

STATEMENT BY
THE HONOURABLE JEAN CHRETIEN
CONTINUING COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS ON THE CONSTITUTION

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

As the Prime Minister said to the Premiers on June 9, and as I suggested to most of you during my cross-country visits, we need to express some collective notion of where we are heading in the process of constitutional renewal. We need to express why we have chosen that direction and what, in broad terms, our destination is.

I do not refer to the reasons why we are working together to change specific elements of the Constitution. No doubt each of us and each of our governments have some different reasons for proposing certain changes. But some reasons underlying our desire for a new constitution are shared and they are fundamental. Among the reasons that we have in common, I suggest are, first, that commitments have been made to the people, that we will get on with this work and, secondly, that there are problems in Confederation that need to be remedied and that can only (or best) be remedied by constitutional change.

The Prime Minister and I have spoken of principles as guiding us in our collective work on the Constitution or as Principles for a Constitution or as a Preamble for a New Constitution. But I would like to be absolutely clear about what it is we, in the federal delegation, now see as the task in this regard. It is to draft, together, a Preamble of a New Constitution. It is for that task that I invite your participation. We will be happy to receive any suggestions which use as a starting point the draft Statement of Principles that the Prime Minister tabled in the House of Commons on June 10. We also will be happy to consider entire new drafts.

I would propose that we set up an informal sub-committee of the CCMC to consider, first of all, what matters should be covered in a constitution preamble. I would propose that we have an informal discussion in the sub-committee before any further draft is prepared. I stress "informal" because what is important here is that all the participants in the work of the sub-committee should feel that they have a personal, as well as official, contribution to make.

I am tabling the present federal draft but I propose that it be set aside while the possible contents of a preamble of the Constitution are discussed.

Once all the interested governments have expressed their views on what the preamble should contain, I would suggest that we have a good discussion on that. We could review matters in the sub-committee and we could talk about the preamble informally among ourselves. Only then should we turn our hands to the matter of drafting a preamble for our collective consideration. It might be that we would not have a draft preamble to look at until the CCMC meeting which is planned for the end of August.

