NOTES OF OPENING REMARKS

BY IVAN HEAD
PRESIDENT, INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE

FORMAL OPENING OF IDRC BOARD OF GOVERNORS MEETING

DAKAR, SENEGAL

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Notes for Remarks by
Ivan L. Head
President, IDRC

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Your Excellency the President of Senegal, Ambassadors, Ministers, IDRC Governors, Distinguished Guests:

Ten years have passed since the IDRC Board of Governors last met in Dakar. The interval between meetings has been an eventful one for the Centre and for Senegal. On that earlier occasion, President Leopold Senghor extended a welcome to Governors; this week we are honoured in that fashion by President Abdou Diouf. The ease with which this country transformed itself from one administration to another, the boldness and dedication of the new leader, the reverence extended to the retired president - these are accomplishments which the rest of Africa, and indeed the rest of the world, regard with admiration. They are evidence of the soundness of the social and political systems of this important country. IDRC is proud that its Regional Office for West Africa is located here and grateful to the Government of Senegal for its hospitality to that office and for its warm attitude toward this meeting. Another transformation has taken place here as well; the creation of the Federation of Senegambia, an experiment in nation-building that is being watched closely by many in the world who understand the peculiar problems which face a good number of small nations; those who have been left by history and by geography with inadequate resources to offer a stable, viable, economic and political base for their peoples. The generous attitude of the Government of Senegal toward its...
smaller neighbour Gambia is admired far and wide. And to Canadians, the richness - and complications - which arise out of this new bilingual union are reasons to regard it with special interest. We extend to you every good wish.

The IDRC Board chose to meet in Dakar for a number of reasons. One of them, certainly, was in tribute to the people of Senegal and their dedication to the development of a pluralistic, democratic society. Another reason was nostalgic: the opportunity to visit again with the distinguished Sengalese Minister of Finance, Gheikh Hamidou Kane, who served for several years as IDRC's Vice-President, International.

The most important reason, however, was IDRC's wish to draw attention by the presence of its Board here, to the onerous circumstances which challenge developmental progress in this region of Africa. Thus, we regret that a drought, more severe than that of 1973, has struck the Sahel, worsening the problems of agricultural production and threatening the survival of people and livestock. We hope to make the international community aware of the urgent need to support more generously the efforts to solve these extremely painful problems. Mien Excellency, I can assure you that IDRC and its Board are deeply concerned over the hardships inflicted on your people by this terrible drought. We certainly wish to associate ourselves with the solidarity campaign you have launched to face this disaster.

Those of us who come from the temperate regions of the world, and some of us of more tropical origin, need to be reminded frequently of the awesome challenge which nature has cast before those who live in the Sahelian and sub-Saharan zones. All our easy assumptions about food production, about agro-industrial activity, about nourishment and health,
about economic policies and human resource development - all these fade and dissemble in the face of the harsh realities which climate and soil conditions have combined to present to you here. We who regard water as a constant, and rich earth as a norm; we who live surrounded by trees and refreshed by the changing of seasons; we and our countrymen need to comprehend the special circumstances which contribute to your environment. One of the tasks we are undertaking this week is to visit research projects in rural areas of Senegal.

IDRC functions in response to the stated needs of the developing countries. The Centre was created by the Government of Canada in 1970 following requests made by countries for assistance in strengthening their indigenous research competence and for bringing science and technology to bear upon their developmental problems. The legislation was introduced by the government of Prime Minister Pearson - who later became Chairman of the first IDRC Board - and was enacted into law by the government of Prime Minister Trudeau who has remained ever since a strong supporter of the Centre and its purposes, as was Prime Minister Clark during his term in office. Over the years the funds made available to the Centre by the Parliament of Canada have steadily increased until, today, IDRC is far and away the largest organization in the world dedicated exclusively to the support of research in the developing countries and to the increase of their scientific capacity through the provision of opportunities for their scientists to pursue their projects according to their priorities.

