

Statement

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Ministère des
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NOTES FOR REMARKS

BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JOE CLARK,

AT THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF

THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES

WASHINGTON, D.C.

November 13, 1989.

Secretary of State
for
External Affairs

Secrétaire d'État
aux
Affaires extérieures

Canada

Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Mr. Assistant Secretary-General,
Your Excellencies, Foreign Ministers of Member
Countries, Distinguished Permanent Representatives and Permanent
Observers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today is an historic and happy occasion for me and for my country. For today, Canada joins the oldest regional organization in the world and the centrepiece of the Inter-American system. Today, at long last, we take our seat at the table of the Organization of American States.

I am touched by your warm words of welcome and your unanimous support for our application of membership. We shall proceed quickly to ratify our signature of the Charter and to undertake fully the responsibilities of our membership.

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Jorge Luis Borges, the great Argentinian author, is reported to have said, and I quote, "Canada is so far away that it almost does not exist."

There has been a psychological distance between Canada and the southern part of this hemisphere.

We intend to change that state of mind, to make Canada "exist" more significantly for Latin America and to make Latin America "exist" more substantially for Canadians.

Mr. President, Canada's joining of the OAS represents not so much a decision to become a member of an organization as it does a decision to become a partner in this hemisphere. For too long, Canadians have seen this hemisphere as our house; it is now time to make it our home.

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We are living in a period of potent challenge and immense opportunity. Developments in Latin America mirror the profound changes sweeping the globe, particularly the freedom of people to govern themselves.

In the past ten years, no fewer than ten Latin American countries have made the historic and courageous transition from dictatorship to democracy. It is our hope that democracy will soon become the accepted form of government in all countries of the hemisphere.

At the same time, trade barriers are coming down, and economies are being opened, to let in new ideas and enterprise. These are brave and difficult changes. It is one thing to attempt political transformation. It is quite another to accept the challenge of economic revolution at the same time, because the economic adjustments inevitably bring social tensions. We applaud the historic steps taken by Bolivia, Uruguay, Mexico, Argentina and Venezuela among others.

That turn to the marketplace, that flowering of democracy are, in our view, examples of a new realism which now defines international life - a realism which discards ideologies which do not work and embraces practices which deliver tangible progress.

We saw this welcome moderation in the recent progress towards peace in Central America, where flexibility was replacing rigidity both in the region and outside.

The events of the last few days in El Salvador are a serious cause for concern and pose a definite threat to the consolidation of the peace process in Central America. We urge the parties to the conflict to put an end to this senseless shedding of blood and to return to the negotiation table. The long history of the conflict in El Salvador has amply demonstrated that violence cannot and will not bring a solution: only negotiations can. Similarly, we hope the negotiations taking place at this very moment, here in Washington, between the Nicaraguan government and leaders of the Contras will lead to an agreement permitting the re-instatement of the ceasefire.

We also see a new pragmatism in discussions concerning debt, where both lenders and borrowers recognize the need for compromise and imagination.

Interdependence is being accepted as a fact of life and a guide to action. It is no longer possible for nations or institutions to operate in isolation.

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But that interdependence displays itself not simply in those positive trends we see in the region, but also in the problems we face.

Indeed there is a connection between the two. For without pressing challenges to our survival as societies - indeed as a species - there would be no compelling case for common action and constructive dialogue.

Here too, this hemisphere carries its share of the global burden.

The challenges to the hemispheric environment are acute, requiring changed lifestyles, altered goals and intensive dialogue.

We in the Northern half of the hemisphere must accept the burden of cleansing our air and water of the poisons we have dispensed with such abandon. We must acknowledge that the vast majority of global pollution originates in the industrialized world. We must also assist others in avoiding the mistakes we have made, for the world cannot sustain continued assaults on its environment.

Thus, the destruction of the Amazon rain forest causes us great concern, for it is here where so much of the oxygen which feeds the world is born.

