

# STATEMENT DISCOURS

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85/27

STATEMENT BY THE RIGHT HONOURABLE  
JOE CLARK, SECRETARY OF STATE  
FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING  
OF THE CONFERENCE ON SECURITY  
AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE,  
MEETING OF EXPERTS ON HUMAN  
RIGHTS

OTTAWA

May 7, 1985

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates and Visitors,

It is my pleasant task today to welcome to Ottawa those who will take part in the CSCE Meeting of Experts on Human Rights. A number of you will have been to North America and to Canada before. For those making your first visit to this continent and to this country, I believe it is particularly appropriate that you are here in springtime. After the long and difficult winters we so often have to face in the northern part of this continent, spring comes -- not a moment too soon -- as a time of renewal, of expanded horizons, and of a sense of new opportunities. I hope that this seasonal phenomenon can somehow be a metaphor for our meeting, and that by the time it ends in June, you, as delegates, and the many citizens of our countries who are watching intently, will share the view that we have managed to renew our commitment to respect human rights and to expand our co-operation in this field.

As my colleague, Madame Vézina, the Minister for External Relations, noted when she welcomed delegates to the Preparatory Meeting on April 23, this experts meeting has two claims to historical importance. It is the first CSCE meeting held on the North American continent, and also the first dedicated exclusively to human rights.

Canada has placed great importance on the CSCE process since its inception because it offers the possibility of continuing dialogue and progress in areas of interest to our countries, and allows its participants, large and small, to each make our own distinctive contribution on the basis of equality.

Canada, furthermore, can never turn its back on developments in Europe. North Americans though we are, there are too many historical and cultural attachments, too many political and economic links, and too many individual human ties for this country ever to ignore European affairs. Deeply conscious of these associations and their durability, Canada has in the past played an active and I believe, constructive role in all aspects of the CSCE process. Under this Government, Canada remains firmly convinced that a safe,

prosperous and humane Europe is a cornerstone of a safe, prosperous and humane Canada. We will therefore both at this meeting, in Stockholm, in Budapest later this year, and in Berne and Vienne in 1986, to expand our dialogue and cooperation.

It is, I know, a widely shared perception that the Ottawa meeting could be a difficult one. In proposing and pursuing with others at Madrid the idea of holding a meeting on human rights, Canada was conscious both of the sensitivity of the subject and of some of the reservations and concerns held by our CSCE partners.

But issues of central importance such as human rights cannot and must not be avoided just because they are sensitive and can sometimes give rise to disagreement between governments. Both the Helsinki Final Act and the Madrid Concluding Document point out that respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is an essential factor in the search for the peace, justice and well-being necessary to ensure the development of friendly relations and cooperation among us. The same recognition is enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. These assertions reflect the fact that a world that is not increasingly humane is unlikely to be increasingly safe, or even, in the long run, more prosperous. This is why human rights are, and will stay, on the international agenda. It is why you are gathered here today to dedicate six weeks to discussing human rights in our states, something that would have been unimaginable twenty or perhaps even ten years ago.

Intellectually, we know, of course, why human rights are not an easy question in interstate relations. Despite the many things which our CSCE countries share, we all have different cultural traditions and historical experience, and these inevitably have affected and will affect our value systems in different ways. Ours is not a monolithic world, nor should it be.

But these differences do not absolve us of the commitment we each made in Helsinki and Madrid. Nor can they deter us from our task of seeking over time to ensure that progress on respect for human rights-- whether civil, political, cultural, economic or social-- is made in all our countries. I am convinced that national boundaries can never and should never insulate any of us from the natural concern of human being for human being. This is especially so among a group of countries whose destinies have been so closely interlinked, and whose populations have so many ethnic, cultural, religious and intellectual traditions in common.

Nor must we forget that our journey in search of greater respect for human rights is already well begun. There already exists an impressive body of legally binding United Nations instruments on human rights. We have all freely subscribed to the painstakingly drafted human rights commitments in the Helsinki Final Act and Madrid Document. Many of the participating states are members of regional groupings which have developed their own sophisticated human rights machinery. We cannot now halt or turn back on our road, even if the way ahead looks long and our visions of what the final destination should look like may vary. Given the importance of human rights, and the serious concerns which our citizens continue to manifest about their implementation both at home and abroad, we must doggedly seek to improve our implementation, strengthen our commitment, and intensify our dialogue.

It would be gratuitous for me to suggest what exactly you should or can accomplish in your six weeks in Ottawa. You, as experts in your field, and as experienced negotiators, will be able to articulate the problems and determine the progress which can be made here. Suffice it to say that Canada sees this meeting as a valuable opportunity which must not be lost to give impetus to the process of improving fulfillment of our human rights and humanitarian commitments. If Ottawa can provide momentum which will help at Berne, Vienna and beyond, it will indeed have achieved something positive. It will also do much to give us a positive perspective of the tenth anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, which we observe this summer.

Before concluding, let me recall the deep personal interest that so many of our individual citizens will be taking in this meeting. For them the questions you will be discussing are not abstruse matters of interstate relations, but rather affect their everyday lives in the most direct and fundamental ways. I do not pretend that Canadians have any special corner on concerns for human rights nor would I say that Canada has itself a perfect human rights record, though we do try hard. It has nevertheless been very apparent to me in the course of our own national preparations for this meeting how much informed interest there is in this country in the work you will undertake.

During your meeting I expect you will yourselves see signs of this interest. Some of the expressions may be vigorous; all of them, I hope, will be within the bounds of legitimate self-expression. In the final analysis, I believe it is a token of the need for this meeting that there should be heartfelt interest of this sort.

Let me finish by welcoming you once again to our country and to our capital. Canada will do all it can to ensure that this very important meeting is the occasion of a genuine and productive discussion, and that you, as delegates, are able to work effectively. The task before you is difficult, certainly. But I have confidence that the skills and experience which this meeting brings together can produce a worthwhile outcome, one that will make a contribution to human rights, strengthen the CSCE process, and advance relations among us as a whole.