

We face, in our Arctic regions, environmental problems unique in the world; we contend that Canada must be given management of the fisheries within and beyond the so-called economic zone; we share with a few other nations -- among which is Scotland -- special responsibilities for the preservation of the salmon that spawn in such rivers as the Tweed, the Fraser and the Matapédia; and I should not even remind Scots, benefiting as they are from the North Sea oil-boom, of the need for an international legal régime that facilitates, rather than hinders, the exploitation of the oceans' mineral resources.

The economic stakes for both Britain and Canada in a thorough reform of the law of the sea are, therefore, considerable; and this is why our two governments have worked in close co-operation at Caracas and Geneva and will continue to do so in New York. Of course, we all have our national interests (I just mentioned some of Canada's), but I am well aware of Britain's own imperatives -- the traditional sea-lanes of the world. To a certain extent, every country's case is a special case: the landlocked, the islands, those with and without a continental margin. Somehow, all of these special cases have to be accommodated in the new international agreement for which we strive; and this can only be done if the Law of the Sea Conference proceeds by consensus. Such a process is inevitably slow; but unquestionable progress is embodied in the single negotiating text issued at the end of the Geneva Conference.

Nevertheless, as I pointed out to the General Assembly of the United Nations last month, the search for consensus, past a certain point in time, becomes procrastination; and, after a further point in time, procrastination becomes failure. I reiterate, however, that only if the multilateral approach fails to produce an international agreement will the Canadian Government resort to other solutions to protect its fundamental national interests. I hasten to add, however, that I have been much encouraged by the ability of the members of the United Nations -- developing as well as developed -- to adopt by consensus the historical resolution on international economic relations that concluded the seventh special session of the General Assembly. I was also heartened by the co-operative spirit manifested recently by our fishing partners, both in bilateral consultations and at the special meeting in Montreal of the International Commission on Northwest Atlantic Fisheries (ICNAF), where agreement was finally reached on curtailment and more effective control of fishing efforts off our coasts.

All this augurs well for the next -- and, one hopes, the final -- session in New York. And on this more hopeful note I am pleased to declare open this Canadian Exhibition on the Law of the Sea.

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