

Report From Caracas

[AMBASSADOR J. A. BEESLEY ANNOUNCES ACCOMPLISHMENTS]

THE Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea concluded its first session in Caracas, Venezuela, on August 29. Three committees of the whole considered various aspects of several complex issues. The first focused on the basic legal principles needed to govern the seabed area beyond the limits of national jurisdiction, the area designated as the "common heritage of mankind" by the 25th U.N. General Assembly in 1970. The second took up traditional issues such as fisheries, continental shelf, high seas, the territorial sea, archipelagoes, straits and islands. Its working papers will be used as the basis for interim consultations and for future negotiations. The third committee composed draft texts of articles dealing with the protection and preservation of the marine environment. It also prepared drafts of general principles for the conduct and promotion of marine scientific research.

Ambassador J. A. Beesley, head of the Canadian delegation, said that, in a sense, the Canadians acted as the "theologians of the Conference" — challenging old dogma.

"We deliberately used mind boggling techniques to open up ideas that were totally foreign to the

traditional thinking. Those of us who have been with the Seabed Committee feel we are on the verge."

No concrete agreements emerged from Caracas, but Canada considers the time well spent. It became widely recognized that any future law of the sea treaty would have to accept the concept of a twelve-mile territorial sea and a 200-mile economic zone in which coastal states would exercise extensive controls over mineral and living resources and responsibility for protection of the marine environment. Canada and the United States co-sponsored separate working papers suggesting a solution along these lines.

Subject to the concurrence of the U.N. General Assembly, the Conference will hold a second substantive session in Geneva, Switzerland, from March 17 to May 10, 1975. A final session will be held in Caracas at a date yet to be determined. Canada will consult with other participating nations before the Geneva session to narrow the differences of opinion.

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