



STATEMENT

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**NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS BY
THE HONOURABLE CHRISTINE STEWART,
SECRETARY OF STATE (LATIN AMERICA AND AFRICA),
TO *THE ECONOMIST* CONFERENCES
SECOND ROUND TABLE WITH
THE GOVERNMENT OF CUBA**

**HAVANA, Cuba
June 20, 1994**

Good evening. I am delighted to be in Cuba and to be a part of this conference. I would like to congratulate *The Economist* and Sherritt for taking the initiative to bring us all together and for providing such excellent arrangements. That such a gathering is taking place here is recognition of the reality that this is a significant time for Cuba, and for Cuba's relations with the international community. This meeting can make an important contribution to the discourse between Cuba and other countries on economic issues, and can enhance prospects for substantial commercial relationships.

It is now also an interesting time for Cuban-Canadian relations. I, therefore, am grateful that Ian Delaney, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Sherritt extended an invitation to the Canadian government that has enabled me to address this conference. My focus will be on the Canada-Cuba relationship, a relationship that is deeply influenced by what is happening in Cuba and elsewhere in the Hemisphere.

Since taking up my responsibilities as Secretary of State for Latin America and Africa, I have travelled widely in the hemisphere and met with many political leaders. Earlier this month I represented Canada at the 24th OAS [Organization of American States] General Assembly in Belém, Brazil. Naturally, I have been struck by the political and economic transformation of the hemisphere — by the willingness to address difficult economic issues such as trade liberalization and poverty alleviation, the desire to make multilateralism work through the OAS and other institutions, and by the determination to strengthen democratic institutions to make democracy work. Canadian business people, of course, are especially interested in the progress in reforming domestic legal and regulatory frameworks to make the rules of the game more transparent and predictable. My appointment following the election, last year, of the Liberal government demonstrated the Prime Minister's desire to see Canada more actively engaged in these significant developments. As underlined in the foreign policy review we have initiated, and in the speeches made in Parliament by myself and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, André Ouellet, our priorities in the Hemisphere focus on sustainable development, democratic development and good governance, trade and economic integration and security issues. We are pursuing these objectives multilaterally, especially through the OAS, and bilaterally in our relations with individual hemispheric partners.

Because we regard Cuba as very much a part of the hemisphere and the broader international community, we will work to bring these objectives to bear in our relationship with Cuba.

Cuba is entering an important period. It is a time of economic change, a time to adjust to a new international economic environment, and yet to ensure that the Cuban population retains the benefits of important social programs in such areas as education and health. Adjustment is a difficult process that

most countries, including Canada, are undertaking in one form or another these days. The decisions can have social and political costs. It is difficult, but vital, to sustain the effort. I am aware of the hardships that many Cubans are currently undergoing. It is with this understanding that Canada already has provided emergency humanitarian relief, most recently in response to an appeal by the World Food Program. The fact that Cuba has begun to adjust is encouraging, and we wish the Government well in pursuing vigorously a program of economic adjustment. I think this conference will contribute to the process.

We also wish to encourage and support political development here, as we do in other countries, both in this hemisphere and elsewhere. Cuba has made some real human rights accomplishments, notably in the areas of economic and social rights. Cuba's health care and educational systems have been models for other countries. I would also stress that when we speak of human rights and democratic development, we do not have a single westernized model. Rather, we are focusing on respect for certain freedoms that are set out in such international instruments as the UN [United Nations] Declaration on Human Rights. These issues form part of the bedrock of Canadian foreign policy. Thus, Canada will make human rights and democratic development an area of continuing discussion with Cuba, in order that Cuban accomplishments in the areas I have mentioned can be mirrored elsewhere in the areas of political and civil rights. We are prepared to co-operate with Cuba as it moves ahead in this area.

The fact of change in Cuba is one of the reasons for my being here. This is very much an introductory visit, one in which I have sought to learn about realities here and how the Government and people of Cuba see the future development of their country. We in the Canadian government have a long-standing belief that whatever our differences with another country may be, an open, honest dialogue is important. That is why our formal relationship with Cuba has been unbroken since it was established in 1945. Even at times when we have had considerable differences of view on Africa, on East-West relations, on the nature of political change in Latin America and, more recently, on human rights and good governance, we have maintained our ties and our discourse.

The Canadian government has been in the habit of describing Canada-Cuba relations in recent years as active and positive; and I think that certainly characterizes the thick web of unofficial, private links that many Canadian organizations, companies and individuals have with their Cuban counterparts.

Some of these unofficial links are concrete and measurable. Cuba is Canada's second largest trading partner after Puerto Rico in the Caribbean/Central American region. Our two-way trade

totalled over 300 million dollars in 1993. It is also a country in which several Canadian firms are pursuing investment possibilities. Some companies already are well established here, Sherritt being the most prominent. I would note here that Sherritt has had an active involvement in the Cuban nickel industry and in the oil and gas sector since 1991. By 1993, for example, Canadian imports of Cuban nickel through Sherritt accounted for over 60 per cent of our total imports from Cuba. Cuba is a country that over 100 000 Canadians visit each year. Eugene Whelan reminded me the other day of another significant Canadian population in Cuba — dairy cattle. It is also a country in which a number of Canadian universities, research institutes and non-governmental organizations [NGOs] have long-standing linkages that benefit both Cubans and Canadians.

Indeed, it is Canadians involved in these kinds of activities who have urged the Government to do more at the official level to strengthen our linkages with the Cuban government and the Cuban people. What they are telling us is that Cuba is at a point when it is more important than ever for governments to remain in contact. They also tell us that we need to do more to enable those outside government to work with their Cuban counterparts, with training, humanitarian assistance and technical exchanges.

