



Statements and Speeches

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CANADA'S FOREIGN POLICY AND RELATIONS

A Speech by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Flora MacDonald, to the Canadian Club of Canada, Montreal, September 17, 1979

I think it is appropriate that I speak to you today about certain aspects of Canada's foreign policy and relations. I know these matters are of immediate importance and concern to everyone in this room.

The conduct of Canada's external affairs has not been subject to an over-all review for ten years. And in those ten years the world has been changing fast. Power relationships have changed remarkably: the super-powers are subject today to quite different constraints. The emergence of China onto the world stage after a period of relative isolation has changed the political map strikingly. The process of decolonization has almost been completed, with the resulting appearance of many new states — a number of which are recognizing that their small size jeopardizes their aspirations to economic prosperity and even their national security. The enormous price increases by the international oil cartel known as OPEC alone have so changed the economic balance of the world that our perceptions of ten years ago are bound to be obsolete.

As the Government of Canada we have the responsibility, and as a government so recently elected to office we have the opportunity, to take a fundamental look at what the world is like today and where Canada fits in it. I certainly would not prejudge the results of such a review by saying we shall find that our existing policies will all be found wanting or inappropriate. Indeed, I have been impressed with the flexibility with which we have met many of the challenges of the changing world scene. Nonetheless I take it as part of my responsibilities as Secretary of State for External Affairs that we do a solid re-thinking of where we are going.

Perhaps you might be interested if I spend just a minute talking about the way in which I expect to have this review conducted. I cannot prejudge the results, but I can foresee the route by which we shall get them.

One of the ways we plan to carry out our commitment to more open and responsive government is by revitalizing our parliamentary institutions. Elected MPs are, after all, the direct representatives of the people and are the best channel the government has for keeping in touch with the thoughts and concerns of the electorate.

In the period from 1970 to 1973 the Commons Committee on External Affairs and National Defence held inquiries into fourteen major subjects, including such important matters as the Nigerian-Biafran conflict, the establishment of the International Research Development Centre, the United Nations and peacekeeping, Canada-U.S. relations, and the major policy-review paper "Foreign Policy for Canadians". These inquiries were valuable, and they gave an opportunity to many

individual Canadians to put forward their views and concerns as witnesses before the committee. They created public interest in many of the major issues of the day, and they appeared to have an impact on government policy.

The committee, however, held only two inquiries in 1974, one in each of 1975, 1976 and 1977, and none in 1978. This inactivity is to be regretted and is something that will be changed. One of the first jobs that will be given to the committee is the over-all review of our foreign policy in the light of the current world situation. We shall be encouraging the committee to involve as many Canadians as possible in that work.

I have said that I cannot prejudge the outcome of the committee's deliberations. Another thing I cannot do is avoid taking decisions until it has reported and the government has had an opportunity to study its findings. The world will not stop even for the Parliament of Canada. In the interval, of course, I shall be having discussions with a wide variety of people from all walks of life. My officials will be providing me with assessments of Canada's interests in the almost endless variety of issues that arise in the daily work of my portfolio. Life must go on, and in the process I shall also be preparing myself and my colleagues for the over-all review and the decisions that it will necessitate.

But as I have said, decisions must be taken, work must go on. I think it's only proper therefore, if I spend a very few moments outlining some of the approaches I shall be taking to this work, and some of the new emphasis I intend to give to the exercise of my responsibilities in this portfolio.

There are three general areas I want to mention here. First, I intend to ensure that Canada's foreign policy lays even greater emphasis than it has in the past on human rights issues. I firmly believe that the way we treat our brothers and sisters is the measuring stick of civilization. There is no shortage either in Canada or in the international community of pious statements of human and individual rights. There is also no shortage of examples of their flagrant violation.

It will be no innovation for Canada to take a strong stand against such flagrant violations of human rights as those inherent in the policy of apartheid practised in South Africa, though we shall be no less forthcoming in our condemnation of them. In addition, however, I intend to use my office to make direct representations to governments in individual cases of denial of rights. I have already done so in more than one instance. The most recent was the case of Ida Nudel whose attempts to emigrate from the Soviet Union have led to her being exiled to Siberia.

While, much as I would like to, I cannot intervene in every case of this kind that comes to my attention, I chose to make representations on behalf of Ida Nudel on humanitarian grounds: her health is deteriorating rapidly and the conditions of her detention in Siberia are particularly cruel; she is the suffering victim of a punishment that far outstrips her "crime".

The second area is that of public participation in foreign policy. I am deeply con

vinced that the more we can involve individual citizens in all aspects of government policy, the better will be the quality of government we shall have. A few minutes ago I spoke of the increased role we see for one Parliamentary committee. Well that is *only one committee and only one aspect of the government's commitment to this policy.*

There may be some of you here who are saying to yourselves: "oh sure, I've heard all this before." Well let me give you a concrete example of how we have already put these policy directions into effect.

