

Speaking Notes for
Maureen O'Neil
for the
Luncheon Discussion on Built Heritage
Sponsored by the Canadian Heritage Foundation
8 December 2000

Thank you for accepting my invitation to join me today. The subject for discussion at this informal gathering may not be one you would normally associate with the work of the IDRC, but it is an important one, to my mind, which merits our collective attention. I do hope that our discussions today will prove preliminary, leading to further such discussions and, above all, to results.

Here in Canada, we have lost nearly one-quarter of our heritage building stock over the last thirty years. An attrition rate of this magnitude would be viewed with considerable alarm in most other developed countries of the world. Here, however, it seems that we consider this trend inevitable, indeed desirable, in our pursuit of progress and prosperity, of growth and development. I, to be frank, do not take that view, and consider the irreplaceable loss of our heritage buildings to be regrettable. It makes no sense from a cultural, historical, environmental and even an economic point of view to so readily discard the past in the name of the future. But domestic policy is not in my mandate, and I leave the matter to those in whose hands are to be found the policy and program instruments that relate to this matter.

I do have an international mandate, however, and it is for that reason that I saw such a gathering as this as an opportunity to discuss the impact of our international policies and programs. From my travels, I have seen the effect that "development" can have on the heritage and culture of developing countries, something that you, too, have witnessed and of which you can cite ready examples. In other words, the pursuit of progress and prosperity in developing countries can have, and has had, the same kind of impact that we, regrettably, have experienced here in Canada. For that reason, I think we have to examine our international activities with care in order that we not be encouraging the kind of development that exacts such a toll on the heritage and culture of client countries. The World Bank has adopted a culturally-driven definition of development for its program purposes, and I am delighted that Tom Blinkhorn has flown up from Washington to join us today. Others, such as the European Community, have adopted similar approaches, and I think we can benefit greatly from their experience and expertise in assessing the assumptions and the objectives on which we base our international policies and programs.

As I mentioned at the outset, I believe this to be a very important matter, and one which we clearly can only begin to address today in a preliminary way. But I do hope that this first, small

step will lead to further, larger steps towards ensuring that the future of those countries to which we provide assistance is not achieved at the expense of their past.

Thank you all for joining me, and for your interest.