

agreements. This underscores the importance of the capacity-building provisions of Agenda 21, because developing countries, and indeed a number of industrialized countries, are really up to here in their capacity to deal with the proliferation of international negotiations.

The Rio declaration and Agenda 21 are major new examples of soft law based on political agreement, rather than legally binding instruments. Although not legally binding, they do provide, in my view, a very important basis for voluntary co-operation, which enables the action process to proceed expeditiously and paves the way for negotiation of binding legal agreements.

We cannot and should not wait for binding legal agreements to begin the action process. After all, as long as we do not have an effective and enforceable legal regime at the international level, we must rely largely on political commitment as the primary basis for co-operative action in negotiation and enforcement of legal obligations, as well as in the voluntary measures that can precede and prepare the way for them.

Canada, as I have said, made an extremely important contribution to UNCED. Despite the fact that Prime Minister Mulroney was not among the first world leaders to announce his intention to attend the Earth Summit, he made that decision well ahead of President Bush, and his leadership at the Summit itself was extremely influential and much appreciated. It was greatly facilitated by the highly effective role of Canada's delegations at the preparatory committee meetings and at the General Assembly led, as I have already said, by Ambassador John Bell. I hope you will take advantage of his presence here in this university to tap into the gold mine of experience that he brings from that role.

One achievement particularly relevant to Canada's immediate economic interests is its success in securing agreement to hold an international conference on conservation of straddling fish stocks on the high seas. This will not resolve the immediate crisis confronting Canada's east coast fisheries in particular. But it does offer the prospect of international co-operation to ensure the rebuilding of this important resource.