The interdependence inherent in our hemispheric ecosystem is brought home by the fact that dangerous industrial chemicals - now outlawed in Canada - are showing up in our lakes and rivers, borne by winds and rain from Central America.

The awful truth to be accepted here is the irrelevance of natural borders in facing this problem, and the futility of assigning blame. We have no choice but to co-operate, for unilateral solutions won't work and joint actions fail without co-operation in each nation.

This region also bears the painful scars of the drug trade. where demand in the United States and Canada feed production in Colombia, Bolivia and Peru, and vice versa.

Here too, the only solution is to act together.

Finally, the awful burden of debt threatens the stability of the developed and developing world alike. It is particularly acute in Latin America, and poses a separate threat to the fledgling democracies of the hemisphere, demanding co-operation and assistance from the industrialized world.

Canada's new strategy for Latin America - including our membership in the OAS - is based on a straightforward proposition: that the nations of this region have a major influence on issues of global importance - and importance for Canada - whether the issue is drugs, the environment, human rights, debt, trade or the emerging dialogue between developed and developing countries.

Canada recognizes that the ability of the countries of this region to play a positive role in the resolution of these problems depends on a sustained stability, economical and political. Societies cannot help solve global problems while they are battling for national survival. Stability depends on the consolidation of democracy in the region and the return to a sustained pattern of economic growth.

Therefore, the primary purpose of our Latin American strategy is to pursue economic prosperity and a durable fabric of democracy.

It is in Canada's interest as much as it is the interest of Latin America to ensure that recent progress continues and that we do not revert to a hopeless cycle of violence, repression and poverty. The international financial system requires a sustained period of economic growth and stability in the region. The global environment demands creative solutions in Latin America which will not be possible in the midst of poverty. And our societies will not be freed from the cancer of drug abuse until those nations who supply the drugs can produce viable alternatives for their workers and we in North America address the self-destructive syndrome of growing demand.

For Canada, the decision to expand our role in Latin America represents continuity as much as it does change:

- We have long standing economic relations with the region. Latin America is the third largest market for Canadian investment capital after the US and Europe.
- Canada's exports to the region exceeded \$2.1 billion in 1988. Our two-way trade with Latin America is greater with the ASEAN countries and China combined.
- Canada was deeply involved in the reform of the Inter-American Development Bank, whose recent re-invigoration has resulted in a 78% increase in the resources at its disposal.

- We have played an active role in the international efforts to relieve the debt burdening the Latin American region. We have provided bridge loans totalling about \$600 million to Argentina, Mexico and Brazil as part of their efforts to secure short-term financing in the lead-up to new agreements with the IMF. We have re-scheduled official debt through the Paris Club for Brazil, Mexico, Costa Rica, Argentina, Peru and Ecuador. We have provided balance of payments support to Costa Rica and Colombia. And we chair the support group for Guyana where we are contributing \$60 million over the next three years to assist that country in establishing a firm economic base for a more prosperous future.

- And we are proud to have played a role in the peace process in Central America. I am gratified that the countries of the region consider Canada to be a trusted and honest broker with an honourable history of peace keeping. At the request of the five Central American countries, we have been able to assist in the design of a peace-keeping mission for the area.

This led last week to the unanimous Security Council resolution which will trigger the formation of a security verification group to supervise the peace which we all pray will come soon to Central America. I would note that the structure of this peace-keeping mission closely mirrors the recommendations made by Canada after our study of the requirements for an effective and viable UN presence.

- And finally, we have played an active role in many of the functional institutions which make up the family of the Organization of American States.

In 1954, the First Secretary General of this organization, Senor Lleras Camargo of Colombia made the following observation concerning the OAS:

"Any weaknesses that the Organization may have are weaknesses of the governments, reflecting their inability to act in coordination as a group. The strength of the Organization lies precisely in the joint action taken by member governments. Whether for better or worse the Organization is nothing more than an aspect of our behaviour as States and if it is not run well we can blame no one but ourselves".

