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Urgent need for a new international agreement on the law of the sea

In an address to the Thirtieth Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York on September 22, Allan J. MacEachen, Canada's Secretary of State for External Affairs, covered several topics — the recent special session of the UN, the law of the sea, disarmament, peace-keeping and the Middle East, and structural reform of the UN.

Canada, which has been trying at UN conferences to obtain management rights over a 200-mile economic zone off its coasts to replace the present 12-mile limit of national jurisdiction, is hoping that a new multilateral agreement will be signed at the Law of the Sea Conference to be held in New York in March and, speaking of this, Mr. MacEachen stated that "to reach final agreement, all participants must act responsibly, flexibly and above all, with a sense of real urgency".

If the multilateral approach failed, said Mr. MacEachen, Canada would have to "resort to other solutions to protect fundamental national interests".

The Minister's remarks relating to this subject follow:

* * * *

One of the most important but least recognized functions of the United Nations is the regular and persistent efforts it makes to contribute to a stable world order through the progressive development of international law. The law of the sea is a dynamic example.

We are developing new rules which reflect the growing awareness of the interdependence of nations and the need for preservation of the marine environment and the conservation of its resources. I have no hesitation in affirming the view of the Canadian Government that the viability of an increasingly interdependent world order rests on the creation of an international economic system which provides a more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities to all people. This principle must be reflected in the new law of the sea.

Role of UN

The role of the United Nations is central to the process of developing new international law which will reflect broad recognition that the oceans of the world, which cover 70 per cent of the earth's surface, are vital to man's survival. Binding legal rules must be established. The Law of the Sea Conference has already achieved broad agreement on revolutionary new legal

concepts such as the economic zone and the common heritage of mankind, concepts which must form the basis of the constitution of the seas. The new law must lay down duties to go hand in hand with every new right recognized. It must be based on principles of equity rather than power.

The task is a formidable one and may prove to be beyond the reach of the United Nations. I think not. What is clear, however, is that without the United Nations the task would be impossible and the world would be involved in a series of conflicting claims which could produce serious threats to the peace.

My Government is preparing now for the crucial fourth round of negotiations of the Third Law of the Sea Conference beginning here in New York next March. We do so knowing that to reach final agreement all participants must act responsibly, flexibly and above all, with a sense of real urgency.

Canada cannot wait indefinitely

No government is more committed than my own to achieving agreement on a viable and balanced global regime for the seas. But I would be less than candid if I did not state clearly that the Canadian Government, like many other governments, cannot be expected to wait indefinitely for agreement. I