The Centre's policies continue to be set, and the Centre's directions fixed, by an international Board of Governors consisting of scientists and developmental experts drawn from eleven different countries, six of them developing. At present, two members of the IDRC Board are...4
Africans - Mr. Allison Ayida from Nigeria and M. Hadj Mokhtar Louhibi from Algeria.

The present Board and its predecessors have welcomed research proposals from the West African scientific community and, by its presence here, hopes to stimulate increasing activity. Since the Centre's inception, 217 projects have been supported in this region with appropriations totalling 32 million Canadian dollars (or 11 billion CFA). On the project docket for this meeting 4 additional projects by West African research institutions will be considered.

Your Excellency, I will not tax your patience by giving a list of the research projects which IDRC has supported in this region of Africa. I only want to mention a few research themes which the Centre has encouraged over the years and which demonstrate our desire to support initiatives most likely to match the priorities set by the governments of the region. Thus, in the fight against the desertification of the Sahel, the Centre has supported several research projects on aorestation of desert lands here in Senegal and in Mali. In the area of health sciences, we have concentrated our efforts not only on tropical diseases, but also on nutritional problems of mothers and new-borns and on water supply. Finally, in the field of science popularization, the Centre is happy that the magazine "Famille et Développement", which it helped to launch, has been successful and is now capable of standing on its own two feet. I have given you these few examples among many to illustrate the extent to which IDRC sets its agenda according to the priorities of the developing countries and quite free from any intervention by the Canadian Government.
Understandably, the Centre's resources are not sufficient to permit it to support all projects proposed to it, no matter how meritorious they may be. It endeavours, however, to choose those projects with the greatest potential impact and, in the process, to stimulate a better awareness and impact on the part of governments of the important role that research plays in the developmental process. That latter task is made much easier when governments such as that of Senegal exhibit so clearly both a dedication of resources to research activities and a wide range of achievements for its people that are the product of sound planning, carefully pursued research, wise investment, and fair social policies.

The legislation creating IDRC purposely severed it from political influence within Canada, placing all decision-making authority in an independent Board. The Board, in turn, endeavours consciously not to allow political circumstances within the developing countries to influence its consideration of research proposals. These are examined against a template of objective criteria - the seriousness of the problem sought to be solved, the extent of the impact of any solution and the willingness of the government to share widely the benefits and the results, the practicality of the research contemplated and the scientific soundness of the methodology proposed, the involvement of junior scientists and - as important as any
other factor - the management of the project by local, not expatriate, scientists. Having said that however, I am certain that my fellow Governors would want me to add that their decision-making process is more joyful and much more satisfying when the proposals under examination emanate from a country - like this - where democratic practices are effective, where human liberties are protected, where social benefits are broadly shared, and where the dignity of individual citizens is a primary concern of government.

I wish to add only, on behalf of the people of Canada whose tax payments provide 100% of the revenues of IDRC, that they support what the Centre does because of their understanding of the interdependent nature of the world in which we live. No nation, no matter how populous or how rich, is able to determine its policies or its future without regard for the causes and the effects of circumstances elsewhere. The futures of all peoples everywhere are irrevocably intermingled. If we believe, as Canadians do, in the critical importance of a non-deteriorating biosphere, of the value and the richness of culturally diverse, stable societies, and of the shared advantages of economically viable countries, then endeavours such as IDRC continue to be required. I am confident that the Parliament of Canada still regards these goals as being as worthy of pursuit as it did when IDRC was created 14 years ago. It is my judgment that immense danger is posed by the failure of some governments to appreciate adequately the perils that mankind faces should the concept and the practice of burden-sharing not continue to be honoured, that the most destabilizing forces in the world today must be recognized as poverty, hunger, disease, ignorance and the deprivation of human rights, that in all these respects international relations cannot be regarded as a zero-sum game. In the world of today, peace, economic security,
and human welfare are an inextricable whole. Either we all make progress toward their attainment, or we all fall back.

I am confident that the deliberations of the IDRC Board of Governors in Dakar this week will make a positive, albeit necessarily modest, contribution toward that end. On behalf of the Board and the staff of IDRC, I thank you sincerely, Mr. President, for the honour you have extended to us by your presence here today.