This remains true today, for the OAS as for any other international institution. We all know that the OAS is not a perfect institution. However, for Canada imperfection is no reason to evade our responsibilities as a partner in this hemisphere, any more than the failings of the United Nations should prompt our withdrawal from that organization.

Indeed, it seems to me that the rejuvenation of the United Nations is cause for considerable optimism within the OAS. The new realism which has liberated the United Nations has resulted in a renaissance for that organization. Its members have discovered that the words of its Charter can be a valid guide for effective and pragmatic action. This same pragmatism can - and I believe will - result in a new era of relevance for the OAS.

We therefore applaud the efforts made by member countries to reform and revitalize this organization. We strongly support the position it has played in the Central American Peace Process and the monitoring of elections in Nicaragua, as well as the great efforts made in seeking a solution to the difficulties in Panama.

The success of international institutions is often found not in their ability to resolve the grand political issues of the day. Rather it resides in the many functional activities devoted to the resolution of particular problems. There may not form the stuff of headlines; but they do define the dimensions of success.

That is why we have been an active member of the Pan American Health Organization which has done so much to improve the health conditions in the region, especially with its program called " Health - a Bridge for Peace" in Central America.

We are also impressed by the useful work of the Inter-American Institute for Co-operation on Agriculture, of which Canada has been both a member and contributor.

We applaud the vital work of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in promoting the observance and protection of human rights in the hemisphere.

And the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Committee is an increasingly vital instrument to fight drug abuse. As a contribution to the activities of this body, Canada was pleased to host a successful seminar for law enforcement officers earlier this year.

By taking our place in the OAS, Canada accepts our full responsibility to be an active participant in the larger political discussions which come before this organization.

We will not let down those states in Latin America who have sought our membership for so long, and who have looked forward to Canada's increased engagement in the region. Our autonomy, our interest in practical solutions and our pursuit of bridge-building will continue as the hallmarks of our diplomacy.

It was not simply our expertise which led the countries of Central America to seek our assistance in constructing a durable mechanism for peace. I believe it was also our refusal to close doors or borders, our willingness to listen, to maintain a dialogue with all parties, and our steadfast determination to separate political preferences from the needs of suffering people.

This is not an isolated example of Canada's approach to the affairs of Latin America. It is an illustration of our overall commitment as a nation and as a government.

I must admit to you that there are some Canadians who believe that our membership in the OAS will diminish our capacity to act according to our interests and our beliefs. They are profoundly wrong.

Our purpose is clear. We have a responsibility to be at the table where issues of importance to Canada - and of the region - are discussed. Our place at this table is not to sit in silence, but to add a voice of commitment and moderation.

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In the lobby of this headquarters are the names of the famous heroes and explorers of this hemisphere. Those names include the great Simon Bolivar and Jose de San Martin. Also among them is Samuel de Champlain, the great explorer of Canada.

His inclusion in this pantheon of hemispheric heroes reminds us of our shared heritage. It reminds us that our world is still a new world. A new world which shares many of the problems of the old, but retains the same spirit of adventure and hope for our peoples which motivated our forbears.

Canada will approach its membership in this organization with the same spirit of hope and adventure.

We do so with energy and enthusiasm, conscious of the legacy of history, the extraordinary challenges we all face today, and the existing promise of what we can do together.

As we take on this new responsibility, Canada counts upon your great wisdom and your long experience. We do not have unrealistic hopes, but we have hopes nonetheless and expectations, of ourselves and of our partners.

Mr. President, Jorge Luis Borges once wrote:

"A man gradually identifies himself with the form of his fate; a man is, in the long run, his own circumstances."

So it is with our region and with this organization. Our fate is our own and future circumstances are of our own making. We can stand back and allow the moment to pass us by and in so doing to force us to bear the consequences of inaction. Or we can stand together, put aside our differences and face as nations of creativity and maturity the great challenges which lie before us.

I am thankful - and proud - today of your acceptance of Canada as a member nation of the OAS. On behalf of the Government of Canada, I dedicate our country to the pursuit of your noble aims and the realization of our common dreams.