I and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, André Ouellet, agree with these views. Canada is in the habit internationally of supporting, where appropriate and where we can, peaceful change leading to more pluralistic societies and economies. To do so is in our short-term as well as in our long-term interests. In some parts of the world, the process of change is complicated by long-standing conflicts. In some cases the international community may have become involved too late in the game. It is all too easy to see the results in terms of human suffering, as well as the impact on neighbouring countries. It is something no-one can seriously wish for this hemisphere. In the case of Cuba, I think we all have the opportunity to become involved at an early stage of the reform process. We can provide advice and support that could underpin positive, orderly change in the economic and political spheres. Many of the organizations and businesses alluded to earlier have already contributed much in this vein. Governments can play a role as well, by supporting the non-governmental sector, but also by sustaining a regular and open consultative process at the official level.

Beyond the strictly bilateral, I would add that as a long-standing believer in multilateralism, Canada attaches special importance to the role of international organizations. Even if they only can maintain civil international discourse on some international issues, they have made a valuable contribution. Thus, Canada is a strong supporter of universality of membership, whether it be full international membership in such global bodies as the UN, or full regional membership in regional organizations.

At the recent OAS meeting in Belém, I suggested that, as an organization, the OAS needs to look to a day when Cuba can once again play its full role, with all the privileges and responsibilities involved. Isolation is unhealthy, while close contact with an increasingly vibrant organization, doing important work to promote economic and political liberalization, can have a positive, practical impact.

What are Canadian objectives in Cuba? First, we are here to promote several concrete Canadian interests, especially in terms of commercial activities. Second, we wish to support positive, peaceful change in Cuba, both political and economic. We may disagree on some aspects of change, in particular in the areas of human rights and democratic development, but we will pursue the discussion at appropriate levels. Third, we wish to encourage Cuba's full, constructive participation in international affairs. Finally, we want The Canadian government not to be an impediment, standing in the way of Canadian organizations and individuals pursuing their own activities and dialogues with Cubans because of historic restrictions on official development assistance.

To achieve these objectives more effectively, the Government has decided on a number of adjustments to its Cuba policy. None of these represents a major turn-around, since we already have the basis of what I consider to be a sound policy. Taken together, however, these steps point to a somewhat more activist approach to our relationship, and a desire on our part to be more engaged at a senior level. I have discussed these ideas today in my meetings with members of the Cuban government and have also had an opportunity to consult with several Canadian organizations and business representatives.

First, we want to have more exchanges such as I have just had. Thus, the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs, André Ouellet, has indicated to Foreign Minister Robaina that he would welcome a meeting with him at some convenient time.

Second, I have asked senior officials in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade to begin again the regular series of formal consultations with their Cuban counterparts that have not taken place for several years. We will aim to have a substantive agenda that will get into the full range of bilateral and international issues.

Third, as indicated at the recent meeting of the OAS General Assembly, the Government intends to examine, with other countries, what would be required for Cuba to re-establish its full membership in the OAS. I fully recognize that there are some difficult issues which will have to be addressed by OAS members as well as by Cuba. It is not something that can be resolved overnight. However, we believe it is a process that we must begin to think about.

Fourth, the Government wishes to lend its full support to regular exchanges between the parliamentarians of our two countries. Some initiatives are already under discussion and we will do what we can to encourage and assist in this kind of activity.

Fifth, I am announcing, as Mr. Ouellet did today in Ottawa, that the Government has decided to make it possible for Canadian non-governmental partners undertaking development activities in Cuba to draw on government development funds. In practical terms, this means that the full range of what we call partnership programs now will be available to Canadian NGOs and others in the non-governmental sector for work in Cuba, including academic institutions and Canadian businesses pursuing developmental objectives. Cuba will receive an additional \$1 million dollars in Canadian development assistance over the next year through the various programs that we support, including a \$100 000 Canada Fund.

Sixth, given the economic hardships endured by many ordinary Cubans, the Government will provide further humanitarian relief along the lines of what we announced in March 1994 and last summer. We, therefore, are arranging to donate a further \$500 000 to the World Food Program for nutritional assistance in Cuba.

Seventh, we will continue to expand our promotional support to Canadian companies pursuing business opportunities in Cuba. This includes an active government participation in major trade fairs, for example the Havana International Fair. Canadian businesses interested in exploring joint venture opportunities with Cuban partners will now have access to funding provided by the Industrial Co-operation Program of the Canadian International Development Agency.

These, essentially, are examples to illustrate how the Canadian government plans to give more weight to our relationship with Cuba. Each step is modest and reflects what we think is reasonable and affordable. Each builds on activities that are already in place; and each, I believe, responds to what many Canadians have told us they wish to see. As we move ahead, for this is certainly an ongoing process, other ideas will emerge. What I want to signal here is that Canada has interests in Cuba and is interested in Cuba. We want to take advantage of opportunities and we want to help Cuba create opportunities. Canada and Cuba will not agree on every question, whether bilateral or multilateral. We have disagreements with even our closest allies — but we are open for dialogue.

I wish you well in your conference. The participants you have brought together cannot help but stimulate creative ideas on how Cuba and the international community can interact more productively. I look forward to hearing the results. Once again

I congratulate Sherritt and *The Economist* for making this important conference possible. I trust it will mark a positive increment in Sherritt's future in Cuba as well as in Canada-Cuba official relations.

Thank you.