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**NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS BY
THE HONOURABLE PETER MACKAY,
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND
MINISTER OF THE ATLANTIC CANADA OPPORTUNITIES AGENCY,
TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Canada's long tradition of promoting democracy

I would like to start by applauding the initiative of this committee to review Canada's contribution to democracy promotion. I don't want to predict the conclusions you will reach, but I hope they reflect a consensus that promoting democracy is an eminently Canadian endeavour. It is an expression of our values as a nation and transcends partisan interests.

Promoting democracy has been an integral part of Canada's history. Generations of Canadians contributed to building our own democracy. Each generation has also stood ready to defend our way of life and to act for others when their freedoms have been threatened.

As far back as the First World War, Canadians stood up for democracy. Indeed, many have said that our nation was born at Vimy Ridge.

Over 45,000 Canadians then gave their lives defending democracy in the Second World War. Canada also stood alongside other democracies in opposing totalitarian regimes during the 40-plus years of the Cold War. Since the Iron Curtain fell, we have extended a hand to dozens of new democracies around the world.

Our current engagement in Afghanistan is no exception. Throughout our history Canadians have stood up to oppose ideologies that trample the rights of individuals to direct their own affairs. We have faced down threats to the freedom and stability of the world. Our own way of life depends on it. Our own values demand it.

This government's emphasis on freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law is intended to both reflect Canada's own core values—some of the key ingredients in our success as a nation—and to guide our response to many of the challenges and threats in the world today.

Canada's tradition of upholding democracy and human rights informs our opposition to authoritarian regimes, like those of Burma and Belarus. It also informs our unequivocal response to organizations that advocate violence and perpetrate terrorist acts.

In March 2006, Canada was the first country to suspend its assistance to the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority. Our position is firm: the Canadian government will not contact or provide funds to an organization that threatens the security of the Israeli people and their democracy through terrorist means.

In April, the Canadian government listed the Tamil Tigers as a terrorist organization under the Criminal Code. This sends a clear signal that they must reject terrorism as a political tool.

Just as Canada's government is engaged in promoting democracy around the world, so too there is a role for Canada's civil society. The time has come to expand our efforts in the face of a new generation of challenges.

Meeting today's challenges to democracy

Before I speak to those challenges, let us step back for a moment and put democracy promotion in a global context.

When Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen was asked to identify the single most important development of the preceding century, he didn't choose the end of colonialism. He didn't choose two devastating world wars. He didn't choose the rise of new economic centres of power.

To Sen, the most striking feature of the 20th century was the rise of democracy as the "pre-eminently acceptable form of governance." Democratic governance has been accepted as a universal norm.

What explains the universal appeal of democracy? Countries may differ on the forms of democracy they adopt, but the values at the very heart of democracy resonate in every region and with every culture. Those values are the dignity of individuals and the importance of their consent as the basis of government.

The advance of democracy did not happen automatically. It happened because countries such as Canada stood up for the values in which they believe.

Just as previous generations of Canadians stood up for democracy, this generation must do the same. Let me suggest three reasons why Canada should recommit itself to promoting democracy.

First, our values demand it. Canadians believe in the dignity of individuals and popular consent. That is why this government reacted strongly to the flawed presidential elections in Belarus in March 2006. It was a question of principle for Canada to object to this flagrant abuse of power, which denied the right of the people of Belarus to choose their government in a free and fair election and which breached regional democratic standards.

Second, promoting democracy is a fundamental part of our efforts to build a more peaceful, stable and prosperous world. Established democracies are more likely to enjoy peaceful relations between themselves. This confers other benefits: it stabilizes international affairs; it provides an environment in which economic opportunity and prosperity can grow; and it facilitates sustainable development.

Third, the spread of democracy contributes directly to the security of Canadians. While not a cure-all to prevent terrorism, democratic systems of governance—with their appeal and resilience—are among the best allies we have in defeating terrorists.

Democracies make stakeholders of those who are most directly affected by poverty, instability and conflict. They empower citizens within their own political systems to focus attention on serious problems, to propose solutions and to take responsibility for their fates. By providing avenues for peaceful change, they reduce the allure of more violent alternatives.

Canada's contribution

I look forward to hearing your views on how Canada can best assist other countries in achieving their aspirations for democracy. Let me offer some thoughts on what I think our country has to offer in light of the many contemporary challenges surrounding the pursuit of the democratic ideal.

First, Canada enjoys some unique credibility, and with it, some unique opportunities. Having outsiders assist with democratic reform can be very sensitive. Canada's reputation as a fair player confers clear advantages. We were never a colonial power. We do not have great power ambitions. Our motives are not suspect, and our agenda is not hidden.

Canada also has some useful experiences to share. We may take too readily for granted, at home, what others abroad would like to emulate. Our institutions work fairly efficiently. Bribes aren't required to receive public service. Our police forces are professional. Judges are impartial. Editors criticize politicians. Protests take place peacefully. Elections are administered smoothly. Governing parties change, and our political system remains intact.

But it is not just Canada's institutions that are of interest to emerging democracies. We also have a wealth of individual expertise to share. Canada's civil society is a deep reservoir of people with experience in wrestling with many of the issues confronting democracies around the world.

At this moment there are thousands of Canadians from all walks of life fanned out around the world, helping people in emerging democracies address the problems they face in their own national contexts. Many are able to engage in this problem solving in multiple languages. They also bring a particularly Canadian sensitivity to different cultural and social contexts.

The vast majority of Canadians will agree that promoting democracy should be a high priority for our foreign policy and, further, that Canada has something valuable to offer.

The more difficult question to address is how we should go about promoting democracy.

We should start by acknowledging that democracy is not something that outsiders can impose. It is part of the logic of democracy that it needs to be chosen and pursued by citizens themselves. Citizens around the world aspire to democracy, and assistance provided by outsiders should be driven by its recipients.

In addition to development assistance, there is much that we can do in the political and diplomatic realm. The government of Brian Mulroney demonstrated this in its strong opposition to apartheid in South Africa. When we stand on principle, Canadian leadership can make a difference.

Our membership in regional organizations also provides a platform for influence. Bodies such as the Organization of American States have adopted democratic principles as conditions of membership, and that makes them a natural ally in seeking to uphold and advance democratic standards. Cross-regional organizations such as the Commonwealth and La Francophonie can play a similar role.

But Canada is much more than its government. And Canada's commitment to democracy extends well beyond politicians, diplomats and development experts. Democracy involves all of Canadian society, from our universities to our faith-based organizations, from our professional associations to our political parties. We should mobilize Canadian society in promoting democracy.

In every riding in Canada, we also have volunteer organizers trying to connect citizens with government by getting them out to vote and by canvassing their views for the next party platform. In every neighbourhood in this country, we have people passionate about particular causes who band together to advocate their point of view. In every community there are women committed to overcoming obstacles to their equality.

Let's find a way to mobilize these members of civil society to help their opposite numbers in other countries. The obstacles to democracy in different countries are legion. Fortunately, Canada has legions of experts that can help people in these countries address those obstacles.

I believe we should make promoting democracy not just a priority for the Canadian government but for our society as well. Just like our forebears, the current generation of Canadians has its own mission to promote democracy in the face of the challenges of the 21st century.

I look forward to your recommendations on how we can fulfill this task.

Thank you.