

My first remarks are ones of congratulation to the organizers of this conference and to all of those who over the years have worked with such diligence to ensure that this evening we are able to begin the fiftieth Couchiching Conference. No doubt there have been times over the past half-century when the organizers and all those who nurtured the goals of the conference had qualms about its viability and support. But longevity has prevailed, and I for one believe we are all the better off for that.

This is not the first Couchiching Conference to focus on international affairs, which is inevitable, given the momentous international processes through which the world has passed since the first conference in 1931. Today, perhaps even more so than in the past, external events impinge on national life in many countries, forcing more and more nations to look outward and assess our place in the world and to reassess the nature of our international relationships.

The theme of this year's conference -- international development at a time of East-West tension -- goes to the heart of the world's most pervasive problems. How we approach its resolution will profoundly affect the quest of all mankind for the most fundamental of all human and social goals -- namely, the attainment of peace, security and social justice.

Tonight I propose to lay out the general dimensions of this global challenge hoping that in the course of this conference other speakers will probe particular aspects of it, so that we may better understand the dynamics of our common dilemma.

The terms "North-South" and "dialogue" are convenient catch-phrases which to some degree over-simplify and obscure the realities of our international relationships. Too frequently in recent years the Third World has been portrayed in the West as a homogeneous group of nations having a number of common characteristics. The reality is quite otherwise, and by ignoring this we run the risk of engaging in simplistic analysis and of devising unworkable solutions. Nothing could be farther from the truth than the image of a world divided between a powerful North and a weak and dependent South. Events throughout the seventies grossly altered that picture to the point where we must now confront not dependence, but interdependence. The most dramatic example has been the emergence of OPEC (the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries), now confronting the people of the North with a nagging situation long familiar to the South, namely dependency. Like the nations of the South, we too are seeking self-sufficiency.