

Finally, there is the impact that a distinctive international role has had on Canada's sense of itself. In a widely diverse country with strong regional identifications, and with a bilingual and multicultural society, I firmly believe that a strong international presence has in fact helped solidify a national Canadian identity and self-perception in a global context.

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I should like to turn now from my perception of Canada's role in the North-South dialogue to the international scene today. When the Round Table met in Ottawa in 1980, we were looking forward to 1981 as the "Year of the Summits". At the Ottawa Summit of the Seven major industrialized countries, North-South issues were high on the agenda. At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and the Cancun Summit last autumn, these questions were pre-eminent. Most recently at Versailles, these issues were again addressed.

In the late 1970s one repeatedly heard the complaint that negotiations languished for lack of political will. In the early 1980s, these issues were repeatedly discussed at the highest political level. What impact have these meetings made? What was accomplished?

I would certainly not claim that all the world's economic woes have been grappled with since we last met. No one meeting - or even series of meetings - could be expected to do so. Certainly, Cancun was never designed to be a decision-making or negotiating Conference. It is also difficult to assess with any certainty the specific impact of one meeting or another on the ultimate course of world events - and certainly the seeming lack of follow-through, and indeed the apparent setbacks which Summits at times suffer, naturally give rise to questions.

I remain convinced, however, of the ultimate utility of the Summit process. Summits make three major contributions in my view: the personal impact on leaders; the opportunity for a review of governmental priorities; and the provision of renewed momentum to ongoing negotiations.

Least quantifiable, but possibly most important, is the effect of Summit discussions on individual participants. At Cancun, for example I was particularly struck by the frankness of the discussions. Leaders who otherwise might seldom be directly challenged found themselves vigorously defending their positions before others holding very different views. To the extent that Heads of State draw from this experience a better