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GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO REPORT OF
ROYAL COMMISSION ON CONDITIONS OF FOREIGN SERVICE

The Honourable Allan J. MacEachen, Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Gerald Regan, Minister of State (International Trade), and the Honourable Charles Lapointe, Minister of State (External Relations), announced today the Government's response to the findings and recommendations of the Royal Commission on Conditions of Foreign Service.

The text of the response was tabled in the House of Commons today by the Honourable Charles Lapointe.

The Report of the Commissioner, Miss Pamela A. McDougall, was released on December 15, 1981. The Commissioner had been appointed to "examine into changes in the conditions of foreign service and to report on steps that the Government might take to accommodate them in the context of its approach to the legal, administrative and operational frameworks of the Foreign Service ...".

The three Ministers have emphasized that the measures being taken by the Government constitute clear recognition of the indispensable contribution members of the foreign service and their families make to the pursuit of Canada's economic, social and political goals both domestically and abroad and a firm commitment by the Government to ensure that the foreign service is well equipped to fulfil its responsibilities.

In its response the Government recalls that action has already been taken on a number of the Commission's principal recommendations, notably:

- completion of the consolidation of the foreign service to include the former Trade Commissioner Service and other trade elements of the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce, announced in January 1982;
- major improvements in April 1982 in the system of benefits and compensation for members of the foreign service; and
- the introduction in the House of Commons in June 1982 of a proposed new Department of External Affairs Act.

Other measures being taken by the Government include:

- reaffirmation of the commitment of the Government and of the Department of External Affairs to the principle of equity in the treatment of the various categories of foreign service employees and reinforcement of this commitment through instructions to heads of posts and other members of the foreign service with management responsibilities;
- elimination of distinctions in the type of passports provided to different categories of foreign service employees;
- enhancement of the substantial measures already taken to strengthen the personal safety of members of the foreign service and their families abroad;

- clear recognition of the role and concerns of spouses of foreign service members, including an undertaking by the Department of External Affairs to communicate more directly with foreign service spouses and to devote greater attention to the employment related problems they often confront as a consequence of foreign service;
- creation within the Department of External Affairs of a Community Liaison Office to serve as a point of contact for foreign service spouses and to provide a range of counselling, briefing and information services on questions of particular interest to foreign service spouses and families;
- measures to overcome the difficulties some non-Canadian spouses of foreign service members have confronted as a result of postings abroad in meeting the residence requirements for Canadian citizenship;
- recognition of the need to take equitably into account the concerns of single employees;
- a variety of additional measures to improve the health care available to Canadian foreign service personnel and their families abroad and to deal with educational problems faced by foreign service children;
- a range of measures at a selected number of the most difficult posts abroad to help meet the basic recreational needs of foreign service members and their families when recreational outlets commonly available in Canada are virtually absent;

- a number of administrative and other measures to ensure that members of the foreign service abroad are adequately housed;
- much greater attention to personnel management in the foreign service, including appointment of an Assistant Deputy Minister with full responsibility for personnel questions and an undertaking to improve foreign service training with particular emphasis on the development of management skills;
- substantial improvement and expansion of foreign language training within the foreign service to enhance the ability of employees to fulfil their responsibilities abroad and to accelerate the adaptation of employees and their families to foreign language environments;
- development of a substantially enlarged program of secondments between the Department of External Affairs and other Government departments and agencies;
- improvement in the administration of the foreign service benefits and compensation system;
- delegation of greater authority to heads of posts abroad; and
- major changes in the management and organization of the Department of External Affairs designed to strengthen its ability to identify priorities and to allocate its resources efficiently and effectively.

The wide ranging responsibilities of the Canadian foreign service, with members serving in Ottawa and at almost 120 posts outside Canada include:

- representation of Canada and Canadian interests in the countries with which Canada has diplomatic relations and in the many international organizations to which Canada belongs;
- the promotion of Canada's economic and trade relations with other countries;
- the conduct abroad of Canada's international development, immigration and tourism programs;
- the dissemination abroad of information on Canada and Canadian affairs and the fostering of cultural relations with other countries;
- the timely provision to the Government of information, analysis and advice on international developments and issues of relevance to Canadian interests;
- the negotiation and monitoring of international agreements to which Canada is party; and
- the provision of consular services to Canadians travelling and residing abroad.

The full text of the Government's response and copies of a discussion paper, outlining in detail the factors considered by the Government in determining its response, are available on request from Domestic Information Division, Public Affairs Branch, Department of External Affairs (telephone 593-7064).