so as to ensure dissemination of relevant technology to developing countries as well as the need for adequate attention to the public information aspects of the Decade.

The tragedy of flooding in Bangladesh, which has captured international attention in recent years, is a preoccupation of Canadian authorities. Subsequent to the 1988 floods, Canada provided \$14.5 million in assistance to support recovery efforts. Water management is an important part of Canada/Bangladesh cooperation for which \$61 million has been allocated over 5 years. The factors contributing to the problem are complex and have important international dimensions. We are pleased at the serious attention being given to the search for long-term solutions in which multilateral agencies are playing a leading part.

The recent focus in emergency assistance to the Sudan has been upon Operation Lifeline Sudan which was discussed in Plenary yesterday. We do of course realize that there are important needs elsewhere, particularly for the displaced. Canada is relieved that Operation Lifeline Sudan helped to avert a tragedy similar to that of the preceding year. The ceasefire and cooperation of combatants in the relief exercise was an important factor in the successes achieved. We welcome current plans for the preparation of a second phase of Operation Lifeline Sudan under the auspices of Mr Michael Priestly who has succeeded James Grant as

Personal Representative of the Secretary General.

This phase would necessarily focus on rehabilitation and economic reintegration of the displaced. Renewed efforts for the peace process, maintenance of corridors of tranquility, and continuation of the ceasefire would be important elements of future success.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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