

Thank you for offering me the opportunity to speak to you today. I know how much time and effort the organizations represented here have invested in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) process.

I want to begin by discussing the prospects for Prepcom IV and for the conference itself in Rio de Janeiro. But I am not going to dwell on these meetings at length because I suspect that most of this audience has already spent many miles on the road to Rio. And as you know, there are many more miles ahead for all of us.

I do want to discuss, on a larger scale, the meaning of the UNCED process, both domestically and internationally. I want to look at the impact of Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) on UNCED and also what I perceive to be the impact of UNCED on the great diversity of NGOs that are participating.

First, in looking at the prospects for UNCED, I must be candid. I believe that the expectations for UNCED have been inflated beyond the realistic ability of the world's institutions to deliver. The tragedy of high expectations is that they could slow, rather than accelerate future action and they tend to obscure genuine progress that is made. We must be vigilant to ensure that this does not become an exercise in brinkmanship.

UNCED will not be an end in itself. It is not the Earth's last chance. In real terms, it will be neither a spectacular failure nor an overwhelming success. The issues are far too complicated for a once-and-for-all solution to the problems facing the planet to come out of Rio. In fact, UNCED should be seen as one large step that will carry us forward to many others. It is one of the most important and ambitious steps that the world has taken.

The real objective of UNCED should be the meaningful and long-term engagement of the nations of the world in the task of healing the planet.

It is no secret that the nations of the world are still some distance from the broad international consensus that is necessary for formal agreements to be established on the key issues. The goal at Prepcom IV will be to identify and act on those elements that can be resolved, while narrowing the gaps that exist, where resolution is perhaps not achievable.

Let us understand that what we are undertaking through UNCED is nothing less than an international effort to build consensus among states with widely varied levels of development, wholly different political systems and entirely different environmental policies.

That is not a simple task. Those of you who have had the opportunity to participate in the work of the Canadian delegation to any of the previous Prepcoms know that ideas and beliefs that we may take for granted in Canada are not shared by all other