



Statements and Speeches

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CONFERENCE ON THE LAW OF THE SEA

An Address by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Mitchell Sharp, to the Canadian Institute of International Affairs, May 3, 1974, Saint John, New Brunswick.

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The theme I have chosen for my talk to you this evening is the forthcoming Law of the Sea Conference, which will begin next month in Caracas. This conference is perhaps the single most important international meeting to take place in many years. Behind the legal codification of a new international régime for the territorial sea, the continental shelf and the areas of the sea and seabed beyond these, lie all the great problems of global co-operation and organization on which our very survival on this planet depends.

I have mentioned the World Population Conference in August, where, for the first time, will be examined the implications of the tremendous growth of the world's population during this century, and especially since the Second World War. A related conference, on world food problems, will take place in Rome in November. The United Nations special session on resources that has just concluded looked at the problem of food and other raw materials from another viewpoint: the impact on development of the disruption of the international trade and monetary system due to the recent sharp increases in the prices of a number of commodities, especially oil.

All these conferences are concerned with one fundamental problem: the growing pressure of demand on the finite resources of this world. At the forthcoming Conference on the Law of the Sea, an attempt will be made for the first time to regulate and divide equitably the resources, both living and mineral, of a huge area of the earth. The seas and oceans occupy about 70 per cent of the earth's surface. Its riches and its limitations are only beginning to be understood. But already the limitations, the finiteness of the sea's living resources and of its absorptive capacity for pollutants, have become all too apparent.