Very early in my term of office I realized that the refugee situation in Southeast Asia demanded two different kinds of action. The first was on the political front. It was simply intolerable to the new government — as I am sure it was to the people of Canada — that the government of Vietnam was pursuing a deliberate policy to expel hundreds of thousands of its own citizens. You will remember that for years — all through their war with the United States — Canada kept up good relations with the Government in Hanoi. We did not take sides in that conflict. Our moderate position was well recognized and appreciated by Hanoi.

But in light of the policy of violation of human rights that has been recently followed by Vietnam we have cut off our aid programs to that country. I personally have spoken to representatives of that government in Ottawa and abroad emphasizing that the goodwill between our peoples is seriously jeopardized by their actions. At the Geneva conference on the refugee situation I called on all other governments to exert whatever pressure they could to deter the Vietnamese from their inhumane course. Canada's representations, along with those of several other countries, resulted in at least a temporary change in Vietnam's policies. The flow of boat people was stopped. Illegal departures have been checked. Making that kind of appeal in that kind of forum is something that only the government could do — though we could not have taken so strong a stand if we weren't certain of the support for it among the Canadian people.

The second kind of action that was called for was to provide a humanitarian response to the plight of these tragically uprooted people. They desperately need new homes. The countries to which they flee are overwhelmed by the problems that have been created, and cannot be expected to continue to give shelter to the refugees if they are not certain that other countries will open their doors for longterm resettlement. Countries like Canada have to provide a relief valve if we want to prevent hundreds of thousands more people from dying. There was absolutely no choice about Canada having to accept refugees for resettlement. At least there was no choice if we are going to be able to live with our consciences — and to me that means no choice.

But there was a choice as to how we were to do this. One way would have been for the government to just arbitrarily pick a figure and say we will bring in this number and look after them. But we knew that the distress of these refugees had touched the hearts of Canadians. We knew that thousands of people from coast to coast had already been looking for a way in which they, as private citizens, could help. So this is

the program that was designed: the government is sponsoring one refugee for each refugee sponsored privately. Not only does this give an opportunity for Canadians to satisfy their need to help directly in a tragic situation, but it also allows the Canadian people to determine the total number of refugees who will come here. It is a program of partnership between the people and the government.

I think this example clearly demonstrates our commitment to both questions of human rights and public involvement in external affairs. It is also an excellent example of the kind of co-operation we expect to have with provincial governments. Throughout the entire process we were in close touch with the governments of the provinces, consulting them about the numbers of refugees they would be willing and able to help accommodate, and about the services that would have to be provided for the new arrivals. In this regard I want to say how grateful we have been for the concerned and supportive approach taken by the government of Quebec. Their generous and constructive assistance has helped ensure that the program will be a success. A better example of effective co-operation between two levels of government would be hard to find.

The third area of foreign policy I want to mention is that of aid to developing countries. As Secretary of State for External Affairs I am responsible for the shape and direction of our aid programs. This is a particularly important aspect of the portfolio, since aid is very often by far the most significant aspect of our relations with many of the developing countries. The long-term objectives of our aid programs will, of course, be one aspect of the foreign policy review I mentioned a few moments ago. Here again, though, decisions cannot wait. Projects are being proposed and considered constantly and we must make decisions now that will have significant implications for several years to come.

There are several aspects that must be considered in aid questions. In the past, much of our aid has been in the social field. We have helped with schools, teachers, doctors, hospitals and social services. Gradually, however, the developing countries have come to recognize that their own governments must play a larger and more active role in providing the economic infrastructure. There is now, as I found in my recent trip to Africa, a recognition of a need for public investment in such economic facilities. I foresee that more and more we shall be called upon to help developing countries with this kind of aid. This is a tendency of which I fully approve. There is an old saying in the aid business, "Give a man a fish and he can feed his family for a day. Teach him to fish, and he can feed them for life." The enormous and growing disparities between the rich and poor countries will never be reduced if we do not help them to develop their fundamental economies. It is my intention to see that our aid programs really do help the long-term development of the recipient countries — both humanitarian concern and political self-interest demand it.

I do not mean to leave the impression that we should no longer be concerned or involved in aid in social programs. That need still remains in many of the developing countries. But this is an area where, in my view, government may turn increasingly, but of course not exclusively, to the private sector. Canada in particular has a

variety of private organizations, what we call Non-Governmental Organizations, or NGOs for short, who have a great deal of expertise in running successful programs in the Third World. From what I've seen they can do this kind of work with just as much effect and at considerably less cost than we can through government programs. Increased government support for the efforts of the NGOs should make our over-all impact greater for any given level of expenditure, as well as promoting the goal I've already spoken about: increasing the role of individual Canadians in foreign affairs.

These, then, are three examples of the sorts of changes in emphasis you can expect to see in the conduct of foreign affairs under the present administration.

Here as elsewhere in Canada I don't have to emphasize how important our relations with foreign countries are. You know it, you recognize it in your daily lives. The issues we face are of ever-growing complexity, and indeed of ever-growing importance. Government alone cannot provide all the answers. We need your energies, your intelligence, your experience. Together we can help — even bit by bit — to make this a better world — both for Canadians and for people all over the globe.