

"PHOTO OPS ARE NO SUBSTITUTE FOR POLITICAL WILL"

Prime Minister Paul Martin delivered a keynote address to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, on January 23, 2004, speaking on "The Future of Global Interdependence." The following are excerpts.

At its best, which is not always the case, the domestic political process is open and full of energy. It is about making the right choices among competing interests and priorities, choices that reflect the way ahead. Debates and trade-offs occur—in our cabinets, in our legislatures, in town halls with our citizens. Eventually decisions are reached.

When we look at the international scene, it is strangely unpolitical. To a remarkable extent, the dialogue among nations is technocratic and indirect rather than open and free ranging. It is often concerned more with preserving a process than with breaking new ground. It is a dialogue that, in the great international meetings, too often proceeds from set pieces read aloud, meetings that are closed to consultation from the outside—and far too frequently closed to new ideas. This is not to say progress doesn't occur. It's just that it is so painfully slow.

The debate between political leaders must be lifted from the page—must go from *pro forma* to real commitment. We have to broaden our traditional ideas about the responsibilities of sovereign states, not only the responsibilities of rich nations toward poor ones, but of all countries to each other.

The first obligation of sovereign states is to their own citizens. That is clear. But even just to do that properly in an interdependent world, states have to be engaged beyond their borders. Further, all states today have a real and legitimate stake in the welfare of other countries, and that confers a special obligation on political leaders to make our international systems work for the welfare of all.

We need multilateral institutions that work. Not as ideological ends in themselves, but as indispensable instruments of national well-being. No one nation can manage the consequences of interdependence on its own. We can work with our neighbours, with our friends and allies, with our regional and global partners. But work together we must.

The problem with many of today's international organizations is that they are not designed to facilitate the kinds of informal political debates that must occur. The mandates, structures and voting procedures of the UN system largely reflect the geopolitical landscape that emerged from World War II. If they are not reformed to reflect today's realities and tomorrow's challenges, they will be increasingly bypassed.

Very occasional meetings across a divide are not what I'm suggesting. If you believe, as we do in Canada, that progress on these tough issues is in everybody's interest, then we have to get the right mix of countries into the same room at the same time, and most importantly on a regular yet informal basis. We need some soul searching, some head knocking, and—above all else—some honest talk about what kind of world we want five or 10 or 20 years down the road. We are not going to do that with 100 countries around the table—nor in small groups, if leaders are absent.

In short, photo ops are no substitute for political will. Political leaders must work with each other internationally the way they work at home, when they work well—debating, exploring, searching for value-driven solutions that are inclusive rather than divisive, stabilizing rather than destructive, pragmatic rather than ideological.

We all have a stake in seeing international systems work well, and I firmly believe they cannot work unless they work for all the people of the world. If we fail to make interdependence work, the consequence will be dire and our children and grandchildren will rightly lay the blame at our feet. 🍁

For the full text of the Prime Minister's address see www.pm.gc.ca.

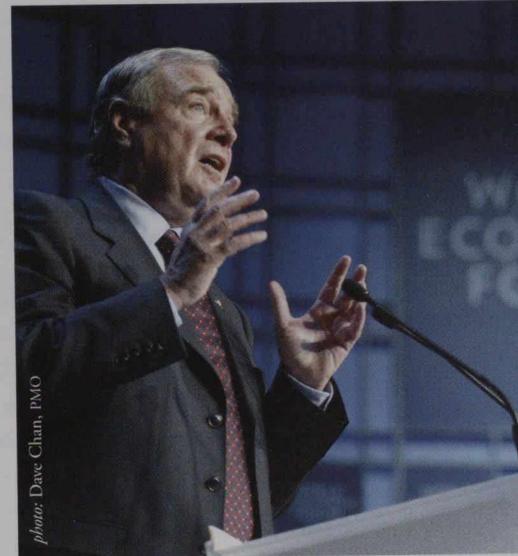


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