

There are times when international relations are marked by suspicion and fear, and in those times it is hard to get things done. Hard even with the best will in the world. Hard even with the most skill in the world. We have a different atmosphere today internationally, not just in the direct relation between the superpowers, but also concerning some of the regional conflicts that were so threatening just months ago. Conflicts in the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, and southern Africa are subsiding. Glimmers of hope can be seen elsewhere as well - in South East Asia, in the Sahara. Those developments, important in themselves, have also injected new optimism into international affairs. We see some successes, and seek more. That optimism, that renewed confidence that international cooperation can work, coincides with a rising sense of urgency about the environment. This Government believes that we should take full advantage of this new atmosphere in international relations to move the world forward on environmental questions. That is why Prime Minister Mulroney gave such high priority to the environmental question when he addressed the United Nations last month.

Let me confess an evident Canadian bias. We believe in multilateral organizations. It may be that we believe in them so strongly because we are not a superpower, and countries that are not superpowers understand particularly how important it is to have rules that work for the whole world. But we think the world needs rules that work, and we think the world needs a strong international system that can let common goals be pursued together. That is why Canada attaches such priority to the effective operation of the United Nations. We always have. We were invited to leave UNESCO. We had good reason to leave UNESCO. We didn't. We stayed in UNESCO to try to reform it from within. That is the spirit we adopt towards international organizations. That is why we were so instrumental, going back decades to Mr. Pearson's service as Foreign Minister, in establishing the idea of UN peacekeeping forces and why we are trying to make that idea work now. That is why we have taken such an active role in international trade negotiations because rules that work are important for the world. That is why we were the first country to announce a formal national response to the Brundtland concept of sustainable development. That has been our tradition in Canada, historically. It is today.

Obviously, we are going to pursue bilateral agreements on environmental issues, particularly with the United States regarding acid rain. Often agreements between two nations can set the stage for broader agreement among many nations, particularly at a time when the world is discovering ways to work together. In these circumstances, two Canadian traditions combine - a profound concern about the world's environment, and our experience in making the international system work.