



# Statements and Speeches

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## THE SITUATION IN CENTRAL AMERICA

Statement by Shirley Martin, to the Fortieth Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, November 25, 1985.

Mr. President. This year marks the third occasion upon which the question of Central America has been brought before this body. I am confident that there is no one here who would argue against the need for our discussions to reflect the support of the entire international community for the development, acceptance and implementation of a workable, durable and comprehensive peace agreement for the entire region. The energetic attempts of the past six weeks led to renewed hope that such an agreement would soon be within our grasp. Alas, sadly and once again, we seem to be watching these undertakings trickle away like sand through the hour glass of negotiations.

After three years of continuous efforts by the countries of the Contadora Group [ Venezuela, Colombia, Mexico and Panama] and the countries of Central America, after three years of slow progress, frustrations and dangerous incidents, we could be tempted collectively to seize upon a superficial solution — a quick fix — something that could be wrapped in all the right ribbons and signed by all the key players to the sound of trumpets. However, the history of cosmetic agreements designed for short-term solutions is well known. Canada believes that the result of such an approach now in Central America would be counterproductive and potentially disastrous.

It is from this perspective that Canada has attentively followed the events in the region over the course of the past year. In fact, when one looks back at the task that Contadora undertook some three years ago, one can only admire its tenacity, perseverance and demonstrated skill. At the outset, the obstacles to this task appeared insurmountable given the diversity of motives, the military disequilibrium, externally supported guerilla campaigns, the growing East-West dimension of the crisis as well as a declining standard of living for all countries of the area and, maybe above all, an overwhelming lack of mutual confidence that characterized the first months of negotiations.

Under these adverse circumstances, the agreement on the 21-point list of objectives in September 1983 could only be seen as a remarkable and highly significant accomplishment. At that time, Canada expressed the view in the General Assembly that enduring solutions to the region's problems could best be reached by the countries of the region. As we noted then, this approach is consistent with the highest principles of the United Nations (UN) Charter. Canada maintains this position on both points. What is needed now is a renewal of faith, a new impetus and above all a willingness to invest the confidence and hard work required to ensure just and lasting solutions within the area. The support of the United Nations and the world community are also essential elements in the search for peace, human dignity and eventual prosperity.

Canada views the current upheaval and unrest in Central America as primarily a function of chronic

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social and economic injustice, coupled with persistent frustration over failure to institute the necessary economic and social reforms to meet even the most basic popular expectations. We realize that external interference and a tendency to view matters in an East-West context have exacerbated and aggravated an already complex situation. Based on our perspective, reflecting the growing concern of Canadians for the region in the recent years, our response, beyond strong support of Contadora, has been to focus our main efforts on bilateral development assistance. Thus, in 1981, we announced a tripling of our aid to Central America. Since then Canada's policy towards Central America has evolved and been refined taking into account both our humanitarian concerns and the geopolitical realities of the area. I must stress, however, that Canadian development assistance in Central America is not given on the basis of politics or held back to reward or penalize governments. Indeed, such a generalized practice would contradict our fundamental policy which aims at promoting the economic and social development of disadvantaged people so that they and their children may look forward to an improved quality of life. Regrettably, however, internal situations do arise which have led us to suspend individual bilateral aid programs, as has been the case in certain countries. We are pleased, however, that at least in one case, we have been able to resume our development assistance programs in light of positive developments. Canada continues to believe that the respect for human dignity and basic human rights in each of the countries of Central America constitutes a fundamental element of the return to peace and stability in the region. Such respect remains a transcendent concern of Canada and a visceral preoccupation of Canadians.

Briefly stated, Canada's concerns in Central America are, in large measure, the same as those which motivate the countries of the Contadora Group themselves. There are honourable exceptions, but we are appalled by the disregard for basic human rights. We are troubled by poverty, the declining quality of life, the displacement from their homes of over two million people or about one-tenth of the population of the entire Central American region and foreign military interference. We fervently hope that all the parties involved in the various Central American conflicts will refrain from increasing the already alarming level of militarization of the area. In the broader context, as a fellow Commonwealth country, we cannot fail to note the severe socioeconomic problems caused for Belize, a small nation, not a party to any conflict, but host to thousands of refugees from those states that are. Our policy towards the region reflects both our compassion for those who are suffering and our pursuit of good neighbourliness in the Western hemisphere.

This is one reason why we have expressed our support for Contadora since its inception and why we have provided practical forms of diplomatic assistance. At the request of the Contadora countries, Canada prepared detailed comments on the control and verification mechanism at the various stages of the draft Contadora Acts, based upon our long experience in the field of UN peacekeeping activities. We have also been assisting the reconciliation efforts in Nicaragua by witnessing in Bogota and Mexico the talks between representatives of the Sandinistas and the indigenous opposition group Misurasata.

We believe that the creation of the Support Group composed of Uruguay, Brazil, Argentina and Peru as well as the recent conference held in Luxembourg between the European Community, Spain and Portugal, the Contadora Group and the Central American countries constitute valuable efforts to strengthen the peace process in the region. These efforts have our full support, as do the complementary

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measures that have been taken from time to time to foster dialogue between the protagonists in the region. In this context, we were heartened to hear the references to dialogue in the statement last Friday by the United States representative, Ambassador Walters, particularly inasmuch as we recognize dialogue between the United States and Nicaragua as a key element in the search for lasting solutions.

We witness in Central America both an era of uncertainty and a time of frustration. Guatemala, Honduras and Costa Rica have recently held or will hold shortly national elections which constitute a renewal of democracy and thus contribute to the strengthening of peace and stability in the area. But the economic crisis continues to take its toll. Border incidents between neighbouring countries are all too frequent. External influences have added pressure and continue to increase tension. Some of the countries of Contadora have just suffered terrible natural catastrophes and to them we continue to extend our sincerest sympathy and help. But as long as the people of Central America cry out for peace and reconciliation, we cannot lose hope. They must not lose hope. The pursuit of the efforts of the Contadora countries in conjunction with the governments of the region are, of course, even more crucial to them than they are to us. It is more important than ever, therefore, that Contadora pursue its valiant work towards a comprehensive regional agreement. There are those who diminish the Contadora peace process — those who say it has achieved too little, the question for the detractors however is obvious: where might we now be without it? Contadora has helped to keep the lid on an increasingly explosive situation; it has created a framework for peace. It will require even more patience and, moreover, the indispensable political will of the parties involved. Continued regional dialogue is the only possible means to find a solution to this most complex crisis. The task is enormous but it is patently obvious that the stakes are even greater.

Canada is willing to continue to help in the design of essential security provisions of a Contadora Act in response to requests from the Contadora Group. We are also prepared to maintain our development assistance to the governments and peoples of Central America. Perhaps most important, Canada and Canadians will continue to view events in this troubled region with humanitarian interest and concern.

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