



Open letter to the Prime Minister regarding the September 11 attacks

Rt. Hon. Jean Chrétien PC, MP
Prime Minister
Langevin Block
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

25 September 2001

Dear Mr. Chrétien,

At the annual policy conference last weekend marking the 20th anniversary of the Group of 78, members spent much of their time discussing the terrible events of September 11 and what appropriate and honourable response the Canadian government should make. We have been anxious to hear about your meeting with President Bush, and have hoped that with your long experience of leadership you have been able to advise him to consider the long-term consequences of any military action rather than make decisions in the short-term context of swift retaliation. We were encouraged in this hope by your words in the House of Commons on September 17, when you indeed emphasized the need to take a long perspective.

Our members agreed that bringing terrorists to justice will require difficult, patient and protracted police and legal work, complemented by political and diplomatic strategies. It will not satisfy an understandable thirst for immediate revenge that must be strong among some members of the victims' families and a broader public. Yet bringing those suspected of organizing these attacks to international justice is the strategy likely to work, and it is the honourable response.

The Group of 78 would like to urge one such approach. We suggest that Canada together with other countries request the United Nations Security Council to create an ad hoc tribunal along the lines of the international tribunals set up by the Council to deal with the atrocities in Rwanda and the Balkans, but concerned with judging "terrorism as a crime against humanity". We see this as a positive counter-proposal to the proposition we understand that the Taliban made, that Osama bin Laden might be brought to face an Islamic court and the United States be required to produce evidence. The special court the Group of 78 proposes should be convened under UN auspices and consist both of Islamic jurists and other judges. It could be held in an Islamic country.

Our view is that a clear time-limit should be established by the Security Council for the ad hoc tribunal to report its judgement, and the Council would then become the body to decide on what further action to take. We believe that such a course of action, under UN auspices from start to finish, would do much to defuse the crisis. It would also place the responsibility for tackling this hazardous situation, which can so easily spiral out of control, in the hands of the body whose decisions all member states are bound to respect.

We understand that the U.N. Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, has made substantially the same suggestion as the Group did in its meeting. We, therefore, wholeheartedly endorse his statement.

Canada has always spoken out for a multilateral approach to problems between nations and for the observance of international law. You will certainly have urged such a course of action upon President Bush. We are deeply concerned that the movement of large U.S. military forces into the region of West Asia around Afghanistan heralds a major attack on that country, in which innocent civilians may be killed in considerable numbers. Such action will only escalate the cycle of violence and is likely to create a new generation blighted by hatred and despair.

Your government has, in other countries like Sierra Leone, won respect with its concern about child soldiers; and the Group of 78 last weekend heard from Senator Landon Pearson and Major-General Romeo Dallaire about the blighting of young lives caught in conflict zones.

We end, therefore, with a heartfelt plea that you do not commit Canada to military action in Afghanistan or other countries which is likely to result in the death of many civilians, including women and young children. Rather, Canada must stand with our allies and friends in this crisis, which may take years to resolve, in a firm partnership for action that has been decided upon under the auspices of the UN Security Council.

Yours sincerely,

Debbie Grisdale, Geoffrey Pearson
Co-chairs, 2001 Policy Conference, The Group of 78

c.c.: Hon John Manley PC, MP
Hon. Art Eggleton PC, MP
Stockwell Day MP
Gilles Duceppe MP
Alexa McDonough MP
Rt. Hon. Joe Clark PC., MP.