



National Défense
Defence nationale

Speaking Notes for

Notes d'allocution de

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Minister of National Defence Ministre de la Défense nationale

Opening Remarks

Plenary Session

Conference of Defence Ministers of the Americas

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Comparer au discours prononcé

Canada

Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning and welcome to the first plenary session of the conference.

- It is a pleasure for me to host this session and set the stage for what I believe will be a productive few days here in the Rocky Mountains.

- Secretary General Insulza, I thank you for joining us in Banff.

- Your participation in our activities is a great testimony to the importance of this conference.

- I would also like to note that, this week, UNASUR will be meeting for the first time outside of Latin America.

- I am pleased that its members have chosen Banff as the place to do so.
- It again demonstrates the usefulness and flexibility of the Conference of Defence Ministers of the Americas.
- This conference, indeed, is a process that all of us should actively support.
- It offers a unique opportunity for all Ministers of Defence to meet face to face and discuss those matters most important to us.
- Our countries maintain regular contacts through various diplomatic and official means.
- But there is nothing like personal contact to help move important files forward.

- Indeed, in the consultations in the last few months leading up to today, we heard this repeatedly.
- This is why my officials have made sure that, during the course of the conference, we, Ministers, will have the opportunity to discuss key issues.
- Canada wants to see our process return to its origins of being a meeting between ministers, rather than between ministries.

- That's because if there is any area where multilateral issues need to be addressed and problems solved at the highest level, it is security and defence.
- I am sure that we can all agree that there is nothing more fundamental for a state than preserving the security and safety of its population.
- Unfortunately, this responsibility is too often put to the test.
- There are those who seek to spread instability and fear through violence and intimidation. They do not hesitate to attack the innocent, as we saw in Cali two days ago.
- These challenges to the rule of law must be met by the unwavering resolve of our defence and security establishments.

- Defence and security issues can have profound impacts on the lives of our citizens.
- We owe it to them to address these important questions at the highest possible level and to look for innovative ways of dealing with them.
- And that's why I believe we should stress the need for us to continue to make the Conference work as effectively as it has since its creation.
- We need to think of ways to make it even more successful.
- Strengthening its organizational capacity and establishing a more focussed agenda may be avenues worth taking.
- That's why Canada developed a discussion paper – distributed in May – that examines organizational challenges to our process.

- I look forward to further action on this matter, as we discussed at breakfast this morning.
- Canada is enthusiastic about collaborating with its partners from across the Americas to improve the Conference of Defence Ministers of the Americas process.
- I believe the time is right for us to strengthen our defence relations.
- To explore ways to better work together.
- As we were organizing the conference, Canada identified three themes that we thought the countries of this hemisphere could pursue in close cooperation, building on our successes:

- The United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, for example, can be considered as an example of success.
- These are also three themes that show that we are indeed capable of working together effectively, but also that we can do more.
- These, we believe, are three themes that deserve particular attention given their importance to all of us.
- Peacekeeping;
 - Armed forces assistance during major events; and,
 - Armed forces assistance during natural disasters.

- There is no doubt that the mission, the Haitian government and the Haitian people continue to face major challenges.
- Poverty is still omnipresent, and ensuring security remains difficult.
- However, we can state that MINUSTAH is an excellent example of collaboration among Ministers of Defence and armed forces of the Americas, as well as among our governments generally.
- More than sixty percent of the troops making up the mission come from the Americas.
- And Brazil is doing remarkable work in its role as force commander.
- We have recently demonstrated that effective collaboration is also possible for the

- organization of major events, such as the 2007 Cricket World Cup.
- This event is among the three most important in the world of sports, rivalled only by the World Cup of Soccer and the Olympic Games.
- This means that it is quite demanding in terms of maintaining security for participants, fans and the local population.
- For the first time last year, it was held in the Caribbean, with nine different countries collaborating to host the event and providing security.
- And it certainly was a success... except, unfortunately, for Canada's team, which lost its three matches...

- Of course, Canada is in the process of doing what is necessary to successfully organize the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver.
- The Canadian Forces are assisting civilian authorities for this incredible event and you will learn more about how we are planning for it in a presentation on Friday.
- Countries of the Americas have also repeatedly shown how they can cooperate when natural disasters strike.
- Hurricanes Katrina and Dean, for example, brought death and devastation to countries of our hemisphere.
- And we must also take the time to note that, just a few days ago, Hurricane Gustav left a trail of destruction across the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico.

- Our thoughts are with all those affected by this disaster.
- But on these occasions, many of us answered the call and provided assistance to the afflicted countries.
- Whether it is for peacekeeping, organizing major events, responding to natural disasters or any other matter related to security and defence, productive cooperation is taking place in the Americas.
- This is also illustrated by the growing number of regional security organizations and peacekeeping training centres.
- The Regional Security System and the Conference of the Central American Armed Forces are great examples of regional collaboration.

- Peacekeeping training centres in Argentina, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala and Uruguay – to name just a few – all contribute to further enhancing regional capacities to undertake operations across the world.
- The RESDAL Atlas, which was recently updated and translated from Spanish into English and French with Canadian support, is another important initiative that promotes better openness and trust among our nations.
- This atlas offers extensive information on armed forces from across Latin America and is an impressive information-sharing tool and confidence-building measure.
- Canada is pleased with these encouraging developments.
- And we intend to do our part to build upon them.

- The hemisphere is one of our top international priorities.
- As our Prime Minister Stephen Harper noted when he visited Chile last year: "Canada is committed to playing a bigger role in the Americas and to doing so for the long term."
- And to anchor this engagement in firm policy, clear objectives and concrete initiatives, Canada has a new Strategy for the Americas.
- The strategy calls for a whole-of-government effort to align our activities in the region and target our resources in support of newly established priorities.

- Our objectives are clear:
 - to strengthen and promote our values of freedom, democracy, human rights and rule of law;
 - to increase prosperity through trade and investment; and,
 - to enhance security in the hemisphere.
- In pursuing these objectives, we specifically intend to reinforce inter-American institutions, such as the OAS, the Summit of the Americas and inter-American ministerial meetings.
- Canada's Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces have a role to play in supporting our Government's Americas Strategy.
- And we are eager to do our part.

- We are currently in the process of developing an action plan to guide the activities of National Defence and the Canadian Forces in the hemisphere.
- We have already undertaken a certain number of initiatives aimed at solidifying our ties with our partners in the Americas.
- In particular, we intend to increase our budget to assist with military instruction for the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.
- We are also seeking to improve our bilateral relations through our defence attachés and the holding of regular discussions on defence issues.

- Ladies and gentlemen, hosting the 2008 Conference of Defence Ministers of the Americas is, for Canada, a significant achievement.
- This plan will empower the Canadian Forces and give them the tools they need to play a constructive role in the hemisphere.
- And finally, we have a new *Canada First* Defence Strategy that is based on a predictable, long-term funding commitment to rebuild and expand the Canadian Forces.
- We will continue our support for MINUSTAH by maintaining Canadian Forces officers in key positions at the mission headquarters.
- We will also continue to participate in major military exercises such as PANAMAX and CONTINUING PROMISE.

- It symbolizes our renewed engagement in the Americas.
- We want to be a partner in the hemisphere.
- We are a part of the neighbourhood.
- And we want to work with our neighbours.
- We may find ourselves at the northern tip of the hemisphere, but we share many values and goals with all our friends, extending all the way to the *Tierra del Fuego*.
- We believe we can work with the nations of the Americas.
- And turn to you for cooperation and common efforts towards democracy, prosperity and security.

- I very much look forward to further discussion with you.
- I hope we have a productive plenary session this morning.
- Thank you.